

TOWARDS LITHUANIA OF KNOWLEDGE: CHALLENGES AND REALITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to make comparative multipartite analysis of the current situation of Lithuanian Higher Education sector and to evaluate the trends of development of the sector keeping in mind the strategic goals of the European Union Lisbon agenda and the intentions of the European academic Bologna process.

The authors fully support the statements of the Communication from the Commission „Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy“, which state, that Europe must strengthen the three poles of its knowledge triangle: education, research and innovation. Universities are essential in all three. Investing more and better in the modernisation and quality of universities is a direct investment in the future of Europe and Europeans.

For the social, institutional, sectorial and evolutionary disquisition statistical data and content analysis are used.

The proposals how to correct the process of development of the Higher Education sector in the country juxtaposing the situation and the process with the vision of the Knowledge society could be assessed as the main result of the paper.

JEL classification: I2; D83; H11; H52; H54.

Key words: Higher Education, Research, Institution, Studies, Science, Quality, Autonomy, Law, Study Programme, Internationalisation, Financing, Bologna Process.

The modern evolution of Lithuanian higher education sector has been started just after regained of independency in 1990 year.

First Lithuanian Law on Science and Studies. First big step towards new understanding of the sector as such as well as governance of them was done by adopting of the Law on science and studies in 1991 year. New Lithuanian academic body – Union of scientists was active and constructive in preparation of the Law.

The law concentrated and adopted modern American and European approach. Looking from contemporary development, especially from University's modernisation point of view, this Law created very constructive platform for institutional modernisation of the sector. The Law defined the new structure of the Science and studies sector as consisted from:

- higher education institutions,
- research institutes,
- Lithuanian Science council,
- Lithuanian Academy of science,
- Lithuanian state fund for research and studies,
- Lithuanian rectors conference,
- Lithuanian conference of State research institutes,
- Lithuanian Catholic academy of science,
- Science and technology parks

and in general democratized all academic process.

This circumstance that the Law described only general fundamental freedoms and obligations of the segments of the sector in that time was very positive. It allowed starting real restructuring and modernising of the sector. Fundamental factor for development was the statement of the Law that Universities have the autonomy and possess the academic freedom. This point was mentioned as well in the Constitution of the state later – in 1992. The Law determined that the Senate is the highest body in University's governance. Private sector was legitimized also, but the strict rules for new establishments were set. Academic community later assessed this factor as very positive, because it protected University sector from the erecting of baseless private establishments. The unity of research and studies was legitimized in Universities.

Rationality of this Law has been demonstrated by long live of the law without any corrections and amendments up to 2002 year. The law enabled modernization of the university's activities. Academic community realized this possibility rapidly. Till 1995 year Universities and academies developed majority of new study programmes, rejected narrow soviet-style specialties and constricted specializations, renewed the content of studies, introduced compulsory modules from social sciences and humanities in technological study programmes. Almost every University and academy changed their structure, corrected mission and vision.

The most important development was implementation of the three cycle study system. The, idea was taken from the British-American system, amended with some European dimensions. In Lithuania bachelor studies last 4 years, master (magister) – 2 or 1,5 and doctor – 4 years. Study programmes were modularized in order to start efficient and fruitful academic exchange. Study credits helped to start implementation of the European credit accumulation process. One Lithuanian credit meant 40 student working hours. National credit transfer system is comparable with ECTS and is used now locally and in ERASMUS exchange.

Modularized system allowed starting quality assurance process from the internal modules evaluation and competition process. In some universities as KTU, optional study programme's part stimulated individualized study programmes for the students.

The reorganized HE system stimulated the local studies in Lithuania during economic and social decline in 1991 -1995 year. The number of students went up from 51,5 thousands in 1990-1991 up to 67,3 thousands in 1994-1995 year.

Although in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which was adapted in 1992, free of charge education for citizens who demonstrate good academic progress was guaranteed, self-supporting studies were introduced in 1994 year.

It is important to emphasise the factor that academic sector from 1990 year was supervised only by very small governmental department. This circumstance assured realisation of the real autonomy of the Universities up to 1994 year. After this year some development of HE sector became evident as well, but they seemed more cosmetic if compare with the development in last two years period.

The HE development period after the 2000 year could be mentioned as the period under the **Law of Higher Education**. The Law introduced stronger state regulation. Academic novelties having been introduced by the universities before the Law became items of the Law. This factor restricted possibility of diversifying of the missions of the universities and academies oriented more to the professional education.

The Law introduced University Councils, as bodies for patronage and supervision. The Council to be consisted from three equal parts – one decided by the Minister, second - decided by University Senate and the third - as the result of common decision by the Minister and Rector. Council got the responsibility to decide on quality of University's activity, including finance reports each year. As the final result of the negative assessment dismissal of the Rector became possible.

Binarity of HE system (university and non-university sector) was adopted. University sector in 2004/2005 school year consisted from 21 HE institutions:

- 10 state universities,
- 5 state academies and
- 6 non- state institutions.

Non university sector in 2004/2005 school year consisted from 27 colleges – 16 state and 11 non state.

At the same year number of students in HE institutions prevailed 190 thousands. From this number state universities and academies consisted from 134,2 thousands (70,4 %) and non state HE institutions - 4,3 thousands (2,2 %). Respectively - numbers in colleges are: in state colleges - 42,1 thousands (22,1 %) and in non-state 10,1 thousands (5,3 %).

Other quite important attitudes have been introduced in the Law. For example: enlarged student's involvement in University governance; cancellation of self-supporting students category in Bachelor day – time studies since 2002; introduction of the system of student payments. The last was based on 60-th article of the Constitution's declaring the statement: „free of charge education is guaranteed for successful students of HE state institutions”.

Quality assurance system in the country has been started since 1993 year. Firstly – as informal teams, invited by the universities to evaluate institutional development or some study programmes. Formal National Quality evaluation system was established in 1995 year. Evaluation Centre for Studies Quality under the Ministry of Education was established at the same year. It started the activity from evaluation of the new study programmes; later the activity was expanded by evaluating study programmes in particular sectors. The problem was in insufficient financing which didn't allow inviting foreign experts. In nowadays Quality assurance system is in full line with the elements of Quality Assurance system which was scheduled in Berlin Communiqué till 2005:

- internal and external assessment which involves students in this process,
- public declaration of assessments results,
- international cooperation – participation of external experts and membership in the international organizations.

External experts participate in the assessment of studies programmes from 2002. The programmes such as law, medicine, public health, public administration, sociology and part of educology programmes have been evaluated up to now. The programmes of management and business administration are in assessment process. In the nearest future informatics and social work programmes will be evaluated. Students take part in the external and internal assessment.

Universities started institutional international evaluation. International teams from European University Association (EUA) or Salzburg seminar have been invited by Vilnius University, Vytautas Magnus University, Mykolas Romeris University and Kaunas University of Technology. Academic community believes the reports prepared and published by the foreign experts stronger. From other side, universities in the report have the instrument against bureaucracy.

Internalisation. It was started in 1990-ties using agreements for cooperation, signed between universities. Later TEMPUS programmes helped to expand academic mobility and perform modernization of total activity at the Universities. Universities actively participated in research programmes as COST, INCO-COPERNICUS, FP-5, FP-6. The main programme which helps to internationalize the activity of universities is SOCRATES. Lithuanian problem is insufficient number of incoming students.

Lisbon convention on professional recognition qualifications and study periods was ratified by the Lithuanian Parliament in 1999.

Some corrections of Law on higher education for introducing joint study programmes and joint degrees are ready for adoption.

Diploma supplement has been introduced in 2005 year (only by request). From 2006 year every graduate will get a supplement free of charge.

Ten Lithuanian universities have been joined EUA. The others are participating in various associations like SEFI, EUCEN, IUA and etc.

Bologna process was started in Lithuania by universities many years before it was proclaimed as Bologna process. Therefore universities don't have academic organizational problems. The biggest and permanent problem for universities and research institutes is lack of financing and lack of autonomy in necessary level.

Therefore, Lithuanian university sector in Trends - IV was mentioned among successful countries. Summary of the success is presented in the tables 1 and 2 presented below.

Table 1
The Implementation of Bologna Process

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory
Ireland Belgium (Flemish Community) Czech Denmark Iceland Latvia Liechtenstein Norway Netherlands Scotland	Austria Belgium (French Community) Bulgaria Great Britain Estonia Greek Cyprus Poland Lithuania Malta France Finland Slovakia Slovenia Sweden Switzerland Vatican Hungary Germany	Albania Italy Spain Croatia Luxemburg Macedonia Portugal Romania Russia Turkey	Andorra Bosnia and Herzegovina Serbia and Montenegro

Table 2
Bologna Scorecard: Lithuania

	Level of success
QUALITY ASSURANCE	good
Stage of development of quality assurance system	good
Key elements of evaluation systems	very good
Level of participation of students	satisfactory
Level of international participation, co-operation and networking	good
TWO CYCLE DEGREE SYSTEM	good
Stage of implementation of two-cycle system	very good
Level of student enrolment in two-cycle system	very good
Access from first cycle to second cycle	satisfactory
RECOGNITION OF DEGREES AND PERIODS OF STUDY	good
Stage of implementation of Diploma Supplement	good
Ratification of Lisbon Recognition Convention	very good
Stage of implementation of ECTS	satisfactory
TOTAL	good

Statistical data on Lithuanian HE sector. Educational comparative level of country inhabitants is reflected in the tables 3 and 4.

Table 3
Education level of Lithuania inhabitants in 2003

	Number of inhab. (th.)	HE (th.)	Part with HE (%)
Working age	1641.9	311.6	19.0
		EU	21.0
		USA	38.0
		Japan	36.0

Table 4
Number of students per 1000 inhabitants

USA	51			
Japan	31			
EU - 15	33			
	2002 / 03	2003 / 04	2004 / 05	
				<i>State supported</i>
Lithuania	41.5	48.5	54	30.5
Universities	34	37	39	23
Colleges	7.5	11.5	15	7.5

Having current number of the students after some years educational level will approach to the European level.

Comparative data on numbers of researchers and researcher's involvement in business are described in table 5.

Table 5

Data on numbers of researchers and researcher's involvement in business

	Researchers per 1000 workers	Researchers in Business (%)
EU	5.5	80
USA	9.0	65
Japan	9.7	50
Lithuania	3.0	5

Involvement in research is not good and perspective, especially looking to the world leaders. The main reason for this unhappy situation is deficit in state financing and unfriendly legal and economical situation for innovative business in country at large.

This statement could be commented by the 6 and 7 tables.

Table 6
Financing of Higher education

	% of GDP	By state
USA	3.2	1.5
Japan	1.1	0.5
EU	1.3	1.1
Lithuania	1.2	0.9
Universities	1.0	0.7
Colleges	0.3	0.2

Table 7
Financing of research

	% of GDP	By state
USA	2.7	0.8
Japan	3.0	0.6
EU	1.9	0.7
Lithuania	0.6	0.4

The result of this critical situation could be seen analysing the scale of ages of teachers and researchers (Fig. 1). Young generation doesn't orient themselves in this sector.

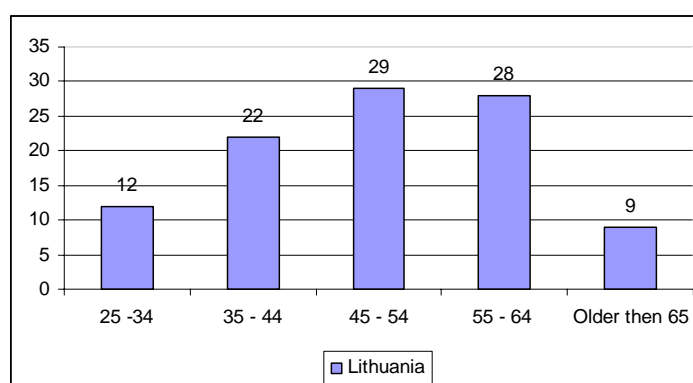


Fig. 1 Teachers and researchers with scientific degrees in age groups

The latest developments of the sector. Lithuanian universities rectors' conference adopted Declaration of the Lithuanian Universities Rector's Conference Regarding Implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. Declaration describes Lithuanian Universities position according EC Recommendation. Following Strategy and vision of Universities and EUA, Lithuanian university rector's conference prepared Vision and Strategy of Lithuanian Universities. This document speaks about university values, university and community, strategy and short term development.

Government on February 2006 year adopted Action plan of development of HE sector up to 2010 year. This plan was initiated and prepared by university Rectors Conference with the assistance of Lithuanian confederation and Lithuanian student's union. The plan ideologically is totally in line with the Lisbon agenda and Bologna process. Supporting the idea of knowledge triangle - development of Education and strengthening of life long learning; strengthening effectiveness of R&D and dissemination of innovations – is central axis of Action Plan.

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