Relevance and Satisfaction of Academic Profession in Knowledge Society

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Abstract **We are analysing the challenges academia must face as a consequence of the new demands of relevance and satisfaction. There is a mutual interaction between these processes: their effects to academia are related to social conditions such as globalization, marketization, and knowledge-based orientation of society, while the reverse effects (influence of academia on these processes) are related to social functions such as research, teaching, service, and administration in knowledge functions.**

Keywords - **Academic profession, Relevance, Satisfaction, Knowledge Society.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The academic profession has always been changing, hopefully improving. This profession is adaptive and responsive to external changes, and it seeks to enact its own environment. While reading historical research or looking at academics' reflections on their situation over time [1, 2, 7, 16, 22], it is striking that, whatever their particular historical moment, these writers all comment that the academic profession is no longer the same. There is clearly no ideal, universal, and stable state of the academic profession. These developments affect the relationships between the academic profession and other parts of society, as well as the position of this particular profession within society. These changes also affect the profession's internal modes of regulation and its autonomy and ability to avoid the intervention of external forces.

Academic careers are influenced by various contexts [15, 20]. Whereas career research traditionally emphasizes personal contexts at the expense of global or societal ones, research on academic careers tends to stress structural factors and conditions influencing careers.

The academic careers have been seen as the prototype for "new" careers [4] and as an opportunity to develop an international academic career [11] and to change employment conditions [14]. There are many international comparative research studies of the academic profession [1, 3] and of faculty members' working conditions [12, 13].

The public reflection on the academic profession is not characterized by satisfaction and equilibrium.

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There are opinions that the concept of the traditional academic profession might be history. The professional tensions with which the academic profession has to live with nowadays are included by experts in at least in four categories: massification, knowledge economy, managerialism and competition [21].

Although academic career seems to remains an attractive choice, the challenge seems to be related to questions about the personal costs of succeeding in academic careers and how to maintain balance between work and family, personal satisfaction and career requirements. This "cost-benefit" of academic careers is operating in the general context of abandoning the tenure system and developing of a parallel system of term appointment [19].

II. RELEVANCE AND SATISFACTION

Relevance and importance of higher education must be correlated with societal expectations and their true functions.

It is important to set that to claim relevance is one thing, to prove it is another. Pressures for greater accountability generate new types of requirements for relevance and in particular the need to find measures of it. This means that it has become more necessary to "talk" about relevance, to explicitly make the "claim" for it and, to varying extents, to find evidence with which to provide some justification for the claim [5].

Pressures on higher education for greater responsiveness are not limited only to the economic sphere. The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in 1998 produced seven senses of "responsiveness" that could be applied. They were: political responsiveness, responsiveness to the world of work, responsiveness to other levels of the education system, responsiveness to culture and cultures, responsiveness to "all", responsiveness everywhere and all the time, responsiveness to students and teachers.

In this respect, the institutional leaders claim for "excellence" and for "relevance". Somewhat surprising, "relevance" is more generally required of the "mass" elements of higher education than of the "elite".

Lately, it puts strong emphasis on value for money and it links to relevance. This has given rise to a growth in a wide range of evaluation mechanisms within higher

education. In many of these, students acquire the status of consumers whose needs and satisfaction levels have to be gauged repeatedly.

Last but not least, academics themselves have their own conceptions of relevance. Academics have their own fields of interest in teaching and research that provide one kind of conception of "relevance". Also, they have their aspirations for career success and recognition that will provide another kind of conception of "relevance".

Related to quality in higher education, there appears the question: Does relevance in higher education equate with quality? Every programme in higher education attracts the interest of a range of stakeholders with a multiplicity of conflicting concerns about relevance and a multiplicity of conflicting criteria of quality. As Brennan, Locke and Naidoo (2007:169) noted "the point about relevance is that it is generally defined by other people" and not by individual academic [6].

A major challenge in higher education is to demonstrate relevance and educational quality to an increasingly wide range of stakeholders' conflicting expectations in the name of "accountability". In many cases accreditation (particularly by professional registration authorities) is deemed to represent educational quality, however the criteria for accreditation is focused on relevance that satisfies only a very narrow band of stakeholder interests, and does not address many other criteria of quality.

Today, more than ever, a new analysis of the strategic role of higher education and university is needed. We need to observe better their relation with the society that often leads the universities towards fundamental transformations and new orientations while preserving the balance between scientific aspects and social commitments. The concept of "social relevance" gains prominence. In many cases, societal relevance is something which is required as part of evaluation processes.

Relevance and importance of higher education need to be evaluated according to the extent of balance between societal expectations from various academic institutions and their true functions. This evaluation must have in view the ethical criteria, political neutrality, the culture of critique, an ever more strengthened link between societal problems and the job market as well as the adoption of long-term orientations with respect to societal needs and objectives. The main source of concern, however, is achieving education for all as well as goal–oriented specialized education with special emphasis on merits and skills, since these two forms of education provide for living in various situations as well as for changing one's job or profession.

From expectations point of view, the quality often depends on perceived relevance to the respective interests of various stakeholder groups (as example: academic teachers who prepare and present the programmes; students who undertake the programmes; graduates who benefit from the programmes; employers of graduates who benefit from the knowledge and skills of the graduates; accreditation bodies who endorse the programmes on behalf of their respective disciplines; the community that benefits from the contribution of the discipline; education specialists who are concerned with the quality and outcomes of the teaching process).

Each stakeholder group expects all of what it considers relevant to be included in respective educational programmes. What is perceived as relevant by one stakeholder group, however, is often perceived as irrelevant by another, and therefore to be excluded [8, 9]. This inclusion/exclusion nexus creates conflicts between stakeholder perceptions of relevance and quality and dilemma for academics and institutions trying to achieve quality education.

Most studies of the higher education sector reveal a clear perception that teaching is not valued as much as research. Research has been considered critical in the functioning of modern universities and the quality of major universities has been adjudged mainly by their research output. Structural change in the funding of the university sector, combined with management decisions on increasing 'flexibility' in staffing appointments, has also resulted in greater separation of "the production of knowledge (research) and its distribution (teaching)" [17]. This separation is contestable, and is regarded by many academics, such as Rowland et al. and the academics in Dunkin's (1994) survey, as inappropriate. With demands for 'increased productivity' academics will come under pressure for more accountability in relation to their dual role as teacher and researcher. However, many academics perceive that the reward system in universities privileges research over teaching.

Job satisfaction has long been identified as a factor which is related to many aspects of behaviour in organizational construct. Job satisfaction deals with whether employers find their employment sufficiently satisfactory to continue in it, either permanently or until they are prepared for greater responsibilities. Low job satisfaction is associated with low performance, poor quality, grievances and other difficulties.

Job satisfaction is an active factor in professionalization. Academic job satisfaction influences the job performance in terms of attitudes, perceptions and reactions. Also, job satisfaction influences both the productivity and morale. It is necessary to find the answer to the questions: Are research-oriented universities more satisfied than teaching universities? These sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction are similar or different? There are two concepts related with teaching-research nexus in terms of job satisfaction. First of them assumes that the two activities are complementary to each other when research enhances teaching (the academics considers teaching as something which follows from research, rather than their main priority). Second concept considers that the two activities are competitive when teaching affecting the quality of research.

The salary level of the academic staff in higher education and research institutions is one of the key issues of job satisfaction. Governments all over the world are trying to cut down costs, increase efficiency, profits and

accountability of higher education in the economy [18]. "Within developing countries the conditions of work and remuneration of the majority of academics is inadequate … Academics have to hold more than one job to make ends meet" [10]. On the other hand, as Teichler and Yagci said (2009:108) "in most economically advanced countries, senior academic staff at universities and public research institutes traditionally had permanent employment contracts, while the situation varied for junior academic staff. In some countries, they had similar contracts as seniors from the very beginning, in others their employment security grew gradually over time, while in others permanent contracts were only awarded with the appointment to senior positions." [21].

This has affected the structure and organization of the profession, namely, the way academic staff are employed, academic profession as a career, quality, academic freedom, autonomy, relationship between teaching and research, etc. Structural change in the funding of the university sector, combined with management decisions on increasing 'flexibility' in staffing appointments, has also resulted in greater separation of "the production of knowledge (research) and its distribution (teaching)" [17]. This separation is contestable, and is regarded by many academics, such as Rowland et al. and the academics in Dunkin's (1994) survey, as inappropriate. Universally, the status of the profession seems to have declined. According to Altbach, colleges and universities are faced with 'severe environments'.

IV. CONCLUSION

This short study has reviewed the evolution of academic profession in terms of relevance and satisfaction. Also, we tried to depict changes in the professoriate due to international competition that now affect individual faculty and their institutions and we will seek to understand how academic professionals are affected by these shifts as well how they respond to them.

The relevance cannot be ignored and the academics must be "relevant" spreading knowledge beyond the walls of the academy into all kinds of public domain.

It is clear that new opportunities and new challenges face higher education in its role as actor to a more globalized society. Universities are under growing political pressure for reform in face of more acute competition for public resources in tandem with a marked slowdown in the growth of funding.

In order understand how academic professionals are affected by these all shifts as well how they respond to them, some research question are proposed:

1. Which are the ways to integrate of research, teaching, and learning? Today, the academia must face to new academic research policies that promote the priority accorded to the research universities. In an international dimension, an academic system capable of responding to worldwide competition in academic productivity is needed.
2. How does academic staff perceive their teaching and research obligations? Are research oriented academics more satisfied with their work than teaching oriented academics? Which is the role of research academics in forming hierarchies within institutions?
3. How relevant is the academic profession to society in the context of economic crisis during the past two years?

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