

## Chapter 2

# The Dynamics of Global Social Systems

### 2.1 The Dynamics of Global Social Systems

Systems of post-secondary education and vocational training are social systems. When they confront one another in the globalization process, the question automatically arises as to their possible dominance or coexistence. That university system which succeeds in imposing its medium of communication upon others will ultimately be dominant, whether it is a system driven by knowledge or by economics. Whichever system succeeds forces the disappearance of other, comparable systems, since these fail to distinguish themselves sufficiently to withstand the dominant forms of communication of the system striving towards dominance.

Thus, there are three conceivable courses which a world university system might take in a global competition:

1. Post-secondary educational systems or academic systems could coexist. This remains the case, and was the case, as long as the three large academic and educational systems in the tertiary sector are not or were not dependent upon communication with one another. Historically, this applied to the continental European system of personality formation through active participation in scientific research, which had not been confronted with any alternative. There was no noteworthy contact to the much older East Asian system, at least none posing a threat to stability. In contrast, around the Meiji Restoration in Japan in the nineteenth century, the East-Asian system was lastingly influenced by the Prussian university model. Similarly, the continental European system dominated in the nineteenth century in several classic American universities which had adopted Humboldt's model. To that extent, we can speak of a co-existence of non-communication before the nineteenth century and of a nineteenth-century phenomenon which in some respects could have led to the collapse of non-continental European systems. This didn't happen; instead, the American university system in particular responded by intelligently distinguishing itself, creating new forms, such as liberal education, as influenced by Humboldt's ideal of general education.

2. A university system can, in a confrontation with other systems, gain world-wide dominance, subordinating the others or even forcing their disappearance.

The nineteenth-century continental European university system did not pursue any such aim. Rather, East Asian and American appropriations were the product of these systems' own efforts, and not any imperial designs on the part of continental Europe. Today, however, the case is otherwise with regard to the Atlantic system. The United States began at an early stage to practice a kind of world-wide university imperialism, among other things by establishing international "American universities." By founding these, it has tried to gain a foothold in various regions of the world. This early concept (the first international American university was founded in Cairo, Egypt in 1919) continued to be pursued following the rise of a new world order at the end of the Second World War; it is interesting, however, that this did not happen in continental Europe, whose understanding of the university, based on an almost 1,000 year-old tradition, remained stable but had difficulty competing with those countries outside of Europe committed to "The American Way." This applies most recently to Iraq, for which the country's education minister, Ali Mohammad Al-Hussein Ali Al-Adeeb, sought the founding of a second American university, following the one in Sualimani, in Baghdad, reasoning, "Students here would be broadly educated in the liberal arts and sciences, but with depth in those areas that will lead to successful careers in Iraq and the region." (Al-Adeeb 2013, p. 24f.) More recently, the United States have continued with efforts to establish the Atlantic system worldwide. For example, the American Council on Education (ACE) recently published a study entitled *Strength through Global Leadership and Engagement*, which is dedicated to the question of "how to save the US advantage in global higher education" and which would like to see "American higher education as a global leader." (American Council on Education 2011) The study analyzes the decreasing number of university-educated US citizens in comparison to the number of university-educated students in Asian countries and the decrease in scholarly publications between 1981 and 2009 in comparison to those in the Asia-Pacific region and the European Union. It further identifies a decrease in the number of international students in the American share of the world university market. This analysis goes hand in hand with the diverse crises Hans N. Weiler has identified in the American university landscape: a financial crisis, a crisis of competition, a political crisis (anti-intellectualism), and a crisis of meaning (Weiler 2010).

In a slightly less aggressive manner, the US Department of Education recently published, for the first time, a strategy for the education sector entitled *Succeeding Globally Through International Education and Engagement* (U.S. Department of Education 2012). The study leaves in no doubt that the goal is global success; it tries, however, to put benchmarking procedures and educational diplomacy in its own internationalization efforts in the foreground, among other things by strategically including international education experts. There can be no doubt that the Atlantic academic and university understanding is the very one which has become, due to geopolitical as well as expansionist processes in education, the most widespread in the last several years—if not the last one-and-half centuries (with regard to Great Britain). Even if American educational policy literature expresses patently unjustified concern about a possible loss of dominance in this area, it is clear that

the Atlantic university system, through different mechanisms, already dominates to such an extent that the continental European and the East Asian systems must make extraordinary efforts to validate some of their own features on a world-wide basis. Several mechanisms are at work:

As far as continental Europe is concerned, it is clear that the Bologna Process as a fundamental university reform has been decisively influenced by the British and backed by decades of Anglo-American academic systems in places like Scandinavia or The Netherlands. The introduction of “employability” as a criterion, the conviction that the imparting of skills is the goal of university instruction, and the introduction of degrees within a three-tiered system (BA, MA, PhD) in addition to many other aspects of the Bologna Process are purely Atlantic in origin. It is only at second glance, upon implementation, that they collide with the continental European understanding of the university and academia. It remains to be seen whether these formal changes so deform classic academic curricula that these are sacrificed on the altar of utility. For utility is the real purpose of education according to Locke’s pedagogical realism or Dewey’s pragmatism.

By the dominance of the three-tiered university system as well as by the decades-old prevalence of engineering and the natural sciences, the East Asian understanding of education could be significantly affected (see below). It also remains to be seen whether the East Asian, Confucian commitment to social harmony, which must be the aim of any form of education, has a chance of survival.

The threat to the continental European and East Asian academic and educational traditions seems to lie in the notion of utility, which was fed and legitimated by the high degree of economization of all existential concerns following the collapse of the East-West divide. Viewed systemically, the university system—influenced by the Atlantic understanding—began to alter its code of communication: education is no longer guided by the question of whether knowledge is true or untrue; it is guided by economics and the question of whether something pays or doesn’t pay. Put simply, whether or not something belongs to the dominance-striving Atlantic academic understanding is determined, not by whether an utterance is true or false, but by whether or not you can earn money from it.

3. In principle, there is only a third way out of the structural trap which arises when a university system is either excluded from the globalization process or compelled to yield to the communication rules of the market in accordance with the Atlantic model: The alternative would be to find, beyond coexistence and dominance, a common world university system which, on the one hand, relies upon consensus about basic rules for academic systems and, on the other, permits divergent interpretations and approaches which do justice to the diversity of regions, milieus, and customs. This third way would require the three large types of university and academic systems to have, if possible, a historically saturated set of beliefs or convictions and to have views of the future upon which consensus can be reached. To judge the possibility for this third way, we need to compare systems. This comparison must be based on the same categories as, for example, the understanding of academia or studying, and these categories must be fundamental in a way that, on the one hand, they are historically significant and, on the other, they are relevant

to the present and the future. These categories are relevant if they allow different responses to the challenges facing all academic and university systems.

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