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“Some Aspects of the ‘Bologna’ Transition and the Quality in Higher Education in Hungary”

Presentation Notes

The starting point: A ‘Russianized-Prussian’ system of higher education

Twofold dual system:

universities versus (professional) colleges (‘degrees with and without diploma’)

traditional universities (‘*artes liberales*’) versus specialized, professional ‘universities’ (polytechnics, ‘*artes mechanicae*’),

‘deductive’ (from abstract to practical) rather than ‘inductive’ (increasing theoretical depth) design of the university curricula (college graduates excluded from university studies).

A special feature in Hungary (Austria):

early emancipation of some (engineering, commercial, agricultural) polytechnics, (Hochschule) into the ranks of universities, right to award doctors title (degree).

Traditionally high social prestige associated with university positions (professors) and diploma: ‘elite’ sector of the society

Small number of students (14% of the age cohort in the 1980s), rigid entrance requirements

Centralized scientific qualification system: Candidate and Doctor of Sciences (dr. univ. reestablished as a title, but not as a degree)

Relatively high quality in most areas of higher education due to the elitist spirit, the selective intake of students and new staff (despite of some political priorities and interferences)

A new phase of development: new rules of survival and threats to quality of education

The historic task and the main issue:

The reassessment of HE as a whole in order to catch up with the main western tendencies in a relatively short period of time. How to combine central control with forces of organic development?

Opportunities and challenges (interesting times by all means):

increased international mobility

increased nominal autonomy of the higher educational institutions, but

serious deficiencies in professional management of HE institutions

sharply decreasing government financing, but

maintenance of strong central control in many areas (more ‘absolutism’ than ‘enlightenment’),

transitional international support

brain drain (emerging new opportunities for the ‘elite’ in business and politics, and abroad)

sudden increase in the number of students (aim: 50% of the age cohort by 2010)

persisting diploma fetishism, partly responsible for the ‘gold rush’, characterized by

excessive increase in new programs and institutions, (eg. economics and management: from 6 to close to 40 institutions)
appearance of (some time wild) private institutions and foreign ‘franchises’
forced integration of institutions
reorganization of the system of scientific qualifications and awards (PhD, Dr. Habil., Dr of Academy) in 1993
introduction of the credit system (compulsory since 2002)
reorganization of the degree system in the EU (the ‘Bologna’ process) in 2004/05

The establishment of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC)

Policy analysts and makers opted for accreditation versus mere assessment of quality in Hungary.

In fact, accreditation was not considered merely as an alternative to quality assessment.

A fragile balance between central control and the forces of organic development:

need to establish norms for the distribution of the short but in proportion still sizable governmental support,

slowly developing sense of quality in the society at large, including the sector of HE too.

HAC was established by the first new Higher Education Act in 1993. The HAC is a legal entity, and an independent professional body.

Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) established in 1993

The main objectives of the accreditation system are:

public protection of the “stakeholders” of HE, students, employers, society at large,

promoting quality improvement,

and to an increasing extent, accountability to the Government and the public about the quality of education.

Among its specific tasks are

to accredit regularly, at least every eight years, ... the quality of education and scientific activity in higher education (since 1993), and

to support quality assurance in higher education (since 1996).

Approach chosen: conducting institutional accreditation via program evaluation, positive evaluation of a sufficient number of programs results in the accreditation of the institution.

HAC makes

Recommendations made to the Minister of Education, who makes the final decision (has to publish the reasons for a dissenting decision).

Recognition of Hungarian institutions is granted by the Parliament.

In Hungary, accreditation was to determine whether a higher education institution was indeed ‘fit for the purpose’ of providing good education and, in case of universities, research. While the licensing function was there,

The main focuses of HAC is

on a college’s or university’s quality improvement, and on retaining the positive values in the Hungarian higher education system as much as possible.

Accreditation is not considered an alternative to quality assessment:

higher education institutions have been required to evaluate annually their effectiveness since 1966 internal quality assurance system had to be introduced in each institution by 2000.

As a result, HAC can lean more and more on the universities' and colleges' own quality assurance, once they surpassed the minimum threshold set for them. The intention is to shift gradually to the evaluation of quality assurance mechanisms of the institutions.

Accreditation as a tool alone for control is not viable. It has to be an option for quality assurance to serve the widest range of actors and stakeholders and ultimately society at large. Quality assurance can be sustained only if it is open to changes and holds out an added value for higher education institutions.

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The 'Bologna' process: how and where?

the introduction of a two(three)-tier system of study called for in the 'Bologna Declaration' (EME, 1999)

Degree programs

bachelor programs (3-3,5 years, 180-240 credits)

master programs (1-2 years, 60-120 credits)

full-cycle university programs (at least 5 years, 300 credits, restricted to certain areas)

PhD programs (3 years, 180 credits)

Non-degree programs

accredited vocational postsecondary training programs (2-3 years, 120-180 credits)

accredited specialized postgraduate training programs (1-2 years, 60-120 credits)