

# Discussion Paper by Professor Kris Olds, University of Wisconsin-Madison

## Associations, Networks, Alliances, etc: Making Sense of the Emerging Global Higher Education Landscape<sup>1</sup>

### Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. National/International
3. National/International >> Global Assemblages
4. Mapping the Emerging Global Higher Education Landscape: Two Symptomatic Vignettes
  - a. Global higher education players, regional ambitions, and interregional fora
  - b. Technology, international consortia, and geographically dispersed research and teaching teams
5. Towards a Multi-Sited Infrastructure for Global Higher Education?

### 1. Introduction

While it is always important to be cautious in creating representations of a world as changing ever faster, where we are witnessing the 'death of distance', the 'flattening' of the earth (Friedman, 2005)<sup>2</sup>, and the steady convergence of systems (including higher education systems), norms, and technologies, it is undeniable to those of us at this conference that there *is* something going on in the world of global higher education.

Over the last decade, for example, an assortment of new or substantially transformed stakeholders has emerged. 'Established' national and international stakeholders are having to take into account 'global network' universities like New York University and the University of Nottingham, Google (est., 1998), private firms like Thomson Reuters, a more assertive European Commission (especially the Directorate Generals of Education and Culture, and Research), and a myriad of regional and international consortia (e.g., ASEAN University Network, est., 1995;

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<sup>1</sup> My sincere gratitude to the International Association of Universities (IAU) for the invitation to develop this discussion paper, and to Susan Robertson (University of Bristol) for comments on a draft version. Please note, however, that the views contained in this paper are not necessarily representative of the views of the IAU, nor any other institution.

<sup>2</sup> Friedman, T. (2005) *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Universitas 21, est., 1997; Worldwide Universities Network, est., 2000), In short, the global higher education landscape is an ever more crowded terrain.

This terrain also has a different topography, one that *stretches out* more broadly (witness the launch and establishment of the European Higher Education Area, one of the most striking of changes at a global scale), is increasingly riddled with variegated *networks* and associated epistemic communities, and is tendentially associated with norms that seem to be increasingly valuing *concentration* (clustering, categorization, differentiation, segmentation, benchmarking) whilst perhaps accepting its corollary (exclusion).

Such substantive and policy changes also come with a discursive element; a desire to change while simultaneously advertising that the change process is underway, and with associated achievements. It is impossible, for example to disentangle the discursive elements of the development process for Qatar Education City, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), Singapore's Global Schoolhouse, or the German "Excellence Initiative", from the tangible and supremely material dimensions of said initiatives. Strategy, including the development strategies we are all associated with in our respective associations, networks and alliances, is increasingly attendant to the power of image and identity, of branding, and not merely the nurturing of minor and major systemic or programmatic change. Yet just whom are we speaking to in the production of discourses (speeches, websites, reports, newsletters, etc.) about these processes? The search to attract, to be attractive -- the key dimension of 'soft power' (Nye, 2005)<sup>3</sup> -- is always present, yet so rarely acknowledged.

The objective of this discussion paper is to begin mapping out this evolving terrain, cognizant though that this is only one entry point in a process of mapping for it is impossible to provide a universal view that captures all. This particular mapping is produced by a white middle class Canadian male geographer who has spent the last 17 years studying, living and working outside of Canada, in the UK (courtesy of the Commonwealth), Singapore, the United States, and most recently Paris (for a year). In short, this is a *discussion paper*, and the text in your sight should be rebutted, critiqued, complemented, reformulated, and so on. The worst that could happen would be silent acceptance.

In the hope of furthering discussion and debate about the emerging global higher education landscape that associations, networks, alliances, and so on, react to and help construct, I have devised the following structure.

First, I will outline some of the logics that I see underlying the establishment of the new initiatives and stakeholders that are helping and complicating the lives of many of you at this conference. A key element of my argument is that the global terrain - the one in focus at this event - is more complicated and busy because of the *denationalization* process vis a vis higher education and research. By

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<sup>3</sup> Nye, J. (2005) *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Cambridge, MA: PublicAffairs.

denationalization, I mean the reframing of scopes of vision, and institutional structures and strategies, to cultivate linkages beyond the national scale.

An example would be the development of a unit within a federal ministry of education or research, that is tasked to devise a global 'branding strategy' for its higher education system<sup>4</sup>, or a unit (existing or new) in the same ministry tasked to develop an understanding of the economic impact of education exports,<sup>5</sup> which then leads to the development of laws, policies and programs to attract foreign students, and the enhancement of capacity to dialogue about this developmental dynamic. As these examples infer, there are a variety of underlying causes behind the denationalization impulse -- from the geoeconomic, to the geopolitical, to the geocultural -- though it is clear that the geoeconomic dimension of global higher education is coming to the fore.

Following the work of Anthony Giddens, Bruno Latour, and Saskia Sassen, I view globalization to be an 'in-here' phenomenon; one we are all enrolled in, effected by, and partially responsible for. This conference, for example, plays a role in the ongoing fashioning, and refashioning, of global imaginaries and strategizing about what roles associations, networks and alliances can and should play in the development process. The emerging global higher education landscape is thus being constructed by an assemblage of actors and their networks (actor-networks, in the words of the French sociologist Bruno Latour), including the ones we are associated with. These actor-networks are guided by a diversity of visions that are differentially enabled by uneven stores of resources, variable technological means, and all things roughly equal, by particular performative skills (including leadership).

In short, we are all - from the long-standing intra-national regional consortia, to the national association, to the extra-national regional association, to the international association/consortia, to the multilateral agency - contributing to the denationalization impulse; one which is:

- Reframing the development process at multiple scales (from the body through to the global);
- Valorizing (and perhaps overvalorizing?), the 'global' scale;
- Promoting policies, programmes and projects to 'internationalize', to 'globalize'.

But we are all unevenly committed, and unevenly enrolled, in the denationalization process. As I imply with this paper, we are experiencing and constructing an early

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<sup>4</sup> Robertson, S. (2008) 'Malaysia Education': strategic branding leads to growth in international student numbers 2006-8?', *GlobalHigherEd*, 16 March, available at: <http://globalhighered.wordpress.com/2008/03/16/malysias-international-student-numbers-increase-by-30-between-2006-8/>.

<sup>5</sup> Stroomberge, A. (2009) 'Measuring the economic impact of 'export education': insights from New Zealand', *GlobalHigherEd*, 7 February, available at: <http://globalhighered.wordpress.com/2009/02/07/measuring-the-economic-impact-of-export-education-insights-from-new-zealand/>.

exploratory phase of the global/transnational era. We are really just finding our way, hindered by the lack of resources, and perhaps by the absence of a multi-sited infrastructure for global higher education. Methodological nationalism (which casts a particularly long shadow in education studies given the historic role of education in nation-building - see Robertson and Dale, 2008)<sup>6</sup>, and a lack of broad *multi-disciplinary* interest in global higher education, is also hindering action.

Second, I will develop two 'symptomatic vignettes' that profile, directly and indirectly, the denationalization process, and the terrain within which all of our networks are operating. These are:

- Global higher education players, regional ambitions, and inter-regional fora
- Technology, international consortia, and geographically dispersed research and teaching teams

Please note, however, that these examples are not meant to represent all of the experiences and challenges being faced by all of our institutions. Rather, they are tangible empirical cases that help shed light on the complicated and evolving dynamics that many of us are seeking to understand, to cope with, and do a better job of mediating, on behalf of our members.

Third, I will close off by outlining some core challenges for associations, networks, and alliances given the nature of the denationalization process. These challenges will recognize the plethora of vision(s) that exists in our worlds, yet flag the point that perhaps more needs to be done to collaborate given the fast pace of change, and the uneven capacities to assess the nature of this change, as well as what future options to pursue. I will put forward, for discussion, the idea of developing a formal or informal *multi-sited infrastructure for global higher education* that associations, networks, and alliances could construct in order to collectively develop a more strategic presence in the global higher education landscape. This would complement, and also reinforce, the valuable work being done by the IAU, and enable it to further its goal of "building a worldwide higher education community". The challenges of a denationalizing era are many, and it worth debating if new forms of cross-border collaboration between stakeholders are needed. An alternative is, of course, the status quo.

## 2. National/International

The world of higher education is populated by a seemingly endless thicket of associations, consortia, networks, alliances, and so on. These stakeholders, a catch-all term I often use in this paper, represent higher education institutions and other groups associated with the education and research processes. Given that the nature of higher education systems vary across space and time, these stakeholders, and their

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<sup>6</sup> Robertson, S. and Dale, R. (2008) 'Researching education in a globalising era: beyond methodological nationalism, methodological statism, methodological educationism and spatial fetishism', in J. Resnik (ed) *The Production of Educational Knowledge in the Global Era*, Rotterdam: Sense Publications. pp. 19-32.

relationships, reflect the variable nature of the systems they are embedded in. Moreover, all higher education systems are embedded in variety of national political economies (see Figure 1 below).

<p><b>Market-ideological state</b></p> <p>Ideologically driven economic and social agendas prioritized. Based on a reversion to state-civil society relations of the of 'competitive capitalism'. Policy choices tend to be framed by ideological . Privatization of higher education and research, as well as opening of territory to foreign direct investment, are key objectives.</p>	<p><b>Plan-ideological state</b></p> <p>The state runs and controls most or all economic units, provides all higher education services, and conducts all formal research. Resource allocation/investment decisions primarily a state function. Policy choices framed by ideological dogma. Select experiments and foreign providers allowed in if tightly managed (e.g., Vietnam)</p>
<p><b>Market-rational/regulatory state</b></p> <p>The state regulates the parameters within which private companies operate. The state regulates the economy in general. But investment, production and distributive decisions are the preserve of private companies, whose actions are disciplined by the market. The state does not concern itself with what specific industries should exist and does not have explicit industry policy. Broad range of higher education and research approaches from nearly complete public provision (e.g., Canada) to acceptance and support for private provision (e.g., USA).</p>	<p><b>Plan-rational/developmental state</b></p> <p>The state regulation of economic activity is supplemented by state direction of the economy. The economy itself is largely in private ownership and firms are in competition, but the state intervenes in the context of an explicit set of national economic and social goals. High priority placed on industry policy and on promoting a structure that enhances the nation's economic competitiveness. Higher education and research traditionally provided by state in public institutions, but select experiments and foreign providers allowed in if tightly managed (e.g., China, Qatar, Singapore).</p>

**Figure 1 A typology of national political-economic systems**

*Source:* Adapted from Dicken (1998: 89)<sup>7</sup>

Stakeholders have historically emerged to represent universities, professors, students, fields/disciplines, and so on, yet they vary considerably depending upon which 'political-economic system' any one national higher education system is embedded in. Often developed in association with a crisis of representation, or following a shift in ideology and broader systemic shift in national political economy, most of the world's still existing university associations emerged in the 1900s, yet have operated, for the majority of their 'lives', within a frame of reference that has predominantly been guided by national and intra-national scale imaginaries. Supra-

<sup>7</sup> Dicken, P. (1998) *Global Shift: Transforming the World Economy*, Third Edition, London: Sage.

national scale actors did exist (e.g., the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, est., 1922), and colonial-era actors were formed (e.g., the Association of Commonwealth Universities, est. 1913) whose influence span across huge parts of the world, but the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was really the era of the national scale imaginary (Sassen, 2006).

Processes and key events, including the post-WWII reconstruction of Europe and East Asia, the emergence of the Bretton-Woods era of multilateral institutions (including UNESCO (est., 1945), and the World Bank (est., 1945)), and in the next decade the creation of the UNESCO-based International Association of Universities (est., 1950), the International Finance Corporation (est., 1956), and the OECD (est., 1961)), all laid the foundations for the insertion of key international voices into debates about higher education. Soon after, waves of decolonization helped fuel the establishment of even more stakeholders.

Critically important work was done by both national and international stakeholders throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They helped guide and mediate the effects of massification, inadequate resources, technological change, the murmurings of integration at a regional scale (e.g., in Europe), the Cold War, demographic and socio-cultural change, inequities in knowledge production and circulation, and periods of instability in higher education systems brought about by regime change (by democratic and other means).

From my perspective, a biased one to be sure, this was the era of the national/international; one profoundly shaped by visions of development that were focused at the local scale, at the state/provincial scales, at the national scale, at the regional scale, and then at the international scale. And by international I mean *inter-national*, for most of the key international actors (e.g., UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD) are creatures of member states, and are therefore only allowed to engage with higher education systems in member states after formal approval of the nation-state(s) in question, while also ostensibly committing to political neutrality.

The legacies of this era are still with us. The vast majority of stakeholders in this room are responsible for member universities who have traditionally operated at the national and inter-national levels. The key developmental dynamics that unfold, and command attention, are of a localized and intra-national or inter-national nature. Just look, for example, at the membership lists of the institutions represented here. They tend to be categorized by country, or perhaps state/province. They tend to reflect the core mission -- to represent institutions of higher education -- and are therefore composed of higher education institutions or officials (e.g., rectors). Rarely do we see non-university members listed, apart from on select advisory boards.<sup>8</sup> The formal membership, and informal structure of many institutions or entities present at this meeting also often reflect the historical legacies of colonialism, which laid the legal and linguistic foundations of many higher education systems. This said, the partial

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<sup>8</sup> I note, with interest, that the IAU seems to be moving towards a more 'inclusive' notion of membership when it substituted, a few years ago, the slogan "Universities of the world working together" for "Building a worldwide higher education community".

breakdown of the national and international scale frames of reference were foreshadowed by the emergence of important post-colonial era institutions (e.g., l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, formed in 1970), which had as its axis of interest the French-speaking world. Francophonie's origins (a creation of 'heads of state'), or the post-colonial era development agenda of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), remind us, though, of the long-lasting sway of national and inter-national imaginaries.

### 3. National/International >> Denationalization & Global Assemblages

If the legacies of the national and inter-national are still important, what has become apparent is that a rescaling process is underway. The argument that I would like to put forward is that a process that could be deemed *denationalization* (Jessop, 1999; Sassen, 2006)<sup>9</sup> is underway. As noted in the Introduction, this is a process that we are all implicated in; it is not a process handed down to us from the ether, or foisted upon us by some unnamed actors shielded from view.

Denationalization can be broadly defined as the process of reorientation from the national and international to the global. A key element of this concept is that the denationalization process is initiated from (a) 'outside' (e.g., via the activities of transnational corporations), but *also* (b) within the nation-state (e.g., a ministry of higher education), and (c) within other national institutions (e.g., a national association of universities) that have traditionally focused upon intra-national scale developmental dynamics. As Saskia Sassen notes, in an interview with Magnus Wennerhag (2006)<sup>10</sup>:

With the notion of denationalization I try to capture and make visible a mix of dynamics that is also altering sovereignty but is doing so from the inside out, and on the ground, so to speak -- the multiple micro-processes that are reorienting the historic national project towards the new global project. National state policies may still be couched in the language of the national, but at least some of them no longer are: they are now oriented towards building global systems *inside* the national state. From there, then, the term denationalization.

Examples of (b) above would include the development of capacity to analyze and develop global higher education export strategies within ministries of education or international trade/economic development, or the formation of ministry strategies and expertise (e.g., via manuals) to court select foreign universities to open branch

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<sup>9</sup> Jessop, R. (1999) 'Reflections on globalization and its illogics', in K. Olds, *et al.* (eds.) *Globalization and the Asia-Pacific: Contested Territories*, pp. 19-38; Sassen, S. (2006) *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Sassen, S., and Wennerhag, M. (2006) 'Denationalized states and global assemblages: an interview with Saskia Sassen', *eurozine*, 20 November, available at: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-11-20-sassen-en.html>.

campuses. In both examples, the nation-state plays a critically important role as animator, mediator and arena for the rescaling process (Brenner, 2004).<sup>11</sup>

An example of (c) would include the development of what tends to be classified as 'international' units or initiatives within national associations. How many of the national associations represented here, for example, have experienced pressure to forge an international/global strategy, or establish connections between your universities and one or more institutions in other countries, not all of them in similar levels of encasement (e.g., nation to region or city-region to nation). Australia's national Group of Eight coalition, for example is currently engaged in dialogue with the US Midwest's Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), a consortia that received a lot of attention last year following its deal with Google to digitize some 10 million volumes from CIC libraries, the results of which will also benefit non-CIC members (McFadden, 2009).<sup>12</sup>

The denationalization process is also associated with new policies, the inculcation and valorization of 'global' outlooks, norms and subjectivities, and the cultivation of globalizing practices (e.g. developing and offering international double & joint degrees).

It is also important to note that the denationalization process facilitates the emergence of a myriad of "global assemblages"; specialized systems that operate across borders, and that govern processes both within and across nation-states (Sassen, 2006).<sup>13</sup>

Examples, when thinking about the application of the assemblage concept to global higher education, would include host Ministry-foreign university agreements about what 'academic freedom' is when a branch campus is opened up in a territory governed by an authoritarian regime (Olds, 2005)<sup>14</sup>, or analytical technologies created by Thomson Reuters for assessing the scope, scale and impact of the international joint authorship of papers, which is then used by the European Commission to frame Europe's new (2008) *Strategic Framework for International Science and Technology Cooperation*. See Figure 2 below which was developed in this particular exercise.

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<sup>11</sup> Brenner, N. (2004) *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>12</sup> McFadden, B. (2009) 'Collaboration among research universities: a model from the US Midwest', *GlobalHigherEd*, 31 January, available at: <http://globalhighered.wordpress.com/2009/01/31/collaboration-among-research-universities/>.

<sup>13</sup> Sassen, S. (2006) *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. On the concept of 'assemblages', also see Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier (eds.) (2005) *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethnics as Anthropological Problems*, Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>14</sup> Olds, K. (2005) 'Articulating agendas and traveling principles in the layering of new strands of academic freedom in contemporary Singapore', in B. Czarniawska and G. Sevón (eds.) *Where Translation is a Vehicle, Imitation its Motor, and Fashion Sits at the Wheel: How Ideas, Objects and Practices Travel in the Global Economy*, Malmö: Liber AB, pp. 167-189.



emerged a mere five years ago, but in two distinct locations: a private sector media outlet located in the UK, and a national (public) university in China. The logics behind the emergence of the two main global rankings schemes could not have been more different, yet they have both come to be progressively more and more institutionalized, and are now exhibitiv of considerable scope yet variable governing power depending on how important their outcomes are perceived to be. At the same time it is possible to note that competing ranking projects are being advanced within Europe, with a variant under development at the OECD.<sup>16</sup>

Let us shift, now, and ground this discussion via the development of two brief 'vignettes' that highlight aspects of the denationalization process at work, often in ways that involve those of us associated with associations, networks, alliances, etc.

#### 4. Mapping the Emerging Global Higher Education & Research Landscape: Two Symptomatic Vignettes

##### *Global higher education players, regional ambitions, and interregional fora*

How do dominant national and regional players in global higher education speak to, and engage with, other parts of the world, especially when these parts are viewed as in need of 'foreign assistance'?

History matters, for it has laid a foundational path, including taken-for-granted assumptions that shape the tone, mechanisms, and power dynamics of bilateral and/or interregional relationships. Times change, of course, and the rationale and logics behind the relationship building cannot help but evolve. The end of the Cold War, for example, enabled the building of relationships (e.g., the 46 country European Higher Education Area) that were previously impossible to imagine, let alone create.

The structure of higher education systems matter too. How does a nation 'speak' (e.g., the USA) when there is no senior minister of higher education, and indeed no national system *per se* (such as that in Germany, Canada or Indonesia)? It is possible, though content and legitimacy are derived out of a relatively diverse array of stakeholders.

In this context we have seen new forms of engagement emerging between Europe and the Global South, and between the USA and the Global South. I am wary that the 'Global South' concept is a problematic one, but it is used enough to convey key aspects of the power/territory nexus, so I'll stick with it for the duration of a brief vignette in a discussion paper.

What are the driving forces underlying such forms of global higher education engagement?

Clearly the desire to engage in capacity building, for a myriad of reasons, is a driving force. A second force is concern about what the other dominant players are doing; a form of global engagement inspired or spurred on by the competitive impulse.

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<sup>16</sup> Though in both cases promoters argue that these are actually not rankings.

A third and related driving force is the amorphous desire to project 'soft power' - the externalization of values, the translation of agendas, the enhancement of the attraction dimension, and so on, such that transformations align with the objectives of the projecting peoples and systems (Hartmann, 2008)<sup>17</sup>. Needless to say, higher education is one of the more malleable, effective, and relatively affordable vehicles for the exercise of soft power.

All three driving forces are evident in a spate of events and initiatives underway in 2008 and 2009.

### Europe Engages Asia

While the long history of Euro-Asia relations has often incorporated a higher education element (witness the impact of colonialism on higher education systems in many of East and Southeast Asian countries), the contemporary era is associated with new dynamics, and new forms of linkages. Over the last decade, for example, the logics of capacity building, the need to enhance ties to select regions (e.g., East, South, and Southeast Asia), and the projection of soft power, has enticed Europe to forge new relations across space via the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) framework.

Following an incremental development process that began with the establishment of ASEM in 1996, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in 1997, and the ASEM Education Hub (AEH)<sup>18</sup> in 2006, programmatic activities shifted from person-to-person, research cluster, and institutional scale initiatives<sup>19</sup> upwards, towards bringing together key administrative and political leaders to discuss a wider array of issues. This was accomplished via the sponsoring of an inaugural meeting of ASEM's Ministries of Education, which was hosted by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and titled 'Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe'. This event took place in Berlin from 5-6 May 2008.

This initiative is part of an emerging move to have ministers of education/higher education/research play a role in thinking bilaterally, regionally, and indeed globally. One interesting aspect of this development is that ministries (and ministers) of education are starting, albeit very unevenly, to think beyond the nation *within* the

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<sup>17</sup> Hartmann, E. (2008) 'Bologna goes global: a new imperialism in the making', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 6(3): 207-220.

<sup>18</sup> AEH's advisory board includes representatives from Academic Cooperation Association (Belgium), Asea-Uninet (Austria), ASEAN University Network Secretariat (AUN), Asia-Pacific Association for Internationalisation of Education (APAIE), Asia-Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development (APEID) in UNESCO, Association of Indian Universities, Association of South-East Asia Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL), Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific (AUAP), European University Association (EUA), German Rectors' Conference, Hanoi University of Technology (Vietnam), International Association of Universities (IAU), International Cooperation of Kunming University of Science (China), Irish Universities Association (Ireland), Korea National Open University (Korea), Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (Denmark), Nuffic (Netherlands), Secretariat for ASEM DUO Fellowship Programme, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Secretariat, Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), University of Aarhus (Denmark), University of Alicante (Spain), University Sains Malaysia (Malaysia).

<sup>19</sup> Information on ASEF projects between 1998 and 2008 is available here: [http://www.asef.org/index.php?option=com\\_theme&task=archive&id=1&Itemid=142](http://www.asef.org/index.php?option=com_theme&task=archive&id=1&Itemid=142).

institutional structure of the nation-state (Jayasuriya, 2009).<sup>20</sup> In this case, though, a regional voice (the European Union) is very much present, as are other stakeholders. The European University Association (EUA), Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service), and the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC) all play critically important facilitative roles with respect to the formation of region-region higher education relations, and they do so via the mechanism of the EU-funded EU-Asia Higher Education Platform (EAHEP) (see (Robertson 2008)).<sup>21</sup>

Since the May meeting in Berlin, a linked event - the 1st ASEM Rectors' Conference: Asia-Europe Higher Education Leadership Dialogue "Between Tradition and Reform: Universities in Asia and Europe at the Crossroads" - was held from 27-29 October 2008 in Berlin. Other related initiatives include:

- The European Higher Education Fair and Symposium in New Delhi, India (12-14 November 2008);
- A Roundtable on Autonomy, Governance and Management (25-26 November 2008, Vietnam);
- A Workshop on Doctoral/Graduate Education in Europe and Asia (8-9 December 2008, China);
- EU-Asia Higher Education Platform (EAHEP) workshop on student mobility, joint degree programmes and institutional development (16-17 February 2009, Malaysia);
- 2nd ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (14-15 May 2009, Vietnam);
- International Partnerships in Higher Education: Policies, Practices and Lessons Learned (8-9 June 2009, Indonesia).

Thus we see a complex patchwork of universities, associations, ministries, regional organizations, and an interregional secretariat, all coming together to fashion dialogue and action regarding the transformation of higher education systems and relations.

### The US Engages Asia

Moving from ASEM to the USA, we have seen the logics of capacity building, the need to enhance ties to select regions (e.g., Asia and Africa), and the projection of soft power, guiding some new initiatives. The US Government, for example, sponsored the Asia Regional Higher Education Summit in Dhaka, Bangladesh between 6-9 October 2008. As the official press release from the US Embassy in Dhaka put it, the:

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<sup>20</sup> Jayasuriya, K. (2009) 'Learning by the market: regulatory regionalism, Bologna, and accountability communities', paper presented at the ISA Conference, New York, February.

<sup>21</sup> Robertson, S. (2008) 'Europe/Asia' regionalism, higher education and the production of world order', *Policy Futures in Education*, 6(6): 718-729.

Asia Regional Higher Education Summit is sponsored by the United States Government through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and co-hosted by the University of Dhaka and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. This Summit is a follow-up to the Global Higher Education Summit recently [29-30 April 2008] held in Washington, DC. The Washington summit was convened by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, and USAID Administrator and Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance Henrietta Fore. The Summit's objective was to expand the role and impact of U.S. and foreign higher education institutions in worldwide social and economic development.

It is worth noting that countries representing 'Asia' at the Summit include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, the United States and Vietnam.

### The US Engages Africa

An event-centred approach to country-region relationship building was also exhibited in October 2008, when the US Government sponsored the Africa Regional Higher Education Summit in Kigali, Rwanda. This summit is also, like the US-linked Asia event noted above, a follow-on initiative of the US-sponsored Global Higher Education Summit held in April 2008.

According to the official program, the Africa Regional Higher Education Summit is a three-day event:

that will address innovative approaches to meet the challenges of the higher education community in Africa; to learn from each other by sharing best practices in partnering; and to foster mutually beneficial partnerships initiated before and during the summit. In this regionally focused forum, speakers and participants will discuss how higher education influences human and institutional capacity development, and plays a role in preparing Africa for economic growth and global competitiveness.

The summit is designed to focus on developing partnerships between higher education institutions, foundations and the private sector at the national and regional levels, although consideration will also be given to international and cross-continental levels.

Summit participation will be limited to presidents, chancellors, and rectors representing African and American universities, and foundation and corporate leaders to ensure maximum interaction and sharing of perspectives between and among decision makers and authorized agents. The working sessions and organized breaks will be structured to maximize input and interactions between summit participants.

It is worth noting that this Summit is the outcome of a long series of 'development'-oriented initiatives framed by the US' National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), an association led by an official with strong political

connections to the Bush-Cheney regime, though someone with the capacity to operate in a 'bipartisan' (in American political parlance) way.

### 'Soft Power' and Global Higher Education

The soft power dimension behind the formation of linkages with regions like Asia and Africa is not always made explicit by Europe nor the USA. Yet two aspects of soft power, as it is sought after, are worth noting in this brief vignette.

First, the intertwining of both soft and 'hard' power agendas and players is more evident in the case of the USA. For example Henrietta H. Fore (Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and Administrator, USAID) spoke at the higher education summit in Africa, as well as at the Pentagon about the establishment of the AFRICOM initiative:

Secretary Gates has spoken powerfully and eloquently on many occasions about the need for the United States to enhance its non-military as well as military instruments of national power in service of our foreign policy objectives. The Department of State and USAID are proud to play their respective primary roles in diplomacy and development.<sup>22</sup>

Thus AFRICOM, which is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, effectively has an Africa-focused global higher education initiative associated with it (under the control of AFRICOM partner USAID).

Second, many of the US-led initiatives with USAID support were associated with political appointees (e.g., ex-U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings), or politically-connected leaders of more autonomous stakeholder organizations. Was it a coincidence that the rush of US events happened a month before the US federal election?

It is, of course, easy to overstate the soft-power dimension of the US higher education for development strategy, for even stakeholders (see Atwood, McPherson and Natsios, 2008)<sup>23</sup> have long lamented the "organizational and programmatic chaos" that exists in Washington DC regarding higher education development aid. This said the geopolitics of regional competition for Africa, and increasingly Asia, are topics worthy of more discussion and debate.

Another perspective is that such US initiatives don't really matter in the end, for the real projectors of American soft power are hundreds of autonomous, highly ranked, active, and well-resourced US universities, such as Cornell (which is active in South Asia), or all of the US universities active in Qatar's Education City complex. In other words these universities don't need ministerial talk shops in places like Berlin or Washington DC to open doors to extend their transnational networks. Of course many

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<sup>22</sup> See Fore's remarks at: <http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2008/sp081001.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Atwood, J.B., McPherson, P.M., Natsios, A. (2008) 'Arrested development', *Foreign Affairs*, 87(6): 123-132.

European universities are just as active as a Cornell, but the structure of European higher education systems is vastly different, and it cannot help but generate a centralizing impulse in the projection of soft power with the consequence that university associations in Europe (especially the EUA) have much more power in determining the principles, and substantive content, associated with interregional relations on a higher education front.

As a phenomenon, the actions of key players developing regional initiatives are well worth illuminating, including by the sponsors and participants themselves. Regions, systems, and interregional relations are being constructed in a conceptual and programmatic sense. As we know from any history of bilateral and interregional relations, frameworks that help generate a myriad of tangible outcomes are being constructed, and in doing so future development paths, from all perspectives, are being laid down.

Yet it is also important not to read too much into this interregional agenda. We need to reflect upon how geo-strategic visions and agendas are connected to and transformative of the practices of day-to-day life in the targeted regions. How do these visions and agendas make their mark in lecture halls, hiring procedures, curricula, and course content? This is not a development process that unfolds, in a seamless and uni-directional way, and it is important to think about global higher education players, regional ambitions, and interregional initiatives at a series of interrelated scales in order to begin understanding what is going on.

### *Technology, international consortia, and geographically dispersed research and teaching teams*

The Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) is one of several international consortia that have been created, since the late 1990s, to deepen linkages between universities. I have been involved with two of them (the WUN and Universitas 21) while working at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the National University of Singapore.

As Lily Kong (Vice-President, Global Relations, National University of Singapore) has noted<sup>24</sup>:

[o]ne of the challenges of making such university alliances work is the lack of clarity of intention, and the lack of a clear articulation of how such alliances, often formed from the top by senior university administrators, can achieve the stated objectives. In almost every new alliance, establishing research partnerships and collaboration among member universities is said to be a priority. Are alliances really an effective way to develop research collaboration though? Member universities that are chosen to be part of an alliance are often chosen for political reasons ("political" in the most expansive of its meanings). They may be chosen because they are thought to be "research powerhouses". But different universities have different areas of research strength, and

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<sup>24</sup> Kong L. (2007) 'The rise, rhetoric, and reality of international university consortia', *GlobalHigherEd*, 7 October, available at: <http://globalhighered.wordpress.com/2007/10/07/the-rise-rhetoric-and-reality-of-inter-university-consortia/>.

university administrators sitting together to decide an area/s among their universities for research collaboration can be quite artificial. Such alliances can then at best facilitate meetings and workshops among researchers, but the collaborative sparks must come from the ground. Throwing a group of people together once or twice and asking that they produce huge grant applications to support collaborative research is not likely to happen. Those with the responsibility of developing alliances, however, will be anxious to show results, and sometimes, just the act of bringing researchers together is hardly sufficient result.

See also the informative work of Eric Beerkens and Marijk van der Wende regarding the phenomenon of international consortia.<sup>25</sup>

Given the challenges that Lily Kong has outlined, my colleagues and I have been trying to think through ways to use the international consortia framework as a vehicle to deepen regular connections between geographically dispersed researchers. In doing so, though, we've been faced with debates about the costs of facilitating relatively frequent human mobility between member universities, not to mention which types of people (Graduate students? Faculty? Staff?) to target with available support. To be sure there is nothing quite like face-to-face engagement: intense sessions in meetings, workshops, summer institutes, and in situ collaborative research. However, these face-to-face moments, which can never be replaced, need to be supplemented by regular virtual gatherings. Furthermore, the ongoing financial crisis is now generating troublesome ripple effects in research networks where bodily movement across space is the ideal.

In the course of thinking about the development of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's WUN website, we have been considering the establishment of some web-based resources for researchers who seek to collaborate virtually, including via sound and video in synchronous (i.e. concurrent/real time) fashion. We have used a variety of such technologies -- Skype, video-conferencing, Access Grid Node -- before, though we have not formally identified, at UW-Madison's Division of International Studies (the internal base of the WUN office), the full array of options, which ones are best for what activities, what the full cost (if any) of using each of them are, and how researchers can access them (if they need to be booked). Yet a recent search for a model website within the WUN, and within an associated consortia (the CIC) failed to identify any examples.

Given the above, we recently met with UW-Madison's Division of Information Technology (DOIT). DOIT's experienced staff ended up having more questions for us - very simple yet telling questions - than we had for them. They wisely helped us think through the forms of collaboration being undertaken via WUN-funded initiatives, and what types and level of resources we had to enable such collaboration to occur.

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<sup>25</sup> See: Beerkens, E. (2002) 'International inter-organisational arrangements in higher education: towards a typology, *TEAM Tertiary Education and Management*, 8(4): 297-314; Beerkens, E., and van der Wende, M.C. (2007) 'The paradox in international cooperation: institutionally embedded universities in a global environment, *Higher Education*, 53: 61-79.

Now, the vast majority of WUN-related research collaboration does not involve the transmission and analysis of large-scale data sets - the type dependent upon the Internet2 cyberinfrastructure and collaborative platforms like HUBzero. Rather, it tends to involve formal and informal dialogue within and between multi-sited research teams, fora such as workshops and conferences, virtual (video-conference) courses for students in multiple sites, and formal and informal graduate student advising. Given this, DOIT's staff recommended that we explore, more intensively, options for web-conferencing. There are, of course, many other options but we settled on web-conferencing as the likely best option.

Web-conferencing is a form of collaboration that enables geographically dispersed research teams to connect via computer desktops, while allowing engagement throughout the link-up process. Deliberative engagement versus 'passive learning', is important for research teams typically do not want to sit quietly while someone they know is speaking. Typical features of web-conferencing include slide-show presentation, live and streaming video, the ability to incorporate web tours (e.g., demonstrating websites), text-based chatting, and the ability to archive associated activities.

There are a considerable number of webconferencing platform options including Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro, Elluminate, WebEx, and Marratech. Note, though, that this is not a new technology: web-conferencing has been heavily used in some disciplines (e.g., Chemistry and Physics), and of course the business world, for some time. It has also moved through a number of development phases, and is increasingly affordable and simpler to use, which facilitates the bringing together of research teams from across the globe.

Synchronous communication technologies that operate via computer desktops are increasingly important when working to deepen network relations between members of small-scale yet geographically dispersed research communities. This said, such technologies can never create nor determine; they simply enable. Yet the enabling process is hindered by lack of knowledge about the technological options at hand, and how they mesh with the nature of the research communities (and cultures) associated with the creative process.

It is at this level - that of the textures of practice - through which international networks are brought to life, and international consortia show their worth, or not. In this case we sought to use some of the positive features of the denationalization process to enable faculty and students to work with the ideal people, regardless of their geographic location. We are in the process of scaling up the findings of this narrowly defined exercise, and the homepage of the WUN will soon outline the array of options for research teams within the entire 17 universities that make up the WUN.

##### *5. Towards a Multi-Sited Infrastructure for Global Higher Education?*

To borrow a phrase from Mary Louise Pratt<sup>26</sup>, this is an era of emerging “planetary longings”; an era that is associated with multitudinous pushes upwards in scale -- or horizon stretching -- framed by norms that are not always in agreement. From searches within higher education systems for global profit making opportunities, - to interregional capacity building and social justice development agendas, - to senior managements’ desire to engender more ‘global cultural competency’ amongst students, - to university consortias’ desire to address the emerging global challenges of climate change and disease, the higher education landscape is in the process of being denationalized.

As the two symptomatic vignettes illustrate, associations, networks and alliances are integral to the denationalization process, enabling members of universities to collaborate across space, virtually, when teaching and conducting research, or in a policy and program sense (not to mention a geopolitical sense) when forging linkages with higher education systems in other countries and regions.

The argument above has suggested that we are witnessing the creation of a more complex and multi-scalar system, with associated sets of logics and visions. The creation of global assemblages -- some stable, some transient -- continues apace. Viewed from an association/network/consortia perspective, the denationalization process opens up a much broader universe of options for action.

Take the case of the creation of the “global dimension” of the Bologna Process (Zgaga, 2006).<sup>27</sup> In developing this formal global dimension (from 2005 on), in thinking beyond the confines of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), key stakeholders were faced with the challenge of crafting principles for relating to the rest of the world, and then delineating which scale or scales (countries, regions, or?) to operate at. While the stakeholders representing the EHEA have done a stellar job of crafting a coherent vision given the myriad of views being expressed, and an equally impressive implementation strategy, nothing short of a Pandora’s box was opened after deciding to ‘turn around’ and face outside of the region. Yet the diverse stakeholders had no choice given the misconceptions and “echoes” (Zgaga, 2006) being created around the world once the Bologna process was formally initiated in 1999.

The challenges facing universities and associated stakeholders are immense, and they are unlikely to go away. The discourses associated with the ‘knowledge economy’, and the ‘knowledge society’ are ever more present, even when speaking about rural development issues. And global market makers - those in the public sphere (e.g., the national governments seeking to enhance export earnings via the provision of higher education services), and those in the private sphere (e.g., the developers of distance education platforms, citation indices, or credit ratings reports) - are pushing forward, and assertively so. No one, not even universities in Bhutan, can escape the networks extended by Thomson Reuters or Google.

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<sup>26</sup> Pratt, M.L. (2008) ‘Planetary longings: sitting in the light of the great solar TV’, in M. Gallagher (ed) *World Writing: Poetics, Ethics, Globalization*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 207-223.

<sup>27</sup> Zgaga, P. (2006) *Looking Out: The Bologna Process in a Global Setting - on the External Dimension of the Bologna Process*, Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Education Research.

It is, of course, unlikely that we will see a world government to provide enlightened oversight and the global governance of higher education. The politics associated with the elevation of any one stakeholder to guide the process is not fathomable, nor desirable. Yet *defacto* forms of global governance are occurring, including via the resources and technologies wielded by the private sector.

In such a context, is more coordination and action needed? Do we need to ensure that a whole host of issues - everything from international double and joint degrees, to questions about how best to negotiate with key knowledge brokers or foreign ministries - are more intensely debated and 'best practiced', so as to prevent the wheel being reinvented, time and time again within all of our institutions?

If this is the case, is it enough for meetings like these to continue to be held? Well organized meetings, such as this one, have much potential value. In addition, periodic meetings between disparate stakeholders enable collaboration *and* competition to unfold for consensus is not required.

Yet if even more collaboration and partnership is needed, what could be done to enhance the "necessary technical and institutional infrastructure" (using Sassen's terms) to better understand what is going on, so that the development process can be more efficiently and effectively reshaped? This is not to say sharing is not underway, but I would argue that the IAU, its constitutive parts, and its many friends, might want to consider playing a role in engendering the creation of an *integrated multi-sited infrastructure for global higher education*; a global higher education space, if you will.

A multi-sited infrastructure would recognize that "global objects proliferate around us, and they seem to be of all kinds and shapes"<sup>28</sup>, yet we know that these objects (e.g., ranking schemes, bibliometrics) mean different things to different people. Any collective move forward, if so desired, needs to recognize the diversity of views on issues of concern. Yet collective action, and associated forms of cooperation and partnership can engender positive change. We certainly don't need more information: if this is the era of planetary longing and global networks, it is also an era of information overload, with little time to digest what does exist. What we arguably need is better-channeled information, periodic (when needed) collective action, and more accessible openings for voices (e.g., student bodies) that have a challenging time extending their views beyond the confines of their bases.

If so, how might this be structured and funded? An innovative web-based platform fueled by an altruistic university or agency? A hub and spoke model, or integrated hubs in multiple regions? Or more effective distribution of the knowledge produced by existing institutions within existing international channels? Here I think, for example, about the wealth of insights generated by the 'international experts' in many of the national associations represented here; knowledge that deserves to be distributed far more broadly than it currently is.

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<sup>28</sup> Pratt, M.L. (2008) 'Planetary longings: sitting in the light of the great solar TV', in M. Gallagher (ed) *World Writing: Poetics, Ethics, Globalization*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 219-220.

If we were to move forward, should the epistemic communities of which we are all a part be broadened, such that a wider array of actors and their networks, including non-university stakeholders, be drawn in? If universities are but one of many knowledge producers in the global knowledge production landscape, why are we so exclusive? Or should core competencies and capacities be enhanced to as to enable the preserve of elements of higher education that might be in danger of being deteriorated if not destroyed?

On a related note, it is important to flag the issue of *preparedness* for the era of global assemblages. If we are, as I have been arguing, in the early stages of new forms of engagement with global scale actors, or new components of the nation-state (e.g., ministries of foreign affairs, ministries of international trade and investment), are we prepared to engage with them, and do we have the needed *capabilities* to do so? For example, what does your institution know about Thomson Reuters or Elsevier B.V. (which owns Scopus): their *modus operandi*, their key players, their revenue streams, and so on? How trained up are your personnel to negotiate, in a hard-headed yet realistic way, with global private sector actors who are ethically obliged to look out for their shareholders, above all else? And when we do engage with these actors, have we taken as much advantage of our own internal resources as we could have - all of our Intellectual Property (IP) professors in schools of law, or our social scientists with expertise in global governance, for example.

One way or another, the terrain that we, as associations, alliances, networks, etc., have to navigate is undeniably more complex, with ever more choices on offer. Yet the logarithmic increase in paths that could be followed is not matched by logarithmic increases in our individual financial resources, such that research and strategy divisions, or think tanks, could be created and drawn upon in any one of our institutions. More interactive and effective partnerships, and global alliances, might be the only way forward.

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