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INTERNATIONAL POWER DIMENSIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF KNOWLEDGE¹

Higher education has important transnational dimensions that exist within the scope of the discipline of international relations. Globalization has been intensifying those dimensions – firstly from the point of view of the changes economies are experiencing, and secondly from the point of view of cultural encounters. Higher education has become especially important during the current transition from an industry-based to a knowledge-based economy. Indeed, knowledge and key competencies – such as problem solving, the capacity for critical, analytical, and creative thinking, along with teamwork – are becoming the very conditions for innovations. The capacity to innovate is crucial in global competition, as it decides who will be in the new center, the peripheries, and the semi-peripheries². The increasing focus on knowledge generates new and intensifies already existing transnational interactions, thereby bringing into relief various power dimensions. Power is one of the focal points of research in international relations (IR) studies. Yet, none of the leading authorities has shown systematically either how higher education can be an element of transnational interactions, or what power dimensions those processes reveal. This paper, referring to both the relational, process-oriented concept of power and the static one, based on resources, addresses that blind spot³.

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are tightly connected with nodal centers of knowledge in the era of global networks⁴. The populations of global cities exhibit

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² O.K. Pedersen, *Institutional Competitiveness: How Nations Came to Compete*, in: G. Morgan, J.L. Campbell, C. Crouch, O.K. Pedersen, R. Whitley, *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*, Oxford 2010, p. 625–658.

³ A. Wojciuk, *Dylemat potęgi. Praktyczna teoria stosunków międzynarodowych*, Warszawa 2010, p. 10.

⁴ M. Castells, *The Rise of Network Society, 2nd Edition, Vol. 1 of The Information Age: Economy*,

a high level of tertiary-level education, and there is also a strong, positive correlation between higher education and competitiveness, both at the level of states and regions. States on the peripheries of the global, networked economic system are characterized by a low percentage of the population holding degrees on a higher level⁵. The development of communication technologies exerts a major impact on the increased mobility of information and knowledge, which for that matter had always been higher than the mobility of human beings, goods and services. Quite simply, knowledge is more globalized than the economy is⁶. As Pierre Bourdieu has shown, in the era of late-capitalism, institutions of higher learning are places that produce national and international elites for the spheres of politics and business. The cultural capital generated by the fields of education and science plays its role in “positioning” states, HEI, research institutes, and individuals⁷. The analysis presented here will concentrate more on the political and economic than on the cultural distinction that education and knowledge introduce into social life.

This paper adheres closely to the realist perspective on international relations, although it relaxes some of the typical assumptions of this approach. Firstly, it treats states as the main actors, nonetheless acknowledging that non-state actors are also very important players in the field of higher education. Non-state actors are involved in most of the transnational interactions in this area, however the assumption is that states play strategically in order to encourage or discourage those interactions, and therefore the behavior of non-state actors that can be observed reflects to a large extent the policies of nation states. Other interactions do exist outside the scope of nation-state policies, but they have less importance and therefore are not covered in this study. Secondly, we assume that states are maximizing their utility understood as power. In the era of the knowledge-economy, higher education becomes more important firstly as something power can draw upon (power as resource), and secondly as a tool of foreign policy (power as influence).

Education has traditionally been considered a part of the international power of states, yet analytically it was understood as a component of the economic capacities of states and in that area was deemed to be a factor of secondary importance. Assuming that the transition from an industry-based to a knowledge-based economy indeed makes higher education more important for states, the questions arise as to how states are adapting to that global change. How are states using their higher education as

Society and Culture, Oxford 2000; M. Castells *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society*, Oxford 2001; G. Jones, P. McCarney, M. Skolnik (eds.) *Creating Knowledge: Strengthening Nations: The Changing Role of Higher Education*, Toronto 2005.

⁵ D. Bloom, *Raising the Pressure: Globalization and the Need for Higher Education Reform*, in: G. Jones, P. McCarney, M. Skolnik (eds.), *Creating Knowledge...*

⁶ M. Castells, *The Rise...*; M. Castells, *The Internet Galaxy...*

⁷ P. Bourdieu, *La Reproduction. Éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement*, Paris 1970; P. Bourdieu, *La noblesse d'état: grandes écoles et esprit de corps*, Paris 1989.

a tool of foreign policy (relational concept of power)? How are states building and using their systems of higher education as a resource of power?

To answer those questions a comparative case study was conducted of countries which demonstrated interest in building their power resources in higher education and in using higher education as a tool of their foreign policy. Those states' international policies in higher education will be the focus of this study. The comparative case study method leads to constructing a typology of states' strategies in building their higher education power as a resource, and of using their higher education as a tool of foreign policy. The study was conducted on the purposive sample of states which were active in their international policies regarding higher education, and included: Australia, China, Denmark, Finland, India, Malaysia, Poland, Singapore, the UAE, the UK, and the US. The research techniques of data collection included above all desk research of primary sources (official documents of governments, reports of governments to international organisations, policy reviews published by international organisations, i.a., OECD and UNESCO, as those organisations are the most active in the field of transnational governance in education) and of secondary sources (academic papers, newspapers, analytical reports). A number of interviews conducted during study trips with government officials, officers representing agencies managing internationalization in HE, and with HEI employees in charge of international relations were also made use of. The interviews allowed insight into the rationale and motives behind declared choices. They also allowed reconstruction of the longer-term objectives pursued by states, objectives which usually are not explicitly declared by governments. The data analysis and interviews sought to find typical patterns of state behavior in the area of higher education, and subsequently to build a typology of state strategies. These are not all the strategies implemented by states in the area of higher education, but rather only those which clearly treat higher education either as a resource of power (and aim at building it or making profits out of this asset if it is already well developed) or as a tool of foreign policy, in which case they treat it as a mechanism of influence (relational concept of power).

1. Cooperation oriented toward mutual benefits

The first type of strategies implemented by states uses higher education exchange programmes as a tool of foreign policy, as they are assumed to bring positive outcomes for both sides of the transaction. The country using that tool is supposed to gain prestige abroad, especially among the present or future elites of the country which foreign students come from. In some cases, for example when the foreign policy is to promote democracy abroad, it may also serve as a mechanism for empowering oppositional forces in a given country. It is also supposed to build mutual understanding between countries and especially a better understanding of the country inviting the elites of the

other state. This strategy is implemented through fostering the international mobility of students and faculty in the framework of developmental aid or aid to civil society. What foremost distinguishes this strategy is the fact that it is not commercial, therefore it does not bring profits to the inviting country/institution. Furthermore, it is often subsidized by the inviting country/institution. Secondly, it does not allow the participants in the programme to stay in the inviting country longer than the programme envisages. On the contrary, the participants often have to sign documents with the sponsor, committing themselves to return to their countries of origin in order to limit the risk of brain drain.

The very mechanism of this type of intervention is based on the fact that the foreigners will act as transmission belts of the ideas and norms they learned abroad and that in their homeland they will be informal ambassadors of the country they studied in. To achieve these objectives it is of crucial importance to invite the right group of people. Hence, these types of programmes typically target current leaders of civil society or persons who are likely to become them. They focus on elites, inviting the most skillful, top-achievers and sometimes also members of the existing establishment. The latter group, if convinced, can become a very important asset for the inviting country. Enrollment for those programmes reflects state aims: usually it is not based on an open call, but rather narrowly targets selected groups or individuals.

These types of programmes can be operated either by the relevant ministries (usually in charge of foreign affairs, education, higher education, science, or development), by government agencies, private foundations, or directly by HEI that receive public funding for these activities. Participants of the programmes are granted visas, the right to stay and study, together with stipends: they do not pay for their education.

This strategy has a long history going back at least to colonial times, when elites from the peripheries were educated in imperial capitals. In the 19th and early 20th century those policies were not, however, designed as precise policy tools with relevant levels of institutionalization and bureaucratic control over the process⁸. During the Cold War the Fulbright programme became an important tool of foreign policy conducted by the United States towards communist countries. Numerous members of the elites who later implemented the transformations in their home states were participants of the Fulbright programme during their university years. Much broader in its scope and less elitist are the objectives of the EU's Erasmus-Socrates programme aimed i.a., at building a sense of European citizenship among young Europeans and at enhancing mutual understanding between the nations of Europe.

Some countries use the export of knowledge as a mechanism for developmental aid. According to the UNESCO analysis, Canada, Finland, and Norway are the countries which attribute relatively the highest priority to education in their developmental

⁸ R.F. Butts, *A Cultural History of Western Education. Its Social and Intellectual Foundations*, New York 1955.

aid⁹. In absolute terms France, Japan, and Germany were the largest contributors to education in the developmental aid framework. The use of education as a developmental aid tool is usually focused on primary or secondary education, and the scale of using higher education as a mechanism of developmental aid remains limited. Therefore, this issue will not be further examined here.

2. Competition for people, competition of systems

The second type of strategies views higher education as a resource of power and aims at building it. Therefore, it is predominantly a competitive type of strategy: when one country is gaining, the other is losing precious resources in relative terms.

At the international level the non-cooperative type of behaviour in higher education policies connected with absolute gains and losses is often described as brain drain. The country implementing this kind of policy is not concerned about the country of origin of the individuals invited, but only about the talent and intellectual capacities of those persons. These types of programmes, similarly to the mutually beneficial ones described above, are also narrowly targeted – yet the group is different here. The brain-drainers usually try to obtain people in the very moment their real capacities can be assessed in order to minimize the risk of investing in the wrong individuals. Usually people who already have at least a BA degree in their country are the target of those programmes. Talented PhD candidates and junior scholars with significant achievements in their fields are considered the optimal target group in this type of strategy. The top scholars in given fields are also welcomed by inviting countries, yet the scale here is much more limited, because the number of such individuals is smaller, and given their age and position, changing their place of residence usually becomes more difficult and costly. The other way to build human resources in this field is to encourage one's own citizens who have studied abroad to come and start working in their home country. The precise policy tools aimed at fostering the immigration of talented people become especially important for countries facing demographic crisis and therefore having a shrinking pool of talent.

The states implementing such policies often facilitate immigration procedures for students, PhD candidates, and junior faculty. They offer foreigners education within their programmes on the same conditions as for their own citizens. In some cases, like in the Nordic countries, the broad offer of social benefits is also used to attract foreign talent. Sometimes these policies have an implicit character and the favourable attitude towards the immigration of talent can be deduced mainly by analysing various diffuse legal regulations facilitating inward mobility and settlement for those people. Other countries have explicit programmes aimed at getting the right individuals and

⁹ *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO, Paris 2005, p. 192.

encouraging them to immigrate. In countries like Germany (DAAD), France (CampusFrance), the Netherlands (Nuffic), and the UK (British Council) there are special agencies in charge of organising student and faculty stays in the inviting countries. Many countries are themselves active or support the activity of their higher education and research institutions during job market sessions; some fund the advertising campaigns of their higher education and science institutions abroad. However, it is research grants and post-doctoral positions for foreigners in the inviting country which will probably remain the most popular tool of this policy.

Non-English-speaking countries face greater difficulties in implementing these types of policies. They have to undertake additional policies in order to be able to attract the best and brightest. In trying to encourage the immigration of talent they open academic and PhD programmes in English, and promote the broad use of English in research. The internationalization of their academia in terms of language is an important condition for adapting to the global competition for talent. All major players use a variety of tools to attract talent at different stages of their careers with explicit strategies implemented by i.a., Germany, France, the UK, the US (for PhD candidates mainly), and recently also Japan and the Republic of Korea.

The growing competition in higher education and science is also driven by the dynamically developing tools for international quality comparisons of HEI and science¹⁰. On the one hand, states and institutions gain additional incentives to compete for the best and brightest and, on the other, they gain much clearer, although still contested, benchmarks showing where to look for the most talented and productive candidates. Cross-country comparisons of these systems and policies also have the important effect of producing the sets of “good practices” in public policies, which are then disseminated and often adopted by other countries that want to modernize their systems and build their own capacities. This feature leads to the convergence of norms and policies and can be clearly observed in the reforms of higher education and science all over the world.

The best practices coming from other systems and opportunities connected with the mobility of students and faculty are also important for those countries that want to catch up and modernize their systems in order to be able to compete globally under conditions of the knowledge-economy. The general features of their strategies are similar

¹⁰ K. Martens, *Boomerangs and Trojan Horses: The Unintended Consequences of Internationalising Education Policy through the EU and OECD*, European University Institute, Firenze 2006–2007 European Forum Series; T.M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*, Princeton 1995; O. Löwenheim, *Examining the State: A Foucauldian Perspective on International ‘Governance Indicators’*, “Third World Quarterly” 2005, no. 2, pp. 255–274; H. Krause Hansen, *The Power of Performance Indices in the Global Politics of Anty-Corruption*, “Journal of International Relations and Development” 2012, vol. 15, pp. 506–531; H. Krause Hansen, A. Mühlen-Schulte, *The Power of Numbers in Global Governance*, “Journal of International Relations and Development” 2012, vol. 15, pp. 455–465; T. Fougner, *Neoliberal Governance of States: The Role of Competitiveness Indexing and Benchmarking*, “Millennium: Journal of International Studies” 2008, no. 2, pp. 303–326.

to the ones adopted by top-achievers: get the best people and reform the system. However, the fact that at least several fundamental capacities are usually missing in those systems, makes their struggle different. Those countries are often lacking the resources which could quantitatively meet the growing demand for higher education in their domestic system, and they therefore struggle to quantitatively address the growing demand of higher education and neglect efforts to design quality-oriented reforms. Hence, their uniqueness often includes the import of knowledge.

The import of knowledge has qualitative and quantitative dimensions and can concern both people and institutions. As far as individuals are concerned, latecomers have difficulty in attracting foreign talent, hence they focus mainly on encouraging their own citizens to study abroad at quality HEI and return afterwards. In 2007 the countries having the largest numbers of students learning abroad were: China 457,366; India 162,221; and the Republic of Korea 107,141 (OECD). If they do manage to invite foreign experts and eminent scholars, this typically happens in a purely commercial way: paying for their services rather than making them a part of their own system. As far as institutions are concerned, states building their capacities in higher education and science foremost endeavor to encourage partnerships or twinings between their own and foreign institutions; and secondly, they strive to attract foreign institutions to establish in their country programmes, affiliates, and campuses in their country. This is the other way to import knowledge, recently very popular especially in East Asia and in the Middle East, with spectacular cases being Malaysia, China, the UAE, Qatar, Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vietnam¹¹. In the EU Portugal is implementing policies that share some of those characteristics. Portugal has a joint programme of several Portuguese HEI with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology covering i.a., bioengineering, systems engineering, energy, and transportation. Similar cooperation was established with Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Texas – Austin.

This strategy is followed by relevant regulations in domestic law, ones conducive to the opening of affiliates and off-shore campuses by foreign institutions and subsequently to recognizing the diplomas and degrees granted by them. The policy regarding migration is on the one hand favourable towards inviting and employing foreign scholars, and on the other hand it implements measures to limit brain drain from the country.

3. Higher education as a part of international trade

The third set of strategies of states and institutions in this era of the growing importance of knowledge is to use one's own resources for the generation of economic profits. In this case export of knowledge becomes a part of international trade and higher

¹¹ S. Vincent-Lacrin, *What is Changing in Academic Research? Trends and Prospects*, "Higher Education 2030", Vol. 2: *Globalisation*, OECD Publishing, Paris 2009.

education as a resource produces wealth. In many cases it is the reverse of the strategy for building capacities being employed by developing countries. The host country is not in any way subsidizing foreign students; on the contrary, they are expected to fully cover tuition fees and the costs of living. In the cases of states which want to develop their own capacities, the sending government often covers tuition fees and provides stipends. The inviting country makes permanent immigration and employment difficult in this case. Visas are granted exclusively for the period of attending the education programme. This strategy, apart from receiving foreign students in the country, also includes establishing programmes and affiliates abroad. This type of activity is a part of international trade and as such is regulated by bilateral and multilateral trading agreements, as well as GATS (General Agreement of Trade in Services). The leaders in the commercial export of knowledge are i.a., the UK (*Education UK*), Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Ireland (OECD 2008). In 2007 the US hosted 595,874; the UK 351,470; and Germany 258,513 foreign students. Australia's hosting of 211,526 foreign students, this being 22.5% of the total number of students in the system (and the second largest share in the world), is a spectacular case of such policy. In 2007 educational services became the third, as far as value is concerned, Australian good or service exported, generating 13.7 billion AUD.

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The analysis of strategies implemented by states while adapting to the transformation from an industry-based to a knowledge-based economy reveals the simultaneous growth of both competition and cooperation. There is a long tradition of using higher education as a tool of political influence on the elites of other countries (power as influence), yet it is only recently that states have been intensifying strategies aimed at deliberate development of resources and capacities in higher education and research, understanding them as resources of state power. The transnational mobility of students, which is an important indicator of the scale of the internationalization of higher education, has risen spectacularly in recent decades. According to OECD and UNESCO data, in 1975 there were around 750,000 foreign students worldwide, in 2006 already more than 3 million, and the projections are that in 2030 there may be from 4 to almost 8 million foreign students¹². This creates opportunities for other actors to treat education exchange as a revenue-generating mechanism. That is how education becomes an increasing part of international trade, with such spectacular phenomena as, on the one hand, the dramatic expansion of student migrations, and, on the other, the new trend of universities from the global centers of knowledge opening commercial affiliates and programmes abroad, usually in countries interested in developing their own capacities.

¹² "Higher Education to 2030", Vol. 2: *Globalization*, Paris, Center for Educational Research and Innovation OECD 2009, p. 81.

On the side of the importers of knowledge, spectacular developments include i.a., deliberate creation of hubs of knowledge in places which traditionally were not the crucial nodes in the networks of knowledge, like Singapore, the UAE, or Qatar.

This analysis has shown three main types of strategies in higher education that exhibit a power dimension, as implemented by states in the era of the growing importance of knowledge. Firstly, mechanisms for using higher education as a foreign policy tool, especially aimed at influencing foreign elites (power as influence), are still being applied. Secondly, sets of strategies aimed at developing one's own capacities are being pursued, as states face increasing global competition in this area (power as resource). And thirdly, often as a reverse of the second type of strategies, higher education can be an object of international trade, therefore becoming a means for generating economic gains (power as resource). The strategies for using higher education as a foreign policy tool are used predominantly by the great powers, having broad political and economic interests in other countries and therefore an ambitious foreign policy agenda. The strategies aimed at building power resources in higher education are mainly implemented by the rising powers and rich middle-size and small states which want to shift their economies from strong dependency on natural resource exports towards a knowledge-based economy. The strategies for commercial export of higher education are implemented by the rich, developed, and predominantly English-speaking states, which are perceived as the ones providing the main-stream models for higher education.

Furthermore, the new phenomenon of cross-country and cross-institution comparisons has started to produce sets of benchmarks and good practices which are now discussed and adapted by other systems via the governance by numbers mechanism. These processes are fostering the convergence of norms between domestic systems. Competition between systems and institutions is driving such convergence and is one of the main rationales behind increased spending on such aims.

To go back to the initial questions posed at the beginning of this paper, I have shown that education is increasingly becoming a part of transnational interactions. Firstly, its role as a tool of foreign policy is rising; secondly, via growing competition between people and systems, education is moving from the predominantly domestic policy realm to the transnational level; and last but not least, transnationalization is driven by higher education becoming a service subject to international trade. States are using education as a tool of their foreign policy in order to gain prestige abroad or to empower oppositional forces in a given country (supporting democracy and civil society). It can also be used to build mutual understanding between countries and especially a better understanding of the country inviting the elites of another state. States are building and using their systems of higher education as a resource of power mainly via the import and export of knowledge mechanisms.

Szkolnictwo wyższe jako element międzynarodowej potęgi państwa w epoce wiedzy

Streszczenie

Artykuł zawiera analizę współczesnych, transnarodowych aspektów szkolnictwa wyższego. Odpowiada na pytanie, w jaki sposób państwa przystosowują się do globalnych zmian związanych z transformacją od gospodarki industrialnej, do gospodarki opartej na wiedzy. W jaki sposób państwa posługują się swoim szkolnictwem wyższym jako narzędziem polityki zagranicznej? W jaki sposób państwa budują i wykorzystują swoje systemy szkolnictwa wyższego jako zasób potęgi w stosunkach międzynarodowych? Zidentyfikowano trzy główne strategie państw w tych obszarach: po pierwsze, współpraca mająca na celu obopólne korzyści; po drugie, konkurencja o talenty oraz konkurencja między systemami; po trzecie, szkolnictwo wyższe jako element handlu międzynarodowego.