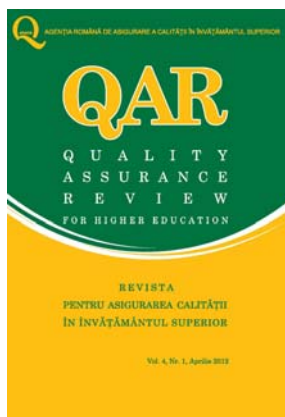




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BOOK REVIEWS

The Collegial Tradition in the Age of Mass Higher Education
Ted Tapper and David Palfreyman, Springer, United Kingdom 2010, 192 p.

Carmen Dobocan

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The Collegial Tradition in the Age of Mass Higher Education

**Ted Tapper and David Palfreyman, Springer,
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The higher education area steps into a process that goes into contemporary times. Having in mind the collegial tradition, the book discusses this theme in the middle of mass higher education development. Focused on British higher education, the authors will provide a broad image on how tradition influences collegiate and non-collegiate universities.

The starting point of discussion is the analysis of Oxford and Cambridge as both collegiate universities and “most developed model of collegiality” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: v). Comparative and international references on the idea of collegiality will come through this book, as well as new challenges on the system of higher education.

Authors' interpretation on the term

Contemporary times challenge the collegial tradition perspectives. Therefore, there is a need for conceptual clarity.

The references to collegiality imply the following concerns:

a. There is “a focus mainly upon collegiality as a federal model of governance” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: vi). Federal model is to be seen not as a balance of power, but as a way of functionality in which university and college share the governance and assume equally the delivery of academic products.

b. Colleges are units that function on their own and with their social basis the relationship between the members is defined. Authors name the social environment of the colleges as commensality, which is basically “a framework for college development” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: vi).

c. Collegiality is a principle that gives an institutional structure to universities; therefore it concerns the organization of the academic life. The book gives an insight of how non-collegiate universities manage the idea of collegiality. Authors' assumption is that “universities need to be organized collegially if they are going to deliver high-quality academic goals” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: vi).

The Collegial Tradition in Higher Education

Collegiality, seen as a value, is considered to be one of the core elements in the national systems of higher education, also can be used as an instrument in distinguishing “a university from an institution of higher education as simply managed machine for teaching at the tertiary level” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: 17).

As institutions, the role of the colleges is influential in teaching undergraduates, in selection of their undergraduate students (they control the admission) and colleges can provide, via inter-collegial system, a financial support for the more poorly endowed colleges.

Characteristics of collegiality

Authors propose the discussion of the most important elements of collegiality. Therefore, **the federal structure of the governance, donnish dominion, intellectual collegiality and commensality** represent the model in a more broad sense.

There are different opinions on how federal governance works within collegiate universities. It seems that Oxbridge has increased the power of the center (the university) over the periphery (the colleges). It is important to keep in mind that this change of power can be reshaped. Authors mention the fact that “the federal systems of governance can be viewed as both inherently stable and inherently fragile” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: 20). Moreover, not to forget how colleges organize themselves, in the shape of university functionality and inter-collegial relationship. Colleges, within the federal model, are described as “autonomous institutions with a legally defined corporate status” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: 21).

Oxford and Cambridge remain university colleges due to the fact that their federal governance is effective. University and college have clear role in the functionality of the institution.

Donnish dominion is somehow a way of governing. Analyzing, Oxbridge are institutions driven from below: “equal rights and obligations for their members, traditionally a leadership that seeks consensus rather than presents an unequivocal way forward, governance by committee and a significant reliance on key individuals who serve on more than one committee or are rotated steadily through the committee system”. In other words, authors describe this as a way of governing dependent upon the engagement of all the governed. The credit is given to the academic control, in what concerns how the university functions and how to fulfill its mission. Any other interests within the university are secondary when comes to policy making decisions.

Intellectual collegiality is about multi disciplinary research and stimulant given for those who participate in the academic life. The intellectual interactions result in the development of different research on crossed disciplines where members have equal rights and show mutual respect. Transparency and access to its findings are also core values of this.

Commensality refers basically to the social life within the colleges. It is a process that concerns both sides, students and professors, and which eventually creates the community within the colleges and the institutional loyalty.

The two historical universities both take in consideration the social life of the students and built upon it a character of day to day familiar activities.

Higher Education in Britain

The book discusses in several chapters the situation of other universities in Great Britain that have embraced the model of collegiality, although there are not considered collegiate universities in their real sense (or at least in the Oxbridge sense). For example, universities like Kent, Lancaster, York and Durham tried to follow the pathway to federalism, going beyond shared responsibilities. Chapters present the evolution of colleges in these universities and their obstacles in institutional development.

The University of London and the University of Wales claim to have federal model of governance, but “do not embrace the collegial values on a wide front”.

Cross National Perspectives on Collegiality

America's system of higher education comes in comparison with Oxbridge collegial model. There are some differences, but shared cultural models exist in both situations. Important to keep in mind that the United States model does not have a federal model in governance, “which shapes

power over the central academic functions between a university and its colleges” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: 130).

Importing the Oxbridge model involves more than just applying a model on the existing institutional forms. Authors point out from Duke’s *Importing Oxbridge* (1996) that there is a failure in appreciating the essence of collegiality, which needs to evolve in time and be constantly.

The experience America has tried while tackling collegiality, even if it is considered a failure taking in consideration their goals, is not to be ignored. The American system of higher education had met the impact of some universities that left behind ideas of what the character of education should be.

On the other hand, in Continental Europe, authors remark that there is difficult to conclude whether universities have sustained collegial tradition. The development of nation states had influenced the collegial approach and discouraged it, somehow.

Important to mention that in Europe there is the trend of education as public good and this wide spread of the idea suggests more power to the state. Taking in consideration the context of it, is questioned whether the universities are to become independent corporate bodies and how they will promote the public good. Authors suppose that there will be a clear direction of “stronger institutional identities with policy directions that are not simply the product of building a consensus out of competing interests” (Tapper and Palfreyman, 2009: 154). On European level, this remain in discussion, more because there is a preoccupation on how the decision making process takes place, and not who controls it.

At the end of the day, the European higher education system is constrained by different external factors where the university can become an actor independent of its internal interests. If the universities will focus more on academic affairs and not on management, the more approached they are to collegiality.

However, the term of collegiality has met some of the greatest challenges in time. From social pressure to different interpretations of the term, institutions in higher education have showed an interest in developing the collegial model. Other factors in higher education development should be taken in consideration and foreseen when comes to new collegial values and institutional characteristics.

This book leaves the impression of collegiality as one of the most popular models of social interaction and governance, though this model is marginalized. Threats exist in the managerial revolution, therefore the collegial governance can be eroded. But, as historical tradition, it remains a core element that can revive in line with mass higher education development.