

### THREE QUICK GLANCES INTO THE CRYSTAL BALL

1.

I would find it plausible if the next 10 years would be a period of REFORM CONSOLIDATION. It is a fairly common perception that Bologna implied a major effort and leap in terms of structural adaptation which has worn out the troops of both camps, those who were pushing forward with the B.P. as well as those who were conscripted to follow it. As a consequence, it would be only natural if we experienced a time of REFORM FATIGUE AND CONSTIPATION, or, if you want to give it a positive spin, a time to digest and assimilate.

There's nothing wrong with this and it is probably even a healthy reaction: Many of the critical stakeholders, faculty and students in particular, are seeing the B.P. as a largely externally-driven agenda, a top-down-big-policy-senior-management-technocratic type of campaign (or, to stick for a moment with the gastronomical metaphors: as a kind of forced feeding). Hence, the need for internalization, digestion, assimilation, for 'letting it sink in'.

So what I am suggesting we will experience during the next 10 years is a REFORM SIESTA – not at all an act of resistance to, or rejection of the B.P., but instead a way of appropriating it by integrating the nourishing elements and getting rid of what seems indigestible. And let me remind you that those countries which adhere to the time-honored tradition of the siesta, have a rather impressive public health record.

2.

As a result of the tiresome, but apparently inescapable surge of accountability measures, performance indicators, evaluation regimes, etc. in HE we are likely to see a lot more STRATIFICATION across the sector, an end of the egalitarian myth that essentially universities are all the same and that they just vary in terms of accidental criteria like size (bigger/smaller), age (older/younger), location (peripheral/central) or access to resources (richer/poorer).

Currently, we have a very one-dimensional criterion for stratification: EXCELLENCE. But as every linguist, social scientist, wine taster and kindergarten teacher can tell you: Excellence is a relational term – there is no such thing as ‘excellence per se’. By and in itself it is an empty and hollow word because you can only be excellent in relation to something. What this something is, is a matter of definition, and by defining the realm of excellence we are creating our own social reality.

I have to cut this short or else you get me started on the value, or lack thereof, of the existing university rankings, national and international. The topic I want to address is stratification: It is my honest hope and expectation that in the course of the next 10 years the present mono-linear stratification along the axis of the assumed excellence of universities will be supplemented by a complementary stratification along a second axis which indicates the RELEVANCE of the learning and research that universities are advancing.

Excellence and relevance are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary: The scope for excellence gets broader when you shift the emphasis and add relevance as a measure and matrix of success. This is perhaps not immediately obvious because the notion of excellence as a universal value is so undisputed within academia. Relevance, on the other hand seems to have a distinct flavor, evoking something more narrow, parochial, instrumental, applied – a world of utilitarian values which still for many within universities is quite incompatible with what they regard as the nobler aspirations of the academic pursuit.

Yet for the vast majority of universities, relevance is in fact all that counts. Traditionally universities are presenting themselves as powerhouses for the production of intellectual capital. When they want to press their case a bit stronger, they also refer to their indispensable role as producers of human resource capital for the knowledge economy, which is the fancy and fashionable, though no less dubious term for what universities have been doing since Aristotle: teaching (it makes you wonder, though, about the time we are living in where students are referred to as capital assets).

But in order to truly capture and benefit from unfolding and communicating what it is that makes HEIs relevant for society, we will have to venture into different territories and not get bogged down in the fierce and often humbling competition for excellence measured against numbers of Noble Prize winners, *Nature* articles, the ISI Citation Index, patent statistics or other internationally recognized indicators. Relevance, in the way I'm suggesting it as a second dimension for the stratification of HEIs, will

operate with a different set of value propositions. It will add value to society by

- increasing its social and cultural capital,
- provide opportunities for social mobility and thus
- strengthen social cohesion,
- contribute to creating healthy communities, both literally and figuratively, and
- generally foster the capacity and the spirit among students and the communities that universities are serving to be adaptable to change

which according not only to Darwin is the most vital precondition for keeping us in the game in the turmoil of evolutionary progress.

I leave it here (and to discussions later) what a stratification of HEIs could look like using a matrix which includes both excellence and relevance as its defining criteria. I'm sure there is a healthy dose of skepticism in the room that such fussy things like social capital or healthy communities could indeed be transferred into measurable data, let alone how universities uniquely contribute to the development and growth of these factors. But the point I wanted to make by highlighting the topic of stratification as a major theme for the next 10 years is, I hope, pretty simple and straightforward: One size doesn't fit all, and the exclusive focus on 'excellence' as a measure of success is not doing justice to the multiple purposes of HE.

3.

The notion of relevance also has some important bearings on the third and final point I want to raise: Having been told again and again that we are living in a post-industrial KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY AND ECONOMY, we know that knowledge is the answer. However, do we really know what the question is?

Surely, it would not be good enough for the premier knowledge institutions in our countries to respond by simply saying: more of the same. Because what we do know is that the same is not sustainable. By and large, for the entire world population to enjoy the same living standard and life style as the average North American, it would require the resources of about 4-5 planets; European life style comes a bit cheaper but we'd still need to discover about 2 more planets to allow the rest of the world to live like us.

In the absence of any astronomical evidence that we'll come up with these additional planets anytime soon, a whole host of pretty nasty and challenging questions is emerging. I won't bore you with the details – I'm sure there are others in the room who are much more competent than I to address these questions. But this is exactly the concern I have: In this knowledge society that we are proclaiming (not least of all at universities because it seems to play into our hands), how much ignorance can we afford to cultivate among those for whom the sand seems to run a bit faster through the hour glass, i.e., for the next generations of our graduates?

In the interest of time I will shorten my argument and directly jump to the conclusion which in this case, I'm afraid, is more of an urgent proposition and not necessarily something that I see on the horizon as a

realistic trend for the next 10 years: For a knowledge society to not be ignorant about its own direction, we will have to make sure that no student graduates from our universities without a good basis of general knowledge about the state of the planet. Those who think that making this kind of proposition is scientific nonsense or apocalyptic fear-mongering I would invite to familiarize themselves with the relevant literature on climate change, scarcity of drinkable water, causes of poverty, the fast decline of fossil fuels (and the slow progress in replacing them with renewable energy sources), and the implications that all of this has for the stability of the political, social, economic and military/strategic order as we know it, locally and globally.

Honestly, I do not think we will have done a sufficient job in educating our students unless they have been introduced to these questions and have acquired what one might call a GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY LITERACY which will enable them to make the choices in their lives based on an awareness of what is at stake instead of a blind trust in business as usual.

I don't think that it would be an adequate response for universities to open up a new degree program or specializations in 'sustainability studies'. No doubt we do need experts in this field, but experts alone won't do. The questions that the knowledge society has to deal with are clearly transgressing the familiar disciplinary boundaries. One way or the other, these questions are affecting all disciplines, from archaeology to zoology and including business studies, law, medicine, you name it. Hence the need for a

new general education, a different type of humanism, which I would like to put on the wish list for HE in the EU and beyond over the next 10 years.