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Short bio (150 words max) Dr. Anna Prades is Head of Internationalisation and Knowledge Generation Department of AQU Catalunya, where she has been working since 2001. She has a degree in Psychology (1996) and a PhD in Pedagogy (2005) from the Universitat of Barcelona. She was the Technical Director of Via Universitaria (2018), which is an adaptation of Eurostudent carried out in three regions of Spain. She coordinates, in Catalunya, the graduate, master and PhD's employment outcomes survey, as well as the recent graduates' satisfaction survey and the employers' survey. She also has been active in designing quality assessment methodology and designing good-practices guidelines. She has recently been involved in two European Projects: project ISLAH, which pretended to enhance quality and relevance of higher education in the partner countries, and project IMPALA, which purpose was to devise an assessment methodology of the impact of external quality assurance procedures.

Proposal

Title: The assessment of the social dimension of Higher Education. A global or a local process?

Abstract (150 words max):

The social dimension of Higher Education has never been before so much emphasized. This is because it is expected that universities will lead the resolution of the challenges that face our societies. Quality assurance agencies way to help universities to tackle this and other challenges is through the establishment of assessment procedures. In this paper we will go through a brief presentation of several assessment frameworks, and then proceed to present the findings of a student survey that identifies barriers to equity in access and in progress in Spain; the survey also offers information regarding teaching practices and student participation. The contrast within the theoretical framework and the empirical results about local barriers or challenges regarding some dimensions of the social relevance of Higher Education will help to pinpoint what should be local and what should be global in this hypothetical assessment process.

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? If yes, give details. No.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

1. **The social perspective of quality assurance and its assessment**

The role of Higher Education in society

The social dimension of Higher Education (HE) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) can be traced to 2001 in the Prague Communiqué, were the ministers responsible of HE reaffirmed the need, recalled by students, "to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process". Since then, the relevance of this perspective has been gaining momentum, to the point that, at the Paris Communiqué, in 2018, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are asked to play a decisive role in providing solution to societal challenges. Challenges that range "from unemployment and social inequality to migration-related issues and a rise in political polarisation, radicalisation and violent extremism". Furthermore, the ministers declared that "the student body entering and graduating from European higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations".

According to the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), HEIs have the singular responsibility of helping to provide appropriate responses to address the global challenges of the world, which are very well summarized by the 2030 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development and international competitiveness of their societies (Grau et al, 2017: 503).

One year before the Paris Communiqué, Sir Peter Scott (2017) provocatively affirmed that "maybe the rise of populism is a welcome call" for universities since it might be an opportunity "not just to speak up more loudly for open societies, but also to recover that sense of social purpose we are in danger of losing." He proceeded to trace a four point plan to "rebuild trust in HE": First, widening participation, ensuring that all social groups are proportionally represented in HE; second, resisting commodification or commercialisation of learning (e.g. degree mills); third, opening up research (topics, people, and methods) and, finally, reinforcing community engagement.

Goddard et al (2016) make a case for the fourth element of Scott's four point plan, advocating for civic universities as institutions that work with others in the leadership of the city in order to ensure that universities are both globally competitive and locally engaged. This proposal extends the concept of innovation beyond the discovery process that is commercialized ("triple helix": business, university, governments), towards a quadruple helix which embraces civil society actors (consumers, customers and citizens).

The role of quality assurance agencies

Quality assurance agencies have been at the heart of the EHEA (see Berlin Communiqué in 2003). They have been policy levers to push HEI out of their comfort zone, in order to meet quality standards (defined through a process of stakeholder negotiation), using a methodology than hinges on self-assessment and peer review.

In fact, Lee Harvey and Jethro Newton contend that quality assurance of HE is ubiquitous because it provides a means for governments to check HE, quality assurance ensures not only accountability but can be used to encourage a degree of compliance to policy requirements (Harvey & Newton, 2007:225).

It is interesting to note, though, that the narratives on what is important to assess have been changing through the years: accountability vs improvement, learning outcomes, teaching and learning, and, recently, social impact. Actually, two of the most influent policy narratives of our time are now in crisis: the knowledge society and the European integration (Matei, 2015). According to Curaj et al (2018), in order to move to the next Bologna level, we have to focus both on fundamental values relevant for our time (equity in access, ethical integrity, etc.) but also on concrete commitments and goals in connection with developments in other policy agendas (EU, OECD, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, etc.). One of

this policy agenda is the aforementioned Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set up by United Nations in 2015[1].

The assessment of the social dimension of HE could be a tool of both accountability and of quality improvement of said dimension. In the next section, we will present four different approaches to the assessment of the social dimension.

Four approaches to the assessment of the Social dimension of Higher Education

The Office for students in the UK addresses the first of Scott's four point plan, i.e. widening participation. It assesses HE providers for access and participation, asking for a range of indicators, for different social groups, that include measures of access, attainment (proportion who were awarded honours degrees), continuation and progression outcomes (Office for students 2018, 2019).

On the other hand, CHEPS et al (2018) approach to the assessment HE relevance is focused on the teaching mission of universities (personal results). They state that HE is relevant if it contributes to personal development, sustainable employability and active citizenship. Personal development refers to cognitive, social and moral development. Sustainable employability means providing the skills to obtain and maintain an appropriate job. Last, active citizenship refers to the development of multicultural competencies, a sense of citizenship and political literacy and participation.

Finally, both GUNI and Times Higher Education's methodology to assess the social impact of university[2] are based on the United Nations' SDGs.

The editors of GUNI's book *Towards a socially responsible university* (Grau et al, 2017) propose an ambitious framework of analysis that encompasses several dimensions[3] such as:
- [Governance]: adopting the mantle of civic university, which implies aligning HEIs interests with those of society, and work collaboratively with other HEIs to maximize their collective impact.
- [Curriculum, learning outcomes]: multidisciplinary programs, providing the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to train new SDG leaders. The curriculum is the main instrument for the preparation of global citizens, who will be able to work and have a positive impact locally.
- [Widening participation and learning support systems]: extending access and successful participation in HE by adopting organizational structures and pedagogical approaches, including online, open and flexible learning.
- [Leading by example]: conducting transversal reviews and refinements to ensure the mainstreaming of SDG issues in curricula (learning outcomes related to sustainability, equity, etc.) and internal procedures (teaching selection and promotion, employment conditions, institution's sustainability procedures, etc.).
- [Research]: the social impact and relevance of research conducted in HEIs should become an important aspect of the accountability of HE. GUNI's report champions open dissemination of research as well as participatory approaches to community based research, where citizens are co-participants and not passive recipients of results. Hellen Hazelkorm defends that new forms of academic credentialism and assessment are needed to recognize the diversity of research outputs and its impact (2012, cited by Grau et al, 2017).

Times Higher Education (THE) impact ranking methodology addresses individually eleven out of the seventeen SDGs. This somewhat atomised structure causes that a few indicators are present at more than one SDG. In contrast to the CHEP's approach, which focuses on the education mission of HE, THE impact ranking stresses the second mission of universities, i.e. knowledge generation, with a

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[1] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/
[2] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/methodology-impact-rankings-2019
[3] The label of the dimensions within the brackets it is not from the original authors.

section for each standard dedicated to research metrics. It is worthwhile to note that this approach to research is different from the proposed by GUNI, being much more traditional (e.g. proportion of papers in the top 10 percent of journals, etc.). THE impact ranking also includes indicators of the third mission of the university (knowledge transfer) such as patents or university spin-offs in the SDG9- Industry, innovation and infrastructure. It comprehends as well widening participation; for instance, the proportion of first-generation students is included both in SDG 4- Quality Education and SDG10- Reduced inequalities. Finally, it includes indicators of what it could be described as "leading by example" specially in SDG8- Decent work and economic growth, but also in SDG5- Gender equality, for example, proportion of employees on secure contracts, or having policies of non-discrimination against women or transgender people.

Although the standards regarding the social dimension might and should be global, barriers to equity and solutions to overcome them will necessarily be local, since they might imply changes in regulation, funding, organizational and information policies, both at the HE's system level and at the HEIs' one. The next section will illustrate this point, through a research that identifies barriers to equity in higher education, among other aspects, such as providing data about teaching practices or participation of students.

2. Main results from a student survey: Via Universitària. Equity, teaching practices and participation

While the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance in HE refer to student-centred learning, there is no comprehensive understanding of who these "students" actually are. Via Universitària is a survey based on Eurostudent that aims to make good this shortcoming through the analysis of the student profile, study conditions, student participation, and student satisfaction with university and teaching (see a summary in Ariño et al, 2019a, and full results in Ariño et al 2019b).

The study was carried out in 20 universities from the Xarxa Vives network, which includes three Spanish Autonomous Communities: Catalunya, Illes Balears and País Valencià. Seven research groups were in charge of the analysis that we will now proceed to summarise. In total, 37.631 Bachelor students completed an online survey in 2018, which accounted for 13% of the reference population and for a global sample error of 0.5%. The following is the summary of the main findings paired with the main recommendations.

Equity in access

The study shows that middle and upper classes are over-represented in HEIs. Thus, the percentage of parents with low education attainment is 12 percentage points lower than that of the population with the same age interval (22% vs 34%).

Moreover, there is horizontal segregation in the subjects studied. Low social classes are under-represented in those degrees with higher employment perspectives, such as Medicine or Engineering degrees (see Table 1); conversely, they are over-represented in Social Sciences and Humanities. It is worth noting that STEM degrees are more expensive (fees are higher due to an experimentality tax). Additionally, these degrees usually last longer due to higher fail rates, which in turn means that grants could be removed, since they depend on the study success (the grant only covers those credits that the student takes for the first time).

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile by disciplinary areas

	Sample	% Women	% Parents with low education attainment	% Parents not born in Spain	% Students coming from VET education
Humanities	3.355	73.4%	25.3%	10.0%	4.9%
Social Sciences	145.21	69.2%	26.4%	9.5%	15.0%
Sciences	3.495	59.9%	18.0%	6.7%	3.6%
Health studies	8.050	75.8%	19.3%	10.2%	13.1%
Engineering & Architecture	7.970	32.0%	18.8%	10.3%	9.8%
Double degrees	240	44.6%	9.7%	7.1%	2.5%
Total	**37.631**	**62.1%**	**22.3%**	**9.6%**	**11.5%**

An interesting finding is that lower social classes are overrepresented between students that access to university through VET education, or mature students. This points out that the recognition of prior learning in VET education could be a possible way to increase the access of underrepresented groups in HE.

> Proposals for improvement:
>
> Reduce horizontal segregation according to social class and gender by the introduction of compensatory or assisting policies. For instance, modify the fees system and grants regulation so engineering degrees will not be much more expensive than social or humanities degrees. (Level: system\government).
>
> Credit recognition for students coming from high VET education, which is foreseen by the current legislation, but is seldom applied, would encourage the access of students from disadvantaged backgrounds; likewise, prior learning recognition should be commonplace for mature students. (Level: HEIs).

Equity in progress

Academic delays are relatively rare. Two thirds of students do not experience any kind of delays in course completion. The factors explaining delays are low family educational level, having foreign parents, lower admission grades, previous study interruptions, or studying Engineering, Architecture and Experimental Sciences. Accessing university through VET, however, is not in and of itself a factor that increases the likelihood of delay.

> Proposals for improvement:
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> Given the relatively high number of students from disadvantaged background who work during the school year or summer vacation, enhance curricular or timetable flexibility at universities. Any progress made towards virtual universities and slower pathways would be very valuable in terms of equity and systemic efficiency. (Level: HEIs).

Funding

The results show a high dependence on family support: 84% of students stated the family as being a source of financial support. The importance of alternative funding sources, always complementary, grows among students from disadvantaged groups (scholarships, working while studying, summer jobs, etc.). Paradoxically loans are more frequent between high-class families than low class, which is probably due to the fact that the former have a higher borrowing capacity.

> Proposals for improvement:
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> Improve access among disadvantaged groups to all sources of funding which could be alternatives to family support. Work with financial entities to offer bank loans to families who come from a more financially disadvantaged background. (Level: system\government).

Gender equity

Degree subjects are also segmented according to gender. Women tend to go towards health and care-taking degrees while men tend to go towards disciplines involving external power and decision making. Women in masculinized degrees (where more than 75% of enrolled students are males), work harder (spend more hours studying that their male peers) but feel less secure of their professional capabilities, and feel that their interventions at class are less valued. This phenomena does not happen to men in feminized degrees (less than 25% of enrolled students are males).

> Proposals for improvement:
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> Mainstream the gender perspective. Tackle stereotype threat[4] for female students in masculinized degrees. (Level: HEIs).

Teaching methodologies

Via Universitària includes a set of questions regarding teaching and assessing methodologies, and their valuation. Students were asked to classify the percentage of subjects that were traditional (lectures, final assessment, etc.), active (group work, continuous assessment, etc.), or innovative (involving ICT such as MOOCs or gamification). The main teaching methodology is still Lectures (see Figure 1). The digital classroom revolution is still very far from these twenty universities. This implies that students cannot benefit from the flexibility that technology offers.

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[4] Stereotype threat refers to being at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one's social groups, for instance, that "women are bad at maths".

Figure 1. Percentage of subjects students classify as traditional, active or innovative
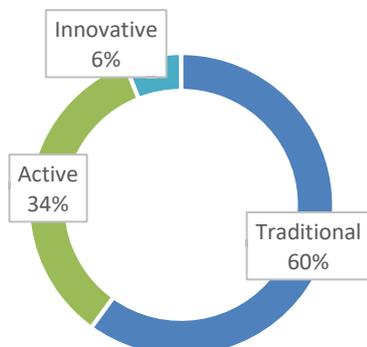
The "educational renovation" process moves at different speeds depending on the degree program. For instance, professional oriented degrees, such as Art and Design, Architecture, ICTs and Education have a higher proportion of active subjects than more traditional ones, such as Medicine, Mathematics or Industrial Engineering. Overall, students prefer practical activities and exercises over master classes and they prefer on-going assessment as opposed to individual papers or group exams or projects.

Proposals for improvement:

Reinforce pedagogical renewal and student-centred learning, progressing towards a more considerable application of active and innovative methodologies. Push ICT in the delivery of education since such technologies enable flexibility and conciliation with other activities. (Level: HEIs).

Student participation

Participation in cultural activities is very low among the student body. Only two out of ten participate in cultural associations, theatre groups, etc. This trend was also detected in institutional participation: 79.6% of undergraduate students never participate in any university governing body and 78.4% never take part in assemblies or clubs.

Proposals for improvement:

Cultural activities offered by universities should be re-evaluated so as to make them more attractive to students. Promote a greater sense of global mindedness in and to higher education. (Level: HEIs).

Conclusions:

In the first part of the paper we have seen different frameworks that address the social dimension. External quality assurance could be a useful tool in order to help universities to handle this challenge.

To address in a systemic way the social dimension it is necessary the commitment of the different stakeholders: government, HEIs, academics experts in equity and higher education, student unions, and representatives of civil society. Stakeholders will have to delimit, for each context, what we do understand for social dimension (widening participation, focusing on teaching outcomes related to social relevance, civic engagement of universities, etc.).

As we have seen in the second section, the proposals may have different target groups: the government, HEIs, teaching staff, students, etc. An evaluation framework must be aware of the limits of the unit evaluated to face the problems, otherwise the assessment risks being an exercise of placing the blame, shrinking away from its own responsibilities. Consequently, it is important to determine, during the diagnosis, which stakeholder holds the responsibility for the actions of the analysed dimension. For instance, fees and support systems depend on government policies in Catalunya, whereas credit recognition for those who access HE through VET education, or the prior learning recognition (PLR) of mature students, depends on HEIs.

Any analysis of university reality must take into account the diversity of disciplines. Not only we should check whether underrepresented groups have access to higher education but where do they enrol, i.e. we have to monitor horizontal segregation in HE.

Tackling widening participation will necessarily be a regional task since it strongly depends on the student's fees and support systems (grants). The interaction between student fees and support is complex, and it is challenging even to compare national realities accurately and clearly at European level (Eurydice, 2018), so it follows that any proposal of improvement should be context specific.

Finally, Via Universtària, or Eurostudent, can become a fundamental tool in universities' information systems to the extent that it provides responses to three key dimensions of the social dimension of HE: equity of access and progression, quality of the education and teaching process and social participation. The study help to identify barriers and proposals of enhancement that should be the starting point of a diagnosis of the social dimension.

To sum up, a resounding yes to global standards, but local analysis and solutions, that need to be informed by existing data and previous research.

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