

Taiwan: From “World-Class” to Socially Responsible

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Building world-class universities has become an important project in many countries, as developing higher education is regarded as a means of enhancing global competitiveness. Following narrowly defined standards for universities to become “world-class,” many governments have reformed, restructured, and internationalized their higher education systems. An implication of this “world-class” trend is the differentiation policy adopted by some higher education systems in East Asia, such as in Taiwan, in recognition that the number of top-tier universities is limited in most national contexts. This is particularly true in the case of Taiwan, where there are over 150 higher education institutions in a relatively small island-state with a population of around 23 million. Providing equal treatment for all universities in terms of budget and mission is impossible for the government. Against this background, and as in other East Asian countries, the Taiwanese government has been led to differentiate the higher education system by compelling stratified missions, with research-intensive universities typically considered top-tier institutions and aiming at world-class status.

WORLD-CLASS TRENDS AND ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS

The Taiwanese government launched the Aim for the Top University Project (also known as the “five-year-fifty-billion” project) as a competition-based funding scheme to provide off-budget funds to universities. The project, which provided NT\$50 billion (approximately US\$1.63 billion) over five years (2006–2010), was designed to promote research excellence and internationalization in Taiwan’s higher education sector. It was renewed to provide an additional NT\$50 billion for another five years (2011–2015). Funded universities were those considered national flagship universities; these were expected to reach world-class status within five years.

The “five-year-fifty-billion” project reveals a policy of differentiation and funding concentration with limited public funds concentrated at a number of leading universities. This policy of building “skyscrapers” aims to sustain a critical mass of research excellence that drives quality and ensures the global competitiveness of Taiwan’s higher education system, thereby enhancing the prestige as well as the overall quality of universities on the island. Indeed, accord-

ing to the SCImago Journal & Country Rank, the number of scientific publications from Taiwan significantly increased in the 2000s, which may reflect an increase in research capacity.

However, this policy also caused a steep stratification and differentiation in the higher education system. A research- and output-oriented culture has been bred, which substantially intensified competition among universities. The consequence is a zero-sum game that causes unhealthy competition and inequality. The single standard that is used by the government, which merely stresses research outputs in indexed journals, reduces diversity in the sector. Meanwhile, as a result of the tendency to emphasize research, teaching has been neglected. These problems were aggregated and understood as a manifestation of the “SSCI (social sciences citation index) syndrome” in Taiwan’s academia, and were widely reported in the press, raising public hostility against the relevant government initiatives.

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PROMOTING UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In response to these problems, and after conducting several public hearings, the new administration that came into office after the general election in 2016 announced a change in the funding policy to develop world-class universities. In 2018, it allocated NT\$86.85 billion (approximately US\$2.82 billion) for a new five-year initiative called the Higher Education Sprout Project. The project includes both public and private universities and consists of two parts. The first part focuses on enhancing the overall quality of universities and encouraging their diversity. It highlights four elements (i.e., promoting teaching innovation; enhancing service to the public; developing the unique characteristics of universities; and achieving social responsibility), and funds a total of 158 higher education institutions, including 71 comprehensive universities and 87 technical institutions. This is the main part of the project. Its key missions include promoting equality in higher education, the development of local linkages, and nurturing talent.

The second part of the project aims to foster global competitiveness in the higher education sector. It is divided into two subprojects. The first subproject identifies four

universities as leading institutions in pursuing all-around excellence. The second subproject selects and funds 65 research centers at 24 institutions to develop as areas of excellence.

The government awarded NT\$17.37 billion (approximately US\$565 million) for the first year of the project, with 65 percent (NT\$11.37 billion or US\$370 million) allocated to enhance social responsibility, and 35 percent (NT\$6 billion or US\$195 million) to enhance global competitiveness. In this funding model, university social responsibility (strengthening university–industry collaboration; fostering cooperation among universities and schools; involving ministries and local governments in university-led projects; and nurturing talents required by local economies) has become a new key performance indicator used to monitor the performance of universities.

The adoption of this new indicator optimistically aims for a return of a local focus among faculty, who are expected to work closely with communities, industry, and government organizations as an alternative to seeking to compete globally by publishing in international journals. This initiative also marks a shift from an outward-looking strategy to a relatively inward-looking approach. Importantly, this reorientation exemplifies the tension between the global and local agendas in higher education policy.

POLITICS MATTERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

This reorientation, following the Taiwanese election cycle, suggests the relevance of local politics for higher education policy making. In the new interplay between educational autonomy and performance culture, it is clear that political circumstances have substantially affected Taiwan's higher education policy. The island's democratic transition has played an important role in motivating various sectors (including industry and municipal authorities) to participate in higher education governance. It has resulted in a decentralized framework of governance, in which individual higher education institutions exercise increased autonomy, demonstrating the responsiveness and accountability of higher education policy to society.

Based on this evolution, we may consider the reorientation as an attempt to balance external/global trends and requirements (as revealed by the world-class trend) and internal/local pressures. To put it another way, there is a zero-sum relationship between the global and local perspectives on higher education policy. This not only justifies the shift toward an inward-looking approach, but also suggests that policy-making processes in higher education are inevitably local because of politically bound views and realities. In this regard, the controversies about world-class university and the call for university social responsibility should be framed

in ways that incorporate political responsiveness and the potential for a blended approach to global and local needs. ■

Higher Education Reform in Moldova: Achievements and Challenges

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The higher education system in the Republic of Moldova has undergone a far-reaching transformation since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This article analyzes some of the main achievements and challenges of the higher education reform in that Eastern European country, which joined the Bologna process in 2005.

THE "DILEMMA OF SIMULTANEITY"

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent Republic of Moldova went through severe crises and had to adjust to a swiftly changing political and socioeconomic environment. The small landlocked state between Romania and Ukraine faced what political scientist Claus Offe once described as a "dilemma of simultaneity," as the country was confronted with multiple transformational challenges at the same time. As an independent state, Moldova had first to establish a new political system and a framework of political institutions. The former Soviet republic then embarked on a transition from a command economy to a market economy and faced economic crises. Last but not least, Moldova had to cope with a secessionist conflict in the region Transnistria, which culminated in a brief war in 1992 and remains unresolved to date.