

Petr Matějů



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Petr Matějů is director and chaired Professor of Sociology of Education and Stratification at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. At the same time he serves as a director of the Department for Analysis and Strategy at the Ministry of Education, Youths and Sports. Between 2006 and 2007 he served as a Deputy Minister for Higher Education and Research. Between 1998 and 2002 he was a member of the Czech Parliament, where he chaired the Committee for Science and Higher Education. In July 2002 he established (and until September 2006 also chaired) the Institute for Economic and Social Analysis, an independent think-tank addressing and promoting reform processes and policies in the Czech Republic and other Eastern and Central European countries. Currently he is a Fulbright *New Century Scholar* participating at the program Higher Education in the 21st Century: Access and Equity.

In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario with regard to social equity and higher education?

Given the historical and social circumstances of East Central Europe, particularly the Czech Republic, the most desirable scenario with regard to social equity in higher education would consist in successfully implementing tightly linked and well coordinated reforms of secondary and tertiary education. The former should aim at reducing differentiation between types of secondary schools, eliminating early tracking into different types of schools, and - consequently - diminishing the currently very strong relationship between social background and the type of attended secondary school. Reform of tertiary education will increase accessibility and participation by means of further diversifying the system, and would require the introduction of an efficient system of student financial aid and deferred tuition fees.

In your opinion, what is or should be the most important objective for higher education in the future? Why?

Make the most of the available human capital of the country. Other objectives (equity, economic competitiveness, social and cultural development) will be achieved more easily if human potential is unfolded and developed by achieving the highest possible education.

What do you consider to be the main future challenge(s) for higher education systems? Why?

1. Fiscal constraints for investing in higher education from public resources; this is due to demographic developments and changing political priorities for public spending;
2. The continued resistance of politicians to allow the introduction of tuition fees that would compensate for inadequate public funding and would increase the efficiency of the entire system of tertiary education; unfortunately, the majority of voters, particularly older ones, are more interested in other issues than higher education.

3. To make higher education one of the most important instruments of upward social mobility; there is a lack of funding needed to increase participation from lower social strata.

In your opinion, what would be the worst, but possible, way to tackle these future challenges? Why?

Blaming others and doing nothing because of the lack of political will and courage to implement reform scenarios proposed by experts.

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What do you consider to be the best possible way to tackle the above mentioned future challenges? Why?

Using the existing evidence to open a professionally moderated public debate on the necessity of reforming both secondary and tertiary education. That will in turn create a more supportive climate for politicians and policy makers to launch reform processes.