

EDITORIAL

INTRODUCTION

Over the past quarter century, in many lands higher education has become the nation's largest single enterprise. Indeed, some of the more megalithic establishments with upwards of 60,000 students on their books, surpass, by far, any other single concentration of labour to be found in one place. La Sapienza University in Rome, the Autonomous University of Mexico and the University of Buenos Aires are, of course, extreme examples of hyperdevelopment, for each of these mega universities has upwards of 120,000 formal enrolments: in 1989 the last-mentioned establishment carried some 200,000 student registrations.¹ The pressures – financial, physical, pedagogic and political – which accompanied the process of massification were – and, for those countries where a combination of formally open access and a relatively weak economy go together, still remain – a fertile source of tension and anxiety on the part of governments and the tax payers. Certainly the heroic days when rates of growth reached 15 to 20 per cent per annum are past in the industrialized countries. They are, however, very much present in certain countries along the North African seaboard where, over the past four to five years, annual increases in enrolments have varied between 25 and 30 per cent.

Though it is not generally admitted, least of all in official circles, the justification for such massive investment in human resources which set off the spiral of growth, has not worn well over the years.

THE 'OFFLOADING' STATE

Over the past ten or more years human capital theory has, if not unravelled at the edges, narrowed; its focus has been brought to bear on certain more limited disciplines and areas of study, held to be more central to economic development than are others. Even in countries where the economic and communications infrastructures are among the most sophisticated, governments – spurred on by changes in economic ideology and often alarmed at the apparently bottomless pit which higher education seems to present for tax-derived financing – have been actively seeking alternative ways to fund the enterprise. The assumption by individuals or, more likely, by their parents, of the cost of tuition and living, generally known by the ambivalent term of 'privatization' (which has other and perhaps no less deleterious overtones to the sociologist), has been held up by other schools of economic thought, busily engaged in burning what their colleagues of a previous generation ardently adored. It is not as if this 'solution' which is, in point of fact, more in the nature of a provisional hypothesis just as was its predecessor of human capital generation, is applied with due regard to the context and conditions in which individual systems and countries find themselves. It is, rather, put forward as a general panacea to what in effect is a situation deriving from many causes. The offloading to the private purse of part of the expense of higher education, and the quest for other sources of funding to take up the gap left by reductions in the state's budget for higher education, are perhaps feasible in countries where there is sufficient spare cash, where private sector industry sees the benefit of investing in higher education, and where industry itself is prepared to make higher education a priority investment over and above its own demands for re-equipment, updating of skills and reinvestment. With the looming spectre of what is euphemistically called 'negative growth' in the world's leading economies, it is a solution whose time has certainly come. Whether it has gone is a matter to which a little more serious attention will have to be paid by the more enthusiastic proponents of the 'market ideology'.

Whether privatization was ever a realistic alternative as opposed to a political wish fulfilment, to the public financing of higher education in those countries with an economic infrastructure insufficient to support the ambitions of mass higher education, is now a matter to which earnest attention will have to be paid. For the industrialized West, there have been periods – and long periods at that – when the cost of higher education was not paid for primarily by the public purse. But these were very different times and higher education was not merely a small-scale 'enterprise'. It was also (though with certain noteworthy exceptions during the 1930s) an 'enterprise', the products of which were eminently employable in the government, administration and training of the nation's citizens.

PRIVATIZATION: NEW SECTORS OR NEW SOURCES OF FUNDING?

It is often forgotten by the adepts of privatization as a 'solution' to the problems higher education faces, that to all intents and purposes, contemporary higher education may have grown out of a past in which income came from private sources. But with the exception of countries such as the United States, Brazil and India, by far the overwhelming majority of the planet's post-secondary establishments of education and research were financed by, and built with, public money. In those countries where a private sector exists, it acts either as a privileged enclave for the sons and daughters of the local nomenclatura, or it is a species of safety valve which preserves the legend of access without the substance of quality to equal its public counterpart. Had private monies been called on as the sole source of meeting the clamour of social demand or to assist in the drive towards democratization of higher education which the 1960s and 1970s brought forth, it is a virtual certainty that they would not have been able to respond on the scale and with the quality of service that public investment subsequently ensured.

Now, whatever the past two decades of investment have left a country in the way of higher education provision, it is equally clear that policies of privatization, 'offloading from public expenditure' or pushing different heads of expenditure down to a sub-national level, do not contribute one iota to resolving the basic dilemma. That dilemma can be summed up by the questions: Is 'privatization' and the introduction of a market economy in the running of universities simply a device to preserve, for those who have, that service which earlier was available to all who wished to avail themselves of it? Or is it simply a fig leaf to cover the embarrassment of governments no longer able to afford to keep higher education provision up to previous levels? Clearly, there are some governments which, for obvious reasons, are unable to admit this to the growing waves of youngsters for whom three or four years' study is the lesser of two evils – between unemployment on leaving school or unemployment with a diploma on leaving university.

THE UNRAVELLING OF HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

Rationing by the ability to pay is, of course, a well-honed device employed when public services – and higher education counts amongst them – are overwhelmed by demand and when the nation is sufficiently well off to allow individuals to assume the burden of 'paying their way'. And this, in turn, raises precisely the question: Who pays now, how much, and for what? Such questions lie beneath the proposals put forward by

Bubtana. The one argument that has carried much weight among international bodies concerned with development assistance, above all in Africa, turns around the often disproportionate level of public subsidization afforded to students. In certain spectacular cases, the sum needed to support a student amounts to more than ten times the annual average per capita income.² And while this might have been justified on the basis of the classical canons of human capital theory – namely, that the nation will have a return on its investment through the individual's higher productivity and higher earning levels, and thus a rapid return on public investment in the form of higher tax rates paid by such fortunates – this has not happened in the way the grand theory suggested. Whether this is because student subject choice is out of step with national needs, which is argued as often as it remains unremedied, or because the economy is unable to absorb such skills to the extent they are created, the fact remains that the generation of human capital in some countries has tied up an immense amount of physical capital on which the nation can ill afford to forego any immediate returns. This situation, which is far from being uncommon in the economies that teeter uncertainly on the razor's edge between breakthrough and collapse, as Forojalla's article hints, gives a rather grimmer interpretation to the phenomenon otherwise known as the 'brain drain'. Without the capacity to employ such subsidized students or to realize rapidly a pay-off on the investment made, the creation of 'brains' effectively drains away the national substance, or locks it away in the form of quite massive unemployment rates among the newly graduated.

In such a setting, the issue of privatization assumes rather different overtones from its equivalent argument in industrialized countries. Reduction in student subsidization levels may be presented as a form of equity, of redistributive justice in which individuals are asked to invest in themselves, to make their career plans accordingly and not to rely on the pennies of the poor to pay for their illusions, their incuria or their ambitions. The argument, at least on paper, is a powerful one and has been aired regularly by the economists of education for the best part of 20 years. It is also especially telling in those countries where access to higher education is selective and founded on some concept of place capacity planning, for this places at the disposal of governments the means – though not necessarily the political will – to implement such a policy. The delicate issue remains, as Ayeni's article points out in the Nigerian context: At what point is selection to be introduced, in what form and to what end apart from cost saving?

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL: FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION OR NEW ÉLITE?

The development of 'the graduate school', whether on American lines or on lines which one sees at present in Western Europe in the shape of the *Graduierten Colleg* in Germany, and on paper, at least, of the *Ecoles Doctorales* in France, is one possible course of action. That it is being envisaged in Nigeria suggests that accentuated differentiation, or the expansion of an additional layer above first-degree level, is not simply a way of strengthening research capacity, though it may have this purpose as well. It is also to place a differential value on certain key subject areas, access to which is limited still further and which, by dint of such limitation, may subsequently become highly attractive. The use of differential funding for disciplines reckoned central to national development and their extension to graduate level has, then, a double function in the setting of developing countries. First, such steps reduce the degree of dependence on study abroad to train graduates; since these individuals may now be trained at home, the outflow of physical and human capital – the main elements in the phenomenon of skills haemorrhage – may, in theory at least, be reduced, if not staunched. Second, in a mass university system where subject demand is often determined by traditional perceptions of social status rather than by personal economic calculus, the creation of highly selective graduate tracks is one way by which specific national manpower needs may be reinserted. They are, however, destined only for the few. In short, the emergence of graduate training programmes has the indirect effect, once again, of emphasizing the university's long historical function which, in the case of developing countries, was very rapidly eroded in the twenty years or so after Independence, namely the training of an élite. It remains to be seen, however, how long such a policy can hold out against twin pressures from that group often known in West Africa as 'applicants' – effectively the graduate unemployed who apply, with desolatingly little success, for public sector posts – and from the rapid erosion of higher education's financial base which is the lot of many African states at the present time.

THE FUTURE OF THE DOCTORATE

Expanding graduate training may prove to be a solution as long as it is clearly understood that such training is not a preparation for an academic career, but rather a higher level of training for a labour market outside the public sector. And this suggests that a clear and unambiguous policy of capacity limitation ought to continue to be exercised. This, as O'Neill's article shows very clearly, is an exceedingly delicate matter – above all in those countries where the effect of market forces has been to detach, with varying speeds, doctoral-level training from the profession of higher teaching and research. That large numbers of young Canadians pursue their studies up to the doctorate for career reasons, and that the training given is less suited to careers outside academia, is once again a reflection of some of the imperceptible, but no less inevitable, changes that market-driven mass higher education appears to bring about. Whether they present a real challenge to academia, other than being yet another example of diploma inflation, is largely a matter of whether academia itself is ready to admit that doctoral training is no longer wholly devoted to reproducing the profession. Moreover, the situation is complicated by the fact that the market for PhDs is not homogeneous any more than the disciplines examined by this degree are themselves similar. They, just as the markets to which they may lead, are highly varied to say the least,³ which is tantamount to saying that if the PhD crowns the student's career of learning, it crowns very different aptitudes, skills, values and work habits transmitted by the discipline within which the student has worked. If the degree of PhD is similar in the level of competence it demands, which has yet conclusively to be proven rather than presumed, the competences it tests are themselves very different. The notion of a standardized PhD, except in the procedural aspects (such as the degree of formal courses required, their number and timing) is thus very much a nominal rather than an essential characteristic.

What is evident and raises a number of important points is the growing importance of graduate training as preparation for the non-academic marketplace. There is a thesis which states that as the post-industrial economy comes to rely increasingly on the type of intensely developed skills, technical mastery and judgement which previously were largely confined to academia, so the range of occupations and careers open to their possessors is itself widening. High technology firms rely increasingly on research and development, have their own research laboratories and are increasingly dependent on human resources investment to create both products and profit. Whether this situation will result in the introduction of a further differentiation between 'academic' doctorates as against 'industrial' doctorates in rather the same way that the study of higher education in the United States has given rise to the EdD is a matter that time, academia and the appropriate professional associations alone can tell.

POLICIES OF CONCENTRATION VERSUS POLICIES OF DIVERSIFICATION

From another perspective, the expansion of graduate provision and its possibility of further division may be interpreted as a policy of resource concentration. For at the very time when governments seek to reduce their expenditure at first-degree level, they appear, if the Nigerian case is

the shape of things to come, to be setting their hand more firmly on the regulation of graduate work. In other words, it is a two-track policy in which withdrawal is the watchword at first-degree level while a more proactive posture is assumed at graduate level. There is, even so, a variation on the issue of concentration versus dispersion that is played out in a slightly different setting, as Forojalla's analysis shows in the case of the Sudan. Here the issues at stake are slightly different, and have to do primarily with the imposition of a linguistic and cultural unity that is not without its contestants in those parts of the country more distant from the capital and to do so within an overall strategy of optimizing the use of resources. The Sudanese case is an interesting example of policies which combine the development of a private sector university, the off-loading of the maintenance element in student subsidization on to individuals with the more original tactic of using the private sector as an instrument of relocation – in effect, moving higher education away from the capital and back into the regions.

The concept of a university as a 'regional growth pole' is, of course, not new as a concept in industrialized countries.⁴ Nor, for that matter, is the strategy of preventing an overconcentration of the student estate in the nation's capital without its precedents either. Indeed, it was a prime consideration in the latter days of the pre-revolutionary régime in Iran. But the use of the private sector to perform this task is perhaps a novel approach. More to the point, it shows that while concentration of a large proportion of the nation's students in the capital may have advantages in economies of scale and in cost saving, it may also have countervailing drawbacks from the standpoint of public order.

THE TEACHING BODY

Finally, in this overview of some of the issues faced by different systems of higher education, there is the question of teacher education and, more particularly, the mechanisms that lie beneath the relationship between the teaching body and its major employer: the state. If higher education is the major vehicle by which new knowledge is generated and stocked in society, it is through the teaching body in secondary and primary education that an edited version of such knowledge is made part of the nation's heritage, culture, identity and self-perception. It is for this reason that the thesis advanced by certain econometricians and rate-of-returns analysts, which held that it was better to invest in primary education and less in higher education on the grounds that the former yielded better rates of return, has been largely unacceptable. If priorities are development and modernization, to strengthen that part of the education system, the function of which is to transmit knowledge, without linking to it that part of the education system which has to do with the renewal of knowledge – higher education – is tantamount to condemning schools to the sterile repetition of the routine.

But there are other blockages that may well, in the medium term, prove to be just as perverse in their effects as the uncoupling of investment in schools and in universities might have had, had it gone any further. One of the most important of these points of restriction lies in the perceived status that the teaching body entertains of itself, the relationships it has to negotiate with its employers and the avenues open for it to lay its griefs before the public. The model developed by Starida, drawing from the recent history of that body in England and Greece, is an analysis whose interest goes far beyond the issues which she overtly explores: namely, systems of control over corporate definition and identity exerted by employers on the one hand and by the members of the teaching body on the other. The model may also be seen as an analysis of one of the mechanisms of blockage – or to use another, perhaps more pejorative term, 'resistance to change' – that may result when alterations to the condition of service are imposed by governments bent on change at all costs.

CONCLUSION

This issue of *Higher Education Policy* is, then, diverse in the issues raised and in the countries covered. But the topics discussed raise questions of a more general order and ones which, if posed in a particular national setting, are not necessarily unique to it. As is usual with individual country studies, they assume a new significance when placed in a broader perspective. Hopefully, the overview has provided just such a perspective.

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NOTES

1. Balan, Jorge (1992) Argentina. In Burton R. Clark and Guy Neave (eds) *Encyclopedia of Higher Education*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, Vol. 1, National systems of higher education, pp. 19-29.
2. Tedeka, Paul J.M. (1988) *L'Enseignement supérieur en Afrique noire Francophone: la Catastrophe?* Abidjan/Paris, PUSAF/L'Harmattan.
3. For this, see Becher, Tony (1989) *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Cultures of Disciplines*, Milton Keynes (England), Open University Press for Society for Research into Higher Education.
For a cross-national perspective on the culture of disciplines as they bear upon research student training, see Clark, Burton R. (ed) *The Research Foundations of Graduate Education: Germany, Britain, France, United States, Japan*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press (forthcoming).
4. OECD (1983) *Higher Education and the Community*, Paris, OECD. Also, for a more detailed analysis of the impact of individual establishments on their region, see *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1979, which examines a number of case studies of higher education's interaction with its region.