

Section 8

Role of Academia & Civil Society in the Evolution of Global Governance and how can it be made more effective?

1. Importance of Academia

Fifty years ago, governments showed little interest in universities – academies, unless they propagated anti-government views. Governments were content that universities should be seats of learning, pure research, and scholarship, and largely at the service of economic systems. Universities around the world had broadly similar structures, with essentially independent (strictly disciplinary) departments of history, physics, philosophy, etc. Governments accepted such structures, provided funding, and did not normally interfere.

In the last fifty years, the world has fundamentally changed. Many governments now realise the new scientific and technological knowledge holds the key to our future wealth and health. Many new medical drugs and industrial products are based upon discoveries made in the academic world. Governments now recognize the power as well as the innovative instinct of (some) academies.

Today, higher education institutions are called upon to play a key role in 1) shaping knowledge, 2) educating citizens and leaders, 3) addressing pressing social issues – with the aim of promoting sustainable futures, meeting human needs and ensuring the integrity of the biosphere.

2. Importance of Society

The society is best placed to judge its developments and its dangers. Typical examples are: Energy and environment related problems, stop of nuclear power plants, the plastics and the oceans, science and ethics in medical research. A good mechanism for collaboration between academy and society and governments is vital

The academy and the society should also consider that the world is being redefined as we speak:

- **By technology:** research change very rapidly, students have to be trained for careers that don't exist yet
- **By globalization:** the world's most valuable commodity is getting harder to find. Company management has a gnawing worry about the supply of talent. Companies in Europe of all sorts are taking longer to fill jobs and say they have to make do with sub-standard employees. The best evidence of a "talent shortage" can be seen in high-tech firms – companies such as Yahoo! And Microsoft are battling for the world's best computer scientists.
- **By changing customer behaviour:** the society is much more demanding and there exists also a collapse of loyalty e.a. people leave easy companies and are moving to the highest bidder.

3. Role of Academia

“The activity of knowing is no less related to our sense of reality and no less a world-building activity than the building of houses”

(The Life of the Mind by Hannah Arendt, Hannah Arendt Center 2013)

There are multiple possible ways of government – academies interactions; in political – economic – scientific – industrial dossiers.

The academy

- should act as a thinking tank and source of information for all world related topics
- should be an adviser and guide to governments, international and world institutions; WAAS should focus on United Nations, OECD, IEA, FAO, UNIDO, etc
 - *Academic field*: Uniformity of university studies worldwide
 - *Research Field*: On Climate Change, Environment, New technologies (Nano-Science) ...Health
 - *Industrial importance*: Energy supply, Transport
 - *Social studies*: Hunger in the world, matters on immigration, nuclear safety, security
- could balance the ‘know-how’ focus with the ‘how to know’ questions, including: 1) addressing the the need to re-consider hidden, unexamined and often flawed assumptions about present and past systems (ISSC and UNESCO 2013) including ontological and epistemological reductionism; 2) collecting and disseminating innovative ways of doing research and teaching, of experimentation and innovation in ways of knowing and learning; 3) promoting the complex practices of inter and transdisciplinary research; 4) reflecting on the need to balance and integrate social sciences, humanities and the arts with ‘hard sciences’, STEM etc.; and 5) promoting a better balance between technological solutions and solutions that build on changes in values, self-awareness, worldviews and related lifestyles.
- should act as a service office for governmental institutions; studies upon request
- should warn authorities of upcoming problems and suggest solutions: water and food shortages
- could balance risk assessment and warning signals, with a pro-active contribution towards shaping futures – providing advice on the knowledge and education that can deliver sustainable futures that meet human needs and respect planetary integrity.
- should be a communicator with the society
The conflicts of curiosity and science and the current needs of society are as old as science itself. Once needs only to recall the famous encounter between Faraday and King William IV, who once asked the celebrated scientist what his “electricity “was actual good for. Faraday answered, “One day you will tax it.

4. Role of Society

- Could contribute to envision sustainable futures and set part of the education and research agendas that can help shape the future
- Should alert Governments, academia and the population on problems/situations of international nature e.a. Green peace, Anti-nuclear “weapons” groupings, plastics movements, Global warming, Traffic in cities,
- Should made suggestions: Weekend Free traffic in cities, Election campaigns,

5. Role of WAAS and the Evolution of Global Governance

As world academy WAAS should:

- Worldwide organizational structure to be built-up
- Create a liaison with continental/national academies
- Seek for official recognition by world authorities and institutions e.a European and International Bodies as OECD, UN: UNESCO, FAO...and even have an official seat in these decision-making bodies.
- Initiate appropriate channels for contacts with worldwide institutions should be created
- A mechanism for communication with the society – media, via press, radio, TV. Internet
- WAAS strategy plan needs to be developed
- Funds raising council/system to be created
- High Level Supporting Group to be installed: composed of politicians, bankers, industrialists, governments
- Within WAAS to develop a thinking tank: scientific – innovative, economic - political, ...with status of Nobel Laureate
- Associations should join, in addition to individuals

One of the great problems worldwide is that academies are, these days, less recognized by our governments and society. They are mainly composed of older generations and often less active persons and the entrance is not limited to strictly restricted to prestigious personalities. A revitalization process is vitally needed.

Marcel VAN DE VOORDE

with contributions by Olivia BINA