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Equity in Higher Education Systems

The Case of Greece

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the structure and characteristics of higher education in Greece with the necessary clarification of its features, alongside the focus on the state of (in) equity and (in) equality in the Greek higher education system.

Historical Development of Higher Education¹

The first Greek university was established in Athens in 1837, a few years after the founding of the state, and was the only one in the wider area. At the time, it is neither considered to be, nor dealt with as new, since it is granted historical continuity with the institutes of higher education of the Byzantine period and the schools of Greek antiquity (Schoinas 1837). Another characteristic is that it attracts students from the wider area since on the one hand Greek was the language of the educated and on the other it wasn't yet the time for nationalism.

The University of Athens was called on in practice to accomplish three missions: (i) the formation of a national identity, (ii) the production of the executive strength of the state, and (iii) to establish contact and coexistence with other universities in Western

Europe, and on equal terms in fact, since it was a 'new very old' institution. It should be considered particularly successful in terms of these three missions even if it was later accused of conservatism and a close relationship with the state.

By 1920, three more institutions had been established, although initially not as institutions of higher education, something that clearly demonstrates the priorities of the policy of the state and its needs: technology (crafts), economy, and agriculture. It should be noted that the creation of these, and later other, 'schools' is connected to the French tradition of the 'Grandes Ecoles'.

The establishment of the University of Thessaloniki in 1925 is another point in the history of Greek higher education system. It is the first outside Athens; it is founded a few years after the liberation of the city and its integration into the Greek state, and is related to the failure of the plan to found a Greek university in Smyrna. It is clear that the 'national' purposes are given priority without the purposes which refer to the internal political scene being excluded. In fact, the University of Thessaloniki was designed to be more open and liberal in relation to the more traditional and conservative University of Athens. As much in the case of Smyrna, as in the case of Thessaloniki, the figure of Eleftherios Venizelos played a major role, a politician with international prestige and an opponent of the conservative, monarchist party.

Until the end of the last dictatorship (1974), other specialized schools of higher education were established, as well as Greece's third university, the University of Patras. Initially, the University of Patras was exclusively technological and was funded by the World Bank, as part of international geopolitical planning related to the strengthening wave of students leaving the Middle East and going to the then Soviet Union, and was an attempt to limit this.

From the fall of the last dictatorship and on, a marked widening of the higher education institutions' network takes place in repeated waves. This is connected to two main precepts: on the one hand, the demand for the 'democratization' of higher education which bases its social legitimacy on the previous exclusions of large sections of the Greek population for political reasons, and on the other hand, a large wave of students going abroad which costs the country significant amounts in foreign exchange.

It is necessary to note a final point in the historical development of Greek higher education. A close relationship between the state and higher education which was connected to the formation of the nation state as much ideologically and symbolically as organizationally and administratively is the reason for the provision of the Greek Constitution regarding the forbiddance of private higher education. Despite that, it should be noted that the private sector either as an individual presence or as a corporate non-state presence, was present in the development of higher education in Greece: since the 1930s, the so-called Centers of Free Studies (CFS) have been operating. These are private training structures which did not belong to the Ministry of Education and offered post-secondary school professional training. During the 1990s, these Centers began to collaborate with higher education institutions abroad,

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⁶ For more information you may see: <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf>

⁷ The data come from the Greek statistical agency (<http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE>)

⁸ With the current exchange rates, it is about 13,500 euros.

⁹ With reference to the credits that the 2014 budget foresees, for the whole of the Ministry of Education: For the 2014 financial year, payments for projects funded from national resources, 90,000,000.00 euros and payments for projects funded from community resources, 400,000,000.00 euros.

¹⁰ KANEP represents the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) in the area of Education and Lifelong learning, promoting the agenda of trade unions which includes employment policies, policies for combating social exclusion, and reinforcement of trade union presence in society.

¹¹ In technological institutions (TEIs) the corresponding percentage is 45.8 per cent.

¹² This issue is international. Indicatively see NESET, 2013.

¹³ “n” is the number of years for the period of study for its first cycle programme.

¹⁴ For more details see Kavasakalis, 2015 (under publication).

¹⁵ The data from the Greek statistic agency shows the birthplace of students and not the place of residence of their families. So obviously the percentage derived from these figures is probably higher than the actual percentage of students studying away from the family home. But in general, it gives us an idea of the magnitude of the problem.

¹⁶ Special cases of candidates for entrance into Greek tertiary education and the additional places for them are determined in a law in 2012 (Law 4071/2012) in particular in article 44 in paragraphs 2 and 3. The special applicants are candidates from large families (three children and more), candidates with a brother or sister, an active student in the first cycle, orphans without either one or both parents or children of unmarried mothers with one or two non-recognized children, parents, children, siblings, spouses who are blind or deaf or kidney patients, on dialysis or suffering from Duchene muscular dystrophy or a category of people with special needs because they have mobility problems due to disability over 67 per cent, children of victims of terrorism. A provision is also made for under-represented social groups or even specifically for the Muslims living at Thrace.

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