

## ACA – Annual conference

Dijon : 24/26 May 2002

### *Marketing as part of the new world order in higher education*

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Ce n'est pas dans les pays

Pleins d'eau

Qu'on découvre la soif

Ce n'est pas dans les pays

Pleins de mots

Qu'on découvre le sens

(Jean Yves Leloup, *Désert, déserts*, 1996)

#### 1. *Marketing : what and what for ?*

If your letter box is similar to mine, its daily content is mainly publicity, free journals, bills and administrative letters. This is completed, from time to time, by postcards from friends, near or far away. If you open your junk mail, especially now that you get adverts disguised in personal messages, you will certainly wonder why, for instance, you should slim down by 7 kilos in a week and what is the mechanism that will induce you buying a 100 Euro drug – not to count all the « useful » gifts that will come with the purchase, a purse for your credit cards, a set of pens or a coloured worry bead – a nice way to point that you could have problems to think of !

Two points : by definition, the sender has no idea of who you are, of your age and capacity to pay, or – for that matter – of what your figure looks like. However, considering the number of such letters received, it must work somehow. And that is my second point, the seller seems to find ways to induce the reader to dream of being as slim as fits his or her ideal image of him or herself. The seller is certainly not to use the Golden Age of painting to prove his point : Rembrandt's or Rubens' women were preferred plump and round. He will not even refer to today's image of the young, active and successful : all this implied and the potential buyer is left to find himself or herself a good reason to slim so that he decides to buy. Of course, the buyer's rational behaviour has to be comforted by the supposed scientific quality of the product, that is confirmed by the picture of an avuncular, warm-hearted but serious doctor, in a white blouse if possible – *l'habit faisant le moine*. And, anyway, if the dream does not come true, you will be able to keep the purse, the pens or the worry-bead. In fact, the seller offers the buyer to use his or her own references to join the crowd of the future disappointed and disillusioned customers of a miracle product.

The trick consists in ***selling the buyer his own expectations*** : the higher the expectations, the higher the price required can be.

#### 2. *Marketing higher education*

The provider of higher education is very much in the same position : he has to start from the buyer's expectations. In other words, he has to put himself in the buyer's shoes. What does training and education bring in terms of hopes and ambitions ? Better job opportunities, I suppose, improved social integration, a facilitated climbing of the social ladder. More academic reasons – of lesser importance perhaps - could be to test one's intellectual capacity by discovering new fields of knowledge, or by understanding better one's own place at work or in society. However, are social expectations the same all over ? Should we assume the similarity of those implicit references that are supposed to structure the market of higher education in various parts of the planet ? Indeed, is there such a thing as a global academic market ?

For instance, *Monash University* has developed – successfully it seems - an active presence in Malaysia, which is a kind of border country for Australia. It has also tried to use this experience of borderless education in Europe but entering the expectations of the Spanish citizen is not really an easy venture for education providers from the other side of the world - perhaps more difficult than reaching the implicit needs of South East Asians.

On the contrary, *Phoenix University* can boast an easier acceptance in Europe, or so I understand. Are the expectations of the European consumer more comprehensible for an American than an Australian institution ? Or is the market penetration of Phoenix University linked to its education line : short modular courses focussing on the upgrading of already employed personnel – most often people familiar with English as a working language since the public first targeted is the personnel of multinational companies with an important US component ? In a way, Phoenix University addresses very much the expectations which it meets in America – so, it can be perceived as relevant and efficient. Monash University, by addressing a wider and more traditional student public, must be more aware of European specificities if it is to play a major role in the Iberian peninsula.

In other words, globalisation stumbles on the fragmentation of target audiences which are more easily reached than before - thanks to the new information and communication technologies. Providers could be tempted to believe that there exists globally valid products and general services – so that they can make economies of scale in the provision of higher education the world over. Indeed mathematics and informatics, for instance, are of the same intellectual nature everywhere but the explicit offer of training in these branches does not necessarily correspond to the implicit expectations of those interested in mastering their complexity. The gap between the explicit need of intellectual training and the implicit dream of social improvement could be much wider still in borderless business administration and the acquisition of international competencies in economics and social development . After all, a course based on ideas of economic progress prepared in Germany has implicit references which are more easily understood in the Rhine Valley than in the Argentinian pampa !

Thus, when understanding peoples' expectations, when entering the buyers' shoes, there is a good chance that even tailor-made courses are not sufficient to meet the dreams of social integration and upward mobility that have a very different flavour – context, drive and history – in Africa, South East Asia, China, Brazil or Yugoslavia. Does this mean that present success stories in the global provision of higher education are mainly linked to the westernised segments of the countries targeted by world providers ? Are we not addressing first our kin the world over, the people who can afford a Western type of education, those who have access to the communication equipment that also transforms our societies, those who speak a European language – English, of course, but also, to a lesser extent, French, Portuguese or Spanish ? Could we not be accused of continuing and developing further *new forms of colonialism* – this time entered into willingly by the audiences we are trying to reach, people we can touch simply because their expectations are very much our expectations in Western, i.e., European countries ?

### 3. *Higher education: a product ?*

If marketing is not only meeting the customer's expectations but also selling him his own expectations, is not the intellectual content of education becoming little more than the purse, pens or worry-bead accompanying the recognised but implicit urge for slimming that drives the publicity for miracle drugs which we receive in our letter boxes ?

Indeed, there is problem with educational services. Their importance can only be understood by those who have already used them, in a way or another. You must have some kind of reference to the use of knowledge for intellectual progress, for professional change, for social transformation if you are to appreciate its potential for further growth, as a person or as part of a group. Why is this so ? Because, if I may say so, higher education institutions sell wind, *l'université vend du vent*.

Very concretely, the words explaining the world of science and the arts are born out of the human breath, they are the expression of the air giving life to our bodies and minds. Nothing more, nothing less. And the miracle of expression is recognised when we use the same word for air passing our lungs and for ideas crossing our minds, i.e., *spiritus*, hence the double meaning of the verb inspire, breathe in, on one hand, and take heed, on the other. In less philosophical terms, education has no material expression as it is first and foremost a process: *e-ducere*. The Latin term means leading you out of a given situation, opening to innovation and to the unexpected. Thus, documents can only certify that you have been through the process – not how you have gained from it. Degrees indicate that you have been helped to go beyond your supposed capacity, to move forward, to be creative. Personal change, indeed, cannot be measured: it can only be witnessed. And that is the role of the diploma, the objectivity of which is usually accepted in a very subjective way - when and if the reader trusts the value of the document. One assumes that the wind has blown in the right direction, i.e., your own. Indeed, in the world of expectations met – those of the buyer, those of the provider -, trust is the only currency of understanding.

So, to reach the customer with facts that can influence the decision to buy, higher education institutions seem unable to prove, assess and defend the reality of the process they propose. As a result, they fall back on concrete side-aspects of the work of personal change they wish to provide in order to justify their specificity on the market of knowledge: equipment is modern, support is generous, residences are comfortable, teachers are available – in short, the context is easily measured even if the content cannot be described. Marketing then tends to underline the quality of the facilities instead of the coherence of personal development as each potential customer has a unique history that cannot be meaningfully connected to expectations experienced on the other side of the planet. It is already difficult to link potential learning to a given environment – at least, this environment enriches the dreams about the needs expected to be met in the mind of the user. And that is what Rolf Hoffmann will discuss later this afternoon.

#### 4. *Marketing, a trend or a fashion*

From my introductory remarks, one can wonder if marketing is not more the problem of the provider than that of the potential customer. Often, marketing has been *an answer to vanished complacencies*. For instance, invoking Humboldt and the spread of the German university model in Europe and the US, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German institutions could consider that their model of higher education had nothing to prove. They recently realised, however, that Germany was no longer a magnet for foreigners wishing to get the best training. Potential students seemed no longer to consider that learning German was worth the effort in order to take advantage of academic training which they could receive in other parts of the world – by using English, the new *lingua franca*. Indeed, the US – or Britain for that matter - could offer shorter studies for the same official result, if not with a higher prestige. France went through the same discovery. Past glory was no longer sufficient to attract foreign students ! One way to react was to market the German or French higher education product, when not packaging it in English.

This usually meant starting from the product – even if it proved difficult to define. The idea was to take advantage of a lack of higher education and academic training in those many parts of the

world that aspire to emulate Western development, way of life and standards of living. The market consisted in emerging new partners – and competitors – ready to use our own weapons, i.e, concepts of development and technology to achieve somewhat similar results. The market could be big, certainly, but it is far from all encompassing. And many with no real expectations from Western models will also react to the creeping imperialism of a given vision of the world, one of scientific progress that even many Europeans fear to envisage in all its consequences – as recent votes have shown in Denmark, Italy, France or the Netherlands.

Is this a fashion in marketing higher education that will disappear when the investment in communication will not evoke financial returns high enough to justify the costs of publicity, student fairs, coloured printouts or – if the lure is to work – of residence construction, linguistic support or the teaching of specific courses in the English language ? Or is it a trend linked to the globalisation of economy and the « informatisation » of society ? Taken from a European point of view, the marketing of higher education is but a symptom of a much deeper change in the nature of our society: it tries to maintain the place of Europe in the world vis-à-vis competitors now dominating the market, America and Australia. It tries to attract new blood in European training and research institutions which face a declining birth rate and an ageing population in countries where the replacement of generations is no longer ensured. It tries to revive the dynamism and creativity of an innovative society, by invoking the knowledge society the European Union is dreaming of.

Basically, the problem is that, since the Crusades, after a thousand years of emigration and conquest, Europe, as a continent, has become *an immigration country*. Immigration is not to serve new human ventures and conquests, like in Australia and North America, but simply to help Europe survive and remain a rich part of the world. That is why Europeans are not ready to share their wealth while Americans and Australians are perhaps more accustomed to engage others in their own development. I think, however, that pretty soon the Western world as a whole will be on the retreating side, in terms of demography, and that Australia and North America will develop similar reactions: keep what there is for those who are here now, certainly not for tomorrow's heirs and successors. *Après moi le déluge !* Defending one's own standard of living does not mean immobility, however. We have to be ready for an *Europe métissée*, a Europe of many colours, many creeds, many customs. And that adds to the complexity of higher education marketing, not only toward foreign but also in relation to “internal” markets.

Indeed, if higher education is to develop new concepts for strengthening the society of knowledge called for by the politicians (especially in Europe after the Lisbon Declaration of EU governments), if higher education is to grow in new areas of knowledge dissemination – like lifelong learning or corporate education, the new forms of adult education -, if higher education is to offer access to an ever-increasing segment of population, not only in traditional age cohorts of young people but also for learners of all ages, then the provision of academic training will need to diversify and develop as a fragmented offer of services, i.e., services no longer recognisable under the generic term of higher education or university studies. As a result, if people – the so-called consumers – are to find the product corresponding to their needs, some kind of tailor-made communication strategy will be needed. And this goes much further than the collecting of new clients across the border for relatively well-known areas of training. It requires a complete overhaul of communication strategies inside one's own back garden. Otherwise, many providers could simply die when confronted by richer, better equipped, more articulated institutions which are able to offer more enticing services. In other words, I am afraid that the need for communication is here to stay, in Europe and beyond, should the institutions survive in a global environment, be they niche or general providers. Dennis Blight will certainly dwell on that matter.

5. *Re-organising the present or fighting the preceding war*

At the end of June, the 144 countries that are members of WTO (the World Trade Organisation) will meet in Geneva and indicate which commitments they are willing to take to liberalise trade in services. This represents a key moment in the development of GATS (the General Agreement on Trade in Services): nations are putting on the table the segments of trade that they would agree to liberalise by the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2005: it could be investment rights in tourism, financial activities linked to bank or insurance services or – even - education.

If governments decide to commit the educational sector to the negotiation process – for the moment some 30 of them have indicated an interest in developing trade in education -, they could limit the liberalisation to certain types of services or open the whole area to free trade. The GATS considers that there are four types of exchanges that can be affected by new regulations :

- The provision of services beyond national borders with no physical move of providers or consumers : in terms of education, this would imply distance education, e-learning or virtual universities – not very much of a market for the moment but a market with a considerable potential if investments follow fast developing information and communication technologies.
- The provision of services to receiving foreigners within the provider's national borders : in terms of education, this represents the traditional market of students moving physically to a foreign university in order to get trained – this is the largest money making service at present, representing billions of dollars for countries like the US, Great Britain, Australia or New Zealand.
- The provision of services to receiving consumers by foreign providers settled in the consumers' country : in terms of education, this covers foreign university branches, franchises or joint ventures – a small but fast growing market taking advantage of gaps existing in the national provision of academic training.
- The provision of services in a receiving country by foreign specialists : in terms of education, this means expatriates offering knowledge, skill and competences, i.e., professors moving for a period of time in another country to practice their job – a market of potential growth if professional mobility is to increase.

Some countries – if they put education on the negotiation table at all – will restrict their willingness to freer trade to one or two of those modalities of exchange. For instance, the European Union, in 1995 already, had indicated that they were interested only in offering better access to foreigners willing to be trained in European countries, while the US, in December 2000, wished also to deal with e-learning and distance education.

We are not meeting in Dijon to discuss GATS. However, this example shows that, if this conference is to discuss the marketing of higher education, we should be thinking about the modalities of education exchanges as they could require different models of communication between the provider and the potential customer. Moreover, considering what I said earlier, one could also wonder if the fears and fights around the GATS are not reflecting obsolete structures of exchanges in which so-called leading nations push for their products abroad rather than explore a world of implicit foreign expectations.

Yet, for the moment, and in the four types of exchanges outlined by the WTO, there will be a similar effort at presenting a product of relevance to the consumer in terms of time, space, and content. What do institutions offer? Mainly a paper, as we said, a paper certifying that the holder can

be trusted to meet the challenges of a special activity, thus deserving a certain level of remuneration. The paper implies that some *time* has been dedicated to structured learning and that the latter has been acquired in a recognised *space* – using specific facilities like libraries, classrooms or offices (virtual ones, in some cases) in order to take advantage of the provision of a given type of knowledge. The document also implies recognised *quality*, the basis for the value and prestige of the certification – which, when passed on to the certifier or the provider, becomes a *brand* – i.e., an aura that can be used in any marketing effort by reducing the proof of quality to a label of confidence. A name, like Oxford or Cambridge, thus becomes a guarantee. Of course, you can buy such documents from a degree mill and act as if an adorned signature was equivalent to training efforts and intellectual sweat! At least, you can do so until you are exposed as a freak ... which does not necessarily happen soon considering, for instance, the number of academic awards easily accessible on the web. But this is not my topic either as Eva Egron-Pollak will discuss the ethics of marketing, and the dangers of fakes.

#### 6. *The new world order of higher education*

Until now, I have tried to explore four fields of contradictions, the contradictions between

- the buyer's expectations and the seller's ambitions
- the process and the product of higher education
- the context and the content of higher learning
- the flight towards external solutions and the fight of internal problems.

The resulting picture is of cynicism and prevailing egoism: marketing of higher education does look like a flight from real European basic transformations in order to keep what power there is by imposing one's own understanding of the world by recruiting foreign allies ready to buy in a Western view of the world and to take advantage of its material implementation.

I would like to nuance this vision as I am not sure that we, Westerners, really know what we are doing and what we would like to achieve. Indeed, I am also supposed to set the discussion of marketing in a wider framework, that of "the new world order of higher education".

Last year, EUA organised in Quebec, with the American Council on Education and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, an intensive seminar entitled the *Brave new world of higher education*. Participants considered that the levers for change were cost effectiveness, borderless education and new information technologies. The new world order of higher education reflects these new constraints and opportunities but it is grounded in more general boundary conditions for social changes, of which the university is only part of – even if it has often played a leading role in their development. As I have no time to go into details, may I simply point to three sets of questions – which in fact you all know – and whose cross influences make our world references rather complex<sup>1</sup>.

The first one has already been alluded to: it is the revolution of *globalisation* and GATS is one consequence of this transformation of our references – with the built-in fears of redistribution of wealth and power that could have had an indirect influence on recent European votes. Globalisation empties *spatial references* from real meaning; thus, the private world of citizens loses its anchors: not only can the butterfly fluttering its wings in the Amazonian forest provoke disasters on this side of

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<sup>1</sup> See: Guillebaud Jean Claude, *Le principe d'humanité*, Le Seuil, Paris, 2001

the Alps but also the destruction of a farmer's house in deprived Central Asia can feed kamikaze attacks on Western symbols of economic laissez-faire in New York, if not in London or Paris. As a result, we feel like a piece of cork floating on turbulent waters, and to pretend there is some kind of order in change, we invoke a *deus ex machina* who can explain it all, the "market".

The second one is the revolution in *communication* and information technologies. If globalisation destroys the sense of space, the communication revolution kills our *sense of time*. Progress, today, spells like "higher speed" as if the aim of human enterprise was immediacy of contact. The faster we reach the other, the better – even if we have nothing to say to him or her. We are taken over by the urgency of the present, and we all complain that our laptops are too slow in opening files and finding bits of information on the web, don't we? Impatience reduces time to minutes if not seconds, so much so that the weight of the past tends to be forgotten while the invention of the future becomes senseless. We are rushing after a fleeting present that makes unfortunately no sense of our social identity, a social presence that was traditionally grounded in history, past or future. As a result, instantaneity loses reality and virtuality turns imagination by some kind of magic into the semblance – or the reality – of power.. Such immediacy kills order – as linearity disappears - and the resulting confusion in time leads to the "Tower of hell" becoming the twin towers of the World Trade Center. And there too, we need a *deus ex machina*, the computer whose growing intelligence – etymologically the capacity to link facts and figures – should solve problems of which we are not even aware.

The third revolution is the *desecration of life*, after all the basis of man's existence, as exemplified by the power that can now be exerted on the genetic heritage of mankind. What is becoming of man, is he to turn into a demi-god, on the way to constant health and immortality or, other side of the picture, is man to assume animality, recognise as life accomplices the beasts with whom we share so much of genes and life? The borders that circumscribe the conventions building our social being are being blurred, there too. And the bio-engineer with the support of an ethics committee becomes the *deus ex machina* for that domain of progress.

In other terms, our common references are being subverted by a progress we trust to be unavoidable and positive even if that progress seems beyond man's power, his capacity to influence the transformation of the world. Intervention is all the more difficult since the three revolutions that question "time", "space" and "man as a subject" are constantly interacting: for instance, the ethics committees assessing the research tampering with life processes are often tempted by the needs of the market, a part of the globalisation process that is considered irresistible. Thus, should there be a market for human cloning, the cloning of man could easily be validated as an unavoidable development. And, in the launch of these three revolutions, academia has played an important part. But it is difficult to see the convergences of science – on the contrary, research separates, dissects, multiplies the areas of knowledge. We live in constant dualities, each of us on a little island of certainty. May I remind you that, in Greek, *diavolos* means the one who divides? In other terms, devil and duality are very much the same thing.

The three revolutions reduce aims and plans to hopes and bets on the unknown – or to rather short-sighted tactics. As a result, we tend to give more and more credit to the tools that made these transformations possible, the laws of the market, the techniques of information, the modalities of bio-engineering. By accepting more or less passively what comes – as our society feels unable to shape the future – we are also accepting duality as the norm of our evolution. We could even consider that we relinquish power to the Other, with a capital O – to the Devil, in religious terms. Marketing, in this connection, appears like not much more than an attempt to give sense to the meaningless, the mask of an unfortunate situation rather than the instrument of a convincing and significant future.

What we need is a new consensus, not a small venture considering that the question is really the place of man in the universe, man's status and prospect in today's world. And this goes far beyond marketing, indeed.

### 7. *Marketing, a tool of communication*

In fact, marketing is but one aspect of communication, a tool for exchanges of goods and products. The origin of the word is indeed the « market » where merchants, at their stands, propose goods to the attention of potential clients. Communication is wider in scope, as the etymology of the word shows : *com-* and *unicare*, i.e., to bring to some unity a group of people, to help them rally around a given meaning, recognised as one by the partners. In other words, it leads to a convention that filters information to give it accepted social value. It addresses individuals to bring them into a group. It is much more about « being » than « having », being as a partner in society. Marketing, on the contrary, addresses a group to convince individuals, its members, to be more of themselves by acquiring some new good or service. It is much more about « having » than « being », even if the merchant could pretend that having more means better, in terms of being.

That is why ESIB, the *National Unions of Students in Europe*, to prepare the Summit of Education Ministers in May last year – a part of the Bologna process - decided to set up a commission on the « commodification » of higher education while they pushed, in Prague, for the Ministers to recognise that higher education was first and foremost a public service – or at least a public duty. As a result, the Prague communiqué insisted on *higher education as a public good*, it spelt social agreement as an expectation that could be met rather than a dream clothed as a merchandise. In a way, the Bologna process can be seen as attempt to reconcile tailor-made instruction, a student centred university – whose activities could be easily marketed to specific groups of customers – with a society building on slowly gained consensus, filtered through comparisons of good, better and best social practices in order to reach some kind of cohesiveness, i.e., a capacity to develop as a coherent whole. In such a situation, where the expectation of the user meets that of the provider, marketing can be a real force for the expansion of a model of society. As long as the community makes sense, the expectations of its citizens can concur towards a similar focus of convergence: then marketing expresses a common language.

Higher education can stop invoking the *dei ex machina* presiding over the passivity of social surrender and the excuses of duality. To be pro-active again, the university can simply come back to its original aim, *ad unum vertere*, a beautiful etymology of the institution that was once proposed to us by Vaclav Havel: turn to the one, make sense of the apparent chaos, re-invest the past to re-invent the future. That is the famous *critical role* of academia that justifies the institution autonomy and freedom to speak. Freedom to bring together a fragmented society, *com-unicare* by being prophetic – i.e., by announcing and pronouncing the future. Then marketing will no longer have to approximate, if not lie, to impose one view of the world but marketing will propose products and services that reflect man's redefined being, man's re-engineered presence in the world, thus making sense of the expectations of all in a global, rational and reasonable whole.

*AB,/Genoa, 22 May 2002*