

# UNIVERSITIES BETWEEN THE STATE & THE MARKET.

Development policy, commercialization  
& liberalization of higher education.



# Acknowledgements

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# Preface

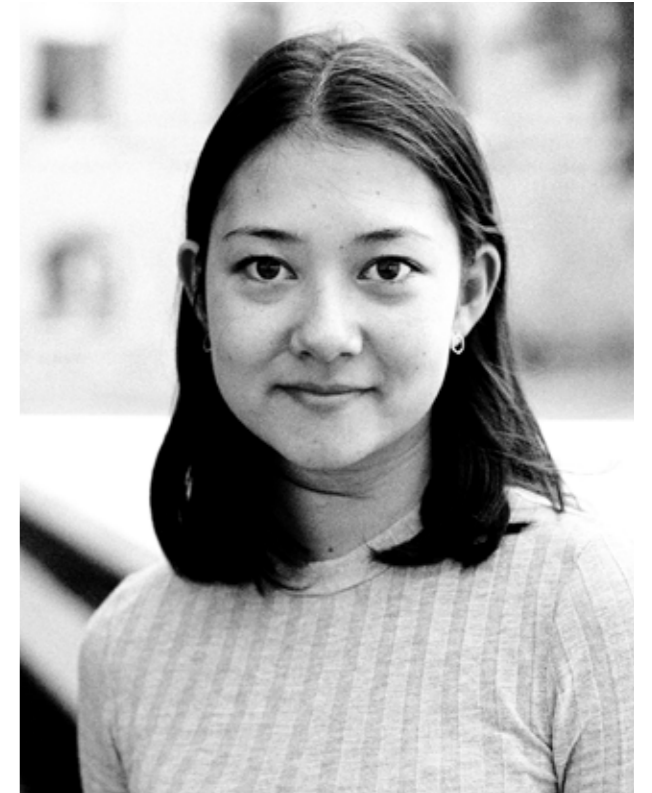
BEATHE ØGÅRD, PRESIDENT OF SAIH

More young people than ever before are knocking on the door to higher education globally. Simultaneously, and to an increasing degree, the less economically privileged are being denied access. This is due to the strong foothold of a market-driven discourse, which have convinced so many that higher education is a petty commodity rather a public good. Still clinging to that it is the size of your wallet that determines whether you are among the lucky few to access to quality higher education.

For decades, increased commercialization of higher education has led to an erosion of quality, overcrowded lecture halls, lack of trained professionals, curriculum that avoids the matter of critical thinking, increased tuition fees and insufficient loan- and scholarship schemes.

In international declarations and conventions, it is stated that education is a human right. Why then is it often perceived questionable or even naïve to state that the global state of higher education has failed us? We are not satisfied to witness erosion of quality and lack of access. It does not matter that our politicians and decision-makers state that we live in a so-called knowledge society where education is the new currency – if it doesn't transform into fair and equal access to higher education. Is promoting higher education as a public good perceived as being controversial because we are so horrifyingly far away from achieving it or because being reminded illustrates how far we have been dragged in the wrong direction?

However, Students and academics worldwide are constantly challenging this to turn us



in the other direction. Globally we witness students and academics rising to promote higher education as a public good and fighting the battle to counteract the narrative of higher education as a commodity. We will continue to do this as long as educational opportunities are out of reach for those who cannot afford it. This struggle is global. We see it taking place in Brazil, South Africa, Colombia, and the UK in addition to more subtle resistance in Norway. These movements are inspiring the broader public and highlighting a future, which is dependent on the continuous development of knowledge, skills and research in order to achieve sustainable development. Concrete policy measures providing quality and access to higher education to those currently left behind are need desperately. This to ensure that agenda 2030 is more than a grand vision.

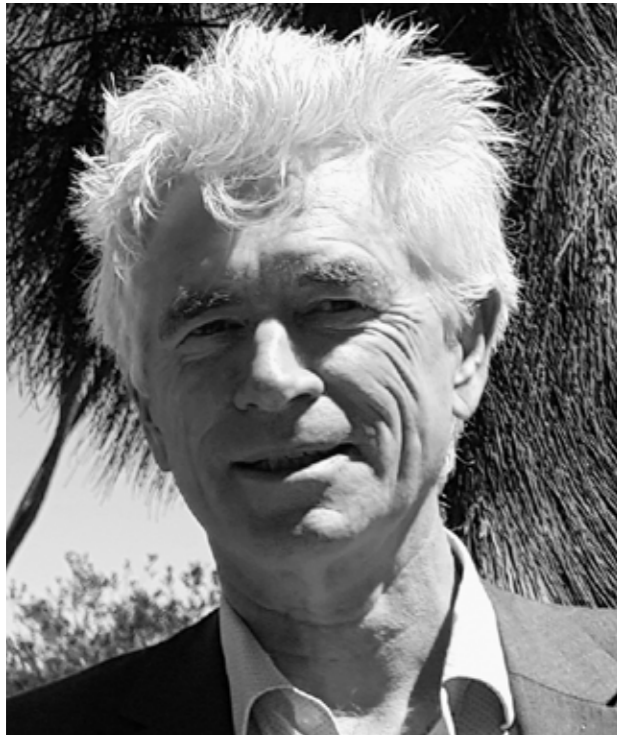
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# Foreword

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**I**t is a great honor to be asked to write a forward to this report initiated by SAIH. It is, and will be, a report of utmost importance for our future discussion about the role of higher education. 50 years after the student movements democratized the old elitist universities, students all over the world are again mobilizing. The initiative leading to the publication of this report is part of this critically important and renewed defense of the democratic values we now have struggled for the last 50 years. The key slogan within this mobilization is again anti-elitist: everyone should have access to the fruits of higher education and the research

that underpins this. Not only should citizens have equal opportunity, but also the knowledge mediated and created through research at universities should be relevant for all. This does not mean that everyone should be a student, but that those who want to go this route should have the chance despite the growing inequalities we see in our society<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> University politics is and the leadership of these, are influenced by the fact that 42 people currently holds as much wealth as half of the global population (just to mention one example) and that education and university employment is marked by a constant struggle not to be trapped by poverty, that is to find ways of being allied with the “mechanism” that produce the 1 % that captured close to 30 % of real income growth (between 1980 and 2016; i. e in the neoliberal epoch). See Oxfam (2018) Reward Work. (January 2018).

This demand does not come without costs. As in the first student revolt, life is also today lost when such ideas are promoted. Democratization of the universities grow out of, but equally often initiate mobilization for democracy in society at large. Students are often the first targeted when authoritarian regimes fight back as Joe Mlenga show in his article on “Death at the campus” in Malawi<sup>2</sup>. Most authoritarian regimes seeks to control the democratizing effect of academic freedom and free speech.

But as the report discusses so well, the greatest threats to democracy has over the last decades evolved out of the western democracies themselves. The neoliberal hegemony has transformed all public institutions in the image of private gain<sup>3</sup>. The Fee must fall movement, starting in South Africa, but spreading to other parts of the world is a reaction to this neoliberal policy. Already in the 1960ties, just after OECD was established (as we know it today) a discussion started about both how to make universities useful for the economy, and also, how to legitimate the use of private resources within the public universities; that is: to make the huge public costs of higher education and research directly relevant for private gain<sup>4</sup>. What started as a debate about “knowledge economy” has today become “the innovation society” to which students contribute as “human capital” and research based knowledge gain relevance to the degree it contributes to capitalist innovations. Society and economy

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<sup>2</sup> See Halvorsen, Tor and Jorun Nossun (2016) (eds). North-South Knowledge Networks: Towards Equitable collaboration between academic, donors and universities. Cape Town: African Minds.

<sup>3</sup> Schmidt, Vivien A. and mark Tatcher (2013). Resilient liberalism in Europe’s political economy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Mirowski, Philip and Dieter Plehwe (2009). The road from Mont Pelerin. The making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective. London: Harvard University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Halvorsen, Tor (2015). The Southern Africa Nordic Center and the Sustainable Development Goals: Opportunities for critical interventions. In: Halvorsen, Tor et al (eds): Knowledge for a sustainable world. A Southern African Nordic contribution. Cape Town: African Minds.

conflate. This innovation logic bases itself on the neoliberal idea that innovations are driven by competition, both between organizations and between individuals. Universities should not only compete with each other on the scales of rankings and ratings (the soft governance of blaming and shaming), they should themselves become businesses competing for the best students, professors, and most importantly, the most rewarding projects so as to gain “overhead” funding. To succeed in this competition, universities should specialize; or rather, market their particular contribution to the innovation society<sup>5</sup>.

Over the last two decades OECD and EU have coordinated their discussions on how to reform the university sector to make it both more vertically differentiated (through specialization) and more elitist through processes of selections driven by who contributes best to the need to make the economy competitive. A new kind of elitist selection of students, driven by the market, has emerged. The rest of the world (often pushed by the World Bank) have adjusted to these ideas and the governance instruments of rating, ranking, rewards, excellence, leaning outcome, citation indexes, production outcome, and overhead as measure of relevance. Instruments like these have spread like wildfire. Unfortunately, both students and professors have all too easily become supportive of this new system of governance and thus transformation of universities as economic actors. Therefore, it is all the more important that this report becomes a “reader” for us all within the academic world.

In our societies, there are continuous contestations between the values of capitalism and democracy. Capitalism is authoritarian, patriarchal and secretive, suppresses open critique, promotes private values, and is

<sup>5</sup> Honneth, Axel (2014). Freedom’s right. The social foundations of democratic life. Cambridge: Polity Press.

competitive in its shaping of “human capital”. It also works to transform public money to private gain. Democracy is egalitarian, open, promotes public values, builds on common understanding, is growing by critique and makes distribution of values and income possible. Democracy also relate to a polity that needs to legitimate decisions with the help of knowledge, thus clarifying how knowledge is used and interpreted to the electorate. Democracy therefore presupposes broad participation within the universities, broad influence on what is being prioritized as research, and the education of citizens of the value of knowledge as truth telling for democratic participation<sup>6</sup>.

Neoliberalism has since the 1980ties however driven the universities away from democracy, and transformed them in the image of capitalism as this report so well documents. When universities more and more see their duty to be primarily to provide relevant research and human capital for the innovation society (read economy) they too become governed by the values of capitalism. Intellectual property rights (see the report) privatizes knowledge, makes it into a commodity and hand the power over to “research oligarchs” who control the “excellence centers” where research topics are decided by the brotherhood (yes, mostly men) of elites: knowledge brokers (often in research council), business leaders, politicians.

Neoliberalism, as it has promoted the delinking of global economic actors from any influence of democracies, is also through its influence on “internationalization of higher education”, trying to delink the universities from their commitment to national democracies and thus from the building of citizenship and openness

<sup>6</sup> Halvorsen, Tor (2017). Breaking the bond between knowledge and democracy? In Kagisano 11/2017: Constituting Higher Education. Council of Higher Education Journal, South Africa.

to citizens influence and participation. The idea of university autonomy in this context is not for academic freedom and student participation, but for market competition for the best (fee-paying) students. It is also a goal to create competition and mobility for the best professors. Reduced public investment and thus state influence through public money make such an internationalization easier for universities in the OECD countries, but also more necessary. The market must now compensate for lack of public funding. In countries like Uganda and Tanzania it reduces the development state’s commitment to promote universities as part of a public sphere thus as part of the building both of democracy and committed academics to the common project; a nation state development for all. After the World Bank forced privatization on these countries, the number of private universities has increased manifold (Uganda for example from 3 to 33 in about 20 years). As in the rich world, this delinking of universities from nation states policies, the attempt to integrate them in a global market for educational services (promoted strongly by WTO), not only weakens democracy, but also the State necessary to stabilize democracy. If you do not have public institutions you do not have to collect taxes or discuss the value of such institutions for society. These institutions have no commitment to society; the only expectation is to produce “human capital” for a globalized innovation economy, and among students, to get value for money through sale of their “human capital”.

When SAIH in this report raises the issue of democratic access to higher education, they are at the fore-front of the coming mobilization for a new global orientation as to how democracy should govern economic development. The expansion of democracy through democratizing the higher education is one crucial step. To secure better and broader access to all, this

report argues for publicly funded institutions; governed according to the ideals agreed on in many documents over the years. These documents (well described in the report) calls for academic freedom, open debate, critical thinking and expressions of opposition. The neoliberal delinking of universities from democratic development is confronted head on by these values, however, to be real they need the kind of mobilization from student and professors SAIH invites us to take part in.

If universities stop being a cultural institution, promoting our foremost value - democracy, one of the most important defenses for democracy disintegrates. If most people feel university-based knowledge is irrelevant to their lives, universities loose legitimacy, and belief in knowledge as a way of strengthening democratic decisions as a compromise for the common good vanishes. Truth telling no longer holds as an ideal. Truth telling, as universities have become democratic institutions, has been important for those most suppressed, or as is argued in the debate about UN Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Goals, **those most left behind**, those who do not have a voice. Truth telling has also been a way of avoiding that “those left behind” seek relief by help of authoritarian regimes, like the one killing students at campus in Malawi, or those who attack academic freedom in EU countries today or the NATO country Turkey.

The SAIH report, as I see it, is a contribution also to the Agenda 2030 debate. The unique agreement on these 17 goals opened up many contested issues that invites academic debates about a new development path. How democracy and capitalism can link in a better ways to reduce inequality, poverty, gender repression, and make us transform our resource- and energy use quickly is at the

center of attention. Many, as I do<sup>7</sup>, argue that we cannot secure a just transition to a new global development, by UNRISD called a social and solidarity economy<sup>8</sup>, without strengthening the role of democracy and therefore the role of universities as democratic public institutions with broad support and participation. In other words, as SAIH’s many suggestions for debate indicate at the end of the report; we have to take the universities back from the control of OECD/EU economic development model and make them into public actors for the public good, at home and in our interactions across borders.

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<sup>7</sup> Halvorsen, Tor (2017). The sustainable development goals, knowledge production, and the global struggle over values. In Halvorsen, Tor et al (ed): Knowledge for Justice. Cape Town: African Minds.

<sup>8</sup> United Nation Research institute for Social Development (UNRISD) (2016). October 2016 Policy Innovations for Transformative Change: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Geneva.



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# Introduction

Higher education is market-driven and market-funded. They operate under the constraints of decreasing public funding both in developed and developing countries. Financial restrictions are accompanied by other kinds of restriction on academic freedom and institutional autonomy, and this happens both in liberal democracies and in authoritarian regimes and conflict-affected settings.

Higher education is placed in a unique position to contribute to both economic and social development. However, for decades, a particular understanding of human capital theory characterizing both the World Bank's commitment to education and the educational agendas of several international donors, has challenged national and international support for higher education. According to this view, investment in higher education showed lower rates of return of government spending compared to basic education, thus it should not be subsidized with public funds (Salmi 2017b; Psacharopoulos et al. 1986). Nevertheless, as early as the 1990s researchers began to challenge narrowly conceived rate-

Some of the fundamental higher education values are their ability to foster 'learning' such as critical thinking, connecting knowledge across disciplines to the real world, and their potential to act as socially inclusive institutions thus fostering social mobility (Salmi and de Maret 2017). In a globalized world, universities are increasingly



to-return analysis, laying emphasis on how it failed to capture the broader social benefits of investing in tertiary education related to job creation, improvement of socio-economic and political governance, research externalities, and broader positive effects on democratic participation and social cohesion (Salmi 2017a).

The shift in focus of the main international donors culminated with the publication of the 2000 report **Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise**, written by a group of independent experts supported by the World Bank and UNESCO. The report called for investment in tertiary education and research in developing countries by establishing a direct link between higher education, economic growth and poverty eradication. In overall terms, the report contributed to changing donor and national policies.

Since the launch of that report, the world of higher education has further changed and grown: enrolment rates and access to higher education in developing countries have been growing steadily, mirroring growth in basic and secondary education in line with implementation of the recommendations of the Education for All agenda.<sup>9</sup> With the launch of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, higher education came

<sup>9</sup> The Education for All agenda was launched during the World Education Forum in Dakar, 2000. Its aim was to provide quality basic education for all children articulated along six goals to be achieved by 2015.

into even sharper focus and gained additional attention, although critics have pointed out that its contribution to the development goals remains unclear.

Commissioned by the Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH), the present research report seeks to address a gap in international development policy as far as the higher education sector is concerned. This report can be seen as a 'white paper' grounded on a rights-based approach to higher education: it analyzes the state of the art of higher education globally while challenging widespread assumptions regarding its relationship to international development policy, liberalization, privatization and commercialization. The report is informed by the needs of students, academics and institutions as laid out in the **World Declaration on Higher Education, The Bergen Declaration** and other relevant documents.

The report is based on primary and secondary sources, including academic and practitioners-related literature. It is guided by research questions addressing the foundational principles underpinning engagement of the development community with the higher education sector. Moreover, it analyzes the benefits for state actors and the international development aid community of development of the higher education sector. Lastly, it highlights the principles informing an agenda for higher education

and independent research in the face of increased privatization and commercialization of the sector worldwide. It also questions, exposes and unravels the contradictions that are inherent in higher education and international development agendas as a result of ongoing global changes as well as struggles over the role of higher education for the broader economy and society.

The report is inspired by critical political economy (Robertson and Dale 2015) and social justice frameworks (Fraser 1995, 2005). A critical political economy analysis is useful in that it places higher education in the broader socio-economic and political structures, institutions and agents that affect and constrain it. Moreover, it highlights the importance of politics and policy in shaping governance frameworks, institutional arrangements and outcomes in higher education reform, both at the local and global level. A social justice analysis explores higher education reform and transformation in terms of representation, relevance and participation. It has been noted that very few social justice researchers locate their work within the sphere of higher education. As Brennan and Naidoo (2008) state: "While there is an extensive research literature on social justice and social equality in the social sciences, in general this is not fully engaged with by higher education researchers. For their part, social scientists have tended not to give much attention to universities and other higher education establishments in their investigations of equity and social justice".

The report is developed in five sections. Section 1 highlights the significance and salience of the topic. Section 2 locates the debate on higher education in a rights-based framework. Section 3 reviews the main debates and trends on higher education and international development from the 1990s to date for the purpose of identifying main processes, trends and actors. These trends and processes are grouped under two main categories - (1) globalization/internationalization and the rise of the knowledge-based economy discourse and (2) commercialization, commodification and global competitiveness. Section four critically analyzes current developments in the sector, exploring questions of expansion of access and increased enrolment, and ongoing challenges to the right to equal access to higher education. Section five analyzes the emergence of a quality discourse at the global level and the proliferation of quality assurance mechanisms across a range of local contexts, and it specifically focuses on preconditions and frameworks to increase quality in higher education. Some of the issues addressed in this report are empirically illustrated by specific case-study analysis of higher education in Colombia, Kosovo, South Africa, and Zambia. The last section will sum up existing trends, critical developments and implications, and will put forth policy recommendations and research questions requiring further scrutiny.

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# 1. SIGNIFICANCE of the report

*Higher education is a public good. The university sector throughout the world has a complex and multifaceted role in developing human capital vital for scientific, political, economic, social and cultural progress. This includes developing pedagogy and providing future teachers for school; acting as a point of critical reflection on national development; preparing young adults to become active citizens and future leaders; and offering a potentially autonomous space, independent of state, capital, religion and society, where key issues can be debated and solutions developed through evidence-based discourse.*

*(NOVELLI AND SELENICA 2014, 93)*

In the past decade higher education has seen an exponential growth both in enrolment and participation, particularly in low and middle income countries, raising questions about the effects on quality and learning. By 2015, 213 million students were enrolled in tertiary education worldwide. As Fig. 1 shows, since 2000 the gross enrolment ratio in upper and middle income countries has risen from 17 percent to 46 percent. In Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean it has increased from 25 percent to 40 percent. By contrast, in the Caucasus, Central Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa, enrolment growth seems to be stuck at the levels of 2000 (GEMR 2017/8, 150).

However, the reality of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa seems to be more nuanced than argued by the Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/8. Compared to 2000, there is a trend of higher education expansion in Sub-

Saharan Africa so the sector is not properly stuck. While enrolment numbers are low they have more than doubled over the last 15 years. In some cases such as Ethiopia, enrolment rates at the undergraduate level have increased by 40 percent over the last 5 years. A significant reason for Sub-Saharan Africa lagging behind may also relate to the huge pressures from international agencies to invest in basic education and marginalize tertiary (and to some extent even secondary) levels. For example, in post-genocide Rwanda, government-donor tensions arose because the Rwandan government insisted on investing in higher education, in this case going against donor demands and prescriptions (Milton 2018).

As mentioned above, higher education plays a crucial role in change, progress and mobility in society. According to UNESCO, the 21st century society is increasingly knowledge-based, and higher education with its components

Fig. 1<sup>10</sup>

## TERTIARY EDUCATION PARTICIPATION INDICATORS

	Enrolment (000)		Gross Enrolment Ratio (%)	
	2000	2015	2000	2015
World	99,718	212,670	19	36
Caucasus and Central Asia	1,425	1,895	22	25
Eastern and Sout-Eastern Asia	24,213	66,813	15	40
Europe and Northern America	39,940	50,702	56	75
Latin America and the Caribbean	11,315	24,894	22	46
Northern Africa and Western Asia	6,836	17,054	20	42
Pacific	1,044	1,750	46	62
Southern Asia	12,162	41,895	9	25
Sub-Saharan Africa	2,559	7,428	4	8
Low income	1,249	4,447	3	8
Low middle income	25,094	61,648	11	23
Upper middle income	31,686	90,201	17	46
High income	41,466	56,135	56	74

Source: UIS Database

of learning and research has become crucial for the cultural, socio-economic and political development of individuals, communities and nations (1998, 2). At the same time, the higher education sector is undergoing deep changes and its role is considered crucial both for economic and societal development. All international conventions, charters, covenants and conferences that address the issue of higher education regard it as a fundamental pillar of human rights, democracy, sustainable development and peace, and a promoter of solidarity, change and justice.

During the past two decades, higher education has increasingly been seen as one of the most important drivers for development in low income countries (Naidoo 2011, 40). This fact represents a policy change in the agenda of international

organizations such as the World Bank, the OECD, the EU, and UNESCO among others, after decades in which investments in higher education were neither promoted nor advocated due to low rates of social and economic return (Ibid.). In an era defined as the knowledge-based economy and society, “the widely held view is that the ability to access, generate and transmit information rapidly across the globe has the potential to transform countries that are materially poor into countries that are ‘information-rich’ with the ability to utilize knowledge for economic development and leapfrog traditional developmental stages” (Naidoo 2011, 40).

While the cases of South Korea, Singapore, China and India – all states that have invested heavily in higher education – suggest a positive correlation between higher education, growth and economic development, this relationship

does not appear to be causally straightforward: it remains always context-dependent. Other cases from African countries show that governments have tied education to authoritarian agendas that have fostered antagonism while not contributing to development. According to Lebeau and Sall (2011), tying higher education to the development path in a linear and deterministic way is not sufficient if the sector is not connected to and coordinated with a wider set of policies and issues (see also Sall et al. 2003).

This report suggests that the analysis of the relationship between higher education and international development needs to depart from how development is defined and conceptualized in developing and low income countries. Generally speaking, development has been associated with growth, and its economic dimension has been given priority. In this view – which is strongly influenced by neoliberal economics – the role of higher education has been seen as a function of the capacity to generate and produce the human capital vital to economic development. This conceptualization has implications for developing countries: it has been often assumed that once economic growth is achieved, it will trickle down to the poorest and most vulnerable, boosting development indicators. However, as the empirical record of case studies show, the reality seems to be quite different, and expectations are seldom met. Alternative conceptions and models of development have challenged hegemonic tenets by linking development to security, political and cultural freedom (Amartya Sen 1999).

The rapid emergence and expansion of a global higher education arena as well as the internationalization and transformation of higher education institutions suggest that higher education in low income countries cannot be researched in isolation from the broader socio-political and economic national

and global contexts; nor can it be separated from an understanding of how capitalism and globalization change and operate within the sector and how the sector changes and operates between state and market pressures. Beside its contribution to knowledge-based society and economy and to development, higher education plays a role in developing political elites as well as acting as a critical space where political elites are put under scrutiny.

The increased politicization and repression of higher education during the last period in some parts of the world have resulted in attacks against higher education in Pakistan, Kenya and a whole range of countries in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Latin America, as well as attacks on academic freedom such as in Hungary and Turkey. As a matter of fact, a rise in authoritarianism in a range of contexts – both within and outside the European Union – is affecting higher education and is resulting in the encroaching of academic freedom. The cases of Academics for Peace accused by the Turkish government as terrorists because they ask for peace (Butlet and Ertur 2017) and the attempts by the Hungarian government to suppress the Central European University (European University Association 2018) illustrate this worrying phenomenon. Attacks against higher education institutions have been documented in armed conflict but they are on the rise in repressive and authoritarian regimes. Non-state actors or ‘would be’ state actors are seeking to control universities and their content in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya and in a growing range of countries as the two UNESCO reports Education Under Attack have documented respectively in 2014 and 2018 (Novelli and Selenica 2014; UNESCO and GCPEA 2018).

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## 2. HIGHER EDUCATION as part of a rights-based framework

**H**igher education is defended by several international conventions. Among them, one can mention the Charter of the United Nations, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 26, paragraph 1, which states that “Everyone has the right to education” and that “higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”. Article 4 of the Convention against Discrimination in Education<sup>11</sup> commits State Parties to “make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity”. International conventions, in other words, make the case for relevant and quality higher education equally accessible to all irrespective of gender, culture and socio-economic background.

A plethora of commissions and conferences have also made recommendations concerning higher education over the past three decades: among them the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand 1990), the Conference on Academic Freedom and

<sup>11</sup> The Convention is a multilateral treaty adopted by UNESCO on 14 December 1960 that aims to combat cultural or religious assimilation or racial discrimination in the field of education. ([http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/DISCR1\\_E.PDF](http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/DISCR1_E.PDF), last accessed 13 April 2018)

University Autonomy (Sianaia, 1992), the Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel adopted during the UNESCO’s General Conference in 1997.<sup>12</sup> Along this trajectory, 17 articles of the UNESCO World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action (1998, 4-15) further articulates the mission, the functions and themes of intervention in higher education in the turn of the millennium:

**Art. 1 - Mission to educate, to train and to undertake research**

**Art. 2 - Ethical role, autonomy, responsibility and anticipatory function**

**Art. 3 - Equity of access**

**Art. 4 - Enhancing participation and promoting the role of women**

**Art. 5 - Advancing knowledge through research in science, the arts and humanities and the dissemination of its results**

**Art. 6 - Long-term orientation based on relevance**

**Art. 7 - Strengthening co-operation with the world of work and analysing and anticipating social needs**

**Art. 8 - Diversification for enhanced equity of opportunity**

<sup>12</sup> (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001604/160495e.pdf>, last accessed 13 April 2018)



Art. 9 - **Innovative educational approaches: critical thinking and creativity**

Art. 10 - **Higher education personnel and students as major actors**

Art. 11 - **Qualitative evaluation**

Art. 12 - **The potential and the challenge of technology**

Art. 13 - **Strengthening higher education management and financing**

Art. 14 - **Financing of higher education as a public service**

Art. 15 - **Sharing knowledge and know-how across borders and continents**

Art. 16 - **From 'brain drain' to 'brain gain'**

Art. 17 - **Partnerships and alliances**

The Declaration came out of the recognition that while higher education has seen an over six fold expansion and increase in student enrolments worldwide (from 13 million in 1960 to 82 million in 1995) it has also witnessed the widening of the gap in access and resources between developing and developed countries, as well as increasing socio-economic stratification and growing difference in higher educational opportunities within developed countries (1998, 2). In its preamble, the Declaration recognizes the “unprecedented demand for and a great diversification in higher education” as well as its importance for sociocultural and economic development and its vital role for the production of skills and knowledge (1998, 1). The Declaration also recognized that the higher education sector is facing difficulties and challenges that are related with issues of financing, equity of conditions in access and quality, employability of graduates, level of quality in teaching and research, and lastly, equitable access to the benefits of international co-operation (World Declaration on Higher Education 1998, 1). Twenty years later, these are some of the same challenges that higher education is currently facing.

Another significant event gathering the voices and positions of students at the global scale has been **The Bergen Declaration – Uniting for a global student voice**, which was drafted and signed in Bergen, Norway, by representatives of students from South America, North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific in May 2016. The Declaration advocates for free access to higher education, academic freedom, students’ rights to freely organize and ultimately it raises concerns regarding the increasing commodification of tertiary education systems. Moreover, it highlights some of the challenges that higher education faces in many countries such as the neglect of quality, lack of accessibility and attacks on students’ fundamental human rights. The declaration re-affirms that education and more specifically higher education is a human right according to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and stresses the importance of universal cooperation for the defense of students’ rights of representation and self-organization, free public tertiary education and education for all. In the declaration students’ rights are put at the center of quality higher education that should be free and inclusive, democratic and built upon the principles of academic freedom (The Bergen Declaration 2016).

Fighting for and promoting tertiary education as a universal and public good implies defending a tertiary education system free of tuition fees and/or any other cost, providing grant-schemes and good loans that could ensure access to every student regardless of the socio-economic background. It also implies that knowledge and education are to be considered a public good – namely that their emancipatory nature and their benefits to society are recognized. According to the Preamble of the Bergen Declaration

*Tertiary education should be democratic, transparent, open to society and embedded in the community. [...] universities that promote progress of the people and serve society” [...] Education is one of the most important venues and institutions for providing global citizens with the necessary tools and opportunities to fight climate change, empowering individuals and building resilient communities that will challenge the current development model which is causing harm to the planet and its people” (The Bergen Declaration).*

The Declaration also suggests the establishment of “global frameworks to support the internationalisation of education, science and culture. [...] Government should work actively towards the development of global frameworks of recognition of qualifications in the area of tertiary education. We highlight the importance of developing these frameworks in accordance with the principles of equality, plurality, social justice and democracy” (Ibid.).

Among the agendas that have linked education

to development models and imperatives in the past two decades one should also mention the Universal Primary Education campaign, Education for All agenda, the life-long learning, and especially the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs mobilized international and domestic actors on developmental challenges. Although the impact of MDGs is still being debated and evaluated, in education, efforts on the ground were translated into expanding access to primary schooling. The global campaigns – Education for All and ‘lifelong learning’ – had already sought to correct the exclusive focus on basic education intrinsic in the Universal Primary Education campaign and to incorporate higher education in their advocacy. Yet, both campaigns did not devote sufficient attention to higher education. It is with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were included in the wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 (in particular Goal 4, ‘Quality Education’) that higher education is brought back into the developmental discourse.

Fig. 2<sup>13</sup>

**THE GLOBAL GOALS  
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



Higher education is specifically mentioned in target 4.3 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 that aims by 2030 “to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (Incheon Declaration 2015, 20). However, higher education plays an important role in the achievement of all sustainable development goals, whose realization cannot be reached separately. In this regard, higher education plays an essential role both in the achievement of decent work and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8) and poverty reduction (SDG 1). It also forms an important part of other goals related to poverty reduction such as gender equality (SDG5), responsible consumption and production (SDG12), climate change (SDG13), and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16). Moreover, higher education plays a critical role in social mobility through a fairer redistribution of resources and opportunities especially among the most vulnerable groups in society. Therefore, it can potentially contribute to addressing and reducing inequalities as envisaged in SDG10. However, as the present report shows, in larger parts of the world higher education widens inequalities as opportunities for access are unevenly distributed among the most privileged, while the less privileged still lag behind.

Tertiary education is essential to achieve progress and improvement in basic and secondary education through the training and formation of teachers for the lower levels of education. Universities, knowledge and research contribute to meeting the health and well-being development goal (SDG 3). Achievements in the remaining sustainable development goals such as the development of a vibrant agricultural sector, building the appropriate infrastructure to mitigate the effects of climate change and the preservation of environment are related to advanced training and research occurring at tertiary

education (Salmi 2017b). Yet, the renewed focus on higher education in the SDGs does not seem to have permeated the strategies and policies of development and donor agencies (DFID being an exception to this) – in higher education and in its links to other sectors.

The SDG4 agenda was articulated following the World Education Forum in Incheon, Rep. of Korea (19-22 May 2015) and the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (FFA) for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4. In the Declaration, target 4.3 is a broad objective encompassing technical and vocational, tertiary and adult education and the roadmap for its achievement comprises two central policy pillars focusing on monitoring and improving learning outcomes for those who are excluded. The Education 2030 Framework for Action calls for progress in favor of higher education based on existing international agreements with a focus on equity, access, quality and relevance.

Salmi’s article highlights the fact that the SDGs do not explicitly acknowledge this cross-cutting role of higher education as many had hoped they would. There are still concerns that the SDGs reinforce a very limited view of higher education – i.e. the only targets narrowly focus on access and (bizarrely) increasing international scholarships to poorest countries, which is quite a regressive and limited form of aid. There is a lack of targets linking higher education to research, engagement, capacity building in key sectors. This is more than a substantive issue because if the SDGs were to explicitly acknowledge the integral role of higher education in achieving all SDGs it would imply a redirection of higher education policy to focus on the public dimensions of universities in national/regional contexts – i.e., the basic idea of universities serving the wider public good does not fit well with the current

globalized competitive higher education sector, nor the rapid privatization of higher education in developing countries. This also underlines the suspicion among basic education advocates that higher education is a ‘cheat’ way for donors to contribute to education aid (Bengtsson and Barakat 2017).

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# SOUTH AFRICA

## Quality assurance, local agency, social justice and privatization: The case of South African Higher Education

This section explores the effects of globalization on higher education policy in South Africa by focusing on the development of quality assurance mechanisms and by analysing issues of local autonomy, agency, social justice and privatization. It reflects on how the concept of externally-driven quality assurance mechanisms is implemented in post-apartheid higher education policy in South Africa through a reconceptualization of quality and accountability based on social justice and social change imperatives of the local political project. The education sector was considered from the very beginning of the post-apartheid transition as “one of the anchor points of the envisaged socioeconomic transformation of South Africa” (Nnadozie 2017, 5). While the sector has undergone a series of structural reforms in terms of curriculum, integration of the fragmented education departments and attempts towards improving quality and outcomes for the disadvantaged, the sector is under-resourced for ensuring effective teaching and learning and is increasingly plagued by broader social problems such as poverty, unemployment, violence and child abuse (Nnadozie 2017, 5).

Higher education reform was formally launched in 1995, when the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was set up and provided with recommendations addressing social transformation and referring to increased participation. In the South African case, this meant redistribution, social justice and equality for the historically excluded and oppressed black majority (Singh 2011, 203). At the same time, the recommendations incorporated questions of international benchmarking for assessing and assuring system quality. In 1997, the Education White Paper was launched and represented the main framework for policy-making and higher education reform: “The key principles for the transformation of higher education included equity, redress and democratization as much as effectiveness, efficiency

and public accountability” (Singh 2011, 204).

The next crucial document, the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education, can be seen as an illustration of how efficiency soon became more important than equity (Jansen 2001). The plan envisaged the reform of higher education according to priorities of planning, funding and quality. However, efficiency was influenced by the historical inefficiencies and discrimination patterns consolidated in the university sector under the apartheid regime: this suggested that in the South African higher education system equity and efficiency were indeed quite related and not always in opposition. In this regard, quality assurance mechanisms and models were studied and imported and eventually aimed to be used as a dispensation mechanism that could address and redress the huge disparities between white and African students’ access and participation.

Following a decade of reforms (1995-2005), enrolment in public universities had more than doubled, including an expansion in African and female participation rates (CHE 2004). However, disparities still remained, with overall participation rates at 16 percent of the population in 2004: 61 percent were white students and 12 percent were African ones (Scott et al. 2007). Figures were similar in terms of graduate outcomes, with only one third of the enrolled students in 2001 graduating

5 years later. As with enrolment and participation patterns, graduation rates were also racially skewed, with graduation rates in business and commerce at 83 percent for white students compared to 33 percent for blacks, 64 percent to 32 percent respectively in engineering, and 48 percent to 21 percent respectively in law (Scott et al. 2007).

Today one can count approximately one million registered students in higher education, compared to 578,000 registered in 2000, suggesting that access is expanding, in particular for black African students (from 58.9 percent in 2000 to 70 percent in 2015). However, while access to higher education for black African students has increased, the participation rate of the age group 20-24 compared to the total population remains low, respectively at 16 percent for black Africans and 14 percent for coloreds. By contrast, participation rates for white and Indians are respectively 54.7 percent and 47.4 percent (Council on Higher Education 2013). Some of the main challenges in the sector remain student funding and student underperformance. The system is characterized by high dropout rates, long completion time and low participation rates (Nnadozie 2017, 10). More specifically, the Council on Higher Education (2013) estimates that around 55 percent of each cohort of intake will never graduate. There remain persisting racially skewed and unequal graduation outcomes with Black African students’ completion rate generally less than



half of white students' completion rate, thereby neutralizing the gains deriving from the expansion of access to black African students (Council on Higher Education 2013). The same inequalities could be observed in the staffing of South African universities predominantly dominated by whites. In other words, while whites accounted for 10 percent of the overall population in 2015, they accounted for 60 percent of academic staff.

Besides disparities and inequalities, the higher education sector in South Africa is regarded as one of the best systems in Africa. Times Higher Education's World University Ranking placed universities in South Africa as 4 out of 5 best universities in Africa for the period 2016-17, with the University of Cape Town ranked as best in Africa and among the top universities in the world based on various ranking systems (Times Higher Education 2016). Furthermore, South Africa has a number of independent science councils that work closely with universities in the production of knowledge and innovation. Between 2012 and 2013, South Africa invested \$1.7 billion on research and development (HSRC 2014). South Africa has been ranked number one nation in knowledge production in Africa in most scientific fields (Adam et al. 2010).

Informed by a human-rights approach, quality in this context has meant, among other things, seeking to increase participation

and graduation rates of the students from the majority population of the country, or in other terms growing the number of black and women graduates. Other legislative and policy frameworks that have made a connection between quality, social justice and transformation were the government's **Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education** in which quality was "identified as a guiding principle for the transformation of higher education in a package that included equity, redress and democratization, in addition to effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability" (Singh 2011, 207). Moreover, the **Higher Education Act (1997)**, the **South African Qualifications Authority Act** and the **Skills Development Act** all establish a link between achievements of quality and equity and envisage the role of quality assurance as "delivering key national objectives of equity and development" (HEQC 2001, 1). The South African evaluation system was launched in 2004. Quality was overseen through the Council on Higher Education and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) having functions of program accreditation, audit of quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions and quality promotion. To redress historical inequalities, "Minimum standards were instituted across historically white and historically black universities, and a capacity-building program undertook to



improve institutional ability to respond to common quality requirements. Audits examine whether historically white institutions have concrete policies to recruit black students from deprived backgrounds and to improve the learning environment for diverse students" (Lange and Singh, 2010 quoted in GEMR 2017/8, 164).

There has been a strong emphasis in the

activities of the HEQC on assessment criteria for institutional effectiveness (how institutional planning in higher education responded to market needs) and educational effectiveness (whether and how graduate competencies were relevant and linked to the labor market), both seeking to evaluate and assess the link between higher education and employment skills (Singh 2011). Moreover, the HEQC assessed success in increasing access by looking for



affirmative policies for redressing demographic imbalances as well as developing capacity development interventions. Beside social justice, the HEQC evaluated the system also in terms of its capacity to promote social change, which would go beyond restorative justice and demographic representation of the excluded majority. In other terms, evaluation functioned through a number of questions that aimed at assessing the kind of knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for the graduates and the youth to live in a transforming society and to contribute to goals of social justice and change. This was done by taking into account issues of “curriculum reform, changes in institutional culture, innovative scholarship, academic freedom, and public-good engagement” (Lange and Singh 2010, 57). Moreover, in its first cycle, the HEQC envisaged a dialogic way to assess quality encompassing a broad range of actors such as institutional leaders, students, scholars and communities, all of which interviewed on issues of mission and social transformation.

Methods of quality assurance based on audit and accreditation envisioned the introduction of formal evaluation mechanisms in a system still characterized by historical differences and disparities in institutional capacity. This in turn carries the danger of exacerbating existing inequalities among universities thus potentially maintaining and reproducing quality disparities

across higher education institutions. As a recent paper commissioned by the Global Monitoring Report has argued, South Africa – a middle income country and the second largest economy in Africa after Nigeria – with a Gini coefficient ranging between 0.6 and 0.7 – is one of the most unequal societies in the world (Nnadozie 2017, 3). The latest National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) that represents the strategic roadmaps for all sectors of development in South Africa envisages a number of development targets in the higher education and training sector.<sup>14</sup>

For the South African government, the achievement of such ambitious developmental goals as related to higher education is possible through the establishment of an educational accountability chain, suggesting an alignment with global agendas of accountability, as advocated by the World Bank and UNESCO (Nnadozie 2017). Funding as well is tied to the provision by public universities of accountability reports to the minister of Department of Higher Education and Training. According to critics, monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms for the purpose of assessing accountability are

<sup>14</sup> (1) Increase graduation rate of further education and training colleges to 75%; (2) produce 30 000 artisans per year; (3) increase participation rates in further education and training colleges to 25%; (4) an additional 1 million learning opportunities per year; (5) increase university science and mathematics entrants to 450 000; (6) increase graduation rates to more than 25% by 2030; (7) increase participation rates for university enrolment to more than 30%; (8) produce more than 100 doctoral graduates per million per year by 2030.

consuming limited public funding (Vally 2007, 19). Public higher education institutions in South Africa are funded through three different sources: grants and subsidies by the government; student tuition fees and donations from private actors or entrepreneurial activities (Nnadozie 2017, 12). Government funding is based on a number of criteria such as student and graduate numbers, research outputs and high proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (*Ibid.*). In 2016, the minister of the Department of Higher Education and Training provided grants to 26 public universities in South Africa for a total of \$1.9 billion (Department of Higher Education and Training 2015).

An important element in pre- and post-apartheid higher education in South Africa is the historically rich role and voice of youth and student activism. Currently, there are a number of student formations and representative councils at higher education institutions (SRC). Some of the most recent campaigns that have united different student voices and interests are the ‘Rhodes must fall’ requiring for the removal of colonial status and symbols from campuses, ending the outsourcing of certain services, the decolonization of curricula and above all the **#FeesMustFall** campaign, asking for free higher education for all. Student fees remain one of the main challenges for parents in South Africa and among the most important factors

for dropouts and withdrawals. With tuition fees ranging between R30,000 to R60,000 (\$2,000 to \$4,000), and average households income at around R145,000 (\$10,740), tuition fees account for 20 percent to 40 percent of average household income (Nnadozie 2017, 13). If one adds to that accommodation, books and subsistence, the cost of the university burden accounts for 80 percent of average household income (*Ibid.*).

To tackle this issue, in 1999 the government established the National Student Financial Aid (NSFAS) with the aim of providing assistance to academically qualifying and financially deserving students. Usually the scheme provides loans and bursaries to eligible and successful students covering tuition, accommodation and subsistence. Approximately 60 percent of NSFAS beneficiaries are expected to pay back the loans, while the remaining 40 percent is usually converted into bursaries. One of the challenges for the fund is the repayment of loans by previous beneficiaries. A second challenge concerns the fact that usually the fund supports the poorest households, while the richest can financially afford to pay the fees. A very large part of students coming from working and middle class families are not qualified for loans and bursaries from the fund. This creates a situation in which both the poorest and the richest can access higher education, while the so-called missing middle students that are still in need for financial aid

are excluded from the loan system: as a consequence, their risk of being excluded from a high-fee higher education system is quite big.

This state of affairs in recent years has led to mass student protests against fees across university campuses. The **#FeesMustFall** campaign (2015) can be considered as the strongest mobilization since the June 1976 student uprising. The protests came to an end following the announcement by the South African president of a 0 percent fees increase for the year 2016 and the establishment of a fees commission tasked to come up with recommendations regarding higher education funding. Three years later, in January 2018 President Jacob Zuma promised free higher education to poor and working class students as of 2018 (Reporter 2018). In April 2018, the Higher Education and Training Minister announced a new free higher education funding policy that will increase student funding by R7 billion and support approximately half a million of students in financial year 2018 (Ndenze 2018).

There are diverging positions among policymakers, governments and scholars with regard to the prospect of free higher education for all in South Africa. Habib estimates that the cost of free higher education for about one million students enrolled at the university level and 700,000 students enrolled in TVET colleges would be around R80 billion or \$5.9 billion per annum (Habib 2016). Shivambu

suggests that free education for all would be possible and the necessary funding could be found in a combination of tax increases and education levies on pension funds (Shivambu 2016). Another measure could be increasing taxes for larger corporations, the additional amount of which could support free higher education (KPMG 2016). The position of the government is that free education for all is financially not viable: in this regard, students from richer families could afford to pay existing university fees while the NSFAS could expand its funding to potentially cover also students from missing middle class households (Nnadozie 2017). However, the situation is one of a university system that lies beyond the reach for students from poor backgrounds: a system where financial aid loan schemes continue to be inadequate (Vally 2007, 20).

According to Salim Vally, current trends in higher education in South Africa “entail a disincentive for universities to enrol students from poor backgrounds and the continuing reproduction of a highly elitist system” (2007, 17). Vally cautions against further corporatization of higher education institutions, and the continuing supremacy of “markets and individualism over social justice, community and solidarity” (2007, 17). In an edited volume by Richard Pithouse published in 2006 under the title **Asinamali: University Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa**, scholars examine the transformation

of the university in South Africa from an ivory tower to a market place, and define this trajectory as a transition from autonomy to managerialism. Authors call for a defense of higher education as a public good and an autonomous sphere of critical and productive democratic citizenry, as well as resistance to the imposition of commercial values to subvert the purpose and mission of higher education institutions (Pithouse 2006).

The case of South African higher education illustrates the ongoing tension that exists between, on the one hand, the imperatives of globalization with its focus on efficiency/accountability that inform quality assurance mechanisms as well as cost-sharing, high fees and

privatization and, on the other, local social and human rights concerns with regard to equity, social justice, change and inclusion in which the sector of higher education is constantly caught up. However, As Rizvi and Lingard have argued (2010, 140), the tension between economic efficiency and social justice and how both conceptualize and address issues of enrolment, participation and graduation, are common to many higher education systems across the world. More broadly, this tension concerns the scope and content of a transformative-based quality education, the ways to evaluate it and by whom. Lastly, they reflect the roles and functions of higher education itself and the tensions that shape and redefine it.

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# 3.

## MAIN PRACTITIONERS' & ACADEMIC DEBATES

### on higher education and development since the 1990s.

Section 3.1 analyzes the changing role and agendas of international actors for higher education and development. Section 3.2 reviews the debate on the processes of globalization, internationalization and the rise of the knowledge imaginary in shaping and redefining the transformation of higher education in the past two decades. Section 3.3 specifically focuses on the expansion of international mobility of students and scholars over the same period. Section 3.4 investigates the increasing role and use of universities as part of the broader global competition between states. Section 3.5 analyzes the commodification and commercialization of universities as a result of the emergence of a WTO-regime in higher education. Section 3.6 investigates the interconnections between higher education, reproduction, change and inequality. Lastly, section 3.7 briefly touches upon the position of higher education in the security-development nexus.

### 3.1

#### International cooperation, transnational actors and higher education

Several global institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and - more recently - the European Union (EU), the Asian Development Bank and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have impacted the shaping of higher education in developing countries at various stages and in different degrees. Along with these big players, other bilateral aid agencies and private foundations have had a role (Lebeau and Sall 2011, 129). This section analyzes the

role played by international organizations in higher education agenda-setting and policy-making in developing countries. In particular it focuses on the WB and UNESCO, which have been the main players shaping the discourse and practice of higher education and development both at the local and global level. Without delving too deeply into the different phases and initiatives, the section analyzes the main policy frames, discourses and narratives that have shaped the WB's and UNESCO's commitment, highlighting the underpinning theories and assumptions. What is perhaps interesting to highlight is that neither the WB nor UNESCO ever had a specific and explicit mandate on the higher education system across the globe: indeed, for a long time the sector was not a policy priority. Both organizations have long been characterized for overlooking higher education and focusing instead on the agenda for increasing access to general education. During the 1980s and 1990s, both the WB and UNESCO strongly recommended for developing countries to focus on increasing access to basic education. DFID has recently decided to fund higher education development projects after a long pause.<sup>15</sup>

#### The role of UNESCO

Following its establishment in the aftermath of WWII, UNESCO tried to link universities to social and economic change and more broadly to national educational policies (UNESCO 1997). The organization expressed its commitment to higher education in particular by tying it to the broader issue of access to education, as part of the 'right to education' enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the Cold War period characterized by decolonization and

the emergence of new post-colonial states, the model that informed international assistance and local commitment to higher education reform was the 'developmental university' (Coleman 1986). The UNESCO paradigm underpinned by multiculturalism and peace implied the reform of higher education in line with the developmental needs of the new states. The notion of the 'developmental university' in the Third World implied "a curriculum around learning that could be productively applied immediately" (Lebeau and Sall 2011, 131).

The role of higher education, in particular the developmental university, was identified as central to both development and nation-building processes and ensured closer ties between the state and the university. This type of assistance from UNESCO and other international organizations focused on building universities for development of the country declined in the 1970s, in the context of the oil crisis and the structural adjustment programs introduced by the WB and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) throughout the 1980s. A new economic paradigm - where the origins of today's socio-economic paradigm are to be traced - was being formulated, implying a limited role for national governments in development and in a sphere that had historically constituted a core prerogative of the nation-state such as education and higher education. This relates to an important point regarding ownership over development processes and the politics of knowledge in development that is still relevant today. While the developmental model was critiqued for being overly directed by the state with issues for academic freedom, the same tension is arising today in the context of higher education reform programs for example in Africa - with national agendas being set by international agencies such as the World Bank (Sall et al. 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform, (<https://www.spheir.org.uk>, last accessed 2 May 2018)

The mid-1970s crisis had an impact on UNESCO's work on higher education, on public universities in developing countries and on the bilateral and multilateral assistance of donor partners to higher education in the same countries. The whole relationship between higher education and development – including the expectations that the former would positively correlate with the latter – was redefined and gradually abandoned. The approach by donors changed as they discovered how public universities in developing countries neither delivered on the expectations that they would bring development (of the western type) nor were they prepared to adapt to the economic crisis that swept their respective countries. Overall, donor policy underwent major revisions – from UNESCO's unconditional support for the developmental university – to UNESCO's support eventually decreasing (Lebeau and Sall 2011, 133).

This period coincided with the emergence of new ideas about the relationship between education and development – ideas that culminated in a long phase of unconditional support for basic education. While UNESCO's role in higher education declined, the WB and the IMF became dominant players and redefined the conceptualization and financing of multilateral assistance to higher education in developing countries. Within the new WB poverty eradication strategy, higher education was seen as an obstacle rather than a catalyst for economic and human development due to estimated poor rates of return of public expenditures on the sectors: thus it was often seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution (Lebeau and Sall 2011, 134).

### **The World Bank, the Neoliberal Agenda and Human Capital Theory**

The WB's neoliberal agenda on education was very much underpinned by a particular understanding and use of Human Capital Theory. Such economic models based on the rate of return influenced investments of foreign donors and national governments: the theory showed that rates of return were the highest for primary education and decreased for tertiary education. Investment in human capital – e.g., education and training undertaken by individuals – would create the skills needed for economic growth (Lebeau and Sall 2011, 134). Examples of countries that had undergone rapid economic growth and had largely invested in higher education included Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. However, in other countries such as Spain, Portugal, UK and US, an expansion of the knowledge base and qualification has been accompanied by growing unemployment rather than economic growth (Olaniyan and Okemakinde 2008, 160). Notwithstanding the lack in substantial empirical evidence, the theory became hegemonic in the WB's approach to higher education.

Higher education reforms during the 1980s should be seen also in the context of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) supervised by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) where budgets were being slashed and hard choices were being made by national governments. Such programs led to the undermining of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa and other debtor regions and a prioritization of basic education. They also paved the way for increased cost recovery and privatization in the higher levels of education.

Contrary to the 1980s and early 1990s, subsequent

WB's anti-poverty and development strategy started to problematize previous assumptions on higher education and reposition it as central to any poverty eradication policy (Salmi et al. 2009). Its 1994 Report **Higher Education: The Lessons Learnt** represented a turning point in the WB's approach to tertiary education (World Bank 1994). As the title suggests, the report recognized the mistake of undermining and overlooking higher education for more than a decade, especially in view of the rising demands for higher education in developing countries as a result, among others, of large investments and mass expansion in basic education. Such deliberate neglect was also a result of 1980s' structural adjustment policies that culminated in the so-called Washington Consensus. The Consensus laid the ground for an international approach to development strategies that was based on market fundamentalism, de-regulation, privatization, economic liberalization, macroeconomic stability and the progressive and drastic reduction of the state's role in the public good, including higher education (Stiglitz 1999).

According to the WB's own reconstruction of the process, local government funds and resources as well as donors' funding in higher education were drastically cut throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Latin America – that is, precisely where and when tertiary education had been the fastest growing sector in the education system (World Bank 1994, 16). The declining state of higher education in low and middle income countries depended on a number of factors such as rapid enrolment growth in a situation of limited resources, high dropout rates and excessive and wrong use of public resources such as “non-educational expenditures in support of student grants and subsidized student service.” (World Bank 1994, 20) The prescription emerging from the report would define the WB's approach to higher

education in developing and post-conflict countries for the ensuing decade as well as more broadly the role of national governments in higher education. The WB's redefined agenda advocated that more attention in higher education reform should be devoted to the institutional level - i.e., enhanced management, leadership and accountability in public resources (Kent 1996, 3). Moreover, some of the key recommendations of the above-mentioned 1994 Report emphasized the diversification of funding sources through sharing costs with students and the importance of institutional diversification through private institutions.

By the late 1990s, the WB had changed again its approach to higher education, this time as a result of the recognition that the gap from more-developed to less-developed countries depended in large part on knowledge disparity rather than capital scarcity (Stiglitz 1999, 588). In a new report entitled **Constructing Knowledge Societies**, the WB introduced new concepts such as globalization and the knowledge economy that would reframe its own strategy for higher education during the ensuing decade (World Bank 2002). The report was a result of a number of commissioned studies, the most prominent of which was **Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise** by the Task Force on Higher Education and Society (TFHES) jointly co-led by the WB itself and UNESCO (TFHES 2000). This study made a new diagnosis of the state of higher education in developing countries, partly building upon the diagnosis made by the WB's 1994 report that focused on local problems such as teaching methods, politicization and patronage. It also touched en-passant upon the negative impact of the WB's structural adjustment policies on access for underrepresented groups and on the funding of public universities (TFHES 2000). Moreover, it placed knowledge at the center of the development strategy. Knowledge was



identified as a central poverty reduction tool also by the World Development Report 1998/1999.

The above-mentioned report **Constructing Knowledge Societies** stressed the need “to expand the higher education sector to meet rapidly growing demand, inequality of access and outcomes, quality assurance concerns, and the need for more effective and relevant governance and management structures.” (World Bank 2002, 102) Some of the main points of the report tried to link social and economic progress to the advancement and application of knowledge; the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge to tertiary education; marginalization of developing countries in the highly-competitive world economy to several structural limits inherent in their tertiary systems of education; placed responsibility to the national governments in developing countries to enable innovative, competitive and efficient tertiary education institutions able to compete in a changing world economy and labor market.

The 2002 report was also relevant in that it stated the intention of the World Bank to lie at the core of the international community's commitment to the future of tertiary education in the developing world (World Bank 2002, 122). Scholars such as Susan Robertson have interpreted the WB's new role as part of a new multilateral agenda in higher education in developing countries, one inaugurating and legitimating an era of international and transnational interventionism and agenda-setting in national higher education systems (Robertson 2009b). According to Robertson, the introduction of concepts such as **knowledge economy** or **knowledge-based society**, “not only legitimates the Bank's policy reversal on the value of higher education, but it has enabled an articulation with capacity discourses and projects that provide a platform for trade agendas to be prioritized.” (2009b,

120) Since the launch of this report, there has been a convergence of discourses, policies and strategies among the main international agencies such as the WB, OECD, WTO and the EU on the role of higher education in a knowledge-based development.

The WB strategy on higher education in the ensuing years was underpinned by the neoliberal **New Public Management** agenda that “provides the basis for tertiary policy attention to institutional differentiation, quality assurance, system oversight bodies, competitive funding, externally accountable governance, and more business-like management” while at the same time introducing a regional dimension such as cross-border supply (WB 2009, 81). This is also confirmed by the WB's 2009 Report **Accelerating Catch-up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa**, which proposes to ameliorate some of the difficulties in equilibrating the market for tertiary-level education and skills through the regionalization of tertiary education provision (WB 2009, xxiv). In the new millennium, global education policies on higher education and development have implied a reduced role of the national state with a number of actors that operate within and beyond state level across a range of regional and international scales.

In addition to the World Bank, since 1998 UNESCO has also attempted to redefine its role through a number of World Conferences on higher education. The first 1998 UNESCO Conference led to the World Declaration on Higher Education as mentioned above, the main points of which were summarized on p. 7. It is important to highlight a convergent position towards a greater attention on higher education from both UNESCO and the WB at the turn of the millennium. This came as a result of pressure from some of the Nordic UNESCO member countries along with scholars' criticism of the overlooking of the

tertiary sector from international agencies and agendas. The UNESCO 1998 World Conference on Higher Education and the UNESCO 1999 World Conference on Science paved the way to the joint UNESCO-WB Task Force on Higher Education and Society which culminated in the above-mentioned report **Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise** and which would two years later inform the WB report **Constructing Knowledge Societies**.

#### **The UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge**

In 2004, in co-operation with the government of Sweden, UNESCO launched the Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, as a follow-up to previous World Conferences on Higher Education and as a steady annual platform for research/studies on the topic of higher education and for successive World Conferences. One of the most ambitious goals of the Forum was to represent a point of departure or diversity from the hegemonic neoliberal policy perspective on higher education that was being implemented in many countries and world regions, and more broadly to serve as a platform that could host a plurality of perspectives on higher education, in particular by incorporating insights from the higher education communities of the global South. In continuity with the TFHES report, the Forum emphasized the importance of strong national systems of higher education and research.

In other words, in a society in which growth and the economy were increasingly linked to knowledge and where the latter was produced by and through universities, the Forum advocated greater attention to the higher education sector, and proposed that each country should have at least one research university. According to the 2004 UNESCO Forum, in many countries there

was a need to strengthen higher education systems, with the aim of meeting the objectives of development policies and educational and training needs (UNESCO 2004).<sup>16</sup>

The UNESCO Forum represented a unique opportunity for repositioning UNESCO in the global governance of ‘higher education and development’. The UNESCO Forum ceased its activities in 2009 under circumstances that suggest that, beside a lack of funding, shifts in the higher education policies of global institutions, including UNESCO, played a role in its termination. At the same time, higher education was increasingly linked to the global campaigns articulated by the international community strictly in relation to its role for consolidation of the information and knowledge society. This was proven by the 2005 UNESCO World Report **Towards Knowledge Societies**, which suggested UNESCO's approach to the growing internationalization of higher education (Mundy and Madden 2009). UNESCO's approach to the knowledge-based society and universities' role therein seems an attempt to distance itself from the narrowly economic approach taken by the World Bank on information and knowledge economies. Put differently, in this report UNESCO embraces the concept of knowledge society within a globalized (higher education) world by putting it in the broader cultural pluralism and diversity approach that had always characterized UNESCO work and to counterbalance the increasing emphasis put by the World Bank and other international players on the information society.

To sum up, starting from the 1950s, international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank and OECD have increasingly influenced national higher education policy. These organizations

<sup>16</sup> (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001291/129172eo.pdf>, last accessed 10 April 2018)

have influenced countries' education agendas through the diffusion of norms and the funding of specific policies (Robertson et al. 2012a, 118). However, higher education was increasingly marginalized during the 1980s and the 1990s, with the shift being mainly justified by the argument of lower rates of return of higher education investments. Since the early 2000s, new evidence supported the policy shift for more investment in higher education (Owens 2017). International organizations shifted their policy perspectives and priorities and started developing parallel agendas in higher education. The World Bank focused on world-class universities; the OECD on skills and training strategies, while UNESCO on "continued coordination of academic networks and global and regional qualifications frameworks" (Owens 2017, 416). Yet, higher education was not explicitly incorporated in the Dakar Framework for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All agenda. Throughout these years, underfunding in the higher education sector has hampered its development, delayed advances in basic education and applied research, as well as teacher training and health care provision (Owens 2017). Currently, international aid in higher education has been fractured and a small amount of it goes on building sector capacities in national contexts: "In 2015, bilateral and multilateral agencies invested \$3.5 billion in post-secondary education, of which only about 30% was spent on strengthening higher education institutions. The remaining 70% went to study abroad scholarships and their indirect costs, most of which was spent in the donor country, not the recipient country" (UNESCO 2016a quoted in Owens 2017, 416).

### 3.2 Globalization and internationalization of higher education: the rise of the knowledge economy/society imaginary

The past three decades have seen the increased globalization of both production and labor markets, with important consequences for the relationship between skill and wages in economies such as that of the US and the UK (Brown et al., 2010). At the same time, the imaginary of knowledge-based economy and society has gained traction. Along this view, economic advantage and competitiveness is based upon consumption and production of knowledge. Both globalization and the knowledge economy have thus affected the development and transformation of higher education, including its growing internationalization (OECD 2014b). The process of globalization is "[...] associated with the actions and interests of transnational corporations, the workings of global financial and labor markets, the development of new forms of production based on new technologies, and the compression of time and space resulting in an ascendancy of real time over clock time." (Naidoo 2011, 41) Held et al. have described globalization as "the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness." (1999, 2) The influence of the knowledge-economy discourse in higher education is seen in the prioritization of the relationship between higher education and economic growth. The rise of the new public management (NPM) discourse has shaped and influenced structural and behavioral changes within higher education. Marginson and van der Wende has summarized some of the defining

features of the new hegemonic concept of NPM: *The templates of the new public management include the modelling of national systems as economic markets; government-steered competition between institutions, and executive-steered competition between academic units; part-devolution of responsibility for administering and often for raising finances; incentives to reduce costs per unit and to engage in entrepreneurial behaviour; new or augmented price signals; incentives to link with business and industry; performance measures and output-based funding; and relations with funding agencies and managers based on quasi-corporate forms such as contracts, accountability and audit. (2009, 55, note 3)*

How relevant and good quality higher education is understood and defined is shaped by the impact of globalization, the predominance of knowledge-economy discourses and NPM approaches, the latter three also shaping and framing quality assurance systems and mechanisms.

Examples of the ways in which globalization has affected higher education span from "changing patterns in the ownership of multinational publishing and Internet companies, the world-wide expenditure of research and development funds, and international patterns of cultural diffusion" (Altbach 2005, 64). Internationalization in higher education is a consequence of globalization referring to policies and programs by governments, higher education institutions and international agencies which allows more autonomy and flexibility to universities in a globalized environment (Altbach 2005, 64). Another interrelated phenomenon identified by the literature is "Multinationalization" which implies overseas academic programs, collaboration between institutions in different countries in the form of joint-degrees or

"twinning" (Altbach 2005, 64). Other scholars have referred to franchising academic branches and programs overseas calling it "McDonaldization." (Hayes and Wynyard 2002) While, historically speaking, universities have always combined national realities with international trends and models somehow mirroring the ideal of the **République des Lettres**, 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization in and of higher education is worldwide in reach and pervasiveness due to the rapid dispersion of innovation, practices and technology and is based on the assumption that higher education is crucial to the production of knowledge in an era where knowledge-based economy is central to the development and expansion of globalization.

Compared to the beginning of the 1990s, the higher education sector has undergone significant changes with a number of themes and policy issues that have come to characterize it: among them, one can mention the growing international academic mobility and interdependence, institutionalized global competences that are translated and transposed through a myriad of policy tools and governance instruments operating at different global, regional and national scales (Robertson and Komljenovic 2016; Robertson 2014). A large body of literature by now has documented the global dynamics at play in the higher education sector worldwide, including market mechanisms like competition and choice to generate greater efficiency, and the penetration of private-for-profit actors in a range of higher education activities (Robertson et al., 2012b; Ehrenberg 2005). The selective process of erasing existing borders and creating new ones, as a result of neoliberal globalization, sees the higher education sector at the forefront, precisely because it represents a knowledge-producing sector in an era where the idea of knowledge-based economy and society is widely sustained



and promoted (Jessop et al., 2008).

However, the transformation of the higher education sector as a result of globalization and the role of the state, international actors and global market competition for higher education reform differ across countries. In the US, the UK and other Western countries the transformation of the sector has been characterized by the introduction of audit and market mechanisms (Naidoo 2011, 43). In China and other emerging Asian economies, the expansion and transformation of higher education has been tied to national development strategies, becoming a function of growing the competitiveness at the global level. A major change in the Chinese case is the introduction of marketization elements such as fees, internal competition and revenue-generating activities (Vidovich et al., 2007).

The dependence on knowledge and innovation for enhancing national comparative advantage in the global economy has made higher education a central factor in the competition between nation-states and has positioned it as a crucial engine for economic development (Naidoo 2011, 43-44). Some of the issues and questions identified in the literature concern the extent to which globalization is producing worldwide inequality, if it has led to the “McDonaldization of the university” and last if it is to be accounted for contemporary changes and pressures on higher education such as massification and growth of the private sector (Altbach 2005, 63). The rise of new technologies and the globalization of knowledge have sharpened existing inequalities in marginalized peripheries (Santos 2007). The global higher education sector is becoming increasingly competitive and is dominated, in terms of enrolled students, by world-class universities based in Western countries (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and France,

and to a lesser extent Italy and Spain) suggesting how globalization has exacerbated existing inequalities in higher education at the global scale (Altbach 2001, 2-3). More specifically, it has exacerbated inequalities in international partnerships between universities in the north and south (Maringe et al. 2013; Unterhalter and Carpentier 2010). This last point relates to the differential impacts of neo-liberalization of higher education in the global north and the global south. On the one hand there has been a demoralization/devaluation of universities in the global south as they fail to compete at the global level; on the other hand those elite universities that do compete are increasingly disconnected from their local societies (Hanafi 2011).

### 3.3 The expansion of international mobility of students and scholars

**I**n the past two decades, one of the most important changes in higher education has been the increase of global enrolment rates. While in 2000, approximately 99.4 million students were enrolled in higher education across the world, by 2030 around 414.3 million students are expected to be enrolled (Calderon 2012, 1). In policy circles, government policies that aim at increasing the access to higher education are linked in part to creating competitive knowledge-based economies (Jessop 2008b). Mobilizing and developing the brain power of the nations is seen to be closely linked to the wealth of the nations in an era of post-industrial development in that new knowledge will lead to innovation, and other forms of intellectual property (OECD 1996). These arguments have been informed by agendas and projects of a range of actors such

as national governments and international and supranational agencies such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank (WB) and the European Union (EU), as well as regional politico-economic areas such as the ASEAN.

A second related change that cannot be overlooked is the expansion and internationalization of students across the globe (OECD 2014a). According to OECD's **Education at a Glance**, in the 1990s around 1.3 million students were enrolled outside of their country of citizenship, the figure increasing to 4.5 million students by 2014 (OECD 2014a, 342). Robertson and Kedzierski (2015, 7-8) contend that a number of drivers have been important in shaping such flows, among them, the demand for a knowledge driven economy and skilled human resources; the emerging of a middle class in Asia able to pay for higher education; overseas education seen as a means for social mobility; regional mobility initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus, the South East Asian Higher Education Area, Mercosur etc. Moreover, the global higher education marketplace expands as there is increasing homogenization between different academic degrees across countries. According to the OECD, the US attracted most of the foreign students (16 percent), followed by the UK (13 percent), Germany (6 percent), France (6 percent) and Australia (6 percent) (OECD 2014a). Generally, the flows of international students and scholars move from the Global South/developing countries to the Global North/metropolitan academic systems. The risk of such academic migratory flows is that they might weaken academic systems in developing countries and reproduce the same inequality patterns. Simon Marginson (2017) points to the emergence of a global elite of cross-border students with the private means to afford access to world-class universities and who thanks to their foreign degrees are able to

secure better careers when they return home, enhancing social and economic stratification. Higher education has also witnessed a multinationalization of educational initiatives such as twinning programs, linking academic institutions in two or more countries, or the opening of academic branches overseas, many of which uses the Internet as a vehicle for delivery. As with students' and scholars' mobility, the multinationalization of higher education sees American and Northern Universities opening local branches in other high, medium and low income countries. Usually, these schools are established based on local request and initiative, but are supervised by US faculty/partners and accredited in the US, with a US-based curriculum and English as the medium of instruction. The inviting partner in the host country is usually a for-profit corporation, an academic institution or a combination of the two.

As a matter of fact, there are relatively few international branch campuses in most countries (except Malaysia and a few others, including some of the Gulf States) – as they are generally considered high investment and high risk. More significant is the range of twinning arrangements (or ‘partnerships’) formed with local institutions, usually from the private, rather than the public, higher education sector. There is growing evidence that when allowed to proliferate, they can skew the profile of the higher education sector through the local private provision of low-investment foreign courses focused on the professions (i.e., finance and accountancy, MBAs, software engineering degrees), leaving the state to fund high cost degrees and/or those not directly linked to a profession (often humanities, social sciences and pure sciences). Moreover, these courses are often used to drive students towards the home campus (i.e., in the US/UK) for high fee top up degrees or higher level masters and PhDs.

Some of these multinational higher education arrangements do not meet local needs as in the case of Malaysia, which hosts many Australian and UK local academic branches: the new programs led to considerable criticism concerning low quality, poor supervision and limitations in the communication between the provider and the host (Altbach 2005, 70). Similarly, when the Israeli government liberalized the higher education market, many small American colleges offered HE programs in Israel, which was followed by local restrictions and eventually closure (Ibid.). Another form that the multinationalization of higher education takes is a form of franchising. In this regard, foreign universities have provided the name and curriculum to a local academic institution or business firm without supervision or quality check, which in practice has led to many abuses linked to the quality of the curriculum and teaching (Ibid.). Multinationalization is driven by profit and often reproduces the same inequalities as other forms of globalization in the higher education sector.

International arrangements to regulate the globalization of higher education take many forms ranging from bilateral agreements dealing with students and faculty exchanges –such as scholarship programs– to the mutual recognition of diplomas. The Bologna framework is the most comprehensive international agreement harmonizing all European Union higher education systems. Launched in 1999 through a number of formal agreements it led to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area whose main points included increasing mobility, employability and equitable student access and progression. It has created an area that includes 48 countries – both European and Central Asian and Caucasus – with a common framework in terms of qualifications, credit system and quality assurance standards. It has also informed other regional initiatives such

as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (GEMR 2017/8, 98). By contrast, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has little implications for higher education.

The role of Asia in the mobility dimension of HE is growing both in terms of sending and receiving foreign students, in particular the growing importance of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and China (UNESCO 2013; IIE 2013). Two often overlooked regions in global mobility figures -Latin America and Africa- have been the target of region building projects often funded by the European Commission (Robertson 2014). It is however Sub-Saharan Africa that comprises 40 countries in total that faces the biggest challenges in terms of student mobility and higher education provision (UNESCO 2013). The gross enrolment rate in higher education for this region is 6 percent compared to 13 percent for South East Asia and 73 percent for North America.

Internationalization is expected to deepen rather than diminish as departments, institutions and countries become more dependent on international student mobility and the economic benefits stemming from tuition fees (British Council 2017; British Council 2012). Besides, international students contribute to the local economy in a range of other ways. This has turned education into a key export good in a nation's trade which seems at odds with the image of higher education as a public good. The growing dependence on higher education as a value-producing sector for the economy, suggests that mobility – seen and defined as crucial to learning in the new global economy – will remain a defining feature of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with effects on students, institutions, regions and countries (Robertson and Kedzierski 2015, 20; British Council 2012) whose changes on social formations need further investigation (Sheller and Urry 2006).

Rationales for internationalization can be complex and interconnected. In addition to the economic drivers for forming higher education partnerships, there is also the need to expand research networks, access research sites and work with new partners to create new knowledge, particularly for complex global problems acutely affecting developing countries.

### 3.4 Higher education and global competition

The ascendancy of knowledge-driven capitalism, with its emphasis on the reconfiguration of skills to inform innovation and technological changes as the basis for value-added production, has affected the role and position of universities in low income countries. One of the transformations of the sector is related to the shift from an elite to a mass institution. A new orthodox position nurtured by the knowledge-based narrative has emerged, assuming that globalization, by enabling the rapid use, access and transmission of information worldwide, would allow developing countries to use knowledge to overcome intermediate developmental stages and reposition and renegotiate their place in the global economy (Castells 2011 quoted in Naidoo 2011, 44). In this new context, universities in both advanced economies and developing countries have become key developmental actors. According to the above-mentioned World Bank and UNESCO Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries “Higher education has never been as important to the developing world as it is now. It cannot guarantee rapid economic development but sustained progress is impossible without it.” (TFHES 2000, 19)

Linking universities to global competitiveness and knowledge-economy has led to the exponential expansion of higher education in a number of countries, from the growing economies of Russia, China and India to emerging economies and low income countries such as Lithuania and Hungary. Rich countries in the MENA region such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates too have known a robust expansion of the sector (Brown et al., 2010). Development of the sector of higher education worldwide over the past two decades has been connected to global competitiveness and competition. An increasingly large number of universities have become part of a race for world-class status based on global university rankings (Naidoo 2011, 45). In this race, universities in low income countries have started to compete with elite American and European institutions and in doing so the former have tried to align with the characteristics of the latter, paying increasing attention to performance indicators and reputation.

The development of regional hubs of excellence in Middle Eastern countries shows how higher education is being used in specific low income countries to both enhance their international profile, soft power attributions and political status in the region and globally (Naidoo 2011, 48). For this purpose, for example, Dubai has created the Knowledge Village and the Dubai International Education City where in the same economic and physical space foreign education institutions and companies are located with the aim of attracting and recruiting international students, building and generating new knowledge and preparing local students for the knowledge economy (Naidoo 2011, 48). Cuba stands out as an example of a developing country that succeeded in building an alternative model of mass and high-quality higher education as opposed to American and Western European countries. According



to Cardenas et al., knowledge in the Cuban context is associated with positive social and economic impact, linked to the public good and not placed at the service of economic competition as in neoliberal regimes (2008, 3). The university system in Cuba is characterized by open source publishing, strong articulation between productive and national innovative systems and a focus on social inclusion (Naidoo 2011, 48). In the past four decades, the country has been cooperating with other developing countries in the higher education sector by accepting disadvantaged students from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and since 2007 by signing bilateral agreements with Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, Nicaragua, Mexico and Ecuador (Ibid., 48).

### 3.5 Commercialization and marketization of higher education: the commodifi- cation of universities

The past two decades have seen the marketization, commodification and commercialization of higher education with profound and yet little explored effects on its public nature. Higher education is now often regarded as a good subject to market imperatives and “is increasingly seen as a commercial product to be bought and sold like any other” (Altbach 2001, 2). As the state is increasingly unwilling or unable to provide sufficient resources, universities are expected to generate funding themselves, through competitive fund raising, partnerships with private corporations, increased tuition fees or privatization. As a result of increasing commercialization, one finds a proliferation of private higher education institutions: these institutions, much

like the public ones, provide and sell skills, diplomas and certificates (Altbach 2001, 3).

The World Trade Organization (WTO) and its General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) have played an important role in regulating the free circulation of knowledge products in the global market. The goal of both WTO and GATS is to ensure free market access to higher education institutions and products. This means that education providers, both private and public, could export and sell programs and degrees and set up overseas educational institutions with minimal restriction (Robertson et al 2012a; Ehrenberg 2005). The marketization and commercialization of higher education by means of WTO and its GATS raises questions related to the idea of higher education, its role and future, particularly in developing countries. These questions concern first the ways and possibilities for universities to preserve their academic independence and freedom in an interconnected and globalized world in which legal and practical control over higher education is reduced and often delegated to transnational mechanisms and venues. Second, they concern the ways in which accreditation and quality assurance function, under which conditions and by which authorities. Third, the increasing proliferation of private providers or corporations in higher education raises questions regarding the ways in which education and knowledge are valued and differentiated between public and private providers. As higher education is being regulated under the WTO regime, its autonomy is restricted: research becomes a product subject to market rules, international treaties and bureaucratic regulations (Altbach 2001, 3).

GATS promotes an open market for knowledge products including higher education. It is underpinned by the assumption that knowledge is a commodity that should be freely traded. It

provides frameworks that legally bind the free circulation and competition of educational services and the protection of intellectual property. These frameworks aim to ensure the global trade in knowledge products and protect the owners/sellers of knowledge products. It is for this reason that the agreements have a negative impact for developing countries. In an unequal world, one of the issues that the GATS regime raises is whether higher education could be treated as a commodity and what impact this would have on higher education in developing countries. A global framework of commerce and exchange in higher education would come at the expense of reduced autonomy for national educational decision-making.

Extending free trade to higher education has paved the way for universities and private educational corporations from high income countries to penetrate educational markets in the developing world without barriers and checks (Robertson et al 2012a; Ehrenberg 2005). Historically, the role and functions of universities have been often linked to national development priorities in developing countries, linking research to local needs and knowledge. This is where commercialization has a specific effect: universities in developing countries are not competitive in the global marketplace. Under a WTO-regulated regime they could be swapped away by overseas universities and programs that are profit-driven rather than (national) development-driven. The historic connection between universities and national development priorities in the global south is increasingly absent/broken due to the fact that elite universities compete at global level and to the mushrooming of for-profit private universities that are characterized by extremely limited research capacity and minimal commitment to public good. There seems to be a lack of understanding and awareness of the potential longer-term impacts on national

higher education systems, and also the economic and political drivers associated with the foreign policy agendas in higher education aid.

Recent research points to the fact that 1 in 3 students globally are enrolled in a private university and almost 70% of private universities are located in the global south, with rising concerns about quality and equity (Bothwell 2018). This proliferation of private universities is particularly apparent in post-conflict contexts such as Lebanon, Bosnia, Angola with implications for the role of higher education in post-conflict recovery processes (Milton 2018).

Evidence from India shows that the proliferation of private higher education with weak regulations has led to low-quality ‘diploma mills’ (Knight 2003). With one of the largest higher education systems in the world, third to the US and China, the system is dominated by private actors who “account for 60 percent of the total institutes and 64 percent of total enrolment of students” (CCS 2015, 4). However, the Indian higher education sector continues to suffer from three fundamental challenges, namely access, equity and quality (FICCI 2011, 5). By 2006, approximately ¾ of Indian private universities did not meet minimum standards (Anandkrishnan 2006). This led to a multiplication of regulations and regulators aimed at ensuring minimum standards that have often resulted in overlapping mandates, barriers to foreign university participation and restrictions on running for-profit higher education institutions (FICCI 2011, 57). By 2011, 161 colleges out of a total of 4,371 were accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council [NAAC] (FICCI 2011, 17). Currently, private higher education faces challenges related to quality of teaching staff, a complex and inflexible regulatory framework for private provision and funding constraints

(FICCI 2011, 53). Other scholars working on technological education in India have shown how the state has provided high-quality technological education for a narrow elite while the masses have had access to technology education provided by private institutions, ultimately leading to a situation in which caste and class inequalities are reproduced (Kamat et al. 2006).

De Cohen (2003) has shown how in the Argentinian case, public higher education has historically served as a vehicle of social mobility. This situation has changed and the public sector is challenged by the growth of an elite private higher education sector, limited student financial resources and aid, and overcrowding related to transformation of the sector into a mass system.

To sum up, higher education has emerged as a globally-competitive producer of knowledge and a service sector. The market-making processes are reconstituting the university and the higher education sector. There is now a consolidated literature that investigates and identifies the ideological origins of the market logic in higher education in neoliberalism and New Public Management. Both have paved the way to the transformation of social relations within the university sector as well as to competition, privatization and the commodification of it (Komljenovic and Robertson 2016). Some of the changes and consequences of the marketization of universities have to do with students being seen as consumers, a pervasive market logic and imperatives that underpin and inform academic work, as well as the linking and equaling of investments in universities with investments in human capital. Some of the outcomes of neoliberal policies in higher education have to do with changes in the governance of higher education: how the government, historically the main provider of higher education, has been replaced by supra-

governmental and supra-national or for-profit organizations that provide a range of services in the HE sector (Ball 2007, 2012).

### 3.6 Higher education, inequality, reproduction and social (in)justice

In his book *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Thomas Piketty puts forward that “[...] the best way to reduce inequalities with respect to labor [...] is to invest in education” (Piketty 2014, 306-7). According to Susan Robertsons, Piketty narrowly views education as human capital, “rather than seeing education as being a key social institution involved in both the production and reproduction of capitalist societies. It is thus a key institution in producing social relations, including class, race and gender, which in turn mediate ongoing income and wealth inequalities” (Robertson, 2015, p. 4). Robertson and Dale (2013) claim that higher education has produced greater inequalities as a result of how the sector has been transformed and the types of individual, subjectivities and social relations that it has produced.

These transformations are linked to the income and wealth dynamics depicted by Piketty. These dynamics are also connected to declining tax receipts to the state that has limited its own capacity to redistribute, thereby creating a burden on households. As mentioned above, higher education itself is a new frontier for commodification both for the state and entrepreneurs bringing it directly into the sphere of production, profit making and wealth generation (Robertson et al. 2012a). Following the launch of the post-2015 education priorities agenda, OECD Director for Education and Skills Andreas Schleicher claimed that South Korea’s

economic development and its investment in education proves “what is possible in education.” More specifically, he argued that

*Korea provides an amazing example of how education can leverage social progress and become the key agent of change. Two generations ago Korea had the same level of economic development that Afghanistan has today, and one of the least developed education systems. Today, Korea is one of the driving forces of the OECD, and Korea’s school system comes out on top of our global PISA metrics for the quality of education...and better education outcomes can help improve income and reduce poverty. The key message here is simple: there is no shortcut to improved learning outcomes in a post-2015 world where knowledge and skills have become the global currency. And there is no central bank that prints this currency. We cannot inherit this currency, and we cannot produce it through speculation: we can only develop it through sustained effort and investment in people, both young and old. And for those countries struggling to provide high-quality education, the economic output that is lost because of poor education policies and practices leaves many of them in a permanent state of economic recession (Schleicher 2015, 1).*

As Robertson argues, “whilst clearly enhanced levels of education can enhance worker productivity and economic growth, it is not causal”, nor automatic (Robertson 2015, 12). This loose correlation is illustrated by those low growth economies such as Spain, Portugal, US and UK with highly educated workforces and high unemployment levels (OECD 2014b). A technical/human capital view of education often identified as a panacea to rising inequalities reproduces the competitive foundation of inequality (Robertson 2015, 13). Morley et al, (2008) argues that expanding higher education access does not necessarily reduce inequality but can exacerbate it.

Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2010) contend that ongoing processes of globalization have transformed national labor markets, production and wages with consequences for sectors like higher education. Innovations such as digital technologies have enabled routine professional work such as health and education among others to be off-shored, outsourced, completed and returned back quickly. The authors have called this “digital Taylorism” (Brown et al. 2010, 72). Along this line, the social inequalities emerging as a result of the concentration of wealth and income since the 1980s have impacted the public nature of education and, most importantly, higher education, in particular with regard to three interconnected issues: declining tax receipts accompanied by rising public and private debt; commodification of education; the emergence of new social norms such as individualism and entrepreneurship.

Reforms promoted since the 1970s have resulted in an escalation in public debt on the one hand, and a fiscal crisis of the contemporary state on the other: a shift from a model of tax state to one of debt state can be observed (Streeck 2014b): “rising public debt can be and is being utilized politically to argue for cutbacks in state spending and for privatisation of public services” (Streeck 2014a, 43). For education this has meant that investment, redistribution and teachers’ wages have come under pressure. This has also resulted in hybrid forms of fundraising known as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). Increasing public debt has been paralleled by rising private debt through various micro-financial mechanisms. The implications become clear once one considers how a growing number of households are expected and required to carry the costs of a highly competitive education race. The higher education sector in the UK and the US is a case in point. In the US, \$1.2 trillion is owed



in student loan debt with approximately 40 million borrowers involved (Holland 2015, 1): “as universities are confronted with funding shortfalls and/or governments willing to change the regulatory protections around education as a public good – they are also exposed to a predatory form of financial capital – including private equity firms which in turn makes education vulnerable to the logics of profit, differentiation and social inequalities” (Robertson 2015, 19).

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## COLOMBIA

### The case of higher education in Colombia, between privatization and local resistance

In 1990 Harry Anthony Patrinos, a World Bank economist, advocated a number of policy changes for funding higher education in Colombia. In his own words, such policy changes would “allow more equitable access to education, to increase the resources flowing to education and to derive maximum benefit from this increase in funds. The proposed changes include decentralizing management, expanding private schools and introducing student loans and selective scholarships and cost-recovery in higher education” (Patrinos 1990, 161) Two decades later, a joint report by the OECD and the World Bank entitled **Tertiary Education in Colombia** points to remaining challenges in tertiary education in Colombia that represent also key governmental policy goals, such as “expanding enrolment and improving equity, increasing quality and relevance, and making governance and finance more responsive.” (OECD-World Bank 2012, 3) Some of the strengths in Colombian tertiary education identified in the report are a dramatic expansion of enrolment during the decade 2002-12 that brought about a more equitable distribution

of access to tertiary education; a diverse institutional planning; sound national planning; strong support for equity and a student loan institution, the **Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad** (ICETEX), which was the first one in the world and is considered by the OECD and the World Bank as one of the best; and a comprehensive assessment system in education (OECD-World Bank 2012, 13-14). While the expansion of public provision of higher education has created additional opportunities for students in need of financial support, institutional finance policies have resulted in unequal opportunities for access: in some regions tertiary education is free of charge in public institutions while in other regions students have to pay considerable tuition fees (OECD-World Bank 2012, 15).

Colombia is a major economy of the Latin America and Caribbean region. In line with global discourses and policies, several Colombian governments have identified human capital development as key to the achievement of social and economic developmental goals. Until the peace agreements signed in 2016



the country was caught up in a long violent conflict between Marxist-inspired guerrilla movements, the Colombian security forces and far-right paramilitary organizations. The conflict roots are identified in “the highly unequal distribution of wealth and political power in a country bestowed with a wide range of natural and human resources. [...] coupled with a history of government failure to deliver equitable social and economic reform” (Fernandez 2003 quoted in Novelli 2009a, 191). The conflict has affected the education system in direct and indirect ways, including political violence and attacks targeting students, teachers and trade unionists (Novelli 2009a; Novelli 2009b; Novelli 2010). The government’s attempt to reform Law 30 - i.e., the statute governing tertiary education -which envisaged further involvement and legalization of for-profit education- faced fierce opposition in the national debate. The Colombian education system suffers several quality and efficiency problems across all levels of education, and it is a stratified system whereby students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds often lack the preparation to succeed at tertiary level, with the tertiary level characterized by high dropouts. Higher education funding relies upon a mix of private and public sources, with disparities in distribution of resources persisting.

Colombian tertiary education is structured along four different types of institutions: universities (which offer the full range of academic

programs including doctorates); university institutions (a type of institution offering undergraduate/graduate programs up to professional level, qualified above bachelor but below master level); technological institutions; and professional technical institutions. In 2011, there were respectively 32 public universities and 48 private ones; 27 public university institutions and 88 private ones; 12 public technological institutions and 42 private ones; 9 public professional technical institutions and 30 private ones (MEN 2011). Compared to 2007, there has been an increase in private universities and private university institutions. Overall, there are more private tertiary institutions than public ones, suggesting that the agendas of international organizations such as the World Bank and governmental strategies have converged towards an increase in private provision of higher education. Of the growth in total enrolment between 2002 and 2012, 75.7 percent was in public institutions while 24.3 percent was in private ones (MEN 2011).

In Latin America, Colombia has historically been a leader country in the diversified private higher education provision, with a 68 percent of private sector in tertiary education, half of total national enrolment and twice the number of public higher education institutions (Uribe 2015, 13-14). Colombian governments have supported private higher education ability to absorb the increasing demand for access





and graduation and have identified private higher education provision as the solution for the financial (un)sustainability of higher education expansion. Increasing privatization in education has occurred as a result of a lack of investment from the state to expand public higher education. Quality has become a major concern in a system relying so much on private provision. Since 2001, with the adoption of a quality assurance system, the government has become more concerned with academic quality-related issues, developing a number of tools “to stimulate the private initiative in open competition for public funds, by supporting projects to increase quality while achieving enrolment goals.” (Uribe 2015, 14)

A large part of private non-elite universities are family-owned navigating ambiguously between the goal of financial gains and the legal condition and constrain of operating under a non-for-profit status. Some of the critiques towards such private higher institutions concern dubious practices related to financial gains, i.e., family members having positions and high salaries within the same private institutions, rented buildings officially under the name of university but used for private reasons, etc.<sup>17</sup> The massification of higher education has led to a proliferation of different types of private higher education institutions ranging from bottom-tier, semi-elite, to elite ones. This has raised issues related to quality and legitimacy

<sup>17</sup> Informal interview with Law professor, Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, 12 April 2018

of such institutions. A dilemma and trade-off that is found also in other countries is the expansion of access, which has created low quality problems in private higher education provision. While private higher education has achieved a 62 percent absorption rate of high school graduates, their academic background remains quite poor.

During the period 2007-2011, GDP spending on higher education rose from 1.84 percent to 1.96 percent. During the same period, private spending has declined. Colombian public universities are funded following a calculation that takes into account staff numbers, student enrolment and research output. All tertiary institutions charge fees that vary according to the kind of provision (private/public), degree, university and geographical origin. In particular, private tertiary institutions rely on student fees and they are required by law to serve on a not-for-profit basis. A draft law to revision Law 30 of 1992, the main statute governing tertiary education, aimed at legally introducing in the system for-profit universities under specific conditions. Under the current legal framework, for-profit providers are not allowed to enter the system and private higher education institutions are legally obliged to operate under a non-for-profit status. The revision of the law was explicitly justified by the need to implement the ambitious National Education Plan 2011-2014. Another reason was to allow the government to fill the gap in

resources for tertiary education. The rationale was to increase the places for students by allowing more private funds to enter in tertiary education through public-private partnerships. Through a series of public protests, demonstrations and eventually university strikes throughout the country, students and teachers contested the draft law. This led to the withdrawal of the law in November 2011. Among the concerns of students and academics was the fact that the revised draft law aimed at encouraging more professional-technical and technological education and private provision of higher education, thus further weakening the already weak Colombian public universities, in particular by threatening their autonomy to provide liberal arts education. Resistance against the new law and national demonstrations showed the importance of Colombian tertiary education, and suggested that at stake was not only the vision of Colombian tertiary education but also alternative visions over the future.

One of the main challenges in Colombian tertiary education remains equality in access for students from poorer households. One of the factors determining inequality are the different fees based on the type and level of tertiary education, very much related to the public or private status of the institution. A further factor is the limited resources of ICETEX to provide loans to all eligible students. In 2014, the program Ser Pilo Paga

was introduced to cover tuition and living costs for students in 39 high-quality universities on the basis of merit measured in graduation and income for pursuing higher education either at private or public universities (ICETEX 2017a quoted in GEMR 2017/8, 168). Another program called Tú eliges made repayment options flexible (Ibid.). The main criticism to Ser Pilo Paga is that it reproduces and reinforces existing inequalities between private and public universities, since the majority of students receiving such scholarships choose private higher education institutions such as the Universidad de Los Andes which is the only Colombian university featuring in the top 500 of the World Universities' rankings (Webometrics.info).<sup>18</sup>

It is expected that the demand for higher education in Colombia will continue to increase. Government's plans on boosting the sector have been focusing on areas deemed necessary for a changing global economy, namely technical, technological and graduate-level education and on inclusion of private actors in higher education provision. Not surprisingly, this choice has entailed less focus and resources on degrees such as the humanities and social science. Similar to other contexts, tertiary institutions and programs are disproportionately and unevenly distributed in particular regions and cities, in particular in the capital Bogota. Geographical constraints decrease the opportunities for

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

access to tertiary education for students from lower socio-economic strata. What seems to be missing is a fairer geographical distribution of resources that takes into account the need for access to tertiary level for students from lower socio-economic and rural backgrounds, as well as students from indigenous communities.

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## 4

# Challenges to the right to equal access to and representation in higher education

One of the trends that has mainly characterized higher education in the past decade is the expansion of access in developing countries. While access in developing countries has been influenced by similar trends in Western universities, part of the literature has questioned the extent to which this trend reflects the specific needs of developing countries and with what results (Lebeau and Sall 2011, 129). According to Salmi (2017a), such trend is in part related to increasing access to basic education.

Some of the current challenges in higher education concern the lack of quality control, equal access, accountability and costs of accreditation. This section explores a number of factors and challenges that affect the equal access to quality higher education: socio-cultural factors, in particular, section 4.1 focuses on the gender issue in higher education. Economic factors are further developed in three sections: section 4.2 focuses on the affordability of tertiary education as far as fees and increasing costs are concerned; section 4.3 focuses on funding and investment and section 4.4 on the privatization of higher education provision.

### 4.1

## Gender equality, access and representation in higher education

**A** number of policy and advocacy initiatives, as well as gender equality legislations and expansion of opportunities at various national and international levels have led to the increase in the number of women undergraduate students in academia (Morley 2011). Currently, female enrolment ratios slightly exceed those of men worldwide. Between 1977 and 2008 the number of female students in higher education rose from 10.8 to 77.4 million (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2010). In terms of enrolment rates, women have outnumbered men as graduates in almost all regions, with the exception of Sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of participation rates, figures from the latest GEMR report (2017/8, 162 - see Fig. 4) show vast disparities between rich and poor in low and middle income countries and suggest that low and middle income countries need to introduce policies to make post-secondary education accessible to the poor.



However, high rates of women's enrolment and participation at the undergraduate level are not translated into proportional representation at upper levels in the global academy, in particular in leadership and decision-making positions. Research conducted by the **Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER)** at the University of Sussex for the periods 1997-2003 and 2004-2010, shows that women's role and presence in tertiary education is decreasing in those higher grades where power, resources and influence increase (Blandford et al. 2011; Lund 1998; She Figures 2003, 2006, 2009; Singh 2002, 2008). More specifically, women headed only 13 percent of higher education institutions in the 27 EU countries. In the EU, countries that scored better in terms of highest share of female rectors were Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Israel, while countries that scored worse were Denmark, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Hungary (She Figures 2009 quoted in Morley 2013, 119-20). This under-representation reflects and constitutes continuing inequalities and missed opportunities for women to contribute to higher education both in the present and future. In a research report on women's leadership in South Asia commissioned by the British Council, Morley and Crossouard concluded that women in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka are not only restricted from gaining higher level leadership positions but also reluctant to seek promotion in a male-constructed and driven system (Morley and Crossouard 2014).

Gender inequality in senior leadership positions is a transversal issue, one that is present in countries with different gender equality legislation and diverse socio-economic and political contexts both in the Global South and in the Global North. Between 2009 and 2010, women were 44 percent of all UK academics and moving to the professorial

role, women made only 19.1 percent (Morley 2013, 121). Data from the EU confirm a similar trend whereby undergraduate female students represent 55%, graduate female students 59 percent and women in professorial positions only 18 percent (She Figures 2009). While the latest reforms in HE have created a variety of managerial positions such as quality assurance, innovation, engagement and marketing managers (see Deem 2003; Fitzgerald and Wilkinson 2010; Morley 2003; Noble and Moore 2006), these are occupied by men while women are found more often in communication and human resource management.

Some of the recent reforms in higher education have seen a shift in focus from managerialism to leaderism, the result being further exacerbation of the gender divide in academia. According to O'Reilly and Reed, the concept of leadership has come to represent an organizational technology that redefines public services' role towards the consumer-citizen (2010, 2011).

*A powerful cultural ideology has emerged in higher education reform suggesting that the essential ingredient in successful organisational transformation is that of leadership. Leadership has replaced management in post-neo-liberal higher education change discourse and is defined by Northhouse (2007,3) as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. The focus on leadership as the organisational panacea has produced a critical literature on 'leaderism' [...] The cultural ideology of leaderism suggests that certain subjectivities, values, behaviours, dispositions and characteristics can strategically overcome institutional inertia, outflank resistance and recalcitrance and provide direction for new university futures (Morley 2013, 117).*

As research has shown, however, such subjectivities are always male: women's

leadership in the global academia remains under-represented. Part of the literature has pointed out how focusing on productivity, competitiveness, and the logic of the market makes HE leadership a masculine domain (Fitzgerald 2011), while other scholars belonging to the 'female advantage' literature have stressed the existence of female leadership traits such as empathy and relationality (Helgesen 1990). Both approaches tend to essentialize female and male identities and roles, forgetting that gender is an ever evolving social construct. Moreover, they seem to represent varieties of Western feminism by claiming more access to power for women in an unequal world without necessarily challenging the very causes and sources of inequality or the neoliberal traits of leadership and managerialism (Fraser 2013). Perhaps more useful and significant to change in the current status quo is a gender sensitivity approach that questions neoliberal concepts and constructions such as leadership and managerialism rather than one that stresses the biological sex traits.

## 4.2 Accountability, affordability and rising costs in higher education access

**A**ffordability is a new concept enshrined in SDG target 4.3 for ensuring equal access to higher education without discriminating against disadvantaged groups. Linked to accountability, it implies that it is the state's and government's responsibility to provide affordable access to higher education, in particular for those that need it the most and can afford it the least. However, as Migdal and Schlichte have pointed out (and as the present report has sought to show) in a

growing range of contexts some of the most important state core functions such as the provision of core services including higher education are highly internationalized (2005). Accountability has emerged to tackle the issue of rising costs of higher education as enrolment and demand for higher education is growing especially in emerging economies. As the state is increasingly unable or unwilling to fund higher education, governments' strategies have been to shift part of the costs to households or non-state actors (Johnstone and Marcucci 2010). This is done in two ways: first, a strategy known as dual track which involves introducing or increasing tuition fees to specific groups of students (and which complements the government's budget allocation to universities); second, a strategy that directly encourages private higher education provision.

This state of affairs affects the existing gap in higher education access and the gap in quality higher education access, which remain large and dependent upon economic means. According to Carnoy et al. (2014), in emerging economies such as India, the Russian Federation and China, public elite universities receive more funds and charge more fees while non-elite universities receive less funding and charge lower tuition fees. The impact on distributional opportunities among those who can afford access to elite universities and quality higher education and those who cannot is evident when the state reproduces and sustains unequal access.

At the national level, in some countries, governments have used different legal measures to ensure equity and affordability to higher education access. In few countries such as Ecuador and Greece universal access to post-secondary education is enshrined in the Constitution, while in Tunisia it is guaranteed by the 2008 Law on Higher Education (GEMR

2017/8, 165). In other countries, the prohibition of discrimination in higher education access and the goal of ensuring access to disadvantaged groups and minorities are guaranteed by specific legal provisions. In Brazil, access for people from disadvantaged groups, in particular indigenous and Afro-descendant students, is guaranteed through the 2002 law on diversity in universities, while in Laos, the 2009-2015 Education Sector Development Framework emphasizes equality of access (GEMR 2017/8, 166).

While access is more often dealt with and guaranteed in national legal frameworks, both cost and affordability are hardly guaranteed through legal provisions. In a few cases, governments have sought to establish specific funding mechanisms. For example, the 1995 Higher Education Loans Board in Kenya was established to increase access for socio-economic disadvantaged students through loans granted by a funding mechanism (GEMR 2017/8, 166). By contrast, Peru's Constitution regards costs as potentially discriminative, and guarantees the right to free education based on performance for those who lack the economic means to pursue public higher education (Peru's Constitution 1993). Similar to Peru, the 1994 Higher Education Act in the Philippines aims to promote the right to affordable quality higher education to all citizens (Higher Education Act 1994).

In order to ensure equitable access, participation and graduation especially for low-income students, the GEMR 2017/8 report recommends a mix of fees and financial aid from the government. According to this report, a free higher education for all while fundamental is not enough to ensure equitable access if it is not accompanied by a strategy that targets and supports disadvantaged students and their families. Marcucci (2013) argues that equity in access could be ensured by a combination

of tuition policies – which can be dual-track, free, deferred or upfront – with financial aid programs, which comprises scholarships and income-contingent loans. High- and low income countries use a combination of measures spanning from no tuition plus financial support (grant and interest-free loans with a five-year grace period) in Germany, different grant programs exempting students from fees plus loan schemes targeted to low income students in Chile, a combination of low tuition fees, merit-based and income-based scholarships, and loans in Poland, to upfront tuition and government assistance for low income students in China (GEMR 2017/8, 167).

Some of the typical challenges related to fee waiver and loan payment policies are an excessive demand for loan programs and the difficulty to measure income – on which many grants and loan programs are based – in many low and middle income countries. Another barrier remains the broader and more structural inequality in access to quality basic education that is then reflected into an inequality in higher education access. Grant programs would be of limited use in this situation. Other challenges for students and parents to make informed choices on the type of university and program concern reliable, transparent and accessible data on higher education costs and quality. As a matter of fact, few countries provide data on average tuition fees and attendance costs. The EU publishes information regarding fees for its member states at a highly aggregated level (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2016). Similarly, the OECD publishes annual average tuition fees of educational institutions that are tailored for policy makers and which do not reach households or students (OECD 2016a). In other words, “there is a lack of data to help students and their families choose programs and to assist policy-makers and experts in monitoring progress to 2030” (GEMR 2017/8, 169).

To sum up, current global trends confirm reduced public expenditures on higher education with costs shared both with households and the private sector (Yang and McCall 2014). This is done by introducing or increasing student fees and encouraging private higher education provision. In many emerging economies this has deepened the existing gap in quality higher education access. To tackle distributional opportunities to higher education access, affordability and accountability have emerged as global concepts regulating state responsibilities to provide affordable and equal access to higher education for all, in particular for disadvantaged groups. In several countries equity and affordability to higher education access are guaranteed in national constitutions or legal educational provisions. In other countries, governments have used a mix of funding mechanisms ranging from income-contingent loans, merit-based scholarships, fee waiver and fee-free policies. While “fee-free policies alone do not deliver equitable access” if not accompanied by financial aid that target households as the GEMR 2017/8 report argues, governments' strategies that are based upon fee-free higher education provision decrease the existing gaps in access opportunities (2017/8, 169).

### 4.3

## Funding and investment

According to the latest Global Educational Monitoring Report 2017/8, performance-based funding is growing in higher education (GEMR 2017/18, 55). While rewards based on learning outcomes are not common in higher education, a number of countries are increasingly linking funding to other performance indicators. Funding in OECD countries has been linked to “enrolment, faculty qualifications or performance factors,

such as graduation and job placement rates, faculty research productivity and student satisfaction” (McLendon and Hearn, 2013, quoted in GEMR 2017/8, 55). Countries such as Australia have linked funding to equity objectives, which in practice has been translated into the provision of scholarships for students from a low socio-economic background, or coming from remote areas, while in Japan grants for national universities have been determined by an external quality evaluation system (Santiago et al. 2008).

In the US, changed funding incentives have led to changes in institutional practices such as greater awareness of institutional performance, increased competition among institutions, greater use of data in planning and policy-making and changes in academic and student service policies (Dougherty and Reddy, 2011). At the same time, however, incentives have not been associated with student outcomes in terms of greater graduation rates (Hillman et al., 2015). By contrast, there exist studies showing a negative relationship in terms of a decline in graduation rates (Rutherford and Rabovsky, 2014).

While the GEMR report (2017/8, 56) claims that “pressures to meet higher education targets pose a risk of unintended negative consequences similar to those at lower levels,” Hillman (2016) argues that performance-based funding that is linked to graduation rates may lead institutions to restrict access to less capable or financially disadvantaged students. Moreover, precisely because performance-based funding increases competition among institutions, it may hinder institutional cooperation as well, as a survey among 18 community colleges and public universities in the United States has found (Lahr et al. 2014). During the 1990s, Argentina experimented a professor-researcher incentive program that tied monetary and non-monetary



awards to university output. The program led to unintended negative consequences: the pressure to increase research output activities such as publishing, increased the number of professors involved in research but decreased the quality of research with cases of plagiarism involved (Araujo 2003). In the Russian Federation, performance-based funding in higher education – based on enrolment, student entry exams scores and research – has increased inequality. In particular it has sharpened divisions between universities and reproduced existing inequalities among higher education institutions, as state funding has been concentrated on large, wealthy universities (Semyonov and Platonova, 2017).

The report **The Learning Generation. Investing in Education for a Changing World** issued in 2016 by the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity led by Gordon Brown (hereafter ‘the Education Commission report’) represents the first comprehensive effort to analyze and make a case for increased funding and investment in education. Interestingly enough, for higher education more specifically, the Commission made a strong case for privatization and for a stronger role of non-state providers (Education Commission 2016). The Education Commission report maintains that while in many parts of the world for-profit tertiary level institutions are not legally allowed to operate, when their role is recognized and they can operate freely a rapid growth can be observed. For example, in Brazil, Peru, Korea and the Philippines enrolment in for-profit higher education institutions accounts for 50% of the total student population. One way for the government to weigh the possibility of allocating public funding to for-profit colleges is by evaluating whether they will increase access, promote choice and equity (Education Commission 2016, 84).

According to the report, public spending in tertiary education is higher than public spending in pre-primary or primary education: “In Malawi and Eritrea, for example, government spending on a tertiary student is over 100 times higher than what is spent on a primary school student; across Sub-Saharan Africa just 0.3 percent of the education budget is spent on pre-primary education” (Education Commission 2016, 88). These findings are in contradiction to the case study analysis that has been conducted for this report, which has pointed out how public spending in higher education is considerably lower compared to other levels of education. That higher education is well funded compared to primary education seems to be a widespread perception among donor agencies in developing countries. However, the material conditions of public universities and the difficulties in access to quality higher education suggest otherwise. While it is not clear how spending per each level of education is calculated, most likely donors’ findings are based on the per-student-cost that makes higher education spending look much higher compared to spending in lower levels of education.

The Education Commission report recommends “supporting the complementary role for private financing and cost recovery for higher levels of education where appropriate” (Education Commission 2016, 89). It pinpoints the example of Ghana, which “consistent with progressive universalism [...] gave relatively low priority to tertiary education up to 2000. Since then, tertiary enrolment rates have grown rapidly and are now at 16 percent, exceeding the Sub-Saharan African regional average of 9 percent” (Education Commission 2016, 91). One of the recommendations of the report is to “substantially increase the availability of student finance and loans for higher education” (Education Commission 2016, 93). For many low and lower-middle income countries – the

report contends - it is not sustainable to ensure free higher education while expanding access in lower levels of education. Some of the strategies for governments to finance tertiary education, the report argues, may include “introducing or increasing fees at public universities; targeting government funding to subsidize fees and related costs for poor and disadvantaged students; diversifying post-secondary education pathways and providers; and student loan programs. Given the significance of private returns to tertiary education, it is correct to expect greater private contribution” (Education Commission 2016, 93).

There are significant hidden costs of higher education that impact access in some developing countries. As in basic education, there is often a huge hidden cost to the higher education student in private tuition, particularly in public higher education institutions where there are often very low or no official tuition costs. These classes are taught by the same teachers in the universities and are essential to passing exams. In some countries, particularly pervasive in Indian private ‘low-cost’ higher education, there is also an upfront one-off ‘registration’ or ‘capitation’ cost that is off-books, illegal and not reflected in the tuition fees, but which is a significant barrier to students and their parents (British Council 2014).

Other studies come to significantly different conclusions from the Education Commission: a reduction in state funding has resulted in increased pressure on universities to generate surplus income and enhance competition in a global race to attract international students (Naidoo 2011, Robertson 2009a). In the UK and Australia, attracting international students has been driven by the need to generate income at the university level and to increase trade surpluses at the national level (Naidoo 2011, 45). In Europe this has been best exemplified by

the ‘Bologna process’ the overall aim of which – according to Robertson (2009a) – has been to increase the market share of higher education and the need to attract international talents to fuel the European economy.

#### 4.4

### Liberalization and privatization in higher education

The contribution of the private sector and private actors in education, while not new, has both increased in the past two decades and changed in nature. As shown by Fig. 3 (GEMR 2017/8, 152), the share of private institutions in tertiary enrolment is growing rapidly in low and middle income countries: “In Nepal, it grew by 38 percentage points between 2000 and 2015, followed closely by Burundi and Rwanda, where private institutions now account for two in three students. In Congo, one in three students attended a private university or college in 2015, up from close to zero in 2000. However, in some countries, including Colombia, Georgia, Portugal and Romania, private enrolment decreased” (GEMR 2017/8, 150, 152).

According to the report “in low and middle income countries, 18-to-22-year-old attendance takes off among the richest fifth of the population, but remains close to zero for the poorest. While in El Salvador, 51% of the richest fifth but less than 2% of the poorest fifth attended any form of post-secondary education, in Mongolia, the respective shares were 67% and 3%” (GEMR 2017/8, 159). While many national laws advocate for increasing access to higher education for minorities and disadvantaged groups, the political economy issue of affordability – that is who can afford it and who cannot – is seldom addressed (GEMR 2017/8, 148).

Fig. 3<sup>19</sup>

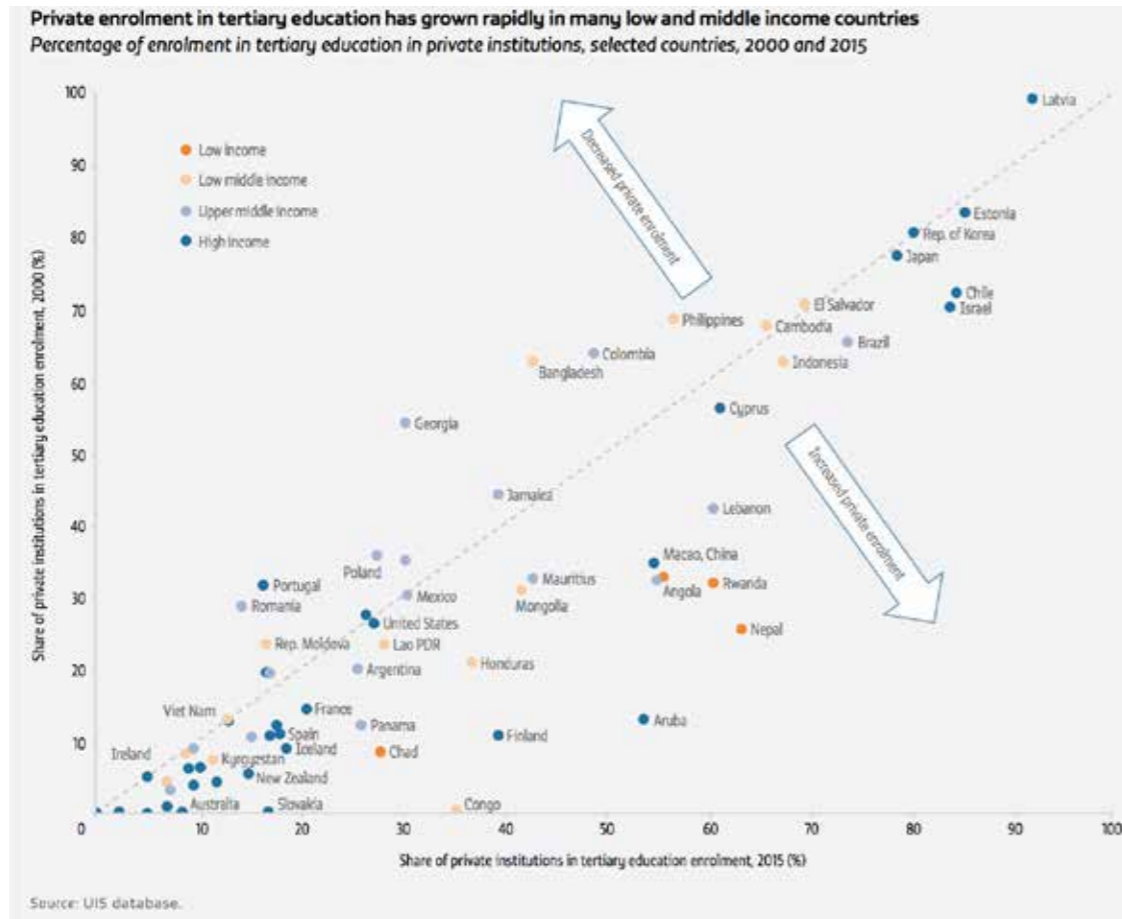
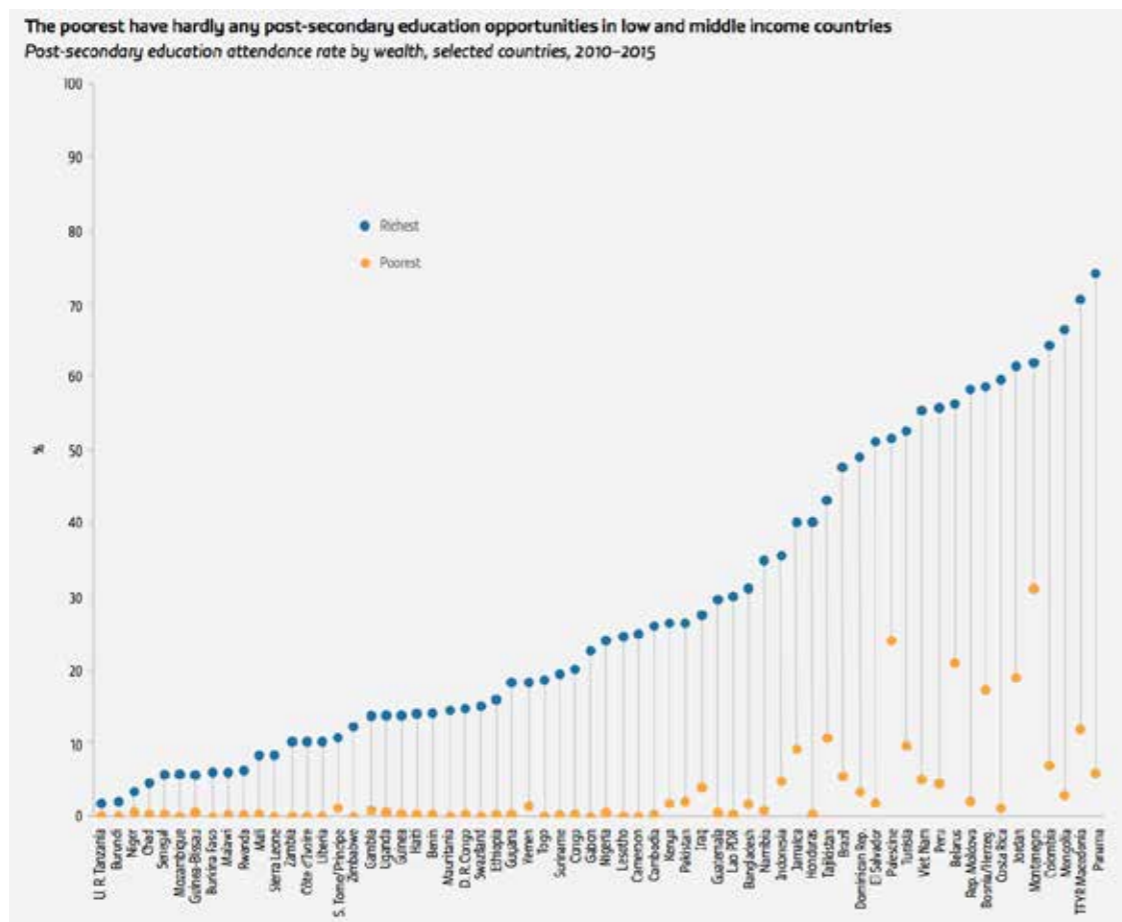


Fig. 4<sup>20</sup>



One of the major changes in the current context is the rise in demand for higher education in developing countries – i.e., in a situation of limited resources available to governments and as a result to universities. In these contexts, the provision of higher education by foreign governmental actors or for-profit, private providers is seen as a means for ameliorating the pressures “for access in countries where there is limited domestic capacity to meet growing demand and may provide access to groups not provided for by government as a result of ethnic or religious affiliation” (Naidoo 2010).

Over the past two decades, changes in the governance education promoted by international institutions, governments, philanthropies, NGOs, profit firms, religious organizations and consultants have led to hybrid partnership arrangements in tertiary education (Robertson et al. 2012a, 1). Such partnerships have entailed a combination of state and non-state actors engaged in a range of activities – among which provision – within education more broadly and higher education more specifically (Ibid.). In this regard, corporate actors have started to play a relevant role in shaping higher education opportunities. In the late 1990s, as part of the post-Washington consensus’ ‘good governance paradigm’, UN agencies, the WB, OECD and bilateral aid donors such as DFID, USAID and DANIDA started focusing on Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) (Robertson et al. 2012a, 27). In this new development paradigm, new emphasis was placed on market, entrepreneurship, business funding and collaboration (Ibid., 27). The rise of such PPPs has entailed a range of private actors and private authorities whose presence and role have grown within higher education (Robertson et al 2012a; Ehrenberg 2005).

related to the participation of for-profit foreign providers in national higher education systems, the emergence of a transnational higher education area and the revitalization of the higher education sector as part of the competitive global knowledge economy. Linking higher education to the needs and requirements of the knowledge economy may not necessarily bring about benefits to developing countries. The hypothesized nexus higher education-development is based on the high-skill model, which implies that in the current knowledge society a given country can be competitive if it changes and upgrades the nature of skills and their relationship to productivity (Naidoo 2011, 50). Ashton (2004) argues that in developing countries a development strategy based on low-skills may be positive as it could pave the conditions for labor-intensive forms of employment and alleviate mass unemployment. The transformation of higher education into a global commodity that increases trade surpluses may not necessarily lead neither to enhanced quality nor to social inclusion and justice in low income countries (Naidoo 2011, 51).

However, there exist risks and shortcomings

19 GEMR 2017/8, 152

20 GEMR 2017/8, 162



# ZAMBIA

## Access, quality and academic freedom in Zambian Higher Education: the case of ZANEC

Over the last decade, Zambia has experienced a sustained period of political stability and economic growth that has ranked it as a lower-middle income country (UNESCO 2016, 3). The country has a young population with 45.4 percent below the age of 15 (EFA 2015 Review, 3). Budget shares for education and education sector plans have put education development among the government's main priorities and the education system has been based upon four pillars: access, equity, quality and efficiency. However, huge challenges remain that have to do with the quality and relevance of curriculums, internal efficiency and equity, effectiveness and efficiency of educational service delivery, a low expansion rate of HE, low funding to the sector and high levels of brain drain for lecturers as well as high levels of gender disparities with low female participation rate (UNESCO 2016, 3; Sarua, 4) Educational attainment at tertiary level remains low, besides the fact that higher education and technical and vocational training are expected to act "as key drivers of the social and economic development to sustain Zambia's 2030 vision"

of becoming a prosperous middle income country (UNESCO 2016, 21). Other important challenges include inadequate "faculty education, insufficient classroom space, poor curriculum relevance" (Beyani 2013). Moreover, research output remains low in the public universities although research is a stated major component of academic work in the strategic plans of both Copperbelt University and University of Zambia (Sarua, 15).

In Zambia, the tertiary sector is composed of two types of institutions: first, universities and colleges such as the University of Zambia, the Copperbelt University, the Mulungushi University (under a public and private partnership) and 14 teacher training colleges under the Ministry of Education; second, 151 technical and vocational colleges under TEVETA (Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority), half of which are private and the rest are state-run or religious-based (UNESCO 2016, 63). There are no data on the employment rate of recent graduates (Sarua). In 2013, the Higher Education Act was enacted

which regulates quality assurance and promotion in higher education, and the establishment, governance, registration and regulation of both public and private higher education institutions (UNESCO 2016, 63). The pyramidal structure of the Zambian education system raises concerns about higher education access, as only 8 percent of primary school pupils access public universities and a ratio of 229 students per 100,000 inhabitants, positioning Zambia as one of the African countries with the lowest rates of participation in higher education (NIF III, 2011 quoted in UNESCO 2016, 63). To tackle the challenge of higher education access, the government has encouraged private sector involvement in higher education, with 14 more private institutions accredited in the past decade. While a rise in enrolment has been registered as a result of the proliferation of private universities, challenges of access remain for those students who cannot access tertiary education for lack of available places, funds or inadequate and insufficient bursary schemes.

In Zambia, liberalization has led to a proliferation of private educational institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary level. According to the UNESCO report, these institutions lack the planning, regulatory and monitoring framework at the administrative and legal level (UNESCO 2016, 46). The Zambian Education Act provides little guidelines for registration and establishment of private educational institutions. Thereby many private

institutions do not meet minimum standards for quality learning and lack qualified teachers (Ibid.). School fees were eliminated in 2002, however the new government scheme was insufficient for schools to cover operational costs. This led to a situation in which schools were charging user fees although they were operating under a free education policy. Fees have been introduced at the higher education level: on average, fees in public universities are approximately \$1500 per semester.<sup>21</sup>

Recent trends in education financing suggest that the government is shifting its focus from basic education to secondary and tertiary education, aligning its strategy to the Education 2030 agenda, yet higher education remains underfunded when compared to other Sub-Saharan African countries (UNESCO 2016, 87, 119). In 2016, the education budget for higher education was 13 percent, compared to 59 percent for primary education and 21 percent for secondary education (Betuz). Universities in Zambia are legally autonomous and self-sustaining, yet they suffer from budget deficits due to high operational, management and administrative costs (Betuz). Unable to attract funding from the private sector due to high inefficiency costs, they depend on government funding, which in 2004 transformed the Bursary Scheme into a Loan scheme. The costs of HE are addressed through cost-sharing

<sup>21</sup> Email exchange with Ivym Mutwale, Coordination and Coalition Program Officer, ZANEC, 11 April 2018



initiatives, particularly through Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiatives such as the case of the Mulungushi University.

According to the Zambia EFA report, the private sector should be encouraged to contribute “in a systematic and long term way” to education financing as international assistance and cooperating partner budgets are decreasing (EFA 2015, 36). Through the Sixth National Development Plan, the government aimed to increase admissions of privately funded students in both public and private universities. As a consequence, one could observe “a proliferation of private tertiary institutions leading to increased enrolments in both public and private institutions” (Betuz). The soar in enrolment – in a situation characterized by inadequately qualified staff (in particular in private institutions), insufficient classroom spaces and lack of a relevant curriculum – resulted in the weakening of the quality of tertiary education.

According to OSISA, the quality of higher education delivery “is quite poor. Many of the institutions are in a state of despair, with broken down workshops and laboratories. Even the quality of teachers entering these institutions is highly questionable” (2013, 29). In line with global trends, infrastructural school (re-) construction and increasing access have dominated education programming in the past 15 years, thus leaving quality challenges

virtually unaddressed (EFA 2015, 36). A potentially positive step in the monitoring and regulation of the quality of higher education has been the development of the National Qualifications Framework and the establishment of the Zambia Qualifications Authority (ZQA) in 2011, whose impact is yet to be assessed.<sup>22</sup> The ZQA is not a quality assurance body, but one of its functions has been coordination of the outputs of other Quality Assurance Bodies such as the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA), the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) and the Department of Curriculum and Standards. The fact that many private universities do not meet minimum standards for quality learning and lack qualified teachers suggests that the existence of quality assurance bodies is not a sufficient condition for ensuring quality in higher education.

The *Zambian Sixth National Development Plan 2011-2015/6* is focused on “people-centered economic growth and development, with a specific educational development objective to increase equitable access to quality education and skills training through efficient and cost-effective measures that enhance human capacity for sustainable national development” (UNESCO 2016, 96). In this regard, one of the priorities of the Education Sector NIF III – i.e., the main implementation

<sup>22</sup> (<http://www.zaqa.gov.zm/>, last accessed 2 May 2018)



framework – is the expansion of tertiary and higher education. The weak development of tertiary education lies in stark contrast with Zambia’s developmental goals – namely, becoming a prosperous middle income country by 2030. This is particularly true given the fact that the country’s development policy relies on human capital (i.e., higher education) to sustain socio-economic growth.

Zambia’s higher education planning is related to and has been influenced by the Millennium Development Goals. For example, achieving universal primary education has led to an infrastructural expansion of HE with a view to absorbing growing student enrolment rates. The goals of promoting gender equality and

empowering women have led to adopting a 30% quota reserved for female students, although wide gender disparities persist both among students and university staff (Saura). Combating HIV, AIDS and other diseases was incorporated in HE planning as well as in all other levels of education. Developing a global partnership for development has introduced in Zambia the concept and practice of Public Private Partnership initiatives in HE provision (Sarua, 10).

In a report supported by the Norwegian Students’ Academics’ International Assistance Fund (SAIH), the *Zambian National Education Coalition (ZANEC)* finds that full enjoyment of academic freedom in Zambia is compromised

by material constraints, such as “inadequate funding for research, inadequate staff, inadequate teaching and learning space as well as inadequate teaching and learning materials. For students, these challenges were further compounded by inadequate accommodation, poor sanitation, inadequate bursary for university students and absence of bursary for college students.” (Zanec Academic Freedom Study, iii) At the same time, “instances of external, particularly political interference in the exercise of academic freedom by public higher institutions of learning in Zambia” are recorded (**Ibid.**).

Some of the measures to protect academic freedom identified by ZANEC in a report supported by SAIH, **Generic Code of Conduct on Policy on Academic Freedom for Institutions of Higher Learning in Zambia**, are “legislation, granting of full autonomy to the universities and colleges, introduction of a code of conduct for both lecturers and students on how to responsibly exercise academic freedom without infringing on other people’s freedoms and pro-activeness in the practical exercise of academic freedom by both staff and students through research and dissemination of research findings through publications, seminars, conferences and lecturers” (ZANEC Academic Freedom Study, iii-iv). Interviews conducted by ZANEC in the country’s three public universities show that there is broad consensus among faculty staff and students on the

need for the universities to reach full autonomy on, among other issues, students fees - as well as on the fact that by raising them the quality of higher education is better enhanced (*Ibid.*, 23). Lastly, the Coalition identifies in the student unions a major instrument and agency to protect academic freedom and advocate for higher education quality in the education for all agenda.

Recognizing that higher education in Zambia is still a privilege of the few as university fees are expensive – with students facing huge barriers to access higher education in particular if they are women, poor or from rural households – ZANEC with the support of SAIH and in collaboration with the Zambian National Student Union has advocated a student loan scheme, which would cover tuition fees, books and a living allowance. This was translated into a Students Loan Scheme Bill signed by the president in May 2016 and enacted by the Parliament in June 2016. There are still some issues that are not fully clear, related to the ways in which students will pay back the loan, whether the fund will be sustainable, how it will be funded in the long run and how it will be practically managed. Furthermore, the initiative promoted by ZANEC does not challenge the existence of tuition fees at tertiary level.

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## 5 The agenda of quality higher education and research

Quality has become a crucial concept together with learning in the global education agenda. While emphasis on quality has increased in the past years, it is necessary that a focus thereon does not divert attention away from access questions. While interrelated, the relationship between the two concepts is not often positively correlated, as more access does not always imply more quality and often it may reduce learning outcomes upon which quality is often benchmarked. In higher education, quality refers both to learning goals and the process of achieving them (Sanyal and Martin 2007). The current section focuses on preconditions and frameworks that are considered to increase quality. More specifically, section 5.1 analyzes dimensions that affect quality such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy and governance structure, delving into questions of representation, participation and relevance. Section 5.2 focuses on the global emergence of regulatory and evaluation regimes in the form of quality assurance mechanisms and systems. The remaining sections empirically explore and illustrate some of the issues touched upon in this report, with a number of case study analyses focusing on Colombia, Kosovo, South Africa and Zambia.

### 5.1 Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and governance structure: representation, participation and relevance

Kent Keith defines academic freedom as comprised by three elements “(1) freedom to conduct research and publish the results; (2) freedom in the classroom to teach one’s subject; and (3) freedom to speak and write as other citizens do [...] academic freedom is central to the character and contributions of the modern college and university [...] It protects the essential mission of higher education –the discovery and dissemination of knowledge” (quoted in ZANEC Academic Freedom Study, 2, 3). The UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel declares that “the right to education, teaching and research can only be fully enjoyed in an atmosphere of academic freedom and



autonomy for institutions of higher education and that the open communication of findings, hypotheses and opinions lies at the very heart of higher education and provides the strongest guarantee of the accuracy and objectivity and scholarship and research” (UNESCO 1997, 25-32). As research conducted by the Zambian National Academic Coalition (ZANEC) on the topic suggests, academic freedom could be seen as related to the university’s freedom to perform its functions and roles, to its autonomy in generating its resources, developing its curriculum and following its research agenda without external interference, and to the responsibility to exercise such freedom with respect to the freedom of others (ZANEC Academic Freedom Study, 6).

There seems to exist a nexus between academic freedom and promotion of the education for all agenda: that link depends on the capacity of public universities to freely generate and disseminate relevant knowledge through applied research and innovation (ZANEC Academic Freedom Study). McCluskey (2017) questions the kind of role that corporate funding is playing in public universities studies across the US and sheds light on the multiple ways in which corporations are increasingly penetrating the US academic world, influencing research and what counts as scientific knowledge. The academic world is facing pressure from corporations to conduct research, which remains the property of the funder. As guidelines regulating these relationships are missing, the **American Association of University Professors** has issued recommendations for engagement, although the Association is not effectively tracking which universities adopt such provisions. In a similar vein, following the US presidential elections, thousands of scientist in the US asked the Trump administration “to set high standards for integrity and transparency in supporting

independent scientific research” (**Ibid.**).

In the US, as a result of the 2008 financial recession, higher education has been receiving less public funding, increasing their need to be financed through corporate funding. As a matter of fact, there is an overall \$10 billion less funding for higher education than before 2008. At the same time it is more difficult to determine whether and how corporations are influencing research results through their financial support. While the amount of funding is on the rise, large part of it is not disclosed. In-campus engagement ranges from money flowing directly to the school department or the university’s foundation, the provision of private advisors and academic mentors or the organization of symposia and workshops, and - finally - the establishment of ‘industry-affiliates’ programs supported by corporations which then benefit from being part of the university’s advisory boards or from having private recruitment sessions with students and graduates (**Ibid.**).

From a political economy perspective, the public universities-corporation link raises important issues on the consequences for academic freedom and independence, the kind of research that is being funded and for whom. Further issues concern the potential conflict of interest or mission between a public university and a private corporation. Research conducted at the university may have an impact on policy decisions and broader development dynamics and it is usually seen as impartial and independent. This is an aspect that increasingly informs corporations’ goals and efforts to fund research that is being regarded as ‘legitimate, validated and true’.

For centuries, higher education has been a national (i.e., state) domain. While the government needs to maintain control over

education, higher education has been the sector that has preserved more autonomy and freedom from state control, both being a prerequisite and fundamental condition for its own development and that of society more broadly. During the same period, universities – whose core responsibilities are teaching, learning and research – have represented a central institution for the transmission of practical knowledge and skills, for the production and reproduction of cultural and societal values and as a political space for critique and change. This has often hindered the advancement of higher education autonomy in countries with authoritarian or military-backed governments, who see universities as spaces of critical thought and thus a threat to their power.

Globalization, commercialization and the increasing role of international actors have changed higher education in different ways. Universities themselves have often contributed to and aligned with these processes by being engaged in commercial activities. For example, world-known universities such as US-based New York University and Columbia University and Australian-based Monash University were among the first higher education institutions that established for-profit campuses overseas (Altbach 2001, 4). In China, many universities provide profit-making consultancies. Another for-profit activity has been going online and selling courses and degrees to consumers in the global marketplace, or cultivating industrial parks populated by various types of spin-offs.

Representation and participation of stakeholders in school governance vary depending on the level of education. In primary and secondary level of education, parents and communities play a major role. By contrast, in higher education students “play a prominent role in voicing collective concerns over government and institutional issues affecting students. Student

representation on university committees is a main way institutions field such concerns and involve students in decision-making” (GEMR 2017/8, 57). In the majority of the 48 countries of the European Higher Education Area, governing bodies of higher education institutions include student representatives. However, in some European universities expanding institutional autonomy, combined with the adoption of a managerial structure, has led to a decrease in student representation in decision-making (GEMR 2017/8, 57). By contrast, in Africa student representation in higher education decision-making is growing due to increased politicization of student organizations and due to the legal requirements of many quality assurance mechanisms for student inclusion at the board level (Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume 2014).

## 5.2 Quality assurance mechanisms in higher education

**T**he global expansion of access and the diversification of higher education provision have led to a growing need for quality assessment in tertiary education. As learning and quality have become central to the education agenda both at the transnational and national level, one witnesses a proliferation and sophistication of quality assurance mechanisms. A number of evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms and agencies have developed which imply “monitoring and evaluating academic program design, faculty characteristics, capacity to support learning and research, and student outcomes” (GEMR 2017/8, 159). Quality assurance mechanisms perform a number of functions such as registration, accreditation, auditing and monitoring, reviewing qualifications and



awards and are carried out by a number of public and private actors. The development and diffusion of quality assurance mechanisms and practices has become an increasingly powerful global model that has influenced local higher education systems and shaped local policy making as nation-states become more penetrated by international trends (Dale 2007). The challenge to adapt and adopt 'global tools' to local contexts is more important in developing countries, where a combination of limited resources and capacities constrain local agency but also provide it with opportunities to change and contextualize imported global models (Singh 2011).

It is during the 1990s, following a rapid growth both in higher education enrolments and private higher education provision, that countries started developing quality assurance frameworks (GEMR 2017/8, 162). Nonetheless, poor countries with limited enrolment and private providers often lack a national quality assurance system. This is for example the case of Bangladesh where a higher education sector with a complex structure that comprises four types of higher education institutions is still lacking a single national agency (GEMR 2017/8, 161). Other countries such as Mauritius with a dominant public sector and moderate enrolment rate have a single national agency. In other cases such as Brazil, characterized by the existence of several private higher education providers, one often finds several quality assurance agencies.

This being premised, as the latest Global Education Monitoring Report notes, it is not clear whether and how quality assurance tools improve teaching and learning and the extent to which they are feasible and sustainable in developing countries with fast expansion of the tertiary sector (2017/8, 148). As a matter of fact, low income countries with expanding

higher education struggle to establish a quality assurance mechanism. Besides quality, assurance standards should incorporate other objectives such as evaluating admissions in order to encourage access for under-represented groups or assess research outputs related to universities' contribution to social and economic development (GEMR 2017/8, 164). Moreover, there is often a complete disconnection between the quality assurance rationale and more fundamental issues of university autonomy, academic freedom and the university's role as a critical public space (Mazawi 2010).

While accreditation and regulation through quality assurance mechanisms could guarantee quality in particular in private provision of higher education, both accreditation and regulation are not always able to adapt to the rapid growth of higher education specifically in its private forms. Put differently, "regulation is not keeping pace with the growth of higher education" (GEMR 2017/8, 163). In the case of Peru, the need to overcome limits to regulation of private higher education institutions led Congress to pass a number of laws that clashed with universities' autonomy and whose main goal was licensing new private universities (Cueto et al., 2017). In Poland, the rapid expansion of the private tertiary sector between 1990 and 1995 was not reviewed by an accreditation agency. The latter was created only in 2002, immediately raising issues of teacher quality (Jakubowski 2017). One can observe a trend whereby several countries reduce regulation for the purpose of increasing institutional flexibility and private participation in the higher education sector (GEMR 2017/8, 163). This development raises questions of quality and how regulations and effective quality assurance could identify fraud and exploitative and corruption practices. Besides increasing privatization at the national level, with the internationalization

and commodification of higher education - as sections 3.5 and 4.4 have shown - quality assurance of cross-border higher education remains relatively weak. As of January 2017, approximately 34 countries (the largest exporters include Australia, the US, France, the UK and the Russian Federation) have opened 310 international branch campuses in 91 countries. Among the main countries that are hosting such campuses one could list the United Arab Emirates, China, Malaysia, Qatar and Singapore (C-BERT 2017 quoted in GEMR 2017/8, 164). More recently a few hosting countries such as the United Arab Emirates appear to be intent on evaluating international branch campuses through the establishment of University Quality Assurance International Boards: still, in many other host countries quality assurance of cross-border higher education remains rather weak.

Other similar quality assurance mechanisms that provide information regarding the quality of higher education are those ranking systems that are located at the country-level, such as the U.S. News and World Report, Der Spiegel in Germany and Reforma in Mexico or global rankings such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities. While the proliferation of such ranking systems based on quantifiable indicators may lead to greater competition and thus to increased quality, it may also affect equity in school choices as these rankings issued by private agencies highlight certain aspects while overlooking others (Hazelkorn 2015). For example, perceptual indicators such as 'reputation' lend themselves to distortion and critique.

The question of more transparency in quality assurance mechanisms and among quality assurance agencies can in no way be overlooked. The international venue that connects quality assurance agencies and best practices to encourage accountability

and transparency is the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) counting 270 members and quality assurance affiliates in around 100 countries (INQAAHE 2017). Other regional venues include the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education with 47 agencies in 23 countries (EQAR 2017), the Asia Pacific Quality Register and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the US that recognizes 60 accrediting organizations. These agencies do not always share or disseminate the results of their activities (GEMR 2017/8, 165). As a result, little of their reviews in the form of annual reports or other relevant material reaches the broader public or specific groups such as families or students. An exception is Austria, where annual stakeholder meetings are organized to publicly discuss outcomes and evaluation. Even in countries with a well-developed quality assurance system such as Norway there is little understanding and awareness among university leaders, faculty staff and students about the impact of quality assurance mechanisms on teaching and learning as a recent survey has shown (Stensaker et al. 2011).

There seems to be an interesting but little explored connection between students as consumers and quality assurance leading and reflected in the growth in and importance of national and institutional student satisfaction surveys and indicators such as employment rates and graduate salaries after completing a degree, compared across institutions, the results of which can be attached to levels of government funding, but also to fuel competition between institutions. In the UK, the recently formed Office for Students now oversees the quality assurance agency and other national higher education governance processes and functions.

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# KOSOVO

## A grassroots and civil society-based initiative fighting for quality higher education: the case of ORCA in post-conflict Kosovo.

The University of Prishtina has historically played a crucial role for the Kosovo society. However, it has never been closer to collapse than today.<sup>23</sup> Its financial management is hampered, among others, by the abuse of funds for professors' salaries who often have more than one job position. Moreover, a consistent number of faculty members are either accused of plagiarism or have published in dubious journals. This despite two decades of post-conflict reconstruction during which the international community was active in reforming higher education through the Bologna process and promoting initiatives that could strengthen the autonomy of higher education institutions versus party politics. While the Bologna Process and the transposition of the discourse of 'knowledge-based society' have been an important point of reference for interventions in Kosovo's higher education, there is little consensus that the Bologna

<sup>23</sup> (<http://prishtinainsight.com/solution-university-prishtina/>, last accessed 15 March 2018)

framework has brought structural changes in teaching and learning (Bacevic 2014). In daily reality, the main activity in university life remains teaching, while little research is undertaken by the faculty in departments, with more than 50 percent of university professors having a second job, often teaching at private institutions. Moreover, after more than a decade of reforms based upon the Bologna process the diplomas, knowledge, and skills that the University of Prishtina produces do not match those demanded by the economy and are not competitive in the European market (ETF 2015).

In the first years following the war of 1998-99, local governments maintained a restrictive approach towards higher education, avoiding any opening of private universities. This situation changed after the declaration of unilateral independence in 2008, as the local government gained more power and liberalization was extended to the university field, with a

corollary of corruption accusations touching both main political parties. By the end of 2013, a country of approximately 1 million inhabitants had 8 public higher institutions, six vocational training institutions, and 23 private colleges.<sup>24</sup> According to the then Deputy Minister of Education, Science and Technology, one of the strategies for making Kosovo a "knowledge state" has been boosting development of the higher education sector, which includes its liberalization and privatization.<sup>25</sup> As the Kosovo public sector does not have the potential to absorb most of the young people that are educated in the current education system, one of the rationales behind the liberalization and commercialization of higher education has been the development of a workforce equipped with the skills for competing, integrating and indeed migrating in the European labor market.<sup>26</sup>

The proliferation of private and public universities throughout Kosovo has had little to do with market demands, and much more to do with private interests and political agendas.<sup>27</sup> Judging from the amount and the type of cases brought to the attention of the public opinion, and comments I could gather through interviews and subsequent exchange with Kosovo's scholars and civil society representatives,

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Deputy Minister of Education, Science and Technology, 6 November 2013, Prishtina, Kosovo

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with local education expert, AAB University, 1 November 2013, Prishtina, Kosovo

the liberalization of higher education in Kosovo has brought about a devaluation of knowledge, quality and diplomas.<sup>28</sup> In 2014, the University of Prishtina was swept by student protests against the rectorate and the clientelistic system that have characterized the appointment of administrative and academic staff. The growing emphasis on higher education and the proliferation of a number of public university and private colleges all over Kosovo regardless of budget and demand/supply considerations illustrate the widespread phenomenon of 'populist use' of higher education on the part of those elites that have captured it.<sup>29</sup> In a country hosting the youngest population in Europe the government has dealt with youth unemployment by liberalizing higher education, and many students find themselves jumping from one post-graduate program to the other, postponing the moment on which they enter the labor market.

Besides ethnic segregation, the university sector in Kosovo is affected by corruption, political collusion and low quality of research. In a recent report commissioned by the European Council, education experts Ian Smith and Tom Hamilton shed light on corruption in higher education in Kosovo as an endemic, persisting and structural problem that has only worsened over the last

<sup>28</sup> Interview with assistant professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Prishtina, 2 November 2013, Prishtina, Kosovo; Interview with investigative journalist, Preport, 10 November 2013, Prishtina, Kosovo

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



few years.<sup>30</sup> The university sector – and in particular the University of Prishtina – is increasingly in the spotlight with corruption allegations and scandals involving unfair promotions, the buying and selling of theses,<sup>31</sup> and political interference in the university.<sup>32</sup> A new civil society initiative – **The Coalition for Integrity and Transparency at the University** – led by the recently founded **Organization for Increasing the Quality of Education (ORCA)**<sup>33</sup> and involving 11 more NGOs<sup>34</sup> demands that the Ministry of Education urgently address the alarming situation of higher education in Kosovo in particular as far as the application of standards and criteria of quality and merits in the process of selecting and promoting the academic staff of the University of Prishtina is concerned (Osmani 2017). It has published 6 reports in 2017 raising concerns about integrity and transparency at the University of Prishtina and showing how the links of academics with political parties have generated

<sup>30</sup> “European experts concerned about ‘vulgar corruption’ in higher education in Kosovo”, Prishtina Insight, 17 March 2017, (<http://prishtinainsight.com/european-experts-concerned-vulgar-corruption-higher-education/>, last accessed 15 March 2018)

<sup>31</sup> A bachelor thesis could be bought for 150-250 Euros while a master thesis for around 2000-300 Euros according to anti-corruption NGO COHU

<sup>32</sup> “Suspicious promotions mar Marjan Dema’s UP rectorship”, Prishtina Insight, 10 March 2017, (<http://prishtinainsight.com/suspicious-promotions-mar-marjan-demas-rectorship/>, last accessed 15 March 2018)

<sup>33</sup> (<http://orca-ks.org/sq/rreth-nesh/>, last accessed 15 March 2018)

<sup>34</sup> The coalition includes prominent NGOs such as EdGuard Institute, Kosova Education Center, Encompass Center, Sbunker, Center for Political Courage, ORCA, Admovere, COHU, D4D and KFOS.

a system of unmerited academic advancements (Bytyci 2017).

Founded in 2016 in Prishtina, ORCA aims to contribute to enhanced quality, accountability and academic integrity in Kosovo higher education and has published a number of research reports claiming that 72 percent of professors at the University of Prishtina do not have the necessary number of publications in international journals to justify their academic ranking and at least 28 percent have published in dubious and predatory journals (Bailey 2017). The organization is active in the supervision of academic processes, documenting irregularities in advancement procedures and in the improvement of teaching and research mainly focusing on the University of Prishtina, the biggest public higher education institution that serves most of the students. ORCA grassroots approach supported by former students from the University of Prishtina aims to raise awareness and enhance student activism to bring about changes in the public higher education sector plagued by corruption and plagiarism.<sup>35</sup>

The organization has succeeded to form a platform with other civil society actors concerned with integrity, accountability and quality in higher education, combining

<sup>35</sup> Plagiarism is a transversal problem touching both private and public universities in Kosovo, and is found both among students and professors who have translated texts into Albanian claiming them as their own or who have stolen students’ work. See Limani, L. (2017) “Copy Paste”, Prishtina Insight, 12 December 2017, (<http://prishtinainsight.com/copy-paste-mag/>, last accessed 15 March 2018)





institutional and public pressure with recommendations to relevant stakeholders in the higher education sector (Gjinovci 2017). Some of these recommendations focus specifically on plagiarism, which could be fought by a combination of legal measures – currently lacking in Kosovo – to prosecute criminal acts involving academic fraud, and the reduction of both the student-professor ratio and the number of students mentored by one professor (Bytyci 2017). According to the director of ORCA, the principles of accountability and transparency should be at the basis of higher education reform in Kosovo, suggesting to open the University of Prishtina's Ethics Council to civil society participation and making every Senate meeting open to media, civil society organizations and students (Gjinovci 2017).

The role and importance of a grassroots initiative such as ORCA are further stressed by the dismissal of the national Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) by the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (February 2018). KAA lost its European network membership following the decision of both the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Prime Minister to dismiss the agency's board and acting director, thus hampering the autonomy of the institution. The reasons that led to the dismissal of the whole board of the agency are not clear and the information is defined by the government as “classified” (Limani 2018). However, civil society

representatives and media sources point to the active role of the KAA to suspend 23 study tracks at the University of Prishtina due to a lack of qualified teaching staff, and the withdrawal of accreditation of 131 study programs (at bachelor, master and doctorate level) across private and public higher education institutions in Kosovo for not satisfying minimal quality criteria (Mustafa 2017). According to ORCA's executive director Rron Gjinovci, “these programs were not based on what the society, economy, or arts and culture of the country need, but were designed to employ specific people” (*Ibid.*). Since the active engagement of this quality assurance coalition of NGOs, 70 cases of unmerited advancements have been prevented during the last year, showing how their activism, advocacy and transparency have had an impact on the University's management and the Senate.

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## Conclusions and recommendations

Higher education is increasingly caught between the state and the market in contradictory ways and with deleterious effects on basic freedoms. Today universities are subject to contrasting roles, trends and expectations that exert different, sometimes diverging pressures: on the one hand, one finds the idea that universities are a public good and should contribute to national development; on the other hand, a hegemonic narrative according to which universities are and should be significantly affected by global markets and serve market interests. The market implies an additional and increasing pressure on universities, a pressure determined by financial fluctuations and at the same time enforced by international treaties and legal requirements under the WTO/GATS regime.

While universities have been highly internationalized institutions since their emergence during the Middle Ages, today higher education is being internationalized, multinationalized and globalized in completely

different ways as a result of tectonic shifts in the global political economy, in technological and IT sectors, as well as pervasive communication and mobility of students and highly educated personnel. Not only do inequalities continue to characterize higher education but they have sharpened as a result of new international governance arrangements and frameworks. There is urgent need to challenge and address these inequalities: the task forward is neither easy nor straightforward, given the gaining traction of marketization in the sector.

The education privatization debate is now mobilized and increasingly supported by a range of international actors such as the World Bank, UNESCO, OECD, and substantiated through research and policy reports such as the Education Commission. Their effects are tangible in developing, low and middle income countries where national governments actively promote further privatization of the sector as a means to meet costs

and demands of higher education expansion. As Robertson et al 2012a and Ehrenberg 2005 have shown, “some international agencies use evidence in a selective and tactical way as a means to support their pre-established policy preferences” (2018, 1). Often the case for more privatization in higher education is based upon its role in increasing quality and in supporting higher education growth in a period in which the state is inefficient or unable to fund higher education publicly. However, the argument for cost-sharing mechanisms and privatization is often based on opaque and simplified data on higher education costs and funding.

Quality assurance mechanisms have proliferated in the past decade, also as a result of an increase in higher education enrolment, private provision and student mobility. However, in many low and middle income countries experiencing a growth of the higher education sector, quality assurance mechanisms are still lacking. While highly sophisticated in terms of standards, good practices and resources invested, in many countries information and results from quality assurance systems are not widely shared and many groups such as families, students, faculty may not understand how assurance mechanisms may lead to improvements in teaching, learning, research and access.

Quality assurance has emerged as a regulatory strategy in higher

education reform both in the developed and in the developing world. The rationales underpinning regulatory evaluation are linked to economic and consumer interests which also shape the social purposes of higher education. Non-economic goals related to social justice and equity are generally absent in benchmarks that measure higher education achievements and they are neither considered nor incorporated among the dimensions of what counts as quality or excellence in the assessment of higher education institutions. Equity objectives are sometimes partially encapsulated in targets for widening participation or in impact measures on society. The case studies analyzed in this report show the tensions that characterize quality assurance system implementation in specific contexts, often taking the form of a dilemma between efficiency and accountability on the one hand and equity, social justice and change on the other.

The report highlights the importance of broadening the conceptualization of quality, going beyond a narrow focus on accountability and cost-efficiency. This also brings up conceptualizations of social justice in higher education and therefore socially just informed dimensions of quality (Walker 2010; Hall 2012; Patton et al. 2010). Higher education is often framed in mere technical terms: an economicist and depoliticized view of higher education based on human capital theory does not question inequalities,

while it is likely to overlook the salience of class conflict and power in their account of labor market and higher education (Robertson 2015, 14). It is thus crucial to bring politics back into the analysis of the nexus between higher education and international development. For this purpose, one may recommend the adoption of political economy lenses.

This also relates to building the case for the transformational potential of higher education as an engine for addressing inequalities and contributing to social justice and deconstructing the (still predominant) idea that higher education is a luxury, and that by benefiting elites investment on it would perpetuate inequality. While this ‘luxury’ narrative can be traced back to the World Bank position in the 1980s, it continues to be reproduced, also by activists working on issues of education and social justice. Global education movements have tended to see higher education as a threat to funding for basic education. The current SDG target on international scholarships only fuels this fear/perception. So, while recognizing the role of universities in reproducing social inequalities, a more transformational case needs to be made – not only to challenge the neoliberal/security mindset, but also to integrate higher education into existing discourses about education as a public good, a foundation of social justice and a means of tackling coloniality of knowledge.

As mentioned in Section 1, the changing discourse about higher education in development policy as embedded in the SDGs is very limited and narrow in scope, currently focusing only on access and, very problematically, international scholarships. Ultimately the problem relates to and reflects the existing tension between higher education for the knowledge economy and higher education as a public good. In other terms, while the global development discourse appears to be taking note of higher education this is still very much within the knowledge economy discourse. Higher education can play a more important role in meeting the SDGs, and this role goes beyond offering advanced training and building skills: “It holds the potential to educate excellent teachers, uncover groundbreaking research, and connect services to communities” (Owens 2017, 418). It is important, however, to go beyond an ‘instrumentalist’ reasoning for higher education in development, i.e., meeting SDGs, training professionals, building local expertise in public health. The less tangible role of higher education as a critical public space is also very important.

With regard to gender equality, more gender sensitivity is required in research on higher education and development. Explicit awareness and commitment to gender equity and social change are required as well as the intersection of gender issues with other forms and structures of inequality and exclusion (class, race,



etc.). Moreover, more collaborative type of research needs to be funded that includes commonly excluded groups such as researchers, students, trade unions, social movements. Building inclusive reforms remains a weak spot in many countries, as in most of them there is a failure to stimulate meaningful dialogue and exchange with civil society and social movements.

In order to contribute to the launch of a policy and critical research agenda on higher education and international development, the present report identifies some gaps whose bridging needs further scrutiny and comparative research. It also puts forth policy recommendations.

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## Research

- More research is needed to understand the unequal power relations at play between higher education systems in developed and developing countries;
- More research is needed to investigate the changing relationship between higher education and development in low-income countries.
- More research is needed on alternative models and contents of higher education – for example, indigenous and afro-descendant – emerging in particular in opposition to and as an alternative of current neoliberal developments in higher education. The case of Cuba stands as an example in this regard, as the report has shown. There is a need to identify spaces of resistance and articulation of alternative visions of higher education and development that could counter the knowledge-based narrative that is ideologically depicted as the natural and unique worldview;
- More research is needed to investigate the effects of global educational policies on social inclusion and social justice in low-income and developing countries. In this regard, a social justice framework should be developed for international collaboration in higher education in developing countries;

## Quality and quality assurance mechanisms

- Quality assurance mechanisms should be more inclusive and based upon the participation of grassroots civil society initiatives rather than as very often exclusively based upon the expertise of external evaluators.
- The outputs and all information regarding quality assurance systems should be transparently shared and disseminated. Moreover, the rationales underpinning quality assurance and evaluation mechanisms should be further problematized;
- Given the global privatization pace of higher education, the link between quality and privatization should be questioned and further researched;
- While quality assurance mechanisms could raise both autonomy and quality in higher education, the relationship is not a straightforward one. The relationship between what informs quality assurance mechanisms and how it affects academic autonomy needs further investigation;
- More attention should be placed on the existing tension between access and quality in higher education. More specifically, more action is needed to enable access to higher education for hard-to-reach and displaced communities in remote and conflict-affected areas;

## Universities and development

- Universities should work together through transnational networks in defense of their nature as a public good. They should work towards the preservation of a space where free debate and dissent is possible, critical thinking encouraged and knowledge is useful, relevant and linked to the local context and local needs rather than to international and national market expectations and imperatives. An interesting trend in Africa is the shift from North-South collaborative partnerships to intra-regional networks of universities. More research is needed on these kinds of collaborative partnerships;
- Universities should strive to be more inclusive, especially with regard to those qualified students from vulnerable groups that often are prevented from accessing universities due to financial barriers. Moreover, universities should find to strike a balance between their role as a safe space for critical thinking and their role as producer of knowledge that is relevant to society, and that addresses local and global challenges;

- Universities should collaborate and base their relationship upon cooperation and solidarity rather than compete with each other in a global race whereby both universities and knowledge are seen as tradable goods and services. In this regard, support for open source publishing might reduce one of the barriers to inequalities in knowledge access, dissemination and creation;
- Universities in developing countries should be protected from a WTO regime that liberalizes and commercializes them through legally binding regulations;

## International aid and assistance

- The overall contribution of development assistance to higher education in low-income countries should grow, and be equally distributed rather than skewed according to security imperatives;
- Moreover, assistance and finance should be based not only on efficiency and performance but also equality and social justice;
- Development assistance should go primarily to national governments conditional upon their investment in public higher education. Depending on the contexts and specific local needs, development assistance could be partly channeled to other societal actors that include universities, student organizations, social movements, civil society organizations and research organizations;
- For higher education to contribute to the SDGs, a more expansive approach to higher education in the SDGs is needed that is not limited to access and scholarships;
- For higher education to act as a catalyst for development and innovative societies it should become a central actor in development cooperation next to national governments and international agencies. In fact, higher education leadership and stakeholders are excluded from influential development advocacy networks such as the Global Partnerships for Education, the Global Education 2030 Steering Committee or the Education Commission (Owens 2017, 418).
- The rationale underpinning cost-sharing and private participation in higher education should be questioned and its validity theoretically and empirically substantiated.

## State and national level

- Public authorities should support and protect the autonomy, freedom and quality of universities by inverting the trend that sees public funding for higher education continuously squeezed. A sharper and stronger focus on accountability should be counter-balanced by other equally important functions of the universities that have to do with equity and social change.
- The participation of civil society in specific areas of higher education reform and development should be encouraged but also broaden in scope to encompass also student organizations and social movements;
- Gender should be mainstreamed into higher education policy in relation to students and higher education staff;
- For universities to become a central sector in achieving SDGs and in development, research should be publicly-funded;
- In order to increase innovation, the state should increase research funding, among others by targeting specific areas of research;
- Regional higher education partnerships and networks in developing countries should be encouraged;
- For higher education to provide the basis of a new and socially just contract, it needs to be re-appropriated as a human right: universities must be free and viewed as a social, public good funded by the state;
- For this purpose, the state should not encourage privatization and public private partnerships in higher education.



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