

Congreso Internacional sobre el Planeamiento y Gestión del Desarrollo de la Educación

ROUND TABLE: PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT FOR EXCELLENCE AND EFFICIENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Round Table on Planning and Management for Excellence and Efficiency in Higher Education was organized within the framework of the International Congress on Planning and Management of Educational Development (Mexico City, 26-30 March 1990). It assembled some 50 participants, including 7 panelists which met on 28 March 1990.

The panelists and the numerous other speakers (there were more than 30 interventions during the three hour discussion) singled out a number of basic issues facing higher education today, which they considered to be relevant for the two major topics of the Round Table, i.e. excellence and efficiency in higher education:

a) how to cope with an increasingly number of students; i.e. how to manage size and the accompanying diversity and complexity of systems and of institutions of higher education;

b) how to raise the quality of teaching, training and research programmes;

c) how to do both (a) and (b) above more efficiently and more effectively, under conditions of severe financial constraints;

d) how to secure optimal employability of higher education graduates.

1. Planning and managing for excellence in higher education

At this time of crisis for higher education, the search for excellence is the most adequate response it can provide in order to claim the important role incumbent upon it as a main source for highly-skilled human resources development. In adopting strategies for reaching excellence, there are and there can be no ready-made rules and measures which would have general applications to all systems and to all institutions. The way to start -the discussants agreed- was to develop awareness of the need to attain such excellence among all factors and actors concerned: decision markers on matters

related to higher education, university administrators, the teaching, research and support staff and, not the least, the students themselves.

Among the possible approaches to and the requirement for excellence in higher education, mention was made of:

- the need to redefine certain goals and functions in higher education so as to strike the right balance between expansion (which is determined by external factors -demographic, social, economic and political) and the reinforcement of quality and value of teaching, training and research. While agreeing that no institution can hope to attain internationally recognized excellence in all areas of scientific endeavour, and that centres of excellence will continue to exist and to strengthen their positions, many speakers agreed that, through persistent effort and support, new centres of excellence can be created and a more balanced distribution of such centres, internationally, can be achieved;
- the need to promote and to impress upon the wide public opinion a new, fresh, image of the university and of higher education in general, an image in which the traditional values of academe are complemented by an opening up towards the basic needs of society. The central axis of that image resides in the role of higher education institutions as guardians and creators of new values, as critical judges and fomentors of change in all spheres of life. This role is becoming more important than ever before;
- the need to redefine contents and methods in higher education, to develop greater responsiveness to societal demands, with due emphasis on the constant and fast changing nature of such demands;
- the need to strengthen internationalization in higher education, to develop a spirit of solidarity, of belonging to the world-wide academic and scholarly community for which the search for excellence in one's own institution blends harmoniously with the wish and readiness to

help build up excellence in institutions of higher education everywhere, particularly where it is most needed, namely in the developing countries. This spirit of solidarity does not preclude -on the contrary it implies- not only partnership but also competitiveness and a questioning attitude which are inherent in all true scholarship, in all endeavours to advance science and to search for truth.

The essential condition and the best guarantee for higher education institutions to attain excellence is to reinforce their autonomy and their freedom in research and in teaching. There is a new meaning of autonomy however, several participants pointed out, which emerges from the present close link between higher education and society. Never before have the higher education institutions been required with equal stringency to justify their freedom and autonomy by assuming clear responsibilities *vis à vis* society in the broadest sense of the word.

2. Efficiency in higher education

It is imperative -the discussants agreed unanimously- to take bold, imaginative steps in order to improve institutional management and governance in higher education. Universities and other higher education institutions have been, perhaps justifiably, criticized from various quarters for their loose management. What is needed is to develop **managerial professionalism** at various levels of the organizational structure of higher education systems and of their institutions. In this enterprise, better knowledge of how this is achieved in other sectors, including the economic one, acquires particular importance. In fact, in this trading-off of knowledge universities, as large non-profit institutions may themselves have something to offer from their own experience in imparting a sense of common mission to all its members: teachers, students and researchers.

On the other hand, what universities can and must learn from the economic sector is to introduce the norms and styles of governance, management and administration which are intrinsic to large organizations. They imply concern for cost-effectiveness, accountability, constant assessment and evaluation based on clearly defined performance indicators. The belief that these concerns are restricted to spheres of life outside the academic world is no longer tenable. They are increasingly becom-

ing realities and concerns of the every day life of higher education institutions. They must be examined from the specific perspective of higher education so as to find the most adequate answers to the problems they pose.

Considerable experience has been gained in various countries in the use of new information technologies in the management and administration of higher education institutions. The strengthening of information systems, of data bases and of various measurable indicators could, with the help of computers, turn into valuable instruments for qualitative analysis of higher education systems.

It was commonly agreed by most speakers that managerial issues affect a wide range of actors in higher education, some of whom had not been aware of its implications in the past. Hence the need to bring about a shift of attitude regarding such concerns. The most convincing way towards developing this new mentality is to undertake soundly based and systematic research on the complex issues involved in the planning, governance and management of higher education institutions.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

In the improvement of planning and management of higher education, cooperation at all levels - national, sub-regional, regional and international - acquires particular importance with regard to the gathering and exchange of information, to research and to training. The participants were unanimous in pointing out the role that UNESCO can play particularly in this field and were highly appreciative of the Organization's initiative to launch a concerted Plan of action for research and training on governance, management and administration in higher education.

They made numerous recommendations for this Plan, more particularly the following:

- to systematically gather and disseminate information on new developments, on techniques and practices for the planning, management, administration and financing of higher education in various countries of the world;
- to encourage research on planning and management of higher education, and to help establish links and active co-operation among researchers in this field across national fron-

- tiers. The creation of cooperation networks at the regional level, and, on that basis, of a possible world-wide network of institutions and individuals which are actively engaged in research and training programmes, were considered to be areas in which UNESCO could bring a most important contribution, acting in close co-operation with specialized NGOs and IGOs;
- to undertake an international, comparative study on excellence and efficiency in higher education, based on micro level analyses of individual institutions, as well as on broader approaches aimed at identifying new developments and trends at the subregional, regional and international level. Particular attention should be given not only to cases of recognized success, but also to cases of institutions which encounter difficulties in their search for optimum solutions. One other topic for comparative study could refer to modalities for securing external financial support for higher education, including also a serious analysis of the implications of the present trend towards privatization for the future of higher education;
 - to organize training programmes (workshops, seminars, modular courses, etc.) for key university administrators and to help set up expertise and institutional self-supporting mechanisms for systematic and permanent training at such levels, acting in close co-operation with national authorities in charge of higher education as well as with international governmental and non-governmental organizations;
 - to encourage and to create facilities for international co-operation in higher education, through direct institutional arrangements and through sub-regional, regional and inter-regional networks;
 - to undertake research on inter-university co-operation, with particular emphasis on the planning, management and implementation that such cooperation involves.

PROYECTO "COLUMBUS". SEMINARIO SOBRE COOPERACION UNIVERSIDAD-SECTOR PRODUCTIVO

El Proyecto COLUMBUS tiene ya varios años. Algunas de sus actividades han estado coordinadas por el Consejo de Rectores Europeos (CRE) en permanente relación con algunos rectores de universidades en América Latina. En relación específicamente con la Cooperación universidad-sector productivo, han sido llevadas las siguientes actividades: presentación de informes de autoevaluación (a partir de Diciembre de 1988), visita de estudio de rectores latinoamericanos a universidades europeas (26 de noviembre al 10 de diciembre de 1989), misión de expertos a universidades latinoamericanas (marzo de 1990).

El Seminario de Caracas a celebrarse en mayo del presente año brindará una oportunidad para que los participantes evalúen las estrategias de Cooperación con el sector productivo en práctica y

analicen los aspectos legales, financieros y administrativos de las modalidades de Cooperación que se desean implementar. Entre los participantes estarán autoridades académicas, funcionarios a cargo de las relaciones con el sector productivo, directivos industriales, tanto de América Latina como de otros continentes, especialmente de Europa.

Los objetivos de la reunión son:

- 1) Extraer conclusiones de las actividades relacionadas con el tema, ya llevadas a cabo en el marco del Proyecto Columbus;
- 2) Comparar los puntos de vista del sector universitario e industrial acerca de los dife-