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Knowledge for All

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Workshop 8

The Governance of Higher Education in the Gulf Cooperation Region

Workshop Directors

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Abstract

The impressive expansion of higher education opportunities in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Member states over the last two decades is well reflected in the systemic heterogeneity that currently characterizes higher education systems across the region. Higher education systems include a wide variety of public and private institutions, as well as a range of undergraduate and technical institutions, geared towards academic and vocational aspirations. Within this larger context, the trend towards privatization and Americanization of higher education systems in the GCC region has been most noticeable. Some analysts have pointed out that this expansion should be understood within the larger geopolitical reconfigurations that have taken place in the Gulf since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR in the late 1980s-early 1990s. Within this broader context, the reconfiguration of the higher education landscapes in the GCC region play an important role in consolidating the emerging position of power of the Gulf states within the region and in relation to the Arab world more generally. Yet, the transformation of GCC higher education systems into regional hubs - both in relation to incoming students and to prospective faculty members who immigrate into the region - also means greater competitiveness between and, in the case of the UAE, within GCC states.

Underpinning the expansion of GCC higher education opportunities is the shift from a continental model of higher education governance, which largely replicated the structure of Egyptian public universities, to a variety of models of governance in which state and non-state

actors have become increasingly involved in the development of higher education venues along different specializations. In the smaller Gulf states, this change is well reflected in a retreat of the state from founding public universities directly, shifting part of their policy efforts and funding resources to private and quasi-private entities and agencies. This policy approach has been most noticeable, for instance, in the Sultanate of Oman, Kuwait, and in the United Arab Emirates, where private and corporate enterprise in the field of higher education underpins much of the expansion in higher education opportunities. In these countries, the state assumes a more regulative posture, particularly regarding outreach universities, whether at the graduate or undergraduate level. In contrast, higher education expansion in Saudi Arabia follows a somewhat different path, with the state remaining deeply involved in the founding and operation of public higher education venues, such as universities, while regulating the emergence of different types of undergraduate colleges dubbed as 'community institutions'.

Workshop Description and Rationale

One of the central issues that have been left out in the larger discussion on GCC higher education concerns the impact this expansion has on the national and regional systems of governance regulating the field of higher education. Many questions arise at this junction, offering an opportunity to deepen our understanding and knowledge of the current possibilities and challenges that face higher education in the GCC region. The present workshop invites the submission of research papers that delve into the various aspects that pertain to the governing of higher education institutions, as academic institutions, and as institutions which operate within increasingly competitive economic and political environments, at the regional and global levels. The aim is to critically unpack the different factors that shape decision-making processes both internally, and in relation to the state and outside publics and stakeholders. Workshop organizers welcome the submission of critical and empirical papers that address aspects related to the following three thematic clusters:

(1) Legislative and policy reforms, particularly studies that examine (a) their political and ideological underpinnings; (b) the emergence of different types of higher education institutions within GCC countries; (c) the privatization and internationalization of higher education opportunities; and (d) their impact on access opportunities to higher education of different social and citizenship groups.

(2) Modes of internal and external governance, particularly studies that examine (a) issues related to academic freedom; (b) relations between academics, researchers, and administrators; (c) the participation of different publics - such as students, faculty members and communities - in the governing and development of higher education institutions; and (d) the recruitment of faculty members into various disciplinary fields and types of higher education institutions.

(3) Regional dynamics, particularly studies that examine (a) challenges facing the emergence of a GCC 'academic region'; (b) regional flows of faculty members and students; and (c) regional inter-institutional networks and programmes of study.

Comparative studies - between or within GCC states, or with institutions and policies in the Arab region and beyond - are particularly welcome, as are case studies (including multi-site case studies) based on critical ethnographic work. Papers must be organized around a clearly defined problematic, related to the framing of the workshop and its thematic, as outlined above. They should also reflect a critical approach that interrogates, unpacks and problematises the

issues under consideration within a well-defined theoretical/conceptual framework and a rigorously articulated methodology.

Workshop Director Profiles

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