EDITORIAL

Higher education has many paradigms, certainly as many as the disciplinary perspectives which contribute to the study of the institution. And these, over the past decade and a half, have undergone very substantial expansion. In times past, higher education was usually presented in terms of élite cultivation, political socialization and the moulding of a class whose general function was the preservation of national unity, the latter often taking a dual form — on the one hand, the upkeep of the nation's intellectual identity and, on the other, its administrative cohesion. *Beamtenstand* and *Gelerntenstand* were, and in many countries still remain, closely intertwined. Agreed, the cultural paradigm persists, though nowadays more associated with the study of particular disciplinary groups and the 'anthropology' of their shared beliefs than the formation of study attitudes as part of 'élite studies'. Change in the shape of the institution has tended to relegate this perspective to a less exalted position. It is, in short, neither primary nor, one might suggest, the most important. It has, rather, been superseded by concepts derived from and revolving around the Economics of Education. The paradigms imported on the back of the Economics of Education have had immense influence on the way higher education is conceived — as an instrument for modernization through public investment, or, alternatively, depending on one's particular proclivities, as a species of 'transformation industry' or processing system. Its mission lies less in the cultivation of those virtues of the well-rounded man, which were often associated with public service, so much as in the supposedly neutral and technical functions of 'adding value' to the individual by dint of the particular field she or he studies. How far it does this effectively is expressed in terms of 'process efficiency' which, again, assumes various forms — numbers 'output', and that perennial species of fool's gold, 'the matching of skills' with those required by industry, commerce, technology, engineering — being amongst the most evident.

Certainly, paradigms of higher education which derive from economics are by no means alone, though they have continued to enjoy high currency for the past quarter century or more. Amongst the more illuminating models brought into the study of higher education from policy analysis is the notion of it being a 'loosely coupled system', or from public administration, as a 'self regulating' system. Each paradigm has its own explanative power and adds to our overall understanding of the field. They are, nevertheless, models which stand aside from those culled from Economics in one vital respect; namely, that it is within the changing fashions in the realm of economic theory that the most marked shifts have taken place in what might be termed 'the public view' of the university.

Why of all the disciplines bearing down on the study of higher education, Economic theory has been so powerful in recasting the way in which higher education is perceived, is not a matter of great puzzlement. If higher education is central to the transformation of human resources, it is also *par excellence* an intense 'consumer' of other resources, financial and equipment, in order to carry this out. It was instrumental in justifying the massive investments undertaken during the 1960s and 1970s through the Human Capital theory. And, equally, at a time of apparent resource squeeze, it has found new theories of government strategy and human behaviour which underpin what is seen by many as a return to more rigorous and less interventionist policies.

To be sure, theories and ideologies may wax and wane. But in higher education, resourcing remains a central issue. Who is to determine how much is to be allocated, who is to decide what the priorities are and who is to determine what are the criteria by which institutions are made accountable? Proven efficient or not, as the case may be, these are all matters of constant concern, for there is no establishment so fortunate as to agree that such issues can be solved nowadays simply by injecting more. To say that resourcing is a central matter of higher education to the exclusion of all else would be an exaggeration. Even so, depending on the type of answer given to questions like those just mentioned, a whole range of relationships between higher education and government, between the different internal components of individual establishments, not to mention the intellectual identity of the establishment itself, are embedded in organizational form. And, last but far from being least, the manner in which academia has the ability to influence the way in which resources are distributed, both at system level and also at base unit level, is a goodly indication of the degree of real, as opposed to formal and legal, autonomy existing in any one particular system.

In the course of the present decade, resourcing has undergone a major shift, above all in the more long-established Western industrialized systems of higher education, though this development is by no means limited exclusively to them. The essential feature of this shift is to place responsibility for seeking additional sources of funding away from central government and into the hands of individual establishments. Which elements are involved is clearly subject to considerable variety depending on particular circumstances. Such a move can be interpreted in a number of ways: first, as an attempt to reduce the reliance of higher education on the public purse; second, and as a consequence of this, to imbue higher education with a greater sense of engagement vis-à-vis the private sector; and third, to strengthen what some have termed 'civil society' in its demands upon higher education by strengthening the 'consumer' principle of payment for services directly rather than indirectly, by passing through the intermediary of central government.

Whether this type of strategy should be seen as one example of the way in which a public resource — that is, higher education — becomes, in part at least, a private good, is a matter of

debate. Such a strategy is, irrespective of the ideological context in which it takes place, part of a rather wider issue. This issue involves the acceleration of social demand for higher education beyond the level at which governments are willing to underwrite it. The partial conversion of higher education into an individually purchasable good, whether by enrolment fees or by the selling of services in other areas of activity can, from this perspective, be regarded as a specific response to a situation which, in many developing lands, is perennial, namely, the inability of public resources wholly to meet the resource demands of higher education.

What solutions are there to this problem? The articles in this issue suggest, broadly speaking, there are three, none of which are necessarily incompatible with one another. First, to find more efficient resource usage by closer managerial control and most particularly at the level of individual departments; second, to seek alternative funding sources outside government; third, to prioritize certain disciplinary fields held to be crucial to economic and/or industrial development.

Most higher education systems may undertake adjustment in the first and third items, though the price paid is often to increase internal bureaucratic weight to meet the development of additional systems of control, monitoring or self-regulation. But to meet resource squeeze by diversifying away from public resource to a semi private 'consumed good' depends very closely on the stage of economic development in the country concerned.

Finally, there is the ticklish issue of how access is likely to be affected by higher education's conversion to becoming a private good. In certain systems of higher education, even those where the concept of its being a public resource takes the form of heavy indirect subsidization of student fees, welfare, lodging etc, sectors exist where the full cost is born by the individual or his family. These full-cost enclaves often constitute a species of élite segment within mass higher education. They are often distinguished by their better physical conditions, good staff, student ratios and sometimes, though by no means always, by an element of formal selection more rigorous than in the 'public sector'. But the extension of 'consumerism' in higher education by moving towards individuals bearing the full economic cost, a matter being actively pursued in certain Western European countries — notably the United Kingdom — remains delicate. Hitherto, much of the resourcing of higher education has rested on the principle that it was the obligation of government to provide the opportunity for talent to benefit from higher education, irrespective of the formal ability of the individual to pay. The modification of this commitment is, one would guess, justifiable only to the extent that costs borne by individuals in no way deter talent from coming forward. And that, in turn, suggests that individuals must reasonably expect that they will be able to repay debts incurred. In short, that the economy will be sufficiently buoyant and able to absorb the skills individuals hold.

The paradox of this situation is that those countries where greatest pressure is placed on public monies to uphold higher education as a national collective resource are often precisely those where the need for more diversified forms of financing are also the most pressing. Yet, at the same time, the linkage, at best partial, between higher education and the productive sector is such that the move towards a 'consumerist' model of higher education is ruled out by dint of the parlousness of the economy. In short, 'consumerism' as a driving force for change in higher education is an option available only to those who command considerable resources in society. And, by extension, to those societies which themselves have accumulated similar riches.

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