

EDITORIAL

Challenges to higher education governance in Ibero-America

A recent report on higher education in Ibero-America¹ shows the changing landscape and the speed with which this sector is changing in most countries of the region. Access has massified and is in the process of universalization –that is, gross participation rate exceeds 50% of the corresponding age cohort– in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Spain, Portugal, Uruguay and Venezuela. The number of students is over 24 million, 11.5% of the student population worldwide.

As a counterpart of this explosive multiplication of demand for tertiary studies, also the institutional platform that provides educational opportunities has experienced a true implosion.

There are currently about 11,000 institutions in the region; 4,220 universities and 6,648 non-university higher education institutions. Within each of these two categories there is a huge diversity of organizations, according to their state or private nature, founding date and trajectory, declared mission and size, characteristics of their academic and student body, relative weight of postgraduate and research, connections with civil society and the state, degrees of social and academic selectivity, relationship with the productive sector and impact on the public sphere, accreditation and quality of its programs, internationalization and prestige of the institutions and their sources, and modalities of financing.

Unlike what happens with the national higher education systems of the old world, particularly in Western Europe, in Ibero-America –same as in Asia and other regions of the world– there is a strong private presence, both in the enrolment provision² and funding of organizations³. This is especially noticeable in some Latin American countries, where half or more of the national enrolment and of total resources for higher education are of a private nature, as in Chile, Brazil, El Salvador, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, and Peru.

In the Latin American region, the challenges of governance of higher education –this is its articulated operation with all stakeholders⁴ and coordination by using bureaucratic hierarchies, competitive exchanges, networks of trust and collaboration, and instances of self-government and corporate governance⁵– are contextually determined by the above mentioned elements. First, the coexistence of strong –and sometimes contradictory– state and private dynamics⁶. Second, the mixed character of the provision, coordination and financing of these systems with a wide range of stakeholders involved in

¹ J.J. Brunner (ed., coord.) and D. Miranda (ed. adj.). Educación Superior en Iberoamérica. Report 2016. CINDA, Santiago, Chile, 2016.

² D.C. Levy and William Zumeta. Private higher education and public policy: a global view. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 13:4, 2011, 345-349, DOI: 10.1080/13876988.2011.583772 D.B. Johnstone and P.N. Marcucci. *Financing Higher Education Worldwide. Who Pays? Who Should Pay?* The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore, 2010.

³ D.B. Johnstone and P.N. Marcucci. *Financing Higher Education Worldwide. Who Pays? Who Should Pay?* The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore, 2010.

⁴ B. Jongbloed, J. Enders, C. Salerno. Higher education and its communities: Interconnections, interdependencies and a research agenda. *Higher Education*, 56, 2008, 303-324.

⁵ I. Austin, G.A. Jones. *Governance of higher education: global perspectives, theories, and practices*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, 2016.

⁶ J.J. Brunner and C. Peña (eds.). *El Conflicto de las Universidades: Entre lo Público y lo Privado*. Universidad Diego Portales editions, 2011.

governance⁷. Third, the complexity resulting from the interaction –in multiple levels and aspects– of self-regulatory processes of organizations, with political processes, markets and networks that operate among organizations, within the organizational field of higher education. Fourth, the effects and impact of bring in global trends⁸ expressed in massification processes, institutional differentiation, specialization of disciplines and professionalization of self-government and management of organizations.

These challenges cluster around the role that the constituent components of Clark's Triangle of Coordination are expected to play, and the relative weight they should have⁹. That is, the national state (centralized and decentralized, with its various policy instruments); the relevant markets (students, resources, reputations and, indirectly, the labour market which employs graduates of tertiary education) and academic organizations themselves, with their loosely coupled units and various internal agents.

Presently it is this distribution of roles –its combination, performance and results– that produces the most intense academic, political, ideological and cultural debates in the field of higher education worldwide. In Latin America they acquire a particular intensity and are studied from different disciplinary perspectives¹⁰. Beyond these controversies, countries in Latin American seem determined to establish new balances¹¹: how much and what type state, which markets and how, and how much autonomy and what kind of alignment of universities with the public is good?

Indeed, what emerges on the horizon of national policies is: (i) a regulatory and evaluative state, with varying provision functions in different countries; (ii) an increasingly wider range of instruments for monitoring, evaluation and accreditation for quality assurance purposes; (iii) the allocation of public resources increasingly linked to performance and results, by using quasi-market instruments and incentives; and (iv) adaptation of institutions to this changing environment through the toolbox of “new public management”¹² and with institutional governing structures within organizations trying also to reach new combinations between collegiality and management, participation and decisions, dependence on public resources and entrepreneurship to generate income, and between traditionalism of the old *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* and productivity of late academic capitalism¹³.

Recently, a group of countries –especially in the Andean region– has modified (or tried to) their basic higher education legislation, as occurred also in Portugal and Spain. The aim is to change and redefine the previously established balances between Clark's Triangle forces, while adopting new regulatory frameworks that encourage institutions to modify their own organization and to adopt new behaviour patterns¹⁴.

⁷ B. Jongbloed, J. Enders, C. Salerno. Higher education and its communities: Interconnections, interdependencies and a research agenda. Higher Education, 56, 2008, 303-324.

⁸ P.G. Altbach, L. Reisberg, and L.E. Rumbley. Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution. UNESCO, Paris, 2009.

⁹ B.R. Clark. The Higher Education System. Academic Organization in Cross-National perspective. California University Press, Berkeley, 1983.

¹⁰ I. Ordorika. Governance and change in higher education: the debate between classical political sociology, new institutionalism and critical theories. Revista Bordon 66 (1), Special Issue, 2014, 107-123.

See also F. Ganga and J. Abello (comps.). Gobernanza Universitaria. Aportes desde una Perspectiva Latinoamericana. RIL Publisher, Santiago, Chile, 2015.

¹¹ See national reports electronically published accompanying the volume of J.J. Brunner (ed., Ed.) And Miranda D. (ed. Adj.) Cited in note 1.

¹² C. Paradeise, E. Reale, I. Bleiklie, and E. Ferlie (eds.). University governance. Western European comparative perspectives. Higher Education Dynamics Series, Vol. 25. Dordrecht: Springer, 2009.

¹³ See Slaughter, S. Problems in comparative higher education: Political economy, political sociology and postmodernism. Higher Education, 41, 2001, 389-412. See also Slaughter, S., & Rhoades, G. Academic Capitalism and the New Economy. Markets, State and Higher Education. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

¹⁴ See Magazine Bordon 66 (1), Special Issue, 2014, 11-164.

But, what are the odds of result and impact?

It is still too still early to pass judgement. However, the regional picture is already changing. Mixed provision and financing schemes prevail that seek a tighter regulation of higher education public schemes for quality assurance are strengthened. New regulations for private institutions are introduced, and sometimes, greater transparency and accountability is required from state universities. Universities professionalize their management and as well as they differentiate their missions and structures, they also adopt different forms of governance, strengthening executive functions and, in some state university boards, establishing a better balance between faculty and external stakeholder representation.

In the near future¹⁵, governance of national higher education systems will have to deal with an additional order of challenges, related to the renewal and innovation of the core academic functions: teaching, research, linking with civil society and participation in the public sphere. Here the effectiveness of these new emerging forms of governance will need to be assessed; that is, its ability to stimulate changes in the modes of production, transmission, transfer and communication of knowledge to face up to them up to the demands of the XXI century.

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¹⁵ See J. C. Shin and Teichler, U. (eds.). *The Future of the Post-Massified University at the Crossroads: Restructuring Systems and Functions*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

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