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DOMINANT TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Today, higher education managers operate in complex social and organizational settings, in fast-changing contexts and circumstances. Globalization and related issues to a big extent influence tertiary educational policy and planning. The rapidly growing worldwide education market and mobility of talents pose new challenges on modern universities in terms of attracting international students, improving their ranking and increasing their competitiveness. The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of the official documents on the main issues associated with recent trends and developments in global higher education. These documents focus on the changing role of higher education in the modern knowledge-based society. Although not a full list, these documents offer knowledge of the complex forces shaping international higher education, and understanding of the factors that may follow predictable patterns and have a potentially persistent influence on the field. The analysis conducted in the paper has allowed the author to identify a few dominant trends (driving forces) that should be in the focus of the university policy-makers responsible for creating a comprehensive strategy of the university aimed at increasing its international competitiveness.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the expansion of tertiary education on a global scale is remarkable (Huisman, Santiago, Högselius, Lemaitre & Thorn, 2007). There are a big number of incentives for people to attend higher education in the agenda of higher education massification (Sarrico, 2017). Thus, modern education managers operate in complex social and organizational settings, in fast-changing contexts and circumstances. Globalization and related issues to a big extent influence tertiary educational policy and planning. The rapidly growing worldwide education market and mobility of talents pose new challenges on contemporary universities in terms of attracting international students, improving their ranking and increasing their competitiveness. This is closely associated with the process of modernisation of higher education and enhancing its quality (Report to the European Commission on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions, 2013; Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe, 2014; Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe 2017; Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2005; Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2009; Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015),

The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of the official OECD and EU documents on the main issues associated with recent developments in global higher education. These documents focus on the changing role of higher education in the modern knowledge-based society. In the paper, the author also uses theoretical literature in the field of educational and strategic management.

The analysis conducted in the paper has allowed the author to identify a few dominant trends (driving forces/forces of change) that should be in the focus of the university policy-makers responsible for creating a comprehensive strategy of the university aimed at increasing its international competitiveness.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

According to White (2004), there exist many different ways of interpreting what the term "strategy" implies. In general, strategy can be defined as a long-term plan designed to specifically achieve a goal (goals), as differentiated from tactics (David, 2011). These goals include long-term performance goals (Thompson & Strickland, 2003; Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). The supporting objectives are stated in the "hierarchical" manner reflecting the anticipated result of the prearranged activities (Alkhafaji, 2003). According to Nag, Hambrick, & Chen, (2007), strategic management is concerned with some evolving initiatives taken by managers that include the best use of internal resources for enhancing the performance of organizations in the external environment.

Strategy is concerned with strategic planning (Nag, 2011); so strategy development is linked with planning (White, 2004). Strategic management involves making important (strategic) decisions (Frynas & Mellahi, 2011). Strategic management is associated with creating a "more proactive management posture" for making "reactive and defensive" decisions (Ike, 2017). Thus, strategy-making is regarded as a planning process, which in turn, is viewed as integrated decision-making (Mintzberg, 1994). As managers don't make strategic decisions in a "competitive vacuum", they have to develop strategies that would allow them gaining a sustained competitive advantage in the modern turbulent environment (Hill et al., 2016). Strategic

planning provides the framework for all decisions to be made (Nag, 2011). Strategic management and strategic planning are crucial for the success of contemporary organizations, intuitive-anticipatory planning and formal systematic planning both being important integrated processes (Steiner, 2010). In planning, management needs trustworthy and applicable information about the organization's internal and external environment (Alkhafaji, 2003). So the strategic process includes the analysis and use of various internal and external factors, as well as a qualitative combination of opinions and views for developing successful strategies (David, 2011).

Since contemporary universities, being complex and big organizations, operate in highly competitive settings, and the pressure on resources is strong, the importance of effective planning and management of universities is increasing (Taylor & Miroiu, 2002). The need for exploring the future and encouraging broad discussion to guide educational policy and decision-making has become critical for higher education managers (Mahshi, 2013). Management of an educational organization, being aimed at its improvement, is carried out in a strategic planning framework (Fiddler, 2002). Strategic management of a present university is closely linked with the strategic planning process in the context of accomplishing competitive advantage in the global education market (Stukalina, 2017). Different industries (areas) are characterized by different competitive environments; investigating the external and internal environment and selecting suitable strategies are the main components of strategy formulation (Hill, Schilling & Jones, 2016). Management of an academia takes place in a "specific social, economic and educational context", which should be taken into consideration for handling fast and multiple changes that characterizes modern society; consequently, a proactive approach linked with the longer-term perspective and regular scanning of the external environment is especially important for strategic management in education (Bush & Coleman, 2000).

Strategy is holistic and interactive (White, 2004), so the complex pattern of various contributing influences forms determines the decisions made by education managers (Stukalina, 2013). Reacting to the emerging challenges that are associated with the highly competitive international education market, university managers should re-evaluate their previous strategies by lining up with both present-day and future realities (Stukalina, 2017). Each decision made by managers involves considering the future (Mintzberg, 1994; White, 2004). As said by Hill et al. (2016), managers plan not only within the context of the current competitive environment, but within the context of the future competitive environment. From the holistic point of view, educational managers must analyse several perspectives in the context of supporting continuous quality improvement (Stukalina, 2010). As the environmental situation of a university reflects both the external environment of competitors and economic conditions and the internal environment, the strategic plans based on the environmental analysis reflects the internal view of the university in its approach and its priorities (Hinton, 2012).

Organizations scan their environment for identifying the external forces of change in order to generate operational responses for improving their position in the future (Choo, 2001). Information gathered by means of the environmental scan gives education managers a common understanding of main trends (driving forces) for the future, so that they would be able to create a vision and broad strategic goals integrated in their strategy; this way, the environmental scan sets the basis for the discussions about the organizational future (Hinton, 2012). The most dominant forces, having the major impact on the internal

organizational environment, will outline the organizational strategy; their analysis includes the following steps: identifying them and then measuring the effect they may have on the corresponding area (Thompson & Strickland, 2003). Managers should also categorize these driving forces as being either major or minor determinants (ibid.).

In view of the above, "detecting", describing and assessing the main dominant trends (forces of change) in the field of higher education would be a very important analytical task of university policy-makers responsible for a comprehensive strategy development and implementation in terms of enhancing the university's international competitiveness.

3. Research Method

This paper is based on secondary sources of research used to facilitate the discussion of the given topic. In the paper, the analysis of theoretical literature in the field of both strategic educational and management is used. In the paper, a review of the official OECD and EU documents on the main issues associated with recent developments in global higher education is also provided.

The author has selected the most significant documents related to the topic under discussion. Although not a full list, these documents offer knowledge of the complex forces shaping international higher education, and understanding of the factors that may follow predictable patterns and have a potentially persistent influence on the field. The review of some important documents identifying major trends in international higher education also aims at suggesting new research directions in the area of higher education management in the context of creating a competitive strategy of a contemporary university.

4. Findings

The documents analysed in this section provide an overview of the main changes, challenges and developments in higher education worldwide and within the European Higher Education Area. They identify a few essential trends having an impact on how higher education is perceived and delivered now and in the years ahead. Describing the context, in which strategic decisions in a modern university are made, these documents can be used for guiding and supporting education policy-makers in developing competitive strategies, management plans, and relevant institutional practices and procedures.

4.1. Main developments in modern global higher education: implications for strategic management in universities

The documents analysed in this sub-section provide an overview of main developments in higher education worldwide. In Table 1, the main identified trends are described, as well as the related implications for university management in the agenda of developing a competitive strategy.

Table 01. Main developments in global higher education: implications for strategic management in a contemporary university

Document	Identified trends/driving forces	Corresponding tasks	Related strategic objectives
Higher Education to 2030/ volume 2: Globalisation (2009)	1. Internationalization of higher education: increased cross-border education and international academic research and collaboration 2. Quality assurance (QA) in higher education with more accent on global institutional ranking and academic (research) reputation	1. Intensifying student and academic staff mobility 2. Attracting national and international funding for university research 3. Increasing student enrolment and retention rates 4. Ensuring recognition of the awarded qualifications	1. Developing new study programmes (including joint programmes) for exporting educational services 2. Developing a relevant policy for attracting national and international funding for research 3. Developing a relevant student recruitment strategy and develop an efficient and comprehensive system of student support 4. Establishing effective quality assurance systems based on internationally recognized standards
Higher Education to 2030/ volume 1: Demography (2009)	1. Diversification of higher education: emphasis on broader access into higher education 2. Massification of higher education 3. Quality assurance in higher education: accent on the quality of academic staff	1. Enhancing student enrolment levels taking into consideration the change in ages 2. Increasing the inclusiveness of higher education 3. Controlling the quality of faculty members	1. Developing flexible study programmes including distance learning options 2. Developing a relevant admission policy 3. Developing a consistent policy for attracting/retaining more qualified academic staff
The shape of things to come: higher education global trends and emerging opportunities to 2020 (2012)	1. Internationalization of higher education: increased outbound student mobility ratios; growth of global tertiary enrolments 2. Business and academic international Research collaboration 3. Trans-national education	1. Attracting more international (outbound) mobile students seeking to gain a foreign qualification without moving from their country of residence 2. Carefully choosing research and business collaboration partners	1. Developing new study programmes/modules for outbound mobile students 2. Developing a relevant policy for establishing collaborative patterns/attracting funding for research 3. Developing new joint study programmes

4.2. Major developments in the European Higher Education Area: implications for strategic management in European universities

The documents analysed in this sub-section provide an overview of major trends in European higher education. In Table 2, the main identified developments are described, as well as the associated implications for strategic management in European universities.

Table 02. Major developments in European higher education: implications for strategic management in the EU universities

Document	Identified trends/driving forces	Corresponding management tasks	Related strategic objectives
Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010)	Quality assurance in higher education: more emphasis on quality and performance of universities	Improving educational outcomes through increasing research performance and use of ICTs	Developing life-long study programmes based on ICTs and aimed at the on-line dissemination of knowledge
The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report (2012)	1. Internationalization of higher education: emphasis on enhanced mobility and international	1. Increasing student mobility 2. Enlarging the size and diversity of the student population	1. Creating joint programme with integrated mobility periods

	academic/research collaboration 2. Diversification of higher education: more emphasis on broader access into higher education 3. Massification of higher education: more emphasis on social inclusion and creating equal opportunities for young people to participate in education 4. Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education: more emphasis on Bologna structures, procedures, processes and tools	3. Providing flexible study options for non-traditional learners; improving student experience and employability 4. Implementing the tools for enhancing transparency across national jurisdictions	2. Developing study programmes addressing the needs of non-traditional learners 3. Creating alternative access routes to higher education in the agenda of life-long learning 4. Developing consistent qualification frameworks for achieving transparency and comparability
Report to the European Commission on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions (2013)	University commitment to quality teaching and learning in the agenda of quality assurance in higher education	- Providing full institutional support for teaching and learning in the context of quality assurance; - regarding teaching and learning as a shared process - imposing responsibilities on both students and staff for supporting sustainable educational process; - regularly collecting feedback from students	Developing a consistent teaching and learning quality assurance policy that ensures excellent planning and delivery of the curriculum
- Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Access, Retention and Employability (2014) - Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff (2017)	Diversification and massification of higher education: - emphasis on access as key feature of the social dimension of modern higher education; - emphasis on improving student retention and supporting students through graduation, student retention being a key performance indicator	- Providing broader access to quality education for all social groups - improving student retention rates; - increasing employability of university graduates	- Creating non-traditional study modes including part-time provision; - developing programmes focused on the formation of skill and competences relevant to the modern labour market
- Improving Quality, Enhancing Creativity: Change Processes in European Higher Education Institutions (2009) - Bucharest Communiqué (2012) - Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area (2005; 2009; 2015)	Quality assurance in higher education in the context of international accreditation: accent on internationally recognized standards	Providing higher education institutions and accreditation agencies with common standards for both internal and external quality assurance	Developing a policy and relevant QA procedures for the quality assurance of university's educational programmes that include a) regular monitoring of study programmes; b) periodic review of study programmes programmes; c) revising and improving study programmes according to experts' recommendations

As one can see from Tables 1 and 2, strategic implications for the management of higher education institutions can be interpreted as consequences arising from dealing with the impact of various forces of change that can influence a contemporary university from different aspects. The identified developments call for adequate responses to be reflected in relevant strategies and policies in the higher education area in

Europe and worldwide. For example, the EU has a fruitful record of supporting higher education through policy cooperation and funding programmes (COM (2017) 247 final (2017).

5. Conclusion and Discussions

The analysis of theoretical sources in the field educational management, as well as official documents on the current and future developments in higher education has enabled the author to draw the following conclusions.

Through the examination of the above sources a few long-term trends (driving forces), creating major risks and opportunities for education managers, who are responsible for developing competitive strategies of a modern university, have been identified. They are as follows:

- Internationalization of higher education
- Diversification of higher education
- Massification of higher education
- Quality assurance in higher education (of vital importance for the Bologna process participants).

Each of the above trends that are driven, among other things, by globalisation and intensified competition in the international education market requires universities respond to the challenges posed on them in due time, careful planning and control being performed at all levels of an educational organization. They should be in the centre of the institutional policy making process; they must be reflected in the institutional comprehensive strategy, aimed at increasing the university's international competitiveness. The developments trends in higher education cause changes in policy priorities. The focus on the expansion of higher education is now being accompanied and even replaced by an increasing "concern for the quality of the entire educational process and for the control of its results", the main concern of education managers being defining applicable strategies for change (Mahshi, 2013).

In the complicated contexts, where various strategic goals may be followed, multiple strategies can be created in universities within different "orders" – either aimed at developing their particular strengths (for example, a specialty or niche), or improving their national or international ranking (Bleiklie, 2004). As higher education is concerned with the changes linked to globalisation, education and research remain to be central elements in the process of creating the global environment, because they are vital for "sustaining complex communities" (Higher Education to 2030: Volume 2, 2009). So, in general, university-specific strategies rest on the following domains of a modern university: education, research, and the involved staff, services and facilities (Stukalina, 2014). In Table 3, some strategies to be formulated with regard to the identified development trends in higher education are desribed. Generally, all these strategies are supposed to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of the knowledge-based society at the present point in time.

Table 03. Strategies associated with the major developments trends in higher education]

Development trend	Main focus	Strategies
Internationalization	Inbound and outbound student/staff mobility and international academic/research cooperation	Internationalisation strategies for developing and managing international engagement
Diversification	Different enrolment levels and age groups	Educational strategies focused on different age cohorts and different levels (Bachelor, Master and doctoral programmes)
Massification	Social inclusion (involvement of traditionally under-represented groups in the life-long learning process)	Educational strategies focused on social groups that are at risk of exclusion from higher education
Quality assurance	a) Quality teaching, learning, research b) Consistent qualification framework for achieving transparency and comparability	Quality management strategies aimed at managing quality through quality management systems certification (accepting the leading role of internationally recognized standards)

All-in-all, the findings presented in this paper indicate that the higher education field is now undergoing significant changes. In the context of massive expansion, wider participation, internationalisation, and more diverse profiles of institutions, their programmes and students, there is a) a high demand for new approaches to governance with growing emphasis on performance, quality and accountability; b) new modes of financing (Tremblay, Lalancette, & Roseveare, 2012).

This makes university policy-makers respond proactively to the new challenges in their efforts to create competitive strategies aimed at accomplishing academic and research excellence. The proactive response may include (among other things) the following:

- Scanning the external environment to identify the driving forces of change
- Transforming any challenge into a constructive action and a competitive advantage
- Develop and implement multiple strategies focused on quality education
- Establish a consistent strategic planning, implementation and monitoring system
- Establish a model of organizational change and state the responsibilities of change managers.

The above activities integrated in the overall university's strategy would result in creating "inclusive and connected higher education systems" (COM(2017) 247 final, 2017), which are properly managed and coordinated through strategic planning mechanisms, strategic planning being an essential tool for handling organizational change.

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