

VOLUME 3 – SEGUNDA PARTE

ÍNDICE DOS DOCUMENTOS

1.“Institutional and political challenges of accreditation at the international level” (2006) – This text was signed jointly by Professor Hans Van Ginkel, rector of the United Nations University and Professor Marco Antonio Rodrigues Dias- It was presented to the Third Barcelona Conference on Higher Education (27 to 29 November 2006), organized by GUNI –Global University Network for Innovation- It was published as chapter of the book Higher Education in the world 2007 (Guni series on the social commitment of universities 2) on the general theme of “Accreditation for quality assurance: what is at stake?” – Palgrave Macmillan- pgs. 37 to 57. The Spanish version “Retos institucionales y políticos de la acreditación en el ámbito internacional” was published in December 2006 by Ediciones Mundi-Prensa, as chapter of the book “La educación superior en el mundo 2007 –Acreditación para la garantía de calidad: Qué está en juego?”- pgs. 37 to 57. Uma edição em portugués foi publicada por GUNI, EdiPUC-RS, Palgrave Macmilln e FOPROP, em 2009, com o título de **“Desafios institucionais e políticos de credenciamento em nível internacional”**.

2.“Public and Private Higher Education: Public Good, Accreditation and International normative instruments on recognition of studies” (2002) – text partially in French and partially in English presented during the “Parallel Thematic workshop (Debates and Exchange of views) – Public vs. Private Higher Education: Public good, equity, access- First Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the recognition of qualifications in higher education – globalisation and higher education”- UNESCO, Paris, 17-18 October 2002.

3.“Philosophical and political basis for ensuring quality in higher education” (2004) – Document presented during the symposium on “Quality Assurance in higher education and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications between Research Universities” organized by GUNI-AP, 20-21 September 2004, in Hangzhou, China.

4. "**Quality in higher education from an international point of view: the role of Unesco (1993)**" – Text of a speech presented during the "First biennial Conference and General Conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (INQAAHE) - Montreal, 24-28 May 1993.

5. "**Interuniversity linkages for improving quality" (1995)**" – Third meeting- International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – 21-23 May 1995, Utrecht the Netherlands – The text was published in a special edition, with the format of a booklet, "Proceedings", by the Association of Netherland Universities, International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and Inspectorate of Education of Netherland Pgs. 72 to 80.

6. "**The abandonment of the 1993 Recommendation on recognition of studies and diplomas of higher education**" – This was not a public document and was not published anywhere. These are personnel reflections of the author shared with some experts interested on the subject.

7. "**Non à des situations d'injustice, oui à un monde de liberté" – (1992)**" – Speech presented during the "International Conference on the recognition of studies and the academic mobility" – Paris, 2-5 november 1992.

8. "**Défis politiques de l'évaluation dans le contexte de la mondialisation**" – (2007) – Speech presented during an international symposium on "l'Université en questions: les échecs des tentatives de réforme" organized in the headquarters of the "Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le progrès de l'homme"- Paris - 8-9 March 2007.

DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 1

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GUNI SERIES ON THE SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF UNIVERSITIES 2

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE WORLD 2007

*Accreditation for Quality Assurance:
What is at Stake?*



GLOBAL UNIVERSITY NETWORK FOR INNOVATION



INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF ACCREDITATION AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

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3rd International Barcelona Conference on Higher Education –27 to 29 November 2006-
“Accreditation for quality assurance: what is at stake?” – GUNI – Global University Network for Innovation – This document was published in GUNI Series on the Social Commitment of Universities 2 – Higher Education in the world 2007 – Accreditation for quality assurance: what is at stake – published by Palgrave Macmillan (2007) – Pgs. 37 to 57

ABSTRACT

This contribution is a strong plea for approaches in quality assessment and accreditation, which honour diversity and promote innovation and creativity in higher education.

For many reasons, accreditation has become an important issue for higher education, which has occurred during a period in which there has been a major shift in values. Higher education, always considered primarily a public good, is increasingly being transformed into a predominantly private good; a commodity that could be subject to trade rules. Basic questions should be answered before any action is taken in this field. Accreditation for what purpose and for which qualities? Who will be the gatekeepers of the system and what will be their criteria?

The implications of the concepts of quality and of accreditation, and the methods adopted in this field, will produce consequences not only at economic and financial levels but also in terms of the cultural, social and political life of institutions and nations. In 1998, during the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE, UNESCO, Paris), a consensus was reached and the idea of evaluation was accepted, based on the general acceptance that quality in higher education is multidimensional. The WCHE favoured a system in which quality and relevance should go hand in hand. Since then, accreditation, a method already used for a long time in some countries, in particular the United States, was added more prominently to the international agenda.

The concept of quality is crucial, here. A proposal of the WCHE, requesting institutions of higher education to define or redefine their missions together with society, could serve to help create the necessary conditions for appropriate evaluations, by comparing what the institutions actually achieve with what the society as a whole expects from them. Standards could be defined through this mechanism instead of using models that do not relate to the cultural environment of institutions or the specific needs of society. These standards should guarantee appropriate quality, while at the same time enhancing diversity, innovation and creativity.

Three interconnected processes are under way on the international scene at present, which have a direct impact on the organization of higher education institutions and the way accreditation systems will be organized. They are the Bologna Declaration, the definition of guidelines for the establishment of a system of accreditation at the international level, and the increasing presence of the World Trade Organization, also with regard to higher education.

The Bologna Declaration is a successful process to create a European space of higher education. Originally, it was a policy statement that now represents a kind of agreement among more than 30 European countries. One pertinent question, here, is whether a new methodology is becoming routine at the international level. It takes a long time to finalize a treaty, and the same applies to normative instruments. The elaboration of a declaration by a selected group of ministers or experts seems to be much easier.

This apparently happened with the Bologna Declaration, and the same might occur with the guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education, adopted in December 2005 by the OECD Council. The UNESCO General Conference in December 2005, among other things, only took note “that the Director General plans to issue the Guidelines as a Secretariat Document”. The International Association of Universities (IAU) and 35 other institutions launched another document, giving more importance to ‘relevance’ in this process. For the purpose of ensuring accreditation, regions are being actively encouraged to revise UNESCO’s normative instruments on the recognition of studies and diplomas. If the reforms are undertaken, it is essential that they take into consideration the diversity of systems in relation to the relevance of higher education in their respective societies.

Finally, it is necessary to look once again at the WTO and at the GATS – the General Agreement on Trade in Services – approved in 1994. The GATS raises a number of questions of principle. Concerns are expressed, in particular, with regard to its provisions in the clauses linked to the most favoured nations, national treatment, and recognition and accreditation. All this brings us, in our view, to the need for reinforcing higher education as a public good, which is based on three principles: equality, continuity and adaptability. For this, the WCHE in 1998 established a courageous framework. When implemented properly this will help higher education to truly contribute, in all countries, to a better future for all.

INTRODUCTION

Accreditation has become a major issue for higher education over the past few years. The reasons are well known: the development of new technologies, progress in distance and virtual education, multiplication of new providers, attempts to generalize the transformation of education into a commodity, internationalization of higher education¹ and, as a consequence of all these factors, the need for trustworthy systems to ensure the quality and relevance of institutions and programmes. Measures at the national, regional or international levels are presented as being justified in order to ensure quality and protect countries and students from ‘bad educational products’ and from fraudulent providers of educational services.

The accreditation systems are also considered as an instrument for allowing higher education to face transformations in the economy, society and civilization, which can, in many aspects, be considered to be more important than the changes that occurred in the world during the Industrial Revolution. The cornerstone of this evolution is knowledge. The creation of knowledge and the way it is handled, as well as the control of information, are crucial tools for developed countries to achieve and consolidate their power in a globalized world. Knowledge creation, dissemination and application, however, are also crucial to safeguard the future of developing countries. In the economic area today, the fundamental difference is between who conceives the products and their production. The conception is directly linked to research and development based on science and on theoretical knowledge codification. As higher education is where research is undertaken and where researchers graduate, achieving the appropriate quality standards appears to be essential. This was reflected in the Declaration adopted in Paris by the participants in the World Conference on Higher Education (October 1998), the Preamble of which states:

‘... owing to the scope and pace of change, society has become increasingly knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socioeconomic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations’.

This evolution favoured a shift in values. Solidarity tends to disappear. Competition is paramount. Social, spiritual and collective values risk being replaced by commercial, materialistic and individual values and behaviour. As one Dutch expert, Chris Lorenz, mentioned recently in Oxford:

‘The notion of the ‘knowledge economy’ does not at root mean the restructuring of the economy on the basis of scientific knowledge. On the contrary, it means that the domain of knowledge production is being ‘economized’: the homo academicus is now to be modelled after the *homo economicus*. In comparison with the traditional Enlightenment view, the relationship between science and the economy is no longer represented as the domain in which science demonstrates its applied success, based on its truth; rather the economy is treated as the domain which determines whether ‘intellectual production’ is to be regarded as making a scientific contribution (or not). The economy now plays the role of legitimatizing scientific activity, or of disqualifying it as ‘unprofitable’.

Since it is in this context that accreditation started to be treated as a pressing matter, it is not difficult to understand that there are many reasons why important and basic questions are being raised on this subject. We must make increasingly clear what we want to exactly achieve. Accreditation for what? For which qualities? What kind of qualities do we really want, who will be the gatekeepers of the system, what will be their criteria? These types of questions must be specified and answered before any serious decisions can be made (see also Ginkel, 2006).

The implications of the concepts of accreditation and of adopted methods in this field are not neutral and will produce consequences not only at the economic and financial levels but also and particularly in terms of the social cultural and political life of institutions and nations. Many analysts consider that these methods reflect frequently a concept of world society in which the people in the developing countries are seen as passive receivers rather than as active partners. This is reinforced by the feeling that the policies adopted in rich countries tend to be oriented to keep for themselves the role of exporting know-how whenever this is convenient for them – and maintaining the dependent status of developing nations in the production of knowledge and technology.

These analyses are not new and similar statements were made in the recent past regarding evaluation, when threats against university autonomy and academic freedom were frequently identified. A well-known Latin American expert, José Dias Sobrinho, used to say that evaluation implies a concept of the world. This was also the opinion of a graduate sociologist from the Catholic University of Louvain, Nair Costa Muls, when she stated in 1993:

"Evaluation is not neutral. There is no evaluation for evaluation. The evaluation represents always a questioning having as reference a project previously defined. Consequently, there is no unique and universal definition of what is evaluation, neither of the underlying concept of quality.

These questions were also central to the discussions held during the preparations for the WCHE (World Conference on Higher Education) that took place in Paris in UNESCO in 1998. During several decades, UNESCO and other international organizations, even if they had different objectives and targets, campaigned in favour of evaluation to improve quality and relevance, and to increase accountability with regard to society as a whole in each and every country. They were successful in this campaign.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

It was in fact a long road towards the 1998 consensus, in which participants in the WCHE stated:

"Quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipments, services to the community and the academic environment. Internal self-evaluation and external review conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international expertise, are vital for enhancing

quality. Independent national bodies should be established and comparative standards of quality, recognized at international level, should be defined. Due attention should be paid to specific institutional, national and regional contexts in order to take into account diversity and to avoid uniformity. Stakeholders should be an integral part of the institutional evaluation process. (Article 11(a) of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action – UNESCO, Paris 1998)

At that time – 1998 – the idea of evaluation was accepted by consensus. The assessment of higher education institutions became one of the vital elements of higher education analyses and policies everywhere. Questions on how to assess, assure and improve quality became universal. Important segments of the academic community accepted the idea of evaluation as an instrument for maintaining and reinforcing quality, relevance and accountability, but without losing autonomy and freedom. Many experts and institutions also reacted against the use of evaluation as an instrument for sanctions. Since then, accreditation procedures (a common practice in the United States for several decades now), in addition to internal and external evaluation, were added more intensively at international level to the methods used for achieving quality and relevance. But new controversies and divergences emerged immediately, this time on standards to be used as benchmarks for defining and identifying the quality of higher education institutions and programmes. In addition, the concept was not always very clear. A definition was given in the Encyclopaedia of Higher Education edited by Burton Clark and Guy Neave, with the International Association of Universities (IAU, Paris) in 1992, when C. Adelman stated:

‘Accreditation refers to a process of quality control and assurance in higher education, whereby, as a result of inspection or assessment, or both, an institution or its programmes are recognized as meeting minimum acceptable standards’.

The same author informs us that by 1979, there were nine purposes of quality assurance in United States:

1. certifying that an institution has met established standards;
2. assisting prospective students in identifying acceptable institutions;
3. assisting institutions in determining the acceptability of transfer credits;
4. helping to identify institutions and programmes to apply for the investment of private funds;
5. protecting institutions against harmful internal and external pressures;
6. creating goals for self-improvement of all programmes and stimulating a general raising of standards among educational institutions;
7. involving the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning;

- 8. establishing criteria for professional certification and licensure, and upgrading courses offering such preparations (although only partly through accreditation);
- 9- providing one of several considerations used as bases for determining eligibility for federal assistance.

Accreditation – it must be emphasised – should be seen as the method for evaluating the quality and relevance of a higher education institution or of a specific programme, allowing for its recognition within an existing (specified) system of higher education.

At present, the literature on quality assessment and accreditation is enormous. Mention is made to standards and accountability, the differences in institutional accreditation, the nature of the processes (voluntary or compulsory), and its legal organization (private or public, profit or non-profit). In this paper, we can only mention a few of the documents on this subject and technical questions will not be treated.

The dominant concept among participants in the World Conference on Higher Education, in 1998, favoured what Gudmund Hernes and Michaela Martin called ‘fitness for purpose’ (a terminology already adopted by the British scholar Christopher Ball in 1985) against what they defined as the ‘standard-based approach’. In the fitness-for-purpose approach, an accreditation system should provide elements to analyse the quality of the institution’s performance and relevance in accomplishing its missions. In the standard-based approach, detailed standards, frequently following foreign experience, are used to define the quality of an institution or programme.

According to the concept resulting from discussions at the WCHE, higher education must serve society’s needs and development goals and base its long-term orientation on societal aims and requirements, including respect for cultures and environmental protection. For this purpose, ‘higher education should reinforce its role of providing a service to society, especially its activities aimed at eliminating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation and disease, mainly through an interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approach in the analysis of problems and issues’ (Article 6(b) of the above-mentioned Declaration).

These duties, in a certain way, were renewed by the United Nations, with the definition, in September 2000, of the objectives of the millennium (the Millennium Development Goals), to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.
3. Promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.
4. Reduce child mortality.

5. Improve maternal health.
6. Prevent HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

The participation of higher education institutions in reaching these objectives could at present help to assess whether an institution is relevant. However, this is not the dominant approach today, particularly within international organizations. The winds of change, since the beginning of the 1990s, coinciding with the application of the principles of the ‘Washington Consensus’ (opening up of economies, structural adjustment, elimination of inflation and public deficit, privatization), conceived in 1990 by the English economist John Williamson, are oriented towards the adoption of principles for, and standards of, excellence as an instrument for achieving quality with no priorities for the links to relevance. This orientation was reinforced with the adoption of the Global Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 1994 and the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

In the field of higher education, the application of the ‘Washington Consensus’ brought about more intensively proposals such as encouraging a reduction in state participation in social expenses; decreasing the volume of public investments in higher education; stimulating the development of private education as an equity instrument; giving priority to commercial aspects rather than to educational considerations; and accepting higher education as a commercial good regulated according to principles established by the WTO.

In the developed world, but also in some emerging countries, a process of ‘schizophrenia’ is affecting a significant number of public higher education institutions. Internally, in the countries where they are based, they need to be considered as public institutions delivering public goods, but at international level, in particular in their relationship with the institutions of the developing world, they serve as providers of commercial services and give absolute priority to financial benefits, instead of acting in a spirit of solidarity by sharing knowledge. Instead of cooperation the watchword is competition.

The certification of quality has now become more complex and involves more directly values that are not of an academic nature. This reality has provoked some caustic comments from Guy Neave, the editor of the International Association of Universities bulletin 4(1), February 1993. After stating that ‘quality’ has now been added to the ‘Gladstone bag of universal problems’ and mentioning that ‘academia finds itself beset by a growing and often cacophonous crowd of “quality assurers”’, he concluded:

"The issue behind quality has very little to do with ‘quality’ per se. It has to do with who sets the criteria involved in its definition and from these to the question of control over the heart of the academic enterprise is but a short step".

The value and strength of higher education resides in its worldwide diversity. This is why the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 1998, highlighted the function of independent national bodies in evaluation exercises and requested that ‘due attention should be paid to specific institutional, national and regional contexts in order to take into account diversity and to avoid uniformity’ – and also that ‘stakeholders should be an integral part of the institutional evaluation process’ (UNESCO, 1998).

It is not without reason that UNESCO’s Regional Conventions on the Recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees (the first one for Latin America and the Caribbean was adopted on 19 July 1974) underline the wealth and diversity of national systems of higher education as a key asset, which must be preserved and further promoted. The quality and relevance of higher education institutions, together with their programmes and diplomas, cannot be judged in terms of given models, however perfect they may seem. They must ultimately be assessed within a particular context, and at a given time. Quality cannot be derived from a universal model, and it cannot emerge only from theory and abstraction or, following present attempts towards commercialization, have response to market interests as its main criteria. Quality is the result of a series of actions responding to precise social needs at a very specific moment. Real quality is *hic et nunc* (here and now), it exists in specific contexts.

The regional conventions were realistic but progressive instruments. Member states realized that the former process of equivalence could not be employed because, as René Ochs, the former Director of Higher Education at UNESCO (until 1981) emphasized, ‘equivalence stated in terms of perfect correlation of contents, duration and quality of studies is obviously rare, given the diversity existing from one country to another’. In fact, the majority of member states considered that equivalence was impossible to assess because of the widely differing needs, structures and contents in higher education, and this was the reason for the use of the term recognition, which was considered to be more appropriate.

It may seem obvious that cross-border educational services require multinational regulatory mechanisms to maintain an appropriate level of quality and relevance (calculations for a bridge, for example, are the same everywhere), but the regulations and their application will always be controlled by a person or an institution. UNESCO’s Regional Conventions, completed by an international recommendation (1993), offer a framework for dialogue and concertation with member states. There is a need to update the terms of reference and the reforms in its application methods. They provide, however, if they are able to keep their commitments to respecting the cultural diversity of countries and systems, a better point of departure than rigid and strict agreements with no room for adaptations, or guidelines elaborated essentially on the basis of the experiences and models of the developed world.

At present, there is silence on these principles, and mechanisms are foreseen for defining quality more as a basis for equivalences than for recognition. During this period characterized by the commercialization of education, they can also serve trade more than providing a service to their community.

DEFINITIONS OF QUALITY

And here we face the main difficulty concerning accreditation. What, precisely, is quality? There are no clear definitions either on quality or on the related concept of excellence and a lot of subjectivism exists in this area. Definitions are frequently a ‘tautology’ or they describe a situation related to some specific cultures.

In fact, the apparent objectivity of many statements and presentations on methods for achieving quality is unable to solve this basic question. And this is not new. In opening a symposium on quality of higher education in Latin America at the Universidad de Los Andes (Bogota, July 1985), the former Minister of Education of Colombia, Ms. Doris Eder de Zambrano, emphasized that ‘Quality is a diffuse term, as beauty or goodness, which is conducive to multiplying definitions, and which is felt or perceived in absolutely different ways by different groups or individuals. Factors derived from the needs of each group and from its expectations regarding the role of education contribute to this perception’.

One Indian expert, who has lived in Europe for decades, Bikas C. Sanyal, when dealing with this question in 1992, felt it necessary to look up the Webster’s Third International Dictionary, where he found that excellence is defined as ‘the state of possessing good qualities in an eminent degree’, and quality is defined as ‘the degree of conformance to a standard’.

In this definition, conformity with standards appears to be an instrument for identifying quality. Going further, and quoting Charles F. Carter, Bikas Sanyal (1992) added, that ‘excellence in a higher education system would mean that the system possesses the characteristics of conforming to standards in an eminent degree, that is, to what extent the programme has achieved the desired outcomes. This leads to the identification of the desired outcomes or objectives of a higher education system.’ A clearer statement than this would be impossible to find ... but the questions that remain without clarification are again the same ones: What are the standards? What are their foundations? Who defines them? Where do they come from? Beyond this, the issue here is that quality in higher education cannot be seen as ‘conformity to a standard’, as higher education is supposed to promote creativity and innovation (see Ginkel, 1994; 1995 a and b).

One of the most influential experts who supports concepts such as ‘global public good’ and the need for international systems of accreditation, a Flemish specialist, Dirk Van Damme, who was one of the main personalities in the foundation process aimed at establishing principles and a system for international accreditation, was also very clear when he said that what is crucially important ‘is the development and worldwide acceptance of a common definition of what quality in higher education actually means’. After proposing, in particular at international level, detailed systems for accreditation, with the main reason d’être being quality, this expert feels obliged to acknowledge that the concept needs to be researched or, to put it in another way, that it is not evident.

The problem is, in fact, a real one. The participants in the WCHE (World Conference on Higher Education, Paris, 1998), confirming the debates that took place all

over the world prior to this conference, indicated the necessary elements for integrating the whole concept of quality. In this sense, they also followed the descriptive line and referred to quality as a multidimensional concept embracing all higher education's main functions and activities. However, they did not stop at a descriptive attitude but went further, linking the concepts of quality and relevance in a pragmatic and realistic way.

In addition, they debated and made recommendations, which until now have not attracted the attention they deserve from experts and officials responsible for policies in higher education institutions. They examined hundreds of documents but adopted only two. One was "The World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century – Vision and Action", in which principles were approved and a general framework established, and the other was the "Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development in Higher Education". The first document is more permanent in nature, the second deals with suggestions for action.

Among these suggestions, there is a recommendation that higher education establishments, together with public and civil society, should define (or redefine) their missions. All stakeholders of higher education should be called upon to participate in this exercise. Clear missions, defined initially by all segments of the university in an autonomous way and approved by the society the institutions are supposed to serve, can be used as a flag for them. They should also serve as targets to be attained, and they can create the conditions to make appropriate evaluations, comparing what the institutions actually achieve with what the whole society expects from them during one precise period of their history. In other words, the famous standards could be better established through this mechanism, and could also create an element of comparability adapted to each institution and according to the missions they defined autonomously.

This approach differs from the common patterns that stimulate higher education institutions to look for external models, expecting them to adapt to patterns that frequently do not have any connection with the cultural sources of the institution or the social needs of the society to which the higher education institutions are linked. This is the great challenge today in the adoption of evaluation and accreditation systems.

It is obvious that if a broad discussion is undertaken with all segments of society, the debate will become more open and members of the academic community, even before taking decisions on the model of universities they want, will participate in concrete debates to build a better society in a country, a region and the entire world. We should not forget, even when adapting to the present world situation and the emergence of the knowledge society and globalization, the proposal made by one of UNESCO's creators, the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, who felt nations should define their project for a 'historic ideal', that is to say, the project of a Nation, aimed at building a more just society.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

We have described, thus far, the context in which the new debate on accreditation is taking place and have tried to identify the difficulties and main challenges in defining

quality in concrete situations. Now we want to focus on some major initiatives. Why are international organizations so interested in this question? In reality, many things are happening at the same time, and it is often difficult to understand the interactions between elements that seem to be unconnected with each other but have, in actual fact, some common bases and targets. It is useful to mention three processes that have made a considerable impact on the subject we are examining, and which are clearly interconnected:

1. The Bologna Declaration and its rapid evolution. The Bologna Declaration directly concerns Europe but its implications are relevant to the world as a whole, since international organizations have apparently decided to transform this process into a model for the entire world.
2. The definition of guidelines for the establishment of an international system of accreditation and its impacts on existing instruments, such as UNESCO's Conventions on the recognition of studies and diplomas in higher education and the position of university associations.
3. The WTO's presence and influence in the field of higher education, in particular, in accreditation matters.

THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION

The Bologna Declaration, was originally a policy statement that now represents a kind of agreement among more than 30 European countries. Its aim is to reform their higher education in a consistent way. Its final goal is to create a single European system with increased competitiveness. The officials responsible for the initiative took into consideration several factors:

- An increased share of new knowledge now occurs outside Europe;
- Access to higher education is still low in Europe, particularly when compared with other developed regions;
- Europe does not display great efficiency in transforming scholarly knowledge into innovation in the economy;
- Several countries in other regions are becoming more attractive poles for students from developing countries, and even many Europeans are leaving the continent to receive their training in other parts of the world.

The Bologna Declaration is not an international treaty, it does not constitute a law, it does not have the format of traditional normative instruments such as declarations, recommendations, conventions, but it is nevertheless being applied all over Europe and, through cooperation mechanisms, its influence has extended to other regions, particularly Latin America and Africa. Legally, it has no binding effect, but the reality is different.

One question can be raised if this is not a new methodology in international relations. It takes a long time to finalize a treaty, and it requires the involvement of parliaments and, frequently, of civil society, entailing numerous discussions and debates in the press, until an appropriate agreement is reached. Rules within international organizations are sometimes heavy and complex. The elaboration of a Declaration by a selected group of ministers, and its incremental implementation, seems to be much easier and more efficient; there is less control, parliaments and civil societies are not involved, and changes and adaptations can be made during the implementation process. This methodology, of course, raises doubts about the democratic nature of the process, but until now, it does not seem to have aroused concern either in parliaments or in academic circles.

Structural reforms stimulated by the Bologna Declaration are being carried out very rapidly, and in 2003 it was felt that 80 per cent of the countries that had signed the Declaration had already adopted the system of 3 + 2, as well as the scheme of credits. The success in its operation is visible and there is no doubt that changes and reforms will facilitate the mobility of students, professors and researchers, as well as the recognition of studies and diplomas. The general impression is that even if difficulties emerge – for instance how to assess the work carried out individually by students at home, in libraries or in laboratories – for obtaining credits, the process is developing smoothly and has become irreversible.

Among the structural changes having obtained a wide consensus, or at least a widespread acceptance, which now seems to exist in Europe, one can note:

- The adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- The adoption of a system based on two main cycles: undergraduate and graduate, or of a basic three-cycle;
- system (3 + 2 + 4), corresponding to a Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and a doctoral programme, following the system adopted by higher education in the United States;
- The establishment of a system of credits that can be obtained not only through traditional courses but also through contexts outside higher education;
- The promotion of mobility for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff;
- The promotion of European dimensions in higher education;
- The promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance.

It is important to note that the promotion of cooperation in quality assurance is one of the key factors for strengthening convergence between institutions all over Europe. Credit transfer, for example, implies necessarily an appreciation of the contents and methods of

learning. This explains why the ministers in question decided to set up converging paths for evaluation, quality assessment and accreditation.

A few comments should be made at this point. It should not be forgotten that when launching this process, the French Minister, Claude Allegre, made it clear that France and Europe were losing the competition to the United States, Australia and some other countries. The exporter model of these countries was presented as a pattern to be followed, and this implied a change in the way France, and Europe in general, used to regard cooperation. As the Dutch expert Chris Lorenz stated recently,

‘The EU representatives there noted that the ‘export value’ of higher education in US amounts to many hundreds of millions of dollars per year, while in Australia higher education even takes fifth place in terms of total export value. Given these perceived ‘successes’, the EU concluded that European inferiority on the global educational market could no longer be tolerated. On the basis of the presuppositions about the ‘knowledge economy’ and the ‘knowledge society’, the EU pretty inevitably came to the conclusion that European higher education had to adopt, as its ultimate goal, becoming the ‘most dynamic’ and ‘most competitive’ in the world!'

Here lies one of the main obstacles to the implementation of the Bologna Process: how to establish a convergence based on the model of higher education in the USA, but respecting, as far as the content is concerned and according to the wish expressed by European universities, cultural diversity and the relevance of the missions of higher education institutions within the European space?

The risks of adopting not only a structure and organizational methods based on the experience of higher education in the United States, but also contents that are designed to suit different cultural contexts, have not yet been sufficiently analysed. And the risk of coming back to a system of equivalence based exclusively on a unique model, instead of a system of recognition where differences are respected, is real.

It is a well known fact that 30 years ago, a similar process took place in Latin America, with success in some cases, in a problematic way in others. This should stimulate the European Commission and European universities to undertake case studies on the implementation of these reforms at universities such as the Universidad de Costa Rica, the Universidad de Concepción (Chile), the Universidad de los Andes (Colombia), the Universidade de Brasilia and the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Brazil). Instead, European leaders seem to act as if Latin America did not have any experience in this field. What their academic communities are being called upon to do is to adapt themselves automatically to the new European structures, with the same cycles and degrees, the same duration of programmes, eventually the same contents and – this point is essential – the same mechanisms for controlling the academic staff and for evaluating courses and programmes.

Equally relevant is the need to develop a Europe of citizens, based on humanist attitudes and tolerance. Recent electoral results in some countries, such as Spain and Italy, the results of the referendum on the European constitution in France and the Netherlands,

and the riots in France, were considered by many analysts as a sign that neo-liberal policies had gone too far, citizens were forgotten and reasonable limits were surpassed.

This prospect is not clearly highlighted in the actions Europe is undertaking to create a common academic space. One should bear in mind what Federico Mayor (1998) used to say when he was Director General of UNESCO:

‘A market economy, perhaps, but a market society, market democracy, no! It is up to the people to set their priorities, not up to the market. It is poverty and

exclusion, either geographical, economic, social or cultural, which is the very root of conflict, of extremist behaviour, frustration and radicalisation. Exclusion is at the root of massive emigration flows. The market economies have not honoured their promises to facilitate endogenous development in the

developing countries. This means we must defend our society and our democracy, to ensure it is fully participatory and representative’.

One essential element in the strategy to modernize European systems is also integration and harmonization with the world of work. If this is not carried out, universities will train people who will surely be condemned to unemployment, the level of which is already excessively high in many European countries, as in other parts of the world, where precariousness has become a pandemic. However, as the reality shows, the unemployment rate of the active population in the EU in 2003 was 4 per cent lower for people with a high education level than for the population as a whole, and 7.5 per cent lower than for those with less than junior secondary education.

A higher education diploma is still considered essential to acquire skills for the modern world. But higher education institutions cannot train people only for today’s needs. If institutions of higher education do so, the diplomas would immediately become obsolete. Programmes of continuing education should be envisaged, but students should learn to learn, learn to be, and learn to take initiatives, in addition to learning to live together. Even if the vocabulary used was rather different, all this was foreseen in UNESCO’s regional conventions and strongly emphasised by the World Conference on Higher Education. To be able to prepare a personality with these skills, higher education institutions should play a role as an observatory, studying their society, analysing the evolution and working with prospects.

GUIDELINES AND INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF ACCREDITATION

Since the academic community and educational sectors of different governments discovered in 1999 the presence of the GATS and WTO, and felt concern about their implementation, several initiatives have been taken to face the new environment, most of

them, in fact, aiming at the acceptance of the application of the GATS principles, which some experts consider to be inevitable.

The academic community in general only discovered the GATS and became aware of its implications in 1999 (see below). However, early in 1995, one organization was created for dealing with trans-border education with the suggestive name of GATE – Global Alliance for Trans-national Education. The official founder of GATE was Glenn R. Jones from Jones International Ltd, a powerful enterprise in the field of cable-TV, also interested in selling educational products. The launching conference of GATE, opened by Glenn Jones, took place in London, in September 1996. One of the main speakers was Sir John Daniel, at that time vice-chancellor of the Open University in the UK. Between participants, in addition to representatives of the Open University of UK, there were representatives of Monash University in Australia, of CEPES in Bucharest (Karin Berg), and of the OECD (Kari Hyponnen). There were some participants from developing countries such as Maria Jose LeMaitre, from the National Accreditation Council of Chile and Johan Brink from the Committee of University Principals (South Africa). Most of them became members of the board of GATE.

GATE elaborated a set of principles for trans-national education presented to the London Conference, collaborated with the Services Division of WTO (World Trade Organization) and launched a GATE certification process. It is clear that in spite of the participation of some institutions including a few from receiver countries, GATE was considered the property of an international enterprise, which suddenly was in the position of provider of educational products and of certifier of quality of those same products. One important conference of GATE took place in Paris in the week preceding the World Conference on Higher Education. The GATE Conference (30 September–2 October 1998) was held in the middle of polemics. The conference was co-sponsored by CEPES (Bucharest) and the OECD, the opening reception took place at the Australian Embassy in Paris, and was opened once again by Glenn R. Jones followed by representatives of CEPES and the OECD.

There was an opening panel on regional and national planning with participants of the Soros Foundation and KPMG International, and of Finland (Kari Hyponnen – OECD), Canada (Jane Knight), the Netherlands (Hans de Wit) and Hong Kong (Nigel French). Glenn Jones gave a banquet for participants in the Château de Versailles. A clash between the different roles GATE was trying. It could not work in the form envisaged, and in fact the organization ‘imploded’. According to Van Damme (2002a), in a statement given in Washington in 2002 ‘the “Global Alliance for Trans-national Education” (GATE) was established as an alliance of institutions, quality assurance bodies, governmental organisations and companies with the objective of developing accreditation procedures for providers of trans-national higher education programmes, With a radical change in its governance and a take-over by the corporate interests of Jones International, the stakeholders with an academic background left the initiative’. Today whoever consults the GATE web page will find the information that ‘Jones International transfers GATE to the United States Distance Learning Association’.

The idea of launching once again a set of principles for trans-national education can be examined through the analysis of an important process launched internationally in 2001, with great determination and efficiency, apparently with a view to creating suitable conditions for setting up an international system of accreditation or, at least, to create a framework for agencies dealing with the accreditation process. The OECD is once again actively involved in this process, which also started to be discussed inside UNESCO when Sir John Daniel was its assistant director-general for education. Its final objective is seen as a solution for solving many problems but some important challenges are hidden.²

During the UNESCO General Conference in 2005, member states acknowledged the existence of a document on ‘guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education’, but did not endorse it. The General Conference took note ‘that the Director-General was planning to issue the Guidelines as a Secretariat Document’ (Resolution adopted on the Report of Commission II at the 17th Plenary meeting, 19 October 2005). In addition, disposals were adopted establishing that the secretariat can participate in the implementation of these guidelines ‘when requested’. In other words, when and if one Member State takes the initiative to present a request. The document was later adopted, without any restriction, by the OECD in December 2005. In this document, the views of the authors on the situation of higher education in a period of trans-national education are clear. It describes how the importance of cross-border higher education has grown considerably since the 1980s.

A number of critical comments presented during its elaboration were taken into consideration, including what was said in WTO by the Japanese delegation, which declared that ‘factory’ diplomas were unacceptable. Criticism from some regions such as Latin America, condemning foreign institutions offering programmes without quality, or at least of an inferior quality to what is provided in their countries of origin, were also used when drawing up the text. It acknowledges the important role of non-governmental organizations, such as higher education associations, student organizations, recognition and credential evaluation bodies and professional bodies, in strengthening international cooperation for quality provision in cross-border higher education.

The document, in many aspects, became ‘politically correct’. However it does not highlight the importance of relevance and the social commitment of universities. Reference to relevance is slight and appears to be a kind of formality for answering in advance criticism from receiver countries; and the document is clearly Euro-centrist (following UNESCO’s tradition, Europe includes here, the United States, Canada and Israel).

Quality assurance and accreditation bodies are invited to ‘apply the principles reflected in current international documents in cross-border higher education such as the UNESCO (CEPES)/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Trans-national Education’ (Article 17 e). Higher education institutions/providers delivering cross-border higher education are recommended to ‘where relevant, use codes of good practice such as UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practices in the Provision of Trans-national Education and other relevant codes such as the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications’. Academic recognition bodies are invited to ‘use codes of practices such as the Council of

Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications”.

The International Association of Universities (IAU) and 35 other regional and national associations decided to launch another document (Sharing quality higher education across borders: a statement on behalf of higher education institutions worldwide), which is not presented in opposition to the first one, but clearly tries to highlight the importance of relevance for higher education at present. And this makes a difference!

This document takes a position against possible limitations, through trade frameworks, in the field of higher education, which ‘may have unintended consequences that can be harmful to the missions of higher education’ and seems to reflect more accurately the position of academic institutions. The institutional leader in this manifestation is the International Association of Universities, with headquarters at the UNESCO premises, and the document is shared and recognized by the following institutions:

- Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)
- American Council on Education (ACE), USA
- Association of African Universities (AAU)
- Association of Arab Universities (AArU)
- Asamblea Nacional de Rectores del Perú
- Asociación Colombiana de Universidades (ASCUN), Colombia
- Asociación Iberoamericana de Educación Superior a Distancia (AIESAD)
- Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (ANUIES), Mexico
- Asociación de Universidades Grupo Montevideo, Uruguay
- Asociación Universitaria Iberoamericana de Posgrado (AIUP)
- Association of Universities of Bangladesh
- Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), Canada
- Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), The Netherlands
- Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors, Sri Lanka
- Compostela Group of Universities, Spain
- Conférence des Grandes Ecoles, France
- Consejo Nacional de Educacion Superior (CONESUP), Ecuador
- Consejo de Rectores de Universidades de Brasil (CRUB), Brazil
- Consejo de Rectores de Universidades de España, Spain
- Consejo Superior de Universidades de Centro América (CSUCA)
- Consorcio Red de Educación a Distancia (CREAD)
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), USA
- European University Association (EUA)
- International Association of University Presidents (IAUP)
- The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad), The Netherlands
- Higher Education South Africa (HESA)
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), USA

- Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM), Hong Kong
- International Association of Universities (IAU)
- International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU), France
- Indonesian University Rector Forum (IURF)
- La Red de Macro Universidades de América Latina y El Caribe
- Organización Universitaria Interamericana (OUI)
- La Red Iberoamericana de Estudios de Posgrado (REDIBEP)
- Unión de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe
- Vice-Chancellors Ghana (VCG), Ghana

In the process for establishing an international system of accreditation, some risks are evident even if they are not discussed:

1. Here also, the traditional methodology for the approval of normative international instruments was not followed. Officially, the document duly noted by the UNESCO General Conference and approved by OECD is not binding, but, in practical terms, its implementation actions are taken as if it were an official normative instrument. In June 2005, in a policy forum organized by IIEP (International Institute for Educational Planning) in Paris, it was announced that countries would be required to present information to UNESCO and the OECD on its implementation.
2. Important elements for the development of cooperation systems based on solidarity are not highlighted. No clear information is given about the question of who will be in charge of accreditation if international systems – as proposed in 2001 at the beginning of the process – are set up, or about their authority or validation. Positive recommendations are addressed to organizations of quality evaluation and accreditation, they are encouraged to respect cultural diversity, but in this case too it is not clear who will co-ordinate the process, and according to what criteria. It is clear that the document was improved during its elaboration, but the final goal of the process still appears to be the consolidation of the foundation for an international system of accreditation, which can facilitate the application of the rules related to recognition and accreditation of the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services).
3. Regions are being actively encouraged to revise UNESCO's regional conventions on the recognition of studies and diplomas,³ but the approach risks being Eurocentric because models of regulations under discussion were exclusively elaborated under the European Council of Europe-UNESCO Convention (Lisbon, 1997), reflecting the decisions taken by European countries. Regions should not be called upon to adopt or adapt the European convention, but to update their regional conventions according to their needs, participating also in the revision of the International Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Diplomas, whose principles could be utilized in the search for an international understanding on this subject. Of course, the content of these conventions should be analysed in the light of present realities and an effort must be made, for example, to develop concrete

and trustworthy methodologies to assess knowledge obtained outside the educational system, in particular through the world of work.

An important element that the application committees of the conventions on recognition and diplomas may not have been able to implement was precisely the arrangements related to the preparation for the world of work, with the need for recognition of the value of knowledge and experience acquired outside schools, particularly through self-learning and professional activities. The promotion of lifelong education, the democratization of education, and the adoption and application of an educational policy should take structural, economic and technological developments into account, as well as the social changes and cultural contexts of each country.

The ‘world of work’ must not be seen as a synonym for the world of business. The universities should be modern and have a good administrative performance, and although enterprises normally aim at earning profits, higher education institutions should exist for much wider purposes, including humanitarian. In addition, given the importance of workers and the need for links with the work cannot be seen from a narrow point of view. Cooperation with private and public companies – taking into account the present state of the economy – is necessary, but it should not run against the long-term objectives of higher education and must not be guided exclusively according to the short-term and floating interests of the market. Failing which, they will no longer be relevant and cannot be considered as quality institutions. And if standards are based only on the present needs of industry and of trade, they will engender bad results in the long term (on the crucial roles of universities, see also Ginkel, 2006).

If reforms of the conventions are undertaken, it should be noted that observations on their implementation since the 1970s have revealed that the committees of application do not meet more than once every two years (sometimes even less frequently), their members are not permanent, and frequently are not familiar with the subject under discussion. Universities and their associations do not belong to these committees or are invited to participate in meetings only as observers. Bearing in mind that in many parts of the world, universities, according to the law, should enjoy autonomy and academic freedom, their absence in this case condemns the committees of applications to complete inefficiency. Their participation as full members is indispensable.

When engaging in this process, educational authorities, as the academic community, must be aware of its nature and be well informed of its main goals as defined since the beginning of the operations in 2000/2001. The basic reference in this case are the Introductory Paper Professor Van Damme elaborated for the expert meeting in Paris in September 2001 and the WTO document on education services dated 23 September 1998 (S/C/W/49). It is in this document that the Secretariat of WTO gives elements for considering higher education as a commercial service and raises questions such as: ‘how can problems of non-recognition of diplomas/degrees granted by foreign providers be prevented from frustrating the expected gains in the market access?’ Useful information for understanding this whole process is also provided on the OECD site (www.oecd.org), which contains a clarifying text presented as a foreword to the Guidelines adopted by this organization:

"The Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education provide an international framework to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision and disreputable providers. They will sustain the development of quality cross-border higher education that meets human, social, economic and cultural needs. The Guidelines set out how governments, higher education institutions/providers, student bodies, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, academic and professional recognition bodies of the sending country and receiving country could share responsibilities, while respecting the diversity of higher education systems. The development of the Guidelines was carried out in collaboration with UNESCO, which has also issued the Guidelines under the responsibility of the Secretariat following the decision of the 33rd session of its General Conference in October 2005. The text was prepared through three drafting meetings where all countries in the world were invited as well as various non-governmental organisations. These meetings were chaired by Jan Levy, Norway with Mala Singh (South Africa) and Stella Anthony (India) as Vice-chairs. The Guidelines were approved on 2 December 2005 by the OECD Council. Within the OECD, the Guidelines were launched in 2003 by the Governing Board of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) as a follow-up to work on internationalisation and trade in tertiary education. Responsibility for their implementation was then transferred to the Education Committee. The project was initiated by Bernard Hugonnier and Kurt Larsen, and led by Keiko Momii. The project was partly sponsored by the Department of Education, Science and Training of Australia, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, and the Ministry of Education and Research of Norway. The Guidelines are published on the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD... (OECD, 2005)'.

The preamble also expresses gratitude for the work done by OECD staff and for the fruitful collaboration of members of the Higher Education Division of UNESCO's Secretariat, especially Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić and Zeynep Varoglu.

During all these discussions, the so-called North American model of accreditation, in fact being the United States model, was analysed and presented as a good practice, because its decentralization allows higher education institutions to be more active in the process. In 2005, a higher education commission in the Education Department of the United States, proposed eliminating regional accreditors in that country and to replace them with one national accreditation body, perhaps a foundation that the Congress could create to replace the existing system. In a document found on the Internet (<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/03//accredit>, retrieved on 13.4.2006), the reasons for this proposal are mentioned: a lack of transparency, low and lax standards and outdated regionalization. To explain this last point (outdated regionalization), it is stated that 'technology has rendered the quaint jurisdictional approach to accreditation obsolete!' and 'more and more students are crossing state lines to complete their education and enrolling in multiple institutions, often simultaneously'.

The reactions of experts and of institutions inside the United States were immediate. They consider that this initiative could present risks to the diversity of the higher education system in the United States and a threat to its multiple cultural systems. A national agency could ‘undermine the strength and diversity of U.S. higher education’, says Judith S. Eaton (mentioned by Burton Bollag in The Chronicle, 4/4/2006), president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. For Dr Eaton, the creation of national quality standards could result in putting pressure on colleges to become more alike.

The argument seems solid, and to go back to our discussions on the internationalization of accreditation, we could ask about the effects of international quality standards in US institutions of higher education. And what would be the effects in institutions of all other countries?

IMPACT OF THE WTO AND THE GATS

Today, one cannot study evaluation and accreditation mainly at the international level without referring to the GATS (the General Agreement on Trade in Services) approved in 1994 and to the World Trade Organization (WTO) which began operations in 1995. The GATS’ main aims are the lowering of tariffs and other commercial barriers to exchanges of goods but also of services. The GATS raises some questions of principles. Instead of being a right, established by law, of the citizens of states, higher education is redefined as – and is being actively transformed into – a commodity or, to put it in another way, an international service to be bought and sold through any international supplier. This concept provides the ideological framework for systems being set up all over the world.

The changes in the concept of higher education and questions raised, have had concrete consequences for all institutions and countries involved in the process of exchanges of programmes. Since then, an important issue for both governments and universities consists in knowing whether individual countries still have the right and, indeed, the opportunity and capability to regulate the functioning licences of institutions, and the recognition of studies and diplomas issued by cross-border providers. The questions are political, economic and legal, and the situation is unclear.⁴ Concern has been expressed, in particular regarding the GATS’ provisions in the clauses linked to the most favoured nations, national treatment, and recognition and accreditation.

Many universities and their associations in several parts of the world have realized that if these clauses are implemented in a strict way, one immediate consequence will be that all signatory countries of the GATS might be obliged to recognize, certify, and accredit the diplomas of all other members of the GATS. Instead of being associated with a system in which results are obtained through dialogue, rigid and binding norms will be implemented. The texts are ambiguous but interpretations of this nature are possible and this explains, at least partially, the interest so many countries, experts and organizations now have on the subject of accreditation.

In addition, the risk is that any state not complying with the commitments executed within the WTO relating to higher education could be condemned to pay indemnities to the entrepreneurs or industrialists of education, who might feel impaired and could be subject to retaliation on the part of countries that provide education, especially those supplying courses through the Internet. Many representatives of the academic world also expressed concern that the GATS could provoke the erosion of funds and subsidies for higher education, as well as the government's capacity to regulate its quality and to ensure that its higher education institutions – also beyond teaching, through their research and services to society – do contribute to the sound development of their country.

At the beginning, this agreement was ignored by the academic community and higher education institutions, until September 2001, when four organizations – the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the American Council on Education, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the European University Association – disseminated the Joint Declaration on Higher Education and the General Agreement on Trade in Services, expressing their 'strong reluctance to the inclusion of higher education among services that are to be committed to freer trade' (Barblan, 2002). Later, the International Association of Universities also signed this document.

In February 2002, at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, the participants in the working day on 'Science and Technology, an instrument for the peace in the XXI century', decided to propose a global pact guaranteeing the consolidation of the principles of action approved at the World Conference on Higher Education, promoted by UNESCO, in Paris, 1998, and the exclusion of higher education from the GATS. In the same city of Porto Alegre, on 26 April 2002, the presidents who participated in the III Meeting of Rectors of Ibero-American Public Universities discussed the matter and approved a resolution, in which, after a series of considerations, they stated:

"The Iberian and Latin American academics hereby gathered, reaffirming the commitments made by the governments and by the international academic community at the World Conference on Higher Education, held in Paris in October 1998, conceiving higher education as a public good, alert the university community and the entire society about the disastrous consequences of such proceedings and require the governments of their respective countries not to subscribe any commitments on this issue within the framework of the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)

Students and teachers' organizations and other academic associations also expressed their disagreement with the proposals issued from the GATS regulations. But it was also during this period that representatives of some governments and universities started to believe that the GATS is inevitable and that, given this situation, there is a need to adapt to the new reality, establishing the standards to be used so that various educational services could be considered similar enough to compete on the world market. The commercial interests are obvious in this position. However, certain experts also point to ethical motivations, for instance Andris Barblan, the former Secretary General of the European Rectors Conference who said (2002):

"this is essential if we are to protect the students, if we are to reassure the parents (who often foot the bill either by paying fees or by supporting taxes), and if we are to set a path of

convergence for teachers, employers and professions so that they can refer to some kind of order in the whirlwind of globalization.”

Certain analysts and members of governments tried to interpret the rules of the GATS, supporting the idea that the public education sector is not covered by the GATS negotiations and member states of the WTO have the right not to make any commitment on this subject.

The reality is more complex. Declarations of this nature are well intentioned, but often somewhat naive, and at the best the result of wishful thinking. It is true that Article I, 3(b) states that ‘services’ include any service in any sector, except services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority. However, if we continue reading the text of the GATS, we come to the letter (c) of the same article, where it is written that ‘a service supplied in the exercise of governmental authority means any service which is supplied neither on a commercial basis, nor in competition with one or more service suppliers’.

The text seems clear: any interpretation in favour of exclusion can easily lead to major conflicts. It seems to be enough that private universities do exist in a country to allow anyone to say that there is competition. In that case, major problems may arise for public universities when they try to play a commercial role by selling some products or enjoy advantages, such as public funding, exclusive degree granting authority, or research grants, that are not available to their private competitors.

In addition, Article II of the GATS contains a series of measures for immediate application. Among them, one can note the ‘most favoured nation’ clause (MFN), according to which, in number 1 of this article of GATS, it is stated:

‘With respect to any measure covered by this Agreement, each Member shall accord immediately and unconditionally to services and service suppliers of any other Member treatment no less favourable than that it accords to like services and service suppliers of any other country’.

The Canadian Association of Universities Teachers consulted jurists and published a document (GATS - Impact on Education in Canada: Summary of Key Findings; which can be found on the site of the Canadian Association of Universities Teachers, the key findings contained in the legal opinion. In this document, in the part related to the unconditional obligations under the Agreement, we can read that:

- a) ‘all education services supplied on a commercial basis or in competition with one or more suppliers, regardless of whether it is in public or private hands, are subject to the ‘most favoured nation’ treatment and other GATS unconditional obligations.
- b) ‘thus the ‘most-favoured-nation’ treatment obligation applies to all GATS services, irrespective of whether they are the object of a commitment ... Other GATS provisions that apply to all services include transparency, judicial and administrative review, monopolies and restrictive business practices’.

Exceptions to this rule are possible, but under certain conditions, and only for a certain period of time (10 years).

Another complicated clause is complementary to the MFN, and it concerns the ‘national treatment’ that applies to all sorts of national measures including subsidy-type measures (III part, article XVI, 1). The GATS ‘defines national treatment as treatment no less favourable than accorded to like domestic services and services providers’ (same source – see www.caft.ca retrieved on 22.05.2006).

This arrangement applies to obligations arising from commitments member states decide to undertake. In other words, this clause cannot be applied if commitments are not made. But even in this case, the situation is ambiguous. The GATS established a permanent process: from time to time, countries will be called upon or submitted to pressures to open their system. This will end only when the opening is total. Recently the Brazilian press announced that following a request presented by some rich countries, the WTO started new negotiations in early May 2006 on the opening of economies and on the need for changes in national legislations to facilitate the free operation of foreign universities in the territories of each country. Most developing countries expressed an opposition to these measures (<http://www.estadao.com.br/ext/inc/print.htm> retrieved on 16.05.2006).

Concerning accreditation, there are provisions in GATS disposing that ‘recognition should be based on multilaterally agreed criteria’. Suggestions are made to member states, in appropriate cases, to work in cooperation with relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations towards the establishment and adoption of common international standards and criteria for recognition and common international standards for the practice of relevant services trades and professions.

In keeping with this rule, at the beginning of the present process, which led to the approval by the OECD of the guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education, Professor Dirk Van Damme said, in October 2002 (in the First Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education), that ‘it could be worthwhile to formulate a set of core values that are shared by the global higher education community and that define its fundamental value system’. He also mentioned that ‘of more relevance to the learners worldwide is a set of common concepts to define basic levels of academic qualifications. The global knowledge society calls upon the international higher education community to produce degrees and credentials that are recognizable in the international labour market.’

In Washington, in May 2002, he presented a series of measures that would reinforce the process of creating ‘favourable conditions for the establishment of international quality assurance and accreditation schemes’ and ‘an international system of meta-accreditation that gradually moves ahead in this direction, can be expected’ (OECD/US Forum on Trade Educational Services, 23–24 May 2002).

This fits with conclusions and recommendations of the Expert meeting on the impact of globalization on quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications in higher education, which took place in Paris, in September 2001 (UNESCO, 2001, Draft Conclusions and Recommendations – ED-2001/HED/AMQ/05 – Paris 20/09/2001), when, after noting that a “ general consensus was reached by the participants that a global forum

on the international dimensions of quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications was necessary”, the conclusions stated that ‘the need was expressed for the education community to have a common stand worldwide on this issue, bringing together different already existing networks and taking stock of recent developments’. A plan of action was adopted for starting the process which included, among other measures:

- establishment of a Task Force, conceived as an operational working body, which will develop further the Action Plan proposed;
- promotion and codification of good practices;
- development of guidelines to member states in the form of international codes or other international accepted norms.

Reading the text of the GATS on recognition and accreditation shows that the academic community is right to be worried about prospects in this field:

‘Article VII: Recognition

1. For the purposes of the fulfillment, in whole or in part, of its standards or criteria for the authorization, licensing or certification of services suppliers, and subject to the requirements of paragraph 3, a Member may recognize the education or experience obtained, requirements met, or licenses or certifications granted in a particular country. Such recognition, which may be achieved through harmonization or otherwise, may be based upon an agreement or arrangement with the country concerned or may be accorded autonomously.
2. A Member that is a party to an agreement or arrangement of the type referred to in paragraph 1, whether existing or future, shall afford adequate opportunity for other interested Members to negotiate their accession to such an agreement or arrangement or to negotiate comparable ones with it. Where a Member accords recognition autonomously, it shall afford adequate opportunity for any other Member to demonstrate that education, experience, licenses, or certifications obtained or requirements met in that other Member’s territory should be recognized.
3. A Member shall not accord recognition in a manner which would constitute a means of discrimination between countries in the application of its standards or criteria for the authorization, licensing or certification of services suppliers, or a disguised restriction on trade in services.

4. Each Member shall:

- a) within 12 months from the date on which the WTO Agreement takes effect for it, inform the Council for Trade in Services of its existing recognition measures and state whether such measures are based on agreements or arrangements of the type referred to in paragraph 1;
- b) promptly inform the Council for Trade in Services as far in advance as possible of the opening of negotiations on an agreement or arrangement of the type referred to in paragraph 1 in order to provide adequate opportunity to any other Member to indicate their interest in participating in the negotiations before they enter a substantive phase;
- c) promptly inform the Council for Trade in Services when it adopts new recognition measures or significantly modifies existing ones and state whether the measures are based on an agreement or arrangement of the type referred to in paragraph 1.

5. Wherever appropriate, recognition should be based on multilaterally agreed criteria. In appropriate cases, Members shall work in cooperation with relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations towards the establishment and adoption of common international standards and criteria for recognition and common international standards for the practice of relevant services trades and professions' .

The final texts of UNESCO's normative instruments on recognition of studies and diplomas of higher education were always the result of hard negotiations.⁵ These texts are based on an idea of cooperation among equals, where solidarity works and the transfer and sharing of knowledge is an important element. One of the greatest difficulties in their elaboration used to come from delegations, in particular from Eastern Europe, who considered that equivalences should be established and, since they felt their model was the best or the only acceptable one, they should serve as a reference for every country. In other words, a diploma to be recognized should be equal to theirs. The word standardization was not used but it was, in fact, a great accomplishment on the part of the international community to shift from the concept of equivalences to the idea of recognition, respecting different systems, whose survival would be ensured. Are we now faced by a return to the system of equivalences, in grant degrees and deliver diplomas based on programmes structured in a similar way and with the same contents? Often leading to mediocrity rather than to excellence, conformity to standards understandable for evaluators is seen as more important than creativity and innovation.

EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD

This reality, this environment, this framework brings us, yet again, to discuss the importance of keeping higher education as a public good, a service, which is based on three principles: equality, continuity and adaptability (Bartoli 1997).

Equality means that all -on the basis of merit- must have the right of access to the public service, without discrimination. This notion is very clear concerning higher education, both in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Declaration of the CMES (Paris 1998).

Continuity or permanence means that the public service must permanently meet the needs of the citizens, and here the notion of relevance is more than implicit. The notion of adaptability (responsiveness), means that the public service must be ‘reactive’ and evolve upon general interest changes, either technological or social. It can and it must, therefore, be updated, following the evolution of the society, but without abandoning its basic characteristics, which are crucial to guarantee the equality and the permanence.

In synthesis, for a service to be considered public, its provision must first of all be implemented on an equal basis, it must be continuous and permanent, and not subject to any kind of discrimination, including commercial or financial ones. This applies to all education and certainly also to higher education. In 1998, in the WCHE, a consensus was established that higher education must be considered a public service, which must be accessible to all on the basis of merit, no kind of discrimination being accepted. As several other public services, the provision of education can be entrusted, delegated or granted to private persons or institutions, but under rigid regulations and submission to serious evaluation practices, established following the principles mentioned above.

This subject was discussed in the Nobel Laureates’ meeting at the 2nd Barcelona Conference_(December 2005). We had the opportunity, on this occasion (‘Social commitment of the universities against the commercialization attempts’ – UPC- Barcelona, December 2005), to mention that ‘In Europe, now, the doctrine evolves in the direction of not speaking about public services, an expression that was replaced by ‘general interest services’, that, according to the dossier published by the French periodical Le Monde dated 4 June 2002, ‘refers to the activities of the service, with a commercial nature or not, which are considered of general interest by the public authorities and therefore submitted to the public service obligations’.

However, this evolution of the concepts is not always clear. It occurs inside an overall development in which, an ambiguous and conflicting liberalization movement has been growing since 1986, all over Europe, which has affected many sectors of the economy and has now reached education and, consequently, research. This is happening at a time when a new expression has been coined: instead of public services or services of general interest,⁶ reference is now being made to ‘services of general economic interest’ (see the French newspapers Libération and Le Monde dated 15 and 16 July 2005). This clearly represents a deviation from the tradition and seems to privilege the concept of finding the

market that is capable of solving educational problems, and that individual interests should take precedence over social/public interests.

We believe that for this purpose a prudent but courageous framework was established by the participants (almost five thousand) at the World Conference on Higher Education (Paris, UNESCO, 1998), in which representatives of over 180 countries (more than 130 official delegations headed by ministers of state) from every continent (including all European countries) approved a set of principles, always valid, that were summarized by UNESCO as follows:

SUMMARY OF THE WORLD DECLARATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

‘1. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit, in keeping with Article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a consequence, no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language, religion or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities.

2. The core missions of higher education systems (to educate, to train, to undertake research and, in particular, to contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole) should be preserved, reinforced and further expanded, namely to educate highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens and to provide opportunities (*espaces ouverts*) for higher learning and for learning throughout life. Moreover, higher education has acquired an unprecedented role in present-day society, as a vital component of cultural, social, economic and political development and as a pillar of endogenous capacity building, the consolidation of human rights, sustainable development, democracy and peace, in a context of justice. It is the duty of higher education to ensure that the values and ideals of a culture of peace prevail.

3. Higher education institutions and their personnel and students should preserve and develop their crucial functions, through the exercise of ethics and scientific and intellectual rigour in their various activities. They should also enhance their critical and forward-looking function, through the ongoing analysis of emerging social, economic, cultural and political trends, providing a focus for forecasting, warning and prevention. For this, they should enjoy full academic autonomy and freedom, while being fully responsible and accountable to society.

4. Relevance in higher education should be assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do. For this, institutions and systems, in particular in their reinforced relations with the world of work, should base their long-term orientations on societal aims and needs, including the respect of cultures and environment protection. Developing entrepreneurial skills and initiatives should become major concerns of higher education. Special attention should be paid to higher education’s role of service to society, especially activities aimed at eliminating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy,

hunger, environmental degradation and disease, and to activities aiming at the development of peace, through an interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach.

5. Higher education is part of a seamless system, starting with early childhood and primary education and continuing through life. The contribution of higher education to the development of the whole education system and the reordering of its links with all levels of education, in particular with secondary education, should be a priority. Secondary education should both prepare for and facilitate access to higher education as well as offer broad training and prepare students for active life.

6. Diversifying higher education models and recruitment methods and criteria is essential both to meet demand and to give students the rigorous background and training required by the twenty-first century. Learners must have an optimal range of choice and the acquisition of knowledge and know-how should be viewed in a lifelong perspective, based on flexible entry and exit points within the system.

7. Quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, infrastructure and the academic environment. Particular attention should be paid to the advancement of knowledge through research. Higher education institutions in all regions should be committed to transparent internal and external evaluation, conducted openly by independent specialists. However, due attention should be paid to specific institutional, national and regional contexts in order to take into account diversity and to avoid uniformity. There is a perceived need for a new vision and paradigm of higher education, which should be student-oriented. To achieve this goal, curricula need to be recast so as to go beyond simple cognitive mastery of disciplines and include the acquisition of skills, competencies and abilities for communication, creative and critical analysis, independent thinking and team work in multicultural contexts.

8. A vigorous policy of staff development is an essential element for higher education institutions. Clear policies should be established concerning higher education teachers, so as to update and improve their skills, with stimulus for constant innovation in curriculum, teaching and learning methods, and with an appropriate professional and financial status, and for excellence in research and teaching, reflecting the corresponding provisions of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel approved by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 1997.

9. National and institutional decision-makers should place students and their needs at the centre of their concerns and should consider them as major partners and responsible stakeholders in the renewal of higher education. Guidance and counselling services should be developed, in cooperation with student organisations, to take account of the needs of ever more diversified categories of learners. Students who do drop out should have suitable opportunities to return to higher education if and when appropriate. Institutions should educate students to become well informed and deeply motivated citizens, who can think critically, analyse problems of society, look for solutions to the problems of society, apply them and accept social responsibilities.

10. Measures must be taken or reinforced to ensure the participation of women in higher education, in particular at the decision-making level and in all disciplines in which they are under-represented. Further efforts are required to eliminate all gender stereotyping in higher education. To overcome obstacles and to enhance the access of women to higher education remains an urgent priority in the renewal process of systems and institutions.

11. The potential of new information and communication technologies for the renewal of higher education by extending and diversifying delivery, and by making knowledge and information available to a wider public should be fully utilised. Equitable access to these should be assured through international cooperation and support to countries that lack capacities to acquire such tools. Adapting these technologies to national, regional and local needs and securing technical, educational, management and institutional systems to sustain them should be a priority.

12. Higher education should be considered as a public service. While diversified sources of funding, both private and public, are necessary, public support for higher education and research remains essential to ensure a balanced achievement of its educational and social missions. Management and financing in higher education should be instruments to improve quality and relevance. This requires the development of appropriate planning and policy-analysis capacities and strategies based on partnerships between higher education institutions and responsible state authorities. Autonomy to manage internal affairs is necessary, but with clear and transparent accountability to society.

13. The international dimension of higher education is an inherent part of its quality. Networking, which has emerged as a major means of action, should be based on sharing, solidarity and equality among partners. The 'brain drain' has yet to be stemmed, since it continues to deprive the developing countries and those in transition, of the high-level expertise necessary to accelerate their socioeconomic progress. Priority should be given to training programmes in the developing countries, in centres of excellence forming regional and international networks, with short periods of specialised and intensive study abroad.

14. Regional and international normative instruments for the recognition of studies and diplomas should be ratified and implemented, including certification of skills, competencies and abilities of graduates, making it easier for students to change courses, in order to facilitate mobility within and between national systems.

15. Close partnership among all stakeholders – national and institutional policy-makers, governments and parliaments, the media, teaching and related staff, researchers, students and their families, the world of work, community groups – is required in order to set in train a movement for the in-depth reform and renewal of higher education.

We strongly believe that the outcomes of the WCHE, Paris 1998, reflect well the opinions of the experts in the field of higher education, both political and academic experts. It will, indeed, serve the future of humankind, when all efforts to enhance the quality, relevance, accessibility and internationalization of higher education worldwide would be based on the outcomes of the WCHE and respect the values of diversity, creativity and innovative

approaches. Only then can higher education truly contribute, in all countries, to a better future for all.

NOTES

- 1 Some experts have a tendency to say that internationalization is new. But it is not so new ... Universities were inter-nationalized in the Middle Ages and, more recently in 1983, the working document of an international symposium organized by UNESCO in Sofia, Bulgaria, on ‘l'évolution probable des finalités et des rôles sociaux de l'enseignement supérieur au cours des prochaines décennies’ stated: ‘L'interdépendance des nations et, partant, la coopération internationale, ont développé une tendance très marquée: l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur. Ainsi les universités de différents pays qui fonctionnent dans des conditions différentes, uniformisent leurs programmes, leurs plans d'études et leur cursus. L'influence mutuelle des universités en général, celles des universités novatrices en particulier, où le niveau des études est plus élevé et le plus apprécié, est déterminante pour le monde entier. Ce processus s'est développé suivant plusieurs canaux.’
- 2 ‘a) Meta-accreditation can be a very powerful tool at the international level as well. A kind of recognition procedure, based on the evaluation of quality assurance and accreditation agencies on agreed standards in the professional community would produce a multilateral recognition of agencies. In turn, this would give programmes, institutions, students, employers and the general public the reassurance that assessment by such an agency is done on the basis of internationally recognized standards. Trust in quality assurance and accreditation systems would also provide a very powerful incentive for making significant progress in the field of recognition of qualifications’ (Trends and models in international quality assurance in higher education, in relation to trade in education services – Dirk Van Damme, OECD/US Forum on Trade in Educational Services , 23-24 May 2002, Washington DC, USA).
- (b) ‘The idea of an international agency that would engage in quality assurance and accreditation worldwide, or even regionally, may seem strange to many people but this strategy must not be overlooked when listing the various possible models and trends’ (same source as under 2 (a)).
- (c) Similar proposals, were presented by Prof. Van Damme, perhaps in an even clearer way, in the introductory paper for the UNESCO Expert Meeting held in Paris on 10–11 September 2001 (The need for a new regulatory framework for recognition, quality assurance and accreditation), in which he said: ‘The impact of globalization is such that without a trustworthy international quality scheme of whatever kind that could balance the development of the global higher education market, we will have to face severe problems in the future, of which countries in the least developed parts of the world, and their students, will be the victims.’

(d) All this fits in with what the WTO Secretariat says in document S/C/W/49, disseminated on 23 September 1998 : ‘the development of agreements concerning standards for professional training, licensing and accreditation might significantly benefit trade in this mode, as foreign-earned degrees become more portable.’

3 ‘UNESCO’s regional conventions on recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education were adopted in Latin America and the Caribbean (1978), Arab States (1978), Europe (1979), Africa (1981), Asia and the Pacific (1983). In 1976, an interregional convention was adopted in Nice, France, concerning the Arab and European states bordering the Mediterranean. In 1997, a new European Convention was adopted under the aegis of the Council of Europe and UNESCO. In 1993, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted an International Recommendation on the same subject.

4- One of the more detailed studies on the legal aspects of this issue is the thesis submitted in 2004 by a professor of the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Gustavo Ferreira Ribeiro, for obtaining a graduate diploma at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, in Brazil. Additional comments can be found on the sites of several organizations, such as International Education (IE), the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, and the Canadian Association of Universities Teachers.

5 The second author was the Director of the Division of Higher Education, in Paris, from October 1981 until February 1999. During this period, four normative instruments on recognition on studies and diplomas of higher education were adopted under UNESCO’s aegis.

6 General interest following the Treaty of Rome (European Union) in its section 90 means activities of trade services that fulfil missions that interest to all and that should be consequently submitted, by Member States of the European Union to specific duties of the public service.

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DOCUMENTO 1 – VERSIÓN EN ESPAÑOL

**RETOS INSTITUCIONALES Y POLÍTICOS DE
LA ACREDITACIÓN EN EL ÁMBITO INTERNACIONAL**

SERIE GUNI SOBRE EL COMPROMISO SOCIAL DE LAS UNIVERSIDADES 2

LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR EN EL MUNDO 2007

*Acreditación para la garantía de la calidad:
¿Qué está en juego?*



GLOBAL UNIVERSITY NETWORK FOR INNOVATION



GUNI
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NETWORK FOR INNOVATION



Retos institucionales y políticos de la acreditación en el ámbito internacional

Hans J. A. van Ginkel y Marco Antonio Rodrígues Días

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Publicado en castellano en diciembre de 2006 por Ediciones Mundi-Prensa, como capítulo del libro La educación superior en el mundo 2007 –Acreditación para la garantía de calidad: Qué está en juego?- pgs. 37 a 57

Tercera Conferencia de Barcelona sobre Educación Superior- Barcelona, 27-29 noviembre 2006

Resumen

Este artículo es un fuerte alegato para un acercamiento a la garantía de la calidad y la acreditación, que honra la diversidad y promueve la innovación y la creatividad en la educación superior.

Por muchas razones, la acreditación se ha convertido ahora en un asunto de importancia para la educación superior. Esto ha tenido lugar durante un periodo en que ha habido un cambio de fundamental importancia en los valores. La educación superior, que en sus inicios siempre se consideró un bien público, se está transformando cada vez más en un bien predominantemente privado; en una mercancía que pudiera estar sujeta a las reglas del comercio. Antes de tomar ninguna acción en este campo debería darse respuesta a ciertas preguntas básicas. La acreditación ¿con qué propósito y para cuáles calidades? ¿Quiénes serán los guardianes del sistema y cuáles serán sus criterios?

Las implicaciones de los conceptos de calidad y acreditación, y los métodos adoptados en este campo, tendrán consecuencias no sólo en los niveles financiero y económico sino también en los términos de la vida cultural, social y política de las instituciones y naciones. En 1998, durante la Conferencia Mundial de Educación Superior (CMES, UNESCO, París), se alcanzó un consenso y fue aceptada la idea de evaluación, basada en la aprobación general de que la calidad en la educación superior es multidimensional. La WCHE favoreció a un sistema en el que la calidad y la relevancia debían ir de la mano. Desde entonces, la acreditación, un método que ya se venía utilizando desde hacía bastante tiempo en algunos países, particularmente en los EE.UU., tomó más preeminencia en la agenda internacional.

El concepto de calidad es un factor de importancia en este asunto. Una propuesta de la CMESI, que solicitaba a las instituciones de educación superior que definieran o redefinieran sus misiones conjuntamente con la sociedad, podría servir para ayudar a crear las condiciones necesarias para unas adecuadas evaluaciones, comparando lo que realmente obtienen las instituciones con lo que la sociedad en su conjunto espera de ellas. A través de este mecanismo pudieran definirse los estándares en vez de utilizar modelos que no están relacionados con el entorno cultural de las instituciones o de las necesidades específicas de la sociedad. Estos estándares deben garantizar la calidad adecuada, reforzando al mismo tiempo la diversidad, la innovación y la creatividad.

Actualmente, en la escena internacional están teniendo lugar tres procesos interconectados, que repercuten de forma directa en la organización de las instituciones de educación superior y la manera en que los sistemas de acreditación serán organizados. Estos son la Declaración de Bolonia, la definición de directrices para el establecimiento de un sistema de acreditación a nivel internacional, y la creciente presencia de la Organización Mundial del Comercio (OMC) también en relación con la educación superior desde 1995.

La Declaración de Bolonia es un exitoso proceso para crear un espacio europeo de educación superior. Originalmente, fue una declaración política pero ahora representa un tipo de acuerdo entre más de 30 países europeos. Una pregunta pertinente, aquí, es si una nueva metodología se está volviendo rutinaria a nivel internacional. Toma mucho tiempo concluir un tratado, y lo mismo puede decirse de los instrumentos normativos. La elaboración de una declaración por un selecto grupo de ministros o expertos parece ser mucho más sencillo.

Aparentemente esto fue lo que sucedió con la Declaración de Bolonia, y lo mismo pudiera ocurrir con las directrices para garantizar la calidad en la educación superior transfronteriza, adoptadas en diciembre del 2005 por el Consejo de la OCDE. La Conferencia General de la UNESCO sólo tomó nota del mismo. La Asociación Internacional de Universidades y otras 35 instituciones presentaron otro documento, dando mayor importancia a la relevancia en este proceso. Con el propósito de asegurar la

acreditación, las regiones están siendo estimuladas de manera activa para que revisen los instrumentos normativos de la UNESCO para la convalidación de los estudios y títulos en educación superior. Si se llevaran a cabo las reformas, es muy importante que consideren la diversidad de sistemas en relación con la relevancia de la educación superior en sus sociedades respectivas.

Finalmente, es necesario mirar de nuevo a la OMC y al Acuerdo General del Comercio de Servicios (AGCS), aprobado en 1994. El AGCS plantea una serie de cuestiones de principio. Se expresan preocupaciones, particularmente en los planteamientos de las cláusulas relacionadas con las naciones más favorecidas, el tratamiento nacional y el reconocimiento y la acreditación.

Todo esto nos lleva a pensar, desde nuestro punto de vista, en la necesidad de reforzar la educación superior como un bien público, que está basado en tres principios: igualdad, continuidad y adaptabilidad. Para ello la WCHE estableció en 1988 un valiente marco de trabajo. Cuando ejecutado apropiadamente, la educación superior podrá contribuir verdaderamente a un futuro mejor para todos en todos los países.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Durante los últimos años, la acreditación se ha convertido en una cuestión de suma importancia para la educación superior por motivos bien conocidos: el desarrollo de nuevas tecnologías, los avances en la educación a distancia y virtual, la multiplicación de nuevos proveedores, los intentos por generalizar la transformación de la educación en una mercancía, la internacionalización de la educación superior (1) y, de resultas de todos estos factores, la necesidad de unos sistemas fiables que garanticen la calidad y la pertinencia de los organismos y los programas. Medidas son presentadas en el ámbito nacional, regional o internacional como si tuvieran por objetivo garantizar la calidad y proteger a países y estudiantes de los «malos productos educativos» y de los proveedores de servicios educativos fraudulentos.

Los sistemas de acreditación también son considerados un instrumento que permite a la educación superior hacer frente a las transformaciones que tienen lugar en la economía, la

sociedad y la civilización, las cuales, en muchos aspectos, pueden ser consideradas más importantes que los cambios que ocurrieron en el mundo durante la Revolución Industrial. La piedra angular de esta evolución es el conocimiento. La creación de conocimiento y la forma en que se maneja, así como el control de la información, son herramientas fundamentales de que se valen los países desarrollados para lograr y afianzar su poder en un mundo globalizado. Sin embargo, la creación de conocimiento, así como su difusión y aplicación, también son esenciales para salvaguardar el futuro de los países en vías de desarrollo.

Hoy en día, en el ámbito económico existe una diferencia fundamental entre quien concibe los productos y su producción. La concepción está directamente vinculada a la investigación y el desarrollo está basado en la ciencia y en la codificación del conocimiento teórico. Puesto que la educación superior es el campo donde se lleva a cabo la investigación y se titulan los investigadores, parece ser esencial conseguir los requisitos de calidad adecuados. Esto se recoge en la Declaración que aprobaron los participantes en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior (París, octubre del 1998), en cuyo Preámbulo se establece:

“Dado el alcance y el ritmo de las transformaciones, la sociedad cada vez tiende más a **fundarse en el conocimiento**, razón de que la educación superior y la investigación formen hoy en día parte fundamental del desarrollo cultural, socioeconómico y ecológicamente sostenible de los individuos, las comunidades y las naciones”.

Esta evolución ha propiciado un cambio de valores. La solidaridad tiene tendencia a desaparecer. La competitividad es primordial. Los valores sociales, espirituales y colectivos corren el riesgo de ser sustituidos por unos valores y conductas comerciales, materialistas e individualistas. Chris Lorenz, un experto holandés, subrayó hace poco en Oxford:

"![...] el concepto de la *economía del conocimiento* no significa propiamente la reestructuración de la economía a partir del conocimiento científico. Todo lo contrario, significa que el campo de la producción de conocimiento se está “economizando”: ahora el *homo academicus* se inspira en el *homo economicus*. En comparación con la visión tradicional propia del Siglo de las Luces, la relación entre la ciencia y la economía ya no está representada como el ámbito en el que la ciencia

demuestra su éxito aplicado, basado en la verdad, sino que la economía es considerada el campo que determina si la “producción intelectual” hace una contribución científica (o no). Ahora la economía se encarga de legitimar la actividad científica, o de descalificarla por no ser “rentable”.

Dado que éste es el contexto en el que la acreditación comenzó a tratarse como una cuestión acuciante, no resulta difícil entender que existen muchas razones por las que surgen interrogantes importantes y básicos acerca de este tema. Es preciso que concretemos cada vez más lo que queremos lograr exactamente. ¿Acreditación para qué? . ¿Para qué calidad? . ¿Que tipo de calidad queremos en verdad? ¿Quiénes serán los guardianes del sistema y también en qué consistirán sus criterios? Antes de tomar cualquier decisión firme, es imprescindible plantear y responder adecuadamente a toda esta clase de preguntas. (ver tambien Ginkel, 2006)

Las implicaciones de los conceptos de acreditación y de los métodos adoptados en este campo no son neutrales; repercutirán más allá de los ámbitos económico y financiero, influyendo, de un modo especial, en la vida cultural y política de instituciones y naciones. Muchos analistas consideran que estos métodos reflejan a menudo un concepto de la sociedad mundial en el que las personas que viven en países en vías de desarrollo son consideradas receptores pasivos en lugar de socios activos. Esta idea cobra más fuerza con la impresión de que las políticas adoptadas en los países ricos tienden a enfocarse hacia conservar su papel de exportadores de conocimientos —siempre y cuando les convenga—, así como la condición dependiente de los países en vías de desarrollo en lo que se refiere a la producción de conocimientos y tecnología.

Estos análisis no son nuevos; de hecho, en los últimos tiempos se han hecho observaciones similares en lo que se refiere a la evaluación, cuando las amenazas contra la autonomía universitaria y la libertad académica eran frecuentes. José Dias Sobrinho, un célebre experto de América Latina, solía comentar que la evaluación comporta un concepto del mundo. Compartía esta opinión Nair Costa Muls, una socióloga titulada por la Universidad Católica de Louvaina que, en el año 1993, afirmó:

"La evaluación no es neutral. No existe evaluación por la evaluación. La evaluación representa siempre un conjunto de interrogantes que tienen como referencia un proyecto definido previamente. Por consiguiente, no existe una definición única y universal de lo que es la evaluación, y tampoco del concepto subyacente de calidad".

Estos asuntos también se abordaron ampliamente en los debates que tuvieron lugar durante los preparativos de la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior del 1998, que se celebró en la sede de la UNESCO en París. Durante varias décadas, la UNESCO y otros organismos internacionales, aunque cada uno con objetivos y propósitos diferentes, defendieron la evaluación a fin de mejorar la calidad y la pertinencia, así como aumentar la rendición de cuentas respecto a la sociedad como conjunto en todos y cada uno de los países. Cabe decir que lograron hacer valer sus ideas.

UN CONCEPTO MULTIDIMENSIONAL

De hecho, no fue nada fácil llegar al consenso de 1998, en el que los participantes en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior arguyeron que:

"[...] **la calidad de la enseñanza superior es un concepto pluridimensional**, que debería comprender todas sus funciones y actividades: enseñanza y programas académicos, investigación y becas, personal, estudiantes, edificios, instalaciones, lequipamiento y servicios a la comunidad y al mundo universitario. Una autoevaluación interna y un examen externo realizados con transparencia por expertos independientes, en lo posible especializados en lo internacional, son esenciales para la mejora de la calidad. Deberían crearse instancias nacionales independientes y definirse normas comparativas de calidad ,reconocidas en en plano internacional. **Con miras a tener en cuenta la diversidad y evitar la uniformidad, debería prestarse la atención debida a las particularidades de los contextos institucional, nacional y regional.** Los protagonistas deben ser parte integrante del proceso de evaluación institucional" (artículo 11.a) de la Declaración Mundial sobre la Educación Superior en el siglo xxi: Visión y acción, UNESCO, París, 1998)".

En esa época —el año 1998—, la idea de la evaluación se aceptó de forma consensuada. La valoración de las instituciones de educación superior pasó a ser en todas partes uno de los elementos clave de los análisis y las políticas de la educación superior. Se generalizaron las dudas sobre cómo se debía evaluar, garantizar y mejorar la calidad. Importantes sectores de la

comunidad académica aceptaron la idea de la evaluación como instrumento para mantener y afianzar la calidad, la pertinencia y la rendición de cuentas, pero sin perder la autonomía y libertad. Un gran número de expertos e instituciones también reaccionaron contra el uso de la evaluación como un instrumento de punición .

Desde entonces, los procedimientos de acreditación (una práctica común en los Estados Unidos desde hace varias décadas), se sumaron a las evaluaciones internas y externas, como métodos utilizados para obtener una calidad y una pertinencia determinadas. No obstante, de inmediato surgieron otras polémicas y divergencias, en esta ocasión debido a los estándares que se pretendían utilizar como referencias para definir e identificar la calidad de las instituciones y los programas de educación superior. Además, el concepto relativo a la acreditación no era siempre muy obvio. Se propuso una definición en la *Encyclopaedia of Higher Education*, editada en 1992 por Burton Clark y Guy Neave, con la Asociación Internacional de Universidades, cuando C. Adelman señaló:

"La acreditación se refiere a un proceso de control y garantía de la calidad en la educación superior, por el que, como resultado de la inspección y/o de la evaluación, o por los dos, se reconoce que una institución o sus programas satisfacen los estándares mínimos aceptables".

El mismo autor informa que, en 1979, ya se habían definido nueve propósitos relativos a la garantía de la calidad en los Estados Unidos:

1. certificar que una institución ha cumplido los requisitos estipulados;
2. ayudar a posibles estudiantes a identificar los centros aceptables;
3. ayudar a las instituciones a definir la aceptabilidad de los créditos de transferencia;
4. ayudar a identificar instituciones y programas que puedan solicitar la inversión de fondos privados;
5. proteger a las instituciones de presiones tanto internas como externas que puedan perjudicarlas;
6. crear objetivos para la automejora de todos los programas y fomentar el incremento general de los estándares entre los organismos educativos;

7. implicar al cuerpo docente y al resto de personal de una forma muy estrecha en la evaluación y la planificación de la institución;
8. establecer criterios para la certificación y atribución de licencias profesionales, y mejorar el nivel de los cursos que ofrecen estas preparaciones (aunque tan solo, en parte, mediante la acreditación);
9. proveer una o varias consideraciones como base para determinar la elegibilidad para recibir ayuda gubernamental federal.

Es preciso subrayar que la acreditación debe ser considerada como el método para evaluar la calidad y la pertinencia de una institución o de un programa determinado de educación superior, permitiendo que sean reconocidos dentro de un sistema de educación superior existente (especificado).

Actualmente, las publicaciones que tratan acerca de la evaluación de la calidad y la acreditación son numerosas. En ellas se hace mención a los estándares y la rendición de cuentas, las diferencias en la acreditación institucional, la naturaleza de los procesos (voluntarios u obligatorios) y su organización jurídica (privada o pública, con o sin ánimo de lucro). En este informe únicamente podemos hacer referencia a algunos de los documentos que abordan este tema, y no se tratarán cuestiones de carácter técnico.

El concepto que dominó entre los participantes en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior de 1998 estaba de acuerdo con lo que Gudman Hermens y Michaela Martin llamaron *adecuación a los objetivos* (un término que ya adoptó en el 1985 el ‘académico británico Christopher Ball) en contraposición a lo que definieron como el «enfoque basado en estándares». **En el enfoque basado en la adecuación a los objetivos, un sistema de acreditación debe ofrecer elementos para analizar la calidad del rendimiento de la institución y la pertinencia en la ejecución de sus misiones.** En cambio, en el enfoque basado en estándares que son a menudo detallados, y casi siempre imitando experiencias extranjeras, son utilizados para definir la calidad de una institución o de un programa.

De acuerdo con el concepto resultante de los debates que tuvieron lugar en la CMES, la educación superior debe satisfacer las necesidades y los objetivos de desarrollo de la sociedad, y también basar su orientación a largo plazo en los fines y necesidades sociales, entre los que se incluyen el respecto a las culturas y la protección del medio ambiente. Con este propósito, “la educación superior debe **reforzar sus funciones de servicio a la sociedad**, y más concretamente sus actividades encaminadas a erradicar la pobreza, la intolerancia, la violencia, el analfabetismo, el hambre, el deterioro del medio ambiente y las enfermedades, principalmente mediante un planteamiento interdisciplinario y transdisciplinario para analizar los problemas y las cuestiones planteados» (artículo 6.b de la Declaración anteriormente mencionada).

En cierta manera, estos cometidos fueron actualizados por las Naciones Unidas mediante la definición, en septiembre de 2000, de los objetivos del milenio (los llamados "Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio"), que son:

- 1- Erradicar la pobreza extrema y el hambre .
- 2- Lograr la enseñanza primaria universal.
- 3- Promover la igualdad entre los géneros y la autonomía de la mujer.
- 4- Reducir la mortalidad infantil.
- 5- Mejorar la salud materna.
- 6- Prevenir el SIDA, malaria y otras enfermedades.
- 7- Garantizar la sostenibilidad medioambiental.
- 8- Crear una asociación mundial para el desarrollo.

La participación de las instituciones de educación superior en la consecución de estos objetivos podría contribuir, en el momento actual, a evaluar si una institución es pertinente. De todos modos, hoy en día este planteamiento no es el que está más respaldado, en especial en lo que se refiere a los organismos internacionales. Los vientos de cambio, desde principios de los noventa, coincidiendo con la aplicación de los principios del Consenso de Washington (la apertura de las economías, el reajuste estructural, la supresión de la inflación y del déficit público, la privatización), concebidos en el 1990 por el economista

inglés John Williamson, abogan por la adopción de unos principios y unos estándares de excelencia como un instrumento para conseguir la calidad sin prioridad alguna en cuanto a sus vínculos con la pertinencia. Esta tendencia se consolidó con la aprobación del Acuerdo General sobre el Comercio de Servicios (AGCS) en 1994 y la creación de la Organización Mundial del Comercio (OMC) en 1995.

En el terreno de la educación superior, la implantación del Consenso de Washington dio lugar a un mayor número de propuestas, tales como: una menor participación del Estado en gastos sociales; una reducción del volumen de inversiones públicas en la educación superior; una estimulación del desarrollo de la educación privada como instrumento para la igualdad; la priorización de los aspectos comerciales en detrimento de las consideraciones educativas; la aceptación de la educación superior como un bien comercial que es regulado de acuerdo con los principios que establece la Organización Mundial del Comercio (OMC).

En el mundo desarrollado, pero también en algunos países emergentes, un proceso de esquizofrenia está afectando un número considerable de instituciones públicas de educación superior. Desde el punto de vista interno, en los países donde están, es preciso que se las vea como unas instituciones públicas que ofrecen bienes públicos, pero en el ámbito internacional, sobre todo en cuanto a su relación con las instituciones del mundo en vías de desarrollo, actúan como proveedores de servicios comerciales y dan prioridad absoluta a los beneficios económicos, en lugar de promover el espíritu solidario basado en compartir el conocimiento. En vez de cooperación, el lema es competitividad.

La certificación de la calidad se ha hecho más compleja e involucra de una forma más directa valores que no poseen una naturaleza académica. Esta realidad ha suscitado algunos comentarios mordaces de Guy Neave, director del boletín de la Asociación Internacional de Universidades (vol. 4, núm. 1, febrero de 1993). Después de apuntar que se ha metido la *calidad* en el «maletín de los problemas universales» y que el «mundo universitario se siente acosado por una multitud cada vez más numerosa y a menudo cacofónica de "garantizadores de la calidad"», Neave concluye:

"[...] la cuestión que se oculta tras la calidad guarda una relación muy limitada con la *calidad* en sí. A decir verdad, está relacionada con quién fija los criterios que intervienen en su definición, y de ahí hacerse con el control del núcleo del sector académico está solo a un paso".

El valor y la fuerza de la educación superior residen en su diversidad mundial. Por ello, la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior, que tuvo lugar en el año 1998, subrayó la función de los organismos nacionales independientes en los ejercicios de evaluación y exigió que «con miras a tener en cuenta la diversidad y evitar la uniformidad, debería prestarse la atención debida a las particularidades de los contextos institucional, nacional y regional; además, subrayó que «los protagonistas deben ser parte integrante del proceso de evaluación institucional».

No sin razón, los convenios regionales de la UNESCO sobre la convalidación de estudios, diplomas y títulos (la primera para América Latina y el Caribe fue aprobada el 19 de julio de 1974) subrayan la riqueza y diversidad de los sistemas nacionales de educación superior como un valor clave, que se debe mantener y, más aun, impulsar. La calidad y la pertinencia de las instituciones de educación superior, junto con sus programas y diplomas, no pueden valorarse en función de unos modelos determinados, por muy perfectos que puedan parecer. En última instancia, deben ser evaluadas dentro de un contexto concreto, y en un momento determinado. La calidad no puede basarse en un modelo universal, y no puede surgir tan solo de la teoría y la abstracción ni, según las tentativas actuales hacia la comercialización, tener como criterio principal responder a los intereses del mercado. La calidad es el resultado de un conjunto de acciones que responden a unas necesidades sociales determinadas que existen en un momento muy concreto. La calidad verdadera está *hic et nunc* ('aquí y ahora'), existe en unos contextos determinados.

Las convenios regionales fueron instrumentos realistas pero, al mismo tiempo, progresistas. Los estados miembros se percataron de que no era válido el antiguo sistema de equivalencias porque, tal como arguyó René Ochs, antiguo director de la División de Educación Superior de la UNESCO (hasta 1981), «la equivalencia percibida desde el punto de vista de una correlación perfecta de contenidos, duración y calidad de los estudios es, por supuesto, muy poco frecuente, dada la diversidad que existe de un país a otro». De hecho, la mayoría de los

estados miembros consideraron que era imposible valorar la equivalencia dadas las necesidades, estructuras y contenidos tan dispares en la educación superior, y por este motivo se usó el término *reconocimiento*, que fue considerado más apropiado.

Puede parecer evidente que los servicios de educación transfronteriza requieran unos mecanismos de regulación multinacionales para mantener un nivel adecuado de calidad y pertinencia (los cálculos que se efectúan para la construcción de un puente, por ejemplo, son los mismos en todas partes); ahora bien, los reglamentos y su aplicación siempre estarán controlados por una persona o entidad. Los convenios regionales de la UNESCO, completados con una recomendación internacional (1993), ofrecen un marco para el diálogo y la concertación con los estados miembros. Es preciso actualizar los términos de referencia y las reformas en sus métodos de aplicación. No obstante, proporcionan, si son capaces de mantener su compromiso de respetar la diversidad cultural de países y sistemas, un mejor punto de partida que los acuerdos rígidos y estrictos que no dejan espacio para la concertación, o las guías elaboradas esencialmente a partir de las experiencias y modelos del mundo desarrollado.

Hoy en día, se observa un silencio sobre estos principios, y es prevista la creación de mecanismos para definir la calidad más como una base para las equivalencias que para el reconocimiento. Durante este período caracterizado por la comercialización de la educación, también pueden beneficiar el comercio en lugar de ofrecer un servicio a la comunidad.

DEFINICIONES DE CALIDAD

Así pues, nos hallamos ante la mayor dificultad relacionada con la acreditación. ¿Qué es, exactamente, la calidad? No existen definiciones claras de lo que es la calidad ni del concepto de excelencia, que está relacionada con ella, y en este campo abunda el subjetivismo. Las definiciones suelen ser «tautológicas» o bien describen una situación relacionada con apenas algunas culturas.

De hecho, la aparente objetividad de muchas afirmaciones y presentaciones de métodos para lograr la calidad es incapaz de resolver este punto básico. Esto no es nada nuevo. En la

inauguración de un simposio sobre la calidad en la educación superior en América Latina, en la Universidad de Los Andes (Bogotá, julio de 1985), la ex-ministra de Educación de Colombia, Doris Eder de Zambrano, subrayó: «La calidad es un término difuso, como la belleza o la bondad, que se presta a múltiples definiciones, y que se percibe en forma totalmente distinta por diversos grupos o individuos. Entran en esta percepción factores derivados de las necesidades de cada grupo y de sus expectativas en relación con el papel de la educación.».

Cuando abordó esta cuestión en 1992, Bikas C. Sanyal, un experto de la India que vive en Europa desde hace muchos años, tuvo que consultar la tercera edición del diccionario Webster, donde encontró que *excelencia* se define de la siguiente forma: «el estado de poseer buenas cualidades en un alto grado»; en la misma obra, el término *calidad* se define como «el grado de conformidad a un estándar».

En estas dos definiciones, parece ser que la conformidad con los estándares es presentada como un instrumento para identificar la calidad. Al profundizar más en la cuestión, y citando a Charles F. Carter, Bikas Sanyal, añadió: «La excelencia en el sistema de la educación superior significaría que el sistema reúne las características de conformidad con estándares en un alto grado, es decir hasta qué punto el programa ha conseguido los resultados deseados. Esto lleva a identificar los resultados u objetivos deseados de un sistema de educación superior [...]». Sería imposible encontrar un posicionamiento más claro que ésto... Aun así, las preguntas que siguen abiertas son las mismas de antes: ¿cuáles son esos estándares?, ¿en qué se basan?, ¿quién los define?, ¿de dónde proceden? En resumen, la cuestión esencial es que la calidad en la educación superior no puede ser considerada «una conformidad a un estándar», puesto que se supone que la educación superior debe impulsar la creatividad y la innovación. (Ver Ginkel, 1994; 1995 a and b).

El especialista flamenco Dirk van Damme, uno de los expertos más prestigiosos que defiende conceptos como el "bien público global" y la necesidad de unos sistemas de acreditación internacionales y que fue una de las principales personalidades que contribuyeron a la fundación del proceso lanzado con el objetivo de establecer unos principios y un sistema de

acreditación internacional, también se mostró muy rotundo al afirmar que lo más importante era «el desarrollo y la aceptación a escala mundial de una definición común del significado que tiene actualmente la calidad en la educación superior». Tras proponer, especialmente en el terreno internacional, sistemas detallados para la acreditación, con la calidad como la principal razón de ser, este experto se siente obligado a reconocer que es preciso ahondar en este concepto o para expresar este hecho de otra manera, reconocer que el concepto de calidad no es evidente.

Existe, pues, un problema real. Los participantes en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior (París, 1998), que ratificaron los debates que tuvieron lugar en todo el mundo antes de esta conferencia, indicaron cuáles eran los elementos necesarios para integrar el concepto de la calidad en su conjunto. En este sentido, también siguieron la línea descriptiva y se refirieron a la calidad en tanto que un concepto multidimensional que comprende todas las principales funciones y actividades de la educación superior. Sin embargo, no sólo adoptaron un talante descriptivo, sino que se embarcaron en vincular los conceptos de la calidad y la pertinencia de un modo pragmático y realista.

Además, debatieron e hicieron recomendaciones, que si bien hasta el momento no han atraído la atención de los expertos y las autoridades responsables de las políticas en instituciones de educación superior, sí merecen tenerla. Examinaron centenares de documentos, pero tan solo aprobaron dos; uno fue la *Declaración mundial sobre la educación superior en el siglo XXI: Visión y acción*, cuyos principios fueron aprobados y que sirvió de base para crear un marco general, y el otro fue el *Marco de acción prioritaria para el cambio y el desarrollo de la educación superior*. El primer documento tiene una naturaleza más bien permanente, mientras que el segundo presenta propuestas para tomar medidas concretas adecuadas al tiempo en que fueron formuladas y adoptadas..

Entre otras sugerencias, este segundo documento recomienda que los centros de educación superior, junto con la sociedad pública y civil, deberían definir (o redefinir) sus misiones. Todos los actores implicados en la educación superior deberían ser llamados a participar en esta actividad. Unos cometidos claros, tareas delimitadas, que hayan sido definidos en un

inicio por todos los sectores de la universidad de forma autónoma y aprobadas por la sociedad a la que supuestamente sirven las instituciones, pueden ser utilizados por ellas como estandartes. Estas misiones se deberían presentar como los objetivos que se deben conseguir, y que además pueden crear las condiciones necesarias para llevar a cabo evaluaciones adecuadas, comparando lo que realmente logran las instituciones con lo que la totalidad de la sociedad espera de ellas durante un período concreto de su historia. En otras palabras, este mecanismo permitiría elaborar los estándares de forma más eficaz, así como introducir un elemento de comparabilidad adaptado a cada institución y de acuerdo con las misiones que hayan definido de un modo autónomo.

Este planteamiento difiere de las pautas comunes que instan a las instituciones de educación superior a buscar unas prácticas externas, con la esperanza de adaptarlas a sus realidades, olvidándose que a menudo no guardan relación alguna con las fuentes culturales de la institución ni con las necesidades sociales de la sociedad con la que están vinculadas las instituciones de educación superior. Sin duda, éste es el gran reto para la sociedad actual en cuanto a la adopción de unos sistemas de acreditación y evaluación.

Es obvio que, si se habla largo y tendido con todos los sectores de la sociedad, el debate será más abierto y los miembros de la comunidad académica, incluso antes de tomar una decisión acerca del modelo de universidad que desean, participarán en debates concretos a fin de construir una sociedad mejor en un país, una región y en todo el mundo. No debemos olvidar, incluso si nos adaptamos a la situación del mundo actual y al nacimiento y consolidación de la sociedad del conocimiento y la globalización, la propuesta de uno de los fundadores de la UNESCO, el filósofo francés Jacques Maritain, quien creía que los países debían definir su proyecto para un «ideal histórico», esto es, el proyecto de una nación, dirigido a construir una sociedad más justa.

INICIATIVAS MÁS DESTACADAS

Hasta ahora, hemos descrito el contexto en que el reciente debate acerca de la acreditación se lleva a cabo y hemos tratado de identificar las dificultades y los principales retos que se

presentan al definir la calidad en situaciones concretas. En este apartado nos centraremos en algunas de las iniciativas más destacadas que se han emprendido.

¿Por qué los organismos internacionales se muestran tan interesados en este asunto? En realidad, muchos sucesos tienen lugar a la vez, y a menudo resulta difícil comprender las interacciones entre los elementos que aparentemente no guardan relación alguna, pero que, en efecto, comparten algunas bases y fines. Cabe mencionar los tres procesos que han influido notablemente en la cuestión que tratamos, y que guardan entre sí una relación muy estrecha:

1. La Declaración de Bolonia y su rápida evolución. La Declaración de Bolonia incumbe directamente a Europa, pero sus repercusiones son pertinentes para todo el mundo, ya que parece ser que algunas organizaciones internacionales han decidido transformar este proceso en un modelo para el mundo entero.
2. La definición de unas directrices para la creación de un sistema de acreditación internacional y sus repercusiones en los instrumentos que ya existen, como los Convenios de la UNESCO sobre la convalidación de estudios, diplomas y títulos de enseñanza superior y la postura de las asociaciones universitarias.
3. La presencia y la influencia de la OMC en el terreno de la educación superior, y especialmente en los temas relacionados con la acreditación.

LA DECLARACIÓN DE BOLONIA

Al principio, la Declaración de Bolonia, que fue precedida por la Declaración de Boloña del 25 de mayo de 1998, era una declaración política; en cambio, en la actualidad constituye una especie de acuerdo entre más de treinta países europeos. Su propósito es reformar la educación superior en estos países de un modo consecuente, y su objetivo último es crear un único sistema europeo con una mayor competitividad. Los dirigentes encargados de esta iniciativa tomaron en consideración varios factores:

- actualmente, un mayor porcentaje de los nuevos conocimientos tienen lugar fuera de

Europa;

- el acceso a la educación superior todavía es bajo en Europa, sobre todo en comparación con otras regiones desarrolladas;
- Europa no es muy eficaz a la hora de transformar el conocimiento académico en innovación en el campo económico;
- Varios países de otras regiones se están convirtiendo en destinos más atractivos para estudiantes procedentes de países en vías de desarrollo, e incluso muchos europeos abandonan el continente para formarse en otras partes del mundo.

La Declaración de Bolonia no es un tratado internacional ni una ley, no posee el formato de los instrumentos normativos tradicionales tales como declaraciones, recomendaciones o convenios, pero a pesar de ello es vigente en toda Europa y, por medio de los mecanismos de cooperación, su influencia se ha extendido a otras regiones, en especial a América Latina y África. Desde el punto de vista jurídico, no tiene un efecto vinculante, pero la realidad es otra.

Puede surgir el interrogante de si se trata de una nueva metodología en las relaciones internacionales. Elaborar un tratado es un proceso muy largo; exige la implicación de los parlamentos y a menudo de la sociedad civil, y el camino hasta lograr un acuerdo adecuado está sembrado de deliberaciones y debates en la prensa. Las normas por las que se rigen los organismos internacionales a veces son pesadas y complejas. La elaboración de una declaración por parte de un grupo de ministros designados a tal fin, y su entrada en vigor automática, parece ser mucho más fácil y eficaz; el control es menor, los parlamentos y las sociedades civiles no están implicados, y es posible efectuar los cambios y las adaptaciones durante el proceso de ejecución. Esta metodología, por supuesto, plantea dudas sobre la naturaleza democrática del proceso, pero hasta ahora no parece que haya suscitado inquietud ni en los parlamentos ni en los círculos académicos.

El conjunto de reformas estructurales que impulsó la Declaración de Bolonia se están llevando a cabo con mucha rapidez, y en el 2003 se acreditaba que el 80 % de los países que habían firmado la Declaración ya habían adoptado el sistema de 3 + 2, así como el

sistema de créditos. El éxito que ha comportado su puesta en marcha es palpable y no cabe la menor duda de que los cambios y las reformas facilitarán la movilidad de estudiantes, profesores e investigadores, así como la convalidación de estudios y diplomas. La impresión general es que, a pesar de algunas dificultades (por ejemplo, cómo evaluar el trabajo que realizan individualmente los estudiantes en casa, bibliotecas o laboratorios) relacionadas con la concesión de créditos, el proceso marcha tranquilamente y es considerado irreversible.

Entre los cambios estructurales que han obtenido un amplio consenso, o por lo menos una gran aceptación, en la actualidad en Europa, cabe destacar:

- la adopción de un sistema de titulaciones fácil de interpretar y comparar;
- la adopción de un sistema basado en dos ciclos principales (cursos de grado y de posgrado) o un sistema básico de tres ciclos ($3 + 2 + 4$), que corresponde a las titulaciones de licenciatura, master y doctorado, de acuerdo con el sistema utilizado en Estados Unidos ;
- la creación de un sistema de créditos, que se pueden obtener no sólo a través de cursos tradicionales, sino en entornos externos a la educación superior;
- el fomento de la movilidad de estudiantes, profesores, investigadores y personal administrativo;
- la promoción de la dimensión europea en la educación superior;
- la promoción de la cooperación europea en la garantía de la calidad.

Es importante señalar que la promoción de la cooperación en la garantía de la calidad es uno de los factores clave para reforzar la convergencia entre las instituciones en toda Europa. La transferencia de créditos, por ejemplo, supone necesariamente que se analizan los contenidos y métodos de aprendizaje, lo que explica por qué los ministros en cuestión optaron por establecer unos caminos convergentes para la evaluación, la garantía de la calidad y la acreditación.

Llegados a este punto, cabe hacer hincapié en alguna cuestiones. No se debe olvidar que, cuando se activó este proceso, el ministro francés Claude Allegre dejó claro que Francia y Europa estaban perdiendo terreno ante los Estados Unidos, Australia y otros países. El modelo exportador de dichos países fue presentado como un ejemplo a seguir, lo que supuso un cambio en la manera en que Francia y Europa en general solían contemplar la cooperación.

Hace poco (2006), el experto holandés Chris Lorenz afirmó:

"Los representantes de la Unión Europea han señalado que el "valor de exportación" de la educación superior en los Estados Unidos asciende a cientos de millones de dólares anuales, mientras que en Australia la educación superior incluso ocupa un quinto puesto en lo que se refiere al valor total de exportación. En vista de estos "éxitos", la Unión Europea ha llegado a la conclusión de que la inferioridad europea en el mercado educativo mundial ya es intolerable. A partir de las presuposiciones acerca de la "economía del conocimiento" y la "sociedad del conocimiento", la Unión Europea concluyó de forma casi inevitable que la educación superior en Europa debía proponerse, como máximo objetivo, ¡ser la "más dinámica" y "más competitiva" del mundo!"

Éste es uno de los mayores obstáculos a la puesta en marcha del proceso de Bolonia: ¿cómo se debe establecer una convergencia basada en el modelo de Estados Unidos y, al mismo tiempo, respetar, en lo que se refiere a los contenidos y según el deseo expresado por las universidades europeas, la diversidad cultural y la pertinencia de las misiones de las instituciones de educación superior en el espacio europeo?

Todavía no han sido analizados lo suficiente los riesgos que comporta adoptar no solamente unos métodos estructurales y organizativos basados en el modelo de Estados Unidos, sino también unos contenidos pensados para adecuarse a diferentes contextos culturales. Existe, por tanto, un riesgo real de dar un paso atrás hacia la adopción de un sistema de equivalencias basado exclusivamente en un modelo único , en vez de un sistema de convalidaciones que respete las diferencias.

Es bien sabido que, hace treinta años, tuvo lugar un proceso semejante en América Latina, que tuvo éxito en algunos aspectos y fue problemático en otros. Esto debería instar a la

Comisión Europea y a las universidades europeas a llevar a cabo estudios monográficos sobre la puesta en marcha de estas reformas en universidades tales como la Universidad de Costa Rica, la Universidad de Concepción (Chile), la Universidad de los Andes (Colombia), la Universidad de Brasilia y la Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais (Brasil). En cambio, parece que los dirigentes europeos actúan como si América Latina no tuviera ningún tipo de experiencia en este campo. Se solicita ahora que sus comunidades académicas se adapten automáticamente a las nuevas estructuras europeas, con los mismos ciclos y grados, con programas con la misma duración, hasta lograr los mismos contenidos, y —este aspecto es crucial— con los mismos mecanismos para controlar el personal académico, así como evaluar cursos y programas.

Igualmente importante es la necesidad de fundar una Europa de ciudadanías, basada en actitudes humanistas y en la tolerancia. Los recientes resultados electorales que se han obtenido en algunos países (España e Italia), los resultados del referéndum sobre la constitución europea que se han registrado en Francia y los Países Bajos, así como los disturbios que se han producido en Francia, han sido considerados por un gran número de analistas como una señal de que las políticas neoliberales han ido demasiado lejos, de que la ciudadanía ha caído en el olvido y de que se han rebasado los límites razonables.

Sin embargo, esta perspectiva no cobra una importancia clara en las acciones que Europa emprende para crear un espacio académico común. Deberíamos tener presente lo que solía decir Federico Mayor (1998) en su etapa como director general de la UNESCO:

"[...] una economía de mercado, quizá, pero una sociedad de mercado, una democracia de mercado, ¡no! Es la gente, y no el mercado, la que debe decidir cuáles son sus prioridades. La pobreza y la exclusión, ya sea geográfica, económica o cultural, son la mismísima raíz del conflicto, del comportamiento extremista, de la frustración y de la radicalización. La exclusión es la primera causa de los flujos masivos de emigración. Las economías de mercado no han cumplido su compromiso de facilitar el desarrollo endógeno en los países en vías de desarrollo.

Esto significa que debemos defender nuestra sociedad y nuestra democracia, a fin de garantizar que es enteramente participativa y representativa".

Un factor esencial que debe contemplar la estrategia dirigida a modernizar los sistemas europeos también es la integración y la armonización con el mundo laboral. Si esto no se lleva a cabo, las universidades formarán a personas que, sin duda, estarán condenadas al desempleo, cuyo índice ya ha alcanzado unas cotas demasiado elevadas en muchos países europeos, como en otras partes del mundo, donde la precariedad se ha convertido en una pandemia. Aun así, los datos revelan que en el 2003 la tasa de desempleo entre la población en edad activa de la Unión Europea era un 4 % inferior entre la población con un alto nivel educativo que para el conjunto de la población, y un 7,5 % inferior entre aquellas personas que no terminaron la educación secundaria de primer ciclo.

Una titulación de educación superior aun es considerada esencial para adquirir habilidades o aptitudes en el mundo moderno. Ahora bien, las instituciones de educación superior no pueden formar a estudiantes solamente para las necesidades de la vida actual. Si las instituciones de educación superior actuaran de este modo, los diplomas quedarían obsoletos de inmediato. Si bien es preciso prever unos programas de educación continua, los estudiantes deben aprender a aprender, aprender a ser y aprender a tomar iniciativas, además de aprender a convivir. Aunque se empleara un vocabulario bastante diferente, todas estas ideas se recogieron en los convenios regionales de la UNESCO, y fueron enfatizadas con convicción en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior. Para poder formar a una personalidad con estas aptitudes, las instituciones de educación superior deben desempeñar un papel en tanto que observatorio, estudiando el funcionamiento de sus sociedades, analizando su evolución y investigando con la utilización de métodos prospectivos.

DIRECTRICES Y UN SISTEMA INTERNACIONAL DE ACREDITACIÓN

Desde que la comunidad académica y los sectores educativos de diferentes gobiernos descubrieron en el año 1999 la presencia del AGCS y la OMC, y se interesaron por su

ejecución, se han emprendido varias iniciativas para abordar el nuevo entorno, en su mayoría, de hecho, con el objetivo de aceptar la aplicación de los principios del AGCS, que algunos consideran inevitable

Se puede afirmar que la comunidad académica en general tan solo descubrió el AGCS y fue consciente de sus repercusiones en 1999. Sin embargo, a principios del 1995, se fundó una organización destinada a tratar la educación transfronteriza con el nombre tan sugerente de GATE – Global Alliance for Transnational Education (Alianza Global para la Educacion Transnacional) – por su proximidad con GATS –Global Agreement for Trade in Services- . Su fundador oficial fue Glenn R. Jones, miembro de la Jones International Ltd, una poderosa empresa del sector de la televisión por cable interesada también en la venta de productos educativos. La conferencia inaugural de este organismo tuvo lugar en Londres en septiembre del 1996, y Glenn Jones fue el encargado de iniciarla. Uno de los ponentes más destacados fue John Daniel, entonces rector de la Universidad Abierta del Reino Unido. Entre los participantes, aparte de los representantes de la Universidad Abierta del Reino Unido, asistieron representantes de la Universidad de Monash en Australia, del Comité Asesor del Centro Europeo de Enseñanza Superior (CEPES), situado en Bucarest (Karin Berg) o de la OCDE (Kari Hypponen). Asimismo, acudieron representantes de países en vías de desarrollo, como María José Lemaitre, del Consejo Nacional de Acreditación de Chile, y Johan Brink, de la Comisión de Rectores de Universidades (Sudáfrica). La mayoría de ellos fueron designados miembros del consejo de la GATE.

La GATE redactó un conjunto de principios de educación transfronteriza que presentó en la Conferencia de Londres, colaboró con el Área de Servicios de la OMC y lanzó un proceso de certificación propio. Como es natural, a pesar de la participación de instituciones de educación superior, incluso algunas procedentes de países receptores, la GATE era considerada una propiedad de una empresa internacional, que de pronto se convirtió en la suministradora de productos educativos y también en la entidad certificadora de calidad de los mismos productos. La GATE organizó una importante conferencia en París una semana antes de la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior (del 30-9-1998 al 2-10-1998), que estuvo rodeada de polémica. Esta conferencia fue copatrocinada por el CEPES

(Bucarest) y la OCDE, la recepción inaugural tuvo lugar en la embajada australiana en París y de nuevo se abrió con un discurso de Glenn R. Jones, al que siguieron los de los representantes del CEPES y la OCDE. Acto seguido se organizó un debate sobre el planeamiento regional y nacional con miembros de la Fundación Soros y de KPMG Internacional, y también de Finlandia (Kari Hyponnen-OCDE), de Canadá (Jane Knight), de los Países Bajos (de Wit) y de Hong Kong (Nigel French). Glenn Jones ofreció un banquete a los asistentes en el palacio de Versalles.

Era fácil augurar un conflicto entre los diferentes papeles que la GATE intentaba desempeñar. No daría resultado tal como todo se había organizado, y de hecho la entidad "implosionó". En el 2002 Van Damme hizo en Washington las siguientes declaraciones: "La Alianza Global para la Educación Transnacional (GATE) fue fundada en tanto que una alianza de instituciones, organismos para la garantía de la calidad, organizaciones estatales y empresas con el propósito de idear unos procedimientos de acreditación para centros que ofrecieran programas de educación superior transnacional. Con un cambio radical en su gobierno y el predominio de los intereses de Jones International como empresa, los actores implicados con un bagaje académico abandonaron la iniciativa" [...]. Hoy en día quien consulte la página web de la GATE verá que "Jones International transfiere la GATE a la Asociación Estadounidense de Aprendizaje a Distancia".

La idea de proponer de nuevo un conjunto de principios por los que se rigiera la educación transnacional se puede examinar a través del análisis de un proceso importante que se ha llevado a cabo a escala internacional desde el 2001, con gran resolución y eficacia, al parecer con vistas a crear las condiciones adecuadas para trazar un sistema internacional de acreditación o, por lo menos, idear un marco para los organismos implicados en el proceso de acreditación. De nuevo la OECD participa activamente en este proceso, que empezó a ser debatido en la propia UNESCO cuando John Daniel era subdirector general de educación. Su máximo objetivo aparece como una solución para muchos problemas,¹ pero algunos retos importantes permanecen ocultos.

¹ a) La metaacreditación puede ser una herramienta muy poderosa también a escala internacional. Un tipo de sistema de convalidación, basado en la evaluación de la garantía de la calidad y en unos organismos acreditadores que se sirven de unos estandares aprobados por la comunidad internacional daría lugar a un

Durante la Conferencia General de la UNESCO que tuvo lugar en el 2005, los estados miembros admitieron que existía un documento sobre «las directrices para la garantía de la calidad en la educación superior transfronteriza», pero no lo aprobaron. La Conferencia General tomó nota ‘que el Director General planeaba editar las directrices como un documento del Secretariado’ (Resolución adoptada en el Informe de la Comisión II en la reunión plenaria número 17, en 19 de octubre de 2005). Más adelante, en diciembre del 2005, la OCDE aprobó el mencionado documento, sin oponerle ninguna restricción. En él se exponen con claridad las opiniones que tienen los autores sobre la situación de la educación superior en un período de educación transnacional, y también se describe que la importancia de la educación superior transfronteriza ha aumentado de forma considerable desde la década de 1980.

Se tuvieron en cuenta varias observaciones críticas presentadas durante su elaboración, incluso lo que la delegación japonesa dijo en la OMC, según la que la existencia de verdaderas fábricas de diplomas era inaceptable. Las críticas procedentes de regiones como América Latina, que condenaban el hecho de que instituciones extranjeras ofrecieran programas que carecían de calidad, o bien de una calidad inferior a los que ofrecían los países de origen, también se tomaron en consideración al redactar el texto. El documento

reconocimiento multilateral de los organismos. Asimismo, de este modo los responsables de programas, instituciones, estudiantes, empleadores y el público en general tendrían la certeza de que la evaluación a cargo de uno de estos organismos se efectúa a partir de unos requisitos que gozan de aceptación internacional. La confianza en unos sistemas de acreditación y de garantía de la calidad también sería un gran incentivo para realizar importantes progresos en el campo de la convalidación de las titulaciones (*Trends and Models in International Quality Assurance in Higher Education in relation to Trade in Education Services*, Dirk van Damme, OCDE/EE. UU., Foro sobre el Comercio en los Servicios Educativos, 23 y 24 de mayo de 2002, Washington DC, EE. UU.). b) **"La idea de que un organismo internacional se implique en la garantía de la calidad y la acreditación en todo el mundo, o incluso a escala regional, puede extrañar a muchas personas, pero esta estrategia no debe ser infravalorada al enumerar los diferentes modelos y tendencias posibles [...]"**. (ibid) . c) El profesor Van Damme, quizás con mayor transparencia, unas propuestas similares en el informe introductorio de la reunión de expertos de la UNESCO que tuvo lugar en París el 10 y el 11 de septiembre de 2001 («La necesidad de un nuevo marco regulador para la convalidación, la garantía de la calidad y la acreditación), en que afirmó: «Los efectos de la globalización son tales que **sin un plan de calidad internacional fiable que sea capaz de equilibrar el desarrollo del mercado mundial de la educación superior tendremos que hacer frente a graves problemas** en el futuro, de los que los países de las zonas menos desarrolladas del mundo y sus estudiantes serán las víctimas». d) Todo esto concuerda con lo que sostiene la Secretaría de la OMC en el documento S/C/W/49, divulgado el 23 de septiembre del 2006: «La creación de unos acuerdos relacionados con los estándares para la formación profesional, el licenciamiento y la acreditación puede beneficiar de forma significativa esta modalidad de comercio, ya que resulta más fácil transferir titulaciones [...]».

reconoce el papel crucial que ejercen las organizaciones no gubernamentales, tales como asociaciones de educación superior, organizaciones de estudiantes, entidades para la convalidación y evaluación de diplomas y también centros profesionales de acreditación a la hora de consolidar la cooperación internacional para la garantía de la calidad en la educación superior transfronteriza.

El documento llegó a ser, en muchos aspectos, «políticamente correcto». Sin embargo, no subraya el peso que tienen la pertinencia y el compromiso social de las universidades. Apenas alude a la pertinencia y parece ser una especie de formalidad para responder por adelantado a las críticas procedentes de los países receptores. Además, el documento es, sin duda, eurocéntrico (según la tradición de la UNESCO, Europa comprende Estados Unidos, Canadá e Israel).

Los organismos que velan por la garantía de la calidad y la acreditación están invitados a «aplicar los principios que se recogen en los actuales documentos de ámbito internacional acerca de la educación superior transfronteriza como la UNESCO(CEPES)/ Consejo de Europa, Código Europeo de Buenas Prácticas en Educación Transnacional» (17.e)). Se recomienda a las instituciones/centros suministradores de educación superior transfronteriza "que, cuando lo estimen pertinente, empleen códigos de buenas prácticas como el Código de Buenas Prácticas en Educación Transnacional, de la UNESCO/Consejo de Europa, así como otros códigos pertinentes como la Recomendación sobre los Criterios y Procedimientos para la Evaluación de Titulaciones Externas, elaborado por la UNESCO/Consejo de Europa». Cabe esperar que los centros de convalidación académica «se valgan de códigos de buenas prácticas como la Recomendación sobre los Criterios y Procedimientos para la Evaluación de Titulaciones Externas, a cargo de la UNESCO/Consejo de Europa...».

La Asociación Internacional de Universidades, junto con otras treinta y cinco asociaciones regionales y nacionales, optaron por publicar otro documento, que lleva por título «Sharing Quality Higher Education across Borders: A Statement on behalf of Higher Education Institutions Worldwide». Si bien no se opone al primero, sin duda trata de subrayar la

importancia que tiene hoy la pertinencia para la educación superior, ¡lo que representa una gran diferencia!

Este documento se muestra contrario a las limitaciones que presentan los marcos comerciales en el campo de la educación superior, lo que «puede tener unas consecuencias no previstas que pueden perjudicar los cometidos (de la educación superior)» y al parecer recoge con mayor fidelidad la postura de las instituciones académicas. El responsable institucional de esta manifestación es la Asociación Internacional de Universidades, cuya sede se encuentra en las oficinas de la UNESCO, y comparten y reconocen el documento las siguientes instituciones:

- Agencia Universitaria de la Francofonía (AUF)
- Consejo Americano de Educación (ACE), EE. UU.
- Asociación de Universidades Africanas (AAU)
- Asociación de Universidades Árabes (AUA)
- Asamblea Nacional de Rectores del Perú
- Asociación Colombiana de Universidades (ASCUN), Colombia
- Asociación Iberoamericana de Educación Superior a Distancia (AIESAD)
- Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (ANUIES), México
- Asociación de Universidades Grupo Montevideo, Uruguay
- Asociación Universitaria Iberoamericana de Posgrado (AUPIP)
- Asociación de Universidades de Bangladesh
- Asociación de Universidades y Escuelas Universitarias del Canadá (AUCC)
- Asociación de Universidades de los Países Bajos (VSNU), Países Bajos
- Comisión de Rectores y Directores, Sri Lanka
- Grupo Compostela de Universidades, España
- Conferencia de Escuelas Superiores, Francia
- Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior (CONESUP), Ecuador
- Consejo de Rectores de Universidades de Brasil (CRUB), Brasil

- Consejo de Rectores de Universidades de España, España
- Consejo Superior Universitario de América Central (CSUCA)
- Consorcio Red de Educación a Distancia (CREAD)
- Consejo de Acreditación de la Educación Superior (CHEA), EE. UU.
- Asociación Universitaria Europea (EE. UU.)
- Asociación Internacional de Presidentes de Universidad (IAUP)
- Asociación de Universidades de Ciencias Aplicadas de los Países Bajos (HBO-raad), Países Bajos
- Educación Superior de Sudáfrica (HESA)
- Asociación Hispánica de Colegios Universitarios y Universidades (HACU), EE. UU.
- Comisión de Directores de Universidades (HUCOM), Hong Kong
- Asociación Internacional de Universidades (IAU)
- Federación Internacional de Universidades Católicas (IFCU), Francia
- Foro de Rectores de Universidades de Indonesia (IURF)
- Red de Macrourniversidades de América Latina y el Caribe
- Organización Universitaria Interamericana (OUI)
- Red Iberoamericana de Estudios de Posgrado (REDIBEP)
- Unión de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe
- Rectores de Ghana (VCG), Ghana

El proceso para crear un sistema internacional de acreditación conlleva algunos riesgos que, aunque no se traten, son evidentes:

1. También en este caso, no se siguieron los métodos tradicionales para la aprobación de los instrumentos normativos internacionales. Si bien, desde un punto de vista oficial, el documento que la Conferencia General de la UNESCO debidamente tomó nota y que la OCDE aprobó, no es vinculante, pero en la práctica se está estimulando la aplicación de medidas como si las directrices fueran un instrumento normativo oficial. En julio del 2005, en un foro que organizó el Instituto Internacional de Planeamiento de la Educación (IIPE) en París, se anunció que los

países deberían presentar un informe a la UNESCO y la OCDE acerca de la ejecución de dicho documento.

2. No se subrayan elementos importantes para el desarrollo de sistemas de cooperación fundados en la solidaridad. No se facilita una información clara acerca de quién se encargará de la acreditación si se definen los sistemas internacionales —tal como se propuso en el año 2001 al inicio del proceso—, ni sobre su autoridad o convalidación. Se dirigen recomendaciones positivas a los organismos que evalúan la calidad y la acreditación, se les urge a que respeten la diversidad cultural, pero tampoco en este caso se sabe con certeza quién coordinará el proceso, y según qué criterios lo hará. Es obvio que el documento se mejoró a lo largo de su elaboración, pero el objetivo final del proceso sigue siendo, al parecer, el afianzamiento de la creación de un sistema internacional de acreditación, que pueda facilitar la aplicación de las normas relacionadas con el reconocimiento y la acreditación del AGCS.

3. Se urge con apremio a las regiones a revisar los convenios regionales de la UNESCO acerca de la convalidación de estudios y diplomas;² no obstante, este planteamiento corre el peligro de ser eurocéntrico, ya que los modelos de normativas que son objeto de debate se redactaron de forma exclusiva en el Convenio europeo entre el Consejo de Europa y la UNESCO (Lisboa, 1997), por lo que reflejan las decisiones que tomaron los países europeos. En vez de instar a las regiones a adoptar o adaptar el convenio europeo, se les debería urgir a actualizar sus convenios regionales de acuerdo con sus necesidades, así como a participar en la revisión de la Recomendación internacional para la convalidación de estudios y diplomas, cuyos principios pueden ser utilizados para buscar un acuerdo internacional sobre esta cuestión. Como es natural, el contenido de estos convenios debe ser analizado a la luz de realidades actuales y es preciso realizar un esfuerzo,

² Los convenios regionales de la UNESCO fueron aprobados para América Latina y el Caribe (1978), los estados árabes (1978), Europa (1979), África (1981), y Asia y el Pacífico (1983). En 1976, se aprobó un convenio interregional en Niza, Francia, para los estados árabes y europeos que estaban situados alrededor del Mediterráneo. En 1997 se aprobó otro convenio europeo bajo los auspicios del Consejo de Europa y la UNESCO. En 1993, la Conferencia General de la UNESCO aprobó una recomendación internacional.

por ejemplo, para trazar unos métodos concretos y fiables a fin de evaluar los conocimientos que proceden de fuera del sistema educativo, en especial del mundo laboral.

Un elemento importante que puede que no hayan sabido llevar a la práctica los comités de ejecución de los convenios sobre la convalidación y los diplomas son, precisamente, las disposiciones relativas a la preparación para el mundo laboral, puesto que es necesario reconocer el valor del conocimiento y la experiencia que se adquiere fuera de las escuelas, sobre todo a través del autoaprendizaje y las actividades profesionales. El fomento del aprendizaje permanente, la democratización de la educación y la adopción y aplicación de una política educativa deben tomar en consideración los avances estructurales, económicos y tecnológicos, así como los cambios sociales y los entornos culturales de cada país.

El mundo laboral no debe ser considerado sinónimo del mundo empresarial. Es preciso que las universidades sean modernas y dispongan de una maquinaria administrativa eficaz, y aunque el objetivo de las empresas acostumbra a ser la obtención de beneficios, las instituciones de educación superior deben fijarse unos propósitos mucho más amplios, como los de índole humanitaria, por ejemplo. Además, en vista de la importancia que tienen los trabajadores y la necesidad de establecer vínculos con el conjunto de la sociedad, no se debe contemplar el mundo laboral con estrechez de miras. Es necesario que haya una cooperación con empresas tanto públicas como privadas —teniendo en cuenta el estado actual de la economía—, pero esto no ha de perjudicar los objetivos a largo plazo de la educación superior, y no puede guiarse exclusivamente por los intereses a corto plazo y fluctuantes del mercado; en caso contrario, perderán su relevancia y no podrán ser consideradas instituciones de calidad. Asimismo, si los requisitos se basan solamente en las necesidades actuales de la industria y el comercio, los resultados serán insatisfactorios a la larga. (Sobre la función crucial de las universidades, ver tambien Ginkel 2006).

Si se llevan a cabo reformas de los convenios, debemos señalar que, según las observaciones realizadas sobre su puesta en marcha desde la década de los setenta, los comités de ejecución se reúnen sólo una vez cada dos años (en ocasiones con menor

frecuencia), sus miembros no son permanentes y a menudo no conocen a fondo el tema que abordan. Las universidades y sus asociaciones no forman parte de estos comités y se les invita a participar en reuniones únicamente en calidad de observadores. Si tenemos en cuenta que, en muchas partes del mundo, las universidades, según la ley, deberían gozar de autonomía y libertad académica, el hecho de que se las mantenga alejadas de estos comités conviértelos unos órganos absolutamente ineficaces. Es indispensable que las universidades formen parte de ellos en calidad de miembros de pleno derecho.

Al implicarse en este proceso, tanto las autoridades educativas como la comunidad académica deben ser conscientes de su naturaleza y estar bien informadas de cuáles son sus principales objetivos, como se han ido definiendo desde que el proceso se puso en marcha en los años 2000 y 2001. El material de referencia básico en este caso es, por un lado, el informe introductorio que el profesor van Damme elaboró para la reunión de expertos celebrada en París en septiembre del 2001 y, por el otro, el documento de la OMC sobre los servicios educativos publicado el 23 de septiembre del 1998 (S/C/W/49). Justamente en este documento, la Secretaría de la OMC presenta un conjunto de elementos para que la educación superior sea considerada un servicio comercial y plantea preguntas tales como: ¿cómo se puede evitar que los problemas derivados de la no-convalecidación de diplomas o títulos concedidos por proveedores extranjeros frustren los beneficios previstos en el acceso al mercado?

El sitio web de la OCDE (www.oecd.org) también proporciona información útil para entender todo este proceso. Así, por ejemplo, contiene un texto ilustrativo que es presentado como un prólogo a las directrices aprobadas por la propia organización:

«Las Directrices para la provisión de la calidad en la educación transfronteriza ofrecen un marco internacional que protege a los estudiantes y a otros grupos de interés de la oferta de poca calidad y de unos proveedores de dudosa reputación. Su propósito es garantizar el desarrollo de una educación superior transfronteriza de calidad que satisfaga las necesidades humanas, sociales, económicas y culturales. Las directrices estipulan de qué modo pueden compartir responsabilidades, a la vez

que respetan la diversidad de los sistemas de educación superior, los gobiernos, las instituciones/proveedores de educación superior, las entidades estudiantiles, los organismos de acreditación y de garantía de la calidad, y los organismos de reconocimiento académico y profesional del país proveedor y el receptor. Dichas directrices fueron elaboradas en colaboración con la UNESCO, organismo que también las ha publicado bajo la responsabilidad de la Secretaría en virtud de la decisión de la 33.^a sesión de su Conferencia General, que tuvo lugar en octubre del 2005. El texto fue elaborado a lo largo de tres reuniones de redacción a las que estaban invitados todos los países del mundo, así como varias organizaciones no gubernamentales. Estas reuniones fueron presididas por Jan Levy (Noruega), Mala Singh (Sudáfrica) y Anthony Stella (India) como vicepresidentes. Las directrices fueron aprobadas el 2 de diciembre de 2005 por el Consejo de la OCDE. En el seno de la OCDE, la elaboración de las directrices fue iniciada en el 2003 por el Consejo de Administración del Centro de Investigación e Innovación Educativas (CERI) como un seguimiento del trabajo realizado en el ámbito de la internacionalización y comercio de la educación superior. Entonces la Comisión de Educación asumió la responsabilidad de aplicarlas. Bernard Hugonnier y Kurt Larsen iniciaron el proyecto, que fue dirigido por Keiko Momii. Una parte del proyecto fue financiada por el Departamento de Educación, Ciencia y Formación de Australia, el Ministerio de Educación, Cultura, Deportes, Ciencia y Tecnología de Japón y el Ministerio de Educación e Investigación de Noruega. Las directrices han sido publicadas bajo la responsabilidad de la Secretaría General de la OCDE [OCDE, 2005]”.

En el preámbulo, la OCDE también agradece el trabajo realizado por su personal y la colaboración fructífera de miembros de la División de Educación Superior de la UNESCO, en especial Stamenka Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic y Zeynep Varoglu.

En todos los debates, el denominado modelo de acreditación norteamericano, de hecho el modelo de Estados Unidos, fue analizado y presentado como una buena práctica, puesto que la descentralización que defiende permite a las instituciones de educación superior tomar un papel más activo en el proceso. En el año 2005, una comisión de educación

superior del Departamento de Educación propuso suprimir los acreditadores regionales de los Estados Unidos y sustituirlos por un organismo acreditador nacional, quizá una fundación que el Congreso podía crear para sustituir el sistema actual. En un documento encontrado en Internet (<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/03//accredit>), recuperado el día 13 de abril de 2006, se mencionan los motivos de dicha propuesta: la falta de transparencia, unos estándares insuficientes y laxos y una regionalización anticuada. Para aclarar este último punto (regionalización fuera de moda), el documento sostiene que «la tecnología ha convertido en obsoleto el pintoresco planteamiento jurisdiccional» y «cada vez más estudiantes se trasladan a otro estado para completar su educación y matricularse en varias instituciones, a menudo al mismo tiempo».

Las reacciones de expertos y organismos de los Estados Unidos no se hicieron esperar. Consideran que esta iniciativa podría atentar contra la diversidad del sistema por el que se rige Estados Unidos y representar una amenaza a sus múltiples sistemas culturales. Una agencia nacional podría «socavar la fortaleza y la diversidad de la educación superior estadounidense», afirma Judith S. Eaton, presidenta del Consejo de Acreditación de la Educación Superior. Para Eaton, la creación de unos estándares de calidad a escala nacional podría hacer que las instituciones universitarias se sintieran presionadas a ser más semejantes entre ellas.

Este argumento parece convincente. Así pues, para volver a los debates sobre la internacionalización de la acreditación, nos podríamos preguntar de qué forma influyen los estándares de calidad internacionales en las instituciones de educación superior de los Estados Unidos. ¿Y en las instituciones de los demás países?, ¿de qué modo influirían?

LAS REPERCUSIONES DE LA OMC Y EL AGCS

Hoy en día no es posible estudiar la evaluación y la acreditación esencialmente a escala internacional sin aludir al AGCS –Acuerdo General sobre el Comercio de Servicios–, aprobado en 1994, y a la OMC –la Organización Mundial del Comercio–, que empezó a

operar en 1995. Los principales objetivos del AGCS son la reducción de las tarifas y otras barreras comerciales que se imponen sobre los intercambios de mercancías y también de servicios. El **AGCS** plantea algunas cuestiones relacionadas con los principios. La educación superior, en vez de ser un derecho, estipulado por ley, de los ciudadanos de los estados, es redefinida como un producto —de hecho, es en lo que se está convirtiendo con celeridad—; es decir, un servicio internacional que se compra y vende por medio de cualquier proveedor internacional. Este concepto ofrece el marco ideológico para los sistemas que se crean por todo el mundo.

Los cambios que ha experimentado el concepto de la educación superior y las cuestiones que han planteado han tenido unas consecuencias concretas para todas las instituciones y países involucrados en el proceso de intercambios de programas. Desde entonces, un asunto que ha cobrado importancia tanto para los gobiernos como para las universidades consiste en averiguar si los distintos países todavía tienen el derecho y, en realidad, la oportunidad y la capacidad de regular las licencias vigentes de las instituciones, así como el reconocimiento de estudios y diplomas concedidos por proveedores transfronterizos. Se trata de un tema político, económico y jurídico, y es una situación **incierta**.³ Se ha mostrado cierta preocupación, sobre todo en lo que respecta a los términos que dispone el AGCS en las cláusulas relacionadas con las naciones más favorecidas, el trato nacional y el reconocimiento y acreditación.

Muchas universidades y sus asociaciones ubicadas en varias partes del mundo han advertido que, si estas cláusulas son aplicadas en sentido estricto, lo que ocurrirá de inmediato es que todos los países signatarios del AGCS podrían verse obligados a reconocer, certificar y acreditar los diplomas de todos los otros miembros del AGCS. En lugar de estar asociados con un sistema en que los resultados se obtienen a partir del diálogo, se aplicarán unas normas rígidas y vinculantes. Aunque los textos son ambiguos,

³ Uno de los estudios más detallados acerca de los aspectos jurídicos de este asunto es la tesis que fue defendida en el año 2004 por un profesor de la Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais, Gustavo Ferreira Ribeiro, para la obtención de un diploma de maestría en la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina, en Brasil. Se pueden encontrar más comentarios en los sitios web de varias organizaciones, como son la Educación Internacional (EI), la Asociación de Universidades y Colegios Universitarios de Canadá y la Asociación Canadiense de Profesores Universitarios.

no es descabellado hacer interpretaciones de este tipo, lo que explica, al menos en parte, el interés que hoy muestran tantos países, expertos y organizaciones en el asunto de la acreditación.

Además, existe el riesgo de que el estado que no respete las obligaciones que se han cumplido en la OMC relativas la educación superior sea condenado a pagar unas indemnizaciones a los empresarios o industriales de educación, quienes podrían sentirse perjudicados y sufrir represalias por parte de los países que ofrecen educación, en especial los que ofrecen cursos por Internet. Numerosos representantes del mundo académico también se mostraron preocupados por el hecho de que el AGCS pudiera provocar el menoscabo de fondos y subsidios destinados a la educación superior, así como de la capacidad del gobierno para regular su calidad y garantizar que sus instituciones de educación superior contribuyan, más allá de la enseñanza, por medio de la investigación que llevan a cabo y los servicios que ofrecen a la sociedad, al buen desarrollo de su país.

La comunidad académica y las instituciones de educación superior ignoraron este acuerdo hasta septiembre del 2001. En este mes, cuatro organizaciones —la Asociación de Universidades y Escuelas Universitarias de Canadá, el Consejo Americano de Educación, el Consejo de Acreditación de la Educación Superior y la Asociación de Universidades Europeas— difundieron la Declaración Conjunta sobre la Educación Superior y el Acuerdo General sobre el Comercio de Servicios, y manifestaron que «se oponían firmemente a que se incluyera la educación superior en los servicios que se desea comprometer con el comercio más libre» (Barblan, 2002). Más tarde, la Asociación Internacional de Universidades también firmó este documento.

En febrero del 2002, en el Foro Social Mundial de Porto Alegre, los participantes en la jornada "Ciencia y tecnología, un instrumento para la paz en el siglo XXI", resolvieron proponer un pacto mundial que garantizara la consolidación de los principios de acción aprobados en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior, a cargo de la UNESCO (París, 1998), y la exclusión de la educación superior del AGCS. En la misma ciudad, el 26 de abril de 2002, los rectores que participaron en el III Encuentro de Rectores de Universidades Públicas

Iberoamericanas abordaron el asunto y aprobaron una resolución en la que, tras una serie de consideraciones, manifestaron:

"Los presidentes y académicos latinoamericanos reunidos aquí, a fin de afianzar los compromisos que en octubre de 1998 adoptaron en París los gobiernos y la comunidad académica internacional en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior, para quienes la educación superior es un bien público, advierten a la comunidad universitaria y a la sociedad en general de los efectos nefastos que pueden tener estas políticas, por lo que exigen a los gobiernos de sus respectivos países que no sellen ningún tipo de compromiso en relación con este asunto en el contexto del Acuerdo General sobre el Comercio de Servicios (AGCS) y la OMC".

Las organizaciones de estudiantes y profesores, así como otras asociaciones académicas, también expresaron su desacuerdo con las propuestas derivadas de las normativas del AGCS. No obstante, fue durante este mismo período cuando los representantes de algunos gobiernos y universidades empezaron a creer que era inevitable atender a las condiciones previstas por el AGCS y que, dada esta situación, era preciso adaptarse a la nueva realidad estipulando los nuevos estándares que debían usarse de forma que varios servicios educativos pudieran ser considerados lo suficientemente semejantes como para competir en el mercado mundial. Es evidente que tras esta postura se esconden unos intereses comerciales. De todos modos, algunos expertos como Andris Barblan también indican unos motivos éticos; Barblan, ex-secretario general de la Conferencia de Rectores Europeos, afirmó:

"[...] esto es fundamental si queremos proteger a los estudiantes y tranquilizar a los padres (quienes con frecuencia corren con los gastos al pagar las tasas o impuestos), y si estamos dispuestos a trazar una vía de convergencia para el profesorado, el personal contratado y los profesionales a fin de que puedan recurrir a algún tipo de orden en la vorágine de la globalización".

Algunos analistas y miembros de los gobiernos se esforzaron en interpretar las normas del AGCS, convencidos de que el sector de la educación pública no se trataba en las negociaciones del AGCS, así como de que los estados miembros de la OMC tenían derecho a no contraer compromiso alguno en esta cuestión.

La realidad es más compleja. Las intenciones de este tipo de declaraciones son buenas, pero a menudo un tanto ingenuas, y en el mejor de los casos aparecen como resultado de «hacerse ilusiones». Es cierto que en la sección *b* del apartado 3 del artículo I se estipula que en los «servicios» se incluye cualquier servicio de cualquier sector, salvo los servicios que se ofrezcan en el ejercicio de la autoridad del Estado. Ahora bien, si seguimos leyendo el texto del AGCS y llegamos a la sección *c* del mismo artículo, vemos que se establece lo siguiente: "Un servicio que se ofrece en el ejercicio de la autoridad del Estado comprende cualquier servicio que no se brinda con un fin comercial ni en competencia con uno o más proveedores de servicios".

El texto parece claro y es evidente que cualquier interpretación que defienda la exclusión puede fácilmente generar controversias. Basta con que un país cuente con universidades privadas para que cualquiera afirme que hay competencia. En esta situación, problemas más graves pueden intervenir para las universidades públicas cuando intentan ejercer una función comercial vendiendo algunos productos o beneficiando de algunas ventajas como las que son provenientes del financiamiento público y las que son relativas a la autoridad exclusiva para conceder grados o recibir financiamiento público para investigaciones, a los cuales no tienen acceso sus competidores privados.

Asimismo, el artículo II del AGCS prevé un conjunto de medidas para que sean aplicadas de forma inmediata. Entre éstas cabe destacar la cláusula que define la «nación más favorecida» (NMF), en virtud de la que en el primer apartado de este artículo se establece:

'1. Con respecto a toda medida abarcada por el presente Acuerdo, cada Miembro otorgará inmediata e incondicionalmente a los servicios y a los proveedores de servicios de cualquier otro

Miembro un trato no menos favorable que el que concede a los servicios similares y a los proveedores de servicios similares de cualquier otro país'.

La Asociación Canadiense de Profesores Universitarios consultó juristas y publicó un documento (GATS – Impact on Education in Canada: Summary of Key Findings, que puede ser encontrado en el sitio de la Asociación, www.cauf.ca, recuperado de internet en 22.05.2006), que presenta un resumen de los principales elementos contenidos en un documento con la opinión legal de los juristas. En este documento, en la parte relativa a las obligaciones incondicionales que estipulaba el acuerdo, los juristas estimaron lo siguiente:

- a) "Todos los servicios educativos que se ofrecen con un fin comercial o en competencia con uno o varios proveedores educativos, con independencia de si los ofrece un organismo público o privado, quedan sujetos al trato de la nación más favorecida y a otras obligaciones incondicionales del AGCS.
- b) "Por consiguiente, la obligación del trato de la nación más favorecida ataña a todos los servicios del AGCS, independientemente de que sean objeto de un compromiso [...]. Entre otras disposiciones del AGCS que atañen a todos los servicios, cabe destacar la transparencia, la revisión judicial y administrativa, los monopolios y las prácticas comerciales restrictivas".

Es posible hacer excepciones, pero bajo unas condiciones determinadas y tan solo durante un período de tiempo concreto (diez años).

Otra cláusula que entraña complejidad es complementaria a la del principio NMF, y concierne al «trato nacional» que se aplica a toda clase de medidas nacionales, incluso las medidas relativas al subsidio (tercera parte, artículo XVI, 1). El AGCS "define el trato nacional como el trato que no es menos favorable que el que se concede a servicios y proveedores de servicios nacionales afines" (ibid. www.cauf.ca, recuperado el 22 de mayo de 2006).

Este dispositivo concierne a las obligaciones que se derivan de compromisos que los estados miembros han decidido contraer. En otras palabras, no se aplicará esta cláusula si no hay unos compromisos. Sin embargo, incluso en este caso, la situación es ambigua. El AGCS estableció un proceso permanente: de vez en cuando, se requerirá o instará a los países a que abran su sistema, proceso que terminará tan solo cuando la apertura sea total. Recientemente la prensa brasileña anunció que, tras una petición presentada por algunos países ricos, la OMC inauguró en mayo del 2006 un nuevo marco de negociaciones sobre la apertura de las economías y la necesidad de realizar cambios en las legislaciones nacionales con el objetivo de facilitar la libre actuación de las universidades extranjeras en el territorio de cada país. La mayor parte de los países en vías de desarrollo se mostraron reacios a las mencionadas medidas (<http://www.estadao.com.br/ext/inc/print.htm>, recuperado el día 16 de mayo de 2006).

En cuanto a la acreditación, unas disposiciones del AGCS establecen que «el reconocimiento deberá basarse en criterios convenidos multilateralmente» (Artículo VII 5 del AGCS) Asimismo, sugieren a los estados miembros, si procede, que trabajen en colaboración con las organizaciones intergubernamentales y no gubernamentales pertinentes a fin de crear y adoptar unos estándares y unos criterios internacionales comunes para el reconocimiento, y unas condiciones internacionales comunes para la puesta en marcha de los servicios comerciales y profesionales apropiados.

En conformidad con esta norma, al principio del proceso actual, que llevó a la OCDE a la aprobación de las directrices para la garantía de la calidad en la educación superior transfronteriza, Dirk van Damme arguyó en diciembre del 2002 (durante el First Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education) que: «Valdría la pena formular una serie de valores básicos que sean compartidos por toda la comunidad de la educación superior y que definan su sistema de valores fundamental». También adujo lo siguiente: «[...] aún es más importante que los estudiantes de todo el mundo dispongan de un conjunto de conceptos comunes para definir unos niveles básicos de calificaciones académicas. La sociedad del conocimiento global insta a la comunidad internacional de educación superior a constituir

unos títulos y unas credenciales que gocen de un reconocimiento en el mercado laboral internacional».

En Washington, en mayo del 2002, Van Damme presentó un conjunto de medidas con el objetivo de afianzar el proceso que llevaría a crear «condiciones favorables para la redacción de unos esquemas internacionales de acreditación y de garantía de la calidad», y añadió: «Cabe esperar que se instaure un sistema internacional de metaacreditación que sea enfocado paulatinamente en esta dirección» (Foro OCDE/EE.UU. sobre la Comercialización de los Servicios Educativos, 23 y 24 de mayo de 2002).

- Esto concuerda con las conclusiones y recomendaciones de la reunión de expertos donde se trataron los efectos de la globalización en la garantía de la calidad, la acreditación y el reconocimiento de las titulaciones en la educación superior, que tuvo lugar en septiembre del 2001 en París (ED-2001/HED/AMQ/05, París 20/09/2001); en ella se notó que se había llegado a un consenso general de los participantes sobre la necesidad de un forum global relativo a las dimensiones internacionales de la garantía de calidad, la acreditación y el reconocimiento de los títulos y se concluyó a favor de “la necesidad de que la comunidad educativa adoptara una postura común en todo el mundo sobre esta cuestión (la garantía de la calidad, la acreditación y el reconocimiento de titulaciones) mediante la unión de redes ya existentes y la evaluación de los recientes avances”.
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- Se aprobó un plan de acción para iniciar el proceso que incluía, entre otras medidas:
 - o la creación de una comisión especial, concebida como un cuerpo de trabajo operativo, que desarrollará a fondo el plan de acción propuesto;
 - o la promoción y la codificación de buenas prácticas;
 - o la gestación de unas directrices para los estados miembros en forma de códigos internacionales u otras normas internacionales aceptadas (reunión de expertos sobre los efectos de la globalización en la garantía de la calidad, la acreditación y el reconocimiento de titulaciones en la educación superior)

Del texto elaborado por el AGCS acerca del reconocimiento y la acreditación, se desprende que la comunidad académica tiene derecho a mostrarse preocupada sobre las perspectivas en este ámbito:

Artículo VII: Reconocimiento

1. A los efectos del cumplimiento, en todo o en parte, de sus normas o criterios para la autorización o certificación de los proveedores de servicios o la concesión de licencias a los mismos, y con sujeción a las prescripciones del párrafo 3, los miembros podrán reconocer la educación o experiencia obtenidas, los requisitos cumplidos o las licencias o certificaciones otorgados en un determinado país. Ese reconocimiento, que podrá efectuarse mediante armonización o de otro modo, podrá basarse en un acuerdo o convenio con el país en cuestión o podrá ser otorgado de forma autónoma.
2. Todo miembro que sea parte en un acuerdo o convenio del tipo a que se refiere el párrafo 1, actual o futuro, brindará oportunidades adecuadas a los demás Miembros interesados para que negocien su adhesión a tal acuerdo o convenio o para que negocien con él otros comparables. Cuando un Miembro otorgue el reconocimiento de forma autónoma, brindará a cualquier otro Miembro las oportunidades adecuadas para que demuestre que la educación, la experiencia, las licencias o los certificados obtenidos o los requisitos cumplidos en el territorio de ese otro Miembro deben ser objeto de reconocimiento.
3. Ningún Miembro otorgará el reconocimiento de manera que constituya un medio de discriminación entre países en la aplicación de sus normas o criterios para la autorización o certificación de los proveedores de servicios, o la concesión de licencias a los mismos, o una restricción encubierta al comercio de servicios.

4. Cada Miembro:

- a) en un plazo de 12 meses a partir de la fecha en que surta efecto para él el Acuerdo sobre la OMC, informará al Consejo del Comercio de Servicios sobre las medidas que tenga en vigor en materia de reconocimiento y hará constar si esas medidas se basan en acuerdos o convenios del tipo a que se refiere el párrafo 1;
- b) informará al Consejo del Comercio de Servicios con prontitud, y con la máxima antelación posible, de la iniciación de negociaciones sobre un acuerdo o convenio del tipo a que se refiere el párrafo 1 con el fin de brindar a los demás Miembros oportunidades adecuadas para que indiquen su interés en participar en las negociaciones antes de que éstas lleguen a una fase sustantiva;
- c) informará con prontitud al Consejo del Comercio de Servicios cuando adopte nuevas medidas en materia de reconocimiento o modifique significativamente las existentes y hará constar si las medidas se basan en un acuerdo o convenio del tipo a que se refiere el párrafo 1.

5. Siempre que sea procedente, el reconocimiento deberá basarse en criterios convenidos multilateralmente. En los casos en que corresponda, los Miembros trabajarán en colaboración con las organizaciones intergubernamentales y no gubernamentales competentes con miras al establecimiento y adopción de normas y criterios internacionales comunes en materia de reconocimiento y normas internacionales comunes para el ejercicio de las actividades y profesiones pertinentes en la esfera de los servicios.(Articulo VII del AGCS)

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Los textos definitivos de los instrumentos normativos de la UNESCO acerca del reconocimiento de estudios y diplomas de educación superior han sido siempre producto de arduas negociaciones.⁴ Estos textos se fundamentan en una idea de cooperación entre iguales, que tienen la solidaridad como consigna y en los que compartir y transferir conocimiento es un elemento esencial. Una de las mayores dificultades que ha comportado su elaboración solía estar relacionada con las delegaciones, especialmente las de la Europa del Este, puesto que éstas consideraban que era preciso definir unas equivalencias y, como creían que el modelo que ellas empleaban era el mejor o el único aceptable, debían servir de referencia para todos los países. En otras palabras, para que un diploma fuera reconocido

⁴ El segundo autor fue director de la División de Educación Superior de la UNESCO, en París, de octubre del 1981 a febrero del 1999. Durante este período, bajo los auspicios de la UNESCO fueron aprobados cuatro instrumentos normativos sobre el reconocimiento de estudios y diplomas de educación superior.

debía ser igual al de los países de esta región. No se mencionaba el término *estandarización*, pero lo cierto es que un gran logro de la comunidad internacional fue abandonar el concepto de las equivalencias y adoptar la idea del reconocimiento; de este modo se respetaban los diferentes sistemas, cuya supervivencia estaba garantizada. ¿Nos encontramos ahora ante un retorno al sistema de equivalencias, según el cual todas las universidades de todo el mundo deberán conceder títulos y extender diplomas basados en programas que se caracterizan por una estructura y unos contenidos idénticos? ¿Teniendo en cuenta que la conformidad con estándares comprensibles a los evaluadores frecuentemente produce más mediocridad que excelencia es aceptable que esta conformidad se considere más importante que la creatividad y la innovación?

LA EDUCACIÓN COMO SERVICIO PÚBLICO

Esta realidad, este entorno y este marco nos llevan, de nuevo, a tratar la importancia que tiene seguir considerando la educación superior como un servicio público, que está basado en tres principios: la igualdad, la continuidad y adaptabilidad (Bartoli, 1997).

La igualdad significa que todas las personas, con base en el mérito, deben tener derecho a acceder al servicio público, sin discriminación alguna. Este concepto está muy bien claro y definido en lo que respecta a la educación superior, tanto en la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos como en la declaración aprobada por la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior de la UNESCO (París, 1998).

Continuidad o permanencia significa entendemos que el servicio público siempre debe satisfacer las necesidades de la ciudadanía; en este contexto, el concepto de *pertinencia* aparece claramente y no sólo de forma implícita.

El concepto de *adaptabilidad* significa que el servicio público debe ser «reactivo» y evolucionar de acuerdo con los cambios que tienen lugar en el interés general, ya sean tecnológicos o sociales. Por consiguiente, puede y debe ser actualizado en función de la

evolución de la sociedad, pero sin que por ello abandone sus características básicas, que son cruciales para garantizar la igualdad y la permanencia.

En resumen, para que un servicio sea considerado público, en primer lugar es preciso que se suministre de forma equitativa, así como de forma continua y permanente, y no deberá estar sujeto a ningún tipo de discriminación, incluidas la comercial y la económica. Esto atañe a toda la educación y, por supuesto, a la educación superior. En 1998, en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior, se llegó al consenso de que la educación superior debía ser considerada un servicio público, que debía ser accesible para todo el mundo en función de los méritos, y en el que no se aceptaba ningún tipo de discriminación. Como ocurre con otros servicios públicos, es posible confiar, delegar u otorgar la provisión de la educación a personas físicas o instituciones particulares, pero de conformidad con unas regulaciones estrictas y unos métodos de evaluación minuciosos, fijados de acuerdo con los principios mencionados arriba.

Este tema fue objeto de debate en el año 2005, en Barcelona, en el encuentro de premios Nobel durante la Segunda Conferencia de Barcelona para la Educación Superior (diciembre del 2005). Tuvimos la oportunidad, en esta ocasión (Días 2005) de hacer la siguiente declaración: «En este momento, en Europa, la doctrina evoluciona hacia no referirse a servicios públicos, una expresión que ha sido sustituida por servicios de interés general»; y esto, de acuerdo con el *dossier* publicado por el periódico francés *Le Monde* el 4 de junio de 2002, «se refiere a las actividades del servicio, de índole comercial o no, que son consideradas de interés general por las autoridades públicas y, por tanto, están sometidas a las obligaciones del servicio público».

Aun así, esta evolución de los conceptos no es siempre obvia. Se enmarca en un desarrollo global en que desde 1986 ha ido creciendo un movimiento de liberalización ambiguo y conflictivo en toda Europa, que ha afectado numerosos sectores de la economía y que ahora ha tocado de cerca la educación y, por tanto, la investigación. Esto ocurre en un tiempo en el que se ha acuñado una nueva expresión: en vez de servicios públicos o servicios de

interés general,⁵ ahora se habla de «servicios de interés económico general» (ver los periódicos franceses *Libération* y *Le Monde* de los días 15 y 16 de julio de 2005). Esta denominación representa, sin duda, una desviación de la tradición y parece dar prioridad al hecho de hallar un mercado que sea capaz de resolver los problemas educativos, y también a la idea de que los intereses individuales deben prevalecer sobre los intereses sociales.

En nuestra opinión, por este motivo los participantes (casi cinco mil) de la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior (París, UNESCO, 1998) definieron un marco prudente pero audaz, en el que los representantes de más de ciento ochenta países (más de ciento treinta delegaciones encabezadas por los ministros de estado) de todos los continentes (incluso todos los países europeos) aprobaron un conjunto de principios, siempre válidos, que fueron resumidos por la UNESCO de la siguiente manera:

Resumen de la Declaración Mundial sobre la Educación Superior

1. De conformidad con el párrafo 1 del Artículo 26 de la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos, **el acceso** a la educación superior ha de ser **igual para todos**, en función de los méritos respectivos. Por consiguiente, en el acceso a la educación superior no se podrá admitir ninguna discriminación fundada en la raza, el sexo, el idioma, la religión o en consideraciones económicas, culturales o sociales, ni en discapacidades físicas.
2. Hay que preservar, reforzar y fomentar aún más las misiones fundamentales de los sistemas de educación superior (a saber, educar, formar, llevar a cabo investigaciones y, en particular, contribuir al desarrollo sostenible y al mejoramiento del conjunto de la sociedad), especialmente a fin de **formar diplomados altamente cualificados y ciudadanos responsables** y de constituir un espacio abierto que propicie **la formación superior y el aprendizaje a lo largo de toda la vida**. Además, la educación superior está desempeñando funciones sin precedentes en la sociedad actual, como componente esencial del desarrollo cultural, social, económico y político, y como

⁵ El "interés general", según el capítulo 90 del Tratado de Roma (Unión Europea), son las actividades de servicios comerciales que cumplen cometidos que interesan a todas las personas y que, por tanto, deben ser sometidas por los estados miembros de la Unión Europea a unas obligaciones determinadas del servicio público.

elemento clave del fortalecimiento de las capacidades endógenas, la consolidación de los derechos humanos, el desarrollo sostenible, la democracia y la paz, en un marco de justicia. La educación superior ha de velar por que prevalezcan los valores e ideales de la cultura de paz

3. Las instituciones de educación superior, su personal y sus alumnos deberán preservar y desarrollar sus funciones fundamentales, sometiendo todas sus actividades a las exigencias de la ética y del rigor científico e intelectual. Deberán reforzar también sus funciones **críticas y de previsión**, mediante un análisis constante de las nuevas tendencias sociales, económicas, culturales y políticas, desempeñando de esta manera funciones de centro de previsión, alerta y prevención. Deberán para ello disfrutar de **plenas libertades académicas y autonomía**, siendo al mismo tiempo plenamente responsables para con la sociedad y rindiéndole cuentas.

4. La pertinencia de la educación superior debe evaluarse en función de la adecuación entre lo que la sociedad espera de las instituciones y lo que éstas hacen. Para ello, las instituciones y los sistemas, en particular en sus relaciones aún más estrechas con el mundo del trabajo, deben **fundar sus orientaciones a largo plazo en objetivos y necesidades sociales, y en particular el respeto de las culturas y la protección del medio ambiente**. Fomentar el espíritu de empresa y las correspondientes capacidades e iniciativas ha de convertirse en una de las principales preocupaciones de la educación superior. Ha de prestarse especial atención a las funciones de la educación superior al servicio de la sociedad, y más concretamente a las actividades encaminadas a eliminar la pobreza, la intolerancia, la violencia, el analfabetismo, el hambre, el deterioro del medio ambiente y las enfermedades, y a las actividades dirigidas al fomento de la paz mediante un planteamiento interdisciplinario y transdisciplinario.

5. La educación superior es un componente de un sistema único que empieza con la educación para la primera infancia y la enseñanza primaria y continúa a lo largo de toda la vida. La contribución de la educación superior al desarrollo del conjunto del sistema educativo y a la nueva orientación de **su vinculación con los demás niveles de enseñanza, y más concretamente con la enseñanza secundaria, ha de ser una prioridad**. La enseñanza secundaria debe no sólo preparar para la enseñanza superior y facilitar el acceso a ésta, sino también ofrecer una formación general y preparar a los estudiantes para la vida activa.

6. La **diversificación** de los modelos de educación superior y de los métodos y los criterios de acceso es indispensable tanto para atender a la demanda como para brindar a los estudiantes las bases y la formación rigurosas necesarias para entrar en el siglo XXI. Los educandos han de disponer de una gama óptima de posibilidades de educación, y la adquisición de saberes y conocimientos prácticos ha de efectuarse desde el punto de vista de **la educación a lo largo de toda la vida**, lo cual supone que se puede ingresar en el sistema y salir de él fácilmente.

7. La **calidad de la educación superior es un concepto multidimensional** que debería comprender todas sus funciones y actividades: enseñanza y programas académicos, investigación y becas, dotación de personal, alumnos, infraestructura y entorno académico. Ha de prestarse una especial atención **al progreso de los conocimientos mediante la investigación**. Las instituciones de educación superior de todas las regiones han de someterse a **evaluaciones internas y externas realizadas con transparencia** y llevadas a cabo abiertamente por expertos independientes. Sin embargo, ha de prestarse la debida atención a las particularidades de los contextos institucionales, nacionales y regionales, a fin de tener en cuenta la diversidad y **evitar la uniformidad**. Se percibe la necesidad de una nueva visión y un nuevo modelo de educación superior, que debería estar centrado en el estudiante. Para alcanzar dicho objetivo, hay que reformular los planes de estudio, no contentarse con el mero dominio cognoscitivo de las disciplinas e incluir la adquisición de conocimientos prácticos, competencias y aptitudes para la comunicación, el análisis creativo y crítico, la reflexión independiente y el trabajo en equipo en contextos multiculturales.

8. Un elemento esencial para las instituciones de enseñanza superior es una enérgica política de **formación del personal**. Se deberían establecer directrices claras sobre los **docentes de la educación superior**, a fin de actualizar y mejorar sus competencias, estimulándose la innovación permanente en los planes de estudio y los métodos de enseñanza y aprendizaje, garantizándoseles condiciones profesionales y financieras apropiadas, y velándose asimismo por **la excelencia de la investigación y la enseñanza** con medidas en las que queden reflejadas las disposiciones pertinentes de la Recomendación relativa a la condición del personal docente de la enseñanza superior aprobada por la Conferencia General de la UNESCO en noviembre del 1997.

9. Los responsables de la adopción de decisiones en los ámbitos nacional e institucional deben situar a los **estudiantes** y sus necesidades en el centro de sus preocupaciones, y considerarlos participantes esenciales y protagonistas responsables del proceso de renovación de la educación superior. Hay que desarrollar los servicios de orientación, en cooperación con las organizaciones estudiantiles, a fin de tener en cuenta las necesidades de categorías cada vez más diversificadas de educandos. Los alumnos que abandonan sus estudios han de tener oportunidades adecuadas para volver a la enseñanza superior, de estimarlo conveniente y en el momento que les parezca oportuno. Las instituciones de educación superior deben formar a los estudiantes para que se conviertan en ciudadanos bien informados y profundamente motivados, provistos de un sentido crítico y capaces de analizar los problemas y buscar soluciones para los que se planteen a la sociedad, de aplicarlas y asumir responsabilidades sociales.
10. Hay que tomar o fortalecer medidas encaminadas a obtener **la participación de las mujeres en la educación superior**, en particular en el ámbito de la adopción de decisiones y en todas las disciplinas en las que están insuficientemente representadas. Se requieren más esfuerzos para suprimir todos los estereotipos fundados en el género en la educación superior. Eliminar los obstáculos y mejorar el acceso de la mujer a la educación superior sigue siendo una prioridad urgente en el proceso de renovación de los sistemas e instituciones.
11. Hay que utilizar plenamente el potencial de las **nuevas tecnologías de la información y la comunicación** para la renovación de la educación superior, mediante la ampliación y diversificación de la transmisión del saber, y poniendo los conocimientos y la información a disposición de un público más amplio. Ha de conseguirse el acceso equitativo a éstas mediante la cooperación internacional y el apoyo a los países que no disponen de la capacidad de adquirir dichos instrumentos. La adaptación de estas tecnologías a las necesidades nacionales, regionales y locales, así como el suministro de sistemas técnicos, educativos, de gestión e institucionales para mantenerlas, ha de constituir una prioridad.
12. La educación superior ha de considerarse un **servicio público**. Si bien se requieren fuentes de financiación diversificadas, privadas y públicas, **el apoyo público a la educación superior y a la**

investigación sigue siendo fundamental para conseguir que las misiones educativas y sociales se cumplan de manera equilibrada. En la educación superior, la gestión y la financiación han de ser instrumentos de la mejora de la calidad y la pertinencia. Ello requiere la creación de capacidades y la elaboración de estrategias apropiadas de planificación y análisis de políticas, basadas en la **asociación** entre las instituciones de educación superior y las correspondientes autoridades. Las instituciones han de gozar de autonomía en sus asuntos internos, pero han de rendir cuentas a la sociedad de un modo claro y transparente.

13. La **dimensión internacional** de la educación superior es un elemento intrínseco de su calidad. El **establecimiento de redes**, que ha resultado ser uno de los principales medios de acción actuales, ha de estar fundado en **la ayuda mutua, la solidaridad y la igualdad** entre asociados. Hay que poner freno al "éxodo de competencias", ya que sigue privando a los países en desarrollo y a los países en transición de profesionales de alto nivel necesarios para acelerar su progreso socioeconómico. Se debe dar prioridad a programas de formación en los países en vías de desarrollo, en centros de excelencia organizados en redes regionales e internacionales, acompañados de cursillos en el extranjero especializados e intensivos de corta duración.

14. Han de ratificarse y aplicarse los instrumentos normativos regionales e internacionales de reconocimiento de estudios y diplomas, incluidos los que atañen a la homologación de conocimientos, competencias y aptitudes de los diplomados, a fin de permitir a los estudiantes cambiar de curso con más facilidad y de aumentar la movilidad dentro de los sistemas nacionales y entre ellos.

15. La **asociación** estrecha entre todas las partes interesadas —responsables de las políticas nacionales e institucionales, gobiernos y parlamentos, medios de comunicación, personal docente y asociado, investigadores, estudiantes y familias, el mundo laboral y los grupos comunitarios— es indispensable si se quiere poner en marcha un movimiento de reforma y de renovación profunda de la educación superior.

Estamos absolutamente convencidos de que los resultados de la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior (París, 1998) reflejan con acierto las opiniones de los expertos, tanto políticos como académicos, en el campo de la educación superior. En efecto, servirá al futuro de la humanidad cuando todos los esfuerzos dirigidos a mejorar la calidad, la

pertinencia, la accesibilidad y la internacionalización de la educación superior se basen en las repercusiones de la Declaración Mundial sobre la Educación Superior y respeten los valores de la diversidad, la creatividad y los planteamientos innovadores. Sólo entonces la educación superior podrá contribuir verdaderamente a construir en todos los países un futuro mejor para todos.

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DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 1
VERSÃO EM PORTUGUÊS

DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 2

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION: PUBLIC GOOD, ACCREDITATION AND INTERNATIONAL NORMATIVE INSTRUMENTS ON RECOGNITION OF STUDIES” –

Texto parcialmente em francês e parcialmente em inglês, apresentado ao “Parallel Thematic Workshop (Debates and Exchange of Views) – Public vs. Private Higher Education: Public Good, Equity, Access – First Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education – Globalization and Higher Education” – UNESCO, Paris, 17-18 October 2002 –

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION: PUBLIC GOOD, ACCREDITATION AND INTERNATIONAL NORMATIVE INSTRUMENTS ON RECOGNITION OF STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

En octobre 1981, j'ai pris mes fonctions à l'UNESCO comme directeur de la Division de l'Enseignement Supérieur, poste que j'ai exercé pendant 17 ans et demi. En arrivant dans cette Organisation, je croyais avoir des idées nouvelles et originales, ce qui s'était passé avant était -comme le mot même l'indique- «du passé», ça valait même pas la peine de regarder!

C'était une position naïve ou arrogante, je dois le reconnaître. Cependant, je n'ai pas mis longtemps pour vérifier que je me trompais énormément, que beaucoup d'idées nouvelles n'étaient pas si nouvelles comme on s'imaginait, que d'autres avaient déjà percé les mêmes chemins avant nous ou que de nouvelles actions ne pouvaient avoir un sens que si elles se basaient sur ce que mes prédécesseurs avaient lancé, en donnant la base à des actions plus ambitieuses.

J'ai découvert ainsi que, dans le domaine de la mobilité, l'UNESCO avait déjà parcouru un long chemin depuis les premiers programmes de l'Organisation qui inscrivaient déjà des activités destinées à l'établissement d'équivalences. En effet, elles étaient présentes dans les mesures d'«action immédiate pour favoriser la compréhension internationale» adoptées lors de la première session de la Conférence Générale et qui comportaient, notamment, la création d'un Centre d'information et de triage (Clearing House) sur les échanges internationaux de personnel. Ce centre était chargé d'une enquête sur l'équivalence des divers systèmes scolaires et des diplômes de l'enseignement supérieur(1).

Plus tard, quand nous avons mené dans les années 80 une grande réflexion sur l'enseignement supérieur et les défis auxquels il faisait face à la fin du Siècle XX et qui ont abouti à une réunion à Sofia, en Bulgarie (2), qui a servi comme instrument aux études faites au début des années 1990, en vue de la publication (3) du document d'orientation («policy paper») sur l'enseignement supérieur et le développement (version provisoire publiée en 1993, version finale en 1995), j'ai découvert qu'à la fin des années soixante-dix, l'UNESCO avait publié une série de 4 volumes sur l'éducation, dont le numéro 4, consacré à l'enseignement supérieur, était tout à fait remarquable (4).

J'ai eu le même sentiment quand j'ai vu des collègues enthousiastes avec l'idée d'un supplément de diplôme, un instrument pour faciliter la reconnaissance des études et qu'on présentait comme une nouveauté extraordinaire. Je m'amusais à dire à certains de mes collègues qu'à l'Université de Brasilia, dans les années 70, même les certificats d'extension avaient un supplément qui permettaient de vérifier si l'activité était un cours plutôt de recréation ou si elle avait un contenu solide, ratifié par des examens ou par un processus quelconque d'évaluation(5). La réforme moderne qu'on annonce aujourd'hui, avec l'adoption du système de crédits, les semestres comme unité de mesure du temps académique, le développement d'une échelle qui va du cycle de base ou d'introduction au doctorat (et maintenant au post-doctorat), ne fait que répéter l'expérience ancienne des universités nord-américaines, déjà adoptées en Amérique Latine depuis les années 50 et 60 du siècle passé grâce aux travaux pionniers d'universités comme Concepción au Chili, Los Andes en Colombie et Brasilia, au Brésil.

Plus récemment, en lisant ce que le Rapport Delors proposait sur l'enseignement supérieur, je me suis tourné vers le Rapport Edgar Faure produit comme réaction à Mai 68 et j'ai découvert que tout, ou presque tout, avait déjà été visualisé dans le document «Apprendre à être» publié pour la première fois en 1973 (6).

Tout cela m'a mené à dire que raison avait l'écrivain mexicain, Octavio Paz, que, dans un de ses écrits, a dit, dans la version anglaise, que «the search for the future ends inevitably with the reconquest of the past (7).

Si je mentionne tout cela, c'est pour dire également qu'en lisant plusieurs documents sur la qualité dans l'enseignement supérieur, quand je vérifie des propositions pour régler la question de la reconnaissance des études, quand je vois des propositions pour établir des mécanismes qui pourraient mesurer la qualité, j'ai vraiment l'impression qu'on souhaite réinventer la roue et qu'avant de suggérer à des organisations comme l'UNESCO de se lancer dans des aventures, il faudrait vérifier les mécanismes déjà existants et d'analyser comment ils peuvent donner, le cas échéant, une réponse à des réalités nouvelles.

LES ANTÉCEDENTS HISTORIQUES

Qui se souvient aujourd'hui que la création de l'Association Internationale des Universités, décidée par un congrès réalisé à Nice, en 1950, était le résultat d'études entamées par l'UNESCO dans le cadre de ses soucis concernant l'équivalence des diplômes universitaires et des conditions d'immatriculation des étudiants? Qui mentionne le fait que, en participant à la création de l'AIU, l'UNESCO s'est engagée, avec cette organisation et avec d'autres associations, dans des activités qui portaient sur la collecte de l'information et de la documentation qui devraient faciliter les échanges et en conséquence la compréhension internationale et ce qu'on appelait alors l'équivalence de diplômes?

Comme a déclaré mon prédécesseur à la direction de la Division de l'enseignement supérieur, le normalien Renée Ochs, ce que l'on visait, à cette époque, c'était une contribution «à la recherche de solutions d'un problème rendu complexe par la diversité des contenus et de la durée des études, de la nature des diplômes, des procédures de choix des étudiants, des méthodes d'enseignement et d'apprentissage, des critères d'évaluation des connaissances, de la nature des autorités conférant les grades et les diplômes» (1).

Des études et des analyses élaborés dans les années 60 ont montré la nécessité d'une action plus soutenu dans ces domaines et qui pourraient aboutir à une Convention internationale ou une recommandation aux Etats Membres sur l'équivalence des certificats d'études secondaires, diplômes et grades universitaires.

L'analyse de la question faite par des experts et des responsables politiques a mené l'UNESCO à établir une stratégie qui consistait d'aller avant tout dans les régions. La dimension régionale, en effet, est considérée par l'UNESCO comme un relais important entre l'échelle nationale et l'échelle internationale, correspondant à une réalité déterminée

par des caractéristiques culturelles largement communes, et comme un cadre naturel de concertation et de coopération en vue du progrès et du développement.

Cette stratégie a été utilisée, avec un succès reconnu par tout le monde quand l'UNESCO a élaboré son document d'orientation (policy paper) sur le Changement et le développement dans l'enseignement supérieur (1993-1995) et pour l'organisation de la Conférence Mondiale sur l'enseignement supérieur, précédée par cinq conférences régionales (8).

Le résultat est que sous l'égide de l'UNESCO, mais avec la participation active de l'Association Internationale des Universités et des associations régionales », les Etats Membres de l'UNESCO ont adopté une série de conventions sur la reconnaissance des études, des grades et des diplômes de l'enseignement supérieur:

Amérique latine et les Caraïbes, en 1974;

Les Etats arabes et les Etats européens riverains de la Méditerranée (1976);

Les Etats arabes (1978);

Les Etats de la région Europe (1979);

Les Etats d'Afrique (1981);

Les Etats d'Asie et du Pacifique (1983).

Ultérieurement, avec les changements en Europe, sous l'égide conjointe de l'UNESCO et du Conseil de l'Europe, une nouvelle convention Europe a été adoptée en 1997, sans que celle de 1979 soit abrogée et, en 1993, au plan mondial, la Conférence Générale de l'UNESCO a adopté. A sa vingt-septième session, une Recommandation sur la reconnaissance des études et des titres de l'enseignement supérieur.

EQUIVALENCE ET RECONNAISSANCE

Dans ces conditions, ceux et celles, qui ont élaboré ces instruments normatifs, visaient non seulement à apporter une contribution à l'intensification des échanges (qui ne datent pas de nos jours et ne sont pas le résultat de la commercialisation de l'éducation...) en facilitant l'accès aux études supérieures dans des pays étrangers appartenant de plus en plus souvent à d'autres régions, mais aussi de tenir compte de la situation créée par l'accroissement du nombre des pays accueillant des étudiants étrangers, comme de la diversification croissante des filières d'études et des diplômes et grades conférés à la fin de ces études.

Les études élaborées dans le cadre du programme conjoint UNESCO-AIU ont, dès le début, montré que l'équivalence était pratiquement impossible d'établir tellement divers

sont les systèmes d'organisation comme les cadres culturels qui encadrent la formation au niveau supérieur. Cette diversité, qui est aujourd'hui considérée comme une richesse, ne peut pas être perdue de vue. Par ailleurs, un des points forts de la Conférence Mondiale sur l'Enseignement Supérieur réalisée à Paris en 1998 a été la reconnaissance de la diversité culturelle qui empêche les essais de ceux qui aimeraient mettre en œuvre un modèle unique d'éducation supérieure applicable dans toutes les régions, voir dans tous les pays.

En effet, dans son article 11, après affirmer que «la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur est un concept multidimensionnel», les participants ont statué que «l'attention requise devrait être accordée à la spécificité des contextes institutionnel, national et régional afin de tenir compte de la diversité et d'éviter l'uniformité».

L'équivalence étant considérée très difficile, voir impossible, ce sont donc le concept et le terme «reconnaissance» qui ont été utilisés dans les instruments normatifs de l'UNESCO, depuis la première convention en 1974. La reconnaissance doit prendre en considération en plus des études la connaissance et les expériences acquises. Il ne s'agit donc pas de mesurer simplement des heures d'études ou de faire une comparaison formelle de contenus, mais d'évaluer les compétences d'un individu. L'auto-apprentissage et la vie professionnelle doivent donc être prises en considération dans ce processus. «La notion d'étapes d'études, comme signale René Ochs, trouve dans ce cadre sa pleine signification, car permet de tenir compte, pour l'évaluation du niveau de compétence, des études partielles et des diverses expériences acquises» (1).

Il faut tenir en compte également que les conventions, comme n'importe quel autre mécanisme qu'on envisage de créer, ne sont pas capables de résoudre toutes les questions d'ordre pratique que ces procédures exigent. Elles donnent un cadre conceptuel mais requièrent des organismes nationaux et régionaux d'information et la mise en œuvre de comités d'application dont rôle, le fonctionnement, les moyens mis à leur disposition mériteraient d'être révisés maintenant par l'UNESCO, par la communauté académique, par les gouvernements, bref par tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la question. Dans cette révision, la question de l'accréditation pourrait être contemplée, avec des mécanismes attachés aux comités régionaux.

Par ailleurs, au cas où l'évolution présente de la société mondiale le justifie, un amendement pourrait être présenté à la Conférence générale de l'UNESCO et prévoir un mécanisme pareil pour la Recommandation sur la reconnaissance des études et des titres de l'enseignement supérieur de 1993. En plus des Etats Membres des représentants de la communauté académique régionale et mondiale, des experts de toutes régions dans ce domaine, des représentants de la société pourraient être impliqués, essayant de mettre en œuvre la décision de la CMES qui, selon le résumé officiel de la Déclaration de 1998 établi par l'UNESCO, statue, dans son article 15 :

-"Des partenariats étroits entre toutes les parties prenantes –responsables de l'élaboration des politiques nationales et institutionnelles, gouvernements et parlements, médias, enseignants, chercheurs, étudiants et leurs familles, monde du travail, groupes communautaires –sont nécessaires pour mettre en train un mouvement de réforme et de rénovation en profondeur de l'enseignement supérieur".

UNE CONVENTION INTERNATIONALE?

Une autre possibilité serait –de nouveau au cas où l'on considère que le temps est venu pour adopter une approche globale- que les Etats Membres de l'UNESCO décident, dans leur Conférence générale, d'entamer une procédure pour transformer en convention la Recommandation de 1993, en prenant garde à ce que les besoins actuels de toutes les sociétés, dans cette période de globalisation, soient tenus en compte.

Cette approche, qui implique tous les Etats membres de toutes les régions, ainsi que les divers partenaires ("stakeholders") serait plus légitime que celle de donner à un groupe d'experts, même si ceux-ci individuellement sont compétents, le pouvoir de dire ce qui est qualité dans le monde entier. Une telle approche pourrait représenter un dérapage dangereux, similaire à ceux qui sont reprochés à l'OMC qui se montre incapable de tenir compte des pays en voie de développement. Il faut ajouter que ce n'est pas l'implication dans cette opération d'experts originaires du Tiers Monde, mais qui souvent ont la tête ailleurs, qui résoudra le problème. Le gaspillage financier de certains pays d'Amérique latine a été provoqué par des économistes de ces pays, formés dans des universités du prestige du Nord et qui ont perdu complètement ses racines culturelles et sociales.

L'approche régionale et aussi l'internationale (par ailleurs prévue dans l'article 15 de la Déclaration de Paris en 1998) établies dans le cadre des instruments déjà existants à l'intérieur d'une organisation comme l'UNESCO est plus conforme à la réalité mondiale et à la nature de ces activités, qui ne peuvent pas avoir comme référence principale autre chose que l'éducation, autre élément que le droit de l'homme. Il faut noter, en plus, qu'au delà des initiatives dans ce domaine prises par des experts ou institutions européennes, d'Amérique du Nord ou de la région Pacifique (Australie et Nouvelle Zélande), on ne peut pas ne pas prendre en considération le travail accompli dans ce domaine en Asie à partir du bureau de l'UNESCO à Bangkok, ni d'autres initiatives comme celle du puissant réseau CINDA, basé à Santiago de Chili, qui a créé un institut avec l'objectif de promouvoir l'accréditation dans les pays où le réseau est présent.

RÉCONNAÎTRE N'IMPORTE QUOI!

Il est vrai qu'actuellement face aux dispositifs du AGCS ou GATS (Accord Général sur le Commerce de Services), plusieurs personnes, partout dans le monde, ont peur d'être obligés de reconnaître n'importe quel diplôme, de n'importe quelle institution universitaire, basée sur n'importe quel pays ou territoire. L'Université de Genève ou celle d'Oxford peuvent ne pas vouloir reconnaître automatiquement les diplômes d'une université en Patagonie, en Amazonie, en Tunisie ou en Mongolie. Une université au Kenya, une autre à Cabo Frio ou à Terezina, au Brésil, peuvent également considérer abusive l'obligation de reconnaître automatiquement un diplôme de la Sorbonne, de Salamanca, de Stanford, ou de l'Arizona pour ne citer que quelques exemples, simplement parce qu'elles sont en Europe ou aux Etats Unis. Ces mêmes universités comme n'importe quelle autre en Thailande, aux Iles Fiji, en Scandinavie, en Roumanie, en Allemagne, au

Japon pourront considérer, en accord avec la CMES, que la qualité est un concept multidimensionnel, qu'il n'y a pas de modèle unique de qualité.

D'autres pourront juger que, face à la réalité mentionnée par les autorités japonaises dans une récente note présentée à l'OMC (10), il ne sera pas acceptable qu'on soit obligé à reconnaître les diplômes de ce que les japonais ont désigné par «fabrique de diplômes» qui, en plus, ne tiennent pas compte de la diversité culturelle existante dans le monde et de la spécificité de chaque peuple. Et que dire d'universités qui poussent la commercialisation à un tel point que des doctorats d'honoris causa sont mis en vente aux enchères? Que réaction peuvent avoir des universités du Tiers Monde face à des établissements qui essayent de vendre des programmes de doctorat dans des domaines où elles ne sont pas compétentes? Et que dire d'individus capables d'essayer de vendre des programmes et, en même temps, d'organiser de soi disant systèmes indépendants d'accréditation?

Ici, il faut être très clair. Dans un système d'accréditation, qui seront ceux qui vont accréditer (the gatekeepers)? Qui a le droit de constituer un groupe d'experts indépendants et internationaux? Quels seront les modèles ou standards ? Qui prendra des décisions dans ce domaine? Ces standards seront-ils de nature à garantir la diversité culturelle? de nature à garantir que les institutions rendent service à la société locale, régionale, nationale et internationale?

En octobre 1998, il faut ne pas oublier, que parmi les points forts de la Déclaration approuvée par les représentants de plus de 180 pays et par les représentants de la communauté académique mondiale, nous pouvons noter, d'après le résumé officiel établi par l'UNESCO, des points comme ceux-ci :

-la diversification des modèles d'enseignement supérieur et des modes et critères de recrutement est indispensable...

-La qualité de l'enseignement supérieur est un concept multidimensionnel qui devrait concerner toutes ses fonctions et activités: enseignement et programmes, recherche, dotation en personnel, étudiants, infrastructure et monde universitaire.

-L'enseignement supérieur doit être considéré comme un service public...

-La dimension internationale de l'enseignement supérieur fait partie intégrante de sa qualité. Les réseaux, qui se sont avérés un moyen essentiel d'action, doivent reposer sur le partage, la solidarité et l'égalité entre les partenaires...

-Les instruments normatifs régionaux et internationaux relatifs à la reconnaissance des études devraient être ratifiés et appliqués , y compris ceux qui concernent l'homologation des connaissances, compétences et aptitudes des diplômés, pour permettre aux étudiantes de changer de cours plus aisément et pour faciliter la mobilité à l'intérieur des systèmes nationaux et entre eux.

L'OMC ET LA COMMERCIALISATION

Il n'y a aucun doute que l'ingérence de l'OMC dans le domaine de l'éducation et en particulier de l'enseignement supérieur pose des problèmes. Le sujet a été maintenu en cachette pendant plusieurs années, c'est grâce à des fonctionnaires canadiens que la communauté internationale a pu se réveiller et commencer à débattre la question. Plusieurs documents ont été élaborés au cours des derniers mois et plusieurs réunions consacrées à ces thèmes dans tous les continents.

On ne va pas revenir ici sur l'ensemble des analyses. Par ailleurs d'autres ont été appelés à le faire au cours de cette réunion.

Rappelons de façon télégraphique certains de problèmes auxquels font face les institutions d'enseignement supérieur devant les actions entamées dans le cadre de l'OMC et en particulier du GATS, qui souhaite couvrir tous les services et les considérer comme des services du commerce, à l'exception peut être des services militaires et de police.

1-La définition de services et surtout des services gouvernementaux est considérée ambiguë et tout peut se trouver sous les règlements de l'OMC, à l'exception peut-être de la Police et des Forces Armées.

2- La combinaison des dispositifs relatifs à ce qu'on dénomme le principe de la nation la plus favorisée (article 2) et de la clause concernant le traitement national (article 3) risque d'entamer des conséquences désastreuses non seulement aux services publics comme aux institutions privées nationales, car tout ce qu'elles recevront, y compris des subventions, risquent d'avoir été concédées à n'importe quelle autre institution nationale ou étrangère (y compris aux fabriques de diplômes mentionnées par les japonais) (10). L'article II statue que «chaque Membre accordera immédiatement et sans condition aux services et fournisseurs de services de tout autre Membre un traitement non moins favorable que celui qu'il accorde aux services similaires et fournisseurs de services de tout autre pays». Par ailleurs, l'article XVI définit que dans les secteurs inscrits dans sa Liste, et compte tenu des conditions et restrictions qui y sont indiquées, chaque Membre accordera aux services et fournisseurs de services de tout autre Membre, en ce qui concerne toutes les mesures affectant la fourniture de services, un traitement non moins favorable que celui qu'il accorde à ses propres services similaires et à ses propres fournisseurs de services similaires»

3- l'OMC dispose d'un pouvoir coercitif, avec un vrai tribunal auquel tous les Etats Membres doivent se soumettre, y compris changeant leurs législations pour s'adapter aux normes et décisions de l'OMC. Celle-ci, en plus, est accusée de ne pas être transparente et de ne pas prendre en considération les intérêts ni la spécificité des pays envoi de développement, ce qui a été la base du programme de l'actuel directeur général en fonction depuis le 1^{er}, Septembre dernier, l'ancien premier ministre de Thailande, Supachai Panitchpakdi. .

4- Finalement, la prise de position de l'OMC a provoqué des réactions de la part d'associations universitaires dans le monde entier, la première étant divulguée en septembre 2001 par quatre organisations du Nord (Association des universités et collèges du Canada, American Council on Education, Association Européenne de l'Université, Council for Higher Education Accreditation), qui ont signalé que «la raison d'être de l'enseignement supérieur est de servir l'intérêt public et qu'il ne constitue pas une 'marchandise', un fait que les États membres de l'OMC ont reconnu dans des conventions et déclarations de l'UNESCO et d'autres instances internationales et multilatérales» (11). Elles ont ajouté:

“La mission de l'enseignement supérieur est de contribuer au développement durable et à l'amélioration de la société dans son ensemble, à savoir: éduquer des diplômés hautement qualifiés, capables de répondre aux besoins de tous les secteurs de l'activité humaine; promouvoir, créer et diffuser les connaissances par la recherche; interpréter, préserver et promouvoir les cultures dans le contexte du pluralisme culturel et de la diversité culturelle; offrir des possibilités d'apprentissage tout au long de la vie; contribuer au développement et à l'amélioration de l'éducation à tous les niveaux; protéger et promouvoir la société civile en inculquant aux jeunes les valeurs qui sont à la base d'une citoyenneté démocratique et en offrant des points de vue critiques et objectifs dans le débat portant sur les choix stratégiques que les sociétés ont à faire”.

Et encore:

“face à ce mandat public, le pouvoir de réglementer l'enseignement supérieur doit demeurer la prérogative des instances compétentes, désignées de n'importe quel pays. Rien dans les accords internationaux du commerce ne devait restreindre ou limiter ce pouvoir”.

La manifestation de ces associations a réveillé la communauté internationale dans le monde entier. À titre d'exemple, nous mentionnons les participants au III Sommet des universités publiques ibero-américaines, qui, s'est tenu à Porto Alegre, au Brésil, en avril de cette année. À la fin des travaux, les participants ont déclaré:

-The Iberian and Latin American academics hereby gathered, reaffirming the commitments made by the governments and by the international academic community at the World Conference on Higher Education in Paris in October 1998, which considered higher education as a public good, alert the university community and the society as a whole to the disastrous consequences of such policies and demand that the governments of their respective countries do not subscribe any commitments on this issue within the framework of the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services"(GATS) (12)

We observe also that the manifestation from the four North organisations has had a great impact in many parts of the world, either inside governments, or within the framework of universities, teachers, researchers, and students' organisations, which have started to include it in their agenda of discussions. At international level, some organisations, such as the International Association of Universities (IAU) and International Education (IE), immediately adhered to the terms of the note and initiated a debate on the subject.

THE POSITION OF THE WTO SECRETARIAT

On 23 September 1998, less than two weeks before the World Conference on Higher Education was held in Paris, the WTO Secretariat, in a document on education services, considered as restricted at that time (S/C/W/49), stated that “education is normally regarded as a ‘public consumption’ item, provided in many instances free of charge or at prices not reflecting the costs of producing it.(10)”

But, the WTO secretariat, after mentioning that rapid changes are taking place in the area of higher education, observed that “education also exists as a ‘private consumption’ item with a price determined freely by the providing institutions”. They added that the “consequences of this shift in control have included less government funds, and more competition and institutional reforms to cut costs and raise revenues. These, in turn, have resulted in an effort to attract more fee-paying students, including foreign ones.”

From this statement, and based on a reality that everybody is aware of - that commercialisation is a fact in many countries nowadays, in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, and that higher education is now an important element in the list of exports - the secretariat of WTO went further, and without more analysis or counter analysis, concluded on the need to incorporate higher education in the list of trade in international services.

In the WTO document of September 1998, mention is made of the several modes of supply of education services, starting with the consumption abroad or the supply of a service from the territory of one Member to the territory of any other Member (e.g. student mobility across borders). A more recent form in the trading of education services consists in the setting up of facilities abroad by education providers, or the supply of a service by a service supplier of one Member, through its commercial presence in the territory of any other Member (commercial presence). WTO also mentioned twinning arrangements, which provoke and stimulate the system of franchising. Finally, reference is made of the movement of scholars (presence of natural persons) or the supply of a service through the presence of natural persons of a Member in the territory of any other Member. According to WTO, the figures illustrating this were inadequate.

The arguments of WTO used to have a great impact on many analysts, impressed by the fact that the commercialisation of education is a tendency and that the presence of private universities, even in European countries where public service is an institution, is increasing substantially. Today, in a country such as Brazil, almost 70% of university students are enrolled in private institutions.

THE NOTION OF PUBLIC SERVICE

However, we are faced with a notable error in this kind of consideration. The existence of private providers does not justify the adoption of the principle of transforming education into a commodity. Like several other public services, the provision of education can be entrusted, delegated or granted to private persons or institutions, but under rigid regulations and subject to serious evaluation procedures. In fact, the meaning of the question raised by university associations from Europe, North America and, later, Latin America, was the refusal to adopt the market as a principle to guide the education and training of citizens (13).

On the other side, some public institutions act in a very odd way. At home, they require to be treated as public institutions, but, going abroad, they act as any commercial institution, whose unique interest is to make benefits.

Here –let me make a parenthesis- we are not discussing the commercialisation of results of university research or some services from universities to governments and business companies. This can be, in certain cases, an instrument to diversify the financing of the institutions. But of course, universities should not forget their social missions and professors should not become a kind of privileged trader.

It is evident that in this debate, the notion of public service is fundamental. In fact, a public service, the supply of water, for example, can be entrusted to the private sector, under regulations laid down by public authorities.

For a service to be considered public, it must be implemented on an equal basis. Everyone must have the right to drinkable water, independently of which organisation provides this service. In addition, public service must be continuous and permanent. It is unacceptable for the service to be limited or partial.

With respect to higher education –and this is a matter of principle- the academic community and the official representatives of more than 180 countries considered it to be a public service (article 14), which, following article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, must be accessible to all on the basis of the merit, capacity, efforts, perseverance and devotion, with no kind of discrimination being acceptable.

It should also be added that there is a consensus about the need, these days, for the internationalisation of higher education. No institution can survive alone or act in an isolated way. The progress of knowledge is so fast that no institution can control everything. In developing countries, internationalisation is an instrument for access to knowledge. The UNITWIN programme launched within the framework of UNESCO in 1991 is an example of internationalisation based on solidarity and the sharing of knowledge. Created in 1991, the programme sponsored more than 300 projects in all continents by the end of 1998 and covers today more than 500 projects all over the world.

The increase of exchange of informations, the revision and reinforcement of networks in the framework of UNITWIN programme and of normative instruments on the recognition of studies, titles and diplomas, the multiplication of bilateral and multilateral agreements

For improving quality and relevance of higher education (two interlinked concepts) based on solidarity as we can read in the “Déclaration de l’AUCC (Association des Universités et Colléges du Canada) sur l’internationalisation et les universités canadiennes (14) and through examples given by agreements involving some Spain universities such as the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and the UOC –Universitat Oberta de Catalunya- this should be the way to be used to find a solution for better mobility among students, teachers and researchers, and for improving quality and relevance in higher education through a co-operation based on the solidarity and equality among partners.

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ANNEX

A POSITIVE AGENDA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The idea of a positive agenda, as supported by UNCTAD, is also applicable to education. And it already exists. The principles adopted by the 5.000 participants and representatives of more than 180 countries at the World Conference on Higher Education, in a declaration and action plan, which are perceived in many countries as the guidelines for concrete action and reforms in the field of higher education, including its internationalisation, can be considered this positive agenda. Higher education must serve sustainable development and must help to build a better society or, as it would be said today, to build a fair globalisation, which all societies in the world deserve.

To achieve this, higher education must have quality, but there is no quality without relevance. International co-operation is now an essential element in the missions of higher education institutions and it should be based on the transfer of knowledge and on solidarity. New technologies are a powerful instrument to achieve this, and a great effort should be made to ensure that access to new technologies is widespread all over the world. Evaluation and accreditation are elements to help in the construction of a system with these objectives, but it should not be forgotten that unique models are unacceptable because higher education must take into account cultural diversity in different regions of the world. In other words, accreditation and evaluation systems cannot be used to impose models that quite often are not effective even in the regions where they are designed and applied.

Summary of the World Declaration on Higher Education

1. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit, in keeping with Article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a consequence, no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language, religion or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities.
2. The core missions of higher education systems (to educate, to train, to undertake research and, in particular, to contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole) should be preserved, reinforced and further expanded, namely to educate highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens and to provide opportunities (*espaces ouverts*) for higher learning and for learning throughout life. Moreover, higher education has acquired an unprecedented role in present-day society, as a vital component of cultural, social, economic and political development and as a pillar of endogenous capacity building, the consolidation of human rights, sustainable development, democracy and peace, in a context of justice. It is the duty of higher education to ensure that the values and ideals of a culture of peace prevail.

3. Higher education institutions and their personnel and students should preserve and develop their crucial functions, through the exercise of ethics and scientific and intellectual rigour in their various activities. They should also enhance their critical and forward-looking function, through the ongoing analysis of emerging social, economic, cultural and political trends, providing a focus for forecasting, warning and prevention. For this, they should enjoy full academic autonomy and freedom, while being fully responsible and accountable to society.
4. Relevance in higher education should be assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do. For this, institutions and systems, in particular in their reinforced relations with the world of work, should base their long-term orientations on societal aims and needs, including the respect of cultures and environment protection. Developing entrepreneurial skills and initiatives should become major concerns of higher education. Special attention should be paid to higher education's role of service to society, especially activities aimed at eliminating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation and disease, and to activities aiming at the development of peace, through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach.
5. Higher education is part of a seamless system, starting with early childhood and primary education and continuing through life. The contribution of higher education to the development of the whole education system and the reordering of its links with all levels of education, in particular with secondary education, should be a priority. Secondary education should both prepare for and facilitate access to higher education as well as offer broad training and prepare students for active life.
6. Diversifying higher education models and recruitment methods and criteria is essential both to meet demand and to give students the rigorous background and training required by the twenty-first century. Learners must have an optimal range of choice and the acquisition of knowledge and know-how should be viewed in a lifelong perspective, based on flexible entry and exit points within the system.
7. Quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, infrastructure and the academic environment. Particular attention should be paid to the advancement of knowledge through research. Higher education institutions in all regions should be committed to transparent internal and external evaluation, conducted openly by independent specialists. However, due attention should be paid to specific institutional, national and regional contexts in order to take into account diversity and to avoid uniformity. There is a perceived need for a new vision and paradigm of higher education, which should be student-oriented. To achieve this goal, curricula need to be recast so as to go beyond simple cognitive mastery of disciplines and include the acquisition of skills, competencies and abilities for communication, creative and critical analysis, independent thinking and team work in multicultural contexts.
8. A vigorous policy of staff development is an essential element for higher education institutions. Clear policies should be established concerning higher education teachers, so

as to update and improve their skills, with stimulus for constant innovation in curriculum, teaching and learning methods, and with an appropriate professional and financial status, and for excellence in research and teaching, reflecting the corresponding provisions of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel approved by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 1997.

9. National and institutional decision-makers should place students and their needs at the centre of their concerns and should consider them as major partners and responsible stakeholders in the renewal of higher education. Guidance and counselling services should be developed, in co-operation with student organisations, to take account of the needs of ever more diversified categories of learners. Students who do drop out should have suitable opportunities to return to higher education if and when appropriate. Institutions should educate students to become well-informed and deeply motivated citizens, who can think critically, analyse problems of society, look for solutions to the problems of society, apply them and accept social responsibilities.
10. Measures must be taken or reinforced to ensure the participation of women in higher education, in particular at the decision-making level and in all disciplines in which they are under-represented. Further efforts are required to eliminate all gender stereotyping in higher education. To overcome obstacles and to enhance the access of women to higher education remains an urgent priority in the renewal process of systems and institutions.
11. The potential of new information and communication technologies for the renewal of higher education by extending and diversifying delivery, and by making knowledge and information available to a wider public should be fully utilised. Equitable access to these should be assured through international co-operation and support to countries that lack capacities to acquire such tools. Adapting these technologies to national, regional and local needs and securing technical, educational, management and institutional systems to sustain them should be a priority.
12. Higher education should be considered as a public service. While diversified sources of funding, private and public, are necessary public support for higher education and research remains essential to ensure a balanced achievement of its educational and social missions. Management and financing in higher education should be instruments to improve quality and relevance. This requires the development of appropriate planning and policy-analysis capacities and strategies based on partnerships between higher education institutions and responsible state authorities. Autonomy to manage internal affairs is necessary, but with clear and transparent accountability to society.
13. The international dimension of higher education is an inherent part of its quality. Networking, which has emerged as a major means of action, should be based on sharing, solidarity and equality among partners. The "brain drain" has yet to be stemmed, since it continues to deprive the developing countries and those in transition, of the high-level expertise necessary to accelerate their socio-economic progress. Priority should be given to training programmes in the developing countries, in centres of excellence forming regional and international networks, with short periods of specialised and intensive study abroad.

14. Regional and international normative instruments for the recognition of studies and diplomas should be ratified and implemented, including certification of skills, competencies and abilities of graduates, making it easier for students to change courses, in order to facilitate mobility within and between national systems.
15. Close partnership amongst all stakeholders – national and institutional policy-makers, governments and parliaments, the media, teaching and related staff, researchers, students and their families, the world of work, community groups - is required in order to set in train a movement for the in-depth reform and renewal of higher education.

DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 3

**“PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL BASIS FOR
ENSURING QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION”**

Documento apresentado no Symposium on Quality Assurance in and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications between Research Universities – GUNI-AP Symposium Series I, 20-21 September 2004, Hangzhou, China

PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL BASIS FOR ENSURING QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Research Universities – GUNI-AP Symposium Series I, 20-21 September 2004,
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INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, two very important documents related to policies on higher education were launched at international level: "Higher Education – The Lessons of Experience" by the World Bank and "Policy Paper for Change and Development in Higher Education" by UNESCO.

The authors of these documents started from a similar diagnosis: they observed a quantitative expansion, but accompanied by inequalities in access, diversification of institutional structures, programmes and forms of studies, and widespread financial constraints affecting higher education systems. However the "prescriptions" suggested by both documents focused on completely different directions, based on views of the function of higher education related to society and related to the nature of society itself.

Since then, both documents have had great influence in the development of educational policies all over the world and the questions they raised, ten years later, follow basically the same lines, even if the circumstances surrounding them have changed completely today.

In 2000, the World Bank published the report of a Task Force called "Higher Education in Developing Countries – Peril and Promise" covering the period from 1994 to the present, and more recently, in 2002, a book entitled "Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education".

It should be made clear from the outset that when dealing with problems related to society, there is no neutrality, each author having his or her own view based on personal history, culture and interests. The author of these comments is not, and cannot, be neutral. Ten years ago, I was, in fact, Director of the Higher Education Division at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, where I was responsible for supervising the Organization's higher education programmes, including the elaboration of its Policy Paper. Let me warn you. I will try to be objective but I am by no means "neutral".

I believe that in its last book, "Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education", the World Bank presents a more coherent view of problems linked to the relationship between higher education and society. At the same time, it recognizes its former mistakes in appreciation and analysis, and tries to clarify that higher education cannot be looked upon as a discreet sub-sector of the educational system as a whole as it is, in fact, an essential component in a holistic system that must become more flexible, diversified, efficient and responsible when facing the knowledge society.

UNESCO, on its side, after launching its Policy Paper on Change and Development in Higher Education (the first version in 1993 and the final version in February 1995), made

joint efforts with governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop debates on this subject all over the world. At the same time, after reflecting on certain ideas, such as the consideration of higher education as a public good and the possibility of co-operation based on solidarity, the Organization launched a programme, which in fact became a movement called UNITWIN-UNESCO Chairs. At the beginning of 1999, more than 300 projects were in operation, and today there are over 500 projects. These reflections and concrete actions paved the way for the World Conference on Higher Education in Paris in 1998, when nearly 5,000 experts and representatives of governments, NGOs and IGOs met to discuss higher education issues, the biggest event ever organised on this level of education.

During the last ten years, these two concepts have been included in discussions on higher education issues all over the world. In 1998, China, for example, decided to expand access to higher education. In the opinion of experts in this country, this was due to China's active participation in the World Conference in Paris (the Minister of Education of China, Ms. Zhili Chen was one of the key speakers at the Conference), where it was firmly declared that there would be no discrimination vis-à-vis access to higher education. On the other hand, the commercialisation of education, a reality in the present world, reinforced by the creation of WTO in 1995, was clearly based on principles disseminated by World Bank documents, in particular the first one on "Higher Education – The Lessons of Experience". The decision of a country such as Malaysia to transform its higher education system into an educational hub is a clear indication of this influence.

As the present Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Matsura, when referring to cooperation between UNESCO and the World Bank in the field of higher education, stated correctly in June 2000, "we have often, though perhaps not always, shared the same views on directions for its (higher education) renovation and development". It seems clear that when the two organizations elaborated their policy documents, they did not share the same opinion. What is the reality now? The world is changing very rapidly and the reality in all fields is even more complex than ten years ago.

DIFFERENT VIEWS

One of the essential points of the World Bank analyses concerned the social returns in education and, in particular, higher education.

In the 1994 document, it is clearly stated:

"It is arguable that higher education should not have the highest priority claim on incremental public resources available for education in many developing countries, especially those that have not yet achieved adequate access, equity and quality at the primary and secondary levels. This is because of the priority that countries attach to achieving universal literacy; because the social rates of return on investments in primary and secondary education unusually exceed the returns on higher education; and because investments in basic education can also improve equity because they tend to reduce inequalities. Each country needs to weigh carefully the right balance of resource allocation between the three education sub-sectors, considering the relative social rates of return at each level as well the complimentarily which exists between primary, secondary and tertiary education. Furthermore, the overwhelming fiscal reality in most developing countries is such that **quality improvements and**

enrollment expansion in higher education will have to be achieved with little or no increase in public expenditures”.

As a result of this concept, the directions for reforms, according to the World Bank in 1994, should be:

- Encouraging greater differentiation of institutions, including the development of private institutions.
- Providing incentives for public institutions to diversify sources of funding, including cost-sharing with students, and linking government funding closely to performance.
- Introducing policies explicitly designed to give priority to quality and equity objectives.

On its side, the UNESCO Policy Paper tries to show that higher education matters cannot be isolated from the debate on the situation of societies, especially nowadays when “an overview of the main global trends shows a series of concurrent, sometimes contradictory processes of **democratization, globalization, regionalization, polarization, marginalization and fragmentation...** Equally important are the shifting imperatives of economic and technological development, and the modifications in development strategies, which should pursue **sustainable human development** in which economic growth serves social development and ensures environmental sustainability. The search for solutions to the problems arising from these processes depends on education, including higher education”.

Relevance, quality and internationalization are, according to this Policy Paper, the key words in establishing policies in this field. **Public support for higher education remains essential....**

“There is a risk that a policy of detachment of the State from higher education in matters of financing may result in excessive pressure for cost recovery, alternative funding and a narrow interpretation of the need for self-reliance. If higher education is to make a significant contribution to the advancement of the society, the State and society at large should perceive it less as a burden on the public budget **and more as a long-term national investment for enhancing economic competitiveness, cultural development and social cohesion.** This is also the framework within which the problem of cost sharing in higher education needs to be addressed.”

SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL RETURNS

The ideas related to social and individual returns are complex, and strong statements were made by the World Bank to stimulate the development of policies with a view to reducing or eliminating investments in higher education.

It is true that in its last documents, the World Bank specialists are more cautious about these questions. As the Task Force (document for 2000) stresses, “traditional economic

arguments are based on a limited understanding of what higher education institutions contribute. ... Educated people are well positioned to be economic and social entrepreneurs. ... They are also vital to creating an environment in which economic development is possible. ... Finally, a **rate-of-return analysis entirely misses the impact of university-based research on the economy**"...

In the most recent document published by the World Bank (2002) "Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education", it dedicates a whole chapter on the contribution of tertiary education to economic and social development. In addition, it affirms that "investments in tertiary education generate external benefits essential for economic and social development. These benefits, including long-term returns from basic research and technology development and the social gains accruing from the construction of more cohesive societies, transcend the private benefits captured by individuals". It also declares – an affirmation which is completely in opposition to earlier World Bank documents, in particular those drawn up under the leadership of Mr. Pshacaropoulos, that "turning to public social benefits, tertiary education promotes nation building through its contribution to increased social cohesion, trust in social institutions, democratic participation and open debate, and appreciation of diversity in gender, ethnicity, religion and social class" ...

However, despite the change in analysis, the World Document Bank authors retain the same prescriptions concerning higher education, presenting the first priority or the first criteria for supporting reforms programmes: "increasing institutional diversification (growth of non-university and private institutions) **to expand coverage on a financially viable basis** and establish a lifelong-learning framework with multiple points of entry and multiple pathways". In other words, the diagnosis has changed but the prescriptions are the same as in the 1994 document, on which, in fact, many experts and government officials based their decisions. And, of course, this approach was reinforced during the last few years with the philosophy spread by the GATS – Global Agreement on Trade and Services (also from 1994).

This brings us once again to an alternative analysis on the question of social and individual returns. One of the best texts on this aspect was by Peter Atherton, a Canadian professor (who has passed away). According to his analysis, this method treats the economic cost of an acquisition as one financial inversion and compares it with the economic advantages. A rate of personal return (greater advantages to individual life) expresses the profit of the individual investment on his own instruction.

The social return means the result of the total inversion in education (public expenses under different forms of subsidies). According to the Indian economist Jandhyala Tilak, the rates of social returns are the statistical synthesis of the relations between earnings during a whole life and the education costs. For him, even if the return rates of higher education are lower than what is obtained from primary education, it has been observed that the result of higher education represents a very attractive return to society, as well as to individuals.

According to Tilak, the social and individual returns of higher education in the several regions are as follows:

Asia: 11.05% (social) and 18.2% (individual)
 Europe, Middle West and Northern Africa: 9.9% and 18.8%
 Latin America and the Caribbean: 12.3% and 19.5%
 Sub-Saharan Africa: 11.3% and 27.8%
 World average: 10.3% and 19.0%.

THE ISSUE OF QUALITY

To finalize this partial analysis of international documents related to higher education, it should be pointed out that the issue of quality was highlighted in both papers but in a different way.

According to Berit Olsson,

“The quality concept figures centrally in the World Bank paper without being clearly defined. The UNESCO paper discusses a variety of quality aspects, including the need for a renewal of methods and ways of teaching and learning, and the need to integrate and develop research. UNESCO’s view on the importance of academic freedom in order to preserve higher education institutions as a community of free enquiry, capable of performing its creative, reflective and critical functions in society at large, is also interesting. For the World Bank, autonomy appears to be mainly a way of enhancing diversified funding”.

In the view of the World Bank “higher education must be able to bring together the minimal inputs necessary for successful performance: well prepared secondary school graduates, competent and motivated faculty, and facilities with essential instructional and research equipment and materials. Effective institutions are also open to international exchanges and rely on sound evaluation mechanisms for assessing the quality of teaching and research”. The Bank emphasizes “diversification with privatisation as a condition to obtain quality”.

In its last document (Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education”), the World Bank mentions several initiatives all over the world to promote quality through the introduction of assurance mechanisms. “That depends on an enhanced information and evaluation system and new rules for funding universities”.

UNESCO’s policy paper establishes that “quality **assessment** is essential to the search for solutions which will enhance the quality of higher education.” The World Conference on Higher Education held in 1998 followed this line and highlighted the importance of evaluation, stating, *inter alia*, in the approved declaration, that “quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment, internal self-evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international expertise, are vital for enhancing quality. Independent national

bodies should be established and comparative standards of quality, recognized at international level, should be defined. **Due attention should be paid to specific institutional, national and regional contexts in order to take into account diversity and avoid uniformity.** Stakeholders should be an integral part of the institutional evaluation process”.

This matter was one of the main elements in the discussions during all the regional preparatory conferences to the WCHE. In particular, the members of the Asia and Pacific Conference, organized jointly by UNESCO and UNU in Tokyo in 1997, in their declaration, stated:

“All higher education systems and institutions should give a high priority to ensuring the quality of provision and outcomes. However, great care should be taken in making comparisons between the achievement of different higher education systems and institutions since it is not possible to arrive at one set of standards applicable to all countries and institutions and against which institutions can be assessed”.

Finally, as mentioned above, during the WCHE in 1998, the participants considered that quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept that should embrace all its functions and activities.

NEW ELEMENTS

New elements recently emerged in discussions on higher education throughout the world, reinforcing the position defined by the World Bank in particular. The appearance of the World Trade Organization, with its decision to include education and, especially, higher education, among the commercial services ruled by the principles of GATS – Global Agreement on Trade and Services, led to several consequences in the definition of higher education policies.

Within this framework, several representatives of universities in the North considered, justifiably, that if the GATS principles are implemented – and they believe they will be - every university will be obliged to recognize the diplomas granted by all academic institutions throughout the world. The question is clear. If recognition is refused, a person can argue that the freedom of trade is being corroded.

The solution is also clear. Following the principles of the WCHE, “comparative standards of quality recognized at the international level should be recognized”. But accreditation is not a simple matter.

According to Professor Kemal Guruz (“Higher Education in the Global Knowledge Economy” – Community of Mediterranean Universities, Bari, Italy, 20-22 November 2003),

“Recognition of credits and credentials from other countries has always been a difficult matter. Academic evaluation, assessment and accreditation and quality

assurance have a century-old history in the Anglo-Saxon countries, particularly in the US and are now an integral part of their culture. On the other hand, even in Europe, the cradle of the university, such concepts are being put into practice only relatively recently. There is academia in many countries. Concerns are now being expressed over additional issues, including unclear distinctions between public and private education and how GATS; institutional autonomy concerning academic matters; state and provincial authority cover each other fiscal policy; and independent accreditation and quality assurance processes around the world. These negotiations are in progress, and the outcomes and consequences for colleges and universities around the world are as yet unclear. In the long run, we may be faced with supranational quality assurance and accreditation bodies, a possibility although seemingly remote at the present, dreaded by the majority of academics”.

This is why the Rector of UNU raised the main question. “Accreditation”, Professor Van Ginkel, said, “can be a serious initiative, but we need to see who will evaluate or who will be the gatekeepers? Who has the right to constitute an independent and really international group? What will be the models or standards? Who will take decisions in this field? Will these standards ensure cultural diversity?”

An attempt was made to persuade UNESCO to transform itself in an international accreditation agency. UNESCO’s member States did not accept this idea. However, a group was set up and conducted by a former Assistant Director General and by one of UNESCO’s small units. The Group met recently (July 2004) in Paris but little is known about the results of the meeting. The Group previously met in Paris in 2002 and its composition (eleven members) was as follows:

- Three members from the United Kingdom
- One member from the USA
- One member from Japan
- One member from Belgium (Flemish side)
- One member from Scandinavia
- Three representatives of developing countries belonging to the Commonwealth (India, South Africa and Nigeria)
- One French lady working in Mexico.

A large part of Africa and Asia was not represented, neither were Latin countries in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

A DOMINANT VIEW

No one knows what will happen now. What can be expected is that decisions coming from this Group will not be different to what can already be observed, based on available information about its work.

The dominant view is the Anglo-Saxon one: an attempt made to establish its action within the framework of the European Convention on the Recognition of Studies and Diplomas, jointly adopted by member States of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, with the Anglo-Saxon countries having a privileged position (it should be pointed out that Canada, the United States and Israel are members of the European region in UNESCO and that Australia was admitted as member of this Convention). For the moment, it is clear that all discussions on codes of good practices in the provision of transnational education are based on the code adopted by participants in the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its second meeting in Riga on 6 June 2001.

One of the bases for the analysis seems to be a study on “the role of trans-national, private and for-profit provision” written by Professor Robin Middlehurst and Steve Woodfield, from the Centre for Policy and Change in Tertiary Education of the University of Surrey, in the United Kingdom.

A number of facts can be taken into consideration. An expert group is in the process of preparing a draft related to guidelines on a responsible partnership between cross-border higher education, business and society. This started at a meeting in Paris in October 2002, and was followed by discussions at a Conference held in Oslo in May 2003 on the globalization of higher education: implications for the North-South dialogue. This expert group, according to official information from UNESCO, is composed of representatives of public higher education providers, cross-border providers and the business community”. The objective is to encourage all institutions of higher education to adhere to these guidelines.

Apparently the guidelines for the work of this group were set in a speech by Carolyn Campbell, Assistant Director of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education of the United Kingdom.

In one speech (May 2003) on “higher education, business and society: responsible partnership” a slight reference was made to public commitment by all providing institutions, but emphasis was given to the links between business and society. She supported “tackling the elimination of unethical practices”, and apparently presents the University of Monash, in Australia, one of the greatest sellers of educational products through Internet in the world, as a model that should be followed. She insisted on ethical principles but at all moments raised the question of the inter-culturality, without explaining the reasons for the gap between countries as far as access to higher education is concerned.

At the same time, experts from OECD and UNESCO are drafting guidelines on “quality provision in cross-border higher education”. “The endeavour will involve the collaboration of both sending and receiving countries of education services and will have global reach”.

The group should meet soon (14-15 October 2004 in Tokyo) to discuss the draft of the guidelines. The group already met in Paris last April, but participation in the meeting, according to the information disseminated through Internet, was “upon invitation only”. At present (September 2004), it appears impossible to have access to the documents produced by this group, at least through Internet. The group also met in Paris in June 2004.

On the other side, OECD, the World Bank and certain countries that are more involved in selling educational products, the same that are activists and militants inside the World Trade Organization, will be present at the UNESCO/OECD Australia Forum, to be held in Sydney from 11 to 12 October 2004, on “Trade Educational Services – Building Capacity for Education through cross border provision”. The first meeting held in Washington in fact became an instrument for disseminating the agreement to include higher education in within the framework of GATS. This is the third meeting and it is being announced as the final one in a series of forums covering different aspects of trade in education services, hosted in three different geo-political regions. The first was held in Washington with the support of the Department of State, the Department of Trade and the Department of Education of the USA and the World Bank. The second took place in Trondheim, Norway, in November 2003. Although it is true that these forums have been organized in three different continents, it would be an exaggeration to say that they have been located in different geo-political regions. All three host countries are covered by the European (Lisbon) Convention on recognition of studies and diplomas.

A NEW CONCEPT

The initiative seems to be supported by a new concept launched by the World Bank in its 2002 document, in which the authors mention the need for promoting higher education as a global public good.

For the UNESCO Policy Paper and for participants of the World Conference on Higher Education, higher education is a public good and the services furnished by higher education institutions are part of a public service, independently of who provides the service.

According to a Latin-American expert, Rafael Guarga, Rector of the prestigious Universidad de la República, in Uruguay, “higher education is considered a public good in relation to each concrete society, whose interests and aspirations, in a democratic framework of government are expressed through the State”.

What does the new concept of global public good mean? It is not clear despite the fact that the Bank announces in its document that “the World Bank will contribute towards the goal of establishing an international qualifications framework through consultations with donors and specialized professional associations, as well as through the Development Grant Facility. Two sets of complementary initiatives will be considered: a) technical and financial assistance to groups of small countries that wish to set up a regional quality assurance system in lieu of separate national ones, and b) support for global quality assurance initiatives on a thematic basis.

Again according to Rafael Guarga, “this ‘global public good’ refers essentially to the educational product delivered by transnational providers, whose receivers are found in socially diversified contexts. Obviously, the concept of pertinence, with the meaning given

to it by the WCHE, lacks content when one tries to apply it to this kind of educational product. Rafael Guarga believes that this concept means the end of a long road; pertinence is rejected and refused as the concrete requests of societies are covered by a unique demand, the “global” demand.

This explains the need for a transnational legitimacy, for which the Bank document offers collaboration. It also explains why most of the Latin American representatives to the Conference Paris + 5, in Paris, in June 2004, refused to accept the section of the report of the meeting in which education was presented as a “public global good” as if all participants in the conference accepted this concept. The Latin-American Rectors who signed a letter addressed to the Director of the Division of Higher Education expressed clearly the opinion that they could not accept the existence of a global forum on quality assurance and recognition of qualifications that would take over this role, which rightfully belongs to States or to regional organizations. Among those who signed this note are the representatives of AUGM (Association of Universities of the Group of Montevideo), OCLAE (Continental Organization for Latin America and Caribbean Students), ANDIFES (National Association of Public Federal Universities in Brazil), ABRUEM (Brazilian State Universities), UNE (National Union Students of Brazil), a number of Latin-American Rectors and some Latin American members of the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge.

THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC GOOD AND SERVICE

It is evident that the notion of public service is fundamental in this debate. In fact, a public service, such as the supply of water, for example, can be entrusted to the private sector, under regulations laid down by public authorities.

For a service to be considered public, it must be implemented on an equal basis. Everyone must have the right to drinking water, independently of which organisation provides this service. In addition, public service must be continuous and permanent. It is unacceptable for the service to be limited or partial. Furthermore, it should be adapted to changes in societies and their needs.

With respect to higher education – and this is a matter of principle - the academic community and the official representatives of more than 180 countries considered it to be a public service (article 14), which, following article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, must be accessible to all on the basis of merit, capacity, efforts, perseverance and devotion, with no kind of discrimination being acceptable.

It should also be added that there is a consensus over the need, these days, for the internationalisation of higher education. No institution can survive alone or act in an isolated way. The progress of knowledge is so fast that no institution is in a position to control everything. In developing countries, internationalisation is an instrument for access to knowledge.

However, some experts are developing a new approach that seems to combine the ideas of trade and cooperation. They are of the view that internationalisations can now be developed mainly, or exclusively, through trans-border education, through the sale of products. Those who think that solidarity is possible in co-operation, those who refer to the need for sharing knowledge, are “idealistic but naïve”.

This subject was also an essential part of the Policy Paper of UNESCO and the decisions of the WCHE, which defined a concept of international cooperation that “should be based on genuine partnership, mutual trust and solidarity”. It also stated that “renewed inter-university cooperation, particularly with developing countries, should not only entail a rapid transfer of knowledge and technology, but should also promote incentives to retain students, academic and staff researchers in their local institutions”. These statements provided the base for launching the UNITWIN programme, officially adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1991.

Today, this is clear and everybody agrees that there is a need for internationalisation in higher education. No institution can survive alone or act in an isolated way. The progress of knowledge is so fast that no institution can control everything. In developing countries, internationalisation is an instrument for access to knowledge. Trade exists, including in education, but to confuse trade with co-operation, or even worse, to claim that co-operation is not possible, is an aberration that will surely be mentioned by future historians as one of the things revealing that the beginning of the XXI Century was a dark period in spite of the progress made by science.

PROSPECTS

What will happen in the future? The history of humanity shows that periods of enlightenment and periods of darkness succeed each other.

The present period, as far as international life is concerned, as far as work relations are analysed, as far as the predominance of values linked to competition and domination prevail, is a time of darkness.

But this will change. The organisation of civil societies will soon bring new and less bureaucratic forms to the organisation of States, more closely linked to essential values reinforcing human dignity. Education once again will be considered as a public good, as a universal right, and as an instrument to consolidate a better society.

In the near future, the discussions that are taking place at UNESCO concerning cultural diversity will be extremely important. A Declaration was approved by the 31st session of the General Conference in 2001 and the 185 member States of this Organization are now studying a more binding instrument, a convention, aimed at promoting respect for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, as an instrument for understanding and peace among all human beings. Pluralism, respect for universal human rights, promotion of creativity and

international solidarity are the key words behind the will to attain this normative instrument. A look at its objectives will reveal that these were the principles of the Declaration on Higher Education in 1998.

Universities all over the world will soon be involved in the preparation of this instrument. It is significant that the subject of the last general conference of the International Association of Universities, held in São Paulo last July (25-29), was precisely “The wealth of diversity – the role of universities in promoting dialogue and development”. Quality implies cultural diversity and not uniformity.

Once again, it should be noted that when UNESCO and UNU decided to launch GUNI, the Global Network for Innovation, based at the Technical University of Catalonia (UPC), the main objective of this network was precisely to give higher education institutions an instrument to participate actively in the follow-up of the World Conference on Higher Education, working together to implement its proposals and stimulate innovative projects to improve the quality and relevance of higher education all over the world. For UNU, networking based on solidarity and co-operation among equals, is the most important instrument for reaching this objective. Next October (18 to 20), GUNI will be organizing its International Barcelona Conference on Higher Education, on the theme of “The Social Commitment of Universities”

Now more than ever, it seems that the academic community and its representative associations, in particular GUNI and its regional networks, should stimulate the debate on subjects such as:

- a) The need to consider higher education as public good.
- b) Strengthening co-operation based on solidarity and among equals.
- c) Participation of higher education institutions in the construction of a better society to improve their quality and relevance.

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DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 4

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION FROM AN INTERNATIONAL POINT OF VIEW: THE ROLE OF UNESCO-

First biennial Conference and General Conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE) - Montreal, 24-28 May 1993 – Uma versão resumida deste texto, sem revisão pelo autor que não foi chamado a se pronunciar sobre os cortes, foi publicada como capítulo do livro “International Developments in assuring quality in Higher education – Selected papers from an International Conference, Montreal 1993, edited by Alma Craft – The Falmer Press- 1994- pgs 156-167



International
Developments
in assuring
Quality in Higher
Education

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QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION FROM AN INTERNATIONAL POINT OF VIEW: THE ROLE OF UNESCO

Allocution by
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First biennial Conference and General Conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE)- Montreal, 24-28 May 1993

If there is a word that all higher education analysts use everywhere nowadays, it is "quality". In this sense, the title of this conference could not be more adapted to the present needs. "Quality Assurance in a Changing World - Higher Education at a Crossroads". But what are we discussing. What precisely is "quality"?

In a symposium organized in Bogotá, in July 85, the former Minister of Education of Colombia, Ms. Doris Eder de Zambrano, said:

"Calidad" es un término difuso, como la belleza o la bondad, que se presta a múltiples definiciones y que se percibe en forma totalmente distinta por diversos grupos o individuos. Entran en esta percepción factores derivados de las necesidades de cada grupo y de sus expectativas en relación con el papel de la educación."

This difficulty for finding a definition - a real one- has not prevented analysts from presenting the issue of quality as the main one in all higher education systems at the end of this century. When UNESCO has been preparing its current Medium-Term Plan, which covers the 1990-1995 period, a series of consultations was held to identify the main important issues for higher education in all regions of the world.

Two groups of issues were identified everywhere:

- i) Issues relating to matters dealing with relevance (role of higher education within societies, democratization, need for diversification, links with the world of work, responsibilities of higher education in relation to the whole system of education etc);
- ii) Issues relating to matters dealing with quality (reforms and innovations, including distance education, interdisciplinarity and continuing education, planning and management of resources, organization of programmes, qualification of teachers etc).

These two sets of issues have been completed by a series of suggestions and proposals concerning mobility and strengthening of international co-operation in the field of higher education.

If we go into detail, we can observe that there is a great heterogeneity in the analysis. The "quality" of the reflection was not the same, differences appeared regarding the priorities and, as the realities are different, the proposed solutions are also different. However, as a common point, everybody asks for measures in order to improve quality.

If we look at the Newsletter of the Association for Institutional Research (volume 32, number 3, spring 1992/1993), in United States, we find the recommendations by a special task force, which in the conclusions stated:

"The Task Force recognizes that the development of national standards and assessment measures for American postsecondary education is a long-term effort requiring much consensus building, assessment development and testing. It concludes, however, that the nation's future well-being depends upon the establishment of standards for learning which will raise educational achievement levels sufficient to insure that the United States' citizens are competitive with their counterparts throughout the world. The

development of national standards of performance and assessment requires national leadership and federal support".

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, CEPES, the European Centre for Higher Education of UNESCO, in Bucharest, Rumania, has recently elaborated a project proposal for the creation of a European Group on Academic Assessment. The justification for this was that "the criteria and practices of quality assessment and assessment of higher education institutions are today among the most important issues for those responsible for the elaboration of educational policies".

According to our colleague, Lazar Vlasceanu, the deputy director of CEPES-UNESCO, various factors have brought this issue to the fore.

- The concern for quality of instruction, as evaluated against certain standards of excellence;
- The expansion of international co-operation and academic mobility, both of students and of staff.
- The need for accreditation to define how institutions (mainly new institutions in Eastern Europe) should be approached, and how the public or other interested institutions should regard them both from the perspective of educational policy and from that of present or future students.

The aims of the Group will be:

- To make a comparative analysis of criteria and procedures of evaluating higher education,
- To facilitate the development of compatible criteria for excellence within the European systems of higher education;
- To further develop the means of implementing the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees.

This proposal was strongly supported by the participants in a special meeting CEPES organized for ministers of Education of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Russian Federation, on "Quality Assessment and Institutional Accreditation in Higher Education" in Oradea, Rumania, from 5 to 7 may 1993 and which was attended by one of your co-presidents, Ms. Marjorie Peace Lenn.

In a final statement, the participants stated that "the reform of higher education systems is being undertaken in all the countries of the subregion. As different from each other as they might be in terms of specific objectives and stages of implementation, these reforms are aimed at academic excellence as well as the enhancement of the contribution of universities to the development of the societies to which they belong and for the speeding up of the transition to pluralist democracies and prosperous market economies".

In the same document, we can read:

- "Quality is and should be the hallmark of all changes and developments in the higher education systems of the Central and Eastern European countries. The questions of how to assess, to assure, and to improve quality, and of which standards are to be considered as the benchmarks for the further development of existing higher education institutions and programmes of study are part and parcel of the current strategy to establish lines of development for the present and to envisage future trends. The need to define criteria and procedures for the accreditation of higher education institutions in the Central and Eastern European countries is an important priority for any strategy of development and of quality evaluation".

Finally, the participants approved a set of recommendations, the first one being related to quality:

"The issues of quality assurance, assessment and improvement, as well as those of institutional accreditation should be closely linked to the processes through which higher education systems and institutions are being reformed, by means of appropriate policies and mechanisms of implementation".

Similar statements can be found in meetings organized recently by UNESCO, in Latin America and the Caribbean by CRESALC - the Regional Centre for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean - located in Caracas, and by BREDA - the Regional Centre for Education in Africa, located in Dakar, Senegal.

WHAT IS QUALITY

In synthesis, quality is a world priority. But once again, we come to the question: What is quality?

One of my colleagues, Bikas C. Sanyal, when facing a similar problem ("Excellence and evaluation in higher education: some international perspectives" - paper presented at the Institute of Education, University of London, June 1992) looked to a good source, the Webster's Third International Dictionary. He found there that "excellence is defined as the state of possessing good qualities in an eminent degree, and quality is defined as the degree of conformance to a standard".

Quoting Charles F. Carter, Bikas Sanyal adds that "excellence in a higher education system would mean that the system possesses the characteristics of conforming to standards in an eminent degree i.e. to what extent the programme has achieved the desired outcomes. This leads to the identification of the desired outcomes or objectives of a higher education system. As objectives change, the concept of excellence will also change and the objectives of higher education have changed with time as well as space".

However, the difficulty persists and I don't have any pretension of giving a definitive reply to this question or of presenting a final definition of quality. My colleague in UNESCO, Lazar Vlasceanu, is used to saying that "quality is more easily recognized than defined".

Yet, we can try to present elements which almost unanimously are presented as necessary to identify a situation of "quality". On the basis of the results of the discussions in all regions, the Division of Higher Education of UNESCO prepared a draft policy paper on higher education in which an important part is dedicated to "Quality in Higher Education". It can be read:

QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The demand for increased relevance in higher education goes hand in hand with the demand for its enhanced quality. Quality which is not a novel concern in higher education, however has become crucial in present policy debate concerning the development and reform of higher education. It embraces all its functions and activities: quality of teaching, training and research - which reside in the quality of its staff and of its programmes and resources; quality of learning - as a corollary of teaching and research, but also implying quality of students; quality of governance and management - which has a determining impact on the teaching, learning and research environment.

1. Quality of Staff

Higher education institutions, primarily universities and other university-level institutions, enjoy great prestige on the national and international scene. This prestige is assured principally by the eminence of their teachers and researchers. It would be a great misfortune if universities anywhere were to fall into disrepute. However, it would be equally counter-productive for higher education institutions to take prestige and privileges for granted. Everywhere in the world government leaders, politicians, representatives of the corporate sector and of public opinion at large, insist on the fact that quality in any kind of institution - academic institutions included - cannot be assured without a mechanism of evaluation, quality assessment and control.

The evaluation process should start with and actively involve the academic and research staff, given their central role in the diverse activities of higher education institutions. Clearer policies and practices are needed for staff development in higher education. They should be based on initial and in-service training for this purpose, including pedagogical training, and on more rigorous mechanisms for access to and selection for university teaching. Accountability and evaluation - through self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, or external evaluation - are increasingly being recognised by the academic and administrative staff as essential to assuring the quality of their institutions.

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A document on the "desirability of adopting an international normative instrument concerning the status of higher education teaching personnel" was presented to the hundred and forty-first session of the Executive Board of UNESCO being held presently in Paris.

2. Quality of Students

Participation in tertiary-level education has shifted from being a "reflection" of social and economic relationships to be a determinant of such relationships and the overall development of society. Higher education plays an increasingly important role in ensuring upward social mobility. Equity calls for greater opportunities for members from lower status groups to participate in quality educational programmes. The possibility for young people to pursue higher education studies is not only important from the point of view of higher educational institutions. Society makes long-term investments in higher education not only for economic reasons. Cultural development and the building up of more co-operative and participatory relations in society are directly related to the level of education.

There is every justification to consider students as a great asset of society. However, with the advent of mass higher education, it is necessary to engage in a serious debate on a number of basic issues concerning access to higher education. Current UNESCO estimates indicate that there will be some 120 million young people in higher education by the year 2040. Most of them will be in the developing world. Thus, increasingly relevant will be such policy questions as:

- can a trend toward increasing access be upheld indiscriminately?
- What could be the mechanisms allowing societies to afford mass higher education in order to observe the principle of social equity?

One of the key issues seems to be related to the ways in which governments can offer the institutions of higher education and their future graduates incentives to become partners in the overall effort of national development, not only beneficiaries by public support. The interrelation between secondary education and higher education and between the latter and various forms of continuing education acquire particular importance in this respect.

3. Quality of Governance and Management

A clear understanding of relations between higher education and the state are a precondition for quality and accountability in governance and management in higher education institutions. The principle of academic autonomy is central in this respect. Academic freedom and university autonomy guarantee the preservation of the university as a community of free inquiry and the stimulating climate required for scientific advancement and dissemination of knowledge. Governments should accord the proper degree of autonomy - together with adequate financial provision - to higher education institutions in order to allow them to be relevant and perform their creative, reflective and critical functions in society. Therefore, the evaluation and quality assessment should not be perceived as a restrictive instrument for allocation of resources but a process allowing higher education its self-improvement.

However, institutional autonomy also implies increased responsibility for matters of funding, systematic self-evaluation of research and teaching and a constant concern for

cost-effectiveness and efficiency in all activities. It also requires, as emphasised above, greater interaction between higher education and society which should be based on partnerships and alliances with a wide range of economic, social, cultural and other public organizations.

Analyses of the present conditions of higher education are unanimous in pointing to insufficient financial resources as one of the main constraints for its further development. The challenge of limited resources is unlikely to be overcome in the near future. Thus it will be necessary for higher education institutions to show a capacity to redress them in order to be able to cope with this challenge. Elimination of weaknesses in governance and management is paramount in this process. Therefore it is in the interest of higher education that it considers the issues of evaluation and quality, including institutional and programme accreditation, as being vital for a responsive and accountable system of governance and management. The most viable institutions of higher education, also in financial terms, are those which have succeeded to build into their functioning structures, proper mechanisms allowing them to remove mediocrity and to guarantee quality of teaching, research and service. They are also the institutions which stand a better chance in the competition to secure resources from the public and private sectors".

UNIVERSITIES AND SOCIETIES

In addition, I would like to raise here, now, some points which appeared clearly as a result of UNESCO's regional and global consultations on this matter.

One of the most important aspects highlighted was that universities do not exist for themselves. External forces have a tremendous impact in the life of universities. It is not possible, for example, to study the financial situation of universities in developing countries, without making an analysis of the consequences they suffer from the debt and structural adjustment policies. In fact, universities are not isolated from societies and many of their problems are the reflection of the changing world.

The links with societies being necessarily strong, one of the consequences is that, before defining for example what the new missions of the universities are in present times, it is absolutely necessary to define the kind of society and the kind of international order we want to build. We should be clear on this point. Economic development cannot follow rigid structures and only one model for all countries and regions. The failure in the strategies of cooperation based on the transmission of models, as has been done in Africa for example, with old colonial systems, proves that this approach is not a good one. More and more people have become aware of the fact that in all regions the adoption of foreign concepts and values and the neglect of regional and national cultures and philosophies have had negative repercussions on the higher education systems. The reforms of higher education systems in Latin America at the end of the sixties and in the seventies based on foreign models was a failure that now policy makers try to correct by adopting new reforms based on the specific situation of each country. In other words, quality in concrete terms cannot have the same meaning in San Francisco, Paris, Frankfurt, Ouagadougou, Cuiaba, or Gaborone.

As stated in this draft policy paper "the higher education institutions are called to carry out their functions in a very quickly changing world. The end of East-West ideological divide, the worldwide demand for the practical recognition of human rights, the serious struggle for the abolition of apartheid, the progress of democracy, the restoration of authority of the UNU system give greater faith in the action of the international community to tackle, in a spirit of solidarity, the major challenges of today's world: hunger, disease, poverty, homelessness, unemployment, ignorance, the protection of the environment, the construction of peace, the consolidation of democracy, the respect of human rights and the preservation of the cultural diversity. All this calls for a rethinking of the missions of international organizations like the United Nations system, and, at the national level, of institutions like the university".

As far as UNESCO is concerned, the organization sees the relevance of its mission considerably reinforced at the present time. In the fulfilment of its constitutional mission, namely to "maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge ...by encouraging ...the international exchange of persons active in the field of education, science and culture, UNESCO relies on higher education and the academic and scholarly community as a major partner in action".

In other words, before defining what kind of university we want, we should define what kind of society we have in mind; and the basis for a model of a new society is precisely in the roots of the present action of the international community.

What are these bases? A tentative reply is also found in the document we just mentioned:

"The basic premises of the concept of indigenous and sustainable development were formulated by the United Nations in its International Strategy for Development (IDS) which was approved by the General Assembly of UNO. The IDS considers that economic development should be based on two main foundations; diminution of poverty and development of human resources. With regard to the latter, the universities and other higher educational institutions have become, more than ever, the main actors in the implementation of the strategy for development, particularly with regard to their role in the training of highly qualified personnel".

The search for solutions to global problems is the responsibility not only of governments, but of each community, individual and citizen. Two of these problems can be considered as the main ones in present times - the environment and peace. The United Nations Conference, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, confirmed, once again, that the environment is part of human development. It also showed the direction to follow in all major areas of the environment and development - the Agenda 21. The Agenda for Peace, a document presented by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1992, is a true plan of action for peace which coincides with the basic principles of the "culture of peace" that UNESCO promotes through its programmes. The Charter of the United Nations and these documents are the basis for a new international order. These are also the foundation for the development of an agenda for action based on three great pillars: non-violence, equality and liberty. These should also be the basis for establishing the link between learning, research and civic responsibility. They should also constitute the bedrock for the renewal and strengthening of the links between the university and society.

To democratize access and keep a high level of quality in the services provided to societies are the main challenges higher education institutions are facing today. Some analysts, looking at institutions which have not been able to adapt themselves to new situations, have concluded that the increase in enrolments has given rise to expenses which cannot be met by States' budgets, and stated that it has generated social inequities, because wealthiest people have been privileged. This can be true in some parts of the world or in some institutions, but the analysis risks going too far if it concludes that developing countries should not invest in higher education. This is not acceptable. Without a good higher education system, developing countries will not overcome the barriers for improving quality of life, and will become dependent for ever. Two remarks should be made presently on this subject. With the end of the strained relationship between East and West, the main problem in the world is the underdevelopment which will not be solved without development policies in which the strengthening of universities for training and research is essential.

One should not forget also that the educational system constitutes a whole: if a part of the system does not operate properly, the whole system will generate dysfunctions. Higher education is responsible for training managers, experts and researchers necessary for development. Deleting resources at this level, can represent a dead end for real independence in many countries. On the other side, it is not possible to reinforce primary and secondary education without a good system of training at the higher level. Teachers in primary and secondary schools need to be trained and they are mainly trained in higher education institutions, which are also, in several countries, the only institutions able to provide educational research, essential for policy-makers to take valid decisions.

UNESCO'S ACTION

While UNESCO developed this kind of reflections, the Organization decided to launch in October 1991 the UNITWIN and the UNESCO Chairs Programme. This initiative according to a document presented by the Director General to the Executive Board of UNESCO, is intended to enhance the capabilities for advanced training and research and contribute to the development of know-how for the rapid transfer of knowledge to the developing countries. The UNITWIN and the UNESCO Chairs Programme basically involves the creation, in partnership with universities and other international bodies or funding agencies, of professorships enabling visiting scholars to provide core expertise for the development of centres of excellence in key disciplines and in the fields related to sustainable development.

This initiative completed a series of other actions undertaken by UNESCO, which have implications in its action in favour of quality in higher education. Among the more important ones, we should mention six regional conventions on the recognition of studies and diplomas in higher education covering all regions of the world. Next October, the General Conference of UNESCO will examine a draft project for a world convention and an international recommendation on this subject.

To define quality in higher education as we said at the beginning of this exposé is not

an easy task. Hence the claim of practically each and every institution of higher education that it is, if not the best, at least in the same category with the best. Each institution takes it for granted that its diplomas and degrees should be automatically recognized, while the degrees of other institutions need careful scrutiny before assessing their comparability and possible equivalence.

There are, of course, many other obstacles which cannot be disregarded. But let us limit ourselves to the implication of the claim mentioned above and see its consequences.

The real issue is that the obvious solution would be to copy and reproduce everywhere those models of higher education establishments which are considered to be "the best", to have replicas of Oxford and Cambridge, of Harvard, Stanford, Berkeley or MIT, of the Sorbonne, Salamanca, Coimbra and Heidelberg or everywhere else in the world. You will notice that any listing, however long, will always leave people unsatisfied. Why Oxford and not, also, London and Edinburgh? Why Heidelberg and not also Geneva or Lausanne etc. But this is not the real issue. We have already seen and mentioned here the consequences of that approach. We have seen how many African higher education institutions, established according to the models of the universities in the metropolis were devoid of relevance for their countries. We have seen how universities in Eastern and Central Europe - some of them of long standing tradition - were losing their vitality under the impact of an imposed model which was created to suit the needs of totalitarian regimes, and we have seen Latin American universities spare their energy trying to impose a model which was not adapted to their needs.

We firmly believe that the value and strength of higher education resides in its worldwide diversity. It is not without reason that all UNESCO Regional Conventions on the Recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees, underline the richness and diversity of the national systems of higher education as a most important asset which must be preserved and further promoted. Quality and relevance of higher education institutions, of their programmes and their diplomas, cannot be judged in terms of given models, however perfect they may seem. They must ultimately be assessed in a particular context, and at a given time.

It would be gratuitous and untrue, on the other hand, to make the reverse claim that all higher education institutions are equally good and therefore the recognition of their diplomas and degrees should be taken for granted. I don't think we stand to gain by adopting this standpoint. It would mean avoiding a discussion of the real issues facing higher education today. I will raise with you a few issues, having in mind their particular relevance to the need for increased international co-operation as a means to assure quality.

The Demographic Factor

There is no need for me to present to you the various scenarios concerning the future demographic evolution of the world. Rather I would like to insist on the consequences of the demographic factor on the future development of higher education.

Third level education has been expanding constantly from 28.2 million in 1970 to 47.5 in 1980 and 58.4 in 1988. The number of third-level education students can be estimated at about 65 million at present. For the world of education, the second half of the 20th century

will remain in history as the period of the highest and most rapid expansion of higher education. Higher education is the most dynamic level of education at present and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

Current estimates, (and they are rather conservative) indicate that some 120 million students will be seeking higher education qualifications by the year 2010. Most of these will be in the developing world. Are the decision-makers, the university leaders, and the professoriate - ready for this situation?

As Mr Dumitru Chitoran, one of my colleagues, chief of the Section of Higher Education in the Division of Higher Education of UNESCO, states: "UNESCO can only support and very strongly indeed, the need to give a chance for accomplishment to the talented young minds everywhere and more particularly so in the developing world. But this optimistic approach must be accompanied by affirmative action on behalf of all those concerned to assure quality of higher education when large numbers are involved. I believe that we can subscribe to Eric Ashby's statement that "more" does not necessarily mean "worse", but it certainly means "different". Higher education everywhere -in the industrially developed countries and in the developing ones - must change. They must build into their functioning structures operative mechanisms allowing them to remove mediocrity and to guarantee quality".

The Widening Quality Gap in Higher Education

The deteriorating socio-economic situation of the developing countries, particularly of the least developed ones, leads to the continuous aggravation of the crises of their systems of higher education. There are institutions of higher education in Africa and elsewhere which face imminent extinction, unless urgent steps are taken to rehabilitate them.

A very serious vicious circle has been created. On the one hand, economic growth and development in general, has become increasingly dependent on knowledge and on its application. In the knowledge intensive societies of today's world, attempts to bridge the gap between the industrially developed countries and the developing ones necessarily call for people with high-level knowledge and skills. This need has turned the universities and higher education institutions into key factors for human development. And it is precisely there where this function is so much needed, namely in the developing countries, that they are least equipped to perform it.

The difficulties facing higher education in the developing countries call, in the first place, for appropriate measures and efforts to be made by the respective states themselves. However, beset as they are with serious socio-economic problems, bearing the burden of foreign debts, these countries will not find it easy to allocate significant resources to higher education. International assistance to the developing countries for enhancing their high-level training and research capacities has become essential for human development in the South, precisely because it is only in that manner that continued dependence on foreign assistance can be diminished and finally stopped.

University Development Aid

The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme which I mentioned before have this main aim: to assist higher education institutions in the developing world to enhance the quality of their teaching and research programmes, to rehabilitate their facilities. By contributing to quality assurance, UNITWIN also brings a contribution to the mutual recognition of studies and degrees.

A genuine academic, while primarily concerned with the quality of his/her own institution or department, must be equally concerned about quality of higher education institutions everywhere. It was this strong confidence in world academic solidarity that guided the Director General in proposing the UNITWIN and the UNESCO Chairs Programme.

Let me dwell on those features of these programmes which are of direct relevance for the topic of this Congress.

Transfer of knowledge and competitiveness in higher education. One laureate of the Kalinga prize awarded by UNESCO used a simple language to express a very meaningful thought: "Science must be like the sun; it should shine for everybody." The universities, by virtue of their academic freedom and autonomy, are fully committed to the pursuit of knowledge and to its dissemination as the very essence of their scientific role. Liberty of research goes hand in hand with the liberty to share the results of research, if knowledge is to advance. On this matter, UNESCO approach is different from that of other organizations, which look for the concrete benefits that "donors" get from co-operation. UNESCO looks for solidarity, for a policy of sharing resources. We should not neglect the role of competitiveness in the pursuit of knowledge. Without competition acting as a stimulant, progress is slowed down. But there is healthy competition which can only be welcome for universities everywhere, and there is fierce competition which necessarily leads to the final destruction of the weak.

A more even distribution of "centres of excellence". The very concept of "centre of excellence" has direct implications for the recognition of studies and qualifications. The world of higher education has changed considerably with the massive expansion that I had mentioned earlier. No university can claim to be "excellent" in every field. But certain universities manage to maintain an aura of "excellence" by tradition, by myth or simply by better advertising. Others, which are equally good, have still to win international recognition. It took two Nobel Prize winners in a row (Claude Gille de Genes and George Charpak) for the Ecole nationale de physique from France to impose itself as a leading research centre in the field.

What is at stake here is that each higher education institution must aspire to excellence in at least some fields. And one way to do it is through interuniversity co-operation, resulting in a sort of "division of tasks", preferably trespassing national frontiers. It is one of the aims pursued through the UNESCO Chairs. They are conceived to function as centres of advanced studies and research, located at a particular university, primarily in the developing world, but extending their services to institutions in the respective country and sub region. An interlocking system of international chairs can make an important contribution to the overall

enhancement of higher education institutions in a given (sub)region. It is one way by means of which South-South co-operation in higher education can be promoted and an important contribution that institutions of higher education can make to the TCDC Programme of UNDP.

Rehabilitation of universities in the developing countries.

In order to render these institutions competitive in the world academic scene and thus to gain recognition of their diplomas and degrees, an all out concerted effort must be made in order to reverse the decline in quality of their teaching and research programmes and of their facilities. Can international co-operation be the answer? Not the entire answer, certainly, but it can make an important contribution towards reaching this goal.

When the Director General proposed the UNITWIN and the UNESCO Chairs Programme to the General Conference of UNESCO, it was precisely these institutions of higher education which were in greater need of support that he had in mind. And he was persuaded that the governments of the industrialized countries, the intergovernmental organizations, the various donor agencies and foundations were ready to respond to UNESCO's appeal. But he relied in the first place on the spirit of solidarity of the world academic community. "What is needed is a large-scale movement of university volunteers" whether they be dedicated scholars ready to impart their knowledge to those who are mostly badly in need of it, together with colleagues in the developing world and thus enrich their life and scientific experience, technicians who could help with the maintenance of university facilities and laboratory equipment. They are needed in great numbers and the exemplary success of the UN volunteers or of the "Médecins sans frontières" leads UNESCO to believe that the academic community will respond in a similar manner.

I come to the end of this "expose" without answering the basic question (What is quality?), but we all understand that quality cannot be derived from a universal model, quality cannot emerge from theory and abstraction, quality is the result of a series of actions responding to precise social needs in a very particular moment. Real quality is "hic et nunc" (here and now).

UNESCO's role was neither defined in theoretical terms. When preparing this "expose", I had in mind the caustic comments of Guy Neave, the editor of the International Association of Universities bulletin (vol. 4, no. 1, February 1993), who, after stating that "quality" has now been added to the "Gladstone bag" of universal problems" and mentioned that "academic finds itself beset by a growing and often cacophonous crowd of "quality assurers" concludes that "the issue behind quality has very little to do with "quality" per se. It has to do with who sets the criteria involved in its definition and from these to the question of control over the heart of the academic enterprise is but a short step". He also adds: "Quality, seen from this angle, is a technique which allows national administration to insist on the ends whilst rigorously denying the means".

Mr Guy Neave is a famous international consultant for many organizations, including UNESCO, and he touches a real problem. When international experts try to impose a model to the developing world, they are not helping quality per se, they are serving the creation of

mechanisms aiming to control the development of endogenous capacities. They don't serve liberty, they serve the spirit of domination and of control.

UNESCO is a human organization and as all human achievements is not perfect. As an international organization with more than 160 member States, it has the qualities and the imperfections of these who compose it as an entity and who establish its principles and decide on its orientations. But, UNESCO, as the whole United Nations system, is not a simple addition of parts, it plays in the world an ethic role calling the attention to global values and stimulating a spirit of solidarity. In practical terms, as far as higher education is concerned, UNESCO tries to develop a permanent reflection on main issues affecting systems and plays a catalytic role using its moral authority and its presence in all parts of the world for establishing and reinforcing links among the academic community and among institutions themselves. In two words, UNESCO considers the internationalization of knowledge as a condition for the development of all countries. In order to reach this target, quality linked to relevance is essential. Universities services -teaching and research- should serve their societies and these principles guide all actions of the organization in the field of higher education.

DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 5

INTERUNIVERSITY LINKAGES FOR IMPROVING QUALITY

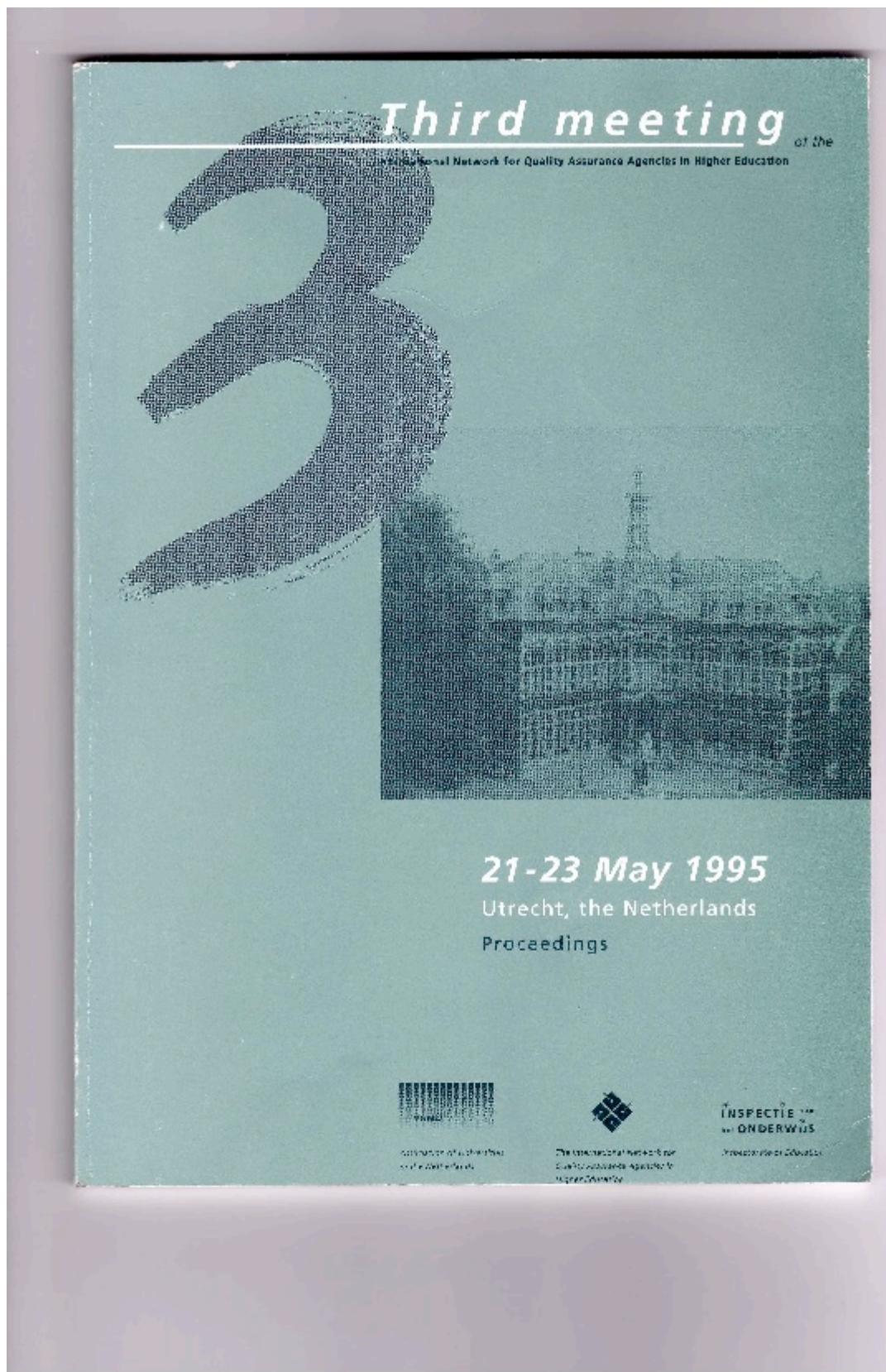
Third meeting of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education - Utrecht- Netherlands- 23 may 1995 – Texto publicado em 1995 pela Associação de Universidades dos Países Baixos, pelo International Network for Wuality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education e pelo “Inspectorate of Education” dos Países Baixos, através de brochura com o título de “Third Meeting – INQAAHE – 21-23- May 1995, Utrecht, The Netherlands- Proceedings

INTERUNIVERSITY LINKAGES FOR IMPROVING QUALITY

Professor Marco Antonio Rodrigues Dias

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Third meeting of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education - Utrecht- Netherlands- 23 may 1995



I- INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, in the conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, you organized in Montreal, Canada, from 24 to 28 may 1993, I made an intervention on "quality in higher education from an international point of view: the role of UNESCO". This intervention seemed to be welcomed, as it was selected to be published in the book "International Developments in Assuring Quality in Higher Education – Selected papers from an International Conference, Montreal 1993", edited by Alma Craft.

However some participants criticized me because when mentioning definitions of quality, I quoted Ms. Doris Eder de Zambrano, former minister of Education of Colombia and I said the minister was beautiful and intelligent. As I said "beautiful" one participant observed: "this is a reaction of a typical Latin American male ("machista"). Others preferred to criticize the adjective "intelligent" saying that I was ironic.

"Machista" and/or ironic was not the remark, the truth was that the former Minister of Education was beautiful and intelligent and her comments on the subject very pertinent.

In fact, in a symposium organized in Bogotá, in July 85, Ms. Doris Eder de Zambrano defined quality saying:

"Quality" is a diffuse term, as beauty or goodness, which induces to multiply definitions and which is felt (or perceived) in an absolutely different ways by several groups or individuals. Contribute to this perception factors derived from the needs of each group and from its expectations regarding the role of education".

In other words, if I can interpret the Minister, it is difficult to define quality, but everybody has a feeling on where it is.

Now, some people want to define quality as linked to the behaviour of costumers, to the behaviour of a given clientele. A good product is a product appreciated by costumers.

I am not sure. One month ago, I was in the territory of one of the 183 Unesco's member States and I saw some beautiful Rolex and Cartier watches sold at the stimulating price of around \$15.

Do these watches have quality?

It seems that people going to this particular country are very happy with these watches. They are beautiful and, apparently, function very well. But if you consult the manufacturers, they will probably advise you not to buy them. It's a counterfeiting and there is no quality assurance for the material.

I must say that the imitations are so perfect that when a friend of mine who got a Rolex as a gift from her wife the day they were commemorating the 30th anniversary of their marriage (by coincidence at the beginning of the International Year of Tolerance), he doubted that his watch was a real one or an imitation, if it had quality or not. "Now", he says, "I wonder whether it is not better to keep the real one at home and, for security reasons, to circulate with a good imitation".

The problem is real. During the last two years after the Montreal Conference, I reviewed carefully to all definitions of quality the experts in higher education utilize and I concluded that the former minister of Colombia was right and the analogy which came to my mind relates to the definition of God.

God is the perfection, but when believers try to define God, they use negative concepts. God has no limits in space, so He is infinite. He has no defect, so He is the Supreme Goodness, He has no limit in time, so He is eternal etc, etc.

Such is quality, we believe in it, we now it exists, but our definitions many times are a tautology or are descriptive of a situation related to one moment, to one space.

II- ONE MODEL FOR QUALITY?

During the last two years, since the Montreal Conference, many things happened in the field of higher education, one of them being the consolidation of your International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, whose objective is precisely to promote and to help to promote quality in higher education.

UNESCO supported this network since its creation and provided funds to ensure the participation of representatives of developing and less developed countries to the present meeting.

It does not matter if there is no possibility of a finding a definition of quality, that received the agreement of everybody. Let us let the democratic game play its full role even in this field. Personally, I am not always in agreement with statements of all members of this network. I consider for example that the system of "franchising" consisting in the transferring whole programmes from developed to developing countries deserves an in-depth reflection on its cultural and social implications and on its results for developing countries.

As a matter of fact, UNESCO's experiences tend to show that there is no global model in education. During the reflections undertaken during the last Medium Term Plan of our Organization (1990-1995), a general consensus appeared according to which one of the basic problems of African universities was due to the fact that they imitated old colonial systems. In Asia, a region in which culture is rich, as proved by the fact that most religions started there, Christianity, Judaism, Islamism, Buddhism, Hinduism, endogenous values were neglected in favour of western materialistic standards and now several experts of the region

express worries with concrete results of this abandon in the mentality of people trained at high level in the region. In Latin America, the reforms of the sixties adopted models of the North which not always fit the reality of this bus-Continent and now revisions are made everywhere.

Let me present to you a concrete recent case. Two weeks ago, the Herald Tribune published an article on the first promotion of students of a Western University transferred with a whole package -curricula, professors, and even baseball trainers - to a former building of the Communist Party in one of the most important cities of an Eastern European country. The Eastern-European students were very successful. They got in average better results than students in the country from where the university came. But, they don't have access to adequate jobs related to their training in their country and now most of them announce their intention to go abroad to pursue studies and look for jobs in the country the University came from. I don't think this was the intention of the administrators of this university, but it is clear that here we have a clear case of incitation to brain-drain.

Is this quality?

I don't think so. But, please let me remove any misunderstanding. I am not defending the idea of a lower level of training for developing world. A bridge in Burkina Faso, Brazil, England or Sweden needs strict calculations. Experts in Informatics should have necessary skills all over the world. That is why quality assurance ("total quality management") developed in industries in countries like Japan raised so great interest. But, in Japan, it was implemented as a whole process through which the enterprise makes its best to satisfy the clients in quality, in costs and delays, through the control of process and of products and through the involvement of the people working in enterprises. In other countries, the total quality management was confounded with the certification, more attention was given to procedures which become the main goal of the enterprise instead of the amelioration of the quality. The certification should be only an instrument to attest the conformity with a product, of an organization system with a norm or technical specification. It should not be an objective in itself.

In higher education, the objectives of the systems should take into consideration the social and cultural needs which are different according to the regions. Recently, under a governmental request, UNESCO sent a mission to one of less developed country to analyze the feasibility of developing a tertiary level educational system in this country. A representative of another organization, having in mind ideas of excellency obtained by Salamanca, Oxford and Harvard, considered that this country should not establish an educational tertiary level system. We can not support this position. This country needs to train teachers, administrators, it needs experts in agronomy, in fishing etc. In other words, it needs a qualified system but adapted to its concrete needs.

III- QUALITY LINKED TO RELEVANCE

You received or will receive copy of the policy paper on higher education the director general of UNESCO launched last February. For UNESCO, quality is

linked to relevance and relevance is connected with several aspects of the progress of societies, as democratization of access and broader opportunities for participation in it, links with the world of work, including partnership with industries, and the responsibilities towards other levels of education.

In a world in which the hopes of real democratization are vanishing in several countries, in which starvation and misery are part of the life of million people, in which million children -the street children- don't have housing, food, school, love and learn that for surviving they should steal and kill, in such a world we are leaving to our children, higher education cannot be isolated from an action for a better and fairer society.

This is the reason why the United Nations in its efforts to reform itself recently approved two documents, Agenda for Peace and Agenda for Development, which present the basis for fairer societies. I really invite the academic community to read and to reflect on it. Agenda for Development launches the basis for reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development and highlighting the need for training human resources, where universities are called to play an important role.

We should also have in mind that higher education can not be analyzed in an isolated way. Any adequate education policy must consider the education system as a whole. Quality in higher education depends on quality at other levels, and higher education, through teacher training, educational research, innovations, should contribute to the development of quality at other levels.

IV- OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

We all agree that quality is linked to objectives and results.

See the experience of old sailors. They go to the sea and during night time they look to Venus. They cannot reach it but they are guided by its light.

Quality should be a permanent objective in higher education institutions and systems. In UNESCO Policy Document, we adopted a pragmatical approach. Quality is considered as a multidimensional concept which depends to a large extent on the contextual setting of a given system, institutional mission, or conditions and standards within a given discipline.

Quality also embraces all higher education main functions and activities: quality of teaching, training and research, which means the quality of its staff and programmes, and quality of learning as a corollary of teaching and research.

It also implies attention for questions pertaining to the quality of students and of the infrastructure and academic environment.

In this framework, assessment to analyze how relevant are the institutions of higher education become an essential element.

The UNESCO's European Regional Center for Higher Education -CEPES- is taking a series of initiatives in the field of accreditation as other UNESCO decentralized offices are doing as well. On the other side, an Advisory Group on Higher Education, integrated by high level experts, representatives of all regions in the world, advised the Director General to elaborate in-depth studies on matters identified by the policy paper, among them matters linked to quality and evaluation.

During next two years, we envisage to utilize these studies as preparation for a World Conference on Higher Education, UNESCO's member States want to organize early in 1998. Your network could be a main partner to UNESCO in this field of quality and evaluation and for this we could collaborate more closely in the organization of the meeting you are foreseeing in South Africa.

V- NEED OF COOPERATION

The UNESCO worldwide reflection showed also that problems are so complex, the evolution of societies goes so fast, that universities as well individuals and societies cannot survive isolated. Networking is not a panacea, but it can be an attempt to find solutions. It is true that when UNESCO launched UNITWIN, a programme of interuniversity cooperation based in two pillars: UNESCO chairs and networks, no one could imagine the impact of the idea.

In three years, more than 100 chairs were created, another fifty are being negotiated, around 32 networks were created or are supported by the programme. The Executive Board of Unesco, presently holding its regular spring meeting in Paris, confirmed its decision to include this programme among UNESCO priorities. As an indicator, I must tell you that yesterday the Japanese representative at the Executive Council of UNESCO announced the creation of three UNESCO's chair in Japan and requested UNESCO's secretariat to: i) invest more resources in UNITWIN programme; ii) use the chairs as instruments to consolidate networks; iii) support regional cooperation in higher education in Asia and Pacific. Japanese are known as people that take time to take decisions, but when they do, they make the best to be efficient. The announcement made yesterday is a good sign for the programme.

An internal evaluation of UNITWIN was initiated and next year an external evaluation will be carried out. I insist: networking is not a panacea, but some examples are indicators of what can be achieved in this field. That is the case of the Montevideo Group, a series of universities in countries linked to MERCOSUR (Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay), in which a dynamic of exchanges was developed through this programme. It is also the case of an international network in Ecotechnics, Environment in all technical, scientific and economical aspects, launched jointly by UNESXCO and Cousteau Team.

Last March- NUFFIC- the Netherlands Cooperation agency for higher education- organized in The Hague a conference on "Linkages revisited". The advantages of networking were highlighted as well the difficulties (cultural problems, concepts of solidarity against domination, financial problems) but successful cases were mentioned such as the Southern African Utrecht network, in which links were established among universities of South Africa (Western Cape), Namibia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, together with universities in Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and Portugal.

There was a consensus that in spite of difficulties efforts should be kept to utilize the potential of networking mainly to the benefit of quality in the development of higher education in developing countries.

CONCLUSION

In all this effort for the quality for higher education, we should keep in mind that the Convention against discrimination in Education, adopted by UNESCO in 1960, urges the States party to it, "to make primary education free and compulsory; make secondary education in its different forms generally available and accessible to all; make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity". In the same line, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by United Nations in 1989, also emphasized that "higher education should be made, by every appropriate means, accessible to all, on the basis of capacity".

These statements are mentioned in the UNESCO Policy Paper on Higher Education and I want to conclude quoting, once again, this document in which UNESCO supports the idea of a "pro-active university" which, among other trends, should constitute "a community whose members, being fully committed to the principles of academic freedom, are engaged in the pursuit of truth, defense and promotion of human rights, democracy, social justice and tolerance in their own communities and through the world, and participate in instruction for genuine participatory citizenship and in building a culture of peace".

"This broad vision of the "pro-active university" implies its creative adaptation in the process of searching for specific institutional models and practices which meet the needs, conditions and possibilities of particular higher education institutions, communities, countries and regions. Such a search for the development and change of higher education should also be seen as an essential part of the broad process of changes in contemporary society."

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DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 6

**THE ABANDONMENT OF THE 1993 RECOMMENDATION ON
RECOGNITION OF STUDIES AND DIPLOMAS OF HIGHER
EDUCATION –**

Documento inédito, não publicado. Trata-se de reflexão pessoal elaborada a partir de questões endereçadas ao autor em março de 2007

THE ABANDONMENT OF THE 1993 RECOMMENDATION ON RECOGNITION OF STUDIES AND DIPLOMAS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Document 175 EX/27 Part I of the one hundred and seventy-fifth session of the Executive Board of UNESCO contains statement and makes a proposal concerning the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications of Higher Education (1989), which is surprising and deserves some attention and comments. In paragraph 8, document 175 EX/27 Part I says: "Annex II shows that 21 recommendations are not being monitored, for the following reasons:

- a) The recommendations have been overtaken by the later adoption of a standard-setting instrument dealing with the same subject or by various technological developments (13 recommendations):
 - 1).....
 - 13) Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education (13 November 1989) (see the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region of 1997 and the other regional conventions on the same subject for which revision is currently planned).

The rationality behind this statement is that the recommendation on the recognition of studies and qualifications in higher education should be abandoned because (a) either the organization adopted later a standard-setting instrument dealing with the same subject, or (b) the recommendation has been overtaken by technological developments.

In fact, in paragraph 8, mention is made of:

- 1- the adoption of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region of 1997,
- 2- other regional conventions on the same subject for which revision is currently planned.

No mention is made of any technological development that might have overtaken the recommendation. So the reasons for abandoning one international instrument covering all regions is the existence of the later adoption of an instrument limited to one region.

A number of questions can be raised:

- 1- The European Convention of 1997, jointly adopted in the framework of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, deals exclusively with Europe. This decision confirms concerns that what the UNESCO Secretariat is presently doing in the field of recognition of qualifications in Europe might be applied to all other regions. This concern applies, in particular, to the renewal of other regional conventions (Latin America and the Caribbean, Arab and European States bordering the Mediterranean,

Arab States, the European Region, African States, and Asia and the Pacific, all adopted prior to the Recommendation). The model to be followed is to adhere to the rules European States adopted because they were the most convenient to them and their higher education systems.

- 2- In the field of the recognition of studies and diplomas in higher education, with the exception of the joint UNESCO/Council of Europe Convention of 1997, adopted to face the political changes that occurred in Europe at the end of nineties, any new normative instrument within the framework of UNESCO was adopted to cover other regions after the approval of the international recommendation
- 3- However, recently (at the last session of the General Conference in 2005), an attempt was made to obtain from Member States approval of a document – which should not be a normative or a standard-setting instrument - related to the adoption of “guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education”. This document, according to OECD, should “provide an international framework to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision and disreputable providers”. The guidelines should not be binding, nor should they be considered as a normative instrument. But they are receiving a treatment that the recommendation adopted by the UNESCO Executive Board and General Conference in 1993 never received. The UNESCO Secretariat, together with OECD, has a plan of action for stimulating its implementation, and it is pushing the regional committees to utilize guidelines and the joint UNESCO-Council of Europe Convention (1997) as a model for the renewal of the UNESCO’s conventions on the recognition of studies and diplomas of all other regions.

UNESCO’S ACTION IN THE FIELD OF RECOGNITION

All this is surprising. In fact, UNESCO began to take action in the field of the equivalence and recognition of studies quite early in its history (René Occhs, 1986). Activities intended to establish equivalences were included in the very first programmes of the Organization. At the beginning of the 1960s, UNESCO undertook a series of activities in this field, in conjunction with the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the International Association of University Professors and Lectures (IAUPL).

In 1963, following a decision by the Executive Board at its sixty-fifth session, UNESCO launched a systematic study on comparability and equivalence, which was examined by the same Executive Board at its sixty-sixth session. At that time, it was decided to analyse the technical and juridical legal aspects of the question to enable it eventually to adopt the necessary measures for examination by the General Conference in 1966, concerning the opportunity to draw up **an International Convention or a Recommendation addressed to Member States on the equivalence of secondary school-leaving certificates and of university diplomas and degrees.**

Since then, a long process has developed. At the very beginning, **at the end of the sixties, the General Conference considered it premature to adopt either an international**

convention or an international recommendation on this subject. Instead, it decided to implement a long-term programme of systematic action relative to international comparability, equivalence and recognition of certificates, diplomas and degrees.

Since the beginning of the seventies, UNESCO has focused its efforts on the preparation and adoption of regional conventions. **The regional dimension was considered an important link between the national and the international levels, since it corresponds to a reality determined by widely shared cultural characteristics.** They should serve also as a framework for bilateral or sub-regional agreements on this subject.

The first regional convention on the recognition of studies and diplomas on higher education was adopted for Latin America and the Caribbean in 1974. This was followed by the Arab and European States bordering the Mediterranean (1976), the Arab States (1978), the European Region (1979), African States (1981), and Asia and the Pacific (1983). The various regional conventions were conceived so as to lead to an ultimate objective, namely the elaboration of an international convention, as envisaged by the General Conference at its fifteenth session. They took into account regional prospects, as well as the fact that the mobility of students and specialists implied not only moving from one country to another within a given region, but also and each time more frequently, from one region to another, with consequences for both developing and developed countries. This is the reason why the General Conference set as an objective the elaboration of an international convention at the end of this process. These conventions were in advance of their time. For example, they established that when applying criteria for the evaluation of a person's qualification for admission to higher levels of education or for occupations, not only diplomas, certificates and degrees obtained, but also the knowledge and experience acquired are taken into consideration.

The accent was shifted, due to these UNESCO normative instruments, from a formal equivalence assessed arbitrarily to an evaluation of the competences of individuals. The conventions took into consideration the major trends and tendencies in education in the past century to meet more effectively the needs, realities and aspirations of contemporary societies.

Equally, they had in mind as goals "the development of the human personality and the comprehension, tolerance and friendship among nations", as well as all goals relating to the rights of man assigned to education by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international covenants relating to human rights, adopted by the United Nations and written down in the convention of UNESCO, concerning the fight against discrimination in the field of education.

The conventions were also "progressive" when dealing with preparation for the world of work. The recognition of the value of knowledge and experience acquired outside school, the setting up of educational structures intended to permit the resumption of studies for students obliged to interrupt them, the alternation of study and work, all needs that until now have been important were considered. Lifelong education, the democratization of education, the adoption and application of an educational policy taking into account structural, economic and technological developments, as well as social change and the

cultural contexts of each country were included in the adopted texts of these conventions. The notion of phases of study, until now a “progressive” idea compared to that of cycles, was also introduced, making concrete the conditions, for the purposes of evaluation, of taking into account levels of competence, partial studies, and the particular experience of individuals.

The conventions were adopted to provide an instrument to improve co-operation, without of course solving all problems. The conventions were realistic and dealt with questions that today are more than up-to-date at this turn of a century. They did not exempt candidates for higher education from “complying with the conditions (other than those relating to the holding of a diploma) that may be required for admission to the higher education or research institution concerned of the receiving state”. Also, they did not exempt them from satisfying, with a view to the practice of a profession, “any other conditions (in addition to a diploma, title or degree), which may be laid down by the competent governmental or professional authorities for the practice of the profession concerned”. The conventions were considered as a starting point to improve co-operation in this field, hence the extremely important role of the mechanisms for implementation. First of all, national bodies have an essential role to play as the regional committees composed of the representatives of the Contracting States, which should make concrete recommendations to the Contracting States, whenever necessary, for the implementation of the Convention. Independently of the enormous work they accomplished, there seems to be no doubt that the functioning of these committees became a weak point in the implementation of the conventions. As far as principles are concerned, even if certain points can be highlighted better, there is no doubt that the UNESCO conventions are still up-to-date and give a satisfactory response to educational needs.

In the nineties, UNESCO also started to take initiatives aimed at reinforcing co-operation among the committees of the different regions.

In 1988, with all regions having adopted their own specific conventions, the Secretariat was called upon to deal with the elaboration of the draft of an international convention. A strict timetable was prepared, in accordance with the rigid rules of UNESCO in this field. A preliminary study was made, but during the implementation of these activities it became clear that Member States felt that not all obstacles were solved, with a view to the adoption of an international convention, of a rigid binding instrument, in this field.

But contrary to what they felt during the initial period of this process in the second half of the sixties, they were of the view that an international recommendation, putting together the basic principles adopted by all the conventions and establishing an international non binding framework for the development of co-operation, could and should be established. Initially, the idea was to submit a text to the General Conference in 1991 (26th session), but negotiations were long. Member States were cautious, and finally it was only in November 1993, at its 27th session, that the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education. It was a provisional achievement of a process started at the First General Conference of UNESCO, when measures were earmarked for “immediate action in favour of international

comprehension". At this time also, the creation of an Information Centre was requested to prepare a survey of equivalences.

PRESENT CHALLENGES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

What are the current major challenges for higher education at the beginning of this century?

If one looks at the Declaration of the World Conference on Higher Education (1998), we can list them in a succinct way:

- **Democratization of access** (Article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
- Contribution to the **sustainable development and improvement of the society** (educating highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens; developing and enhancing its critical and forward-looking function, enjoying full academic autonomy and freedom, being **relevant**, being assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do, improving the relations with the world of work; basing their long-term orientations on societal aims and needs, including **the respect of cultures** and environment protection; having as priority to establish **links with all levels of education**; **to be diversified** and establish programmes in a lifelong perspective, Seeing **quality as a multidimensional concept, avoiding uniformity** and being assessed through transparent internal and external evaluation; improving permanently action for staff development; putting students at the centre of their concerns; ensuring the participation of women in higher education; using the potential of new information and communication technologies; being considered as a public service and reinforcing its international dimension, through networking and a policy of **co-operation based on sharing, solidarity and equity, in which the application of normative instruments for the recognition of studies and diplomas are an essential part of strategies to be adopted**).

All these needs are covered – most of them almost in an explicit way - at least in an implicit way in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 13 November 1993.

Let us mention a few points to confirm this statement.

- Education, higher education in particular, is seen as a human right, knowledge is universal, and knowledge and learning must be more accessible to each individual, the diversity of cultures and of higher education systems must be preserved and promoted.
- The international dimension is a key factor nowadays and the mobility of students, researchers, teachers and specialists is essential.
- Due to the great diversity of higher education in all its components, it is necessary to put into practice policies for evaluating competences that take into account the qualifications obtained, but also the courses of study taken and the skills, knowledge and experience acquired.

The recommendation takes into account the need to bear in mind the existence of partial studies. It insists on the role States must play to establish that “recognition” of a foreign qualification in higher education means its acceptance by the competent authorities of the State concerned (whether they be governmental or non-governmental) as entitling its holder to be considered under the same conditions as those holding a comparable qualification.....

Like all the regional conventions adopted under UNESCO’s supervision, it is a reminder that all these principles should be implemented without prejudice to the legal and professional rules or procedures in force in the States concerned.

The recommendation was also a progressive document, and it adopted a measure that has turned out to be extremely important now in this period of globalization, with the development of courses transmitted and frequently sold through the Internet, with a shift in values whereby higher education instead of being seen as a public service and a human right is looked upon as a commodity. The recommendation states: “Recognition of a qualification or certificate may not give a greater right to consideration in another State than in the State in which it was conferred”.

In establishing procedures for evaluating qualifications for all purposes covered by the recommendation, this instrument establishes that the wide diversity of institutions, types of study, programme content and teaching methods, **including distance teaching and other non-traditional forms of higher education, should be taken into consideration.**

Institutions of higher education in each Member State should work together and with national bodies in order to establish, as far as this is possible, common or comparable policies with respect to the evaluation of qualifications, in line with the principles set forth in this recommendation.

Member States should encourage the setting up of mechanisms, such as evaluation and accrediting bodies, for the purpose of assuring the quality of higher education studies, and they should also encourage international co-operation among such mechanisms and bodies.

Briefly, after almost fifty years (1946-1993) of experiences, studies, reflections in the field of the recognition of studies, UNESCOs Member States adopted by consensus an instrument that was non binding instrument but presented very clearly principles aimed at establishing a system in which:

- 1- The notion of a recognition that respects cultural diversity and the different systems prevails over the concept of equivalence, based as it is on an authoritarian concept of insisting that systems should be identical.
- 2- The recommendation, based on the experience of regional conventions, takes into account the major trends and tendencies in education in the last decades, meeting the needs, realities and aspirations of modern societies.
- 3- It takes into account the progress of technologies and stimulates co-operation, based on the democratization of the access to, and sharing of, knowledge

- 4- It recognizes the role States should play in this field either directly or through delegations according to national laws.
- 5- It calls attention to harmonization with the world of work and links with other levels of education.
- 6- It considers the need for evaluation based on the principles of the recommendation.
- 7- It respects the cultural diversity.

REASONS FOR THE ABANDONMENT?

Suddenly, with the justification that in 1997, a new European Convention was established, the convention adopted under the umbrella of UNESCO and the Council of Europe (which used to have also several conventions on this subject and considerable regional experience), and the fact that studies are being undertaken to renew conventions in all the other regions (based, but this is not said, on the European UNESCO-Council of Europe convention), **almost fifty years of studies, experiences, work, negotiations are being discarded.**

One may ask if the strategy is to abandon this normative instrument adopted by the General Conference and to start to utilize as a reference the document elaborated by OECD and the UNESCO Secretariat. This document, it should be recalled, was not adopted by Member States at the General Conference held in 2005, as it was suggested previously in a draft resolution presented to the Executive Board during its hundred and seventy-first session. The Secretariat presented a draft resolution inviting the Director General to include on the provisional agenda of the 35th session of the General Conference **an item proposing the endorsement of the Draft Guidelines**. Instead, the Executive Board invited the Director General “to add an agenda item with a view to the further discussion of the draft non binding guidelines”. Finally, at its 35th session, the General Conference **took note “that the Director-General was planning to issue the Guidelines as a Secretariat Document”**. The General Conference also decided to allow the Secretariat to collaborate in the implementation of these guidelines, upon request made by any Member State or, **when requested**, to “provide assistance to the regional committees for putting them to use”.

This document deals with cross-border higher education and apparently intends to stimulate the creation of an international system of accreditation in higher education. The Document was approved by OECD. Several international and regional university associations criticized these guidelines on the grounds that it did not give importance to relevance for higher education. The International Association of Universities and 35 other university associations signed a different document on this subject. This is officially a non-binding document, but the UNESCO Secretariat, together with OECD, is stimulating its application all over the world, and in the various regions, the document is presented as a basis for the renewal of regional conventions.

In addition, the guidelines make concrete suggestions for improving the systems, and are all based in practice on the European UNESCO/Council of Europe Convention of 1997. In other words, there is a clear risk of ‘Eurocentrism’. The **regional approach** UNESCO used since its inception has been abandoned and a model (a single model?) is starting to be used. Does using a unique model now mean that practices in this field will abandon recognition and come back to equivalences? In this case, what about cultural diversity? What about the diversity of systems? What about relevance and the need to take into account the needs of each country? What about the role States should play directly or through the system of delegation based on national laws? What are the principles that will serve as the basis for co-operation in this field: solidarity or commercialization? Which organizations will be effectively responsible for applying these guidelines and, if an international system of accreditation is adopted, what about quality?

WILL THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION BECOME THE UNIVERSAL CONVENTION?

A final question should be raised. An analysis of the way this question has been treated during the last few years can lead one to believe that the **UNESCO/Council of Europe Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (1987) could be transformed into the Universal Convention that UNESCO failed to achieve after half a century of work.**

European States declared in the Preamble to this Convention that they were “conscious of the wide ranging changes in higher education in the European region since these conventions were adopted, resulting in considerably increased diversification within and between national higher education systems, and of the need to adapt the legal instruments and practice to reflect these developments”. One can argue that this reality affects all regions.

The European Convention is open to signature basically by the member States of the Council of Europe and the UNESCO Europe region. But these States must abstain from becoming a party to any other existing convention on this subject to which they are not already a party, with the exception of the International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering the Mediterranean.

The European States did not decide formally to abstain from becoming a party to conventions of other regions, but they decided (article XI.3 of their Convention) that after the entry into force of their Convention, any State may request accession to the Lisbon 1997 Convention. This access is strictly controlled. Any request to this effect shall be addressed to the Council of Europe or UNESCO but the decision to invite a State which so requests to accede to the European Convention shall be taken by a two-thirds majority of the European States that are parties to the convention. Until now - apparently - the only Member State whose access has become effective is Australia.

DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 7

**NON À DES SITUATIONS D'INJUSTICE,
OUI À UN MONDE DE LIBERTÉ ! -**

Conférence internationale sur la reconnaissance des études et la mobilité académique – Paris,
2-5 novembre 1992 - Allocution improvisée de Marco Antonio R. Dias, Directeur de la
Division de l'Enseignement Supérieur

La conférence qui s'achève maintenant a été complexe, comme l'est aussi le thème de la mobilité et ceux que vous avez analysés sur la reconnaissance des titres, des acquis et l'exode de cerveaux. La semaine dernière, s'est tenue, ici même, au Siège de l'UNESCO, une réunion d'experts gouvernementaux qui ont travaillé sur les projets de recommandation et de convention sur la reconnaissance d'études et de titres dans le domaine de l'enseignement supérieur.

Cette semaine, nous avons eu, en effet, sept réunions différentes: les réunions des comités régionaux d'application des conventions régionales sur la reconnaissance des titres et des diplômes de l'enseignement supérieur, les ateliers de formation, les plénières qui ont constitué le noyau de la Conférence et qui ont favorisé une réflexion sur des thèmes directement liés à la mobilité et qui avaient été soulevés, à plusieurs reprises, à l'occasion de réunions et études régionales organisées par l'UNESCO, au cours des dernières années:

- Mobilité internationale dans l'enseignement supérieur et exode de cerveaux;
- Assurance de la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur et reconnaissance d'études;
- Reconnaissance des compétences et des acquis.

Vos réflexions, vos commentaires, seront dûment pris en compte dans le Programme et budget de l'UNESCO pour 1994-1995 en cours d'élaboration, et se répercuteront dans l'action que l'Organisation entreprend dans ces domaines. C'est un engagement formel de la part du Secrétariat. Ainsi, votre Conférence s'est tenue à un moment opportun. Le Plan d'action que vous avez analysé et amélioré sera donc également pris en considération.

Plus important encore, Monsieur le Président, est le fait que nous vivons dans un contexte de changement, de mutation. Aucun pays ne peut pas se suffire à lui-même. L'interdépendance est une réalité et une nécessité.

L'Europe change, tout le monde le sait, c'est à la une des journaux du monde entier, pratiquement tous les jours.

Pourtant, le changement est universel.

De nouveaux groupes, de nouveaux blocs se forment ou des anciens se consolident en Asie et dans le Pacifique, dans les Amériques (exemple: Traité du libre échange, au Nord, Mercosur au Sud), en Afrique et dans les Etats Arabes.

Il est important de signaler l'importance qu'on accorde, dans toutes ces initiatives, à l'enseignement supérieur. En Asie et dans le Pacifique, par exemple, à la suite d'une proposition de la Délégation de l'Iran lors de la dernière session de la Conférence générale de l'UNESCO, le renforcement de la coopération dans le domaine de l'enseignement supérieur est étudiée, de nouvelles modalités sont analysées par des experts de la région.

En Amérique latine, dans les rencontres des dirigeants des pays qui ont lancé

MERCOSUR -important programme d'intégration sous-régionale- la question de la mobilité est apparue comme essentielle et il y a juste quelques semaines, des experts se sont réunis pour étudier les modalités pour le renforcement de la coopération au niveau supérieur en Amérique du Sud.

Le monde change, c'est une réalité.

Le système des Nations Unies, aussi.

La Conférence mondiale sur le développement et l'environnement à Rio de Janeiro a établi de nouvelles bases pour une action globale en faveur du développement durable.

Par ailleurs, le Secrétaire général des Nations Unies a présenté deux documents qui sont à la base de la réfection actuelle sur la nouvelle société que l'on veut établir pour le monde. Il s'agit de l'Agenda pour la paix et de I.D.S. "International Development Strategy", où la formation des ressources humaines est considérée comme l'élément fondamental et le rôle des universités, visible et essentiel. L'action de l'UNESCO dans le domaine de la mobilité, objet de cette conférence, ainsi que le programme UNITWIN font partie de la contribution de l'UNESCO aux objectifs définis par ce document.

En mai 68, dans un mouvement qui aujourd'hui appartient à l'histoire, les étudiants affichaient sur les murs des universités de mots d'ordre propres à la jeunesse de l'époque, mais qui, dans certains cas, peuvent s'appliquer à l'exercice que vous avez entrepris.

"Transformez vos rêves en réalité" disaient les étudiants".

Que l'action que vous êtes en train d'entamer dans le domaine de la mobilité contribue à transformer en réalité deux rêves de nos temps, lesquels en réalité, ne forment que les deux facettes d'un seul et même rêve:

- Non à des situations d'injustice, à un développement inégal, à plusieurs vitesses;
- Oui, à un monde de liberté, de compréhension et de collaboration.

DOCUMENTO NÚMERO 8

DÉFIS POLITIQUES DE L'ÉVALUATION DANS LE CONTEXTE DE LA MONDIALISATION

Séminaire International – l'Université en questions : les échecs des tentatives de réforme"- Organisé dans les locaux de la Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le progrès de l'homme- Paris - 8-9 mars 2007- Prof. Marco Antonio R. Dias- Représentant de l'UNU auprès de l'UNESCO

INTRODUCTION

Ce qui les organisateurs de cette rencontre ont prévu en proposant une discussion sur les défis politiques de l'accréditation, consiste en effet à reprendre des discussions qui ont eu lieu récemment à Barcelone, à l'occasion de la Troisième Conférence Internationale sur l'Enseignement Supérieur, organisée par GUNI –Global University Network for Innovation- dans les locaux de l'Université Polytechnique de Barcelone, du 27 au 29 novembre 2006. À cette occasion, ensemble avec le recteur de l'Université des Nations Unies, Hans Van Ginkel, j'ai eu l'occasion de participer au débat sur ce sujet, en présentant un document titré "Institutional and Political Challenges of Accreditation at the International Level".⁶

Il s'agit s'un thème d'actualité, important en soi et aussi car il touche un domaine qui fait l'objet de manipulations énormes auprès de la communauté universitaire et d'autorités gouvernementales dans le monde entier.

Examinons rapidement des éléments de base qui pourront permettre à quiconque y manifeste un intérêt à se positionner sur l'enjeu en discussion. **L'accréditation**, telle qu'elle est traitée de nos jours, constitue un processus social. Or, tout processus a un point de départ, une phase intermédiaire qui parfois est assez longue et qui, à la fin, aboutit avec l'accomplissement des objectifs fixés ou par la définition d'un objectif àachever. Ceci est un élément essentiel de la question.

SUPERPOSITION DE PROCESSUS

Mais, attention!

Les processus se superposent. À l'intérieur d'un processus parfois il y a des sous-processus qui interviennent, Certains ayant la tendance à partir d'un certain moment à devenir autonomes ou indépendants de ses origines. Et, assez fréquemment, quand un processus arrive à son aboutissement, cela marque normalement le départ d'un nouveau processus. Il y a donc une dynamique permanente qui ne s'arrête jamais. C'est comme dans l'Histoire. Un cycle s'achève, un nouveau prend immédiatement la relève.

⁶ Le document, dont l'original est en Anglais, a été publié comme chapitre de « Higher Education in the World 2007 – Accreditation for Quality assurance : what is at stake ? » dans GUNI Series on the Social Commitment of Universities 2- GUNI- Palgrave Macmillan 2007, pgs. 37 a 57- Une version en espagnol «Retos Institucionales y políticos de la acreditación en el ámbito internacional » fue publicada en diciembre de 2006 por GUNI e Ediciones Mundi-Prensa- dans «La educación superior en el mundo 2007 – Acreditación para la garantía de la calidad: Que está en juego?» número 2 de la Serie GUNI sobre el compromiso social de las universidades

Donc, pour comprendre ce qui se passe de nos jours, revenons au fait que la fin de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale en 1945 a marqué la fin d'un processus. Les partisans du nazi-fascisme n'avaient pas atteint leurs objectifs, ce qui a permis, dans un certains sens, qu'à la fin des années quarante et au début des années cinquante, l'humanité a assisté un retour à certains valeurs de l'Iluminisme, la période des lumières (the enlightenment).

Je pense que personne ne contestera le fait que c'est dans la deuxième partie du Siècle XX qui s'est renforcée l'idée de démocratie, de relations internationales entre égaux, de coopération basée sur la solidarité. Dans cette période ont été créées des organismes comme l'UNESCO, où dans sa charte de constitution, ont été inscrits des principes basés sur le droit des hommes et sur la nécessité de la paix. C'était aussi en ce moment que les Etats membres des Nations Unies ont approuvé la Déclaration universelle des Droits de l'homme, qui cinquante ans plus tard –en 1998- a servi de base aux résolutions de la Conférence Mondiale sur l'enseignement supérieur organisée par l'UNESCO à Paris.

La fin des années quarante a marqué le départ d'un long processus qui a eu une phase intermédiaire assez longue et qui a abouti récemment avec un moment de gloire pour l'UNESCO avec l'approbation, pendant sa conférence générale de 2005, de la convention sur la diversité culturelle, un instrument normatif, coercitif, qui a établi un cadre où tous les composants du développement humain, y compris l'enseignement supérieur, ont l'obligation de reconnaître que les hommes comme les Etats sont différents et que, en conséquence la démocratie ne peut pas coexister avec l'imposition de modèles uniques.

CONCEPTION DE DÉVELOPPEMENT INADEQUATE

Cependant, le processus intermédiaire a été réellement long. Pendant les années 50 et 60, la conception de développement que les organisations internationales transmettaient à ses membres avait comme modèle des standards dominants dans les grandes puissances. Pour les autres, le développement serait la conformation ou l'adéquation ou l'adaptation ou même l'imitation des standards dominants. Ce principe a été la base de la théorie diffusionniste appliquée en particulier aux moyens de communication, au développement rural, aux industries culturelles, à la culture «tout court».

Mais le processus débuté avec l'approbation de la Déclaration des Droits de l'homme et la création de l'UNESCO, a provoqué ou donné l'opportunité au lancement de plusieurs sous-processus, parmi eux, celui qui visait à considérer l'éducation pour tous, dans tous ses niveaux, comme un droit humain.

Pour atteindre ce but, la coopération basée sur la solidarité était considérée fondamentale. Et, pour cela, le transfert de connaissances y la coopération dans le domaine scientifique ont été vues comme essentielles dans le processus.

Des conséquences ont été tirées de ces principes :

- 1- depuis sa création, l'UNESCO comme d'autres organisations ont entamé des activités en vue de l'équivalence des études et des diplômes;
- 2- des mesures ont été prises pour la création de l'Association Internationale des Universités chargée de développer la coopération interuniversitaire, en particulier à travers les processus de reconnaissance d'études;
- 3- depuis 1966, des débats ont eu lieu sur l'opportunité d'élaborer une recommandation ou une convention internationale sur l'équivalence de diplômes.

Très rapidement, les représentants des Etats membres de l'UNESCO ont constaté que l'idée d'une convention internationale mondiale, avec règles communes pour tous les pays de toutes les régions, n'était pas mûre,

L'APPROCHE RÉGIONALE

Ils ont donc préféré d'adopter une approche régionale, en partant de la constatation qu'au niveau régional, des éléments communs permettraient une approche capable de motiver les Etats membres et les communautés académiques à agir ensemble. En conséquence, des décisions ont été prises pour entamer un long processus où l'aboutissement serait un instrument universel, basé sur l'expérience préalable de coopération qui se serait développée au niveau régional. On partait donc du particulier pour arriver à l'universel.

Ce processus s'est achevé en 1993, après l'adoption et approbation de conventions dans toutes les régions du monde et d'une recommandation sur la reconnaissance de titres et diplômes, de caractère international.

La recommandation, ses principes, pourraient être considérées comme du vrai patrimoine intellectuel de l'humanité. Son utilisation pourrait être le meilleur antidote contre les essais d'adoption de modèles uniques, de standards universels contraires à la diversité culturelle.

Fruit d'une longue maturation dans toutes les régions du monde, elle ne peut pas être remplacée par de nouveaux documents qui ne refléteraient que les intérêts d'un petit groupe de pays et qui n'ont aucune possibilité de légitimation obtenue par un long processus d'élaboration d'un instrument normatif. Et, pourtant, depuis une dizaine d'années, on essaye de consolider la transformation de l'éducation en marchandise, et les tendances dans des organismes qui s'occupent de ce type de questions vont plutôt dans le sens de donner abri à des initiatives que visent plutôt à la manipulation et à la domination d'un grand nombre par un groupe assez réduit d'Etats.

LES PRINCIPES DE BASE

Il faut donc, plus que jamais, insister sur certains principes de base :

- 1- l'éducation à tous les niveaux est un droit humain;
- 2- la qualité et la pertinence sont des concepts associés. La qualité ne peut pas être formelle. Elle doit être associée à la construction d'une société meilleure et plus juste que l'actuelle. Pour cela, il faut respecter la diversité culturelle et des monopoles sont inacceptables ;
- 3- L'enseignement supérieur est un bien public, indépendamment de la nature du fournisseur des services relatifs à ce niveau.

Et ici, finalement, nous arrivons à la question de l'accréditation et à la question soulevée par les organisateurs de cette rencontre. Jusqu'aux années quatre vingt dix, dans une grande partie du monde, l'idée d'évaluation et, encore plus, celle d'accréditation n'avaient pas une bonne presse dans les milieux académiques. Ces processus étaient vus comme une atteinte à l'idée de l'autonomie universitaire.

L'UNESCO, comme d'autres organisations, se sont efforcées pendant des décennies pour avancer l'idée d'une culture d'évaluation, comme un instrument pour rendre l'action des institutions plus pertinente et ayant plus de qualité. Un effort s'est généralisé pour montrer que la liberté n'excluait pas la responsabilité sociale et qu'en fin de compte les institutions d'enseignement supérieur devaient rendre comptes à la société.

QUI VA ÉVALUER ET ACCRÉDITER?

Dans l'évolution de ces processus, des questions à juste titre se sont posées naturellement: Qui va évaluer? Qui va accréditer? Avec quels critères? Quel type de qualité on cherche à établir? Quel est le concept de qualité subjacent à toutes ces actions? Avec quoi doit-on comparer l'action des universités pour savoir si ses activités sont pertinentes et de qualité ?

Si on lit bien les principes adoptés par la CMES en 1998, les établissements d'enseignement supérieur doivent, dans le cadre de leur autonomie, identifier leurs missions. Cela pourrait être le point de départ pour une évaluation. Comparer l'idéal qu'une institution s'est octroyé librement en accord avec la société avec ce qu'elle accomplit en réalité, voilà une méthode juste et démocratique. La pensée unique cependant s'oriente vers la création de standards pré-établis, en général par des pays plus riches ou en accord avec la réalité et les intérêts des pays qui dominent la vie internationale. Peut-on parler de qualité dans ce cas, si les objectifs sont 'débranchés' de la réalité sociale, politique, financière des établissements?

Il y a en ce moment trois processus en cours au niveau international qui semblent séparés, mais qui, en effet, constituent des éléments d'une seule réalité. Ce sont:

1- Déclaration de Bologne

La déclaration de Bologne est devenue une espèce d'accord parmi plus de 30 pays européens visant à réformer les systèmes d'enseignement supérieur d'une façon consistante et cohérente pour les pays qui constituent cette région.

Ceux qui ont lancé le processus avaient dans leurs têtes une réalité dont les traits principaux étaient:

- une partie croissante de la création de nouvelles connaissances a lieu en dehors de l'Europe;
- l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur en Europe en général est toujours bas, surtout quand la comparaison est faite avec d'autres régions;
- L'Europe ne serait pas très performante dans la transformation de la connaissance universitaire en innovation dans l'économie;
- Plusieurs pays d'autres régions deviennent des pôles plus attractifs pour des étudiants qui viennent des pays en voie de développement.

Notons que la déclaration de Bologne n'est pas un traité, elle n'a pas le format d'un instrument normatif, elle n'a pas été soumise aux parlements, mais sa mise en œuvre atteint pratiquement l'Europe toute entière. S'agit-il d'une nouvelle méthode dans les relations internationales?

Quelles sont les innovations proposées par Bologne ?

D'une façon générale, ce qu'on propose inclut :

- L'adoption d'un système qui permet la lecture facile des éléments de chaque système et la comparaison entre les divers systèmes européens d'enseignement supérieur;
- L'adoption d'un système base en deux cycles: gradué et post-gradué (undergraduate and graduate), ou un système de base de trois cycles (3 + 2 + 4), correspondant aux degrés de bachelier, de maîtrise et du doctorat, en accord avec le système appliqué depuis des longues décennies aux Etats-Unis.
- L'établissement d'un système de crédits qui peuvent être acquis non seulement à travers des cours traditionnels mais qui peuvent être obtenus par des moyens en dehors de l'enseignement supérieur proprement dit ;

- La promotion de la mobilité des étudiants, des enseignants des chercheurs et du personnel administrative;
- La promotion de la dimension européenne dans l'enseignement supérieur;
- La promotion de la coopération européenne dans le domaine de la garantie de la qualité.

La réforme de Boulogne est une nécessité en Europe, tous sont d'accord. Là où le bâton rompt est provoqué par deux facteurs:

- 1- Il n'y a aucun doute que la réforme de Boulogne est basé sur le modèle nord-américain qui a toujours provoqué une grande admiration en Claude Allègre, le principal moteur, au départ, de ce processus. Si avec la méthode qui est nord-américaine, viennent les contenus des cours universitaires des Etats-Unis, là un problème sérieux pourra se poser. Cela pourra servir à la consolidation d'une pensée unique dans le monde. Pour ceux qui pensent que cela est impossible, il suffit de voir les directives de l'Union européenne, toujours plus libérales, toujours en faveur d'une conception de société où le social est en deuxième plan.
- 2- La réforme de Bologne vise aussi à rendre les systèmes européens plus compétitifs au niveau international. De nouveau Claude Allègre, en lançant l'opération, il a mentionné l'Australie comme le pays détenant le modèle à être imité par la France. Et là on pense nécessairement à l'exportation de produits éducationnels, aujourd'hui un élément important dans l'économie de ce pays. La question que se pose dans ce cas concerne la coopération avec les autres régions, notamment l'Afrique et l'Amérique latine.

Pour l'Amérique latine, en particulier, lutter pour créer un espace latino-américain-européen peut signifier trouver des meilleures conditions de survie dans un monde globalisé où personne ne peut vivre seul. Mais, adopter automatiquement n'importe quel modèle éducatif, dans n'importe quel niveau, est suicidaire et contraire aux principes de la diversité culturelle et de l'autonomie et de l'indépendance des peuples.

En plus, on ne peut pas ignorer qu'en Amérique Latine depuis la fin des années 50 et le début des années 60, des universités comme celle de Costa Rica, de los Andes (Colombie), de Brasília (Brésil) et de Concepción (Chili) ont adopté des systèmes similaires. Il serait intelligent –y compris pour les européens, de voir ce qui a marché et surtout ce qui n'a pas marché dans le système. Demander à des latino-américains de copier un modèle similaire à celui qu'ils ont adopté dans les années soixante serait ridicule.

2- SYSTÈME INTERNATIONAL D'ACCREDITATION

Les deux autres processus en cours au niveau international, absolument interconnectés, sont le GATS (Global Agreement for Trade in Services) ou AGCS (Accord Général pour le Commerce de Services) et l'établissement d'un système international d'accréditation.

On n'a déjà beaucoup parlé de ces questions – sur Internet on trouve des travaux sur la question⁷ mais rappelons certains éléments de ce processus:

- 1- Dans la deuxième partie des années 90s, aux Etats-Unis, un groupe avec le nom significatif de GATE (Global Alliance for Transnational Education) a essayé de définir des principes et critères d'accréditation, de se constituer en agence d'accréditation, tout en étant, en même temps, fournisseur de produits éducatifs. Il s'agissait d'un mélange d'agendas insoutenable et le groupe a implosé.
- 2- Plus récemment, un nouveau document -cette fois sous le leadership de l'OCDE- a été élaboré pour définir des principes qui –ce serait naïf de ne pas imaginer- servira à développer et consolider des systèmes internationaux d'accréditation. L'élaboration du document n'a pas suivi les méthodes des instruments normatifs, mais il est traité comme si en était un. Face à des critiques, le document est devenu «politiquement correct», on mentionne par exemple la diversité culturelle, mais il ne met en relief la pertinence ni le compromis social des universités. Le document en plus est eurocentriste, tout tourne autour de l'expérience des pays signataires de la convention de Lisbonne sur la reconnaissance des études et des diplômes en Europe, qui couvre l'Europe, mais aussi les Etats-Unis, Canada, Israël et aussi l'Australie qui a été autorisée à ratifier cette convention.
- 3- Dans ces circonstances, étant donné que dans un processus d'accréditation dans un cadre de commercialisation, celui qui contrôle le système aura des avantages évidentes, de nouveau les questions de base se posent: dans un système international ainsi fondé qui va évaluer, qui va accréditer, qui va contrôler le système? Le fait que les révisions en cours des diverses conventions régionales sur la reconnaissance des études et des diplômes se base sur la convention européenne, et une proposition de ne pas prendre en considération dans ce processus de la recommandation ne peut qu'inquiéter ceux qui soutiennent les principes de la diversité culturelle.

L'important donc est de revenir et à l'examen des rapports entre l'éducation et l'enseignement supérieur et l'idée de service public. Rapellons encore une fois que celui-ci est basé sur trois principes de base :

⁷ Voir, par exemple, le site de l'Internationale de l'éducation, le syndicat mondial des enseignants

Equité- ce qui signifie que l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur doit être ouvert à tous sans discrimination.

Continuité ou permanence, ce qui implique que le service doit être fourni de façon continue sans interruption, tout le temps

Adaptabilité – ce qui implique la capacité du service de s'adapter aux nouvelles situations, à fin de, dans n'importe quel cadre, garantir l'équité et y la continuité.

LES DÉFIS POLITIQUES

Pour revenir à la question posée par les organisateurs de cette rencontre, c'est-à-dire, les défis politiques des systèmes d'accréditation, nous pourrons conclure qu'on essaye de réorienter le processus de façon à provoquer :

- 1- un silence sur la nécessité de la pertinence dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur;
- 2- une consolidation de procédures qui favoriseront la commercialisation de l'éducation en mettant les actions des établissements d'enseignement supérieur sous l'égide des principes de l'AGCS de l'Organisation Mondiale du Commerce;
- 3- un oubli des principes adoptés par la communauté internationale en à la fin du processus qui a abouti avec l'adoption d'une recommandation internationale sur la reconnaissance des études et des diplômes de caractère international;
- 4- un retour dans la pratique aux théories du développement qui soutenaient que le lien entre les cultures se fait à travers la domination des sociétés dites plus développées aux plus "primitives" Le progrès ne peut s'accomplir qu'à travers l'imitation de ce qui se fit dans un réduit nombre de pays qui dominent les processus internationaux d'interaction sociales.

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EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR EM UM TEMPO DE TRANSFORMAÇÃO

Novas Dinâmicas para a Responsabilidade Social

TRADUÇÃO DE:
Vera Muller



palgrave
macmillan



Porto Alegre
2009

EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR EM UM TEMPO DE TRANSFORMAÇÃO

Novas Dinâmicas para a Responsabilidade Social

© GUNI 2009 – Global University Network for Innovation

Título original: *Higher education at a time of transformation*

Primeira publicação em 2009, pela Palgrave Macmillan – Divisão da St. Martin's Press LLC
17s Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

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ISBN-13: 978-0-230-23337-9

Registro disponível em British Library e Library of Congress.

Edição em português publicada pela EDIPUCRS em 2009.

Tradução: Vera Muller -- colaboração parcial de Juliana Solano

Revisão: Patrícia Aragão; Fernanda Lisbôa; Caren Capaverde

Capa: Vinícius Xavier (finalização)

Editoração: Supernova Editora

Impressão e acabamento: Gráfica EPECÊ

Dados Internacionais de Catalogação na Publicação (CIP)

E24 Educação superior em um tempo de transformação : novas dinâmicas para a responsabilidade social / trad. Vera Muller. – Porto Alegre : EDIPUCRS, 2009.
xxiv ; 226 p.

Tradução de: Higher education at a time of transformation.

ISBN 978-85-7430-909-5

1. Educação Superior. 2. Universidade e Sociedade. 3. Globalização.
4. Universidades – Fins e Objetivos. 5. Responsabilidade Social.
6. Desenvolvimento Humano. 7. Desenvolvimento Social.
8. Conhecimento (Educação). I. Muller, Vera.

CDD 378

Ficha Catalográfica elaborada pelo Setor de Tratamento da Informação da BC-PUCRS



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PARTE IV

SÍNTESE DA

EDUCAÇÃO

SUPERIOR NO

MUNDO EM 2007

**Credenciamento para
Garantir Qualidade:
O que está em jogo?**

IV.1 QUESTÕES GLOBAIS

1 INTRODUÇÃO

Higher Education in the World 2007, Accreditation for quality assurance: What is at stake? Explora o tema em profundidade. As questões globais e perspectivas regionais apresentam conhecimento e experiências sobre como são e deveriam ser tratadas para proteger a harmonia global na contribuição da educação superior (ES) à sociedade, levando a diversidade e evitando a uniformidade.

Garantia de qualidade e o papel do credenciamento: uma descrição geral, de Bikas C. Sanyal e Michaela Martin, explica os mecanismos para assegurar a qualidade. Segue-se uma discussão sobre os objetivos e os diferentes tipos de credenciamento. Também é feita uma descrição do processo e dos sistemas administrativos de credenciamento. Finalmente, são discutidas algumas estratégicas genéricas para credenciamento eficaz em níveis nacionais e institucionais.

Raízes históricas e sociais de regulamentação e credenciamento da educação superior para garantia de qualidade, de Colin Brock, oferece uma análise sobre a nação-estado europeu e os diferentes modelos de universidades; os efeitos de industrialização e globalização; a exportação da ideia da universidade europeia como um legado colonial, e o impacto do modelo americano e seu colonialismo cultural. Todos esses assuntos dizem respeito a noções de credenciamento e garantia de qualidade.

Desafios institucionais e políticos de credenciamento em nível internacional, de Hans J. A. van Ginkel e

Marco Antonio Rodrigues Dias, estuda o impacto da Conferência Mundial sobre Educação Superior (WCHE) (UNESCO, Paris, 1998) no desenvolvimento de uma visão de credenciamento. O texto enfatiza a importância do princípio de ES como bem público e as razões pelas quais a garantia de credenciamento deveria preservá-la.

A política internacional de garantia de qualidade e credenciamento: de instrumentos legais a comunidades de prática, de Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, revisa instrumentos-chave internacionais e examina tentativas globais de reconhecimento, garantia de qualidade e credenciamento. O texto destaca o papel de organizações internacionais nessa área, através de uma discussão da WCHE, do Fórum Global sobre Garantia de Qualidade Internacional e das diretrizes UNESCO/OECD sobre Provisão de Qualidade da Educação Superior Além Fronteiras.

Tabelas de classificação como instrumentos de políticas: a economia política de credibilidade, de Jamil Salmi e Alenoush Saroyan, examina o papel e a utilidade de tabelas de classificação. Esses instrumentos são cada vez mais empregados para medir e comparar o desempenho de instituições de educação superior (IES). No final o texto considera os méritos e a desvantagens desses instrumentos e faz algumas recomendações para políticos e IES e o público em geral.

A governança de credibilidade, de Mala Singh, enfoca combinações de governança para monitorar e administrar a garantia de qualidade, inclusive o credenciamento. A análise inclui combinações de governança em nível de sistema nacional (governo); nível de instituição/programa; nível de agência de garantia de qualidade. As implicações de governança de garantia de qualidade e credenciamento

“internacional” e provisão de além fronteiras também são discutidos.

Fraude acadêmica, credenciamento e garantia de qualidade: aprendendo com o passado e desafios para o futuro, de Jacques Hallah e Muriel Poisson, analisa a fraude acadêmica e práticas corruptas na ES, incluindo processos de garantia de qualidade e credenciamento. Seis estratégias-chave são examinadas para lidar com os desafios impostos pela fraude e corrupção. São oferecidas recomendações de políticas para os níveis regional, nacional e internacional.

Educação superior além fronteiras: questões de qualidade e implicações para credenciamento, de Jane Knight, enfoca questões-chave e implicações na educação superior além fronteiras e garantia de qualidade, fazendo referência especial ao credenciamento. Esses incluem o registro e o credenciamento dos diversos tipos novos de fornecedores estrangeiros, que sejam universidades tradicionais, empresas comerciais ou parcerias entre fornecedores locais/estrangeiros, públicos/privados com ou sem fins lucrativos.

Espaço internacional de credenciamento, de Judith S. Eaton, descreve quatro questões atuais que devem ser tratadas em um espaço internacional de credenciamento. O texto oferece cinco abordagens ou modelos para refletir sobre a administração de um tal espaço de forma que as questões sejam tratadas e as características desejáveis sejam mostradas. O texto conclui com desafios futuros de um tal espaço internacional.

4 DESAFIOS INSTITUCIONAIS E POLÍTICOS DE CREDENCIAMENTO EM NÍVEL INTERNACIONAL

Hans J. A. van Ginkel e
Marco Antonio Rodrigues Dias⁵

O credenciamento se tornou uma questão fundamental para a educação superior (ES) nos últimos anos. As razões para isso são bem conhecidas: o desenvolvimento de novas tecnologias, o progresso da educação virtual e a distância, a multiplicação de novos fornecedores, as tentativas de generalizar a transformação da educação em uma *commodity*, a internacionalização da ES e, como consequência, de todos esses fatores, a necessidade de sistemas confiáveis que assegurem a qualidade e a relevância das instituições e dos programas. Medidas em nível nacional, regional e internacional são apresentadas como justificadas a fim de assegurar qualidade e salvaguardar os países e os estudantes de "maus produtos educacionais" e de fornecedores de serviços educacionais fraudulentos.

Sistemas de credenciamento também são considerados instrumentos para permitir que a ES enfrente transformações na economia, na sociedade e na civilização que podem, de muitas formas, ser consideradas mais importantes do que as mudanças que ocorreram durante a Revolução Industrial. A pedra angular dessa evolução é o conhecimento. A criação de conhecimento e a maneira em que ele é tratado são cruciais tanto em países desenvolvidos como naqueles em desenvolvimento.

A sociedade está cada vez mais embasada no conhecimento, e essa evolução promoveu uma mudança nos valores. A solidariedade tende a desaparecer. A competição é de vital importância. Valores sociais, espirituais e coletivos correm o risco de serem substituídos por valores e comportamentos comerciais, materialistas e individuais.

Desde que se inseriu nesse contexto o credenciamento começou a ser tratado como um assunto premente, e não é difícil compreender que existem muitas razões para o surgimento de importantes questões básicas sobre o assunto. Precisamos deixar cada vez mais claro exatamente o que queremos alcançar. Credenciamento para quê? Que tipos de qualidades realmente queremos? Quem serão os guar-

diões do sistema? Quais serão seus critérios? Perguntas desse tipo devem ser especificadas e respondidas antes que quaisquer decisões sejam tomadas.

As implicações dos conceitos de credenciamento e dos métodos adotados nesse campo não são neutras e irão ter consequências não apenas em nível econômico ou financeiro, mas também, e particularmente, na vida cultural e política das instituições e nações. Muitos analistas acreditam que esses métodos com frequência refletem um conceito de sociedade mundial na qual as pessoas dos países em desenvolvimento são vistas como recebedores passivos em vez de parceiros ativos.

UM CONCEITO MULTIDIMENSIONAL

Desde o consenso da Conferência Mundial sobre Educação Superior (WCHE) em 1998, procedimentos de credenciamento, além de avaliações externas e internas, têm sido mais e mais acrescentados aos métodos empregados para chegar à qualidade e relevância. Novas controvérsias e divergências surgiram imediatamente, desta vez com relação aos padrões a serem utilizados como referência para definir e identificar a qualidade das instituições de ensino superior (IES) e de programas. O conceito nem sempre era claro.

Credenciamento deveria ser visto como o método para avaliar a qualidade de uma IES ou de um programa específico, autorizando o reconhecimento dentro de um sistema existente e especificado de ES.

A maioria dos participantes da WCHE em 1998 acolheram o que Gudmund Hernes and Michaela Martin (2005) chamaram de "adequação para um objetivo", em oposição à "abordagem com base em padrões". Na abordagem de adequação para um objetivo, um sistema de credenciamento deveria fornecer os elementos para análise da qualidade de desempenho e da relevância de uma instituição para atingir sua missão. Na abordagem com base em padrões, padrões detalhados, com frequência segundo experiências estrangeiras, são empregados para definir a qualidade de uma instituição ou programa.

De acordo com o conceito resultante das discussões na WCHE, a ES deve servir às necessidades e objetivos de desenvolvimento, baseando sua orientação a longo prazo nos objetivos e requisitos sociais, inclusive no respeito à cultura e proteção ambiental.

⁵ Hans J.A. van Ginkel and Marco Antonio Rodrigues Dfas (2007) Institutional and political challenges of accreditation at the international level, in GUNI (Ed.), *Higher Education in the World 2007, Accreditation for Quality Assurance: What is at Stake?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

No campo da ES, a aplicação do Consenso de Washington com maior intensidade produziu propostas tais como a de estimular a redução de participação do estado nas despesas sociais; diminuir o volume de investimentos públicos em ES; estimular o desenvolvimento de educação privada como um instrumento de igualdade; dar prioridade a aspectos comerciais em vez de considerações educacionais; e aceitar a ES como um bem comercial regulado de acordo com os princípios estabelecidos pela Organização Mundial do Comércio (OMC).

No mundo desenvolvido, mas também em alguns países emergentes, um processo de esquizofrenia está afetando um número significativo de IES. Internamente, em países onde elas estão localizadas, precisam ser consideradas como instituições públicas que fornecem bens públicos; mas em nível internacional, particularmente na sua relação com as instituições do mundo em desenvolvimento, servem como fornecedores de serviços comerciais e dão absoluta prioridade a lucros em vez de agirem com um espírito de solidariedade, compartilhando conhecimento. Em vez de cooperação, a senha é competição.

A certificação de qualidade agora se tornou mais complexa e envolve mais diretamente valores que não são de natureza acadêmica. O valor e a força da IES estão na sua diversidade no mundo. A qualidade e a relevância das IES, em conjunto com seus programas e diplomas, não podem ser julgadas em termos de determinados modelos, independentemente de quão perfeitos pareçam. Elas devem ser em última análise avaliadas dentro de um contexto em particular, e em um dado momento. Qualidade não pode ser extraída de um modelo universal e não pode surgir apenas de uma teoria e abstração ou, seguindo as atuais tentativas para a comercialização, ter como critério principal respostas aos interesses do mercado. A qualidade é o resultado de uma série de ações que respondem a precisas necessidades sociais em um momento específico.

Não é sem razão que a Convenção Regional da UNESCO sobre Reconhecimento de Estudos, Diplomas e Certificados chama a riqueza e diversidade de sistemas nacionais de ES um bem fundamental que deve ser preservado e promovido ainda mais. As convenções regionais foram instrumentos realistas, mas progressistas. Se conseguirem manter seu compromisso de respeito à diversidade de países e sistemas, elas fornecem um ponto de partida melhor do que os acordos rígidos que não oferecem espaço para orquestração, ou guias elaborados essencialmente baseados em experiências e modelos dos países desenvolvidos.

DEFINIÇÕES DE QUALIDADE

Aqui encontramos a principal dificuldade relacionada a credenciamento. O que exatamente é qualidade? Não existem definições claras nem para qualidade nem para o conceito de excelência, pois há muita subjetividade nessa área. As definições são com frequência “tautologias”, ou descrevem uma situação relacionada a um dado espaço ou tempo. Na verdade, a aparente objetividade de muitas afirmações e apresentações sobre métodos para se chegar à qualidade não consegue resolver essa questão básica. E isso não é novidade.

Os participantes da WCHE indicaram os elementos necessários para integrar o conceito inteiro de qualidade. Nesse sentido, eles também seguiram a linha descritiva e referenciada como qualidade, como um conceito multidimensional que abrange todas as principais funções e atividades da ES. Entretanto, eles não se limitaram a uma atitude descritiva. Eles foram além, ligando os conceitos de qualidade e relevância de uma forma pragmática e realista. Eles debateram e fizeram recomendações que até agora ainda não atraíram a devida atenção dos especialistas e aqueles responsáveis pelas políticas de ES.

Entre as sugestões, existe uma que recomenda que as IES, juntamente com a sociedade civil e pública, deveriam definir (ou redefinir) suas missões. Todas as mantenedoras de ES deveriam ser chamadas para participar desse exercício. Missões claras, definidas inicialmente como uma forma autônoma por todos os segmentos da universidade, e depois aprovadas pela sociedade a que as instituições devem servir, podem ser usadas como uma bandeira. Também deveriam ser utilizadas como metas a serem alcançadas e criar condições para que se façam avaliações adequadas, comparando o que as IES realmente atingem com o que a sociedade como um todo espera delas durante um período da sua história. Em outras palavras, esse seria um ótimo mecanismo para estabelecer padrões e criar um elemento de comparação adaptado a cada instituição e de acordo com as missões definidas de forma autônoma.

Essa abordagem se diferencia dos padrões comuns que estimulam as IES a buscarem modelos externos, esperando que se adaptem aos padrões que frequentemente não têm ligação com as fontes culturais da instituição ou com as necessidades da sociedade à qual a IES está ligada. Esse é o grande desafio atual com relação à adoção de sistemas de avaliação e credenciamento.

É claro que será empreendida uma discussão com todos os segmentos da sociedade – o debate será mais aberto, e os membros da comunidade acadêmica, mesmo antes de se decidirem pelo modelo

de universidade que querem, irão participar a fim de construir uma sociedade melhor para o país, a região e o mundo inteiro.

INICIATIVAS PRINCIPAIS

Por que as organizações internacionais estão tão interessadas nessa questão? Muitas coisas estão acontecendo ao mesmo tempo, e muitas vezes é difícil compreender as interações entre os elementos que parecem desconectados mas que, na verdade, tem bases e objetivos comuns. Vale a pena mencionar três processos que causaram considerável impacto no assunto que estamos examinando e que estão claramente interconectados.

1. A Declaração de Bolonha e sua rápida evolução. Organizações internacionais aparentemente decidiram transformar esse processo em um modelo a ser seguido por todo o mundo.
2. A definição de diretrizes para o estabelecimento de um sistema internacional de credenciamento, bem como seus impactos em instrumentos existentes e a posição das associações de IES.
3. A presença e a influência da OMC no campo da ES, particularmente em questões de credenciamento.

A DECLARAÇÃO DE BOLONHA

A Declaração de Bolonha visa reformar o sistema de ES da Europa de forma consistente. Seu objetivo final é criar um sistema europeu único e mais competitivo. Não é um tratado internacional, não constitui uma lei e não tem o formato dos instrumentos reguladores tradicionais como declarações, recomendações ou convenções, mas está sendo aplicado assim mesmo em toda a Europa e, através de mecanismos de cooperação, sua influência tem se estendido a outras regiões. Entre as mudanças estruturais que obtiveram amplo consenso ou, pelo menos, uma aceitação significativa, estão os seguintes:

- A adoção de um sistema de fácil leitura e graus comparáveis.
- A adoção de um sistema com base em dois ciclos principais, graduação e pós-graduação, e de um sistema básico de três ciclos (3+2+4) que correspondem a um bacharelado, um mestrado e um doutorado.
- O estabelecimento de um sistema de créditos que podem ser obtidos não apenas através de cursos tradicionais, mas também através de contextos externos à ES.
- A promoção de mobilidade para estudantes, professores, pesquisadores e funcionários administrativos.
- A promoção de dimensões europeias na ES.

- A promoção de cooperação europeia para garantia de qualidade.

É importante observar que a promoção de cooperação para garantia de qualidade é um dos fatores-chave para a convergência fortalecedora entre as IES em toda a Europa.

Um dos principais obstáculos à implantação do Processo Bolonha, porém, é como estabelecer uma convergência com base no modelo norte-americano, mas respeitando a diversidade cultural e a relevância das missões das IES na Europa no que diz respeito ao conteúdo e ambições.

Os riscos de adotar não apenas a estrutura e os métodos organizacionais do modelo dos EUA, mas também os conteúdos formatados conforme os diferentes contextos culturais, ainda não foram suficientemente analisados. E existe ainda o risco de se retornar a um modelo de equivalência baseado apenas no modelo norte-americano em vez de um sistema de reconhecimento em que diferenças são respeitadas.

Igualmente relevante é a necessidade de se formar uma Europa de cidadãos com base em atitudes humanistas e tolerância. Esse prospecto não está bem ressaltado nas ações que a Europa está empreendendo para criar uma área acadêmica comum.

Integração e harmonização com o mundo do trabalho são outros elementos essenciais na estratégia de modernização dos sistemas europeus. Se isso não for feito, as universidades treinarão pessoas que serão certamente condenadas ao desemprego, cujo nível já é excessivamente alto em muitos países europeus e em outras partes do mundo onde a precariedade se tornou pandêmica.

O mundo moderno ainda considera essencial a aquisição de habilidades conferida por um diploma de ES. Mas as IES não devem formar pessoas apenas para o dia de hoje. Programas de educação continuada deveriam ser desenvolvidos, mas estudantes deveriam aprender a aprender, aprender a ser, aprender a tomar iniciativas, além de aprender a conviver. Para conseguir desenvolver personalidades com essas habilidades, as IES deveriam desempenhar o papel de observadores, estudando suas sociedades, analisando sua evolução e trabalhando com prospectos.

DIRETRIZES E SISTEMA INTERNACIONAL DE CREDENCIAMENTO

Em 1995, foi criada uma organização com o nome sugestivo de Aliança Global para Educação Transnacional (GATE) para tratar da educação além fronteiras. Essa aliança elaborou um conjunto de princípios para isso, colaborou com a Divisão de Serviços da OMC e lançou o processo de certificação da GATE. Está claro que, apesar da participação de

algumas instituições, inclusive algumas de países hospedeiros, a GATE foi considerada propriedade de um empreendimento internacional, o qual estava de repente em posição de fornecer produtos educacionais e certificação de qualidade para os mesmos produtos. Era previsível que houvesse conflito entre os diferentes papéis que a GATE estava tentando desempenhar. Ela não poderia trabalhar assim e acabou “implodindo”.

A ideia de mais uma vez lançar um conjunto de princípios para a educação transnacional pode ser examinada através de um importante processo internacional de 2001, lançado com determinação e eficiência, aparentemente visando criar condições adequadas para estabelecer um sistema internacional de credenciamento ou, pelo menos, criar uma estrutura para as agências que tratam de processos de credenciamento. A OECD está mais uma vez envolvida ativamente nesse processo, e já começaram as discussões com a UNESCO. O objetivo final é resolver muitos problemas, mas existem alguns desafios por trás disso.

Durante a Conferência Geral da UNESCO em 2005, os países-membros reconheceram a existência de um documento com “diretrizes para provisão de qualidade da ES além fronteiras”, mas não o endossaram. Posteriormente o documento foi adotado sem quaisquer restrições pela OECD em 2005. Nesse documento, ficam claros os pontos de vista dos autores sobre a situação da ES numa época de educação transnacional.

Uma série de críticas apresentadas durante a elaboração desse documento foram levadas em consideração. Crítica proveniente de certas regiões também foi usada na elaboração do texto. Ele reconhece o papel importante de organizações não governamentais, tais como associações de ES, organizações estudantis, entidades de credenciamento e avaliação de credenciais, e entidades profissionais, para o fortalecimento de cooperação internacional para fornecer qualidade na ES além fronteiras.

Em muitos aspectos, o documento se tornou “politicamente correto”. Entretanto, ele não ressalta a importância da relevância e o compromisso social das universidades. A referência à relevância é fraca, parecendo ser um tipo de formalidade para responder às críticas que recebeu antecipadamente de países hospedeiros; além disso, o documento é claramente eurocentrado (segundo a tradição da UNESCO, esse conceito de Europa inclui EUA, Canadá e Israel).

Entidades de garantia de qualidade e credenciamento são convidadas a aplicarem na ES além fronteiras os princípios refletidos nos atuais documentos internacionais. As IES devem “onde relevante, usar códigos tais como o Código de Boas Práticas da UNESCO/Conselho da Europa sobre o

Fornecimento de Educação Transnacional e outros códigos relevantes”.

A Associação Internacional de Universidades (IAU) e 36 outras associações regionais e nacionais decidiram publicar outro documento (*Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders: A Statement on Behalf of Higher Education Institutions Worldwide*), que não foi apresentado em oposição ao primeiro, mas claramente tentava ressaltar a relevância na ES. E isso fez uma diferença! O documento assumiu uma posição contra os limites das estruturas comerciais no campo da ES, os quais “podem ter consequências não intencionais que prejudicam as missões”, e parecia refletir ainda mais enfaticamente a posição das instituições acadêmicas.

No processo de estabelecimento de um sistema internacional de credenciamento, alguns riscos são evidentes embora não sejam discutidos:

1. A metodologia tradicional de aprovação de instrumentos reguladores internacionais não foi seguida. Oficialmente o documento, devidamente examinado pela UNESCO e aprovado pela OECD, não se aplica em termos práticos, porém, foi implantado como se fosse um instrumento oficial.
2. Importantes elementos para o desenvolvimento de solidariedade com base em sistemas de cooperação não foram ressaltados. Nenhuma informação clara é dada sobre quem é o encarregado pelo credenciamento em um sistema internacional. São fornecidas informações positivas para as organizações de avaliação de qualidade e credenciamento, como por exemplo, se elas são estimuladas a respeitarem diversidade cultural, mas nesse caso também não está claro que coordena o processo e sob quais critérios. O documento sofreu claras melhorias durante sua elaboração, mas o objetivo final do processo ainda parece ser o de consolidar a fundação de um sistema internacional de credenciamento.
3. As regiões foram chamadas para revisarem as convenções regionais da UNESCO sobre reconhecimento de estudos e programas, mas essa abordagem corre o risco de ser eurocêntrica porque os modelos de regulação em debate foram elaborados exclusivamente sob o Conselho da Europa/Convenção da UNESCO (Lisboa, 1997), refletindo decisões tomadas por países europeus. O conteúdo dessas convenções deveria, naturalmente, ser analisado à luz das realidades atuais; deveria também ser feito um esforço, por exemplo, para desenvolver metodologias concretas e confiáveis para avaliar o conhecimento obtido fora do sistema educacional, em particular através do mundo do trabalho.

Um elemento importante que as comissões para reconhecimento de diplomas talvez não tenham conseguido implantar foi a preparação para o mundo do trabalho, com reconhecimento do valor do conhecimento e da experiência adquirido fora das escolas, particularmente através de atividades autodidatas e profissionais. A promoção de educação continuada, a democratização da educação, e a adoção e aplicação de uma política educacional deveriam levar desenvolvimentos estruturais, econômicos e tecnológicos em consideração, bem como mudanças sociais e contextos culturais de cada país.

As universidades deveriam ser modernas e ter bom desempenho administrativo. Embora os empreendimentos geralmente visem lucros, as IES deveriam existir com objetivos muito mais amplos, incluindo esforços humanitários. Além disso, dada a importância que os trabalhadores têm e a necessidade de estabelecer elos com a sociedade como um todo, o mundo do trabalho não pode ser olhado sob uma perspectiva estreita. Levando-se em consideração o atual estado da economia, é necessária a cooperação entre empresas públicas e privadas, mas isto não deveria ir de encontro aos objetivos a longo prazo da ES, e devem ser orientados exclusivamente de acordo com os interesses flutuantes de curto prazo do mercado. Deixando de fazer isso, as instituições não mais serão relevantes nem poderão ser consideradas de alta qualidade. E se os padrões forem baseados apenas nas necessidades atuais da indústria e do comércio, eles produzirão maus resultados a longo prazo.

Com relação à implantação das mudanças nas convenções, deveria ser observado que, desde a década de 70, elas só se reúnem a cada dois anos. As universidades e suas associações não participam dessas comissões nem são convidadas a participar como observadores dessas reuniões. Essa ausência nesse caso acusa as comissões de uma total ineficiência. A participação das IES como membros integrantes seria indispensável.

O IMPACTO DA OMC E DO GATS

Hoje não podemos estudar avaliação e credenciamento em nível internacional sem nos referirmos ao GATS. Esse dá origem a questões de princípio. Em vez de ser um direito dos cidadãos de estados, estabelecido por lei, o ES tem sido redefinido como – e está rapidamente se transformando em – uma *commodity* ou, em outras palavras, um serviço internacional a ser comprado e vendido através de qualquer fornecedor internacional.

As mudanças no conceito da ES e as questões que surgem têm tido consequências em todas instituições e nações envolvidas no processo de intercâmbio. Desde então, tem sido uma questão importante tanto para os

governos como para as universidades saber se países individualmente ainda têm o direito e a oportunidade e capacidade de regulamentarem licenças para o funcionamento de instituições e para reconhecerem os estudos e os certificados outorgados pelos fornecedores. Essas questões são de ordem política, econômica e legal, e a situação não está clara.

Muitas universidades e suas associações em várias partes do mundo se deram conta de que, caso essas cláusulas forem rigidamente implantadas, uma das consequências imediatas seria que todos os países signatários do GATS poderiam ser obrigados a reconhecer, certificar e credenciar os diplomas de todos os outros membros do Acordo. Os textos são ambíguos; interpretações dessa natureza são possíveis. Isto explica ao menos em parte o atual interesse que tantos países, especialistas e organizações têm no assunto do credenciamento.

Muitos representantes do mundo acadêmico também têm expressado sua preocupação sobre a possibilidade de o GATS acabar com os fundos e os subsídios da ES, e sobre a capacidade de um governo qualquer regulamentar a qualidade da ES e assegurar que as IES contribuam para o desenvolvimento sólido do país – através do ensino e além dele, através de pesquisa e serviços à sociedade.

No início esse acordo era ignorado pela comunidade acadêmica e IES. Em fevereiro de 2002, no Fórum Social Mundial em Porto Alegre, aqueles que participaram da atividade “Ciência e Tecnologia: Um Instrumento Para a Paz no Século XXI” decidiram propor um pacto global garantindo a consolidação dos princípios de ação aprovados na WCHE em 1998, e a exclusão da ES do GATS.

Organizações de estudantes e professores e outras associações acadêmicas também expressaram seu desacordo com as propostas feitas com base nas regulamentações do GATS. Foi também nesse momento que os representantes de alguns governos e universidades passaram a acreditar que o GATS era inevitável e que, dada essa situação, era necessário adaptar a nova realidade estabelecendo padrões de forma que vários serviços educacionais pudessem ser considerados similares o bastante para competirem com o mercado mundial.

Alguns analistas e membros de governos tentaram interpretar as regras do GATS, apoiando a ideia de que o setor de educação pública não está coberto, e que as nações membros da OMC têm o direito de não se comprometerem com esse assunto.

A realidade é mais complexa. Declarações dessa natureza são bem intencionadas, mas com frequência um pouco ingênuas e, na melhor das hipóteses, o resultado de uma utopia. O texto parece claro e qualquer interpretação a favor de exclusão continua

sujeita a possíveis interpretações conflituosas. O fato de que universidades privadas existem em um país basta para permitir que qualquer um diga que existe competição. O mesmo pode ocorrer se universidades públicas tiverem um papel comercial vendendo alguns produtos.

Com relação a credenciamento, existem cláusulas no GATS de que “o reconhecimento deveria estar baseado em critérios acordados multilateralmente.” As sugestões são dadas aos estados-membros, quando apropriado, para que trabalhem em colaboração com relevantes organizações intergovernamentais ou não governamentais para estabelecimento e adoção de padrões e critérios internacionais comuns de reconhecimento e padrões internacionais de práticas relativas a relevantes profissões e comércio de serviços. É um elemento importante.

Os textos finais dos instrumentos reguladores da UNESCO sobre o reconhecimento de estudos e diplomas de ES foram o resultado de difíceis negociações. Esses textos se baseiam em uma ideia de cooperação entre iguais, onde a solidariedade funciona e a transferência e o compartilhamento de conhecimento

aplica a todos os tipos de educação, e certamente também à ES.

Esse assunto foi discutido em dezembro de 2005, em Barcelona, em uma reunião dos Laureados do Prêmio Nobel. Naquela ocasião, os participantes observaram que na Europa atualmente tende-se a dizer “serviços de interesse geral” em vez de “serviços públicos”. “Serviços de interesse geral” se referem às atividades de um serviço, sejam eles de natureza comercial ou não, que são consideradas de interesse geral pelas autoridades públicas e, consequentemente, sujeitas às obrigações de serviços públicos. Essa evolução de conceito, porém, nem sempre fica clara. Isso está ocorrendo no momento em que um novo termo foi cunhado: em vez de “serviços públicos” ou “serviços de interesse geral”, está se fazendo referência a “serviços de interesse econômico geral”. Isso representa claramente um desvio de caminho e parece privilegiar a noção de que o mercado é capaz de resolver problemas educacionais, e que interesses individuais deveriam ter precedência sobre interesses sociais.

Acreditamos que os resultados da WCHE de 1998 refletem bem as opiniões dos especialistas políticos e acadêmicos. Na realidade, será bom para o futuro da humanidade que todo o empenho para incrementar a qualidade, a relevância, a acessibilidade e a internacionalização da ES em todo o mundo tenham por base os resultados da WCHE e respeitem os valores de diversidade, criatividade e abordagens inovadoras. Só então poderá a ES realmente contribuir para um futuro melhor para todos em todos os países.

EDUCAÇÃO COMO UM SERVIÇO PÚBLICO

Essa realidade, esse meio ambiente, essa estrutura nos trazem a uma discussão sobre a importância de se manter a ES como um serviço público, um bem público; isto é uma empreitada com base em três princípios – igualdade, continuidade e disponibilidade.

Igualdade significa que todos devem ter o direito de acesso ao serviço público, sem discriminação. Continuidade ou permanência significa que o serviço público deve permanentemente satisfazer as necessidades dos cidadãos e, aqui, a *noção de relevância* está bem implícita. A noção de adaptabilidade significa que o serviço público deve reagir e evoluir com base nos interesses gerais, sejam eles tecnológicos ou sociais. Ela pode e precisa ser atualizada, seguindo a evolução da sociedade, mas sem abandonar as características básicas que são cruciais para garantir igualdade e permanência.

Resumindo, para que um serviço seja considerado público, ele deve acima de tudo ser oferecido de forma igual, deve ser contínuo e permanente, e não deve estar sujeito a qualquer tipo de discriminação, até mesmo de natureza comercial ou financeira. Isso se

⁶ Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbik (2007) The international politics of quality assurance and accreditation: From legal instruments to communities of practice, in GUNI (Ed.). *Higher Education in the World 2007, Accreditation for Quality Assurance: What is at Stake?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.