Chapter 6

Economic Crisis and Higher Education in Greece

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ABSTRACT

It can be argued that higher education (HE) in Greece has always been problematic and dysfunctional in the post-dictatorship era (1974-2008). This is evident from the fact that Greek governments have failed to reform HE according to the EU standards despite the public demand and industry needs. Additionally, the existence of a large number of state universities and technological institutes (TEIs) in combination with the phenomena of: nepotism, favouritism, trade unionism, political involvement, and the creation of unnecessary departments in rural areas in order to satisfy the local voters support this argument. This chapter describes the current situation of HE in Greece. It discusses the challenges that staff, students and the government face from the impact of the economic crisis. In addition, it provides an overview of the effects of the changes in HE on the society. Finally, it explores the prospects and opportunities that exist for HE policy makers, staff and students; especially in terms of their future employability.

INTRODUCTION: THE HIGHER EDUCATION STRUCTURE IN GREECE

The purpose of the following section is to provide the reader a general overview of the Greek higher education system. Firstly we present the role of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (YPEPTH), as an introduction to the tertiary education in Greece. Moreover, the structure of tertiary education is illustrated, and more specifically its sectors namely Universities, Technological Educational Institutes (TEIs) and further education. Finally, a critical evaluation of the Greek higher education system attempts to surface key issues such as the structural problems and the stakeholders’ attitude towards the attempted reforms.

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The Greek Education System at a Glance

The Greek educational system is under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (YPEPTH). Education in Greece, including pre-school, primary and lower secondary education, is compulsory for all children 6 to 15 years old. Primary Education (Dimotiko) lasts 6 years, low-secondary education (Gymnasio) lasts 3 years and upper secondary education – the Unified upper secondary school (Eniaio Lykeio) and the Technical Vocational School (TEE) lasts 3 years. The Vocational Training Institutes (IEK) are part of post-secondary education, offering formal education. Higher Education is divided into Universities (Panepistimio) and Technological Educational Institutions (TEI).

According to the Greek Constitution, education is free in state schools, universities and technological institutions. Admission to tertiary education is based on a student’s performance in national level examinations taking place at the end of the third year of upper secondary education. There is also a thriving private education sector providing tertiary education not recognized as equal to the state universities, despite the EU and Bologna agreements (EHEA, 2012; Hatzis, 2012).

Tertiary Education in Greece

Following the Educational Reform of 2001, public higher education is divided into the University (universities, polytechnic schools, and Athens School of Arts) and Technological sectors (technological educational institutes - TEI). Student admission depends on performance in national written examinations. Those who are over the age of 22 can also apply for admission to the Hellenic Open University.

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**Figure 1. The Greek education system**
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