

QUO VADIS UNIVERSITAS? (ORGANIZATIONAL CONCEPTS – IMPERATIVES FOR SUCCESS AND VALUE)

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Abstract

The paper considers the Bologna university reform in terms of organizational concepts and their contribution to higher education quality. The contribution to shedding light on these issues is considered from the standpoint of corporate concept of organization and model of diffusion, primarily dealing with adoption of change through social systems, complex organizational models studying change as a function of variables such as centralization and change, as well as conflicts of models directed at social conditions and type of changes. Arguments supporting the evaluation of certain organizational concepts are considered by means of empirical research on students' competencies as indicators of higher education quality.

Keywords: organizational concepts of higher education transformation, education quality.

JEL Classification: I2, I23, I29

1. INTRODUCTION

Useful models which would guide decision making processes in higher education, i.e. which would, on the one hand be in accordance with expectations of the world of work in the conditions of highly competitive global market, and on the other hand in the function of sustainable development, imply management of change which does not stop at the level of adaptive responses to environment, but rather lead to innovativeness of development. These models are directed to forming of competencies among which special place belongs to readiness to change and highly developed flexibility, creative and non-dogmatic thinking, ability to accept pluralism of ideas, tolerance for uncertainty, in cognitive sense, while in conative sense they refer to taking initiative, innovativeness and readiness for risk-taking (Đurišić-Bojanović, M., 2008, 45). Changes in the field of higher education introduced by the Bologna process should have contributed to realization of these tendencies. However, as it has already been stated (Little, D., 2000) that the current approaches to the phenomenon of quality are grounded on external control of outcomes (mechanicistic-technicistic orientation and economic logics), leading to the appearance of an alternative approach advocated by the supporters of socio-cultural and critical movement in pedagogy, insisting on respect of essential characteristics of the phenomenon of education (uniqueness, comprehensiveness, development, complexity, dynamics, context and unpredictability). Limitation regarding the length of the paper does not allow broader explanation of the stated organizational concepts and their contribution to higher education quality, but what should be emphasized is the importance of dealing with these issues, having in mind that the choice of a strategy, the way these changes are carried out, i.e. the attempts to transform the system in a new “more productive” state implies organizational concept which will take into consideration not only the structural level of changes, but also complexity, broadness and far-reaching effects of a complex system, change of life philosophy in the age of postmodernism and its influence of philosophy of upbringing, as well as new pedagogic paradigm oriented to an individual and his/her all-rounded development (Jacobs, G.M. & Farrell, T.S., 2001). As a consequence, what has also been emphasized as significant are demands for life long learning, empowerment of responsibility ethics with increasingly more expressed orientation towards self-aware, cooperative and creative individual (humanistic models, emancipation upbringing, learning in freedom... (Jaspers, K., 2003).

2. MOVEMENTS AND MODELS OF CHANGES WITHIN UNIVERSITY

Criticisms of the changes introduced in university in Serbia are in accordance with those expressed by Liessman (2006). In other words, it is considered that, in spite of the fact that the contrary has been advocated for, new approaches have been introduced without sufficient analysis of the system and necessary involvement of academic community, professional and scientific associations... as well as that the frequent changes of the law do not have in all their aspects essential meaning (introduction of the short cycle of studies within the most recent changes of the law on the higher education is not recognized by the world of labour as a need, since labour market offers no possibilities of employment even to academic studies graduates). Education strategy is not grounded on research findings, research findings are not consulted when creating standards understood by the commission for accreditation mechanistically, suffocating participatory approach to organization of the system of those participating in it and who should be the main agents of changes, which would be moving from within, i.e. from bottom to top, rather than vice versa, as it is now the case. In spite of the fact that it has for long now been known that organizational dynamics of these institutions differs significantly from the way the business world functions, the state expresses strong determination, eventually boiled down to calculation, to push university more and more towards to model of corporation, disrespecting the conventional idea about university as an autonomous entity (Kodelja, Z., 2005). What is especially irritating in the model of corporations imposed to majority of university domains is the control of operational details, standardization of what cannot be standardized... as a consequence, university is not in the best position to defend its principles it strives for, having in mind that autonomy, under the burden of standardization and accreditation, has become meaningless, even though university has been trying to defend standpoints according to which education is before all in the function of nurturing of human aspirations for change and of his/her ability to cope with uncertainty and unpredictability; what is now the situation is that learning society, i.e. university, is seen as constant accumulation of capital for economic progress (Štefanc, D., 2008). This is actually the essential determinant of the direction of the changes university is striving for, and a critical point in which university and business world clash. Can such an opposite relation be overcome – it is a question for discussion. Some of the possibilities reflected upon in the world, and

more recently in Serbia, can be perceived in the above mentioned models. Nevertheless, even though majority of universities in Europe considers nowadays their own priorities and development strategies, it is not a rare case that we encounter statements according to which there are few useful models which would guide real decision making processes in the time when higher education is characterized by the trends like: competition in fund raising and attraction of students, transformation of universities from “protected institutions” of premodern world to public service providing organization in postmodern world, disrespectful attitude towards conventional idea of university as autonomous entity by educational policy (Gojkov, G., 2003); thus, it can be said for the model of university development, going on both in the world and in Serbia that it is not in the function of support to the view on learning society, it is rather a support to “constantly growing human capital” for economic progress. This is opposite to the demands for higher education to nurture human aspirations for change and possibility of an individual to cope with uncertainty and unpredictability. The situation in Serbia, under the pressure to speed up the changes and burdened by the fact that policy of education is not ready and able to financially support changes in university, so that they can be harmonized with the general climate and current time spirit, has shown that we are heading towards the models underlined by “adaptive” learning or learning “for survival”; as a consequence, changes within university are more the result of external and internal pressures, even though they are not introduced by educational administration directly, than the so called independent institutions (accreditation bodies...), so that with the lack of a public discussion models “have been imported” which, according to those importing them, are suitable for local conditions, losing the possibility to get insight into the ways of the so called “generative learning” through which capacity of institutions or individuals is increased to create new solutions for growing complex problems. Models of change in higher education must, according to majority of leading names in the field (Luddeke, R.G., 1999) must take the importance of systematic approach into consideration, i.e. the assumption that reforms have to focus on development and interactions between all the main components of the system simultaneously and that they have to respond to deeper problems of university culture (Ibid). There are various approaches to organizational thought. One of them is the “openness concept” suggesting the ways how professionals can be made accept new ideas. One of the models dealing with this issue is Senge’s model of participative and reflexive openness (as cited by Bok, D., 2001), implying their integration. Self exploration and readi-

ness to bring into question and challenge one's own opinion and respect the attitude that any certainty we have ever had is, in the best case, only a hypothesis on the world, having in mind that it is in the basis of reflexive openness. A step further from reconsideration of one's own ideas is at the same time questioning opinions of others, providing more certain way towards reconstruction of university while learning how to make a shift from the culture of "individualism" to the culture relying on cooperation and critical judgement (Jaspers, K., 2003). Studies conducted by Newman and Bensimon (Ibid) point to the importance of team leadership for guidance at university, in order to respect fluid sets of beliefs, understanding and difference and focus on how team members think and act together and take care of the efficient patterns of getting involved and engaging team members. Generative organizational model of changes characterized by being open/verbal, in other words, not predictive or with the features of an algorithm, can evoke the process "organically", rather than "mechanically", taking into consideration that changes at university are not initiated without clear definition of the direction they are supposed to lead to. Divergent problems and conflicts of values demand systematic and creative approaches, intuitive and critical processes in order to develop new perspectives. This model of change within university is different from other rationalistic approaches to changes, having in mind that philosophical ideals permeating it are guided by inner need of university not to loose respect of its basic underlying principles along the way of change. Some of the principles will be mentioned, fundamental ones, penetrating into the core of university, which could be preserved, along with keeping a clear course of actions in a complex developmental activity implied by university reform. This supposes that academic leaders develop and make decisions while creating new findings during the real process of changes; thus the principles are non-linear, and the amalgamation of attitudes and values is complex. What is crucial here is the power of the group which is supposed to define the problem and create knowledge, as well as collaborative groups which can test their own standpoints, as well as viewpoints of others, which is an important mechanism for understanding problems and phenomena. It has been confirmed by findings of numerous studies that an important feature of a team is functionality and cognitive complexity, arising out of abilities of its members to share power with other team members... Authors do not invoke common aims and purposes connecting team members, but findings have confirmed the hypotheses on teams relying on team "convergence" (connectedness) regarding shared values, respects, care and appreciation (Ibid).

Adaptive-generative model of university development is characterised by a twofold nature of the process of change. Apart from the need to adjust to external and internal circumstances, university today has the need to act in the direction of generating solutions to problems, both pedagogic and others. The main assumption of this model is that change results from share construction of knowledge reached by truly interactive, inclusive team. Adaptive generative model consists of a circle diagram easily read, starting from need analysis and ending in evaluation. It consists of 6 interrelated elements: needs assessment, research and development, forming and developing of a strategy, resource support, implementation and dissemination and evaluation. We cannot go in detailed explanation of elements, which are actually stages of introduction of changes into a system. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that seemingly known procedures in the stated stages do not have the meanings we are used to (Lalović, Z., et. al. 2011). Efficient management of the model could be managed by questions (not stated in the present paper, due to the limitation of paper length) which actually facilitate the development of phases in such a way that team discussion is led in the right direction.

3. PRINCIPLES OF A NEW VISION OF UNIVERSITY REFORM

A number of universities is developed according to generative model, so that it remains to be seen to what an extent the model will help the course of changes to lead in a desirable direction through insecure world, demanding explicit knowledge on uncertainty in our educational strategies (Kruse, O., 2011).

Looking back at the movement created in the academic year of 2007/2008 at French universities, spreading with the intention to empower the principles of university and to reinvent university again so that it could endure in its struggle for unconditional right to freedom of research and lecturing, Plinio Prado (2009) states five principles which should be revitalised in order to bring the current situation at university in a state in which it can fulfil its function: *complete independence as a fundamental principle of university, which refers to basic principle of autonomy; free and public action thinking; critical thinking as responsibility of the future; interconnectedness of lecturing and research and the principle of resistance, according to which university, due to current attacks, creates a double line of resistance; being critical in the search for new approaches to future universities.*

The mentioned principles and the need for new vision of university in the present moment point to the direction of changes which must not neglect either basic function of university or the stated indicators. It is not easy to claim with certainty what university in Serbia looks like nowadays, due to the fact that there are no large-scale research findings to be found in the literature. The impressions and outcomes of explorative research, with modest reaches of generalization, are in favour of insufficient attention paid to quality of studies, i.e. the mentioned exhaustion of the steps previously taken through the Bologna process regarding standardisation and thus staying at the level of structural reform (Gojkov, G., & A. Stojanović, 2011). Quality of studies stagnates or even deteriorates. Arguments supporting such a statement and the need for more secure organizational approaches to reform currents, are given through the findings of a research carried out by the authors of the present text (It is possible to find on the web site of the institution stated in the affiliation books of the authors representing findings of other studies, as well as broader explanation of principles, models and other issues, which are not more explicated here, due to limited space).

4. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH ON META-COMPONENTS OF INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY AS INDICATORS OF QUALITY OF STUDIES

Table 1.1 shows that the **first canonical variable** representing a set of variables regarding learning strategies of students is defined, before all, by *being successful in*: interpretation of texts, making analogies, the level of success in giving subtitles to parts of the text (see the list of variables in the footnote).¹

¹ VAR 2 – level of success in identifying the main notions in the given text; VAR 3 – level of success in identifying the main ideas in the given text; VAR 4 – level of success in making abstracts of the text; VAR 5 – *level of success in text interpretation*; VAR 6 – level of success in content reconstruction; VAR 7 – *level of success in giving subtitles to parts of the text*; VAR 8 – *level of success in making analogies*; VAR 9 – level of success in application of ideas offered in the given text; VAR 10 – level of success in making questions related to the text; VAR 11 – level of success in making network of notions and ideas given in the text.

Table 1.1 Canonical loads for learning strategies

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VAR00002	.499	-.347	.340	-.498	.350	-.344	-.083
VAR00003	.227	-.483	.278	-.258	.213	-.480	.365
VAR00004	.516	-.311	.302	-.142	-.147	-.369	.498
VAR00005	.852	-.085	.017	-.005	.033	-.304	.336
VAR00006	.678	-.488	.201	.344	.236	-.022	-.014
VAR00007	.667	.167	.171	-.261	.027	-.458	.134
VAR00008	.745	-.113	.432	-.180	-.094	.002	.108
VAR00009	.403	-.479	.238	.289	-.285	-.545	-.176
VAR00010	.417	-.537	-.117	-.510	-.163	-.012	.138
VAR00011	.478	-.486	.188	.025	-.236	.034	.063

It can be seen that students have different characteristics manifested in their learning strategies and it seems that they are inclined to learning through memorization (making notes and learning them), while the characteristics we could classify within self-reflective critical thinking (*manifestation of networked, complex, or systematic thinking; manifestation of sceptical thinking; complex or systematic thinking, raising critical questions, making relations between ideas, etc*) are rarely present. A conclusion could be made that most often students have expressed the style of learning characterised by reading until memorizing; they repeat aloud what they have read from their notes, learn parts, some of them even by heart. *There is a small number of students whose learning styles characteristics are: reading the text as a whole, raising questions after reading the text, making syntheses, comparing with other ideas, positioning new knowledge in the context – finding examples, search for the better ways of presenting contents, regroupings of ideas, questions referring to the ways of easier ways to solve a problem, acquire new knowledge, critically reconsider contents, evaluate one's own learning strategies, ideas in the text, discussing on the sense of the messages the text carries, etc.* This means that majority of students have poorly developed metacognitive components, or that they do not pay sufficient attention to them in learning, not being sufficiently aware of their learning process, understanding and analysis of questions, problems, that they do not consider them as a whole, searching for new relations and relationships between ideas, notions, etc (Halpern, D. F., 1998).

In the text step canonical loads of critical thinking and metacognitive components were considered, showing that there is poor manifestation of critical thinking (VAR00013-.891-level to which sceptical thinking is expressed and VAR00017-.571-level to which networked, complex or systematic thinking is manifested). In other words, according to Table 1.2 it is evident that the components opposite to critical thinking are expressed, without scepticism, complex consideration of relations between ideas and notions, etc.

Table 1.2 Canonical loads for critical thinking and metacognitive abilities²

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
VAR00012	-.017	.790	-.443	.100	.175	-.196	-.317
VAR00013	-.891	.172	.291	.106	-.039	-.175	.222
VAR00014	-.423	-.403	-.206	-.249	-.292	.350	-.588
VAR00015	-.107	-.195	.077	.295	.656	.653	.004
VAR00016	.059	-.160	-.436	-.660	.445	.103	.370
VAR00017	-.571	-.239	-.301	.382	.327	-.385	-.354
VAR00018	-.413	.114	-.546	.534	-.274	.126	.377

Table 1.2 shows that the **first canonical variable** including the set of variables referring to critical thinking and metacognition is defined, before all, by thinking which is opposite to skeptical and networked, complex thinking. In an attempt to summarize the previous findings we could say that there is moderately expressed tendency of interconnectedness of elements of learning strategies and critical thinking (the greater success in *text interpretation*, the less skeptical, networked complex thinking is). What is also noticeable is that majority of students have poorly developed metacognitive components, so that they are insufficiently consciously immersed into problem understanding and question analysis. *Few students manifest ability to elaborate and dwell on the ways to use prior knowledge, while the lack of resourcefulness is evident in contents structuring, organizing, paying attention to main ideas, etc, which is an indicator of inadequacy in monitoring and managing one's own work, due to the lack of rais-*

² VAR 12 – the level of logical thinking; VAR 13 – *the level of sceptical thinking*; VAR 14 – the level of independent thinking; VAR 15 – the level of natural-scientific thinking; VAR 16 – the level of systematic, methodological thinking; VAR 17 – *the level to which networked, complex or systematic thinking is manifested*; VAR 18 – the level of self-reflective and metacognitive thinking.

ing new questions, meaningful organizing of material, reconsideration of other possibilities, questions on the importance of revealing meaning and fitting what has been noticed into existing knowledge.

5. CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that the modest findings of a sole research on the topic of higher education quality, i.e. up to date effects of the Bologna reform of university, have shown that the previous steps, from the angle of organizational concepts and their contribution to higher education quality, are insufficiently efficient, so that structural changes are not functional to satisfactory degree, since they have not managed to inaugurate a system which would be in harmony with the changed philosophy of life in postmodernism and its influence on philosophy of upbringing and new pedagogic paradigms oriented to an individual and his/her comprehensive development (findings of other studies can be found in Gojkov, G., A. Stojanović A. & Gojkov Rajić, 2014). This is implied by the findings of research dealing with essential issues of purpose of learning, which is characterized by acquisition of instrumentalized knowledge and utility, while complex abilities, i.e. competencies, expected in quality of knowledge proscribed by European qualification framework (European Council, 2008), do not appear in indicators of quality, at least not at expected level. This imposes the need to think about different concepts of organization climate during changes occurring at university, which would support its basic principles.

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