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University autonomy

Annotation

The article explores the concept of university autonomy, its types and forms of realization in modern conditions. The parameters for determining the level of autonomy and criteria for its evaluation are analyzed. The types of autonomy are characterized and options discussed for its implementation in the world praxis.

Keywords

autonomy, types of autonomy, levels of implementation of university autonomy, evaluation criteria for university autonomy

1 Actuality

Nowadays, with the developing of knowledge society, the role of education in achieving socio-economical progress is rapidly increasing. These circumstances condition transition to new forms of economy and change the role and function of a higher education institution, creating a need for transformation in the state regulation. The functioning of educational institutions is implemented under the conditions of market relationships and the increasing global competition. Hence, universities must take into account the market demands and quickly and adequately react to the changes in the supply and demand ratio, and adapt to the new tendencies.

An essential precondition for a successful operation of universities in the complex circumstances of the changing global environment is their ability and opportunity to make independent decisions. Being completely under state regulation, educational institutions are not making use of the opportunities related to market mechanisms which could increase their flexibility and adaptability. The search for the most optimal balance between the state and market mechanisms becomes an acute problem in the theory and praxis of educational activity. In this context, the issue of autonomy of higher education institutions gains crucial importance.

2 Analysis of current research and publications

Research of the theoretical and practical issues of the autonomy of higher education institutions is an acute topic in numerous scientific publications. Thus, autonomy in the context of development of effective regulation mechanisms in the sphere of education is explored in the works of Vasser, Derrida, Dyakon, Ignatova, Kalenyuk, Katsikas, Kuklin, Le Goff, Omarova, Hermans, Tsymbal and other scholars. At the same time, the issue of autonomy of higher education institutions, its definition, measurement and development leave a wide scope for further research in modern circumstances.

3 The aim of the article

To explore the essence of the concept of autonomy in higher education institutions and the forms in which it is manifested.

4 The core material

The concept of autonomy in the broader sense denotes

a certain level of independence in decision making. The call for autonomy of educational institutions (and, first of all, universities) was voiced already in the 1960s. The most widespread definition of university autonomy was formulated in 1965 by the International Association of Universities (IAU), where it was defined as authority to make decisions regarding: who will teach, what will be taught, who will get a degree, what needs to be researched. The financial aspects of autonomy were mentioned only as a formal reference to having a relative financial freedom in establishing and bettering of international contacts [3, 5].

In recent years, educational science and policy have witnessed considerable increase in various publications on the issue of university autonomy. The research carried out under the auspices of the EU and the European Association of Universities (EAU) stands out particularly. More specifically, EAU underscores the crucial role of institutional autonomy for higher education institutions and for the society in general. Yet, at the same time, autonomy is explored not as an end in itself, but as a vitally important precondition for the successful functioning of European universities [2].

It is specifically emphasized that autonomy is a kind of point of consensus between the state regulation and the market mechanism. The state introduces a framework within which the universities can effectively fulfill their mission in the best way possible.

Since the very foundation of the European Association of Universities in 2001, "autonomy with accountability" was agreed on as the primary principle. In the EAU declarations that followed, the need for achieving higher university autonomy was underscored.

Thus, a common stand developed among the majority of researchers regarding the need for a certain degree of autonomy for the universities. Furthermore, nowadays the notion of autonomy of higher education institutions is becoming ever more complex due to the compounded structure of this concept. That is why currently a uniform viewpoint on the degree of autonomy, its parameters, types, spheres of application, regulation requirements and framework simply does not exist.

The Lisbon Declaration of 2007 strictly outlined four types of autonomy: academic (decisions concerning curricula and teaching methods, directions, scope and methods of research), financial (attracting and distribution of funding, decisions on study fees, use of the profits etc.), organizational (determining the structure and statutes of the university, concluding agreements, election of the Rector and other managers), and staff autonomy (staff recruitment, remuneration and career).

Each type of autonomy is characterized by certain parameters, according to which its degree can be

measured (Table 1).

In our opinion, academic autonomy of a higher education institution besides the outlined freedoms is also determined by the freedom of choice by researchers

and lecturers regarding the field of their scientific research and interest. On the other hand, such autonomy also ought to contain instruments for evaluation of the academic staff according to certain criteria.

Table 1 Types of higher education institution autonomy and its evaluation criteria [2]

Financial	Academic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • duration and type of funding • profitability • credit opportunities • immovable property ownership right • right to set the fees for local/EU students • right to regulate the fees for non-citizens of the EU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • right to determine the level of student recruitment and their total number, as well as their selection according to the level of preparedness • right to determine the content of programs on various levels of education • right to abolish or cancel the program • right to choose the language of instruction • right to formulate quality evaluation criteria • right to chose the core content of the program
Staff	Organizational
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to make decisions regarding the staff (recruit and dismiss academic and administrative staff) • ability to decide on the level of salary • ability to make decisions regarding professional development of administrative and academic staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • election and dismissal of management staff • setting of management criteria • duration of the time in office of management staff • right to hire external specialists for managerial positions • right to make decisions regarding the academic structure • right to found official institution

Broadening of university autonomy is conditioned by transformation in their role in the nowadays society. Since the second half of the 20th century, with the development of knowledge economy the role and functions of educational institutions are growing exponentially. Thus, Parsons and Kerr in their publications determine a broad spectrum of functions for a modern university: general education; specialized education; prolonged instruction; periodically going back to university for professional development; research work; scientific cooperation with organizations and representatives of industry and culture; scouting for talents and their recruitment; civic education – of professionals and scholars; cultural impact on the community: university as a center for development and spread of new lifestyles; university as part of an establishment [6]. Hence, the list of university’s functions in a modern and changing society is considerably broader than such classic directions of university’s functioning as education and scientific research.

Standardization of instruction in higher education institutions leads to formation of a certain package of knowledge, skills and competences, which a specialist must have. Yet, in this situation, the standards inevitably become a kind of cage that restricts autonomy. This contradiction causes formalization of disciplines, increases the role of formal requirements, their predominance over the actual content of the academic discipline. In such a case, university’s academic mobility has a very formal character.

An English researcher Dore proposes an even broader scope of functions for the universities in the context of social development, including: cultivation of intellectual skills; formation of the country’s status on the international arena; nurturing of respect to intellectual labor, intellectual elite, critical thinking; cultivation of patriotism, ethical and behavioral norms, a positive attitude to the political regime; formation of a stratum of “alienated intellectuals” who have a critical attitude towards the actions taken by political leaders or towards the dominant beliefs; formation of a new list of professions, their authorization and legitimization; intellectual support to the political elite and nurturing of a new generation of such elite through scouting for talents and providing support for them [1].

In fact, academic autonomy, when implemented, ought to be accompanied by transformations in the administrative functions and redistribution of authority within higher education institutions. Support to academic autonomy, which determines the freedom of scientific work, must be accompanied by introduction of management practices characteristic of private enterprise and the commercial sector of economy. Essential features of university autonomy ought to comprise: risk management, strategic financial management, formation of research and financial portfolio etc.

Realization of the entire spectrum of universities’ functions in modern conditions requires a compulsory broadening of their autonomy, their rights and authority in implementing the necessary actions. The most complicated issue is the search for balance between the state regulation and the real autonomy of higher education institutions. Thus, academic autonomy cannot be realized under the conditions of state regulation and bureaucratization of the education process.

Thus, autonomy necessitates adherence to the market law and formation of such a package of knowledge, which would be in demand on the labor market. At the same time, fundamental research in which the market has no interest is being discriminated. Overcoming of these challenges ought to be compensated by a deliberated state regulation, which should direct universities at the strategic needs and interests of the society.

Timm indicates at this contradiction by arguing that autonomy of an educational institution does not presuppose absolute freedom. A higher education institution is connected to the state and society not only through the budget of a state institution, but also through its fundamental objectives, social expectations and the issue of the quality of education and the social benefits that its graduates may produce [4]. With a view to solving this contradiction, in Germany the functioning of boards at an educational institution is viewed as an essential management mechanism. Such boards allow for attracting external experts and community partners in various spheres of activity.

Another contradiction that springs up in modern conditions is related to financial autonomy. Financial autonomy presupposes the freedom of a higher education institution to use financial resources as it sees fit. Yet, the funds received as governmental funding require a large amount of documentation and reporting and certain criteria to measure the efficiency of the use of this funding. Money received from business also generally has a target orientation: staff training, execution of certain tasks, research of specific processes and phenomena. This again requires documentation and reporting, and the drawing up of new criteria and requirements for the distribution of these resources.

Financial autonomy to a certain degree is characteristic of higher education institutions in the majority of developed countries. Thus, in France universities have a chance to independently attract financial resources, including sponsorship by private companies. However, a viewpoint exists that such a search for funding might cause misuse and pressure on the administration of the educational institution from the sponsoring companies regarding admission for studies.

In several states of Germany, it is also permitted to attract additional funding resources, also in the form of study fees that amount to about 500 euro per term, although the state leaves this decision to educational institutions.

In every separate case, the proportion between the regulatory mechanisms and freedoms can be radically different, which creates different levels of autonomy of a higher education institution. Accordingly, it is possible to distinguish such basic models of autonomy as: minimal, partial and full.

The model of minimal autonomy relates to organization of the functioning of budget-funded educational institutions, which are under full control of the owner (founder). In this model, all opportunities to make independent decisions regarding the financial management of a higher education institution effectively amount to zero. Such a model is characteristic for South Korea where financial, material and organizational-legal management is implemented in a centralized and usually authoritative manner. It should be noted though that autonomy in Korea in essence is rather complicated, combining a certain level of independence and a centralized general management. For instance, the Ministry of Education proposes a list of possible managers of educational institutions and only a person from this list can be elected. Yet, at the same time, managers have a certain degree of autonomy in their work since they can be dismissed from office only by a decree passed by the head of the country.

Within the model of partial autonomy, universities have partial independent authority in the financial sphere, but, at the same time, there are certain control mechanisms to supervise the use of resources. Thus, universities have authority to make independent decisions within the established norms, rules and standards. This may apply to both, the financial and academic autonomy. The model of partial autonomy is implemented in China where the education strategy envisages decentralization and privatization on the grounds of national theories and world experience.

The model of full autonomy presupposes absence of organizational and property accountability. Such a form of autonomy affords maximum opportunities for the

freedom to choose the system of functioning of an educational institution, yet, it does not preclude existence of some forms of control. Examples of such a model of autonomy can be seen in the USA, Canada, Australia and partly Japan. It is characterized by pronounced decentralization in management, absence of state monopoly in founding of educational institutions and by a wide variety of educational institutions and curricula.

The question of belonging to a specific type of autonomy for an educational institution is a complicated one. Attempts to evaluate the autonomy of higher education institutions have been made multiple times over a long period of time. At the end of 1970s the Center for Educational Research and Innovation of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development proposed a set of criteria to determine the autonomy of higher education institutions. This research was conducted in 52 educational institutions. The total index of autonomy within this research was calculated on the grounds of opportunities to make decisions regarding 20 key problems that were proposed as "indices of autonomy" [5].

These indices include a wide array of parameters that permit to evaluate the functioning of an educational institution. For instance, the processes related to academic positions of staff are evaluated (creation, appointment, raising of qualification, promotion, vacation etc.). Besides, autonomy in such issues as appointment or election of the Rector, the choice of teaching methods, design of curricula, matriculation and exmatriculation of students, and budget allocation was also evaluated.

As a result of the conducted research, the universities of Great Britain scored 100 points, while the universities in France, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands scored 42, 32, 29 and 43 points respectively [5].

In 2003, OECD continued their research on the autonomy of higher education institutions. This research was grounded on a wide scope of indices that included freedom to own immovable property, opportunities to get credit, foundation of an academic structure of the programs, calculation of study fees, freedom to use financial resources as the administration sees fit etc. Essentially, this research revealed the changing role of the state in managing higher education institutions.

This research also evaluated the level of autonomy (minimal, partial and full autonomy). The research demonstrated that in the majority of countries the level of bureaucracy and dependence on the governmental bodies and state programs had decreased, except for the countries of Southern Europe and Latin America.

Besides evaluation of the autonomy of higher education institutions, the participation of non-governmental and international organizations in the functioning of an educational institution was also assessed. Thus, particular attention during the research was focused on such new participants of the educational market as national organizations (OECD, UNESCO), various international networks of agencies (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies, European Quality Assurance Register etc.), various international processes (for instance, the Bologna process) and treaties (General Agreement on Trade Services). These participants of the market, on

the one hand, presuppose autonomy of higher education institutions. Yet, on the other hand, their participation creates a new wave of contradictions related to the opportunities to execute academic freedom in the ever changing environment.

5 Conclusions

The topicality of researching the autonomy of higher education institutions is determined by the complexity of the very notion of autonomy. The functioning of a higher education institution without affording autonomy inside the strict state regulation with time causes distortion of the market of educational

services and the market in general. The search for an optimal balance between the autonomy and state regulation prescribes existence of varied degrees of autonomy, which as such, can differ in the various aspects of universities' functioning (organizational, staff, financial, and academic). The difficulties in determining the essence, degree and mechanisms of university autonomy in a modern globalized world underscore the topicality of these issues and call for further research on them. The striving for change in the modern world indicates at the topicality and high perspectives of further research on the opportunities afforded by autonomy and the quest for the optimal balance between the university authority and state regulation.

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