

International Deans' Course as a unique Vehicle for Change

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1 Changes in tertiary education

A process of change of tertiary education is currently taking place in almost all countries around the world. Comparing higher education in the year 2015 with higher education 25 years ago shows a fundamental transformation.

There has been a unique process of political and social change in Europe, hugely affecting tertiary education. Eastern European countries have adopted new tertiary education policies, private universities have been set up, new programmes with new curricula and content developed. New alliances were established. The demand for innovation and change in higher education has gained momentum, many changes originated from this mood of reform which swept through Europe at the beginning of the nineties. Many countries started to reform their tertiary education systems, launched innovative projects in order to inject new ideas and allowed new concepts to be tested.

The Bologna-declaration, signed in 1999, triggered extraordinary changes within the signatory states. The key elements of the Bologna process such as the introduction of the two cycle model, the modularisation and the use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the formulation of clear internationalisation objectives and the need to adjust national quality assurance systems as a response to international challenges implied that all stakeholders in higher education had to rethink their approaches.

Most countries have opted for additional policy reforms, which went far beyond the original Bologna-objectives: across Europe there has been a move towards modernising universities and the tertiary education system as a whole. Higher education institutions in most countries now operate in a framework of increased

financial flexibility and decentralised responsibility. University governance has been adapted in many countries. The notion of competition has gained ground in virtually all countries in Europe. Rankings of universities, business schools, and scholarly institutions in terms of their performance in research or in teaching have become more important.

Germany has gone through a period of reforms of its tertiary education system since the beginning of the nineties when unification created an atmosphere of change. After intensive debate and public reflection, the key legislative instrument to regulate tertiary education was substantially changed in 1998. And just a year later, Germany was among the signatory states of the Bologna declaration in 1999, and started to implement the reforms agreed upon at the beginning of the new century. Concurrently with the implementation of the Bologna process, the governance system characterising the tertiary education system in Germany has been fundamentally changed. Boards of trustees have been introduced and given the power to influence the strategic management of tertiary institutions. The power of the rectors, presidents and deans has been increased. The role of academic bodies such as faculty boards, senates, councils, and student parliaments has been changed. The idea of higher education institutions needing better management has gained prominence and ground. The idea of autonomy for higher education and new forms of accountability have received growing support and made policy makers opt for this new governance model. Rules concerning financing have been changed as well. Tuition fees have been introduced at the beginning for some programmes only, and then in some states for all bachelor and master programmes. Ministries have changed the rules for allocating budgets to higher education institutions in order to strengthen incentives to perform. The flourishing of numerous rankings is closely connected to this change in allocating scarce resources. Competitive processes have gained ground; the countrywide “competition for excellence” sent a strong signal to the public that public money for higher education should (at least partly) be invested where superiority is indeed achieved. It was a clear break with the idea that money is distributed in such a way that everyone gets a fair share, keeping in mind as well regional consideration, developmental perspectives etc.

Tertiary education in Africa is also confronted with major challenges. While English-speaking countries have practiced the two-cycle system for decades and have worked with elements such as modules and credit points in the past, many study programmes need adjustment in terms of structure and contents. Many programmes have not been reviewed for a long time. Ideas such as outcome-based

learning have gained ground in Africa as well. Issues such as employability are extremely important. Countries are revising their systems of quality assurance. Because of the scarcity of funds, public universities are facing serious financial constraints. High population growth rates and the need to invest scarce public resources in primary and secondary education have further added to the problem of the tertiary sector being cash-strapped. The deteriorating public investment per student in most countries has led to a serious decline in the quality of tertiary education. Higher education institutions have had to respond innovatively by looking for new sources of funds, reducing costs etc. At the same time, new private universities fill part of the gap which has been left by underfinanced public tertiary institutions. Many countries have introduced new governance models.

Universities in Asian countries have gone through fundamental reforms. The economic growth rates in many countries have allowed for increases in public allocations for higher education. The increase of public spending in countries such as China and South Korea has been exemplary. The growing living standards and willingness to pay for higher education has led to an increase of private contributions towards higher education. The number of university graduates has increased in most countries. Some countries, such as Indonesia, have seen an astonishing increase in private tertiary institutions. With new institutions coming up, there has been less of a need to deal with the transformation of old and established institutions. Instead, the identification of appropriate rules for new institutions has become more important. And with private institutions gaining relevance, countries have had to find the right balance between autonomy and state guidance. The development of new curricula is constantly challenging the various players in the system. New ideas for managing tertiary institutions based on concepts like autonomy and accountability have gained ground.

2 Drivers for change

The differences in economic, social and political conditions notwithstanding, changes in tertiary education in Europe, Africa and Asia are similar in many ways because the factors impacting on higher education are almost the same in the three continents.

2.1 Globalisation is shaping tertiary education

Globalisation has deeply affected higher education. While academia has always been international to some extent, disciplines increasingly define themselves as part of the wider international community, searching for knowledge in their

discipline. Benchmarking takes place in an international context. Curricula are developed with reference to approaches in other countries and regions. A look at university bookshops in African, Asian and European countries quickly reveals the level of integration. A great many textbooks are used around the world. International conferences and international journals are powerful in influencing the way priorities are defined in disciplines. The internet makes it possible to compare didactic approaches in different countries and allows for benchmarking without great costs. Universities, especially from highly developed Anglophone nations, but also from France and Germany, have started to offer programmes abroad and often act as competitors for local providers of educational services.

2.2 Generation of knowledge becomes more important

With the generation of knowledge becoming increasingly crucial for economic growth, countries recognise the relevance of establishing higher education systems where institutions are able to produce the output required in society. This is not only true for developed countries, which see their future in human capital-intensive production but additionally in developing countries. There we are faced with fears that a neglect of higher education will erode the chances to close the divide between the rich and poor nations.

2.3 Expansion in Higher Education

Many countries around the world are faced with the challenge of expanding access to higher education. Countries in the Southern hemisphere are confronted with high birth rates and the resulting increase in the number of young people entering the educational system. And many countries see the need to expand the percentage of students entering the tertiary education system.

2.4 New technologies drive change

New technologies have radically changed practices in academic life, and further changes are almost certain. The use of computers, the use of internet, the use of smartphones, the use of electronic learning platforms has changed the practice of teaching and learning and of research. Electronic databanks allow students around the world to access academic journals and material. Interaction between universities across borders is much easier as the internet allows for videoconferences and for distance learning when students and teachers are thousands of kilometres apart.

2.5 New concepts in public management gain ground

New concepts in public management, which have substantially transformed other sectors of public life in countries around the world, have found their way into higher education: Decentralisation of decision-making is as important as the idea of strengthening rules and regulations which rely less on state guidance and more on self-regulation, markets and similar mechanisms. The philosophy that management of public institutions can benefit from experiences in the private sector, that cost-efficiency can be reached when modern controlling methods are used, has deeply influenced thinking about running public sector institutions. And it has influenced thinking about the management of higher education institutions, which are predominantly public.

2.6 More competition in higher education

The idea of tertiary education institutions being in competition has gained ground. Governments increasingly try to identify and give special support to a selected number of institutions which can compete internationally. Rankings, despite widespread uneasiness about the arbitrariness in choosing and measuring criteria and calculating a final ranking list, are seen increasingly as an instrument to describe differences in quality, be it in terms of quality of study programmes, quality of research, or quality of services. This is true in the national as well as in the international context.

2.7 Convergence of higher education policies around the world

There has been a global convergence in thinking about the higher education policies which are most suitable. Work by international organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO, the World Bank, the European University Association (EUA), the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (AUAP) and others have produced numerous studies, publications and other output which has helped to spread information about good practices and allowed for mutual learning.

3 Management of higher education institutions as a key challenge for training

The change in the policy environment for higher education institutions involves a tremendous challenge for tertiary institutions. Decision-makers need to have a sound understanding of the new framework conditions. And they have to reflect upon consequences for their daily work, on adaptations of their tools and

instruments, or new tools and instruments. There is wide-spread agreement that the best performance of key decision-makers in tertiary institutions is possible only when the knowledge and skills-gap is addressed. There is a need to check whether skills are still satisfactory, whether they need to be upgraded, or if new and totally different skills are needed. And this applies to all levels; it stretches from the leadership at the top to the staff implementing the new programmes and services.

Such qualifications take place in the context of an increasing number of conferences, seminars and workshops or other forms of expanding the knowledge base on higher education management issues. By these activities, public institutions such as ministries want to raise the level of know-how in the higher education system. Bodies representing universities such as Rectors' Conferences, bodies representing certain disciplines or types of faculties offer programmes to inform and educate, or provide a platform for discussion. Sometimes tertiary institutions in a geographic region work together; in some cases universities use their networks with other universities to collectively offer programmes to upgrade skills. Some universities with programmes in management have started to offer study programmes on the master's level by adapting tools and techniques successfully used in management to the context of tertiary institutions. New service providers have come up with training programmes.

Programmes address skills' gaps at the top management level; others target the level of deans. Some programmes are directed at assistants of top management of universities or faculties. Quite a number of programmes are directed at staff working in higher education.

Some specialised programmes deal with issues such as human resource management in higher education, others look at marketing in higher education. Strategic management and IT in modern universities are topical issues as well. Study programmes have been designed in order to qualify staff in matters of higher education management. This is a sound response to the new complexity, to the need to respond effectively to the changes tertiary institutions are confronted with.

4 The DIES-programme – a joint initiative to address management issues in higher education

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) have responded to this challenge of changes in higher education

management and the need for new skills, new strategies and new perspectives by developing a platform of dialogue between higher education institutions in Germany and developing countries. The joint DAAD-HRK programme, which was started in 2001 with the name “Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies” (DIES) offers a range of activities aiming at building capacity in the field of higher education management in developing countries. Issues such as strategic management, quality management, curriculum design and transnational study programmes are covered. The seminars, study visits, training courses or other forms of exchange such as university partnerships are usually organised together with partners in Germany and from abroad. (See for the full list of activities www.hrk.de or www.daad.de/dies).

4.1 The International Deans’ Course – a partnership-based collaboration

The International Deans’ Course (IDC) is one of the formats being offered in the frame of DIES training courses. The IDC is a collaborative exercise: various German organisations provide perspectives on the issues at stake: the DAAD, the HRK, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH), the Centre for Higher Education (CHE), the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück and the Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin). The partners make joint use of their strengths: The DAAD, a self-governing organisation of the German academic community in the field of international academic cooperation, has proven expertise in the field of higher education and academic exchange and provides its particular expertise in reflecting upon international trends and changes. The HRK, the public and political voice of higher education institutions in Germany, deals extensively with the challenges of managing tertiary institutions and organises a number of events where new trends are presented. The AvH facilitates international academic relations through cooperation between outstanding foreign and German researchers. The CHE, a think tank for developments in higher education, is well known for their influential university ranking of German, Austrian and Swiss higher education institutions and their training programmes for tertiary institutions. The University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück, a tertiary education institution in the northern part of Germany, offers a variety of programmes in higher education management, especially the MBA programme “Higher education and research management” which has been offered since 2004. The FU Berlin is a German research oriented university with high reputation in research and international cooperation.

The IDC is not meant to be a German initiative only. There are important partners in Africa and Asia. Experts from a number of universities have been part and parcel of the organisation of the workshops. Trainers come from Moi University/Kenya, from Taita Taveta University College/Kenya, from Addis Ababa University/Ethiopia, from University of the Western Cape/South Africa, from the Philippine Normal University/Philippines, from Gadjah Mada University/Indonesia, from Bandung Institute of Technology/Indonesia, from Multimedia University/Malaysia.

4.2 Managing faculties – targeted training for deans as key decision-makers

The management of faculties has been identified as an area where changes and challenges are most pronounced and a particular need arises to qualify decision-makers. Deans, vice-deans or deputy deans and heads of departments are the people who carry enormous responsibilities in administering and managing faculties. Deans of faculties need new skills, they need to have a sound understanding of new requirements, they have to have knowledge about the potential of modern management methods, and their limitations. They need to have the necessary social skills in order to create a climate where tertiary institutions find a way that is accepted by people inside and outside the academic realm. The organisers decided to offer a comprehensive programme for participants from Africa and Asia where such skills to manage faculties would be at the centre.

4.3 The objectives of the course

The objectives of the DIES International Deans' Course are:

- The programme should provide knowledge for participants from African and Asian countries on the fundamental changes in higher education in Germany, Europe and around the world.
- Participants should gain an insight into new thinking about management of higher education institutions that might help them to improve the performance of their institutions.
- The programme should give participants practical skills to respond to changes in higher education in their own working environment by using a practical learning approach.
- The programme should build bridges between higher education institutions in Africa, in Asia and in Germany, enabling all sides to use the knowledge about each other for further contacts in teaching, research and administration.
- The programme should assist academics who studied in Germany and have come to occupy leadership roles in higher education institutions.

4.4 The didactic concept

Implementation of the International Deans' Course is in four steps stretching over a period of almost one year. This is based on the idea that the complex skills required to manage higher education institutions cannot be meaningfully discussed, trained or reflected upon when there is just one get-together where people absorb information. Learning in this context is a process which takes time, requires joint reflection, needs to be based on phases of new inputs provided, and time to apply the new inputs in reality.

The first step: The meeting in Osnabrück and Berlin

The first phase lasts one week and aims at introducing important new concepts in higher education management. Participants are sensitised for new ideas and issues, for the forces of change, and the answers found in Germany, other European countries, and around the world. At the end of the first meeting in Germany, participants are requested to identify an issue which they work on in the following months in the framework of a specific project called "project action plan" (PAP). By identifying such a project, participants are applying the new skills to their own work environment. This approach allows for a more active application of the ideas, concepts and theories which are introduced during the course and reduce the typical distance or split between the seminar context and professional reality. The progress on the personal action plans is then shared with other participants throughout the period of the IDC.

The second step: The regional meetings

There is a second interaction a few months after the first phase. It involves a meeting of participants of the International Deans' Course from the same country or region. This meeting is meant to provide an opportunity to discuss with the international trainer team experiences of higher education management in general and of implementing the project action plan in particular. It allows for joint reflection on forces hindering change, and provides for an opportunity to exchange views on alternatives. This meeting is characterised by an intensive debate with participants who are drawn only from the deans' course and hence know each other and have already developed trust and understanding.

The third step: The final conference

The third conference brings the DIES International Deans' Course to an end after a period of approximately nine months. New input is provided, change processes are jointly reflected upon and lessons learned are discussed. This all feeds into further planning of activities.

The fourth step: Follow up

There is in fact an important follow-up to the DIES International Deans' Course which is the networking of participants of the course. The DAAD specifically supports initiatives where participants link up to participants in other DAAD-activities related to higher education management or otherwise. And many participants use their experiences and old or newly established contacts to German higher education institutions to identify joint projects with German universities or universities of applied sciences, or exchange information, or establish other forms of cooperation. The participants have access to various programmes specifically designed to bring alumni of the DAAD in touch with each other and scholars in Germany.

5 Lessons learned

Strong interest in higher education management

The programme has been designed on the premise of fundamental changes in higher education management around the world, confronting virtually all tertiary institutions with new challenges they find themselves not sufficiently equipped for. The workshops confirm that higher education institutions find it extremely challenging to meet the new demands. Participants call for further measures to address the skills gap. The feedback from the programme shows the potential of providing knowledge, skills and competencies to the leadership of faculties in African and Asian countries. Conditions for deans do differ in many ways: in terms of what kind of leadership role they are expected to and are allowed to play, and whether they are expected to be visionary, participatory, communicative etc. This all depends on the size of institutions, on disciplines and their traditions, on the history of institutions, on the culture, on people working in the institution, the availability of charismatic persons etc. But deans in all countries can make a difference when they fully understand the challenges and can see changes in a wider perspective, when they master the management instruments and when they are able to communicate effectively the changes that are required. Only a few programmes in African and Asian countries do address the changes and the implications for management; even fewer programmes are directed at the target group of deans. And while some organisations in Africa and Asia like rectors' conferences, universities, consulting agencies, and international organisations are starting to take up the challenge, the approach quite often lacks a comprehensive and systematic nature. In most countries there is little written material available reflecting upon changes in higher education and implications for management of higher education in their countries.

Bologna process still needs explaining and reflection

While the discourse in Europe on the nature and implications of the Bologna process has been very intense in the last years and people in higher education generally have a good understanding of experiences elsewhere, there is still a great need in Africa and Asia to learn about and reflect upon the key elements of the Bologna process. However, the ensuing discussion on the lessons for tertiary institutions around the world is what is most important.

Strategic management most important

There is considerable interest in looking at the potential of strategic management tools for charting the course of universities or faculties. The changes currently taking place are seen as fundamental and the need for a more holistic approach in management is recognised in many institutions. Participants shared their experience that management is quite often re-active rather than pro-active, with the latter approach leaving much more room for shaping processes and influencing the course of affairs. In some universities, quite advanced tools such as balanced scorecards are used, which left a strong impression on participants when exposed to such experiences. In other universities, the tools used are still very rudimentary and simple, a characterisation of the management as “strategic” would be euphemistic. The International Deans’ Course experience shows: interest in learning about elaborate tools of strategic management is high.

Discussions during the various meetings of the IDC show clearly that a purely managerial approach towards leading a faculty is not feasible or desirable, neither in Germany, and nor in the African or Asian context. There are clear limits to the adoption of a management philosophy in higher education. The learning process is more complicated and diverse than a production process of goods, the individuality of teaching staff might be a burden in some situations, but is a great advantage when a generation of new knowledge is desired. Participatory traditions in higher education are also defining clear limits to the applicability of management practices used in corporate life.

University governance is changing

University governance, i.e. the design of institutions, rules, values that shape the exercise of power in tertiary institutions, is changing across Europe. While governance is not part and parcel of the Bologna process, the process is certainly important in explaining the dynamics. Research shows that governance models in Europe are becoming more similar, there is a tendency towards systems

assimilating. A very influential research work looked at governance models in most European countries and identified five dimensions of governance: the role of the state, the role of external stakeholders, the role of academic self-governance, the role of managerial self-governance and finally the role of competition when allocating scarce resources (Schimank 2010). The study found that there is generally a tendency towards less direct management by the state, there is more involvement of external stakeholders, there is more delegation of managerial authority to the tertiary institution, and there is a more competitive outlook. In many countries changes are triggered by the state, but other forces come into play as well. Discussions during the IDC on this tendency in Europe provoked lively discussion on trends in the southern hemisphere. Quite a number of countries in Africa and Asia saw a redefinition of the role of the state, generally leaving more scope to universities to define their direction. Other stakeholders gained in importance as well.

The first meeting of IDC participants starts with a description of the governance structure at the home universities of experts participating. This opens new perspectives in terms of seeing different organisational modes, reflecting upon possibilities to choose between different governance models. By using concrete, real examples to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different organisational set-ups, participants could reflect more thoroughly on what options are available.

Changes in funding of tertiary education

One of the inputs in Germany into the discussion with deans from Africa and Asia was the analysis of the changes in the funding of higher education, especially financing the teaching function of tertiary institutions. Participants discussed the changes in many European countries where experts have observed a move towards the use of lump-sum payments to tertiary institutions, an increase of the use of financial formulas, and of incentives for high quality. Discussions showed the need for a more decentralised system in the context of tertiary education in the South as well.

Level of funding education insufficient

Major differences exist in terms of total funding for tertiary education and funding per student. The level of funding in Germany and other European countries can be considered as too low. In comparison, the level of funding in African countries is at an extremely low level, and has even declined in the recent past. For Asia, the situation is much better than in Africa, but still remains difficult. With insufficient

funds available, the question needs to be addressed what kind of mechanisms should be in place to use the scarce resources most efficiently. Here as well the interaction proved important because participants could exchange opinions, reflect upon consequences and share thoughts on how to deal with the trends.

Need for external funding

Similarities and interests exist in terms of the importance to attract external funds for research. European as well as African and Asian universities are being challenged to develop the necessary infrastructure to secure funding for research activities. While European funding for research activities in European universities becomes more important, the importance of foreign funding cannot be compared with the need, especially in Africa, for funds to be secured from foreign sources.

Quality management

The discussions on quality management proved to be very useful. The quality debate in Europe has been very intense, many new organisations were set up, tertiary institutions try to establish effective systems, and they try to develop a quality culture where this was absent before. Such discussions will go on because the challenge of measuring quality in higher education is different in comparison to measuring the quality of a normal product or service. Quality has been an important issue in African education as well. Some universities have established quality management units, some universities work with external examiners. Evaluation of lectures is common in many tertiary institutions, but more thorough systems still need to be established.

The presentation of DIES Projects aiming at developing quality assurance capacities at regional level both in East Africa (partnership DAAD-HRK-IUCEA) and Southeast Asia (ASEAN-QA) triggered discussions on essential elements of an institution which is characterised by good or high quality. And presentations by a number of deans about their attempts to go for quality in their faculty showed that room for innovative measures is there.

Soft skills as important element of training deans

The integration of soft skills training in the programme proved very valuable. A one-day-workshop covering topics such as “conflict management”, “management of meetings” and “presentation skills”, by now quite typical in study programmes and training activities in Germany and Europe, provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on the behavioural side of leadership. The trainers, most

of them with international experience, used case studies and role plays to help participants to reflect on behaviour in dialogue or team situations, to help them to see more clearly how certain routines can guide and misguide individuals teams when they look for solutions, and to help them find strategies to handle these situations.

Case studies are important for a better understanding

The programme is based on the idea that higher education management challenges are best understood when theoretical knowledge about higher education, management, and psychology and sociology are coupled with an understanding of the conditions of real challenges in tertiary education. This, for example, involves sudden policy changes, challenging internal traditions and expectations from the public. Or it means that management has to deal with serious financial limitations and bureaucratic conditions which do not allow for the first, best solution. Resource persons for the International Deans' Course are selected in such a way that practical experiences are shared in an open and frank manner, shedding light on the difficult processes in academia as well as possible solutions. Resource persons bring experiences from a great variety of institutions, large and small universities, traditional ones and new ones. These experts come from German institutions, but as well from collaborating institutions in Africa and Asia.

Methodology based on project action plan

The IDC was designed in such a way that each participant identified a specific project he or she would work on in the months after the first training. It was reasoned that this would provide an opportunity to think about the applicability of methods and tools learned in their own academic environment. This approach proved very effective; it increased the participants' interest to look at the tools discussed in the course from their practical point of view. Communication between the first part of the IDC and the second meeting, when first results of the project were presented, showed that this approach was very successful in terms of giving the course the character of a laboratory for tools in higher education management.

Regional integration in Africa still insufficient, approach very useful

The Bologna process and European integration have provided for numerous opportunities in Europe to learn about policies, practices, and problems in other countries. For those who are interested, it is no longer difficult to get access to relevant information about higher education in other countries of the Bologna process. Detailed information about the state of transformation with quite specific

details is available. Experiences in other countries can be used for change processes in one's own country. This is much less easier in Africa and Asia. Little is known to key personnel in higher education institutions about higher education trends even in neighbouring countries. There are few easily accessible sources of information, there is little staff exchange. The workshop, which included numerous occasions to exchange views on experiences in other countries, filled an important gap: The IDC helped to strengthen the view on regional integration, on learning from immediate neighbours. Ties were established which will last and help to organise a permanent dialogue.

Creation of links to German institutions helpful

Participants are academics holding advanced management positions in tertiary institutions. Many of them had studied in Germany or had participated in scholarship programmes of the DAAD or AvH before. The series of activities provided an opportunity to keep in touch with the academic system in Germany, to reflect upon the changes of a system they had been in and most of them cherished. Other participants who had not studied in Germany used this opportunity to learn about the higher education system in Germany and the reforms.

The programme is designed in such a way that participants have many opportunities to develop new links or re-establish old ones, to network with other participants of the International Deans' Course or network with participants of other management-related DAAD-activities in the region. This is seen as a major advantage of the programme, going beyond other training activities where the main activity is "only" the training and learning provided during a training activity. The IDC is meant to open avenues into a network of other experts and a pool of knowledge which can be tapped when needed.