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Some Thoughts on Building World-class Systems

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Globalisation and World-class Universities

- Onslaught of global rankings highlighted intensification of competition and multi-polar character of HE market:
 - Nations and HEIs regularly measured against each other with geopolitical implications;
 - If higher education is the engine of economy, then quality and status of HEIs/university-based research is vital indicator for mobile investment and talent.
- As crisis bites harder, growing worry that “Europe is no longer setting the pace in the global race for knowledge and talent, while emerging economies are rapidly increasing their investment in higher education” (Europa, 2011, 2).
- World-class university has become panacea for ensuring success in the global economy, based on characteristics of top globally-ranked universities;
- Many countries trying to creating “world-class” universities or “Ivy League” to compete: beginning with China, and now Germany, France, Russia, Spain, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Finland, India, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam and Latvia, etc.

Two Main Policy Trends

Neo-liberal Model: Concentrate excellence and resources in small number of elite universities (e.g. France, Germany, Russia, Spain, China, Korea)

- Create greater vertical or hierarchical (reputational) differentiation;
- Greater differentiation between teaching and research universities;
- Link resource allocation to institutional profiling or other classification tools informed by rankings.

Social-democratic Model: Balance excellence and equity via support for a 'good quality' university system across country (e.g. Ireland, Norway, Australia)

- Greater horizontal (mission or functional) differentiation;
- Diverse set of high performing, globally-focused HEIs supporting excellence where it occurs – field specialisation;
- Emphasize close correlation between teaching and research functions;
- Use institutional compacts or strategic dialogues to enforce mission specialisation/differentiation.

Reputation Differentiation: the 'Harvard here' model:

	Field 1	Field 2	Field 3	Field ...
PhDs and research intensive	Institution A1			
Masters and some research	Institution B1			
	Institution B2			
Baccalaureates and scholarship	Institution C1			
	Institution C2			
	Institution C3			
	Institution C4			
Diplomas and extension services	Institution D1			
	Institution D2			
	Institution D3			
	Institution D4			
	Institution D5			

Field or Mission Specialisation model:

	Field 1	Field 2	Field 3	Field 4	Field 5	Field 6	Field 7	Field 8	Field 9	Field 10
PhDs and research intensive	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Institution 4	Institution 5	Institution 6	Institution 7	Institution 8	Institution 9	Institution 10
Masters and some research										
Baccalaureates and scholarship										
Diplomas and extension services										

Policy Contradictions

- Pursuing a resource-intensive “world class university” strategy at the same time public budgets and affordability declining, and demand of/for HE is rising;
 - Even for well-endowed nations, policy decisions and resource allocation is a zero-sum game, leading to policy strains;
 - “Sheriff of Nottingham” model – because by diverting limited resources to a few institutions, it effectively “robs from the poor to pay the rich” (Currie, 2009a, p. 1198; Currie, 2009b).
- Concentrating excellence in a hand-full of universities at the same time as need to enhance human capital development and regional capability;
 - Increasing stratification between elite and mass HEIs?
 - Balancing world-class with uneven capacity and capability across EU – regions and “smart and specialisation” strategies.

Why focus on Systems?

- Growing realisation that globally competitive city regions of knowledge can hold the key to sustainable social and economic development (OECD, 2007c).
- Sustainable prosperity is based in knowledge and innovation-intensive regions, which requires greater diversity of educational and research opportunities and perspectives – and people to work in jobs we don't yet know about (Porter, 2002; IHEP, 2010);
 - “Regions of knowledge” and “Smart Specialisation” strengthen European regions via “research-driven clusters”, associating universities, research centres, enterprises and regional authorities (EU, 2011);
 - Cluster development and regional specialisation (OECD, 2006; 2007b, chapter 1).;
- Emphasis on HE system-as-a-whole being world class rather than on individual world class universities:
 - Maximising capacity beyond individual capability.

Underpinning theoretical framework

1. *Successful global cities and mega-regions* (e.g. Florida, Sassen): As the distribution of economic activity has gone global, regions now compete on global terrain. Successful regions are those which attract key resources of talent and capital.

2. *Innovation clusters or corridors* (e.g. Porter, Nelson, Lundvall, Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff): Innovation stems from "interactions within a network of different actors" and that it is rarely "the result of efforts within a single firm" (OECD, 2006, p124).

3. *Mode 2 research networks* (e.g. Gibbons, Nowotny et al): HE no longer sole provider of new ideas or innovation; rather research is conducted increasingly through bi-lateral, inter-regional and global networks, with inter-locking innovation systems because complex problems require collaborative solutions.

- *Biodiversity* (e.g. Rosen, Wilson): Biodiversity is the variation of life forms within a given ecosystem – within which, each species plays a critical role, mutually supporting each other, without which the entire system may collapse.

System ranking

- Challenge simplistic interpretations that often emerge from global rankings with respect to inflating the role or importance of individual universities:
- Lisbon Council: *University Systems Ranking. Citizens and Society in the Age of Knowledge* (2008):
 - “tertiary education system not simply...a mechanism for churning out a handful of elites and perpetuating social inequality...[rather the] system must be capable...of empowering and equipping the largest possible number of individuals with the fullest set of tools she or he will need to become well-rounded participants in our social democracy and fully-functioning economic units in that society.”
- *U21 Ranking of National Higher Education Systems* (2012, 2013):
 - “importance of creating a strong environment for higher education institutions to contribute to economic and cultural development, provide a high-quality experience for students and help institutions compete for overseas applicants.”

Examples

- Emphasis on world-class system strategy seeks to capture the benefits of diverse approaches to teaching and learning, discovery and research and innovation and engagement, and to value and reward excellence across the full teaching-research-innovation spectrum.
- Success not simply the result of a single world-class or flagship university which is the “entrepreneurial” engine of a national or regional economy, but rather the combined presence of different institutions and organisations.
- Individual HEIs should seek to achieve some form of unique global leadership based upon their particular mission and expertise.

Ireland

- Certainly driven by economic necessity – the need to “reconcile our need to increase capacity while maintaining quality within a sustainable and stable funding context” (Quinn, 2012), but was required/inevitable nonetheless;
 - Quinn: “maintain a clear focus on system performance overall rather than a narrower focus on individual institutional performance”.
- Characteristics:
 - Greater government steering of a co-ordinated and coherent higher education and research system in recognition of its strategic importance;
 - Reduction of number of institutions from c.40 to less than 20;
 - Consolidation and Collaboration between institutions via development of Regional Clusters;
 - Strategic Dialogue between HEIs and HEA;
 - Research strategy is similar (4 Cs: coherence, consolidation, collaboration, co-location)
 - National research priorities;

Policy trade-offs

- Higher education has always been competitive;
 - Confluence of factors has created a new sense of urgency as it becomes evident that no government can/will be able to afford to fund all the higher education that its citizens demand or society requires.
 - Financial constraints have called ‘public character of higher education...into question’ (Musselin, 2011: 455).
- Policymakers and institutional leaders left pondering fundamental issues:
 - How do we educate a larger proportion of our population to a higher level while resources are reducing/reduced and at a time of increasing competition?
 - How should national funds for higher education and research be strategically oriented to ensure knowledge based growth and competitiveness into the future?
 - And, what are the trade-offs between public policy and private good, and between institutional ambition and system coherence?