

**Response to David Ward's presentation:
How does the European viewpoint differ?**

by

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First of all, it must be said that many of David Ward's views can be shared by Europeans; confronted by similar problems, universities on both sides of the Atlantic react in a nearly identical way. This is hardly surprising.

There are differences, of course, which reflect the respective systems and history of these two vast areas and which mainly concern the ways that the debate on the changing university system and the issue of university governance is approached in Europe.

I - A global environment and worldwide challenges

1. Firstly, the changes and trends affecting universities are of a global nature and are similar to those faced by other players:
 - the importance of international outreach; the emphasis placed on international mobility and attractiveness,
 - growing competition due to the ranking of universities at continent-wide and worldwide level,
 - the impact of economic considerations on the way that society's problems are approached and its challenges identified, which to some extent shapes the environment to which universities must adapt, while pushing into the background other adjustment problems linked more closely to other cultural and/or social factors.
2. Universities everywhere must meet the challenges deriving from two developments that were highlighted by David Ward: massification and the rising overall cost of their activity, partly because of the development of research activities. The rising cost of higher education activities is a subject of serious concern on both sides of the Atlantic, one which has focused attention on the issue of how higher education institutions are managed and administered.
3. Confronted by these broad trends, universities are reacting in similar ways: they are aware of the changes that need to be made, but also of the academic values that must be preserved. The universal characteristics common to universities are coming to the fore and prompting identical reactions on both sides of the Atlantic, the priority being to protect the values

described by David Ward. Already in 2001, in response to the GATS talks, the organisations representing North American and European universities had readily agreed to sign a joint declaration outlining the changes that were needed and the limits that had to be respected as regards international trade in “higher education services”.

II - The current European outlook on the changing university

Both within the 25-member European Union and the group of 45 countries participating in the Bologna Process, there is, despite national differences, a generally predominant analysis of the changes that need to be made in Europe, which differs from David Ward’s though it does on occasion address the same problems. This analysis is more often than not based on the ‘idealised model’ constituted by the US higher education system and seeks to reproduce the characteristics of this model, and especially its statistical results. As seen from Europe, this model is considered to perform more effectively because it is more attractive.

Consequently, with regard to the first three headings of David Ward’s paper, the European viewpoint may be described and compared as follows:

- The debate about excellence and employability predominates over that on tuition, together with a focus in Europe which is more on competitiveness than on social cohesion.
 - Europe has a contrasting view on the second point: higher education should be a public responsibility.
 - Lastly, the acknowledged underfunding of higher education and research activities in Europe is resulting in an attempt to raise private funding, although in comparison with the United States this trend is only just beginning.
1. With the Lisbon Strategy, aimed at making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, the European higher education system, which is supposed to drive this strategy, is being scrutinised much more carefully and ambitiously. Instead of a relatively undifferentiated European university system, the authorities would like to develop highly differentiated universities – as in the United States – with champions of excellence emerging to support the European economy and promote its competitiveness. Similarly, in an economic system suffering from unemployment, the employability of graduates is of prime concern. In this regard, the focus is proportionally more on the job opportunities to which university programmes lead than on broad-based access to education. Thus, the vision that people have of the changes to be made in universities is largely shaped by the specific characteristics of the current performance of the European economy.
 2. As part of the Bologna Process – both in Berlin in 2003 and in Bergen in 2005 – Education ministers stated their attachment to the principle of public responsibility for higher education and in a sense settled this debate. However, their stance in favour of public responsibility is no doubt also explained by the fact that ministers in Europe want to preserve their national prerogatives in the supranational area taking shape, for they are also defending the principle of subsidiarity and the apportionment of responsibilities as enshrined in EU texts.
 3. International comparisons show that universities are underfunded in Europe. It was for this reason that, in conjunction with the Lisbon Strategy, the European Council of March 2006 called “on the Member States to facilitate, in line with national practices, universities' access

to complementary sources of funding, including private ones”. However, as Europe does not have the same philanthropic tradition as the United States, Europeans are left with two alternatives, both of which are new to them: requiring users to pay fees and signing research and training contracts with private and public partners. In both cases, the experience of our colleagues, as described by David Ward, can be useful as a way of indicating the balance that must be struck if we are to preserve academic values, whether this means avoiding the risk of moving too far in the direction of users expecting their money’s worth, or economic partners applying pressure in order to obtain the answer that they want. To this must be added the fact that, in their relations with economic partners, universities in Europe must also become more accustomed to determining the real cost of their services and insisting that they be paid a fair price.

III – The desirable changes in governance in Europe

This is an issue that is of greater concern in Europe than in the United States.

If universities are to meet the challenges of the European Bologna process (harmonisation and in-depth restructuring of diplomas) and the Lisbon process (contribution to the competitiveness of Europe), if they are to strike a balance so as not to distort the specific characteristics of academic activity, and, lastly, if they are to position themselves in an international environment, they must have strong and modern governance. However, this is most often not the case, for the form of governance exercised by academics alone is no longer adequate. Diagnosis is not the problem – the question is how to design the new forms of governance that are needed. What role should non-academics play in governance?

1. For those who want to make analogies with other economic activities in search of examples, at least two characteristics of university activities that affect governance must be pointed out:
 - The production process is a lengthy one (it takes roughly 3 to 5 years before a decision regarding a specific curriculum produces a result). Consequently, it is essential to have a long-term vision of the changes to be made, and time enough to implement them, let alone for them to become visible on the outside.
 - the “abnormally” high proportion of senior managers, who by nature enjoy a degree of statutory independence and who have often set up SMEs within the university (research teams – teams providing apprenticeship training or continuing education - international networks, etc..) – SMEs that are a source of innovation and change for the university. Tact is therefore required to guide managers in a new direction without dampening their enthusiasm.
2. Unquestionably, the increasing impact of economic factors on activities requires in-depth changes in management and consequently better statistical knowledge of the operational data of universities. Many European universities do not have these basic data or qualified staff to gather and manage them. Outside perspectives and skills can only play a positive role and should have a real influence on the evolution of universities.
3. Outside influences cannot be limited to the field of management. They must also make themselves felt on the strategic guidance of institutions. Universities are not independent entities, for they must take into account the needs of society and its changing priorities. Governance must be organised so that these needs and priorities, both national and local, are

brought home to academics and are taken into account in the strategy of universities through a significant presence of representatives of civil society on governing boards.

The public responsibility affirmed by the European ministers requires monitoring this aspect of governance. This might be done through a procedure analogous to the French practice of having universities sign a four-year contract with the national ministry (or the regional authorities, depending on the country and the system of responsibilities).

4. But academic power must not disappear. It is a necessary condition for the autonomy of universities, and it is essential for society itself for it acts as a counterweight to the all too rapidly changing fashions and trends of our modern societies. In addition, there can be no accountability for academics without autonomy, and financial autonomy in particular; and, as the European Commission has often pointed out, European universities are not, on the whole, sufficiently autonomous.

The governance of higher education by government must also change and confine itself only to setting broad priorities. It must be left up to institutions to formulate specific choices in terms of strategy (how should they differentiate themselves from one another? which public should they admit or try to attract?) and in terms of academic fields (what should their scientific priority be? what importance should they give to a multidisciplinary approach and how should they rethink the internal organisation of the university?). For academics can only continue to play a substantial role in governance if they are capable of ensuring that their institution is able to adapt and change in a more rapid and more relevant manner.

The issue of the governance of universities is being addressed in most European countries. There is a great diversity of situations and traditions in this regard. In-depth changes affecting the power of academics have already been made over the past few years, for example in the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark and Norway. We must not forget that it will take time to measure the results of these changes and assess their effectiveness, and determine whether they should be introduced elsewhere.