



The Challenge Of Establishing World-Class Universities

O Desafio De Estabelecer Universidades De Classe Mundial

El Desafío De Crear Universidades De Rango Mundial

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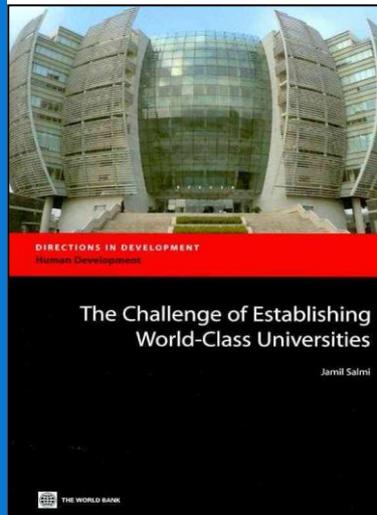
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Salmi, Jamil. The Challenge of Establishing World-Class Universities. Washington: The World Bank, 2009. 136 p.

Launched in 2009 by the World Bank in co-edition with Mayol Editions S.A., the book *The Challenge of Establishing World-Class Universities* has become one of the main reference works for all those interested in understanding the phenomenon of the emergence and expansion of the so-called WCU (world-class universities). This is a work promoted on a global scale by a multilateral agency highlighted in the Brazilian scientific literature "as the main intervenor agent in higher education policies worldwide". A global advocate with the World Trade Organization, among other theses, of the "inclusion of higher education in the set of services to be regulated according to the general rules relating to commerce".

It has been ten years of its publication and it is a surprise the fact that there is not even a record of a review of the book in question in any Brazilian academic journal, perhaps because studies on world-class universities and the expansion of rankings is an emerging field. However, one cannot fail to mention that the work now reviewed is a literature known not only by the authors of the various academic theses and dissertations, already defended in the country, which discuss the subject in question, but also by the university managers concerned with the understanding and construction of WCU.

With versions in English, French, Chinese and Spanish, the book now backed by its English version, has its main objective to show governments and managers of universities the challenges, paths and strategies for the reform of the tertiary education system, with the objective of achieving a teaching of excellence and transforming, if feasible, its institutions in WCU.

The preface was written by Justin Lin, who was senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank (2008-2012), an organization that, in addition to providing technical and financial support to countries and managers of tertiary education institutions since 1963, has promoted and encouraged the creation and evolution of tertiary education, seeking a quality education, and thus, the economic, socio and cultural development of the countries.

Justin Lin talks about the paradigm shift of the big universities, which originally were only for local relevance and culture. In addition, in order to be among the best in the world need, besides a teaching of excellence, a global engagement. Being on the list of WCU has been the objective and challenge of governments, and of tertiary education institutions.

The book has 136 pages, and is divided into three chapters - What does it mean to be a WCU?; Path to transformation; Implications for the World Bank - preceded by an executive summary in which the author synthesizes the main theses defended in his work.

In the executive summary, Salim describes the concern of governments and educational institutions with the ranking of universities, and cites a statement by Philip G. Altbach about WCU, "everyone wants one, nobody knows what it is, and nobody knows how to get one" (p. 22). From this assertion, the book initiates an operational construction of the definition of WCU. The book follows analyzing and tracing possible strategies and trajectories to establish this type of university. The author points out possible risks and costs,

and describes the role of the World Bank in advising governments and institutions. Throughout the book, the author raises many questions that governments and institutions in the process of constructing WCU should answer, and to define the real need and capacity of these countries in the implementation of these universities.

In the first chapter, according to the author, in 2007 the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) demonstrated that in recent years there has been a large proliferation of WCU classification tables, with an increase in the systematization of the way of identifying a WCU. According to Salmi, in 2009 there were two worldwide WCU classification tables, which he used as comparatives in the book reviewed here. The first is SJTU (Shanghai's Jiao Tong University), which made its first classification in 2003 and uses only objective indicators. The second is the THES (Times Higher Education Supplement), its first classification was in 2004, and uses mixed indicators (objective and subjective). According to Salmi, WCU are recognized in part, for their exceptional knowledge and research productions. They train qualified professionals to meet the demands of the labor market, conduct cutting-edge research and publications in leading scientific journals and magazines; and in the case of science and technology institutions, they contribute to technological innovations through patents. In addition, the author emphasizes three characteristics for achieving WCU status; "(A) high concentration of talent (teachers and students), (b) abundant resources, (c) favorable governance." In the 2008 world ranking, the top 20 universities ranked by the SJTU and THES showed that most of them are part of a small number of western countries (United States and England), except Japan. According to Salmi, in Europe, in countries such as Germany and France, there is little or no student screening test, there is a mass entrance, only the completion of high school being the prerequisite. In France there are also vocational schools called the *Grandes Écoles* (elite schools), where selection is rigorous, leaving the rest to the other universities. Despite having a high quality education, these institutions are professional and do not focus on research. In addition, government universities cannot reward, or give differentiated salary to teachers, and are very bureaucratic. This ends up not attracting world-renowned researchers and faculty. All these factors, according to the author, make it difficult for French and German universities to be among the top 20 WCU.

Salmi also cites Latin American universities, and gives as an example the universities of Mexico and Argentina, which, despite having excellent departments, do not have a talent selection process, and the fact that they have a large number of students makes it difficult for these universities to access the WCU rankings. Elite universities tend to have strict selection for both undergraduate and graduate students. In the elite universities there is a large contingent of highly qualified and talented international students and faculty, who add new ideas and approaches, and according to the author, this internationalization is an important factor in the ranking process. There are countries where there is little mobility between students and faculty, where alumni become teachers at these universities. In the same reasoning, the author cites the University of São Paulo (USP), which despite being considered the best and richest university in Brazil, is not even among the 100 best in the world. Salmi quotes from studies by Eunice Durham that there are several factors to make it difficult to rank USP among the best WCU. Key factors include inability to manage their financial

resources due to strict public administration regulations and over-representation bodies, which make decision-making and implementation of reforms difficult for the future.

The author also addresses the fact that USP has little connection with the international research community, and a very small number of foreign students in graduate school. The university has most of its students from the state of Sao Paulo, and its professors are largely USP alumni, in contrast to the goals of its founders in 1934, who hired only outstanding European professors. This is also common in European universities; in contrast, elite American universities such as Harvard have up to 30% foreigners on their staff, including students, researchers and faculty. Referring to a study by Simon Schwartzman, the author points out that the key element is the lack of vision of excellence to change the status quo and the way governance has been done. A lack of ambition and strategic vision can be observed in both federal, state and university leadership. This is an example given by the author that abundance of resources and rigorous selection is not always a guarantee of excellence in teaching and research. The alignment of the factors mentioned, according to the author, is still the best way to become a WCU.

In the second chapter, the author addresses two complementary perspectives to establish WCU. The first dimension is external in nature, related to the role of federal, state and municipal governments, and the resources available to improve the level of institutions. The second dimension is internal to the institutions, and all the necessary steps to transform them into WCU. In the author's experience, the role of government is fundamental in creating WCU. However, it should be asked: How many WCU does the country need? Does the country really need a WCU? Can the country pay for a WCU? Will this investment be taken from other priority areas in the tertiary education segment? Salmi cites an estimate of spending calculated in 2003 by Altbach, which would require an approximate investment of US\$ 500 (five hundred million dollars) to create a WCU. Another viable approach cited by the author would be the creation of education, research, and technology institutes that address the needs of centers of excellence and add value in fields and areas that eventually evolve into world-class institutions. According to the author, there are three most effective strategies for establishing a WCU, namely: upgrading a small number of existing universities (choosing the best); incentive to merge existing universities (hybrid formula); creation of new WCU (from the beginning, new ones). There are strengths and weaknesses in either strategy, countries should look for the best strategy and methodology, or the combination of strategies to achieve WCU.

In the third chapter, Salim addresses the role of the World Bank, which through its tertiary education sector works with developing and transitional governments through reforms and problem solving of tertiary education systems. The World Bank assists with policy advice, analytical work, capacity building, and financial support through loans and credits to facilitate and monitor the design and implementation of most higher education reforms. However, in addition to all this support, the number of countries questioning the World Bank to assist them in identifying the main obstacles that prevent them from elevating their universities to WCU, has recently grown. The World Bank also serves rich countries, not

financially, but in pursuit of technical assistance and international experience. This counseling is charged according to the service provided. Intermediate countries may be interested in receiving technical, financial assistance or both.

Ten years after the publication of this book, and after an analysis of the rankings of the 20 best WCU of 2018-2019 (THES and SJTU), performed by the authors of this review, the 2009 Salim data are reaffirmed. It maintained the predominance of universities in the United States and England, and one in Japan, and ten years later only one from Switzerland and one from Canada can be included in the top 20 WCU. If we extend the survey to the top 50 WCU, we will see an increase in the number of universities in Asian countries such as China and Hong Kong, which demonstrates a policy of large investments in the education sector. No Latin American university is in the top 50 WCU.

In conclusion, the author is emphatic in stating that, “there is no world recipe or magic formula for making a world-class university” (p.12). Each country should look for the best way to adapt its institutions, and raise education to a level of excellence, turning them into a WCU. It is an exciting book, rich in technical information, numbers and examples. Brazil is an emerging country, and needs to reflect on how to turn some nationally renowned universities into WCU. This will generally leverage the country to prominent positions, as it is the case of many countries cited by the author, including China. The book leads us to reflect on the path that Brazilian tertiary education should follow. In the author's analysis of USP, it is clear that we have a long way to go until we reach the WCU level. Like USP, other Brazilian universities have problems that are typical of our culture, and of the history of the implementation of education in Brazil. Problems that are often rooted in institutions and of complex resolution. It is up to the rulers to define priorities as a path for Brazil's progress, and their inclusion in the highest levels of society and the knowledge economy.

Reading this book is indispensable for managers, researchers, investors, and professionals in the field of education, who want to deepen the course of construction of the WCU. Regarding the author, it should be noted that Jamil Salmi is Moroccan and works as an independent consultant specializing in tertiary education and WCU development. Worked as tertiary education coordinator in the World Bank in Washington (2006 - 2012). He has published several books, among them, *The Road to Academic Excellence: The Making of World-Class Research Universities* (World Bank, 2011); and *The Tertiary Education Imperative: Knowledge, Skills and Values for Development* (Sense Publishers, 2017).