Scenarios for Higher Education and Collective Awareness

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Abstract

As a well-known African proverb says, "it takes an entire village to educate a child". There is no doubt that the future of humanity rests in the hands of truly capable individuals and in their ability to act for the benefit of society and communities. Despite the need for fostering leadership and ability, still very little attention is paid in identifying what is the most suitable education systems for the next two decades and what are the dynamics between the personal choices of educators, learners and the communities, and the best pattern/blend of physical and virtual interactions [1] [2]. This paper describes four possible scenarios: 1) evolution of the current model for higher education (HE), corresponding to an highly competitive nationalised model in which students and communities have limited influence and choice, national/regional regimes allow limited collaboration, research and teaching are increasingly separated and competition is strong between high rank universities; 2) revolution or total departure from the current model. A new paradigm for higher education is proposed based on collective intelligence, collaboration between individuals and communities and a highly connected and integrated society. In this scenarios ICT plays an important part in connecting individuals and institutions and the legal regimes are highly harmonised to foster collaboration among a plurality of providers of HE; 3) multi model or integration of several models, to provide a flexible offer of education with integration between a traditional formal education and informal learning and collective intelligence and 4) segregation, in which different models of HE absolve separate functions and are granted different status in society, with a strong separation between formal education and informal education. These models consider the development of ICT technologies and possible directions towards increased centralisation, competition and control of individuals, society and the economy or towards an increased capacity for collaboration, openness, knowledge sharing and disperse centres of education and power [3]. They also consider macro-dynamics such as demographic changes, reactions to globalisation and economic crisis as highlighted by the OECD scenarios for the future of HE [4] to show how individuals making choices within an evolving context can equally affect the direction of a particular scenario and being affected. This paper uses multi-scale, multi-agent models to foresee optimal solutions within an evolving context [5][6][7]. Making use of models and their graphical representations, we discuss how the scenarios will evolve with economical trends, periods of growth and stasis, increased migration and globalisation, to respond to questions such as: What could be the evolution trajectory after a contraction or an improvement of the economy? What effect would increase the personal awareness and the perceptibility? Will an open society affect accessibility to HE?

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