University Autonomy in Ukraine: International Experience and National Interests

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Abstract   The paper focuses on the issue of university autonomy as a leverage of enhancing the quality of Ukrainian higher education, namely, how to effectively apply and appropriately adapt in Ukrainian universities international experience in the field of university autonomy. The authors trace the main tendencies in university autonomy from historical vantage point; identify the probable autonomy models for Ukraine with respect to its national identity, mentality and historical legacy; highlight the autonomous curriculum development as one of the vital aspects in the process.

Keywords: *statecraft factor, borderline culture, national identity, mentality, university autonomy, model*

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1. Introduction

The issues about the fate of higher education in Ukraine today are pivoting round those of reinstating its competitive character at the international education market and attaining the systemic character to all the reforming actions undertaken so far [1]. To gain the European and world quality horizons we are to trace the most effective restructuring technologies and principles that enabled them to reach the desired benchmark. One of the most often associated principles is that of University autonomy. Ukraine political and public mentality have reached consensus on the necessity of doing something in this direction. The range of issues in focus are those from retreat of the State as central financier of the university system to an increase in the entrepreneurial character of research and higher education institutions, the adaptation of curricula to labor market requirements and above all the call for new forms of quality assessment. Estimating the desired process outcome entails the pre-issue - the scope of probable university autonomy for Ukrainian leading universities in the realm of curriculum and organizational structures as well as in widening the scope of university financial independence.

In the article we aim to envisage the main tendencies in university autonomy from historical vantage point; to identify the probable autonomy models for Ukraine with respect to its national identity, mentality and historical legacy; to highlight the autonomous curriculum development as one of the vital aspects in the process.

With the independence of Ukraine in 1991 the necessity for transformations in Higher education as an integral part of democratization process was anticipated and the process of educational reform was launched. It was the time when the university boom started, as it was a mainstream and a challenge to those striving for excellence. In Ukraine there exist more than 800 institutions of higher education. The rapidly changing environment and the increasing demands to universities entail their constant search for effective ways out, for change, institutional reforms to ensure their basic mission. The options are many but which of them is the most effective? Today we often hear of the radical way out for enhancing their quality standards via decreasing the number of the institutions on the one hand and saving the budget on the other. The truth is that smaller number is definitely better managed and controlled. Moreover, the demographic situation in present-day Ukraine does not ameliorate the issue, sooner vice versa. We need to mention that Ukrainians would always treat education as a national value and Ukrainian students normally demonstrate high performance when enrolled in international programs. May be, the clue is not with the number of the universities but with the programs offered or principles the university education is based on.

1.1. Theoretical Explorations

The notion of autonomy – though never clearly defined – has been central to the debate on the reform of universities over the centuries. It was perceived as the key element that would allow for the transformation of the institution from the inside and guarantee the freedom of research and teaching. Autonomy is needed for each and every university to engage in the acquisition, transmission and preservation of knowledge the way it thinks best to serve science, its nation and the individual student. Autonomous university can better adapt to the demands of

society It allows an institution to do things to the curriculum, the consequences of which are good for its competitive image. [2].

The first traces of more focused attention to the issue of University autonomy were put into words in the Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education in 1998. According to it "autonomy" means "the independence of higher education from the State and all other forces of society to make decisions regarding its internal government, finance, administration and to establish its policies of education, research, extension work and other related activities" [3].

Don Anderson and Richard Johnson conducting the research on university autonomy in twenty countries identified seven main topics when considering institutional autonomy and the government's role vis a vis the institutions [4].

The evoked interest would result in lively discussion and pool of ideas from professionals and their arriving at the conclusion that "… far from this idealized vision of autonomy, we have to consider autonomy as a shifting notion which is historically dated, and which should be understood as a relational feature at a given moment in time with an important impact on the way that science functions" [2].

Further elaboration of the issue and positioning it on different countries educational contexts, considering their legacy and national identities resulted in broadening the range of questions in the realm of university autonomy.
One of the aspects is the principles of developing autonomous curricula and syllabi which would enable the content established by a particular university, on the one hand, meet the economic requirements of a particular region, and on the other meet the world academic standards and students interests and demands.

1.2. University Autonomy as the Leverage to Enhancing the Quality of Higher Education

In the field of Education Administration the significance of the issue is proved by the number of world forums (in 1988 in Lima, in Romania in May 1992, in Oslo in June 2003, in, Thailand in 2006) with the focus on the issue. "Universities will not become innovative and responsive to change unless they are given real autonomy…;" recommendation 1762 of the parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (30/06/20006) Art.4"… The assembly reaffirmed the right to academic freedom and university autonomy…" [5].

In Ukraine the issue would become the subject matter of publications in national media and be on the agenda at the Ministry of Education and Science Meetings after a group of leading universities formed a Consortium of Universities for Autonomy in 2003 and initiated discussion on university autonomy. In February 2005 they proposed to the President to run an autonomy experiment at 8 universities – Consortium members." The issue was thus reflected in the "Amendments to the Law on Higher Education", where the lines about autonomy were included. Yet we understand that the way from prescribed autonomy to "real" is not that fast, short and easy.

Why should universities be autonomous? According to Prof. Luc Weber, society needs universities because of the long term responsibility of universities towards society to

develop new knowledge and transmit it; to examine every societal question freely, with a high level of scholarship and the most appropriate scientific methods. Autonomous universities can be proactive and entrepreneurial [5].

Though national university systems have different histories and are built on various models, they have some common areas to explore to meet the world educational area requirements. They have to be recognized as global players while being able to develop a clear local profile [2].

Ukraine as part of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is to keep up with the educational community standards on the one hand and should retain its national identity on the other. The issue is how much and how far are we ready to retreat from state control and governance in higher education.

2. Historical Accents in Ukrainian Higher Education

To position the process of university autonomy onto modern Ukrainian universities we should first identify historical, cultural and social connotations of educational innovations ever launched in this country, since the prompts and clues to effective implementation of anything new are to be sought in our legacy.

Out of many factors that have had impact on the development of education in Ukraine on the whole and idea of higher education in particular, we would point out some: *"the statecraft factor", "the borderline culture", "national identity" and "mentality".*

2.1. The Statecraft Factor

The "*statecraft factor*" implies the fact that Ukrainian nationality, its culture and education have lived for centuries without a national state and have come under the influence of various organized states, i.e. Byzantine, Polish, Russian. This fact impeded with the formation of the skill to independently govern the state and the education as well, thus retarding both effective independent state and education models even under legally obtained independence though didn't diminish national values and traditions. They were cherished and retained via adapting the best foreign models to the needs and interest of the state Ukraine was an integral part of at the time. This supports the idea expressed by M. Hrushevsky, that political factor in the course of centuries of statelessness must inevitably play a less important role than economic, cultural and national factors [6].

2.2 The Borderline Culture

By "*borderline culture*" we mean the following. For many years Ukraine's culture was oscillating between two opposing cultural spheres that emerged in Europe in the 11th century – the Western - Catholic-Roman and Eastern-Orthodox-Byzantine. "The tragedy of Ukrainians is that since the 15th century their territory has been a "borderland" between East and West, incapable of committing itself entirely to either side, and denied a free choice coveted by both" [7]. Mental heritage of this is traced in the outlooks of outstanding cultural figures and their concepts of the educational institutions they founded.

In 1632 Petro Mohyla founded later well-known Academy. An aspiring orthodox activist living in East Central Europe at that time could not afford to belong to any one of the worlds; he had to be the man of many worlds [8].He was the most outstanding product of educational and religious institutions in Eastern Europe of the time. He spent his childhood in Moldova, studied in France, moved first to Poland, then to Ukraine, bought land property near Kiev and entered monastic orders at the city's Monastery of the caves in 1625. In spite of his Western backgrounds and friendly attitude towards Poland, his family was ardent supporters of orthodox. Mohyla's main concern was to adopt the latest achievements of western culture for the purpose of defending Orthodox Rus'. In founding the school Mohyla and his contemporaries followed the most acclaimed and recognized educational models of the time, in the hope that their efforts would benefit the Orthodox Rus' religious and ethnic communities.

For many centuries the concept of higher education was formed mainly under the influence of foreign cultures and educational (though the best) models. For more than 20 years of independence in Ukraine the nominal reforms have been promulgated and launched, including Bologna process transformations. Yet the tangible changes just imitate the best models having no national flavor or accent so far.

2.3. The Factor of National Identity

National identity in education is revealed via educational values and traditions cherished by people of the nation. The first traditions identified in Ukrainian education are: a) existence of different types of school by the form of propriety and sources of finance (in Kievan Rus there existed three types of schools: Palatsova shkola (Palace school - state-run and financially supported by the princes); the School of Books Studies to train clergy; Civic (private) schools for home education; schools were organized by Greek model); b) the content of training conditioned by state demands (in the times of Kievan Rus they studied basic Writing, Reading, Calculus, Chorals, Music, Poetics, Rhetoric, foreign languages (Greek and Latin first and foremost); c) different sources of knowledge and dissemination of knowledge via native and foreign teachers, translated literature; national instructors were not trained because schools of the kind were not organized yet. In the XVI ct. there appeared touring teachers organizing touring schools: d) aspiring for comprehensive and fundamental knowledge. These traditions were cherished and evolved throughout the history.

Despite the fact that Ukrainian *national identity* is not well developed [9] yet and is still in the process of fermentation, we can confirm that striving for national identity precipitated the establishment of the first higher education institution in Ukraine in the 17th century. This striving was an impetus for the revival of national higher education in the 20th century. Today this factor serves as an extra incentive for choosing the very model of transforming our higher education adapting the most effective educational models to our needs and cherishing our national legacy, i.e. traditions and values.

2.4. The Factor of Mentality

Anticipating the changes effectiveness we should also consider the *factor of mentality*, since it is the one that resists anything revolutionary being imposed on and favors only evolutionary irreversible changes [10].

First and most remarkable mental feature of Ukrainians is cherishing education as universal value. Second – historically conditioned tendency to emulating and integrating the best world educational models via adapting them according to national needs and demands; respect of everything intelligent yet processing it and starting national traditions. In the times of Kievan Rus the educational model imitated was that of Byzantine, the most recognized at that time either in Western or Eastern Europe**.** Humanitarian and Reformation ideas fostered the new type of schools in Ukraine – Greek-Slavonic-Latin. The pillars were national traditions combined with progressive gains from Western European schools. The first school of the type in Ukraine was founded in Ostroh in 1580 by Prince Kostyantyn. For many centuries Kyiv Mohyla Academy educational standards integrated European content of training with national forms of instruction. In XVIII-XIX ct. the most recognized German model of university education was borrowed. It is only in the XIX and XX ct. educational reforms were mainly conditioned by state interests and practically didn't emulate foreign models. After gaining the independence in Ukraine there should have been new educational model meeting national interests. Why?

The tendency to imitating the best foreign samples via their adaptation to national needs; respect to everything smart and intelligent; perceiving foreign and cherishing national values can be referred to sensitivity– the key mental feature of Ukrainians. [11]. It facilitates our skill of meeting each other half way when positioning our "self" onto another "self" and thus giving up some of the primary "self ". At the same time we demonstrate the tendency of cognizing the world via personal emotions and experience. Another type of mentality patterns associated with Ukrainians is that of being introverts. It is revealed in cherishing traditional values and treating foreign as an option, something available yet not necessarily worth being imitated or followed [11].

All the factors considered we can arrive at the conclusion that the whole history of higher education in Ukraine was marked by at least two major tendencies: striving for national identity and imitating world educational models. As a result we can say that *historically Ukrainian HE was mainly imitating the best proved models and producing its national blended versions via adapting them to the national needs and demands.* The chances are high that Ukrainian model for University autonomy will *be blended* using the best models via their modification according to the national needs.

3. University Autonomy Models: Present and Historical Profiles

While seeking the answers for Ukraine, we have to delve deeper into the process of university autonomy itself, see what sustains the most effective today university autonomy models (blends); trace their historical profiles to see the process tendencies and regulations. We would

differentiate between 4 main facets in major university autonomy patterns:

Table 1. The University Autonomy Facets

The aspect of autonomy	The scope of autonomy	Implementation degree	Retention tendency
administrative financial academic	full partial restricted modified	theoretical/ virtual/ ideal practical/real formal extinct inchoate	holistic/ traditional/ original evolving/ modified mixed blended modern/ artifitially tailored

3.1. Historical Profiles of University Autonomy Patterns

Out of all the university autonomy models we would focus first on those historically most contributing to this process: English, European (Continental), Western (American).We tried to identify the set of facets inherent in each of the most telling models originally, traced their dynamics till present time and got the following historical profiles of university autonomy patterns.

In Continental Europe university autonomy would evolve from originally *traditional* (in Middle Ages), *full (*embracing administrative, financial, academic), *practical* to *restricted, theoretical, formal* (nominal) in the 19th century and *extinct/*ecliptic in the 20th c.; from that originated by church to state governed and controlled by church to state governed and controlled due to political transformations, namely nation movement in the 19th c., which entailed changes in the relations between university and society and functions of the university in the society [12].

English university autonomy pattern can be referred to as – *mixed:* when original traditional**,** full, practical and slightly modified in financial aspect (due to state grants) in Oxford and Cambridge model coexists with modern formal autonomy at regional and newly organized universities;

*American model o*riginally *blended* from Classical English autonomy into its own highly identical *"3D" model*. It has been supported by pillars of *democracy*, having its own fashion and style. The sustainability is guaranteed by *decentralization* policy, i.e. the mechanism of relationship between the government and education, enhanced economically and tightened by *diversity* as key mental feature of American society. Yet today the pendulum is in motion and state grant is one of the temptations offered to universities and causing its swinging.

Democratization process as antidote to autocratic regimes in post war Europe inevitably entailed changing paradigms in higher education policy and most often university autonomy was the leverage to ensuring the effectiveness of the changes launched. The set of options chosen in every national context and continuum resulted in the patchwork of modern patterns in university autonomy. Yet only full autonomy is viable.

3.2. The University Autonomy Blend for Ukraine

Ukraine does need a university autonomy blend of its own. What kind of blend? *The blend of autonomy and centralization*. Being highly centralized for many years Ukraine would hardly face the challenge of overnight granted (prescribed) totally decentralized higher education and is not ready for it either mentally or economically, since diversity is pretty expensive. Say South Korea which economically supersedes many European countries blends Western (US) model with some centralized authorities retained by the ministry of Education [12]. In recent years they developed an accreditation system and granted more autonomy to regional universities. The high prestige public and private universities have the significant amounts of autonomy for many years. In an-ongoing effort, the government is working to abolish or ease unnecessary regulations so that higher education institutions may voluntarily and creatively maximize their development capacity. The idea is to free institutions from uniform restrictions imposed on their administration, and help them break away from student admission system that rely heavily on standardized test scores by building in a more advanced admission system that identifies and nurtures the potential of young student. Over the years the government has been developing tasks and agendas for expanded autonomy upon conducting surveys on the demands of higher education associations. Unnecessary regulations have been abolished or improved accordingly, and related laws have been set up alongside. Such infrastructure is proved to have enabled a boost of autonomy in terms of faculty appointment, student quota, academic administration, organizational management and financial management. In another major step towards deregulation, the government has allowed institutions to administer admission screening according to their own regulations. The government has also allowed major higher education associations to approve general matters to student admission. Korean education emphasizes the connection between education and work, specialized skills development for the economy and the development of knowledge workers in science and technology. They believe that maintenance of a high standard of living is dependent on a system of higher education and economy oriented toward 21st century innovation.

What are the chances and options for Ukraine in terms of University autonomy? Juxtaposing the autonomy patterns in the world with the ideas expressed and elements scarcely identified in our country and positioning them onto Ukrainian context and reality, we would come up with modern, theoretical, partial, administrative and legally prenatal autonomy at the stage of pre-nuptial agreement negotiation. The media and live broadcasting discussions would highlight so far politically marked opposing types of desired autonomy for Ukrainian universities: administrative/financial and/or academic. Financial and administrative autonomy look more appealing to the Rectors of Ukrainian Universities. Yet either aspect alone won't provide us with the blend required. Administrative autonomy even with the most concrete financial but without academic could be an excellent entrepreneurial project but very short-termed. Those who exclude academic aspect either have perfect idea about the complexity of the process and try to avoid it or have no idea at all. We need a set of aspects including all of them maybe in different ratio but not excluding or substituting one for another.

3.3. University Autonomy and Curriculum Changes in Ukraine

Academic autonomy is really more challenging, time consuming and tedious since curriculum changing is many faceted involving many areas of academic expertise. Yet it is most telling in ensuring real autonomy, not formal or theoretical, since competitive knowledge obtained is the target of those who study. The content of education is sure to be the indicator of valid knowledge provided.

What is the scope of changes to be introduced in curriculum changing and what stages are we to be aware of?

Anticipating the necessity for changes in education, we are to be cognizant of the fact that the whole state of Ukraine is still on its way of looking for the most effective nationally oriented model of development. It entails the fact that education policy will be definitely dependent on the process in progress.

The prerequisite for launching the process is monitoring the pre-autonomous stage in the realm of curriculum changes in Ukrainian universities. Traditionally curriculum design and development have been in the hands and minds of special institution people and Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine. It is only for the last few years that first steps in reshaping the situation were made when the universities were granted with the right and obliged with the responsibility of offering the elective courses. It is an endeavor and preliminary training in the practice of curriculum changing.

The next step is the design and positioning of new curricula. I dare think it could be prolific with the ideas, since we are intelligent and creative nation. What could be a concern are the would-be stages to follow, namely, those of effectively monitoring the society needs to make the curricula effectively respond to them and learning outcomes assessment. Does this require a special inter-University structure in charge of the issue or reshaping the existing ones and their support by intra-University Associations or structures? The concept and the control on the learning outcomes should definitely be in the hands of the Ministry, while the changes and responsibilities will be on the Universities. To be competent in curriculum changing we need to start with curriculum development practices at the university level as well not the ministry only. Sporadic and incoherent effort of individuals should be given systemic approach. In Ukraine there is no consistent policy on curriculum development/ changes, since the practice is fairly exercised. Ukrainian universities are obliged to develop only centralized curriculum. Thus the practice is neither exercised nor even preached. Today the lacuna of the kind can be found may be in the tiny harbor of electives where they are offered and practiced. We don't have national gurus in University Curriculum Development Theory, university courses on Curriculum Development, Departments and thus no elaborated practices or tradition. The elements mentioned and focus groups are the prerequisites for unleashing curriculum development practice.

Autonomy is not a panacea for enhancing the competitive strength of Ukrainian higher education, since it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for excellence. It is neither privatization nor absolute or unlimited independence from the state, sooner expanded institutional freedom in making decisions. It can be a burden in terms of increased accountability so not all the universities will be dying to exercise it if it is imposed on. University autonomy could be granted first to the few pioneers volunteering to launch the process (maybe Consortium members first) and then gradually expanded on the merit-based competition after monitoring the accountability results. To ensure sustainable development of the process we need Focus Group monitoring the process, its ups and downs. This can be delegated to Consortium as well as they are sincerely interested and best motivated. The process will badly demand professionals capable of either doing it or teaching how to do it. We need both extensive and intensive training in the area to be equipped with the knowledge and expertise in the field.

On the strength of the analysis we can conclude that Ukraine needs blended model of autonomy and centralization to meet national interests and integrate the world best models; one of the most challenging aspects within the scope of real autonomy is that of changing curricula to meet the labor market demands and local interests. This entails our long-term perseverance in this realm on condition of in-service training of university faculty and diligent, intelligent and reliable outcomes assessment.

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