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FORMATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES

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ФОРМУВАННЯ ДЕРЖАВНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ В СФЕРІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ КРАЇН ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОГО СОЮЗУ

Formation of public policies of higher education in European Union countries has been investigated. The concept, the types and the advantages of the usage of benchmarking in the development of higher education public policies have been considered.

Досліджено формування державної політики вищої освіти країн Європейського Союзу. Розглянуто поняття, види та переваги застосування бенчмаркінгу при розробці державної політики вищої освіти.

Key words: *public policy, higher education, educational policy, reformation of higher education, educational benchmarking.*

Ключові слова: *державна політика, вища освіта, освітня політика, реформування вищої освіти, освітній бенчмаркінг.*

Problem statement. Nowadays higher education in Ukraine meets a number of challenges such as insufficient funding, a weak connection with the labor market, lack of quality and etc. Higher education institutions must be effective to succeed in research to provide best academic practices and high quality of education. The public policy in the sphere of the higher education of Ukraine is aimed at the reformation of the educational field according to the modern trends and the economical facilities of the country to provide human potential development. The analysis of strategic planning of public policy in the sphere of higher education in European Union countries could be a valuable experience.

Recent research and publications analysis. Among foreign scientists who have studied the issue of strategic planning of higher education public policy in European Union are Amaral A., Kwiek M., Marek K., Tilak J., Wynston G. and others. The issues of the usage of benchmarking in higher education are investigated in the scientific works by Karjalainen A., Kuźmicz, K., Kuortti K., Labanauskis R., Ninikoski S., Paliulis N., Woźnicki J., Wynston G. and others.

Paper objective is to analyze the importance of strategic planning in higher education in European Union countries and to investigate the concept, the types and the advantages of the usage of benchmarking in the development of the strategies of higher education public policies.

Paper main body. A number of significant factors are changing the strategic management landscape in higher education. Market forces are exerting significant impacts on higher education institutions (HEIs) that are fundamentally changing the ways they conduct and manage their affairs. As institutional autonomy grows, so do institutional responsibilities and accountability. The changes in the sphere of higher education are putting a big responsibility on governance. Formal planning strategies are most needed in the higher education system. The increased demands require educational public entities to think and to act strategically as never before.

Scientific literature stresses the positive role of strategic planning in higher education. It is considered as a mechanism for changes, as a specific method of moving an institution forward in which strategies are formulated and implemented in consideration of the organization's environmental context, enabling the institution to acquire sufficient resources to attain its goals [1, p. 43]

According to Watson [2, p.14]: "Managing strategy is arguably the most important thing a university does, enabling all of its core activities of teaching, research and a wider social and economic service to be optimally achieved. It involves a thorough knowledge of the institution's present strengths and weaknesses and the making of choices about the future".

Globalisation process creates new challenges for higher education system, which is facing diversified pressures that impact on its policy. The university no longer provides great prestige on which higher education can build a successful claim to administrative autonomy. Nowadays universities' governance with the tradition of collegial governance is considered as an inefficient mechanism. Institutions should become more flexible, more autonomous to respond to the changes in the organisational environment [3, p. 80].

Nowadays as the dependence of the performance of the higher educational institutions on economic factors increases, resources` capacity of study and research increases too. On the one hand, public expenditure are not able to cover increasing needs of the higher educational institutions, on the other hand, it is necessary to elaborate effective and transparent mechanisms of regulation of their activities outside the budget [4, p. 2]. Thus, the social nature of the relations in the sphere of the higher education and growing dependence of higher educational institutions on economic factors require the formation of the mechanisms of the public regulation that are adequate to the market conditions and the development of a new regulatory state education policy, which would have directed the efforts of the higher education on the consistent improvement of its competitiveness.

In the majority of European Union countries governments implements policies to enhance the international competitiveness of universities and promote their role «in the innovation system, economic development, knowledge-based economy and competitiveness of nation-state» [5, p. 156]. These developments show that a number of European countries moved from the traditional view that all national universities are of similar quality to a new position that promotes a stratified higher education system with a few research universities concentrating significant funding and a number of higher education institutions for provision of mass higher education with a limited research capacity.

The peculiarity of entrepreneurship in modern conditions is, in particular, that it extends from the sphere of material production to education, science, and culture. Nowadays higher educational institutions are gradually transformed into entrepreneurial structures of public sector [6, p. 3]. As, on the one hand, their activities include satisfaction of public needs on the basis of outside budget funding, and, on the other hand, higher educational institutions may be considered as commercial enterprises that offer

services to individuals, who use education with a personal purpose with the intention of obtaining additional revenue in the future. Such variant has some advantages in the transitional economic conditions: focus on customer satisfaction, participation in market competition, desire for efficient use of resources.

Recent research shows a decline of trust in public institutions in general, and in higher education institutions in particular, as well as in professionals. And all recently implemented quality systems are based on accreditation rather than on quality assessment. This might reflect an increased lack of trust in higher education institutions to satisfy the government and society about their capacity to ensure adequate standards of quality [7, p. 3].

The implementation of markets as instruments of public policy has been accompanied by a loud cry in favour of increased institutional autonomy, made necessary to allow institutions to compete in the higher education market [8, p. 10]. However, governments quickly realised that competing autonomous institutions were more difficult to steer and have taken with one hand what they had given with the other. Frequently, higher education reform has often meant replacing one form of government influence and control with another. The new autonomy is then a paradox: it is the autonomy to be free to conform. It remains to be seen if the present global crisis of the financial systems and the loss of credibility of pure market regulation will result in a reversal of the recent changes of the relationship between universities and government.

As a result of gradual abandonment of methods of administration, new possibilities are opened to higher educational institutions, especially the budget ones, leading to their functioning as economic entities like manufacturing companies. Therefore, economic development of the higher educational institution as a process of improving quality and structural parameters of financial and economic activities of the higher educational institution reflects their ability to qualitatively improve the basic functions. Economic development of higher educational institution is impossible without increasing the share of allocations earned by it.

More attention should be paid to the problems of complex economic development of higher educational institution, which is not confined only to the problems of funding, in the process of modernization of social and economic development. The government must improve the mechanisms of necessity of achievements of higher educational institution's scientific researches; strengthen the interaction of business, science and education. Given the above, there is a need to rethink the role of educational institutions not only in ensuring economic progress, but also in forming a highly educated specialist and a strong personality, competitive in today's world.

Almost all higher education institutions have autonomy. The administration of the university has its components in each country. Therefore, the management of the higher education is the interaction and the cooperation between all institutions of higher school divisions, teachers and students[9, p. 5].

As innovation processes are developed the universities should use smart approaches and best practices for the improvement of their activities. The determination and dissemination of the best practices in universities' management are emphasized among the directions of the increasing of the efficiency in universities' operation. One of the instruments that promote the efficiency in the integration processes in the field of education is benchmarking.

The method of benchmarking research means the accentuation of one or more universities efficiently performing the defined function and the usage of its experience as a new idea for the improvement of the situation in own activity [10, p. 47].

In the literature benchmarking has many definitions. It is possible to divide these definitions to three categories: practical definitions, existential definitions and metaphorical definitions (Table 1).

Table 1
Definitions of benchmarking in the literature

Practical definitions (what benchmarking is or what activities it includes)	"Benchmarking is the systematic study and comparison of a company's key performance indicators with those of competitors and others considered best-in-class in a specific function" (Dervitsiotis, 2000)
	"... it is a way of comparing a product or process against others, with reference to specified standards" (Pepper, Webster & Jenkins, 2001)
Existential definitions (try to connect benchmarking with the experiences, emotions and basic processes of the human existence)	"...it is, at bottom, a systematic way of learning from others and changing what you do" (Epper, 1999)
	"It is actually a matter of imitating successful behavior" (Karlof&Ostblom, 1993)
	"Benchmarking is a form of human beings natural curiosity with which s/he explores the possibilities of cooperation and friendship" (Karjalainen, Kuortti&Niimikoski, 2002)
	"Benchmarking is a learning process, which requires trust, understanding, selecting and adapting good practices in order to improve" (ENQA workshop, 2002)
Metaphorical definitions (indicates how researchers, consultants, managers and others see the method)	"...it is the state of mind of an organization which encourages the continuous effort of comparing functions and processes with those of best in class, wherever they are to be found" (Zairi& Leonard, 1994)

Studying of the literature shows, that the most of authors determine benchmarking as the method of comparative analysis of results, practices and processes inside and between organizations and fields for the receiving the information for self-improvement. For higher educational establishments it means the comparing of similar functions of institutions that are not direct competitors.

K. Kuźmicz highlights that benchmarking in an academic context can be divided into four categories: benchmarking for exploration, for experience, for developmental comparison and for cooperation-building. Benchmarking for exploration represents scientific professionalism. This means ensuring the reliability of the data collected in the comparison process. The real performance level of one's self is measured as accurately as possible and it is compared to that of a partner. This kind of assessment is close to comparative cultural study and comparative education and we can make a further categorization between qualitative and quantitative methodology and method criticism. The interest of benchmarking for exploration is primarily technical and aims for methodological explicitness. Benchmarking for experience is aimed to achieve an original individual experience. In this mode the comparison is intuitive and expressive. Its purpose is not to explicitly improve the organization, but to enrich the cultural capital of the person or group who is doing the benchmarking. Benchmarking for experience is not a systematic or carefully prepared measurement, but innocent learning by experience as an individual or as a group. Benchmarking for experience gives new ideas and teaches us new approaches to old tasks. The interest of benchmarking for experience is subjective. The assessment aims at an individual, authentic and often emotional experience. Benchmarking for developmental comparison stresses the point of view of the organization. The assessment is carried out systematically and it is well prepared. The aim is to find ideas to improve one's own work. The main challenge here is how to recognize the relevant issues and to use what we have observed and learned to improve the work. Benchmarking for cooperation-building could be compared to a meticulously-prepared negotiation where the building of future cooperation is the main aim. In this mode the important factors are mutuality, respect and an enthusiasm to create something that together transcends the boundaries of cultural differences [11, p. 22].

In J. Woźnicki's opinion, benchmarking also promotes the planning of long-term and current purposes. It provides for universities the opportunity to establish a network of lasting cooperation and exchange of experiences. Universities participating in the benchmarking enhance their competitiveness and ranking [12, p. 6]. The university firstly should provide knowledge transfer and share own experience with the others. Using benchmarking university identifies its strong and weak sides according to benchmarking partners.

Cooperating benchmarking, which is based on the cooperation and partnership in the experiences transfer, may be used in university's environment. Examples of benchmarking initiatives that reflect the spectrum of possible applications are shown in the Table 2.

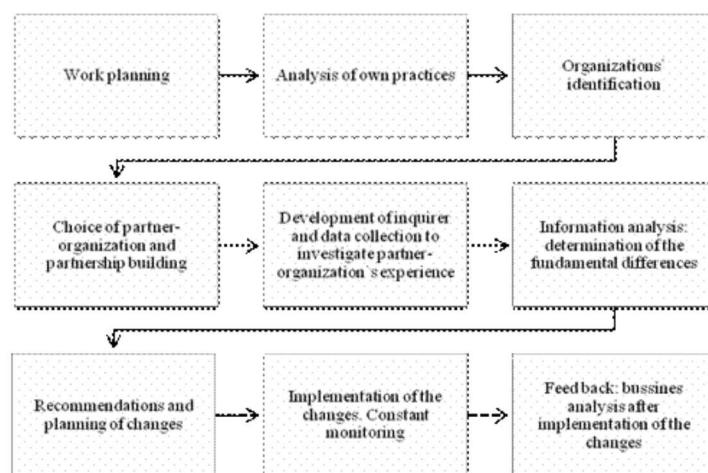
Table 2
The examples of benchmarking initiatives in higher educational establishments

Project name (coordinator)	Geographic place	Scope
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Global Research Benchmarking System (GRBS) (Global Alliance for Measuring University Performance)	Regional (USA, Canada, Asia Pacific)	Scientific analysis
Benchmarking Programme (Association of Commonwealth Universities)	Regional (International Unity – Commonwealth)	Students' education, processes management
Benchmarking and Pathfinder Programme (Higher Education Academy & Joint Information Systems Committee)	Regional (England, Scotland, Wales)	Students' education
European Benchmarking Initiative (EBI) European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities	Regional (Europe)	Students' education, processes management, cooperation between education and business
New Benchmarking Initiative (Council on Social Work Education)	National (USA)	Students' education

Benchmarking process could be divided into 6 stages that is presented on the Picture.

The signed below scheme is only a general algorithm of acts. Usually in real conditions the basic stages are divided into smaller ones. Each of them is provided by the appropriate feedback.



Picture Stages of benchmarking process

Conclusions. In the period of dynamic changes in the services' market of the national higher education policy's strategic planning is of a particular importance. The increasing interest for the competitiveness of higher education institutions has become not only a duty but a public standard. Higher educational establishments do not have any choice to cooperate in the global market of educational services, seeking to make their educational offer attractive and able to meet the needs of a wider group of stakeholders. There is a need to rethink the role of strategies' development for higher education not only for ensuring economic progress, but also in forming a highly educated specialist and a strong personality, competitive in today's world. The usage of benchmarking in public policy strategic planning for higher education demands the atmosphere of openness and collaboration. Its lack is a considerable border for the benchmarking instrument. As the result it is the delay in implementation of Bologna process and in the development of education system.

Therefore, the strategic benchmarking should be emphasized as the modern method and the tool contributing to the increasing in the efficiency of public policy in the field of higher education.

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