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► **To cite this version:**

Nicolas Gachon. Convergencia de modelos y el mercado mundial de la educación superior: El reto para la excepción estadounidense. *Revista Dimensión Empresarial*, 2013, 11 (1), pp.11-22. 10.15665/rde.v11i1.157 . hal-02817794

HAL Id: hal-02817794

<https://hal.science/hal-02817794>

Submitted on 7 Apr 2021

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MODEL CONVERGENCE AND THE GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION MARKET: THE CHALLENGE TO U.S. EXCEPTIONALISM

CONVERGENCIA DE MODELOS
Y EL MERCADO MUNDIAL DE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR:
EL RETO PARA LA EXCEPCIÓN ESTADOUNIDENSE

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the U.S. higher education system from an organizational, political and economic angle. The analysis falls into the policy studies category and uses the framework of model convergence as well as a number of prisms (historical, ideological, and geopolitical) to assess the long-term implications of U.S. higher education's early adherence to market norms. The argument is that the historical construction of a distinctively U.S. higher education model, one that became the global source of policy transfer after the 1980s, and precisely for that same reason, ultimately led to a relative erosion of U.S. higher education's competitive edge at the turn of the twenty-first century. For the United States, one-way external policy transfer conveyed an implicit geostrategic challenge from the outset: in higher education as in other fields, exporting requires sustained renewal capacity to secure the model status of the export source.

Keywords: U.S. higher education, higher education systems, higher education market, model convergence, policy transfer, Bologna Process, international students, globalization.

RESUMEN¹

Este artículo trata acerca del sistema de educación superior en Estados Unidos desde un ángulo organizacional, político y económico. El análisis está enmarcado en la categoría de estudios de política y utiliza la convergencia de modelos así como también una serie de prismas (histórico, ideológico, y geopolítico) para evaluar a largo plazo las consecuencias de la educación superior en Estados Unidos y su temprana adhesión a las normas del mercado. El argumento es que la construcción histórica de un modelo de educación distintiva en Estados Unidos, el cual llegó a convertirse en fuente global de la transferencia de política después del

¹ We are grateful to Lilia Mendosa Vega (Universidad Autónoma del Caribe) for kindly providing the Spanish translation of this article's title, abstract, and keywords.

decenio de 1980, y precisamente por esta misma razón, últimamente condujo a una relativa erosión competitiva de la educación superior de Estados Unidos del siglo XXI. En el caso de los Estados Unidos, la transferencia de política externa de sentido único transmitió un implícito desafío desde el principio: tanto en la educación superior, como en otros campos, exportar requiere capacidad de renovación para asegurar el estado de modelo del origen de la exportación.

Palabras Clave: *educación superior en Estados Unidos, sistemas de educación superior, mercado de educación superior, convergencia de modelos, transferencia de política, Proceso de Bolonia, estudiantes internacionales, globalización.*

To examine higher education in the post-1980 period from the perspective of models is inherently to raise two significant sets of issues. The first set is ideological and has to do with the neoliberal policies that have characterized globalization in recent decades; the second set is structural and has to do with the institutional v. systemic nature of higher education models. To point to the convergence of such models as the British and U.S. models is to address the arguable intrinsic specificity of individual models while uniformization and standardization seem to have become the norm of globalization. With the higher education market often regarded as a U.S.-inspired phenomenon and globalization itself as the avatar of U.S.-style Americanization, that very perspective raises a string of related ideological and cultural questions. The individualism inherent to Anglo-Saxon cultures has been reported to conceive of organizations as instruments “deliberately assembled and contrived in order to serve individual owners, employees and customers” while more communitarian cultures tend to view the organization as “a social context all members share and which gives them meaning and purpose” rather than as the creation or instrument of its owners (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, p.64). From that standpoint a convergence could certainly be pointed to between the British and U.S. higher education systems, with the caveat that the Anglo-Saxon prism could and as a matter of fact should indeed include other Anglo-Saxon models, such as the Australian higher education model. Another question posed by the possible convergence of the British and U.S. higher models is that the global, historical dominance of U.S. higher education, whether real or perceived, arguably exceeds the systemic influence of British higher education in spite of the existence of a number of British world-class institutions. Herein precisely lies a significant field for re- search: in the relations, interactions, convergences and divergences between institutional and systemic dynamics, a perspective that casts globalization and even neoliberal policies in a geo-political, geo-economic, geo-strategic light. In that sense, the theoretical or structural convergence of two cultural and linguistic neighbor-models should not obfuscate the competitive motives underlying systemic constructions, especially when one of the two models in question happens to be part of the European Higher Education Area and, as such, both a partner and a rival of the other. In a global academic context steeped in neoliberal policymaking, to posit the exceptionalism of U.S. higher education stills seems more likely than to posit the exceptionalism of British higher education, again without minimizing the excellence of a number of British world-class institutions. The proclamation and sometimes self-

proclamation of world- class universities in a number of countries in recent years certainly has to do with the desire of prominent institutions to emulate internationally prestigious institutional models. Those models have typically been U.S. institutions over the past century, with the Ivies high on the list. Is it still so in a globalized academic world? That question addresses the sustainability of the specificity, superiority and therefore competitiveness of U.S. higher education at both institutional and systemic level. The present study is interested in the impact of globalization on the exceptionalism of U.S. higher education from a systemic standpoint.

OF INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS : THE HIGHER EDUCATION MARKET

The adjustment of U.S. higher education to market norms can be traced back to different places and times in U.S. history. One such place was Cambridge, Massachusetts with the creation of the Harvard Corporation under the Charter of 1650 and the adoption of a system of electives in 1884 under Charles Eliot. The Harvard Corporation instituted what was to become the governing board model in U.S. higher education: an outside governing body that was primarily composed of representatives of the civil society rather than local scholars and people directly involved in the daily operations of the university. The electives system adopted under Harvard President Charles Eliot paved the way for specialized studies by offering undergraduate students more choice in choosing their courses of study at a time when liberal arts education was the dominant model. One such time was year 1862 which saw the ratification of the Morrill Act and the subsequent federal endowment of land-grant colleges across the states to offer curricula in agriculture, science and engineering to better meet the demands of the industrial revolution. The market orientation of U.S. higher education certainly did not come with the advent of globalization in the latter decades of the 20th century but it did evolve into new unprecedented dimensions at that very moment in time.

Globalization will be best understood as a process rather than as a definite market norm, a process enabling the knowledge-based economy much like economic concentration enabled the industrial society over a century ago. The current ideological debates on the societal impact of globalization, which include the role of modern universities as motors of economic growth, are themselves quite reminiscent of the polarized public response to the new industrial society at the turn of the twentieth century (Gachon, 2009, p.25). With limited variations due to divergences over what is exactly to be understood as globalization,² most specialists will now establish the 1980s as the beginning of globalization as know it. With the Thatcher and Reagan revolutions under way as of 1979 and 1981, the 1980s have proven to be a fitting time frame to close a number of ideological loopholes. However, arguing that conservatism and economic liberalism caused globalization and accordingly generated higher education models in the U.S. and in Britain would certainly be a rash statement. While the 1980s do provide the right time frame, the thesis here is that -sheer ideology put aside- one major impact of the globalization process lay in far-reaching systemic alterations to traditional (i.e. institutional) perceptions of higher education policy and higher education economics.

² Robert K. Schaeffer, for example, whose primary interest was in the devaluation of the dollar and in rising interest rates in the U.S. and Europe in the 1970s, established the early 1970s as the beginning of globalization (Schaeffer, 2003).

American sociologist Burton R. Clark published seminal work on higher education in the early 1980s by proposing a theoretical model to classify universities according to their modes of coordination represented by their greater or lesser proximity to the one of the three angles of the figure of a triangle: the state, the market, the academic oligarchy (Clark, 1983). Clark's triangle of coordination suddenly cast new light on higher education policy, notably on marked and increasing leanings towards the market in the case of U.S. universities, and pointed to the fact that the original structure (or mode of coordination) of higher education systems directly impacted their adaptive capacities and, to a large extent, might determine their future. Clark's model stands as an indication that the concept of a globalized market-controlled academic world certainly was not yet operational in 1983. And the same argument would go for the allegedly converging British and U.S. systems: Clark himself identified universities in Italy and in the U.K. as closer to the coordination by the academic oligarchy in 1983. The leaning towards the market, however, does raise a central ideological issue today: should the global higher education market as we know it be regarded as an inevitable evolution of higher education, which could reveal it as the consequence of capitalistic maturation simply accelerated by the globalization process?

Recent research indicates that such is most likely not the case, that "there is no such thing as systematic state-disengagement in the adjustment of higher education to market norms, no such thing either as a rupture in the political continuum between centralism at one end and privatization at the other end" (Gachon, 2009, p.32), whether it be only because nation-states do measure the geostrategic political, economic, scientific and cultural importance of higher education and research. What did occur was a significant modification in the balance and interactions between political and economic modes of coordination, to use Burton R. Clark's rhetoric, at the level of nations-states, a modification that was brought up by the unprecedented, almost instantaneous development of communications networks at global level. Beyond, the unprecedented development of communications and exchanges also caused a sort of global infatuation for the internationalization of higher education. Internationalization was not even mentioned in the mission statements of universities in the 1980s and 1990s but the internationalization business literally exploded at the turn of the twenty-first century. Although generally quite desirable, internationalization per se is not always a necessity and is not necessarily always in the best interest of all higher education institutions. It has however become a landmark of higher education, a matter of supply and demand, and definitely a driving force behind the current global higher education market.

The argument here is that the higher education market is an intrinsically systemic phenomenon, one that does simply operate as the sum of its institutional components but that primarily reacts to cross-systemic (i.e. transnational) logics, simply because nation-states have quickly integrated the strategic dimension of national higher education and research systems. Such a systemic approach may seem to be at odds with Burton R. Clark's apparently more institutional approach, but this is only a matter of perceptions at different stages of the globalization process. Clark's model dates back to the early 1980s, to the early stages of the globalization process, to a time when a number of subsequent evolutions could not yet be envisioned or even anticipated, such as the shift from government to governance for example (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, pp.116-139). Clark does perfectly identify the state and the market as agents exterior to the academic oligarchy but it can now be argued that the figure of the triangle

has been dismantled by the emergence of intergovernmental and supranational operators (among which the UNESCO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and, last but not least, the European Union) that now play intermediary roles in higher education policy-making. A transposition of Burton Clark's 1983 model has therefore become useful to look at higher education, one that focuses less on the sources of governance (i.e. on Clark's classifications: the state, the market, the academic oligarchy) and more on transactional governance to account for the new models that have emerged in recent decades and that have placed higher education institutions in intermediary positions between their economic imperatives, their public service missions, and their systemic value (Gachon, 2011, p.38).

Perceptions of the systemization of higher education at global level have proven increasingly polarized in recent years. Becker & Round (2009) have gone as far as denying the very existence of a higher education market in quite vivid terms, arguing that "an amorphously implied 'market for higher education' or 'the marketization of higher education' only exists in an untidy and poorly informed mind" (p.30) and that "the myriad policy and operational aspects of higher education must be treated in the framework of an economic 'market,' which in all likelihood means that many separate, and possibly quite diverse, markets need to be evaluated" (p.31). From a different angle, the existence of a higher education market has been widely regarded as the expression of the neoliberal attack on higher education, "a full-fledged attack by corporate and market-driven forces to destroy higher education as a democratic public sphere" (Giroux, 2011). Polarization has tended to equate the systemization of higher education with globalization itself and has therefore entailed a number of ambiguities pertaining to the adjustment of higher education to market norms in the context of globalization. Irwin Feller (2008), for example, has referred to "events internal to the workings of universities that have led them to adopt performance management and measurement approaches similar to those being required by governments or governmentally sanctioned audit agencies," to their participating "in the race to be the next Harvard, Berkeley, or Stanford" and to "to ascend the rungs of the Times Higher Education Supplement or Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking ladders" (p.3).

There are several facets to this issue. Globalization is characterized by economies that revolve around knowledge and innovation, with mechanisms specifically designed for the production, storage and transfer of knowledge. In this context, however, should it be from a more classical, communitarian, democratic standpoint or from a more instrumental, strategic, global standpoint, neoliberal policies are almost universally condemned for stepping back from providing appropriate funding for higher education. The adjustment of public regulation to market norms has been referred to as 'governance by instruments' (Feller, 2008, p.4) to describe the move away from centralized bureaucratic policies or, to use Burton R. Clark's 1983 model, from the coordination by the state. There are undeniable shortcomings to current higher education policies, foremost among which stand an unprecedented hike in tuition fees, i.e. an unprecedented hike in cost per user when the acknowledged goal in recent years has been global competitiveness. From a more structural angle, globalization has also entailed increasing differentiations between the missions of higher education institutions at global level, as well as increasing institutional autonomy in countries with typically centralized systems. There has certainly been a degree of standardization and arguably of alignment to U.S. norms: the 1960 California Master Plan for Higher Education relied on institutional differentiation decades

before the age of globalization (e.g. with the community colleges) while the famed Bologna Process took part of its inspiration from U.S. curricular norms (e.g. credit accumulation and transfer). In this sense, globalization may indeed be regarded as a vindication of the norms of the U.S. higher education market and accordingly denounced as such, or, as the present study will suggest, as a strategic challenge to U.S. exceptionalism.

A less ideological and arguably more pragmatic way of approaching the same issue is again to return to what made globalization possible in the first place. When ICT began to fuel exponential ramifications in communications and exchanges at the turn of the twenty-first century, higher education institutions around the world suddenly became infatuated with internationalization but did not always measure what internationalization per se could entail in the long run. While internationalization is assuredly a highly desirable goal, the assumption that internationalization systematically benefits institutions of all types and sizes, in all places and in all disciplines certainly carries a degree of naivety. What the internationalization craze most certainly produced at the turn of the twenty-first century was a network of transnational dynamics and exchanges that, way beyond the creation of international atmospheres on campuses or the running of simple study abroad programs, both of which already existed, actually placed what had been primarily local institutional characteristics and problematics in a global light that almost inevitably became a preoccupation for nation-states. With its increasingly major role in the economic, social, scientific and cultural influence and reputation of nation-states, higher education soon became a full-fledged export product as well as a regular component of foreign affairs. The promotion of national higher education systems accordingly became a central part of the missions assigned to higher education attachés and counselors in foreign representations around the world. National agencies such as the British Council, CampusFrance, Nuffic³ or DAAD⁴ were streamlined to lead national efforts in the increasingly competitive field of international higher education.

That evolution entailed corollary strategic objectives and international agendas on the global stage. Perceptions of an immediate necessity to go global were certainly at least debatable in quite a few institutional and systemic cases but the fact is that the so-called internationalization process at the turn of the twenty-first century placed higher education institutions and systems in an global competition the likes of which had never been witnessed before. Foreign students were preferably referred to as “international” students when it appeared that they had become the ultimate target of that competition. Australia had already launched a new Policy on Overseas Students by the mid-1980s. Higher education institutions received grants of up to \$200,000 to develop promotional material and marketing strategies to attract full-fee paying international students and were encouraged by the Hawke government to charge profit margins on overseas student tuitions to generate revenue (Tootell, 1999). With international students now regarded as customers contributing to the financial health of higher education institutions and a resulting spectacular growth in international enrolments, the shift from “educational aid” to “educational trade” had started (Back, Davis & Olsen, 1996, p.7). Australian higher education is an interesting example of a national system that was able to position itself strategically very early on in the dawning era of globalization and therefore to

³ Netherlands organization for international cooperation in higher education.

⁴ German academic exchange service.

take a strategic advantage that, in turn, fostered and eventually implemented more systemic logics internationally. From another angle, the American higher education system is sensibly different and arguably unique in that foreign (notably European) students were distinctly attracted to it long before the 1980s and the era of globalization.

A ‘MODEL’ UPON A HILL: HIGHER EDUCATION AND U.S. EXCEPTIONALISM

John Winthrop’s 1630 invocation of a City upon a Hill as he was still aboard the ship *Arbella* off the coast of Massachusetts provides an early stepping stone into the relationships between higher education and American exceptionalism. The phrase “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” from the parable of Salt and Light in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:14) not only prefigured the ideal the Puritan colonists would place upon their capital city Boston but, through John Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity” (Savage, Dum & Yaendle, eds., p.10), became the enduring metaphor of American exceptionalism. The *Arbella* landed at Salem, Massachusetts on June 22, 1630, only six years before Harvard University, the oldest higher education institution in the United States, was founded. While speaking of models would make little sense with only one institution in colonial America as of 1636, there was still a distinct measure of convergence with England: the Puritans wanted an educated clergy, laity, and civil leadership and those settlers who were educated were alumni of British universities, Cambridge and Oxford in particular. Winthrop himself had been admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1602. In all, nine colonial colleges were founded and chartered before the United States became an independent, sovereign nation in 1776: Harvard, William and Mary, the Collegiate School (Yale), the College of New Jersey (Princeton), the Academy and College of Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania), King’s College (Columbia), Rhode Island College (Brown), Queen’s College (Rutgers), Dartmouth College. Like their English models most of them required religious affiliation. They functioned under the auspices of the Church of England or were controlled by transplanted Puritan, Presbyterian, or Baptist sects. The colonial colleges became hallmarks of excellence in learning in the New World, seven of them are modern Ivy League schools.

When Harvard was chartered in 1650, Thomas Dudley, who signed the charter as Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, advocated “the advancement of all good literature, arts, and sciences” (Dudley, 1650) in a posture that was emblematic of the emergence of the liberal arts tradition in the United States. The liberal arts education, exempt from medieval formalism and theology, became one of the historical pillars of the concept of higher education in the United States and remained the norm and model until the 19th century. McGill Peterson has recently attributed the decline of the liberal arts education in the second half of the 19th century to the emergence of a German-inspired university model more focused on graduate research than on the undergraduate teaching that was more characteristic of the British system and of the liberal arts tradition (McGill Peterson, 2011, p.10), a thesis reminiscent of Charles Kerr’s 1963 Harvard University *Godkin Lectures* (Gachon, 2012). By fostering increased specialization and fragmentation of the curriculum, in a way somewhat similar to what happened in Europe, the German-inspired model accordingly weakened liberal arts education in the United States. This, however, is a complex argument to determine the specificity of a U.S. model, especially when other recent articles, especially in the wake of the Bologna

Process, have increasingly tended to replace the liberal arts education in the European tradition, like Marijk Van der Wende's "The Emergence of Liberal Arts and Sciences Education in Europe: A Comparative Perspective" (2011).

An interesting path to trace the roots of a specifically U.S. model of higher education is into the footsteps of Tocqueville (2003) as he travelled the United States in 1831-1832:

In America the purely practical part of science is admirably understood, and careful attention is paid to the theoretical portion which is immediately requisite to application. On this head the Americans always display a clear, free, original, and inventive power of mind. But hardly anyone in the United States devotes himself to the essentially theoretical and abstract portion of human knowledge. In this respect the Americans carry to excess a tendency which is, I think, discernible, though in a less degree, amongst all democratic nations (p.445).

That particular leaning for «the purely practical part of science» became conducive to a distinctively U.S. response to the practical demands of local markets towards the end of the 19th century. The Morrill Act of 1862, also known as the Land Grant College Act, sponsored by Representative Justin Smith Morrill of Vermont, was on such response by the federal government through the realm of higher education policy. The Act established federal funding for higher education by granting federally controlled land to the states for them to develop and endow «land-grant» colleges, with a mission to offer training paths in practical agriculture, science, and engineering with a view to meeting the demands of the industrial revolution, especially for skilled workers, and of a changing society:

SEC. 4. And be it further enacted, That all moneys derived from the sale of the lands aforesaid by the States to which the lands are apportioned, and from the sales of land scrip hereinbefore provided for, shall be invested in stocks of the United States, or of the States, or some other safe stocks, yielding not less than five per centum upon the par value of said stocks; and that the moneys so invested shall constitute a perpetual fund, the capital of which shall remain forever undiminished, (except so far as may be provided in section fifth of this act,) and the interest of which shall be inviolably appropriated, by each State which may take and claim the benefit of this act, to the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life (Morrill Act, 1862).

While European universities were still primarily under the control of central political authorities that used the levers of public appropriations to define higher education policy, the sustainability of the new land-grant universities in the United States was directly related to the practical requirements of the local markets in the states where they had been developed. The new institutions were therefore market-responsive and market-friendly, yet sometimes to the dismay of such policymakers as Senator Henry M. Rice of Minnesota: «We want no farmers; we want no fancy mechanics» (Eddy, 1956, pp. 31-32). A sort of golden age of the university followed the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, a golden age that saw the emergence of over a hundred land-grant institutions and therefore of a land-grant 'system' that became the cornerstone of the modern university in the United States.

In addition to its early adjustment to the requirements of local markets, the U.S. system was to make timely structural and policy readjustments that secured its performance, success, and attractiveness in the course of the twentieth century. One such readjustment was

structural and was implemented in the early 1960s by the State of California with its now famed Master Plan for Higher Education. After the federally infused land-grant system had created and launched what would become mass public institutions in the states, success and diversification would ultimately call for better organization and further systemization to handle such issues as demographic pressure on the demand side and educational quality on the offer side. The State of California followed two fundamental principles to reform its higher education system: the first was access to higher education for all high school graduates, regardless of their economic means; the other was differentiation among the State's three public postsecondary education segments to minimize waste of public resources caused by duplicate efforts. The new organization assigned specific missions to California Community Colleges (academic and vocational instruction through the first two years of undergraduate education), to the California State University (undergraduate education and graduate education through the master's degree including professional and teacher education), and to the University of California (California's primary academic research institution with exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education for doctoral degrees). The multi-campus system was born and soon became the dominant model for public higher education across the United States: 80% of the students enrolled in public colleges and universities currently attend institutions that are part of a multi-campus system (Gaither, 1999). The California Master Plan for Higher Education was a timely adjustment that made it possible for the United States to envision and to confront modern problems early, especially demographics,⁵ and therefore to gain strategic advantage in the global race for excellence and innovation two decades later. Another decisive adjustment came precisely in 1980, in the early stages of the globalization era, when the Bayh-Dole Act (Patent and Trademark Law Amendments Act) in fact validated and secured at federal level the linkages that had been evolved at state level in the wake of the Morrill Act of 1862:

It is the policy and objective of the Congress to use the patent system to promote the utilization of inventions arising from federally supported research or development; to encourage maximum participation of small business firms in federally supported research and development efforts; to promote collaboration between commercial concerns and nonprofit organizations, including universities; to ensure that inventions made by nonprofit organizations and small business firms are used in a manner to promote free competition and enterprise without unduly encumbering future research and discovery; to promote the commercialization and public availability of inventions made in the United States by United States industry and labor; to ensure that the Government obtains sufficient rights in federally supported inventions to meet the needs of the Government and protect the public against nonuse or unreasonable use of inventions; and to minimize the costs of administering policies in this area (Bayh-Dole Act, 1980).

The new patent system introduced a major change and provided U.S. research with a competitive advantage by allowing universities to actually own and therefore to commercialize inventions made through federally-funded research programs. The Bayh-Dole model can certainly be regarded as one of the decisive factors that fueled the successes of U.S. higher education in the global innovation market and therefore brought tremendous financial returns for research universities. Before 1980 the federal government would retain the licenses to all patents granted to universities that had used federal money to support their research, which was

⁵ Difficulties in many European countries with mass higher education systems, especially France, were initially caused by a belated handling of demographics.

imposed a considerable strain on technology transfer as many government agencies were reluctant to relinquish ownership of the patents to universities or industry.

So was it all because of what Tocqueville had described way back in 1831-1832 when he reported what he believed was the “clear, free, original, and inventive power of mind» of the American character? As a matter of fact the entrepreneurial type insight and consequential organization that gave U.S. higher education its initial competitive edge in the knowledge economy may well have been cultural to some extent, that is deeply entrenched in the individual-ism that is so characteristic of the Protestant work ethics and to North American culture as a whole. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) have written extensively on how cultural idiosyncrasies tend to impact organizational structures. The following passage from *Riding the Waves of Culture* could certainly cast interesting light on the very inception of the U.S. higher education system:

In individualistic cultures organizations (from the Greek organon) are essentially instruments. They have been deliberately assembled and contrived, in order to serve individual owners, employees and customers. Members of organisations enter relationships because it is in their individual interests to do so. Their ties are abstract, legal ones, regulated by contract. The organisation is a means to what its actors want for themselves. In so far as they co-operate, it is because they have particular interests at stake. Each performs a differentiated and specialised function and receives an extrinsic reward for doing so. Authority originates in an individual’s skill at performing tasks, and an individual’s knowledge is used to make the organisational instrument work effectively.

In communitarian cultures the organization is not the creation or instrument of its founders so much as a social context all members share and which gives them meaning and purpose (p.64).

Our point here is that U.S. higher education significantly evolved as a system of instruments when higher education in other countries or cultures, such as France, tended to evolve more as universalist communitarian systems that, to use words of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner again, provided social contexts bearing meaning and purpose for academic communities. From this angle, the consequence will seem less surprising as it often is to international observers: intrinsic cultural resistance to sometimes much needed higher education reforms at national level and often deep, entrenched struggles to preserve and defend communitarian social contexts in the face of perceived corporate aggressions. The reaction to French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s 2007-2008 higher education reform, the proclaimed aim of which was to lift France’s university system into the international first tier, i.e. to emulate world-class (possibly U.S.) universities, is a typical example. Because the price to pay in terms of compromising with corporate principles was deemed too high in French culture, the reform could only pass amid intense political uproar and remains contested to this day. However, as the last section of this article will point out, things tend to evolve slightly differently under the European Higher Education Area, i.e. at supranational level, and arguably to the detriment of U.S. higher education.

The U.S. higher education system is characteristic for having suggested ambivalent attitudes from other countries and cultures, attitudes tinged with ideological reluctance (if not sheer hostility) on the one hand and with a share of admiration (if not of sheer envy) on the other hand. Beyond, the U.S. higher education system was gradually regarded internationally as a sort of beacon of performance and success, if only for becoming so attractive to international students, including the students from more communitarian cultures who were

affluent enough to afford a sort of Grand Tour by attending a university in the United States. In that sense, the U.S. higher education system itself had arguably become ‘the’ market norm by the latter decades of the twentieth century, which made it exceptional in many ways. That exceptionalism made it a sort of model that, not unlike John Winthrop’s City upon a Hill, was bound to become an inspiration for other systems across the world. To put it in modern political terms, the U.S. higher education system had become the source of policy transfer in the course of the twentieth century. In an increasingly globalized environment, however, therein precisely lay the danger.

SOCIOECONOMIC VARIABLES: A MARKET FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Among the most recognizable landmarks of the global higher education market and of the knowledge-based economy is certainly the so-called ‘world-class’ university. It is quite revealing to note how the phrase ‘world-class’ and/or the explicit intention of becoming ‘world-class’ has appeared in the mission statements of higher education institutions in recent years, in a way that is reminiscent of how the word ‘internationalization’ had permeated mission statements at the turn of the twenty-first century. The two are closely related but the acceleration of the globalization process has entailed a policy shift from diffusion and universality through internationalization, to concentration and elitism through the holy grail of achieving ‘world-class’ status. Yet what is a ‘world-class’ university? What is a ‘great’ university and what is a ‘world-class’ university? What, if any, is the difference between the two? By all standards, a great university is a university that offers excellence in teaching, excellence in research, excellence in the dissemination of knowledge, and that reaches out to contribute to the cultural, scientific, and civic life of society. From that angle, many universities across world, such as the famed Sorbonne in Paris, for example, were indisputably great universities long before the age of globalization. A great university, however, does not seem to qualify systematically as a ‘world-class’ university. In addition to being a great university, and arguably more importantly, a world-class university is an institution that has developed and implemented strategies and policies beyond its academic greatness to compete and gain market shares in the global higher education marketplace.

As a consequence, romantic, primarily humanist visions of excellence epitomized by age-old European universities or by liberal arts colleges in the United States have given way to more efficiency-based perceptions of the missions of higher education institutions. That very phenomenon has often been identified and reported as a U.S.-inspired dynamic that ultimately turned conducive to the global higher education market as we know it, an argument coined as an implicit criticism of the U.S. higher education system on ideological (neoliberal) grounds. From a more practical angle, we believe that the original orientations and evolution of U.S. higher education, as previously described in the present study, were, from the outset, intrinsically and inherently conducive, earlier than in other nations, to more entrepreneurial approaches to the missions, and therefore to the governance, of higher education institutions. As a consequence, U.S. universities adjusted earlier to the requirements of increasingly constrained financial and economic environments:

The flow of public money to higher education was receding, in part because of increasing claims on government funds. In the 1970s the emergence of global financial markets made possible the

financing of ever large debts in western industrialized countries. These moneys were used primarily for entitlement programs (federally funded programs to which every citizen has a claim, e.g., primary and secondary education, health care, and Social Security), for debt service, and in the United States, for military expansion. As borrowing increased, federal shares of funding for postsecondary education programs, particularly research and development decreased [...]. At the state and federal levels, then, conditions of financial uncertainty encouraged faculty and institutions to direct their efforts towards programs and research that intersected with the market (Slaughter & Leslie, 1999, pp.7-8).

While Slaughter and Leslie's excellent study has depicted this phenomenon as predatory academic capitalism gone global, the present article uses a less ideological prism to focus on the inter-systemic geopolitical implications of model convergence, and ultimately on their arguably adverse effects on U.S. exceptionalism.

Ideology is always an ambiguous prism to look at those issues even though ideology is of course always close at hand, especially when dealing with the United States from an external point of view. As mentioned above, globalization itself is regarded by many as a mere avatar of U.S.-style Americanization. Feller (2008) has remarked that U.S. higher education policy faces little political opposition within the United States because it represents not only "what is but also what is held to have worked" while it is the cause of much political ferment in Europe ("opposition to the imposition of tuition by French universities; reservations about Germany's plans to establish a select number of elite universities") precisely because of the introduction of neoliberal higher education policies (p.4). Our argument here is that ideology is obviously one side of the coin, but that it may also be the tree hiding the global forest. It is indisputable that U.S. higher education policy is contested in Europe, but it is also indisputable that many European universities aspiring to become 'world-class' universities are, at the same time, making every effort to emulate U.S. higher education policies. Take the case of how Sciences Po. (Paris) and many French universities have increased tuition fees at Master level in recent years, while government-induced higher education reforms aiming to lift France's university system into the international first tier were meeting fierce opposition. That has to do with the 'model' status of U.S. higher education, even though it is indeed contested on ideological grounds, a model whose efficiency-based success and attractiveness has, for better or for worse, superseded traditional universalist conceptions of higher education.

There has consequently been such a dynamic as a policy transfer from the U.S. higher education system to other parts of the world, or, to observe the same dynamic from a different, more telling angle in the perimeter of this study, a global convergence towards the U.S. model. The creation, in recent years, of international ranking like the Academic Ranking of World Universities in Shanghai, China, or the Times Higher Education World University Rankings in the U.K., has consistently sought to perform world-class benchmarking through indicators ostensibly aligned on (and therefore favorable to) the U.S. efficiency-based model.⁶

⁶ Academic Ranking of World Universities indicators include the number of alumni and staff winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, the number of highly cited researchers selected by Thomson Scientific; the number of articles published in journals of Nature and Science, the number of articles indexed in Science Citation Index - Expanded and Social Sciences Citation Index, and the per capita performance with respect to the size of an institution.

Beyond the introduction of entrepreneurial management practices described by Slaughter and Leslie in a global context of financial uncertainty (1998), precisely because such practices alone were ultimately insufficient to face the constraints of the new global financial and economic environment, an adjustment variable was suddenly entered in the equations of the higher education marketplace: international students. Formerly 'foreign' students were suddenly labeled 'international' as they were now for all to conquer and register globally. They came with a possibly double-edged competitive advantage as they could be either fee-paying in their fields or internationally competitive in their research areas, sometimes both. The market for international students was fierce from the outset, with countries like Australia developing aggressive policies early on, such as the implementation of an Overseas Student Charge (OSC) of around 25% of the full cost of tertiary education as of 1979. In a just recently globalizing world, however, the visibility, success, and attractiveness of the U.S. higher education system, which, like a City upon a Hill, still stood as the source of policy transfer, did, at least for some time, secure a competitive advantage for the United States in the global higher education market and in the race for international students.

The most remarkable example of policy transfer from the United States started with the Bologna Process in 1999 and proceeded with the creation of the European Higher Education Area a decade later (Budapest-Vienna Declaration of March, 2010). Ensuring more comparable, compatible, and coherent systems of higher education across Europe was a stepping-stone objective towards making European universities more autonomous and responsible, which, in explicit terms, as stated in the 1999 Bologna Declaration, meant more competitive:

We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilization can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions (European Commission, 1999).

The background and influence of U.S. structural norms were implicit from the outset. The new European Bachelor-Master-Doctorate curriculum, for example, achieved far more than simply making European systems more compatible with one another. It made them more compatible with the U.S. higher education system and thereby facilitated transactions, exchanges, transfers - and ultimately competition (Gachon, 2011, p.37).

The structural landmarks of the Bologna system, e.g., the two- or three-cycle system of study (BA, MA, PhD), were almost direct policy transfers from the U.S. higher education system. Many of the U.S. structural norms - degree uniformity, the banking of credits, institutional management structures, mission differentiation, the community college, peer review systems for research support, etc. - were imported into the Bologna Process (Douglass, 2009, p.14). The Bologna Process was inspired by the necessity to improve the competitive prospects of European higher education in a context of U.S. exceptionalism. The initial policy strategy was to achieve systemization at supranational level with the U.S. model never far behind. The European Higher Education Area is certainly the farthest-reaching and most visible instance of policy transfer from the U.S. higher education system, but it is not the only one. A number of South American and Asian countries were also influenced by U.S. higher education norms. The origins and implications of policy transfer from the United States to other parts of

the world will be best understood from the perspective that the U.S. higher education system has historically proven to be a stable one, a system whose structural norms (like California's Master Plan for Higher Education) were developed before the age of globalization and have remained functional through it. Yet, for all its stability, the U.S. higher education system has also proven to be a static one, a system that has built on its own success and that has shown little if any interest for reforms over the last fifty years. U.S. higher education norms are certainly exportable, they have proven to be: in higher education as in other fields, however, exporting requires sustained renewal capacity to secure the model status of the export source.

From the angle of policy transfer the European model has arguably (though possibly transiently) assumed dominant status in recent years, precisely because reform is still on the European agenda, because the Bologna idea still remains a process. Europe, for example, has made a number of efforts to infuse more competitive norms in its traditionally more universalist philosophy (e.g. the introduction of a Europe-wide competitive funding structure as of 2007 in its 7th Framework Program, or the extension of the Bologna Process to doctorate level training with the creation of Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorates). Are there any tangible signs that the European model has become dominant? There are indeed. The focal point has temporarily shifted. So has the source of policy transfer. And this is largely due to the colossal success of the European Erasmus mobility program. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organizations are currently working on an Asian Erasmus Plan. Even Australia signed a joint declaration with the European Union in 2007 to allow for a more rapid convergence of the two education systems: since January 2013, Macquarie University is the first Australian university to align its degree system with the Bologna Process. Beyond, the European model is supported, promoted, and marketed internationally not only by the European Commission itself, but also by intra-communitarian national agencies like DAAD (Germany), NUFFIC (Netherlands), CampusFrance, the British Council, etc. There is significantly no comparable marketing effort of the U.S. higher education system. And that is because the prism of the U.S. higher education system has always been intrinsically national: generations of Americans have been satisfied with its exceptionalism, with its model quality, with its efficiency, with its attractiveness, and incidentally with the fact that it was inspiring the world. Therein precisely lay the danger: for lack of a global strategy the U.S. higher education system has inspired to the point of arousing worldwide emulation and of threatening its own exceptionalism. The U.S. model is exportable but its self-perception is irreducibly national.

Are we to enter a long-term era of European higher education and research exceptionalism? That would be a rash statement. We believe that the success of the Erasmus mobility program still remains a political achievement rather than an academic achievement. Its mission lies in the bringing together of the youths of all E.U. member states to lay the foundations of a much needed European identity. Of course Erasmus has facilitated intra-communitarian mobility for over two million European students since it was launched. This is assuredly a political feat but less of an academic achievement if the contents, coordination, and continuity of training paths is to be carefully looked into. Mass mobility entails quality v. quantity issues. Yet it is indisputable that Erasmus has tremendously increased the figures that measure the flows of international students. International students, as we have remarked previously in this article, were introduced as an adjustment variable in the equations of the

higher education marketplace. That will remain as one of the legacies of the globalization era: the reason why Australia signed a joint declaration with the European Union in 2007 obviously lay in its concern that it might lose much needed overseas fee-paying students to European universities if it did not adapt to the reforms of the Bologna Process.

CONCLUSION: THE CHALLENGE TO U.S. EXCEPTIONALISM

The U.S. higher education system is obviously not on the wane. However, its model status, its intrinsically national prism, its unchallenged confidence that U.S. higher education norms were in fact the norms of the global higher education market have concurred to the erosion of its exceptionalism in the higher education marketplace. In that sense, model convergence has proven to be detrimental to the United States, imposing a shift from market domination to mere market sharing. Two indicators of how U.S. exceptionalism has been challenged in recent years are particularly telling:

Research

The United States has long relied on foreign-born doctorate holders, i.e. doctorate holders who were trained at U.S. universities but who were not initially produced by the U.S K-12 education system, who are likely to return to their home countries and eventually to compete against U.S. research and/or U.S. companies. The importance of foreign-born doctorates has risen to a challenging strategic level in the past decade:

Temporary visa holders, not counting foreign students with permanent visas, have earned 39% to 48% of U.S. NS&E doctorates since 2000. More than half of these students are from China, India, and South Korea.

For engineering alone, the numbers are considerably more concentrated. Since 2000, the share of U.S. engineering doctorates earned by temporary visa holders has risen from 51% to as high as 63% in 2005–07, before dropping to 57% in 2009. Nearly three-quarters of foreign national recipients of engineering doctorates were from East Asia or India.

Many of these individuals, especially those on temporary visas, will leave the United States after earning their doctorates, but if past trends continue, a large proportion—about 60%—will stay. It appears, though, that graduates from top-rated programs are somewhat less likely than others to stay (National Science Board, 2013, p.8).

Foreign nationals obtain roughly 33% of all U.S. doctorates in all disciplines. The indicators of the National Science Board reveal that the figures rise to alarming heights in the more strategic fields of NS&E (Natural Sciences and Engineering), with a dire implication in terms of human capital: over 50% of U.S. research currently needs to be imported. In addition, the fact that many of these foreign-born individuals will leave the United States is a further challenge, one that the Staple Bill⁷ proposed to mitigate in 2009 before dying that same year in the Congressional Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law.

The indicators of the National Science Board also point to the correlated issue of quantity v. quality (an issue we have also pointed to in the case of the mobility scheme of the

⁷ Stopping Trained in America PhDs from Leaving the Economy Bill.

Bologna Process) as “graduates from top-rated programs are somewhat less likely than others to stay.” The other factor here is the strategic importance of Asian students.

Mobility

We have dealt with the specific issue of Asian and Pacific Islander students for the United States in a 2011 article (“U.S. Euro-Asian Student Mobility Equation”) published by *Asian Social Science*. The research, based on statistics provided by the Institute of International Education, has pointed to a growing strategic imbalance in the mobility to and from the United States involving U.S. and Asian students. The imbalance affects destinations, levels, and fields of study (Gachon, 2011, pp.30-31):

1/ The United States is the top destination for students from China, Japan, and South Korea, but none of these countries is the top destination for U.S. students. U.S. students are primarily attracted to Europe and tend to regard mobility (“study abroad”) as an eye and mind-opening experience rather than as a strategic move with possible returns on investments. U.S. students seeking strategic paths will tend to stay in the U.S. while Asian students will seek to study at strategic institutions overseas.

2/ Asian students in the United States primarily seek graduate and research training programs. In 2009-2010 46.3% of foreign Asian students in the United States were registered in graduate programs, a figure that rose to 52.1% in the case of Chinese students. In 2008-2009 the profiles of U.S. students abroad were primarily undergraduate (83.6%), with only 16.3% of graduate students, including 0.4% of doctoral students.

3/ The top five fields of study of U.S. students abroad in 2008-2009 were social sciences (20.7%), business and management (19.5%), humanities (12.3%), fine or applied arts (7.3%), physical or life sciences (7.3%). Asian students in the United States are primarily interested in the more strategic STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. Engineering, 2nd with Asian students in the U.S., ranked 9th with outgoing American students (3.2%); math and computer science, 4th with Asian students in the U.S., ranked 10th with outgoing American students (1.6%). U.S. students abroad appear less attracted to highly strategic R&D fields than Asian students are. The United States is challenged here in what Tocqueville (2003) had described as its specificity, “the purely practical part of science” (p.445).

We believe that this global phenomenon was induced by policy transfer and by the consequential shifting of geopolitical cards. In terms of mobility, Asian students are looking towards the United States with more competitive objectives while U.S. students are looking towards Europe with more widely cultural objectives in the tradition of the Grand Tour or, more recently, of the Erasmus mobility program. Another cause of concern for the United States, and of impending danger when one considers that international students contribute some \$20 billion annually to the U.S. economy through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses, should lie in the fact that European students, who have a long tradition of looking towards the United States, are now increasingly looking towards Asia.

The challenge to U.S. exceptionalism is apparent even in the statistics of the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). When the ARWU was created in 2003 there were 59 U.S. universities among the World Top 100 Universities, a figure that has declined by 6% with 53 U.S. universities in 2012, while the number of European universities has remained stable (31). The challenge is ever present: in 2011, the figures were -6% for U.S. universities, +3% for European universities, and +2% for universities from the Asia-Pacific region.⁸ Of course the U.S. system remains a major stakeholder in the global higher education marketplace. Yet there are signs that the system would need to reinvent itself to secure its exceptionalism in the long run. That however seems most unlikely.

The stakes are high and policy adjustments are needed.⁹

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⁸ Source: <http://www.shanghairanking.com>.

⁹ President Obama’s January 2013 State of the Union Speech insisted on the importance of STEM education (“we’ll reward schools that develop new partnerships with colleges and employers, and create classes that focus on science, technology, engineering, and math – the skills today’s employers are looking for to fill jobs right now and in the future”) and on the need to reform immigration procedures (“real reform means fixing the legal immigration system to cut waiting periods, reduce bureaucracy, and attract the highly-skilled entrepreneurs and engineers that will help create jobs and grow our economy”). Source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

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