

IAU/IAUP Presidents' Symposium

*Institutional Autonomy Revisited: National Experiences, Regional Comparisons*

Chiang Mai, Thailand, 8-9 December 2006

Concluding Summary Remarks

by

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When IAU proposed institutional autonomy as the theme for the second joint event to be organized by the IAU and IAUP, we could not have known how pertinent and timely this optic would be in Thailand where a number of institutions are at present reviewing the law that will make them autonomous universities. I wish to thank IAUP for accepting this topic and for the collaboration we have enjoyed in planning and preparing for this Presidents' Symposium. I am particularly pleased that Prof. Suchada Kranandana, President of Chulalongkorn university has been able to be with us despite the fact the discussions about her university's autonomy are now going on in Bangkok and that, as is usual, the debate is a heated one.

The genesis for this comparative forum was actually a presentation made in Paris about eighteen months ago by the President of Keio University in Japan who was describing the changing law in his country concerning the autonomy of Japanese public universities. His presentation, which was echoed during our Symposium Prof. Tisato Kajiyama's paper about Kyushu University in Japan confirmed the progress and impact that has been made in Japan since the law was introduced. The various forms that institutional autonomy can take and the way the concept is interpreted is continuously changing.

As Dr. Alvaro Romo has already indicated, this is the second joint event organized by IAU and IAUP. Ingrid Moses, IAUP president at that time and Alvaro, as Secretary General-elect of IAUP and I collaborated in 2003 on another key topic, namely Women and Leadership in Higher Education. The conference was held in Monterrey, Mexico and at least two women presidents who are with us here, took part in that event as well.

At that meeting I acted as Rapporteur General and I am glad not to play that role here. Dr. Andris Barblan and I have agreed that our joint concluding comments were less a true report on the proceedings. As you have heard, his presentation has been more of an additional set of reflections about the changing and evolving nature of autonomy and the various reasons for these changes. My few remarks, on the other hand are merely a modest set of points highlighting key areas of consensus from what has been a very rich and dynamic 2-day symposium. I will also indicate some of the steps that IAU may do in the next few weeks as follow-up to the event.

First, though, allow me to start by stating that nothing I heard here during the symposium would lead me to suggest that we revise the IAU 1998 Statement on Academic Freedom, University Autonomy and Social Responsibility. I must thank once again Prof. Justin Thorens and Prof. Guy Neave for this excellent document that warrants re-reading and much wider dissemination. It seems to me that it is withstanding the test of time very

well and this success reflects the long and in-depth discussion and consultation process that underpinned its elaboration. The same must be said about the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, which has been quoted several times and which will soon celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

To demonstrate how much our discussion here, was well-articulated in the IAU Statement let me just quote three sections:

*...the University does not exist for itself or even for the sake of knowledge but for the benefits it brings to Humankind and to Society by virtue and in view of its social utility;*

*... 'neither Academic Freedom..., nor University Autonomy are privileges but [...] are the basic and inalienable conditions which enable the University as an institution of scholarships and learning [...] fully to assume and optimally to fulfil the responsibilities Society confides to both; and*

*... 'the University has the obligation to uphold and demonstrate to Society that it stands by its collective obligation to quality and ethics, to fairness and tolerance, to the setting and the upkeep of standards – academic when applied to research and teaching, administrative when applied to due process, to the rendering of accounts to society, to self-verification, to institutional review and to transparency in the conduct of institutional self-government.'*

There are other ways in which your presentations and discussions during the past two days can be found in the Statement. For example, throughout the symposium, we have been defining and clarifying the concept of autonomy, noting that it is crucial to do so continuously, as the concept does change over time. Though looked upon at different moments in history, it is almost always a matter of balancing various forces, needs and expectations. Autonomy is a negotiated rather than an imposed reality.

In general, autonomy has been defined here and in the IAU Statement as the freedom institutions of higher education have to steer their own affairs. It is the freedom to examine, question and enquire for the sake of those processes and in pursuit of truth. It can also be defined as the distance that exists between the institutional decision-making and the state, the church and/or the market.

This freedom and the manoeuvring room, form the basic, but perhaps not sufficient, condition to fulfil the University's responsibilities and obligations to Society. However the exact nature of this space of freedom is never static and is continuously being negotiated.

We heard much to confirm and thus to convince us that context matters, that history and tradition matter and currently, it is clear that the process of globalisation and its impact on the local economy and local education system also matters.

This fact makes it all the more important for comparisons to be made and for forums such as the IAU/IAUP symposium to be available so that we can compare policies, practices, threats and dangers as well as the various interpretations of autonomy that are being adopted around the world.

It is only because we have such opportunities that we begin to understand why students in Cordoba, in 1918 fought for autonomy and at the same time also understand why students in Thailand today fight against autonomy. Opportunities like this also allow us to understand better why in Japan and Thailand gaining autonomy is most frequently referred to as the process of incorporating the university. This would not be the terminology used for the process of granting or gaining autonomy elsewhere.

It remains essential to explain the rationale and need for autonomy. We cannot treat it as a Sacred Cow, nor should it be taken for granted. While trust is important, it is not blind and accountability with regard to the specific and general ways in which Universities and other HEIs meet their obligations and responsibilities must be continuously documented and shared.

For the most part, accountability frameworks already exist around the world. They are more or less elaborate, but it seems that still, only rarely do they seem to satisfy and lead to the building or rebuilding of trust. This requires more examination and discussion.

Accountability is linked to expectations and these are multiple and growing. In most countries, universities and other higher education institutions are looked upon to deliver a continuously growing, and at times unrealistic list of outcomes. These become particularly unrealistic as State support for the institutions of higher education is eroding. First we need to examine closely the extent to which the accountability frameworks truly invite accounting for the full mission of universities. Do we have accounting frameworks and processes that cover all of the dimensions of the utilitarian, social, scientific and cultural expectations that are placed on these institutions? How much value is really placed on these various aspects?

The Symposium participants also questioned and considered the extent to which these multiple expectation can or should be fulfilled by a single institution of higher education. They went further to underline and call for a better general recognition or and more appreciation for the diversity of HEI missions.

In addition and in the context of higher education diversity, the mission (research intensive, comprehensive or liberal arts, etc.) and the nature (public or private) of the HEI in question also matter and these dimensions must find their place in the discussion of autonomy and the related accountability frameworks. Much of our discussion focused on public institutions and for the most part on the classical, traditional university.

Money, whether it comes from government or from the market as a key parameter of autonomy dominated our discussion. It did so far more than ideology or politics, though we know that this is a luxury not enjoyed by all higher education institutions even in the

present day. We are acutely aware that there are several countries where higher education leaders and their colleagues continue to struggle with and suffer from ideological and political interference today. The tragedy taking place in Iraqi higher education is one very sad example.

Interestingly enough, when reviewing how money acts as a steering mechanism and a constraint on autonomy, in both instances - whether money is coming from the State or resources are based on market forces, the most important exertion of influence on autonomy is often indirect. So contrasting reality and perception, theory and practice and legal means as opposed to mechanisms and administrative or bureaucratic instruments becomes essential in any analysis.

Finally, almost every speaker came back to the issue of leadership and management and several other internal issues, proper to the institution. In other words, the light was also shined on what is required at the institutional level to secure and then successfully operate an autonomous institution so that the autonomy – always hard-won - is maintained and not undermined. Governance structures, the leadership role and the capacity and ability to steer and set strategic direction were all mentioned. In a nutshell, all these and or what one participant called ‘the internal integrity’ of the academic enterprise, are key factors for the sustainability of autonomy in times when institutions cannot afford and should not resist change. On the contrary, leaders must continuously search for the specific role their university can play in its environment, whether they define it in terms of the local, national or global context or some combination of all three.

We had a very lively set of sessions and there were most likely several additional points that should be added to this very synoptic overview. However, in this rapid set of comments, these seemed to me the key areas of consensus. In order to ensure that what our speakers have so eloquently and carefully said, let me also clarify that the IAU intends to publish some of the papers presented quickly as possible in the quarterly, peer reviewed journal *Higher Education Policy*. As indicated initially, it is our hope to see these published in the December 2007 issue. On the other hand, IAU will immediately begin to place all the power point presentations and abstracts on the Web and this can be linked to the IAUP website as well.

Let me end by expressing my very heartfelt thanks to all of you for sharing with us your rich experience and your expertise, whether this was through formal presentations or during the lively discussion. I would also thank Prof Pornchai Mongkhonvanit as president of IAUP for choosing and securing for this Symposium an environment so conducive to a friendly and informal discussion among colleagues. It helped tremendously to find ourselves in the outskirts of Chiang Mai with no diversions and a calm and peaceful setting.

Thank you.