

# **Perspectives on the Future of Higher Education**

**Grigore Belostecinic**  
**The Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova**

**Igor Serotila**  
**Moldova Young Researchers Academy**

**Maria Duca**  
**State University “D. Cantemir” of Moldova**

*Globalization and technological progress have transformed the world in all areas of human activity, including education. Although, it is certain that higher education will change in the near future, there is no clear or unanimously accepted vision.*

*The article provides analysis and perspectives on the historical evolution and features of universities, best practices in tackling challenges related to globalization and technological progress. Moreover, it offers an insight into the arguments that fundament the need to rethink the way we perceive higher education, its mission and goals, as well as draft strategies aimed at ensuring the capacities of universities to be competitive in the ever-changing educational environment.*

*Keywords: globalization, higher education, university, competitiveness, socio-economic development*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization and technological progress have profoundly transformed economies and radically redistributed opportunities to participate and thrive. As a result, there is a need for new deliberate action across stakeholders—business, government and workers—to create greater shared prosperity. Economic inequality and social polarization are growing in many countries. All of this has come on top of the effects of globalization, which left many low-skilled workers in a precarious position by the time the Fourth Industrial Revolution began to unfold.

Globalization and technological change affecting labor markets and skills demands is not a new phenomenon. However, the speed of the current transformation requires timely, responsive and bold policy to ensure that the benefits are widely distributed (World Economic Forum, 2019, p.15).

Whether large or small, strong or weak, all countries face similar odds when it comes to challenges of globalization. While examining these odds we take into account the legislative frameworks, administrative procedures, as well as tax, monetary, financial, commercial, environmental, judicial and even educational systems of a state. According to Stryazhev, the differences between the developed and developing states

depend on their economy in only one third, and the other two thirds relate to the discrepancies existing in the level and quality of education (Stryazhev, 2000, p.54).

As Muravska and Berlin underline, in the last decade, there has been a major eastward shift in global economic power of unprecedented nature. The exact composition of the newly emerging global economic powers is not yet clear, but it is now fully acknowledged that the political and economic relevance of the West is being rescaled and even downscaled.

The European Union (EU), as a trading bloc, since its inception in 1952, has expanded regularly both in scope and membership. Less than 20 years earlier, the EU was primarily seen as a regional integrational entity among a relatively small number of participating countries tearing down the wall that separated them and prevented their economic and political integration, the EU's external policy being essentially a sub-product of this internal consolidation. With globalization, this internal integrating approach to the Single Market was losing its relevance and consequently the EU's external policy acquired a new importance and dimensions, which needs to be taken into account in consolidating the fragmented character of the governance of the EU's external policy, including its economic aspects.

In the 21st century, societies with different and complex cultural identities and beliefs are forced to closely interact. In the EU Member States just as in any ENP country, discussion is taking place on what will be the political as well as methodological response to the challenges in the EU external relations and changing EU Neighbourhood Policy (Muravska, et.al., 2016, p.23).

Globalization comprises several challenges, such as backwardness of economic growth of a number of countries, prevention of environmental pollution, ensuring an ecological balance, energy supply and raw materials etc. Moreover, the phenomenon has allowed the increase of the international financial organizations role and the emergence of various regional economic and political aggregates that have brought about the fear of the rise of supranational structures, losing elements of national sovereignty, as well as culture and national identity loss. It has already been estimated that nation states are becoming economically, socially and politically less relevant, as compared to corporate states and other virtual communities. For example, Microsoft could become more powerful than the US, and sports might be more influential than parliamentary elections in the near future (Fisk, 2007).

Scientific knowledge transformed into new technological developments becomes a catalyst for economic growth at both microeconomic and macroeconomic levels. This statement is validated through the multifunctional role that classical science has in accomplishing its three main functions – socio-cultural (science as part of culture and society), educational (impact on the level of education) and the function of influencing the economy (economic growth and sustainability) (Duca, et.al., 2019).

Moreover, qualitative indicators of a nations development could comprise the expenses for science and education related to GDP, the number of registered patents and inventions, the number of scientific personnel, the production and marketing of high-tech competitive products, etc. In the economically developed states, the investments in knowledge, measured by the expenditures for R&D, higher education, and information technologies, are growing at a higher rate than the investments in the economy in general.

It should be noted that globalization has had a significant transformative impact on national higher education systems, moreover, some researchers argue that globalization is actually one of the fundamental challenges that higher education has faced throughout its history (Scott, 1998). A globalized society generates a global education. Thus, one can find terms and expressions in specialized scientific works related to this topic, concepts such as *global market for educational services*, *global universities*, *transnational education*, etc.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While considering the future of higher education certain scholars refer to *universities as ruins* (Readings, 1996), or that *in 30 years the great university campuses shall become relics, vestiges* (Drucker, 1994, p. 53-80). Although, it is certain that universities will change in the near future, there is no clear or unanimously accepted forecast. It is likely that the very idea of *a university* will be rethought and reconsidered.

Robertson identifies the future of education as open, risky and uncertain. When education futures are claimed by economic actors seeking to expand capitalist markets, there are competing projects around whose future this is (Robertson, 2017, p.24-33).

Rieckmann establishes that universities play an important role in shaping the future of the world society in terms of sustainable development by generating new knowledge as well as contributing to the development of appropriate competencies and raising sustainability awareness (Rieckmann, 2012, p. 127-135).

Márquez-Ramos and Mourelle argue that a quantum approach to time and change (QATC) helps to set out the future scenario where the current educational model will be called into question; it is also a key tool for studying the relationship between higher education and society. One of the advantages of the QATC for studying the future of higher education institutions is that it does not start with the assumption that organizational processes are predictable or consistent. By taking a QATC perspective, we see that there are always multiple paths to the future, and some are associated with pasts that did not occur but may characterize future situations better than the actual past. In this context, it not occurred in the 1980s that the future generations of students were born with continuous access to digital information. Thus, in the 80s and 90s, parents tended to worry about face-to-face dangers to their children, present mainly during the school day and with a small audience (for example, bullying). For children born in the 2000s, cyberbullying coexists with traditional bullying; children face an anonymous enemy and can be bullied not only at school, but also at home, all day and with a wider audience. This example illustrates how the environment of future generations of students has changed in relation to the previous ones (Márquez-Ramos, et.al., 2016, p.86-91).

In his research on the processes of internationalization of higher education in Uzbekistan, Uralov underlines that globalization and internationalization have entered history as critical influential processes of the century. Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization. Uralov establishes that for Uzbekistan internationalization has become the main strategy and dominant trend in the development of higher education, it is an important component for the development of the national economy as well as a mechanism for promoting cultural diversity and national identity (Uralov, 2020).

In order to become and remain part of the world's academic elite, institutions have to come up with a well thought out model, and count on visionary management and dedicated staff for flawless execution.

In this respect, Noulakis, Ricci and Deterli establish that the academic world is more than ever a global war for talent, international mobility of students and faculty, diversification of funding, are a few of the main features of this changing environment faced by universities. International rankings are blooming and contribute - despite their obvious limitations - to globalization as well as competition.

The aforementioned authors argue that innovation is a key driver for the economy and society, and universities play a crucial role at the very origin of the economic and industrial pipeline. Many institutions have therefore developed specific initiatives to support knowledge and technology transfer projects in their very early stages. Interdisciplinarity is a buzzword in all institutional visions and strategies, for beyond cutting-edge research within scientific domains, more and more discoveries occur at the interface between disciplines. Many institutions, including Imperial College, Yale University, KTH Stockholm, Duke University and MIT promote such interdisciplinarity beyond structural organizations, through dedicated centres and programmes (Noulakis, et.al., 2011, p.177-193).

Craciun underlines that higher education has always been international in scope. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of globalization and neoliberalism, nation-states—and, by extension, universities—have faced pressure to internationalize their practices at an increasing pace. As such, higher education internationalization is talked about as a strategic priority for governments and is considered to be at the forefront of policy agendas around the world. Since the beginning, the main goals of the Bologna Process—specifically the harmonization and mobility aspects—have underscored an interest in internationalizing national higher education systems in Europe.

Despite this, there is little large-scale comparative research on the actual policies deployed by nation-states to internationalize their higher education systems. With some notable exceptions, country level

studies on internationalization policy typically focus on in-depth case studies or small-n comparative research. Nevertheless, internationalization does not occur in a vacuum. It only occurs at the intersection of cooperation and competition between nation-states, institutions, and individuals.

The author also highlights that large-scale comparative research of national higher education internationalization strategies can bring to light new aspects of the process that would otherwise be obscured in small-n in-depth case studies (Craciun, 2018, p. 95-106).

De Wit and others sustain that the global higher education landscape and its international dimensions are constantly changing. The global competition for talent, the emergence of international branch campuses, growing complexity in cross-border activity and questions raised in the United States on the payment of agents to recruit students are just some of the issues that until recently were not at the forefront of higher education debates. However, these are now high priorities, not only for international educators, but also for university presidents, associations of universities, politicians and other key higher education players around the world.

The emergence of a global higher education space has implications for our way of looking at internationalization. As the international dimensions of higher education have developed their own momentum and become a global topic of interest, the growing *globalization of internationalization* requires a more nuanced approach to its interpretation and delivery than has hitherto been the case. Western countries have tended to dominate research and discussions on internationalization, and the flow of students has been largely in their direction. However, as more countries attract inbound students and open up to internationalization, their experiences offer new perspectives and issues for consideration (De Wit, et.al., 2015).

## ANALYSIS

The first European university was established in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. As a whole, *medieval universities* initially encompassed theology, medicine and law faculties and later added the arts. Their graduates represented scholars with a specific vision on their society and culture, rather than professionals.

The idea of a *classical university* came into fruition in the 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the form of several higher learning schools. These schools are known today as part of the liberal model of education (the British model or the *Oxbridge* model), based on close communication between students and teachers. Later, they were called the *Chicago* model, having as a core general knowledge university courses with a strong humanitarian content. Similar to the British model, the French model of *grande écoles* represented caste universities with a special atmosphere focused on training the cultural and intellectual elite. The mission of the aforementioned models aimed, first and foremost, at the acquisition of cultural values, intellectual and spiritual development.

The *neoclassical* or *reformatory university* model is linked to the Humboldt name. The later founded the Berlin University in 1810 (hence called *Humboldtian Universities*). The Humboldtian model of higher education contributed to the advancement of German science in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the extent that research and study activities constituted inseparable components of university life and students had to get their scientific research skills through active involvement in the search for knowledge.

The Humboldtian research-based university model spread throughout Europe, gaining significant popularity over the conservative French *grand écoles*. Countries used this model in order to develop their own higher education systems. The neoclassical and classical university models imply the detachment from utilitarianism, based on the concept of institutionalization of research and separation from church, state and other interests (Zakharov, et.al., 1994).

The neoclassical university is the current most widespread model in the world, where science is the core content of the university, the main source of reputation and well-being, followed by teaching, learning, and education. Furthermore, the model of pragmatic, corporate, innovative, religious, and even political universities can be considered among the new emerging university models (Carrie, 1996) (Strogetskaya, 2009, p. 15-17).

As the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of the neoclassical university, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is marked by the apparition of *modern universities* as complex institutions of higher education, which strive to become *educational ecosystems*.

The universities of today are much more complex in construction, being also ubiquitous in the online environment. Basic human resources are supplemented with highly qualified specialists from various fields, who develop technological, linguistic, project writing skills as well as offer career counseling. Academic activity (teaching) is no longer the central objective, but one of the multiple objectives of the university.

Many universities of this type are the equivalent of small or medium-sized cities, each with its own services, housing programs, food and health system, transport infrastructure and entertainment providers. Most own research institutes, technological incubators and related services.

It is worthwhile to mention that the *modern university* inherited characteristic features pertaining to different models, each of them providing certain competences to the institution: The Humboldtian model – scientific research skills, the Oxbridge model – communication skills, as well as a new broad spectrum of socio-economic skills, etc.

## DISCUSSION

Taking into account the considerable increase of the amount of information, methods of obtaining, storing and transmission of data, change in the way of socializing, as well as the increasing role of the social networks, modern universities have found themselves unsynchronized with current cultural realities. Information with an applicative added value is more demanded and appreciated.

Although, states continue to govern the development and functioning of universities, the industry and business, through its support and linkage, including the financial one, is conditioning and shaping the activity of universities. While the paradigm of universities shifts as resources, including those obtained from non-public sources start to flow in, the need to rethink and resize the ideological foundations of the modern higher education begins to ascend.

In order to synchronize, universities are increasingly shifting to a post-modernist organizational-structural and functional form. Globalization represents a determining factor in the decline of the traditional research-based university model, in which the university was perceived as a protector of national culture and claimed to create the values necessary for social integration of a nation as a state. For this very reason, education is perceived as a well-structured system, and those responsible for education hold well-defined positions as well as the right to decide what and how to learn. Given the role of globalization, the value of the nation-state is considerably reduced, and the university ceases to be means of national-cultural identification.

The university can no longer be perceived solely from a utilitarian perspective, as a place where students acquire a profession under the guidance of teachers. The strictly professional training is devoid of perspective, considering the speed that the world changes, when the forecast of the labor market is obscured, at least within a generation. If universities want to be actively involved in the process of modernizing the society, as well as be an essential and successful component in this process, then they must exceed the role of educational services providers. They must evolve from a place of communication and learning, of transmission of traditions and knowledge and become a platform for new knowledge, which ultimately forms the chain of innovative processes. Universities must become the place where new social practices are formed and disseminated, such as the production of new philosophies, creation of new political and economic discourses to persuade the diverse social spectrum, conception of new directions of human action, which, aligned with the effort of graduates are transformed into new activities (market, financial, political, etc.).

The university is increasingly seen as a social institution, which by launching new generations into the global and multicultural world creates and shapes this world. Thereto, while touching upon the social role of the university it is indispensable to prepare students that are citizens of an increasingly pluralistic and diverse world, where uncertainty and ambiguity dominate, where everybody is capable of making mistakes or worthy of the absolute trust of authorities. Universities as modern society *knowledge centers* must anchor

their activity on fundamental and inalienable ideas and values, such as: freedom, honesty, truth, tolerance, cultural diversity, loyalty, democratic norms, etc.

The direction towards postmodernism reinforces the importance of interpretative strategies, challenging modern university with special tasks, such as: training individuals capable of constantly interpreting changing realities, as well as acting accordingly and adjusting their own interpretations to the interpretations of those around.

Furthermore, universities must contribute to the expansion of social horizons as well as changing practices, while creating the opportunity to connect their local, national interests to global issues.

The idea of education needs an update. It is necessary to go beyond the limits of education as means of disseminating research results and interpretations. Moreover, it is necessary to develop new methods and models of teaching-learning, which will encourage students to formulate problems, face and argue situations, hold debates and deal with controversies. Thus, education has to cause *fermentation* in the students' minds (Jarvis, 2014). Such an education process requires constant communication with students, encouraging and strengthening self-confidence, analyzing and raising awareness of their own achievements and successes. It is constructive to mention that in such circumstances, teaching activity could become overly laborious and some scholars would prefer to focus on research activities.

Internationalization of universities arises in response to globalization. Under the later, internationalization takes on new shapes which open many promising opportunities for higher education institutions and systems. At the same time, the real risks and challenges are inherent in such a complex environment, so that aspects of competitiveness and relevance regarding the international dimension require new actions and types of strategic thinking for all forms of higher education.

Guri-Rosenblit argues that internationalization of higher education requires a significant shift in the operation of higher education systems, as well as of individual higher education institutions. Operating in a most complex world, policy makers at the national level of higher education, as well as leaders of universities and other higher education institutions have to handle concurrently contrasting trends, and define their missions and operational strategies accordingly. The increased focus on international collaborative ventures, the growing link between internationalization, research and employability require the rethinking of the roles and responsibilities of higher education institutions within national borders and beyond (Guri-Rosenblit, 2015).

Another important source of transformation in higher education systems is the development of technology. On one hand, the digital revolution has fundamentally changed and is still changing every aspect of human activity, such as economy, innovation, education, health, etc. While forecasted to end Moore's law by 2025, the pace of this digital revolution is constantly increasing. Digital technologies such as the internet, mobile phones as well as any other tools that collect, store and distribute information are spreading rapidly throughout the world, both in economically developed and developing countries. Furthermore, the online environment has become a key platform for new resources.

On the other hand, books, articles and other types of knowledge products are published and spread at a much greater speed than our ability to understand and assimilate them. With the increasing access to information, the academic society is deprived of its previously held right to have exclusive control and access over sources of knowledge. These are the very reasons behind the fact that technology transforms the nature of university activities: creation, maintenance, integration and knowledge transfer. From a historic perspective, university education was focused on the teaching process (i.e. the transfer of knowledge) and not that of learning. Hence, the task of the modern university lies in teaching its students how to operate with new information flows, not trying to replace them in the spirit of the previous models. In this regard, the need for new teacher qualities arises. The modern university teacher should be a designer of the teaching process and its environment.

On the backdrop of lucriveness discussions, the omnipresent task to amass resources for activities is also shaping the future of higher education. Thus, the *entrepreneurial university* is shifting from traditional objectives of education, research and service to society to the focus on what is economically profitable (i.e. short-term professional training, which does not necessarily have to take place on university premises). Meanwhile, the increasing number of clients and beneficiaries of the provided services, as well as its

expanding offer, could lead to the circumstances where professional training of students becomes economically less attractive for some universities. An outcome of this experience would materialize in a university with no students.

Reddy argues that with the emergence of new science-based technologies such as electronics, bio-, and nanotechnologies, university research has come to play a greater role in industrial innovation. Added to it, the perceived notion of *knowledge economy* made the policymakers to think that university research and innovation are indispensable for industrialization and economic development. Consequently, governments have started fine-tuning their policies to promote university–industry interaction. Stemming from the industrialized world, particularly Europe, this idea is fast spreading to developing countries.

Universities, today, are not only collaborating with the industry through technology transfer, but are also undertaking entrepreneurial activities themselves. This has generated a heated debate on the *pros and cons* of university's direct participation in industrial innovation and its potential impact on knowledge generation and welfare. Some critics suggest that financial rewards that accrue from research results may bias and distort the judgments and actions of academicians with respect to problem choice and research direction and in the long run may draw scientists away from basic research (Reddy, 2011).

It is important to underline that universities should obtain a broader autonomy, as well as independence from social and political actors, in order to become platforms for new forms of views. However, in light of the aforementioned, higher education autonomy must be put in accord with institutional mechanisms of university accountability to society.

In conditions of globalization, an important tool for sustainable development and competitiveness of countries as well as for the development of a knowledge-based economy is the efficient integration of science, education and business. This integration can be achieved by creating associations with representatives of professional and business environments. Research geared towards solving specific challenges faced by the real sector of an economy and involvement of business in the research process will inevitably lead to **the strengthening of the knowledge triangle - education, research, innovation, represented by universities, research institutes and companies**, and, it will boost economic growth. In this regard, research results have to also be analyzed in terms of their impact on society.

Business opts to be actively involved in adjusting the fields of study, give recommendations regarding students' knowledge and skills necessary to increase the chances of further employment, design teaching materials, adjust university curricula, assign university professors to activities and offer internships for students. The partnership and cooperation among universities and businesses should be used to assess the level of acquired knowledge, skills and capabilities that are sufficient to allow graduates to be hired or to set up their own businesses, thus facilitating the process of correlating the educational offer with the labor market requirements.

While the university variety is high, we can identify certain basic characteristics that position them as a core element in a society geared towards lifelong learning: the transition from teacher-oriented to student-oriented educational institutions; accessibility for all, regardless of financial resources; tendency towards lifelong learning; lack of space and time restrictions in the learning process; interactive learning; democratization of higher education; accessibility, including disadvantaged/vulnerable people; transition from knowledge teaching-learning to training students' ability to independently perceive new knowledge and to successfully adapt to the new demands of society; transition from formal education (a certain period / number of years) to the idea of lifelong learning, etc.

Universities need to be aware that the 21st century student is different from previous generations. The student requires partnerships with teachers, interactive training methods and online student-teacher communication systems. They must train the ability to understand and accept cultural differences, think critically, tackle problems from a global perspective, work in cooperation, be able to change their lifestyle and consumption habits so as to ensure the protection of the environment, etc.

Universities must also be aware of the fact that education has lost the limitation of borders. This has enabled a very competitive environment. In Europe, it is referred to as the European Higher Education Area, with a considerable increase in academic mobility and greater opportunities for those young people who opt for a European university. The aforementioned challenges require radical changes and refinements

in higher education systems, as well as economic systems. The drafting of the strategies geared towards training abilities and capacities of being competitive under new requirements of the educational environment is required. In line with these strategy, each university must aim to achieve performance in accordance with its goals and strategic priorities.

Considering the plenitude of challenges that higher education is facing it is intricate to estimate whether universities will become mainstream or will dwindle and focus on the intellectual elite. It is very likely that there will be both elite and mass universities, where select applicants or everyone will be entitled to get a degree. At the same time, their differentiation becomes more evident. Since education is essential, universities will have to maintain a duality of providing access to all those who have the necessary knowledge and desire to learn and put in effort to discover young talents across all social backgrounds.

The world we live in has become extremely complicated and complex, furthermore, the terms that best characterize it are: uncertainty, instability, unpredictability, hesitation, fragility, and insecurity (Barnett, 1999). This is a state of the modern world, where life training is part of the challenges which university has to face, thus, education has to be geared towards training students a comfortable life under these circumstances.

Furthermore, as a result of globalization, one of the key challenges of higher education has been defined as brain drain. The emigration of highly trained or qualified people from East to West has had an overwhelming impact on higher education. This is particularly valid for Moldova. In the last 10 years the number of students has decreased by approx. 50%. If in 2008 in higher education institutions there were 115 000 young people, in 2018 this number has diminished to 60 000 (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, 2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

Globalization, alongside many other challenges have a significant transformative impact on higher education, requiring a greater role and implication of universities within society. Universities are called to radical internal changes and refinements, including drafting of strategies oriented towards ensuring the necessary capacities to be competitive under new circumstances and conditions of the educational environment. With certainty we can state that there are no universal recipes to boost competitiveness of universities. Each university must work at achieving performance in accordance with its mission and strategic priorities.

While the political and economic centrality of universities has increased dramatically and has fostered more autonomy for universities in stark contrast with a tradition of often coercive state steering, it has also created overly optimistic expectations on the university system, and a search for *quick fixes* in the form of a simplified emulation of a US-styled governance model. This does not necessarily fit very well with existing institutional structures or with the socioeconomic conditions surrounding universities; it might instead create *islands of excellence* with global connections but limited interaction with broader social and economic interests (Benner, 2011).

Furthermore, it is natural that, only in the case of a true university autonomy, supplemented by sufficient funding, an increase of reciprocal responsibility of both universities and public authorities, complemented by a more active involvement of scholars in the research process, international staff and researcher mobility, along with the internationalization of higher education institutions will contribute to the increase in the capacity to train highly qualified and competitive labor market personnel, as well as to develop knowledge-based economies, where the collaborations among universities, research institutions and business will make headway and provide added value. Higher education is crucial in development, stimulation and maintenance of economic growth in the ever-changing landscape of the world.



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