

The Limits of Massification in the Asia Pacific Region: Six Dilemmas
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How Sustainable is the Current Massification Surge in Asia Pacific?

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Can the current growth of higher education, resources, programs, quest for World Competitive University (WCU) status, and high rankings be sustained when looking toward the future? Is the region approaching a time of reassessment of this approach of unquestioned massification, and following a particular HE paradigm? Sustainability is not only financial but also involves state capacity / capability in managing change in higher education, as well as implications for sustainable development in the cultural, social, economic and political sense, especially when modern universities are under great pressure for productivity sometimes at the expense of culture and value preservation.

This seminar will explore these dilemmas of massification in the Asia Pacific region and seek papers that will critique, support or offer alternatives to this current paradigm of higher education policy.

In 1973 when Martin Trow introduced his three stages of university massification (1. Elite, 2. Mass, 3. Universal) reactions ranged from outrage to joy. There were those who strongly felt that higher education (HE) was higher by definition because it was elite, and there were those who celebrated the vision of societies with open access to HE regardless of social economic status, privilege, or exclusionary benefits. As the “development decades” proceeded into the 21st century the quest for universal HE through the process of massification increasingly came to be viewed almost as an obligation of societies and economies desiring to become “modern”. This has certainly been the case for HE in much of the Asia Pacific region, which since 2003 has seen enrollments surpass those of North America and

Western Europe. Calderon (2012) predicts that by 2035 enrollments in North America and Western Europe will have dropped from around 30% of global enrollments in 1999 to around 10% in 2035. By contrast, in the Asia Pacific region shares of global enrollments will have risen from 25% in 1999 to 42% in 2035 (Calderon 2012, pp. 2-3). These gross numbers conceal a variety of disparities and contradictions yet serve to illustrate the yearning and quest for massifying HE systems throughout regions such as Asia and Pacific. Most importantly, it assumes that such expansion and cost can be sustained over the next 20 years, and that a reasonable level of quality and some alignment with economic and social goals can be demonstrated. Altbach (2015) provides a nice summary of at least one of the primary contradictions of further massification along current vectors, namely that which lies between simply increasing the share of enrollments through continued expansion of HEIs of various types (public and private, traditional and alternative), and at the same time provides for essentially elite research universities to satisfy the needs of the knowledge economy. We will explore six additional contradictions or dilemmas as we shall see in the pages that follow, leading at least one scholar to muse: "Have we reached the end of the current model of mass public higher education," (Hazelkorn 2015)?

Massification Sustainability and the Quality Dilemma

As we survey the various routes and patterns that massification has taken in the overall Asia Pacific region, concerns with quality tend to emerge in three characteristic ways.

The first is the seemingly inescapable linkage that exists between efforts to create greater higher education capacity and their effect on quality. (The overall and various processes and dynamics of this have been explored in Neubauer and Tanaka, 2011, where we examine the varied policy dimensions and consequences associated with Access, Equity and Capacity as essential elements of the massification process). To radically simplify this essentially complex process, expanding access and capacity carries with it the inherent risk that if the expansion (massification) is too rapid, the increased capacity may easily outstrip the ability of institutions to maintain (let alone increase) quality because the labor force needs required to uphold quality outstrip existing supplies and capabilities. Thus, the process of massification is one in which whatever definition is given to quality, the outcome may be imperiled by the very dynamics of seeking to expand capacity and access.

The second quality process common to all institutions and systems engaged in massification arises from efforts to stipulate the nature of quality, to develop processes and techniques to define and measure it within higher education institutions, and to conduct such measurements throughout a “system of comparables” usually within national political settings, but also (as has been the case over the past two decades) within international contexts as well. Within the Asia Pacific this dynamic of utilizing comparables, emerged in the 1990’s and the early 2000’s as most countries engaged in processes of massification. Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, China, Indonesia, all sought to create a structure of quality assurance that would in some way review quality achievements across the

wide and complex range of institutions emerging as components of their national systems of higher education. One important “source” providing direction and expertise for this process was the effort on the part of UNESCO to promote the importance of quality assessment within the process of massification and to provide expertise through a series of conferences that linked Asia Pacific Higher Education quality assurance with efforts taking place in other regions (Harman, G. 1996). These complex efforts involved both program and institutional quality reviews often conducted by new national bureaucratic entities charged with higher education quality assurance activities. Almost concurrent with these events was the emergence of international quality assurance entities that sought to generate effective discussions around what might be comparable within QA systems, and especially to ascertain whether progress could be gained on issues such as mutual recognition of degrees and common degree profiles. This remains an ongoing effort throughout the region.

The third critical quality issue arises from this very process: the effort to specify the nature of quality with sufficient precision and appeal that it can actually yield to comparability. This effort is often conjoined to that of seeking to make ready and consensual progress toward increasing quality within institutional settings. In general terms one might focus on this issue as an effort to move from the input side of quality assurance--checking on the nature of HEIs with respect to their various capacities for quality--to the output side of quality, seeking ways to define and measure how increased elements of quality arise from the very operations of the higher education institution itself. Some have also expressed this

as a progression from seeking to define and measure/characterize institutions by hard, empirical aggregate data (hard data), to that of examining and characterizing institutions by their more contextual and difficult to generalize discrete outcome data. To clarify, this third stage in the process tends to have two related aspects: the progression from characterizing an institution by its input data (capacities) to its output data (capabilities and accomplishments), all of which then move into another area, which is that of comparability between institutions/program within a given frame (e.g. a national state) to institutions/programs within a regional or international frame of reference.

To characterize this progression in the context of the dilemmas of continuing massification, the movement along the three stages of quality/quality assurance is itself an element of the massification process. The issue of sustaining massification in these terms comes to realization in the ability of institutions to progress from the initial capacity stage to the open-ended state of demonstrating continuous quality improvement (or even maintenance) in the output stage. A question for us is: how is this progressing, if indeed it is following this trajectory?

Massified HE systems and the differentiation dilemma

As former elite systems of higher education gave way to expansion and differentiation, it was not long before national systems began to be constructed. In some cases, this simply meant that new HEIs were demanded and provided wherever there existed enough financing and political clout to make it happen. Every province, state, district or other national sub-unit felt obligated to offer some

form of tertiary education to its constituency, often in an uncoordinated and unarticulated manner. It was both expensive and inefficient. The emergence of the private sector, largely a demand absorbing sector, also complicated matters especially in terms of quality. In other cases, efforts were made to develop a more rational model, whereby different tiers and missions were envisioned with some effort to coordinate the system at the national level. And, finally, one finds mixed models of centralization and decentralization, organized and laissez fair approaches. John Douglass (2005, 2015) among others has written informatively about this dynamic and contradiction; namely that it is not likely that nations will slow the progress of massification, but it is likely that efforts will be made to rationalize this energy into some form of articulated “system”. These two efforts will occasionally rub up against each other so it will be instructive to offer some comparative analysis regarding policies and practices for continued and sustained higher education expansion. There are also implications under this dilemma for addressing the issue of diversified modes of instructional delivery and with implications for student learning, and research development (Hawkins and Mok 2015). Douglass’s often referred to study of the California system offers an interesting and illustrative model of how one might approach such a study (Douglass 2015).

The California Master Plan has long been a model for HE system development in the U.S. as well as other national settings particularly in Asia. Its architecture is familiar to many who readily recognize the three-tier structure of the research university, the state university with a focus on undergraduate education and the short-cycle, or community college level. Each has its specific mission and

purpose and redundancies are not encouraged. The overall goal is to provide for access, quality, affordability, and equity. This plan has been constantly evolving to accommodate changing circumstances but represents an interesting example of a centralized local system (state of California) within a decentralized national system (the U.S. in general). The issue of differentiation represents a key contradiction as nations seek to both allow for innovation on the one hand and a more centralized articulation on the other. Douglass argues that a model such as the California Master Plan is one way to achieve this balance, and indeed there has been much interest in this model in Asia in recent years. Papers discussing such innovations and differentiation in Asian higher education and alternative approaches would be a valuable addition to this seminar, and help shed light on this particular dilemma.

Role of funding sources and the sustainability dilemma

Funding sources of the HE sector have evolved in recent years. European universities rely on the public funding while higher education institutes tend to tap into private resources (Liefner, 2003). Compared with other organizations, universities have greater autonomy in diversifying their funding sources. The majority of countries have both public and private funding. Some countries like China, originally developed the HE sector out of public financing, and now collect tuition and fees from students. Therefore, Winston (1999) points out that universities look like “part church and part car dealer” (p. 31). Although the HE sector sounds promising regarding its flexibility, it faces substantial challenges across the regions.

For example, the continual expansion of the HE sector understandably carries with it enormous cost implications as well as a major contradiction. As Hazelkorn (2015) says: “. . .providing high-quality universal higher education at a time of decreasing public funding and escalating global competitiveness is the most important challenge facing us in the coming two decades.” (p. 8). Some nations (China for example) with large reserves view this quite differently than others such as Cambodia or Myanmar, yet both play in the same global field of educational competitiveness. In the U.S., widely regarded as having one of the more accessible and far-reaching HE systems as well as a diverse funding structure, student debt has been almost crippling to many consumers of HE regardless of whether it is public or private. Against a backdrop of financial stringency after the 2008 financial crisis, the pressure to reduce the HE sector’s reliance on public funding has increased throughout Asia as well (Teixeira et al, 2014). Therefore, higher education institutions tend to rely more on tuition fees and other private funding. Student debt is unlikely to be reduced in the near future.

The sustainability-affordability dilemma is in and of itself critical but intersects with many of the other contradictions and dilemmas identified here. The obsession with global rankings has distorted HE systems with profound implications for per student cost to say nothing of national budgets for Ministries of Education and other education agencies. This has coincided with the equally distorting quest for World Class University (WCU) status upon which many HE systems in the region have embarked. Many higher education institutions have introduced a market-like approach to boost WCU status. Competitive bidding for

funds makes university professors work much “harder”. However, some performance measurement indicators such as grants acquired, the number of publications and citations seem superficial in reality. Worse yet, many university professors and administrators become risk-averse as failure in their efforts will have negative financial implications for departments and even universities (Liefner, 2003).

There are inevitably tradeoffs that most systems must make, between a truly mass higher education of high quality, a more focused effort to achieve in certain areas, such as STEM fields and so on, raising taxes, allowing questionable private sector initiatives to flourish, cost-sharing, and other schemes but in the end not everyone can have everything. What are some innovative ways to approach the funding sustainability dilemma while still offering a “mass” higher education system.

The private/for profit/public HE dilemma

There has clearly been a “blurring” of the boundaries between public, private non-profit and private-for-profit HEIs. So-called public HEIs still seek a profit, or in other terms, an excess of income versus expenditures and in many cases rely on large shares of private funds through grants, contracts, and private fund raising. Private non-profit institutions receive significant shares of public, state controlled funds, and in some cases (i.e. Japan, Korea, Taiwan, etc.) these shares represent recurring portions of the regular operating budget, leading to a kind of public-private cooperative enterprise. Then there are the private-for-profit HEIs often characterized as low-quality, high-cost institutions increasingly under government

scrutiny in the region. These different and hybrid institutions all play a role in the continued massification and expansion of higher education. The dilemma is where are these institutions going, how are they changing, and how are they adapting to the continued pressure for access to higher education?

Some relevant questions can be posed. Can there be some irreducible meaning to the notion of the “public good” that might be associated with higher education and if so what might that be? Can we derive essential elements of public and private sectors that cover the range of differences between Asian and non-Asian experiences? Is neo-liberalism a particular form of “privatization” as it is applied to higher education? Are there significant differences between the emergence of neo-liberal regimes in the west and the eclectic borrowings of neo-liberal elements in Asia?

Does public higher education always contribute to “the public good”? Under what circumstances might it be viewed as non-contributory? Are there irreducible roles for the state in HE? Given the many different ways of discussing public / private may we not need a new language to talk about what is going on institutionally in HE? What is the role and function of higher education and its transformative functions, for both the individual and society? How does one get the leadership necessary in this new context? We may need to differentiate the missions of individual institutions. When the market fails, how will the state step in to regulate in order to protect higher education institutions, which are now dependent upon the market for funding?

These represent but a few of the questions that constitute this dilemma when we look at the perspective roles played by “public” and “private” higher education in the Asian region. These HE forms and the questions posed all play a significant role in further understanding whether the current model of massification can be sustained and understood in its current form.

New, alternative forms of the HE dilemma

Soon after the turn of the twentieth century, it was clear that the very success of massification was producing a counter reaction: the more HE expanded its basic model, the more—seemingly—groups and individuals began to seek and create various options to what was becoming the dominant model. In some respects the direction(s) that such innovation (s) would take had been heralded by on-line education, which in its very nature is an approach to education that seeks to combine technology and innovation with the goal of reaching large numbers of students across great distances at low cost. Although distance education for large numbers of students had emerged in many countries, none has equaled Indira Gandhi National Open University which has grown to be the hub of distance education in India, offering 21 Schools with broad subject streams, supplemented by regional centers throughout the country with a recent estimated enrollment of 3.5 million. (<http://www.ignou.ac.in/>) Similar entities exist throughout South and Southeast Asia in particular.

These institutions clearly were directed primarily at learners for whom the issues of access and cost were critical. Other innovations, most spectacularly

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC's), emerged from the open educational resources movement (OER), a term David Cormier had coined in 2008 to refer to the provisioning of education to a small group of tuition-paying students in Canada. This was followed by other imitators, but entered the world's consciousness primarily when in the fall of 2011, Stanford University offered three courses, including Introduction of Artificial Intelligence taught by Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig, followed within weeks by two more. These courses attracted over 150,000 students, and proved a radical disruptive innovation to use Christiansen's (2011) term. By 2012 the *New York Times* would term this explosive phenomenon The Year of the MOOC. (Pappano, 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/education/edlife/massive-open-online-courses-are-multiplying-at-a-rapid-pace.html? r=0>).

These events appeared to be playing out a scenario variously predicted by Christiansen in a set of earlier works in which he introduced this concept of disruption in various contexts, (e.g. disrupting class, disrupting the university, etc.), all special cases of what he and his colleagues frame as forms of innovation to which higher education is no less susceptible than any other industry.

(<http://www.christenseninstitute.org/key-concepts/disruptive-innovation-2/?gclid=CKbE1vqrrscCFQZbfgods7cD6Q>). As might be expected, MOOCs have eventually been followed by the appearance of MOORs (Massive Open Online Researches), such as that recently initiated by the Jacobs School of Engineering at the University of California, San Diego (<http://www.jacobsschool.ucsd.edu/>). As is well known, MOOCs have created their own "industry", perhaps best personified by

Coursera (<https://www.coursera.org/>), which describes itself as “free on line courses from top universities”. One other popular version of such disruption are the various types of self-designed, or DIY (do it yourself education) as described by Anya Kamenetz in which learners creatively seek out (or in some cases invent) education/learning settings that meet their particular needs. Common to all the varying ways in which these engagements present themselves is the learner seeks to individualize or customize the learning environment to fit his or her needs. (Kamenetz, Anya 2011).

Common as well to all these disruptive educational pathways is the sense that existing conventional systems of massified higher education fail in some important way or ways to meet the educational challenges such seekers after innovation themselves perceive as important or essential. At the same time, more recent discussions have pointed to several weaknesses to these alternatives, most notably lack of prestige and high drop out rates. Nevertheless it seems clear to us, in the context of this senior seminar focused on the sustainability of massification, that some forms of disruption/innovation are a likely part of the overall higher education system from this time forward, a prediction underscored by the very dynamics of the information/knowledge revolution itself and the irreducible fact that as institutions, those of higher education have tended to be large, situated in a context of contemporary interests, highly professionalized, and slow to change.

We hope that in seeking to enumerate and describe some of the many critical features of massified higher education in the context of its dynamics of sustainability that we can continue to examine the disruptive movement as a

potential set of “early indicators” that in various ways can help us prepare for some of the more significant changes likely to be taking place within the broader structures of massified higher education themselves.

Closing Remarks: The cultural, social, economic and political dilemma for sustainability of massification

The massification of higher education has not impacted educational development alone but it will certainly affect other aspects of development. The rapid expansion of higher education opportunities and the proliferation of providers in education would inevitably cause concerns for quality enhancement and quality assurance. Meanwhile, the increase in higher education and its production of excessive numbers of university graduates would create tremendous pressure for graduate employment. Graduate employment, within the context of the massification of higher education, has affected social, economic, and political debates, especially when societies are facing unstable graduate employment conditions and the younger generations are worried about their futures. This symposium will critically examine graduate employment, social mobility and social / economic integration of the growing complexity and diversity of graduates coming from different parts of the world, as part of the dilemma of the sustainability of continued massification.

Seminar Tasks: The purpose of this seminar is to invite the further development of these various views of massification and its dilemmas while simultaneously adducing for them data relevant to the overall discussion of the differences that

exist throughout the region in the overall progress of higher education massification. Another lens through which we might simultaneously view this issue is to ask after the overall costs and benefits to society of massification, and its appropriateness to enduring social structures within the societies in which it is occurring. This in turn may introduce discussion of the degree to which factors external to national systems of education such as the more distinct macro forces of globalization itself are creating the effective social and political context within which higher education investment, from both public and private sectors takes place (or does not) and the implications these have for issues of sustainability.

As is usual with our senior seminars we are asking participants to prepare a paper of between 2500-3500 words addressed to some aspect of the problematic represented above. We will have each paper presented and discussed during the seminar. Notes will be taken of all sessions. At the conclusion of the discussion of all papers we will convene as a seminar to discuss the subject as a whole, seeking to “fit in” the individual papers as they apply and/or assist the discussion. At the conclusion of the seminar, notes will be provided to each of the presenters along with a list of suggestions, based on discussions, of how each paper might be revised for publication. Participants will be asked to return a revised manuscript of approximately 5000-5500 words for prompt publication by a major international publisher. The normal time frame is for two to three months to elapse to allow the chosen editors to prepare a prospectus for a publisher. We usually know within six to eight weeks about whether publication will have been approved, at which time

participants will be provided with suggestions for the revision of their chapters in a timely manner.

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