Access to Higher Education in the Post-Soviet States: Between Soviet Legacy and Global Challenges

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Post-Soviet States

Biggest countries (populations):
Russia – 140 mln
Ukraine – 45 mln
Uzbekistan – 30 mln
Kazakhstan – 16 mln
Global Talent Pool by 2020 (OECD). Share of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary degree by 2020

Source: Garcia de León, P., Heckmann, C., and Rojas González, G. 2012. What will the global talent pool look like in 2020?
How can sociology contribute to understanding of massification and equity

• **Three stages of massification** depending on the level of participation (from elite to mass to universal) signifies qualitative changes in the nature and role of higher education in a society which transforms from reproduction of the elite through training a broad range of professionals to an adaptation of wider population to rapid social and technological changes in a society (Trow 1972, 2006);

• **Credential inflation**, as higher education expands, a process more determined by supply than demand, as a process of printing paper by government in a situation when there is no pressures to increase real level of qualification of labor force. Massification of education along with credentialism can not be associated with higher demand of the labor market or employers, but is rather a self-reproducing process generated by public pressure to expand access of population to higher education. (Collins 1979, 2002).

• **Effectively maintained inequality** once at a given level of education saturation has been achieved, quantitative inequalities in the odds are replaced by qualitative inequalities in the odds of getting on the more selective track that pushes forward inequalities at another level/track (Lucas 2001, Ayalon and Shavit 2004).
The nature of recent reforms (neoliberal tradition in economics):

- introducing market into the sector (including an assumption of consumer – supplier relations between a student and institution),
- user fees (tuition),
- reducing state funding,
- privatization of costs of higher education,
- demand for accountability for performance and emphasizing higher education’s role in the economy;
- higher education is mostly a private good, with mostly individual benefits, which helped to depart from the public mission of higher education.

(Neave and Van Vught 1991 cit. by Marginson and Rhoades 2002)
How can political economy contribute to understanding of massification and equity

Political economy approach: higher education as a positional good (Hirsch 1976)

- provides its holder with a **relative advantage** in a competition on the market of labor and social statuses. The most important features of positional goods are
  - their absolute scarcity at each level of position,
  - are rivalrous
  - are excludable.

- when the number of educated people with a given level of **credential** increases, the value of that credential must decline.

- there might be two solutions: to restrict access to this level of education and to develop a vertical hierarchy to enhance relative advantage for more prestigious institutions.
How can political economy contribute to understanding of massification and equity

- The **invisible hand of market does not work on education markets**: normal market rules do not work in elite segment, and lower segment is limited by positional ceiling of any social value of their educational products. As a result, introduction of market mechanism can not ensure increasing effectiveness of educational system and only fix the gaps between elite and non-elite sectors (Marginson 1997).

- Employing positional good as an intellectual device enables to see another important thing – **social limits of meritocracy**. More investment in education by one person reduces the value of the positional investments of others, positional goods are intrinsically inter-dependent. Competition for a fixed number of positional goods at each level of advantage is a zero-sum game where one individual wins only at the expense of another (Hirsch 1976).
The set of reforms in higher education in the countries of the region was similar:

- establishment of non-state sector of higher education;
- introduction of user fees (in public sector as well);
- loans for education;
- unified national test to replace graduation exams in secondary school and admission exams to higher education;
- differentiation and stratification of institutional landscape.
The outcomes:

1. Massification
Higher Education Enrollments in the CIS 1991-2010, thousands

Source: CIS Statistical committee, UNESCO, Russian statistical committee
Higher education expansion in the region (1970-2009), gross enrollments ratio

Higher education expansion in international perspective, 1970-2009 (gross enrollment ratios)

Why massification?

- High participation in Soviet time;
- Higher education market tends to be driven more by supply than by demand;
- Structural transformation of the economy, a need in new skills and knowledge;
- High rate of return on higher education on the labor market (so far in Russia; not the case in Georgia already);
- Social status of non-manual work occupations / social mobility factor.
The outcomes

1. Massification

2. Privatization of costs:
## Privatization of costs: Decline of public funding

### Countries with the Lowest Share of p.c. GDP per Tertiary Student (2007-2010 data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Share of pc GDP for tertiary</th>
<th>Ratio of Tertiary to Primary</th>
<th>Ratio of Tertiary to Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary Gross enrollment ratio</th>
<th>Private Enrollment Share (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Liechtenstein</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Korea, Rep.</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>66.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Russian Fed.</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics in EdStats, July 2011. Note: Figures are for the most recent year with data available. Data were not available for 106 countries.
Privatization of costs: Fee-paying students in public sector as a major factor of massification

Proportions of fee-paying students in public and non-state higher educational institutions, 2010 (% of total enrollments)

Source: CIS Statistical committee 2010 data
Privatization of costs: Fee-paying students in public sector as a major factor of massification; fail of non-state sector - Russia

Higher Education Enrollments in Russia, 1991-2010 (thousands)

Source: Russian statistical committee
The outcomes

1. Massification
2. Privatization of costs.
3. Growing inequality?
Access issues

- Lack of research on access and equity in higher education (not high on the policy agenda);
- Most recent major research project was published as early as in 2004: traditional factors of inequality observed by Soviet sociologists since 1960s persist - income, social and cultural capital of the family, place of residence, type of secondary school (correlated with the family social capital);
- Interestingly, the social make-up of current students studying for free and paying for education does not significantly differ by parental education and social status (workers, specialists, etc.). Partly that could be associated with the inaccuracy of the instrument measuring social status, as well as with ambiguity of social structure of a Post-Soviet society.
Access issues: Proportion of female students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Countries: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Georgia
Inequalities in Access to Higher Education by Parental Education in Russia (students’ parents with higher education, 2011, %)

- fathers with HE
- mothers with HE

**Average in survey**
- Fathers: 45.8%
- Mothers: 54.2%

**1st tier public HEIs**
- Fathers: 57.5%
- Mothers: 66.5%

**2nd tier public HEIs**
- Fathers: 43.2%
- Mothers: 53.5%

**3rd tier public HEIs**
- Fathers: 29.9%
- Mothers: 45.6%

**Elite public HEI (Moscow State U-2004 survey)**
- Fathers: 83%
- Mothers: 85%

**Elite public HEI (Higher School of Economics 2009 survey)**
- Fathers: 88%
- Mothers: 87%

**Population with higher education in 40-60 age cohort**
- Fathers: 19.1%
- Mothers: 24.8%

Sources of data:
Typology of social inclusiveness of higher education systems (EUROSTUDENT data + Russia, by fathers’ education)

Figure 1: Typology of social inclusiveness of higher education systems - highest educational attainment of students’ fathers as a share of corresponding age group in general population (index: 1 = perfect balance) in %

Source: EUROSTUDENT IV, Subtopic C.3 and national statistics/LFS. No data: LT, SE, E/W. No part-time students in sample: DK, LV. High education background oversampled: DK. Low education includes ISCED 3c: CZ. Males of corresponding age are defined as males between the ages of 40 and 60 years old. Update 12.1.12

The role of national test in equalizing chances?

- No thorough research data about the impact of the test on the access/equity
- Some research data suggests that geographical mobility of students (studying outside their home region) has not changed; a hypothesis could be made about a slightly higher mobility to Moscow); needs further research
- Financial barriers persist (some research data on the investments in preparation for the tests resulting in higher test scores),
- Free higher education in a public sector, more prestigious in general, serves an incentive for higher mobility of students: among students studying for free the share of those who came from other regions is higher than among those who pay for education (43.3% vs. 29.0% study at other region)
- Segmentation and high differentiation of secondary schools which reproduce inequalities.
Lessons from the Region

- Massification * Declined demographics *Quality = multiplication of problems
- The design of a HE system with a universal access.
- Design of a higher education system with universal participation, leads to a discussion of a new model of a society, the purposes of higher education in a society (Higher education for all? A social norm? LLL?) and its content
- The notion of merit and admission systems (who can get higher education)
  - What do admission tests measure? How the skills/knowledge measured by the test are correlated with the future academic success and lifetime success? When can we go further towards new admission policies?
- Policies regarding recruitment, engagement and retention of students.
- Migration, mostly from former USSR countries: secondary schools are stating to face this challenges in a decade it will be an issue for higher education.
What can be done?

1. Search for a new conceptual framework to look at higher education. The higher education as a market/quasi-market and human capital theory (which finds more counter-arguments in recent economic research) embrace only economic dimension of education and thus
   - reduces educational mission to mostly instrumental function as skills demanded by a labor market/employability;
   - fosters privatization of education and commodification of knowledge and intrinsically undermine the public/common good essence of higher education;
   - can not catch the essence of education as a developmental process of learning, gaining knowledge, experiences, skills.

2. Change public and policy discourse according to #1 above

3. Do further interdisciplinary research and data collection

4. More realistic goal - improving educational quality at all levels, smoothing transitions between levels, enhancing mobility between levels and institutions

5. For transitional societies – to look for social consensus about the fair access to higher education and its funding.