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Globalization of Higher Education in Greece

John O. LeMay IV

Abstract

The current paper examines the system of higher education in Greece. This discussion incorporates details that describe a brief history of the system's overall formation, an environmental snapshot of the country's current demographics and economic situation as well as similar information for their overall higher education system. Also, details regarding how the Greek system of higher education is structured (for both the university and technological sectors) and situated within the country's larger governmental system are considered. Next, the paper considers challenges that are currently being faced by the country and how they may impact their higher education structure and the policies and activities are in place that may have an impact (positive or negative) on their place within, not only their own borders, but within the broader international and global markets. Finally, potential implications that could be a product of the current choices and the environment in Greek's system of higher education are offered and conclusions are drawn about the ramifications of the economical and educational choices of Greece and how these could influence their position (should they choose to have one) in the growing trend towards an increasingly international and globalized knowledge-economy.

Greece has a long history of advanced education that dates back to antiquity. Records indicate an organized system of higher learning in Greece that began as early as fifth-century B.C. where, in Athens, individuals known as Sophists marked the first full-time teachers paid for a systematic, defined course of instruction (Lucas, 2006). From this classical period to the present, higher education in Greece has developed into a sophisticated system of institutions that offers a range of opportunities. This expansion is necessary to meet the educational demands of not only a country with a population of approximately 10.8 million and a GDP (US\$) of \$242 billion, but it must be able to meet the costs that globalization and internationalization mandate (World Bank Group, 2015). Allocating resources towards globalization and internationalization initiatives is especially important as only 5% of those enrolled in Greek higher education were foreign students as of 2011 (OECD, 2013).

The contemporary system of Greek higher education consists of the university sector and the technological sector and these divisions are made up of 22 universities and 15 Technological Educational Institutes (TEIs) (and a School of Pedagogical and Technological Education), respectively (TEI Patras, n.d.). The technological system includes a number of institutes that provide vocational training in various fields (Euroguidance Center of Greece, 2015). In addition to the various types of traditional universities (research universities, technical universities, and the School of Fine Arts), the university sector also contains the Hellenic Open University that offers distance-learning curriculum to help meet the demand and needs of a growing student population (Euroguidance Center of Greece, 2015) (See Appendix A for a visual representation of the Greek higher education system structure and Appendix B for qualifications granted by institutions).

Enrollment in Greek higher education has been gradually rising in recent years. From 1998 to 2013, the number of students from both sectors in Greece has grown from 188,036 to

296,106, a 57.47% change (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2014). To put this into perspective, one can examine Greece and the state of Georgia in the United States (U.S.), which is similar in terms of population (approximately 10 million) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). When comparing enrollment from 2008 to 2013, Greece falls behind Georgia only slightly with an enrollment increase of 9% compared to Georgia's 14% (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Sustaining this growth is not only important for the Greek system from a financial perspective internally, but also for external stakeholders who are a part of the local economy and the larger global economy. As a result, growth in the quality (to attract both local and foreign students and faculty) and the size (to meet the demands of increased enrollments when quality improves) of the Greek higher education system is imperative if this system desires to accomplish globalization and internationalization efforts and become a force in the international and global markets.

One roadblock to these accomplishments is the unemployment rate of higher education graduates (ages 25-29) in Greece. This rate is nearly three times the average unemployment rate of all countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2011). It is accepted that higher education affords one with more opportunities in the job market. However, the Greek economy and labour market runs counterintuitive to this idea. In general, the higher the education level in Greece, the higher the unemployment rate for individuals 15 to 29 years old (OECD, 2011). The OECD (2011) states that this may be because Greece's economy is behind the current global-orientation of a knowledge-based market because its economic output is still based largely around agriculture and industrial jobs that do not rely on a tertiary education.

This becomes problematic because it incentivizes the Greece's government to concentrate funding on agriculture/industry rather than becoming a globally-competitive knowledge economy. The consequence is a country that: has citizens with an overall lower education, cannot compete with local or distant nations, and cannot attract foreign students or faculty. These results only further harm the future of Greek higher education. In addition, Prokou (2013) argues that the current era of globalization focuses on knowledge economies and the global neo liberal agenda contends that the university must be able to respond to the needs of the market to remain competitive in the global environment. While global competition and a market orientation are vital to institutions, this presents a unique problem for Greece. How does a system of higher education respond to the needs of the local market when the local economy relies less on erudite citizens and more on low-skilled laborers who do not need higher education because of the uneven agricultural focus rather than a knowledge-economy orientation? One answer could be found in educational policy reform as it relates to globalization and internationalization.

International Policies and Activities

Currently, Greece is a member of the Bologna Process, which strives to create a more "comparable, compatible, and coherent system of higher education in Europe" (EHEA, 2014). However, Greece has not yet signed the Lisbon Convention, meaning institutions have not even initiated application of the more traditional bachelor's-master's degree structure and, as a result, their current system does not easily lend itself to compatibility with other nation's systems (EP Nuffic, 2015). This incongruity acts to isolate Greece from the globe and can remove incentives for local individuals to invest in a Greek postsecondary education since it may not improve their job search locally or internationally. In turn, if a lack of perceived value of Greek higher

education decreases enrollment it decreases revenue, further adding to the system's detriment. This perception of a lessened value of Greece's higher education is twice as disadvantageous because it also influences potential foreign students. For example, if students from the U.S. consider studying abroad in Greece, they will likely be dissuaded by the fact that Greece's system of qualifications and curriculum is not compatible with surrounding nations, let alone farther nations, such as the U.S. This is only one example of a policy or lack of action that can obstruct the diversity and globalization of Greece's higher education system.

Any strategy that drives compatibility of systems is essential, but decision makers must also increase funding by finding ways to deal with the country's austerity policy. This program, in the wake of the 2008 global recession, has also impacted Greece unfavorably and has led to a retrenchment plan that has cut budgets by up to 50% for some institutions (Robbins, 2015). If the Greek system wishes to attract adequate faculty, ensure a globally competitive level of quality, and decrease the country's "brain drain," it must find necessary resources to help stimulate their larger economy. This is especially true if the country hopes to improve its financial situation as it relates to their higher education structure and, ultimately, the ability to attract more international students (and faculty).

In summary, and in addition to the previously discussed policies and activities, a number of actions could be taken or adjusted to increase the presence of Greece in the global and international market and to help it shift towards a knowledge-based economy. First, in order to attract more international students, it may help to have more educational offerings in English as most are currently in Modern Greek and the courses that are accessible in English largely exist only in the private sector (EP Nuffic, 2015). Second, according to the International NGO Human rights watch, steps must be taken to decrease xenophobic violence, which has reached higher and higher levels (ICEF Monitor, 2015). In short, Greece must look beyond its borders and increasingly engage other countries for ways to impact and foster a more globally and internationally-rich system of education. These changes have the ability to eventually benefit Greece, other countries, and the larger international and global markets.

I initially assumed that education within Greece would be more stable than it appears to have been over the past few decades. This expectation was grounded in two main assumptions. First, I presumed that since the country has such a rich history of education that it would value or at least make higher education a governmental and budgetary priority above most other areas. However, due to a combination of factors, this seems to be not the case. These reasons could include a potentially unbalanced focus on agriculture and the debt crisis in the wake of the 2008 global recession. Even by itself, this financial predicament brought on numerous obstacles to Greece's ability to globalize and internationalize its system. Complications such as: budget cuts leading to programmatic cuts, salary decreases, less public funding per student (similar to the current situation in the United States), "brain drain," and an inappropriate fiscal policy of the larger government according to Stellern, Phipps, O'Connor (2015).

Secondly, and related closely to globalization, I was somewhat surprised at the lack of diversity in Greek higher education. This revelation stems from my initial impression that international (if not global) diversity would be at least somewhat facilitated by a country occupying such a geographically rich crossroad. Still, international and global initiatives require many resources and a country must meet the internal challenges of its educational system before being able to extend its goals beyond its borders. I did not realize that the global recession had such a negative impact on Greek's economy. This larger, global adverse economic situation has been transferred down to the county's higher education structure primarily because the Ministry

of National Education and Religious Affairs, which governs its system of higher education, is a branch of Greece's larger governmental structure (TEI Patras, n.d.).

Implications and Conclusions

In conclusion, if Greece is to revitalize its system of higher education internally and externally, it will have to address these actions by starting with both the country's government, given the public nature of its institutions, and its larger economy. Furthermore, Greece should make the best of its current limitations by "tightening its belt" as Stellern et al. (2015) states and strategically plan the allocation of its resources and this may mean mergers or getting rid of any redundant, inefficient, or outdated aspects of their higher education system to not allow the quality of its higher educational system suffer any further from its debt crisis. In addition, Greece will have to reach outward through policies and activities mentioned previously to improve not only its educational offerings and environment, but to significantly impact and improve the knowledge economies of both nations close and distant. For example, Greece is a member of the European Union and the Economic Monetary Union and the economic goals of these unions are analogous to the goals of the Bologna Process for higher education. These organizations seek to foster international relations and increase compatibility, especially in an area with such a war-torn history (Stellern et al., 2015).

These aspects are vital because, as with positive effects, since we are experiencing increases in internationalization, global connections, and knowledge-oriented markets, when one country suffers, the negative repercussions have a greater opportunity of adversely influencing other countries. After all, if this global environment was not a reality then the weight of the global recession of 2008 that is still impacting institutions such as those in Greece, education in general, industry, the United States and other societies (both western and eastern), and worldwide society at large would not have been a global phenomenon and would have remained isolated to one region. As a result of this evolving universal reality, and since Greece (like all countries) is not immune to either the positive or negative effects of internationalization and globalization, it is ultimately for them to decide if they wish to pursue a course of action that could foster an environment capable of facilitating growth towards becoming an international and globally-situated center of higher education.

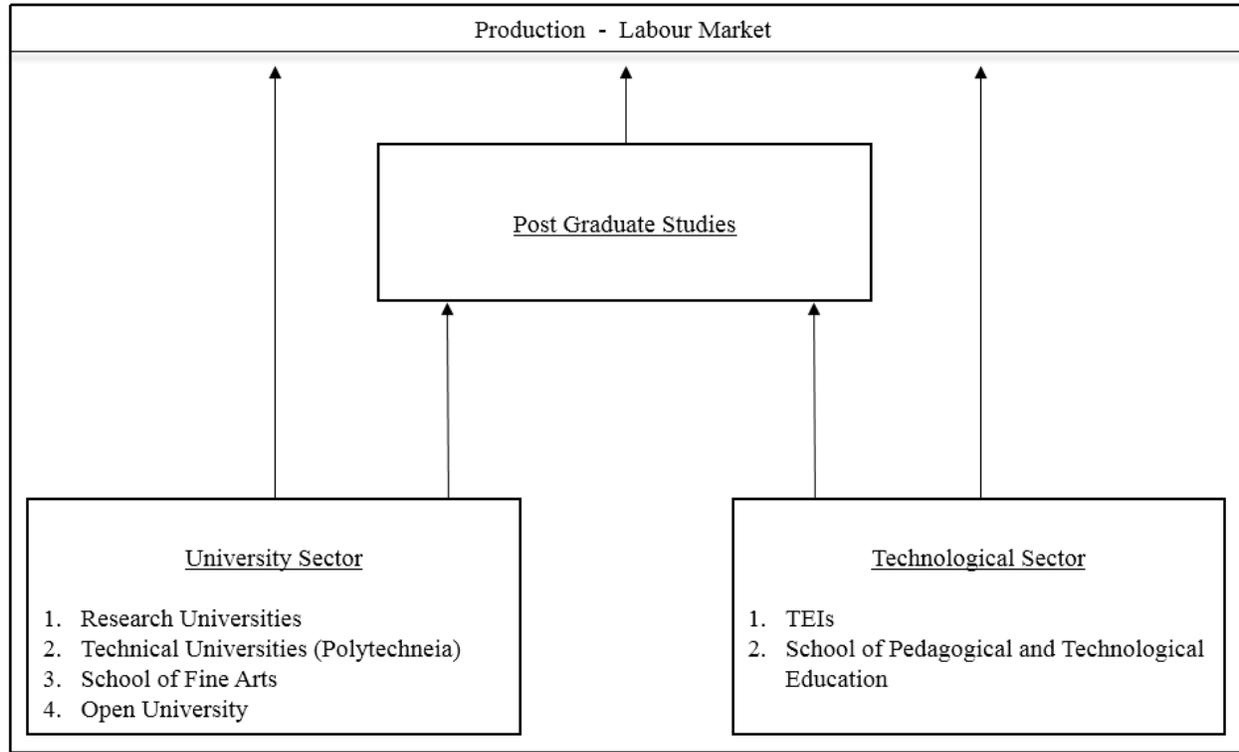
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Appendix A

Adapted from TEI Patras (2015) and EP Nuffic (2015)
Structure of Greek Higher Education System



Appendix B

Adapted from TEI Patras (2015)
Greek Higher Education Award Structure

<u>Level</u>	<u>Award Type & Granting Institution</u>
<u>3rd</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Doctoral Degree: Universities</u>
<u>2nd</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Post Graduate Specialisation Diploma (Master's Degree): Universities</u> • <u>Specialisation Diploma: TEIs</u>
<u>1st</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ptychio (6 years for medicine): Universities</u> • <u>Diploma (5 years): Universities</u> • <u>Ptychio (4 years) Honours Bachelor Degree: Universities & TEIs</u>

John. O. Lemay

I came to Georgia Southern University in the fall of 2011 and graduated with a M.S. in Experimental Psychology in the spring of 2013. Wanting to explore higher education deeper, I applied to the College of Education's Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership – Higher Education Concentration at Georgia Southern and started in the fall of 2013. My research interests have typically involved self-control and its relationship with a number of variables, including most recently, academic achievement. I have worked in the both the offices of Institutional Effectiveness and the Quality Enhancement Plan since coming to the University. In my spare time I enjoy serving both current and potential Georgia Southern students through my work in the Student Government Association, as a graduate ambassador for my program, and by volunteering my time with the Office of Student Conduct. When not on campus, working, or in class, I try to spend time listening, playing, and writing music.