

The loser's path: the policies of change in higher education in Mexico

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Abstract: Paths lead us down different ways. The decisions we make when choosing a path are responsible for getting us to where we had planned. Over the past three decades, higher education in Mexico has gone through several paths of academic and organizational reconfiguration and restructuring. These paths have been the product of exogenous and endogenous factors linked to policies and politics, which have led to the creation of groups and complex structures in universities. The path through which Mexican higher education now moves is restrictive, and demands changes and results in order to maintain state funding and support.

This research consists of the analytical description of some processes of change in the structures of public universities following reforms introduced in the 1990s towards better quality and evaluation. From a perspective of institutional change and public policy analysis, I have taken international change policies as a guide to understand the patterns and processes observed in higher education in Mexico in recent years. I describe the processes of change towards quality, evaluation and diversification of higher education institutions and the paths taken by Mexican universities. In closing, I enumerate the determining factors in this series of changes that allow us to take a look at the current state of higher education in Mexico and possible guidelines for its analysis. **Key words:** institutional change, educational policies, reforms, trends in education, quality, evaluation.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, higher education in Mexico has undergone changes and been subjected to reform in all its sub-systems. International agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank (WB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) believed that the beginning of a new century called for a new type of higher education. These institutions formulated recommendations to design new strategies for change in higher edu-

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cation institutions and to direct educational research towards a “modernization”¹ of education through change and improvement strategies, which led to policies aimed at transforming the role of public higher education towards quality and assessment parameters set by international agencies and trends. Universities, in turn, adapted these policies to their institutional context through plans, programs and models, and an organizational restructuring that created new actors. Academic, labor union, political, student and administrative players were at the core of the new higher education model. A new era of market-led modernization under the influence of those international policies began (Acosta, 2004).

Educational policies in those decades moved education towards the concept of quality as an imperative and an answer to the demands for improvement in education, as well as the goal of having prestigious universities. On the other hand, modernization showed the State as a restrictive and evaluating entity that conditioned higher education institutions’ budget through parameters that measured and assessed achievements and improvements in the institutions’ output (Acosta, 2006). Institutional assessment generated programs to measure the quality of faculty and researchers and to offer them bonuses or other income added to their salary, positioning them on a list of productive or unproductive academic staff (de Vries, 2007). In turn, educational programs were evaluated in order to achieve the quality and accreditation that would turn them into one more of the higher education institutions’ inputs in their competition to be the best. This led to the creation of agencies that accredited university programs and administration, shaping the university along the lines of a business model (Mendoza, 2003). These were only a few of the instances where the possible effects of the new public policies could be observed.

The first path of this research seeks to analyze the main roads taken by the study of the reforms and change in higher education. This first section describes the studies and their settings in higher education nationally and globally in order to find out what the research on change and reform is focused on. Through a review of the literature, the lines through which different countries chose a path to start changes are sketched out. In the early 1990s, educational systems worldwide were reshaped by the policies introduced by international agencies. The scene of higher education in Mexico led to new ways of thinking about institutional organization along lines of market and competition (Alonso, 2006). Globally, higher education became diversified and differentiated as a consequence of supply and demand. To this was added a decentralization and transformation of the State due to an outworn economic model (Diefenbach, 2009). Therefore, reforms to higher education in those decades pointed towards accountability, assessment, quality, equality, merit-based, and internationalization systems (Kent, 2000).

¹ “Modernization” refers to the second stage of change in universities after the widespread growth of educational supply and demand in the 1950s and 60s. It was followed by a series of institutional rules and norms that set the patterns for change in current higher education through mechanisms of assessment, accreditation, and accountability.

Several lines of action and strategies were created by the Mexican government to reform higher education towards a modern entity that could achieve quality standards (a decentralization of the institutional apparatus, autonomy, accountability, teacher training programs and alternative sources of financing, among others). In the same period of the 1990s there was a diversification of the educational offer of both public and private entities (Acosta, 2004). Institutions such as Decentralized Technological Institutes, Technological Universities, Inter-Cultural Universities and the Poly-Technical Universities began to compete directly with a wide range of private institutions offering educational programs. This is where the next path of analysis begins, because due to the modernization processes the private institutions became more relevant and constituted another political, directive, and administrative force, with a business view that would later be adopted by public education through policies of incentives, merit-based payment, assessment, and other mechanisms (Heras, 2005).

Finally, in the framework of the reforms and policies that took place in that decade, there were also some changes in Mexico's political spheres; that is, the path of abandonment. The source of those changes is somewhat uncertain, since it is not known if they were an effect of the policies or of the changes around the world, but the fact is that they did have effects on Mexico's educational systems, leading to a different dynamic in the universities' substantial functions. Social needs, governmental policies and the demands of the business sector gave rise to a multi-conceptual, multiform university, filled with uncertainty and now adapting to current trends in education (Acosta, 2004).

The most controversial issue, however, is the political intention of the policies in their formulation and later implementation. Likewise, the actors involved in the cycle of the policies have taken different views of the way in which the action plans, management, financing, and restructuring of the different institutional areas of the universities have been conducted. The four sections of this paper attempt to provide an overall view and perspective of the changes that have taken place in Mexican higher education in recent decades. This research intends to be a starting point to present a descriptive overview of the international agencies, the programs created thanks to them, and the way in which global change processes in Mexican higher education have been analyzed. Although it is true that higher education is a kaleidoscope, we need to focus on a specific path and, like the oracle at Delphi, be able to visualize a future based on the choice made. Hence, I will start by describing some studies on reforms and institutional change, as well as the implications they have had.

The diverse paths of change: reforms and consequences in a changing environment

If we were to make an analogy with what Miguel de Cervantes said about the wanderer who knows because he sees and reads a lot, and then apply it to the scrutiny of public policies and

the changes that are expected to happen, we could place policy analysis as a guiding axis that allowed us to visualize this change. However, policies in themselves are not the solution to problems but a means to achieve a possible solution (Aguilar, 2009). Different scenarios, with their respective actors, are the ones that allow or do not allow policies to be implemented. It is clear that every phase of the policies must be closely linked to the politics and the government system of each region in order to make the objectives match the resources and the political intentions (Lahera, 2004). This is a key factor when trying to adopt an international policy and implement it in a context different from the one proposed by the agencies (in this case, the OECD or the WB), because the needs (shortages, lack of norms, deeply rooted traditions) and the ways to address them (resources, management capacity, agreements) are different in each social and historical context (Albach, 2008). Examples such as the millennium statement on education, standardized exams (PISA), systems of credits and loans for infrastructure, programs for the improvement of the staff and the development of capabilities and competences of the students, processes for the allocation of resources by output, input and quality (WB, 1994; OECD, 1997; UNESCO, 1995; UNESCO, 1998; OECD, 2003; WB, 2008), allow us to get a glimpse of some proposals made by this type of institutions to make changes in higher education.

Reform processes put forward by the policies of international agencies did not have the same results in contexts that were not prepared to implement them. This is why it is necessary that they fit well with the political, economic, and social environment in political argumentation in order to adapt the technical work to the current circumstances (Majone, 1997). For this reason, decisions made by policy makers describe the different scenarios that can be arrived to with such a policy (or policies), and set the standards for the analysis of the results obtained (Roth Deubel, 2006). A case in point would be the fact that different countries began reform processes through programs based on recommendations made by international agencies (Maldonado and Malee, 2014). Each country directed (perhaps) its experience of change towards the development of policies to re-structure higher education.² Such policies were guided by proposals and diagnoses made in each one of the regions (OECD and WB reports on the quality, equality, pertinence, and financial feasibility) about their educational systems (WB, 1994; OECD, 1998). However, there was a noticeable transmutation of the relationship between the State and the university, and therefore with the social space of the institutional *ethos*, which created a gap between economic development and a responsible democratization of the university (Amaral and Neave, 2014).

To provide some context on the approach and analytic perspectives in Mexico, and thus have an overview on the issues that emerged, we reviewed the literature on spaces of change

² It is still difficult to ascertain if the changes were an effect of the policies or of social and cultural factors shaped by the universities themselves and groups within them, because most of the times the results were not the ones planned for but a determining factor that gave rise to new patterns, norms, customs, and power groups (De Vries, 2004; Zarate, 2003; Gil, 2006).

and policies. We found several lines of study in order to describe how the reforms were carried out, as well as their perspectives for action in higher education in Mexico. One of them addresses the change in the rules and the implications of their implementation in higher education in the 1990s: how the changes were made, what kind of changes they were, and how they originated (Brunner and Peña, 2008; Kent, 2002; Kent, 2009; Acosta, 2006; De Vries, 2005). These studies describe the process of change and the economic, social and political consequences it brought about in universities, and they serve as a guide to determine the specific actions taken and the action scenarios created.

Other studies we found view the changes under a perspective of impact and implications for their implementation in university spaces. These studies take as a conclusion *what* changed (rules, actors, internal processes, and accountability, quality and financing systems), but not the results achieved by the change (Rodríguez, 2000; Kent, 2002; Kent, 2009; De Vries, 2005; Acosta, 2004). A third line of study analyzes the power and organization structures within the universities, and the consequences they have in the creation of new actors and their roles (Acosta, 2006; Acosta 2010; López Zárata, 2003.). Finally, there was a fourth line of studies focused on analyses of the policies and the results obtained in university processes (Alcántara, 2008; Crespo, 2008; Da Rocha Silva, 2008).

The following chart summarizes the researchers' approaches and conclusions, as well as the authors that deal with issues of change and reform processes. It is worth mentioning that this kind of research serves as a guide to learn about processes of change in higher education in recent decades. However, there is a large body of empirical research dealing with change processes in different educational spaces.

Chart 1. Lines of research on policies and reform

| Type of study | Research | Authors |
|--|---|--|
| Reforms in higher education (descriptive study) | Change in the rules and its implications on higher education policies | Brunner and Peña, 2008; Kent, 2002; Kent, 2009; Acosta, 2006; De Vries, 2005 |
| Reforms and changes (organizational analysis descriptive study) | Impacts and implications on the systems | Rodríguez, 2000; Kent, 2002; Kent, 2009; De Vries, 2005; Acosta, 2004 |
| Processes of change in the universities (institutional analysis descriptive study) | Power structures and organization | Acosta, 2006; Acosta 2010; López Zárata, 2003 |
| Policy analysis (policy analysis descriptive study) | Policy and results analysis | Alcántara, 2008; Crespo, 2008; Da Rocha Silva, 2008 |

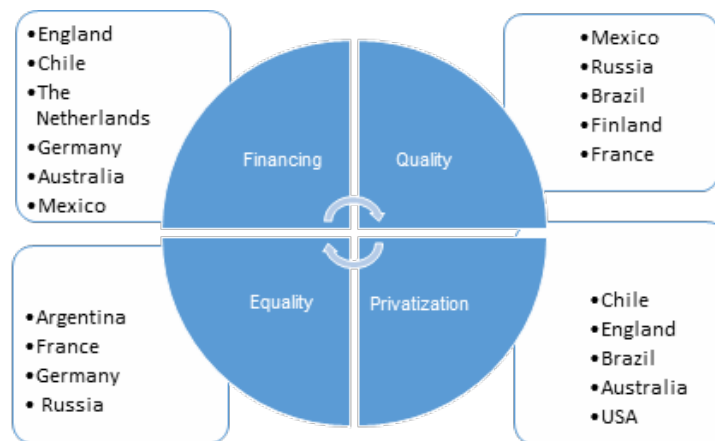
Source: based on the documents reviewed

These studies describe different types of processes of change and their relationship with public policies after the reform in the 1990s. Most of them point to actors as key players³ and describe the way in which changes took place in different contexts and specific spaces. The spaces themselves are created and determined by the policies and agreements between the power groups interested in taking part in the changes (Acosta, 2004). That is where that the influence of international agencies becomes stronger in the reform. After the first recommendations of the WB on critical issues in higher education, it was decided that there should be a diversified and differentiated system to cover the educational demand. It became necessary to create alternate sources of financing and conduct a study on the capabilities of the State to cover the expense of education, which is why assessment became a key issue to learn about the situation of higher education institutions (World Bank, 1994). Based on these recommendations for the formulation of policies, (some) countries created or (most) replicated educational models to address the problems of what they called an “outworn” university model, and in turn followed global educational trends (Ribeiro, 2002). These two issues are very important to visualize the introduction of quality processes in universities through policies, but first I will describe the global trend panorama, and in the next section I will define the scenarios.

Trends on higher education established that educational systems should focus on key factors for the economic development of each region. From this perspective, international studies on change and reforms show a very diverse panorama of the paths taken by educational systems. While it is true that the era of reforms began in the 1980s and 90s, changes are still taking place in different latitudes. The importance of knowing where they are headed and which are the motivators of change generates a need to study the phenomenon. In this sense, processes of change take shape according to global educational trends and are directed towards four fundamental lines: quality, equality, privatization, and financing (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009). In the studies on processes of change reviewed, the trends are positioned along an analytical diagram in order to see the kind of decisions made by governments and how policies have an impact on shaping new scenarios in higher education.

³ ‘Actor’ in this paper refers to those who were directly involved in reform processes (faculty, rectors, executives, union leaders, government officials, students, administrators). Key actors were not selected because it was not considered necessary for the analysis, since we only present a chart of what happened and how it happened.

Diagram 1. Global Trends and Reform Processes



Source: based on the documents reviewed

As can be seen, the different countries on which we reviewed the literature have had some kind of tendency towards one or another line of positioning. Some can be found in two quadrants because, according to the studies, they directed their reform processes towards a specific axis. Global trends on higher education set the guidelines followed by change processes in different countries (Albach, 2008). It can be inferred that these trends set the central issues from which higher education must begin to work in order to avoid being out of step with the global environment. In Mexico, policies have been positioned between the quadrants of restrictive financing (Acosta, 2004) and quality of education (Rubio, 2006), through the launching of programs to improve the faculty (PROMEP, SNI, academic bodies, incentives), accreditation, and assessment (COPAES, CIEES).

This has been the panorama in Mexico in recent decades, and these have been some of the angles that education scholars have explored to better understand the patterns of change (Acosta, 2004; Kent, 2008; Zarate, 2008). Quality and assessment as standard bearers of policies, as well as restrictive systems that to some extent restrict the university's functions and autonomy, create the new university of the twenty-first century. This new educational figure also holds within it new actors who combine influence, power and relationships to form academic bodies that make decisions and influence institutional relationships (Crozier and Friedberg, 1990). The new figures become relevant because they are the ones who create the determining factors for the policies to be implemented, since the agreements reached within the universities favor their performance and application. In the next section I will describe these processes as the basis for changes towards quality, as well as the results they have brought about. There remains another path to be explored, but without an objective it would be just walking for the sake of walking.

The path of change: the processes of restriction, quality, and assessment

The obstacles faced by higher education in the last two decades have been many. Restrictive policies, market-oriented thinking, low budgets, and quality are just a few of the imperatives demanded from tertiary education. International agencies' proposals then and now have favored promoting and developing so-called world class universities (Salmi, 2009). Rankings and indicators are now the means to measure quality in universities and determine whether or not they are globally competitive (López Segrera, 2003). That is, educational demand is now increasingly greater, and evaluators have ever more demanding standards. The tendencies with which education has gone through reform processes in recent decades make educational systems and governments in diverse contexts adapt and establish policies according to such measures. The imperative is to have good results in evaluations and to create standardized systems that can measure the performance of the faculty, researchers, administrative staff, rectors, and executives, in generating high indicators. The capabilities that a university must have nowadays go beyond the creation and application of knowledge and social awareness: now, they are directed towards raising its indicators and creating relevant, efficient and effective models to satisfy the requirements of the business sector to have competent human capital (López Segrera, 2010).

Mapping these educational trends requires elucidating the key features that made policies focus on business globalization issues. Mexico's entry into this global context created spaces for commercial exchange and openness, diversification, economic exchange, long-term planning agreements, as well as programs for the improvement of different social issues that helped direct the action of policies towards the solution of specific problems (Alonso, 2006). One of these spaces is higher education, which in this dynamic acquires a role with the implementation of new programs, curricular reforms, open spaces for academic exchange, quality management systems, incentives, accreditations and evaluations that impel institutions to change their internal ways of thinking (De Vries y Mendiola, 2005). This aspect becomes clear and essential when we analyze the transformation of higher education in Mexico.

In order to create educational reform scenarios, we must first define the role played by institutions in this process. First of all, in the 1980s Mexico experienced a severe economic crisis that had devastating effects on several areas of government. The consequences of bad decisions forced the State to ask for the help of international agencies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) lent the help required for the country to face the crisis and currency devaluation it suffered. Meanwhile, government models worldwide were changing due to crises in other States. Because of the changes produced in the social and economic spheres worldwide and the disappearance of the welfare state, a new perspective of action by the different areas of the State began to emerge which called for a different way of centralizing decisions, power, and accountability. This brought a series of reforms in state structures that sought to reinforce the

political-governmental system in search of a new form of organization and management (*new public management*)⁴ (Hood, 2011).

It must be pointed out that the management style of the current State led to the crisis of the state system and forced it to change into a more managerial one that reduced its direct participation in the actions and decisions of economic organizations. It became a regulatory State that creates norms to re-formulate structures, pushing the state and business spheres towards what has been called the new institutional economy⁵ (North, 2012), which produces a managerial state with business-like patterns and new resources to manage public action (Hood, 2011).

There were several factors that triggered the new public policies in economic and social environments. The university was one of the institutions most strongly criticized by international agencies because it was seen as a weak, problematic institution with no clear (productive) goals (Alcantar, 2009). In this market-oriented view, the relationship between State and university began to be regulated, and new formats of interaction between them (assessment, accreditation, accountability) were created. The norms and change in the rules presented by the State for the universities as policies favored, on the one hand, the detachment of the financial part supported by the State and, on the other hand, created an accountability system in universities (Kent, 2009). Some power groups took extreme positions and new actors were created in different spheres, which made the functions of the university more complex and institutionalized new organizational rules, customs and cultures (Acosta, 2010).

This is the direct relationship that there is, or must be, between State and society, from the formation and belonging to groups with a hierarchical structure (Lapassade, 2008). To understand it we must explain how institutions were transformed towards a type of entities with restricted functions, new mechanisms of action, and new rules, in all the areas of the State (Vargas, 2000). The new rules dictate the processes through which the different players enter or will enter the competition for spheres of power, through a relational process (Crozier and Friedberg, 1990). These rules are the axis of policies, and help to apply them correctly. Thus, the policies created for different scenarios of the State's actions allowed for the creation of diverse programs and projects in the educational, health, economy, and international relationships sectors, among others.

As described in the previous section, the changes were accompanied by an institutionalization of the institutions; that is, when the actors involved and the structure adopt them as their own and define them as part of the structure these changes are seen as necessary for a proper operation of the relationship between structure (policies) and actors (State, universities, businesses, society) (Guy, 2003). The predominant part of the reform was the fact that the business

⁴ The term 'new public management' refers to a wide-ranging subject that will not be addressed in this research. We will only take it as a historical and geographic reference to contextualize the state and institutional reforms we will analyze later as lines of study.

⁵ For further analysis of this concept see Coase (1984) and North (1990).

structures were the ones that introduced a model that followed the needs of the economy. In the document drafted by the WB (1994) on higher education, the universities are described as systems in crisis, because they are not able to absorb the demand and offer quality education, and generate a very heavy expense for the State apparatus (World Bank, 1994).

In this document the WB (1994) stipulates a series of policy proposals to generate new models for higher education, based mostly on redefining financing and the way the State provides education. It also points out that more attention must be paid to improving and creating quality models that foster the formation of researchers and an increase in research. The key to determine if this is achieved effectively or not is the constant evaluation of researchers and the faculty to learn about their skills in creating and transmitting knowledge. Universities, in turn, must create programs that are appropriate to the demands of the productive market, taking advantage of the resources of innovation and technological development, and finally, generate the appropriate institutional factors to make the system equitable and available to those who have the capabilities to obtain it (World Bank, 1994).

From this perspective of the WB, the lines of action directed at changing higher education in the 1990s used an economic analysis methodology to formulate policies and implement them in a context where they would have an impact on the quality of education. The consequences of using this kind of methodologies are that they apply classic market techniques to the functions of policy creation; i.e., the design of the educational policies themselves in this case establishes economic patterns that are applied to the field of education and create gaps in the social sphere of the university's mission (Coraggio, 1995). The schemes for application propose that universities – as proposed by the WB – create markets for education that allow for a diversification of educational system through differentiated financing, and that relationships within the universities change towards efficiency and production standards (World Bank, 1994).

The system of university markets gives us a glimpse into the organization and the intentions of the WB for the financing of universities, from a dynamic marketplace position that diversifies the options of educational offer (Brunner and Uribe, 2007). The rationale behind this was that educational policies would allow for new internal market patterns in universities and create scenarios for competition within (academic level of the faculty, research, quality and competitive students) and without (institutional prestige, competitive programs, financing plans). The scenarios configured new relationships between the actors which were most influential in getting state regulations to allow for the opening of new educational institutions. The social demand, together with the demands and state restrictions on higher education, was to a great extent the creator of this new offer of “educational services” that would satisfy the demand required (Kent, 2009)

From this perspective of changes in the universities' rationale, educational markets create relationships of exchange and competition under a weak state regulation that gives them free

rein, but also regulates the interaction between the public and the private spheres (Brunner and Uribe, 2007). Universities change their positions and internal rules for the selection and admittance of students, and private institutions take advantage of this opportunity to increase their participation and offer options for those who were left out of a public university (Gil Antón, 2005). The reform process led to the strengthening of some private institutions and the creation of other types of institutions that absorbed the demand that public education could not cover. According to Acosta (2012), the 1990s were the decade when private education had the greatest growth, with an average 44 private institutions being registered every year and a fourfold increase in their number of students (Acosta, 2012).

These changes were a possible outcome of the reform processes in which the State promoted different administrative phenomena in the social and economic sectors. Some of them gave rise to the creation of programs and norms for higher education. The norm of incentives or *merit pay*⁶ was one of the most widespread, but the results were not always the ones expected because the competition and dispute for resources had an effect on the scientific output and the relationships among academics (Ordorica and Navarro, 2006). After market schemes that allowed for the proliferation of diverse institutions, both public and private, and the implementation of programs destined to improve the quality of faculty, researchers, and curricula, education was immersed in different paths whose goal was to diversify the educational offer. Some of them were restrictive, some were administrative-bureaucratic, and some others sought to enhance the legitimacy of teachers, researchers, and executives, but all of them aimed to restructure universities (Acosta, 2004).

The policies emerged as government actions in search of change and with specific objectives, goals and strategies. However, during their implementation they were institutionalized according to the organizational ways of each university and to the norms, customs and values they preserved, since they sought, in form and in structure, to solve a problem detected in the educational sector by inserting rules adapted to the institutions and originated in international environments (Amaral and Neave, 2014). Nevertheless, the reality of their formulation, execution and functioning often differs from the end goal of the policies, since they can be used either to assert the governing power or as a source of political manipulation (Subirats, Knoepfel, Larrue, and Varone, 2008). This was precisely what happened in some Mexican universities. Policies were politicized to such an extent that there were major disagreements and conflicts due to the reforms in higher education (University of Guadalajara, UNISON, BUAP, to mention a few cases).

⁶ The term merit pay is adopted by the State as a form of assessment of faculty and researchers based on their scientific output and results. It emerged as a compensatory and evaluative policy that fosters competition among peers and a system of bonuses for good academic performance in a given term.

The path of abandonment: the actors and scenarios of change

After the first indications of the State's change in higher education, the modernization schemes in the late 1990s were based on an internal, evaluative reform. New evaluative agencies such as the Inter-Institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CIEES) and accreditation agencies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Higher Education (COPAES), both of them key figures in the study of the modernization of education, acquired great relevance in the processes of institutional change. However, in this paper I will not look into these agencies, but only take them as a reference to focus on the stage of the changes in education.

Following the recommendations made by the OECD and the WB, policies were based on agreements to improve the quality of higher education and generate quality standards in universities (Maldonado, 2000). Therefore, assessment was established as a regular practice in universities through different types of programs that evaluated the quality of the services and products offered (SNI, Desirable profile for teachers, Quality and Excellence Registry for Graduate Programs, incentives for outstanding teaching performance, among others). These policies met with different reactions from the actors⁷, since universities had to implement management models to measure the quality of their services. Meanwhile, teachers were increasingly attracted to further training and professional advancement, which would help them obtain better wages and contribute to create institutional indicators (Kent, 2009).

Structural changes were accompanied by the development of policies to finance and reward teachers and institutions who met quality parameters. The introduction of councils, academic bodies, directive boards, changes in the figure and attributions of the rector, departments and academic divisions are a reflection of the segmentation of higher education in this period in response to governmental policies. Overall we can see, as Acosta (2010) points out, that the reforms led to a new relationship between the universities and the State, which produced a complex form of governance in universities, as well as power and institutional control structures that empowered certain political and academic figures and fragmented, or divided, the conformation of universities (Acosta, 2010).

The changes mentioned so far were originated with a specific political goal: to improve education. However, it is not clear if this was the primary goal, or just a consequence of what the State presented as an alternative to institutional crises. That is, the political goals of the policies were an important factor that shows how scenarios and actors create links to reach agreements and institutions change their rules to adapt to them. From this we can conclude that the political construction of policies within organizations and societies is a key factor in determining and defining the political goals that the policies will have. The way in which individuals relate with

⁷ An actor may be a person, one or several public, private, social organizations or groups of individuals who share a given shared space. All these actors and entities shape the configuration of policies in the spaces allotted for it.

each other and share a space or political arena will depend on the result of such decisions, and thus create the road to be followed by the policies that will make the changes.

In the case of Mexico, it is evident that the reforms signaled the arrival of an "evaluative State" that completely changed every scheme of financial, normative and structural relationship and dependence with its agencies. A consequence of this was that in recent decades higher education experienced very drastic changes in its ways to obtain financing, its student selection processes, its scientific output and its accountability, to mention just a few. In the global context that has characterized the relationships between countries in different spheres worldwide, the trends in higher education have led to a number of substantial changes in educational systems. The new views of state government and the proposals of international agencies are a point of reference and of great importance to set the standards that universities must have. Internationalization, widespread growth, access and equality, quality assurance, accountability, quality frameworks, as well as the financing and privatization of higher education, are some of the current trends that help analyze and understand globalization in the sphere of education.

The scenarios of the reform of higher education were established from different perspectives, because the actors were diverse and configured different educational scenarios. Each one of them had different interests and, therefore, the goals they pursued were distinct. The result was that the government's agenda included a number of issues that had an impact on the institutional policies of the universities. This had an effect on the conception and application of politics and policy in different scenarios of university action, coercion and reaction. In order for this to happen, political agreements started to be developed to formulate and implement the policies, which led to an intensification of the struggle for power and political interests. In this case, the power to make decisions and the ability to create agreements are linked to belonging to a particular group within the institutions. Likewise, the rules and authority system established by groups and communities are the foundations for the development of policies within institutional spaces (Stone, 2012).

This makes sense in the actual makeup of the political and policy networks through which individuals with different perspectives and diverse ways of behavior, languages and cultures, create structures to coexist and interact in a shared space. In the case of universities, it became clear that the policies of change modified their management and governance schemes (Acosta, 2010). Rules were established from a perspective of evaluation and quality, which modified the cultural and political community in the universities and led to a change in their norms, traditions, history, and institutional language. What used to be regarded as problems were now possible solutions, or to the contrary, what used to be a solution came to be seen as a problem. If we review the literature on the conflicts that arose around this issue, we realize that each State had its frictions in that time of change (Acosta, 2004; Kent, 2002; Zárate, 2003; Acosta, 2006, 2006a; De Vries, 2001).

New groups, new rules, the same packaging. This kind of modifications requires good systems of government, governance, and governability, but most of all, agreements between individuals. Without these agreements it would be difficult to carry out the plans in the policies. This means that decision makers are not immune from individualizing their decisions according to their own convenience. The result is that policies are within a paradoxical design model between the individually rational, the collective, and the comprehensive, where decisions are based only on collective needs, creating a paradox between individual and common aims (Stone, 2012).

However, in order for this series of processes to take place it is necessary that the actions to be performed go hand in hand with the decisions that individuals make to achieve consensus. Usually, the most common components are incentives, especially economic ones (Rodríguez Fazzone, 2006). The kind of incentives created will depend on the place and the actions expected. They may take the shape of a gain or payment, some will be given for good performance, and others for not breaking an imposed restriction (Stone, 2012). Thus, one of the means the federal government found was to promote systems of incentives to universities.

Through the creation of incentive policies, the government sought to enact the new schemes mentioned above in search of a reaction in the universities. Incentives were seen as a means in themselves and not as an end. The effect of this series of policies was that in their implementation there was a diversity of actors involved and unexpected effects. This is relevant because when rewards are given for actions undertaken people follow indications, but as time goes on they again break the rule, and when a wrongful action is not restricted, it tends to be repeated. The consequence is that the incentive model does not have a well-defined original aim, and is only used as a stopgap measure that seeks to reach agreements and consensus (Stone, 2012).

From this dynamic of play and action we can identify incentives clearly as policies of change in those who formulate them (legislators, designers and analysts), those who implement them (bureaucrats and inspectors) and those who receive them (individuals, groups, labor unions). The rationale behind this is that universities are now making a play for their budget. The game results in a large and diverse for the actors involved in the deployment of this incentive system on the public action of universities. Power groups are now competing for the spaces where there is a budget involved, and the output in papers, books and essays produced by academic bodies and researchers conditions their own income level. It is a market system: your output determines how much you are worth.

In conclusion, I find that the topics addressed here lay out some of the central issues that higher education has had to deal with in recent decades. Finally, the current trends set new issues and changes for higher education. One of the main trends today is that of globalization and internationalization, where global schemes generate the roads to be followed by higher education. Globalization is often beyond the reach of the actors at a micro level, of States, or

of the universities themselves, which contributes to an institutional isomorphism in search of higher standards that make universities competitive (Powell and DiMaggio, 1983). On the other hand, internationalization has been a strategy followed by these very institutions in order to join a global process, training individuals who will fit in this environment (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley, 2009).

Due to these reforms, higher education has experienced very drastic changes in recent decades. The global context has inserted relationships between countries into the different environments and contexts of the countries and their educational systems. The trends in higher education have led to a number of substantial changes aimed at internationalization, mass growth, access and equality, quality assurance, accountability, quality frameworks, financing, and the privatization of higher education, among others (Altbach, Reisberg y Rumbley, 2009). Therefore, educational trends are contextualized by global aspects that are part of what the reforms sought.

These trends were set based on the world conferences on higher education held by UNESCO (1998, 2009). The result of both conferences can be summarized in goals and objectives to be achieved by universities and governments. Based on a diagnostic of the current state of education, measures to be taken were presented with the aim of adapting the university to the needs of society and the demands of a competitive world, a university that offered quality, equality, and met social needs. This was another paradox of the policies of modernization: they pushed the university towards a market scheme. The new rules established private actors with a direct involvement in the behavior of universities. Accreditation, evaluation and certification agencies form part of the new actors. The conditioning policies and demands of external actors drive the policies in a number of scenarios of institutional activity (Maldonado and Malee, 2014).

International, regional and local bodies are also actors who influenced and still influence decisions on educational policies in many countries (Albach, 2008). Like the UNESCO conferences, there are also alternative actors who, through economic support (the World Bank), programs, reports, agreements (UNESCO), as well as processes of change and integration on critical educational (OECD), have a direct influence on issues such as financing, quality and, more closely, governmental policies. All these entities present reports where they show their diagnoses and suggestions for specific issues in higher education, which countries take into account when making policy decisions. However, in closing this analysis I will discuss the influence and importance of the analysis and design of policies for changes, and how they are understood.

The end of the path: conclusions and possible solutions

As a conclusion of this paper, it can be said that the approach of study of policies as references of action in higher education seeks to establish the possible decision(s) that create and execute them, as well as the different scenarios in which this will take place. A part of the analysis of

these policies says that the global components (OECD, WB, UNESCO) create factors that have direct repercussions on the local systems (universities) that formulate policies, form political environments, and at the same time come together when making decisions on issues and their possible solutions. As I pointed out in the previous section, international (macro) agencies set the policy standards for decision-making in the specific (micro) spaces. In the space occupied by higher education policies, context has a very important role. Its importance stems from each country's level of educational development, as well as its ability to implement or adapt to them. In highly developed countries, changes are introduced in a profound way so that they will be visible and follow a global environment and global trends. In other countries, changes are more superficial and only have a limited effect on their vision and behavior.

The schemes that produce changes in higher education are based on complex factors established both within and outside the universities. Changes in belief systems, the system of fields of action and the arenas where rules are set are important in the analysis of how policies take shape. Here it may be useful to remember what Capano said about how "changes are brought about by relationships of power created by the interests and beliefs of the actors involved in them, who interact with each other within the (cultural, organizational, institutional) space they create to establish the development of policies" (Capano, 1996: 270). Hence, I can infer that the implementation of a public policy must be democratic, participative, and relevant to the environment where it is being implemented. In matters of higher education, policies for higher education institutions must be aimed at fulfilling the institutions' social mission. To do this, the form of government will be of great importance when making decisions and formulating the institutional ethos. The policies that emerge must be directed towards taking full advantage of the resources generated during the course by teachers, students, executives, research groups and academic bodies.

The path that has brought the university to the present has been a winding one, sometimes uphill, sometimes downhill. What is certain is that the university has sustained serious injuries and has mutated its form. Its mirror shows a different reflection now: more modern, more market-oriented, but one that has required profound changes.

The reforms undertaken due to the recommendations of international agencies changed the relationships and generated controversy on the necessary correspondence between the State, the university and the international agencies themselves in the formulation of policies. Each one of them responds through its work to a particular mission, whether it is through the sphere of structural organization under actors with rules established by groups of power (Crozier and Friedberg, 1990), through the demands of the market and the rationale of economy and exchange (North, 2012), or as the need to create an own, separate culture that safeguards resources and knowledge (Ortega y Gasset, 2007).

The critical or crucial issues the university has had to deal with require the new actors (managers, faculty, government, society) to rethink their old roles and adapt them to the new policies. This kind of requirements in a globalized environment does not imply that they should set aside social issues to cater to the demands of the economic or governmental sectors. Universities now fulfill a twofold function, as generators of knowledge and social cohesion. The changes made have had a direct effect on their own historical evolution that both institutes and institutionalizes the political axes of government and power.

The loser's path goes on, but its destination is still uncertain.

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