Priorities, policies and higher education

María Lorena Hernández Yáñez*

Translator: Pablo Contreras Fresán
E-mail: deepcolearning@gmail.com

* Senior Research Professor in the Department of Arts, Education and Humanities at C U Costa - U de G from 2005 to date.
E-mail: malorena@cencar.udg.mxx

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Resumen

Nuestro propósito fue explorar el impacto que tuvieron los distintos cursos de acción orientados a promover los objetivos de *calidad, cobertura* y *pertinencia* en la educación superior mexicana. Considerando, como explican Elizondo y Reséndiz, que tanto la implementación de las políticas como la valoración de sus impactos requieren un horizonte temporal de mediano plazo porque la inercia impone siempre cierto tiempo de respuesta (2000: 348), en este trabajo adoptamos una perspectiva diacrónica que abarcó de 1988 a 2006 y que correspondió a las tres últimas administraciones federales. La evidencia empírica utilizada provino de fuentes documentales, hemerográficas y bibliográficas.

Palabras clave:

- Educación superior
- Política educativa
- Objetivos
- Prioridades

Abstract

Our purpose was to explore the impact different courses of action aimed at promoting the objectives of *quality, coverage* and *relevance* had in Mexican higher education. Considering, as Elizondo and Resendiz explained, that both the implementation of policies and the assessment of their impacts require a medium-term horizon because inertia always imposes some time elapsed (2000: 348). In this paper we adopt a diachronic perspective that spanned from 1988 to 2006 which corresponded to the last three federal administrations. The empirical evidence used was drawn from documentary sources, periodicals and bibliographies.

Key words:

- Higher education
- Educational policy
- Objectives
- Priorities

Government priorities in higher education: 1988-2006

The composition of the higher education system in Mexico was modified throughout the 1990's. While during the 1988-1994 presidential term it was composed of three distinctly different traditional sectors, namely, university, technological institution and normal (teacher training college), at the end of the 2000-2006 term, major differences arose as a result of the cumulative effect the educational policies implemented throughout the period had on this level, with the additional presence of a hybrid sector consisting of a set of institutions that were, on the one hand, the interface between a university and a technological institution[1] and, on the other, institutions that have a timely and politically correct indigenous-oriented vocation[2].

With the exception of the university sector, which is comprised of higher education institutions (HEIs) public federal and state, of which most are autonomous, as well as private HEIs that are subject to the granting of Official Recognition of Studies (Reconocimiento de Validez Oficial de Estudios, RVOE),[3] the three remaining sectors have been directly regulated from their origin by the federal or state government. Although overall strategic objectives of the sectorial policy, implemented in the last couple of decades, have been equally applied to all of the institutional conglomerate, the fact is that courses of action and specific policy instruments, aimed at promoting a differentiated development of each of these sectors, were designed. And although in this work we provide an overview of the changes in the higher education system as a whole, in reality we deal with the public state universities (PSU) in more detail because they continue to serve the highest percentage of national undergraduate enrollment, but mostly, because it is they who have undergone major transformations as a result of policies implemented between 1988 and 2006.

To a great extent, the six year presidential term 1982-1988 can be seen, in retrospect, as a period in which the SPU began their unfortunate transition into government overregulation. First by the medium and long term impact that the so called "education revolution" has had in the reorganization of the sectorial priorities, it was in the *National Program of Education, Culture, Recreation and Sport 1984-1988* where measures to improve the quality of higher education, to rationalize the use of existing resources and to expand opportunities for access to disadvantaged groups (SPP, 1985: 253) began to seriously be proposed (in the context of which would later be considered the "lost decade"). Secondly, because from then on, although at that time without any practical visible effects, precisely due to the difficulties of inter-

[1] We are referring to technological universities and universities of technology.
[2] That resulted in the creation of the Intercultural University.
[3] That in accordance with the General Law of Education might be granted by the federal education authorities, state education authorities or public HEIs bearing the authority to incorporate programs of these institutions under their mandate.

nal stabilization and adjustment (CEPAL, 2008: 13),[4] the sectorial rationale for budget spending began to change:[5] while in the six years preceding, the financial requirements were estimated based on the expected results, in the 1982-1988 term the allocation criteria began to shift based on results actually achieved, thus articulating the first attempts to institutionalize evaluation. And thirdly, because from then on educational policy began to be packaged in a *program* format,[6] instead of a *plan,* where the constitutionally mandated general guidelines are drawn regulating the action of a government (local, state or national) according to the proposals, ideas, aspirations, expectations, opinions, concerns, complaints and suggestions of political, economic and social stakeholders[7], the program goes from general to specific, i.e. sectorial issues, special, institutional and / or regional, according to their importance and urgency, they articulate a clearly defined strategy of objectives, actions and goals. Therefore, and according to Aguilar (1993) the plan is the systemic agenda, public or constitutional, while the program is the institutional agenda, formal or government.

As a sailing chart shows the navigable waters and adjacent land areas, in the program it is pondered what has been done, in contrast to what is yet to be done, it explores the depth of the problems and the size of the challenges, it defines the nature of objectives and establishes the details of goals, including desirable scenarios and possible risks. Just as the sailing chart is an essential tool for nautical navigation, the educational program is an essential tool for the educational work of all government.

The program is therefore an organized set of means to achieve certain ends. In education these "ends" are usually themed as "strategic objectives" that necessarily must be linked to "the organized set of means", i.e., policies or courses of action to follow. So that strategic objectives are, metaphorically, "light houses" that show the navigation path (i.e., the action strategy), with the State at the helm, maneuvering (political feasibility) takes place in conditions of relative certainty, in terms of width (economic efficiency) and draft (technical feasibility).

In line with the route charted during the term 1982-1988 "to offer educational services of the highest possible quality to an ever increasing number of young people" (ANUIES, 1984), there is broad consensus that between 1988 and 2006, in the subsequent educational programs, a core consisting of two strategic objectives: expanding the *coverage,* broadening its geographical reach and equity; and improving the *quality* of education and support services, remained unchanged. This means that the priority in the educational work

[4] Barba (2004: 32) notes that during the "lost decade" the dispelling of the stabilization and adjustment agenda was very limited and only took place in the economic sphere, while in the social arena, there was a gradual erosion of the old institutional arrangements.

[5] Significant in this respect, is the metaphor used by then President Miguel de la Madrid, at the opening of the twenty-first Ordinary Meeting of the ANUIES General Assembly held in Mexicali, Baja California on November 18 to 19, 1983, who said that knowing that sowing in the field of higher education was not a quick harvest, it was then time to sow "to reap several years later" (ANUIES, 1984).

[6] It is important to recall that during the presidential term 1976-1982 both the *National Education Plan* (1977) and the *National Plan for Higher Education. General guidelines for the period 1981-1991* (1981) were devised.

[7] As stated in Article 26 of the Constitution of the United Mexican States.

for the last two decades has been trying to balance adequate doses of quantity and quality, or in the terms used by Premfors (1990: 46-48), to resolve the conflict between equality and excellence, between the concept of education as a fundamental human right which involves democratizing access opportunities and retention, and the conception of education as a selection mechanism, based on meritocratic criteria, aimed at meeting the future employment requirements.

The prominence of this axiological coverage/quality core did not preclude that, in the six-year-term restatements of the educational agenda, other targets were themed which, although at the time were also called "strategic", were actually short-term or peripheral because they intended to meet specific aspects of levels and/or procedures.

Nevertheless –in some cases– these suffered conceptual elaborations or terminology clarifications in subsequent federal administrations, leaving an indelible mark on higher education, and particularly in the SPUS, a sub-sector currently dependent on the General Directorate of University Higher Education of SEP's Department of Higher Education.[8]

For example, the *1989-1994 Education Modernization Program (Programa para la Modernización Educativa, PME)* specifically raised as additional targets for public university education: (i) "engage higher education institutions and society to guide participatory development of this educational level and thus help resolve, with the knowledge resources and institutional organization, the country's great social, economic, technological and scientific challenges" (which in other words means, theming their *relevance),* (ii) "to strengthen the national higher education coordination and planning system" (i.e., *efficacy),* (iii) "to guide its activities through an internal institutional evaluation and rearranging effort" (i.e., *efficiency),* and (iv) "foster better and broader social participation" (i.e., *shared responsibility)* (Federal Executive Branch, 1989: 130-131).

Meanwhile, the Educational Development Program (EDP) 1995-2000 raised, in addition to the coverage/quality core, the following three objectives. First, the *professionalization of teachers,* which was considered the "fundamental requirement to improve the quality of higher education." Secondly, and this is an example of the above mentioned conceptual reprocessing, the promotion of greater *relevance* of higher education which basically refers to three aspects: (i) that the structure of supply and demand for education would consider the behavior of the professional job market as well as real employment prospects, (ii) that outreach efforts were directed not only at the modern sector of the economy, but also to promote comprehensive and sustainable development in remote communities marginalized from the benefits of development and (iii) to review the objectives, organization and

[8] On January 21, 2005 the *Official Journal of the Federation* published a new Internal Regulation for SEP which approved the replacement of the hitherto Department of Higher Education and Scientific Research (SESIC) to the Department of Higher Education (SES); also the hitherto Directorate General of Higher Education (DGES) was renamed the Directorate General of University Higher Education (DGESU).

institutional underpinnings of social service and other outreach tasks so that HEIs would more effectively support development efforts in their communities and regions.

Finally, the EDP also raised as an additional objective the necessary *organization and coordination* between HEIs, especially among those who shared the same regional or local level to make best use of available resources, but also between the subsystems that grouped different educational modalities. In connection to this it is worth noting, the EDP stressed, first, the importance of "the ability and willingness for institutional change" because, even with the best technical and financial conditions, higher education could not properly operate without the convergence of interests of various sectors in the educational community and, therefore, attempts to find a shared vision. Secondly, advancing the federalization of this educational level would be sought, as part of a framework of shared responsibility between levels of government and institutions (Federal Executive Branch, 1996: 158).

In turn, based on the premise that the country's development required "a higher education system with wider coverage and better quality" that would ensure equity in access and in the territorial distribution of educational opportunities (SEP, 2001: 183), which, as noted, was the core of the last three sectorial programs, the 2001-2006 National Education Program (Programa Nacional de Educación, PRONAE) established, as a third goal regarding the type of higher education and, in the context of federalism, to *integrate, coordinate and manage* the higher education system. To do this, and considering that the structure of the National System for Higher Education Planning (Sistema Nacional para la Planeación de la Educación Superior, SINAPPES) was insufficient for the new conditions facing higher education, it proposed (i) revitalizing the planning exercise to establish and operate a new scheme to harmonize the actions of governments (federal and state), institutions and society, as well as to coordinate with other educational levels, with the system of science & technology and with arts & culture programs, (ii) to increase investment in public higher education, and (iii) to promote the development of new regulatory frameworks for higher education, to enable its development, proper regulation and coordination.

The existence of this clear line of continuity, particularly with respect to the coverage/quality core but also around short-term objectives that linked the last three sectorial agendas –also in regard to the strategies designed and implemented, as courses of action or contingent responses to the state that higher education was in during the reviewed period– can be interpreted as a first condition, in case the results of government intervention turned out positive. In this sense, if we consider the three sectorial programs discussed here, as part of a trans-presidential-term single policy package, i.e., as state policies, not government, it is possible to suggest that the package met three of the six characteristics or key issues, according to Stein *et al.* (2006: 140-145), that are able

to affect the sectorial development,[9] namely: (a) *stability,* given that despite the change of political winds in 2000, it had the capacity to consolidate and enforce inter-temporal agreements that allowed, for almost two decades, to maintain the objectives and some key policy issues, suggesting in some cases gradual changes while consolidating the achievements, (b) *adaptability,* since the policies were adjusted and redesigned to the extent that changes in the conditions of higher education demanded it, and (c) *coordination and coherence,* because despite the changes and/or rearrangements registered in federal agencies responsible for different sub-sectors of higher education, under different administrations, it was able to maintain a degree of consistency in the basic guidelines within each subsystem, nevertheless this was not accomplished in the higher education system as a whole.

The three key features or other aspects that, according to Stein *et al.* (2006: 145-146), affect the development of a sector, in this case higher education, refer to (d) *the quality of implementation and its effectiveness,* which would be associated with the extent to which federal education authorities may or may not have the incentives and resources to build their capacities through a regulatory bureaucracy that is technically competent, (e) *guided in the public interest* that in our case concerns the extent to which higher education policies promoted, or not, the general welfare, in terms of coverage, quality and relevance, and therefore, to the extent that they satisfied the public interest or, conversely, private interest; and finally *(f) efficiency,* which refers to the ability shown by sectorial authorities to allocate limited resources to those actions that generate a higher social return while avoiding waste or duplication.

From our point of view, these three features can not be calibrated *a priori* because they deal with the results achieved according to the specific content of policies aimed at promoting the objectives of coverage, quality and relevance of education in Mexico. So to paraphrase Churchill[10], although the strategy, to reform higher education in Mexico, has been stable, adaptable, coordinated and coherent, sometimes we must examine the results, so thereupon, in the next section we explore, based on available evidence, some of the results of these policies.

The overall balance of higher education policies between 1988 and 2006

The aggregate effect of the various courses of action arising from the "government theology" (Neave, 1990: 5) professed by the last three federal administrations changed, dramatically, the face of higher education in Mexico. The spectrum of change encompassed from the axiomatic coordinates that now legitimize higher education as a public and social uti-

[9] Although the authors analyze the links between political institutions, policymaking processes and outcomes of public policies in the economic sphere, they also suggest that these features can be used to analyze other sectors, in this case, education.
[10] His original quote: However beautiful the strategy, You Should Occasionally look at the results. (http://www.quotedb.com/quotes/3460).

lity, to the computer-mediated educational practices. This means that from the point of view of the three dimensions of change proposed by Đerych (1987: 248), the change was of great depth, breadth and level.

Depth of change

First, the *depth* of change was expressed in the objectives explicitly formulated and pursued in the three sectorial programs considered here, that abruptly replaced the axiological *ethos* that, implicitly and under the auspices of the welfare state, had justified higher education being transformed into a mass system. Thus, also in the late 1980's, a set of basic guidelines began to emerge, that largely reinforced the idea that the *organization and coordination* of institutional and systemic conditions were *sine qua non* for progress, and in turn, the *quality* and *coverage* of higher education, while relegating *relevance* to the background.

These guidelines, which served to redefine the identity and mission of the HEIs as well as to instill new practices in their functioning, can be succinctly stated in the following binomials, where the second category refers to pre-modernization rhetoric that had prevailed until then in the HEIs: to academize *vs.* politize; social responsibility *vs.* "relentless" autonomy; efficiency *vs.* bureaucracy; meritocracy *vs.* equality; co-financing *vs.* free education; transparency *vs.* discretion; accountability *vs.* benevolent patronage; coordination *vs.* isolationism; lifelong learning *vs.* credentialism, entrepreneurship *vs.* corporativism; internationalism *vs.* localism; and innovation *vs.* inertia (Brunner, 1987, 2007; Premfors, 1990, Clark, 1983, 2000). Even considering that these principles have admitted different conceptions and may even have come into conflict with each other, as well as been object of marginal adjustments in the different subsystems, it is undeniable that they somehow permeated the fundamental aspects of the substantive higher education chores, namely: the transmission, generation and dissemination of advanced knowledge.

Breadth of change

Consequently, the *breadth* of change was significant given that in light of the new guidelines, virtually all areas of the HEIs work were covered, throughout the period under review, but particularly the SPU. Thus, there were serious adjustments in their laws and organizational structures (Rubio *et al.,* 2005: 18, 41), as well as major improvements in their academic and administrative processes, which were first "modernized" and then "reconstructed" incorporating management methods (Aguilar, 2004: 186) that, based on mechanisms such as strategic planning and evaluation, apparently allowed to better lead and reorganize all the aspects inherent to university functions (De Vries and Ibarra, 2004: 575, 583; Casanova, 2002: 31), as are the procedures for budget preparation and internal allocation of resources, student enrollment, the redefinition of educational supply, organization and promotion of research,

faculty strengthening and consolidation as well as coordination with key external actors.

It was indeed relevant to the redesigning of institutional management during these years the change in political and administrative rationality of the sectorial authority, which as noted, was embodied in programs. HEIs widespread adoption of this federal practice meant that they began to elaborate, in turn, the medium and long term development programs that would guide the work of successive institutional administrations, specifically their Institutional Development Programs (Programas Institucionales de Desarrollo, PID) between 1994 and 2000 and the Comprehensive Program for Institutional Strengthening (Programas Integrales de Fortalecimiento Institucional, PIFI) between 2001 and 2006 (Rubio *et al.,* 2005: 13-14). This strategy was politically justified in terms of facilitating HEIs to self-monitor their performance as a condition to formulate new proposals for institutional development, which then may receive additional financial support through a broad menu of options[11] designed by the federal government to encourage the gradual development made in the direction of the strategic objectives,[12] thus some processes were launched to try to verify empirically the degree of efficiency in meeting institutional goals, such as accreditation of teachers and educational programs and certification of service provision as well as academic and administrative processes.

Thus, although the higher education system was driven to change its behavior under the pragmatic principle of *performancism* (Bevers *et al.,* 2008: 234-235), there is evidence that the SPU processes of institutional change have been uneven and of all sorts: truncated, mired and in-process (Obregón, 2003).

The same can be seen at the level of the different sectors. For example, because of its attachment to basic education, comprehensive reform of normal (teacher training) education, in the period studied, began in 1992 with its "federalization", i.e. the return of the control over education spending as well as labor relations in this sector to the states, while SEP retained authority over the curriculum (Vázquez, 1996: 937),[13] it continued in 1996 with the Program for Academic Transformation and Strengthening of Normal Schools (Programa para la Transformación y el Fortalecimiento Académico de las Escuelas Normales, PTFAEN) and from 2002 with the Institutional Im-

[11] Cf. Fund for the Modernization of Higher Education (FOMES), the Multiple Contributions Fund (FAM), the Standardization Management Information (PRONAD), the Higher Education Development Support (PROADU) –now called Program to Support Higher Education Development (PADES)– the Faculty Improvement Program (PROMEP), the Integrated Program for Institutional Strengthening (PIFI), the National Scholarship Program for Higher Education (PRONABES), the Investment Fund State Public Universities with ANUIES assessment (FIUPEA) and the Special Support Fund for Public Universities in the States (FAEUP).

[12] As pointed out by Varela (Website) during the presidential term 1982-1988 within the National Program of Higher Education (PRONAES) and especially the Comprehensive Plan for Higher Education Development (PROIDES), limited attempts were made seeking to strengthen planning by means of tying government funding to complying with specific goals, *but this was done with a focus on programs and not on goals* (emphasis added).

[13] On May 18, 1992, the SNTE, SEP and state governments signed the National Agreement for Modernization of Basic Education, which included, inter alia, compulsory basic education (primary and secondary), the renewal of its contents and improved training and retraining of teachers through the "Carrera Magisterial" (Teacher's Lifelong Learning Career).

provement Program for Public Teacher Training Schools (Programa de Mejoramiento Institucional de las Escuelas Normales Públicas, PROMIN) (Casillas and López, 2007: 11),[14] under which each institution developed, analogous to the SPU, the respective Institutional Development Program as a condition to modify the traditional institutional centralized management, to therefore, effect the improvement of teachers' education quality (Perez *et. al.,* 2007: 34). Yet, despite the historically tight control exercised over normal schools by the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), which is considered an obstacle that resists any modernizing initiative (Street, 1992, cited by Santibañez, 2008: 420), there is evidence that federal intervention in this sector, reinforced in 2005 with the administrative relocation of normal schools in the newly created General Higher Education Directorate for Education Professionals (Dirección General de Educación Superior para Profesionales de la Educación, DGESPE) dependent on the SES, had some positive effect, at least from the point of view of its "operators", i.e. school principals, on the improvement of institutional management (Pérez *et al.,* 2007: 96; Casillas and López, 2007: 242).

Conversely, Didou (2002: 54-55) argues that the impact of the policies was more limited in the federal technological institute sector, than in the SPU, on the one hand, due to the fact that their design was more suited to the peculiarities of the latter and, second, the greater capacity for resistance and negotiation that the federal technological subsystem actors had because of being embedded in SENTE's power relations structure, compared to the SPU. The sluggishness to undertake profound changes in the technological and normal sectors (and of this in relation to basic education) is explained, as suggested by a study commissioned by the SEP (Iaies *et al.,* 2006, cited by Santibañez, 2008: 420) by the excessive power that has been given to SENTE over the decades, which constitutes an obstacle for SEP to effectively govern the education sector as teachers, despite being government employees, recognize and respond more to the union's authority than that of the education sector.

In the case of the SPU, as we previously saw, policy changes occurred in the formal and legal structures that sustain the institutional legitimacy without being able to modify, in many cases, structures of domination that have kept them subordinate to one person's and/or a group interests, so that, as stated by Ibarra (2007: 6), they like waving democracy but do not tolerate it internally, and as such their decision making favors corporate self-reproduction and political projects usually linked to the party system, making use, in order to do that, of institutional resources with discretion and under the banner of institutional "autonomy". The impunity associated with this type of dysfunctional leadership is even greater if we consider that none of the federal instruments, designed under the bureaucratic logic of a *performancist* certificationism, is able to capture these institutional realities

[14] That, in turn, was replaced in 2005 by the State Program for Strengthening Teacher Training (PEFEN).

that deeply condition, affect and distort the ways in which the HEIs perform their substantive duties.

It is therefore undeniable that the SPU formal practices have gone to lengths to portray themselves as being in fine tune with the sectorial dictates, but at the same time, informal practices, overwhelmingly more real, of the inner power have clouded, as noted by Carnoy (1994), the legitimate conceptions regarding the mission of the university, often making it difficult to properly perform any of them. Thus, in many cases political infighting has turned HEIs into well-organized and tightly coupled *tyrannies*, which censor and punish any genuine academic attempt to restore *the university*, based on the fundamental principle of "reason", its main distinctive feature, as a space for debate and free discussion of ideas (Bevers *et al.,* 2008: 232 -233). It may be recalled in this regard, as pointed out by Clark (1983: 160), the statement clearly expressed by Lord Eric Ashby in 1974: "The health of a university depends on who controls it *from within"* [author's emphasis], rather than, we would add, who is certifying them *from the outside.*

Level of change

It should be noted, finally, that the most important feature about the *level* of change was the reconfiguration of the higher education system as a result of the expansion and increasing differentiation of the institutional platform of university services, however, in reality this was not accompanied, as Didou (2002: 64) suggests, by the necessary rethinking of missions, objectives and responsibilities of each type of higher education institution. The recomposition of the system was oriented, as noted, by the trans-presidential-term purpose to increase the enrollment rate (coverage) with greater geographical reach and equity, highlighting in the process the expansion of the subsystem composed of privately funded HEIs (PFHEI's) and to a lesser extent, the internal differentiation of technological education.

Indeed, as shown in Table 1, total enrollment in higher education, not including postgraduates, increased from 1 million 33 thousand 261 students in 1990 to 2 millon 481 thousand 654 students in 2005, which means that the growth rate during the period of study was 109.5%, which undoubtedly means that access opportunities to higher education have expanded in absolute numbers.

Table 1
Enrollment in higher education by sector 1990-2005

Year	TSU or Associate Professional		Bachelor's Degree						Total
			University		Technological		Normal (Teacher Training)		
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private*	Public	Private	
1990	(1991) 346		574,721	187,819	151,000	10,388	77,550	31,437	1´033,261
1995	30,000		614,349	274,186	200,610	24,083	118,452	41,584	1´303,264
2000	58,205	2,389	828,779	522,486	313,119	31,984	120,573	80,358	1´957,893
2005	76,256	3,995	913,201	683,539	505,348	157,058	94,051	48,206	2´481,654

*** Includes "Other institutions, as schools, colleges, schools and centers.**
Estimates made based on: ANUIES, 2001; ANUIES (a); anuies (b); Didou, 2002; Marquez, 2004; OCE, 2005; Federal Executive Branch, 1989; SEP, 2001; Rodriguez-Gomez, 2002; SEP, 2007; Vargas (1998, 2003).

But this does not indicate that this process has been accompanied by a more equitable gender and/or geographical distribution of opportunities, and even less, as pointed out by Martínez (2002: 418), that this has achieved greater equality in terms of permanence, graduation or learning outcomes, and even in terms of graduates insertion rates, all of which, according to Márquez (2004: 478), are often considered dimensions of educational quality.

In fact, a measure of inequality that has prevailed in the distribution of access opportunities to higher education is the evolution of the gross enrollment rate for the age group between 20 and 24 years, as shown in the following table, barely managed to double in the span of 15 years to attend one in four undergraduate-age youths.

Table 2
Gross enrollment rate for the 20 to 24 age group 1990-2005

	Total population (a)	Enrollment in higher education (b)	Gross enrollment rate (b/a)
1990	8´367,738	1´033,261	12.34
1995	9´295,658	1´303,264	14.02
2000	9´854,065	1´957,893	19.86
2005	10´093,479	2´481,654	24.58

Source: Author, based on ANUIES, 2001: 10 (Cuadro 1.1).

Thus, a broad estimate would indicate that maintaining this absorption rate constant, doubling every decade and a half, and considering that the projections of the National Population Council (2006: 21) suggest that the total population group ages 20 to 24 years will remain stable at least until the year 2020 when it will begin to slowly decline (it is estimated that by 2050 it will include 7 million 48 thousand 908 people), then we could assume that we would hopefully be reaching a gross enrollment rate of nearly 50 percent of this age group by 2020 to an almost universal coverage by 2035.

But the above seems unlikely, when considering that, before the government's imperative to balance adequate doses of quantity and quality, participation of different sectors in the coverage of higher education not only changed during the study period, but required severe readjustment that also involved cuts and unprecedented financial commitments. Indeed, as shown in Table 3, participation of public universities in enrollment levels, including both federal (UNAM, UAM and UPN) as well as state decreased significantly, from 56 to 37% in response to, as noted, a deliberate government policy to contain its growth as a condition to improve its quality, and although this decline occurred in all regions of the country, Muñoz *et al.* (2004: 11) showed that this phenomenon is expressed more strongly in the Federal District and the Central-West[15]. Therefore, although overall enrollment served by this sector grew by 58 percent between 1990 and 2005, the average annual growth rate was much slower, barely 3.86 percent.

Table 3
Percentage share of sectors in higher education enrollment 1990-2005

Year	TSU or Associate Professional		Bachelor's Degree						Total
			University		Technological		Normal		
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	
1990			56	18	15	1	7	3	100
1995	2		47	21	16	2	9	3	100
2000	3		42	27	16	2	6	4	100
2005	3		37	28	20	6	4	2	100

[15] According to ANUIES regionalization, the Central-West region comprises the states of Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán and Nayarit.

In contrast, this scenario led to an increase of 10% in the private sector's participation in enrollment over the period analyzed, going from 18 to 28%, which resulted in a cumulative increase of 263%, equivalent to an average annual growth rate of 17.53%. To meet this rising demand, the number of PFHEIS almost quadrupled in the fifteen year span, as shown in the following table:

Table 4
Number of heis by type of funding 1990-2005

Type of Funding	1990	1995	2000	2005
Federal	150	167	178	234
State	142	182	184	397
Private	464	809	1,253	1,739
Autonomous	482	527	685	825
Total	**1,238**	**1,685**	**2,300**	**3,195**

Source: SEP *Historical statistics of the national education system.*

Although PFHEIS enrollment concentrated on institutions that had more than 2,000 students and that can reasonably be regarded as "universities" because they show a certain degree of academic integration (Kent and Ramirez, 2002: 130) the study by Muñoz, *et al.* (2004: 43) highlights two relevant national phenomena: first, that the number of PFHEIS showing the highest growth during the period under review was that of the institutions that serve fewer than 501 students and are therefore presumably newly formed, and second, that institutions whose enrollment ranged between 1.001 and 2.000 students showed they were better able to absorb growing demand.

Considering, then, as indicated by De Moura and Navarro (2002: 69), the size, scale and characteristics presented by private higher education during the study period in particular the emergence of non-university institutions that even sometimes called themselves "Schools" or "Institutes" has reached a significant level of development, this subsystem deserves to be the focus of increased attention at both the federal and state level, when formulating public policies for the tertiary level. However, Brunner (2006: 2-5) notes that from an international perspective, the level of privatization in Mexico, both in regard to the *privatization of registration* and in relation to the *privatization of resources* that finance higher education institutions remains relatively low.

Conversely, until the late 1980's the technological higher education sector was comprised only of federal institutions (the National Polytechnic Institute, the Institutes of Technology (IT) –industrial, agricultural, forestry and marine– and Industrial Technology Education Center), but in 1990 the system of decentralized technological institutes (institutos tecnológicos descentralizados, ITD) was born, then 1991 saw the creation of the technological universities (UT) and in 2002 the first polytechnic universities (UP) appeared.

Although the combined effect of these initiatives allowed the enrollment percentage share of this sector to grow ten points in the last fifteen years, from 16 to 26% between 1990 and 2005, the accumulated growth of enrollment in technological higher education for the period only reached 3.10%, yielding an average annual growth of 0.20%.

Since its inception in 1948, the institutes of technology system has depended academically and operationally on a centralized and bureaucratic directive (now General Directorate of Technological Higher Education (Dirección General de Educación Superior Tecnológica -DGEST the SES-SEP), which has turned it into an extremely complex network given its size, territorial distribution of its establishments, its cohesion and corporate identity and the relations it establishes with the business sector (Vargas, 1998). Although the technological education sector[16] has played a key role in regional development, and specifically for its inclusion in industrial corridors in central and northern Mexico[17], during the study period it experienced slow growth: from 97 existing campuses in 1990 to 114 in 2005, in all 31 Mexican states. This policy of "containment" appears to be related, according to Martínez (2001: 6), to the great capacity that the sector has shown for resisting decentralization trends and safeguarding their corporate benefits. Hence, the federal strategy to reform and diversify technological higher education was aimed at designing alternative institutional models. This means, as suggested by Rodríguez (2002: 13), while *ad hoc* programs were applied to public universities to trigger institutional reforms, in the case of the technological institutes the bet was on a change by annexing and/or stratification.

In fact, in this context, the creation of decentralized or state technological institutes was initiated in 1990 under different schemes than those under which federal ITS operated, given that by the signing of agreements they count with the participation of the Federation, the states and the municipalities where they are located. Designed to serve between three and five thousand students, this sub-system in 2005 had 107 institutes in 22 states, with predominantly teaching functions. These institutions remain, as the federal ITS, in a functional and technical relationship with the DGEST -SEP-SES (Martínez, 2001: 6).

However, in 1991, at the interface of university and technological higher education the technological university system came into existence, this further accentuated both, the differentiation and stratification, in between and within different sectors. Their purpose of preparing "high level" middle ranks, holding a university higher technical degree (técnico superior uni-

[16] It includes six federal specialized research centers, namely, the National Center for Research and Technological Development (CENIDET), the Interdisciplinary Center for Technical Education Research and Teaching (CIDET) and four Regional Centers for Equipment Development and Optimization (CRODE) (Rubio *et al.*, 2006: 30).

[17] Carnoy (1994:) notes that hundreds of engineers and technicians graduate from the system of technical institutes each year, but many of them are not sufficiently trained according to the standards of a developed nation because they are not trained to solve problems in highly innovative environments. Therefore, the author says, many of them never work as engineers but end up working as clerks or salespeople.

versitario, TSU) or associate professional (APO)[18], to be worthy of the social recognition and acceptance by the productive sectors that had never managed to be raised before by the high-school-level technological education institutions. Thus, through a Coordination Agreement signed by SEP and the state governments, between 1991 and 2006 the 61 technological universities were created, currently operating in 26 states in the country. For these states, the creation in their territory of a different kind of higher education institution, together with decentralized ITS, has enabled them to define, for the first time, a state higher education policy (Ruiz, 2007: 118), which also reinforces the vision of further integration and consolidation of state higher education systems (ANUIES, 2001: 141).

It should be noted that originally, it was established that creation of all technical universities would be subjected to the results of a feasibility study to define both its relevance as well as the programs offered according to the demands of the potential region, however, Silva, (2006, cited by Villa Lever, 2008: 144) suggests that, in practice, the creation of technical universities has not always followed this planning strategy. For example, when disentangling the "true story" about the origin of the Technological University of Nezahualcoyotl (UTNEZA), Ruiz (2007: 212) concludes that its foundation responded more to a social and political rather than an educational intent. In fact, according to the author, its creation was due to a formal request made by social and business groups from the municipality for the federal and/or state to attend the pressing demand for higher education in the eastern State of Mexico, considered a difficult and potentially convulsive area due to its small scale economy, high levels of violence, intense migration, precarious living conditions and a population characterized by its belligerence. Although socioeconomic and educational supply and demand studies made to respond to this request recommended the creation of a university (Martínez, 1994), both SEP and the state government felt that creating a public autonomous university could mean a great political and social risk for the State of Mexico's future, so, from the beginning the consensus was that the new institution ought not to share the same principles and characteristics of traditional universities.

Therefore, based on France's university institutes of technology model, the UTS sought to offer choices of short, relevant and versatile programs to expand, equitable, and decentralized, access opportunities to public higher education. However, in its first fifteen years enrollment in these institutions had only captured 3 percent of total national enrollment. Moreover, considering that most UTS are located in disadvantaged regions and communities with marginal conditions, it is consistent that 90 percent of enrollment is composed of first generation higher education students (CGUT, 2006: 9) yet, as noted by Silva (2006, cited by Villa Lever, 2008: 145), that did not choose

[18] This degree corresponds to level $5B_2$ of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as proposed by UNESCO. It is distinguished by its professionalization focus. The ISCED is a tool to collect, present and compare education statistics at the international level, defining the different educational levels, as well as, to determine the complexity of the content of educational programs.

it as their first choice to study at the tertiary level because their degrees do not represent the same advantages as those from traditional universities nor do they grant or respond to social expectations of access to post-graduate levels of education.

In this sense, as Ruiz pointed out (2007: 118), everything leads us to conclude that the UTs were designed to facilitate access to higher education for young people that due to their condition of educational insufficiency and low social and economic position were not able to enter traditional universities. Yet, to attempt to remedy this situation, the UT system is now considering a reform to offer a new educational level, equivalent to a bachelor's degree, which could express simply that sectorial authorities seek to attract more youth in order to comply with the six-year-term coverage goals (Flores-Crespo, 2009), but in any case, this measure would not only nullify the advantages attributed to the UT in terms of cost per graduate as compared with university graduates (Márquez, 2004: 484)[19], but would also undermine the very idea of the necessary training of higher university technicians (De la Garza, 2003) and it would indicate that instead of being integrated immediately into the productive structure of their regions to help solve the socioeconomic problems that affect them, students would be expected to pursue graduate, engineering and specialization studies at the same UT or other public or private educational institutions[20].

And this is precisely what has happened to the point that, according to De la Garza (2003), it created a political problem that was then resolved in 2002[21] through the creation of the Politechnical Universities (UP), as well decentralized public agencies of the state governments, although in this case and unlike the UTs, budgetary resources would mainly come from state governments. Indeed, the author notes that the first generation of TSUs was offered, at the time, the possibility of studying an additional year to receive a bachelor's degree. And the options considered for this were twofold: first, that the UTs would develop the curriculum and offer the remaining year, but that would mean to incur in capital expenditure for supplies, laboratories and workshops which, in turn, would duplicate the existing installed capacity of the federal ITs, or second, negotiating with federal ITs full revalidation of TSU curriculum so that graduates would automatically be admitted in the third year of a degree program, an option that the federal subsystem considered unacceptable but, instead, agreed to make partial revalidation based on the results obtained by applicants on a placement test.[22]

[19] According to Márquez (2004: 491), cost per student in these institutions is similar to those which offer four-year degrees, but the shorter duration of the studies provides a comparative advantage to halve the cost per graduate.

[20] The study titled Strategy for Improving the Quality of Higher Education in Mexico, better known as the Coombs Report (1991: 66), led to the creation of the Technological Universities when it recommended the federal and state governments to consider the possibility of increasing the diversity in the higher education system creating a variety of short programs that could lead *directly to attractive jobs* (emphasis added).

[21] The author notes that the Polytechnical University of San Luis Potosi, located in the state capital, began operations in 2001 as a State Education Department initiative.

[22] In 2002 it was estimated that there were approximately 1,800 TSUs who were pursuing degrees in the technological institutes of the subsystem, that had revalidated on average only 60% of their previous studies (De la Garza, 2003).

Thus, the 15 UPs created between 2002 and 2005 in 12 states, came to redeem those youths who were condemned to TSU educational stagnation or partial repetition, for them to gain access to a degree with more prestige in the labor market and thus, as De la Garza (2003) pointed out, UPs were created and closely linked to the model of the UT, such that the CGUT played an important role in their development until the creation of the current Politechnical Universities Coordination (Coordinación de Universidades Politécnicas (CUP) dependent on the SES. The UP curriculum is designed in three learning cycles: one that awards the university higher technical degree in two intensive years; another that awards a bachelor's degree (engineering) in one more year; and the last one, which grants a technological specialization (post-graduate) by taking a fourth year. While the author argues that this model breaks with the traditional training of engineers in the country, he also calls to remain attentive, in the long term, to see if the education received will be comparable, or not, to the training of graduates from the traditional subsystems, both technological and university. Without doubt, the process of creating the UPs clearly shows, as De Vries and Alvarez (2005) suggest, that the emerging challenges in the field of higher education go well beyond the existing policies.

Finally, the intercultural universities system (UI) is composed of six institutions created between 2003 and 2006 in regions with a high density of indigenous population from the states of Guerrero, Mexico, Chiapas, Puebla, Tabasco and Quintana Roo. Although these are decentralized agencies of state governments they depend on the Directorate of Senior High School Education and Higher Education of the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (Dirección de Educación Media Superior y Superior de la Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe, CGEIB) from SEP, a body established in January 2001.

The project for the creation of this new institution, which from our point of view is what most clearly embodies the goal of *relevance,* grew out of requests from different groups and organizations linked to the indigenous communities which at different times, made proposals to get federal education authorities to create a university geographically and culturally close to their villages, since the existing HEIs did not provide conditions conducive to incorporating indigenous youth in a context relevant to their culture. Hence the need for a new educational institution with an intercultural approach, which presumes a creative and enriching interaction between different cultures as it projects a new form of integration of indigenous youth to higher education (http://eib.sep.gob.mx/).

The UI offer professional associate, bachelor's, specialization, master's and doctoral degrees through unconventional training programs such as Language and Culture, Sustainable Development, Alternative Tourism, Intercultural Communication and Traditional Medicine, which certainly are relevant to regional and state development but, above all, to promote the appreciation and revitalization of languages and native cultures (http://www.ses.sep.gob.mx/wb/ses/universidades_interculturales).

However, the increased differentiation of the institutional baseline that emerged after three administrations of policies aimed at expanding coverage can give the wrong impression of increasing diversity. In contrast, several authors (Didou, 2002, Levy, 2002; Vargas, 2003) have stressed that in such "variation" of the institutional offer what has in fact prevailed is isomorphism, a tendency towards "institutional replication" both on the part of new institutions as on the part of those less consolidated, whether public or private, trying to increasingly resemble those institutions placed a top of the demand's preferences.

Paradoxically, this mimetic tendency has been reinforced by the effect that their own policies aimed at improving quality have had over the policies aimed at expanding coverage by means of "diversification". Because by adopting a standard management framework for quality improvement to do so, they have led to an increasing homogenization of educational models, both within each sector and across sectors. For example, the quality management in the technology higher education sector shares, regardless of the type of institution (IT or ITD), certain common elements such as offering undergraduate courses with fewer credits, side exits for the TSU, reduced classroom experiences in exchange for more internships in business as well as skills development and training, by the way, this latter approach, as De Ibarrola (2008: 2) pointed out, is paramount at all levels of the Mexican school system, from preschool to graduate and even postgraduate level.

At this point we should pause to note that the policies aimed at broadening the coverage are not limited, especially during the last six years of the period under review (2000-2006), to expanding the institutional base, but were reinforced with policies to increase the "fairness", i.e. accessibility, retention and completion for low-income youths who are pursuing "good quality" TSU and degree programs, in public HEIS. This means, in other words, that expansionary supply side policies were combined with subsidized demand side policies through cash transfer programs, particularly through the National Scholarship Program for Advanced Studies (Programa Nacional de Becas para Estudios Superiores, PRONABES), founded in 2001 by federal government initiatives in coordination and financial concurrence with the state governments and public HEIS.

PRONABES registered 409, 456 fellows[23] and spent just over five billion pesos between 2001 and 2007, the program's fundamental objective has been to contribute to lower educational inequality that is generated and/or deepened by the dropout due to factors and unequal coverage between the states, adverse family socioeconomic status, parents schooling level, ethnicity,

[23] Eligibility requirements to apply for a scholarship, with an average monthly allowance of 900 pesos, are: a) Mexican citizenship, b) have completed high school, c) have been accepted into a public HEI to start TSU or undergraduate studies, d) have no prior bachelor's degree, e) come from a family whose household income is equal or less than 3 minimum wages by geographic area, f) not having any type of economic benefit or in kind for education, awarded by public or private entities at the time of application. For students already studying TSU or bachelor's programs in a public institution in the country it is required, in addition, to the requirements outlined above, that they have taken and passed all the subjects (subjects, modules or credits) corresponding to the curriculum or cycles (years) prior to the scholarship application and have attained a minimum GPA of 8.0 or its equivalent on a scale of 0 to 10.

gender and family residence, enabling a growing number of youths to timely culminate their studies up to and throughout university. PRONABES also improves student's expectations for future earnings, thus playing an important role in social mobility factors (Solis).

Although the federal government has also tried to use PRONABES as a tool to redirect demand preferences towards programs considered relevant to the country, students continue to choose careers with high demand as well as undergraduate programs over shorter TSU diplomas, this is explained in terms of particular prestige of the profession and the perception of each student on their ability to quickly enter the job market. In addition, according to external evaluations performed annually over the program there are still unknown reasons, academic or extracurricular, why some scholarship holders drop out of higher education even in spite of having the program's financial support (Bracho and Del Rio, 2006: 20, 69, 87). Finally, it should be noted that in 2007 SEP and the Social Development Secretary (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, SEDESOL) signed an agreement to articulate their efforts on behalf of youth in poverty, as beneficiaries of the program *Oportunidades* completed high school to continue their higher education receiving support from the PRONABES.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion we highlight that in the period between 1988 and 2006 two kinds of policies for higher education were applied. The first, as we saw, involves a set of policies related to enrollment's expansion and growth, as outlined above, that met three of the six characteristics that may favorably affect sectorial development: *stability, adaptability* and *consistency* (Stein *et al.,* 2006: 140-145).

The second type of policies involved a set of basic policies to improve the quality and efficiency (organization and coordination) in the HEIS that, ultimately, were too rigid and were unable to generate the fundamental changes that institutions require, hence we consider that the three remaining key aspects, according to Stein *et al.* (2006: 145-146), adversely affected the development of higher education, and should be examined by the sectorial authority.

This is the case in *the quality of implementation and effective policy application*, and despite a former top federal official who considers that second type policy implementation can be considered successful, particularly in the field of the SPUS because "together, and as a result of a remarkable effort made [...] the public university system has better quality indicators than any other group" (Rubio *et al.,* 2005: 77), ultimately, the "improvement" of this subsystem is attributable to the desire of sectorial authority to manage the system in competition (Salvador, 2005: 322), which paradoxically required, transforming the once benign federal educational bureaucracy into a hefty and aggressive bureaucracy that achieved its goal of prompting HEIS to

modernize by using three basic strategies, namely: regulatory expansion, stratification and jurisdictional expansion (Clark, 1983: 212-218), which undoubtedly came to enhance and strengthen the bureaucracy's coordinating influence.

Therefore, this means that *the* policy *orientation* did not follow, strictly speaking, *public interest* but the federal bureaucracy's self-propagating interest in its eagerness to plan, monitor and enforce some consistency on the institutions' and sectors' actions exponentially multiplying the number and complexity of rules and instruments, giving rise to the idea of "paper universities" (Porter, 2003: 44), whose deconstruction can be seen, in the words of Ibarra (2007b: 24), as a control paradigm, from the center and vertex (i.e., from the SES), that led institutions and communities through the dark paths of scrupulous compliance with standards without allowing things to be done in different ways.

Finally, this leads us to call into question *the efficiency* shown by the sectorial authorities in allocating their limited resources into those actions that generated the highest social return, avoiding waste and duplication, given that in order to undertake the reorganization of the system, which was equally subjected to more formal controls and the effects of policies aimed at expanding enrollment, the sectorial bureaucracy experienced a process of internal stratification, during the period under review, as we saw previously, that resulted in the creation of three new "administrative units" within the SES, namely, the CGUT, the CUP and the DGESPE, expanding its scope and, consequently, its jurisdictional reach. Yet instead of promoting the integration and coordination of a true higher education "system", this circumstance "balkanized" it (De Vries and Alvarez, 2005; Stein, 2006: 145), since it further fragmented the university and technological sector, making coordination difficult and promoting hostility and resistance to inter-sectorial and inter-institutional actions.

SES expansion of jurisdiction is also reflected in the authority that maintains, through the Directorate of Decentralized Technological Institutes DGEST on this subsystem, as well as through the participation of two representatives of the federal government, appointed directly by the secretary of education, in the highest governing body of each institute.

Furthermore, and after nearly two decades of failed attempts, since 1997 the SESIC proceeded to revive the State Commissions for Higher Education Planning (Comisiones Estatales para la Planeación de la Educación Superior, COEPES) involving, among others, "members of relevant departments and agencies (SEP's representative in the state)" in order to achieve a more coordinated, rational and relevant higher education in the states (SEP, 1997: 3-4). By the intermediation of these structures, in recent years most states have agreed the creation of new institutions and training options, designed their state plans for science and technology, participated in the operation of PRONABES and influenced the awarding of the RVOE to educational programs offered by PFHEIS (SEP, 2006: 174-176).

Both, the ITD and the COEPES are a good illustration of the fact, noted above, of the greater degree of adaptability shown by policies related to the

expansion and growth of enrollment. Their respective creation and reactivation partially amended certain characteristics of the provision of education, as were the overlapping of financing mechanisms and areas of authority, without any need to realign the entire policy (Stein, 2002: 241-242).

Finally we should add that SES political and bureaucratic coordination attributions were further extended –since it joined in 2002, as part of the Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Public *Government* Information[24]– to include a greater financial control and accountability to society by the so-called "autonomous constitutional bodies", among which universities and other higher education institutions are included –which again are granted autonomy by the law. Among the mechanisms provided to make their role more transparent to citizens, both in terms of its management and use of the resources they receive, are the reviews or audits of their financial budget by internal auditors or the Federal Superior Audit. Also, to fulfill this requirement, institutions have been gradually integrating this information (financial, academic, administrative, institutional, legal and access to information) on their websites, although not all have web sites with ease of access and the quality information required, and not all institutions have yet developed this option (Pavón, 2009: 4; aregional.com, 2009: 5).

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La revista *Perfiles Educativos* del Instituto de Investigaciones sobre la Universidad y la Educación de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México convoca a todos los especialistas e interesados en el tema de la educación superior a participar en el **número especial** 2011 que, con motivo de la culminación de los festejos por **el centenario de la** UNAM, será dedicado al análisis de **los retos actuales y futuros de la universidad en México.**

Se recibirán **artículos inéditos** con una extensión mínima de 10 cuartillas y máximo de 20 (27 ó 28 líneas, 2000 caracteres sin espacios por cuartilla). Las características de los artículos deberán seguir las normas editoriales de la revista incluidas en esta publicación o en la página www.iisue.unam.mx/seccion/perfiles.

Los artículos recibidos se someterán a un proceso de dictamen doble ciego. También se invitará a especialistas en cada tema propuesto, quienes participarán como autores y revisarán los artículos de su especialidad junto con alguno de los miembros del Comité Editorial de la revista.

El resultado de los dictámenes se dará a conocer a más tardar el 30 de junio del 2011.

Los temas propuestos son:

- Universidad y Estado (políticas públicas).
- Universidad y gobierno (autonomía, autorregulación).
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- Universidad y cobertura (índices aprobación/reprobación, financiamiento, concentración de matrícula).
- Universidad y sistema educativo (educación básica y media).
- Universidad y mercado laboral.
- Universidad y calidad de la investigación (financiamiento, condiciones, perfil de investigadores).
- Universidad e impacto social (vinculación, extensión y cultura).

El contenido a desarrollar en cada artículo será el de una revisión crítica de la investigación de la última década sobre el tema elegido, el planteamiento de un balance y sugerencias para acciones futuras. La recepción de artículos estará abierta a partir de la publicación de esta convocatoria (1º de enero de 2011) hasta el 2 de mayo del mismo año.