

# THE ROLE OF THE MARKET IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the international field of studies on higher education (HE), one of the most active subjects in the last two decades is the role of markets at the global, regional, national and local levels.

This is shown by a fast overview of mainstream publications: a search in Google Scholar using the terms 'higher+education+markets' results in  $\sim 4,8 \times 10^6$  items, while in Spanish only  $\sim 20,000$  results appear. What else is needed to prove the incontrovertible idiomatic domination in this field?

In the current literature about this topic there are three outstanding approaches. First, the study of markets per se; their establishment, functioning and dynamics. Here, the manner and degree in which so-called 'market freedoms operate are crucial, specially from the providers point of view, to determine the supply of study opportunities, to create and close programs, decide upon curricular organization, determine enrollment fees and tuition and self-governing in a competitive environment.

Associated topics are the transformation of HE into a commodity, imperfections and failures of these markets, particularly information asymmetries and the growth, under the shadow of the market, of private provision, for profit or not. There is also the ambiguous role fulfilled by rankings (a typical market device) in quality control, from local to global levels.

Second, the analysis of policies associated with the implementation, acceleration, regulation and even dismantling of relevant markets for HE is proceeding energetically.

Regulatory matters associated to the evaluative state and, in general, the study of neo-liberal or pro-market policies, has prompted a complete renovation of research on system governance.

The lineal approach of an administrative State that limits the public service of HE to the sphere of the commons, relying on state-run providers coordinated by hierarchies and commands, has been left behind.

On the contrary, a literature on decentralized governance that combines public and private initiatives and actors has emerged and drives the system under the 'steering at a distance' modality.

In state universities, it does so through quasi-market mechanisms and through the instruments of the 'new public management'.

In private institutions, for profit or not, it operates through government's quality assurance, supervising, auditing and student demand financing.

Third, studies about how universities, as institutions and organizations, are responding to the environmental transformations that markets bring about.

The most persistent effort in this direction is expressed in the theory of academic capitalism.

It holds that in the industrialized countries of the North, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon bloc, public research universities must adapt their government, organization, functioning and the behavior of their executives, academics and students to the imperative of generating private income to offset the reduction in public funding.

Moreover, this theory holds that under the same pressure, the traditional public knowledge and learning regime is being replaced by a market oriented private academic capitalist regime.

Others adopt a globalization perspective and spread this approach to other developed countries. Thus, a view of transnational academic capitalism emerges or, rather, of a variety or variegated modality of academic capitalism.

More recently, such approaches are reaching the periphery, where they are used with descriptive or explanatory purposes and for criticism of neoliberal policies and processes of privatization, commodification and commercialization of HE.

There are other phenomena underway that are part of this turning of the tide towards market imperatives: importance within academic administration of job provision for graduates; emergence of a global HE industry with new kinds of providers; submission of the HE sector to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS); monitoring and measuring of scientific production by private enterprises like Clarivate (WoS) and Elsevier (Scopus), and commercial initiatives that promote alternative metrics based on academic social networks.

All this shows that the ongoing transformations caused by markets and their unceasing development are redefining the behavior of universities and opening new territories for research on HE. Latin America appears as a social laboratory for the study of these changes.

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