University & Cultural Policies: The Relation Between Ideal and Reality

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Abstract

After the Islamic Revolution part of the task of strengthening religious teachings, promoting revolutionary values, countering the cultural influence of the West and students' compliance with the goals of the political system of society was assigned to universities. Cultural policymaking in the country's universities, as a part of the ideological system and within the framework of government discourse, became a tool to strengthen the values and ideals of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the present article, an attempt was made to examine the relationship between such expectations and the existing facts. For this reason, based on the method of documentary study, the salient aspects of the cultural ideals that policy makers were considered about the behavior and character of students was explained. Then relying on a systematic review of national surveys; aspects of the reality of students' thoughts and behavior were analyzed. The findings indicated that there is a significant gap between cultural ideals and the reality of students' attitudes and tendencies. This situation may be due to inefficiency of policies or shortcomings in the way they are implemented, or it may be due to ignoring the structural conditions of society and disregarding the social life of young people in today's world. In any case, it is necessary to rethink the cultural expectations of the university towards the student in a more realistic framework.

Introduction

The Islamic Revolution brought about significant changes in the form and content of higher education and universities in Iran, leading to an intensification of their cultural missions. Examples of these changes include the Cultural Revolution in 1980 and the establishment of the Deputy of Social Culture in the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and in universities in 1997. The underlying idea behind these implementations is that

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culture can be planned, organized, and directed from the outside, and that it is possible to intervene in it. Government agencies, including universities, bear responsibility for these interventions. The question then arises as to how effective these interventions have been.

According to Joseph Nye (2008), cultural policy-making and its effects are a form of soft power. Soft power involves making an impact on others to achieve expected results through peaceful means, such as highlighting, persuading, and positive absorption. Thus, cultural policy-making is closely related to government performance. The analytical framework of this study, influenced by critical theories, regards cultural policy-making (as a cultural industry) as part of an ideological apparatus in the universities of Iran. The purpose of this apparatus is to stabilize the values and ideals of the Islamic Republic of Iran within the framework of governmental discourse. However, since the success of the cultural system or ideological apparatus depends on its coordination with other institutions in society, cultural policy will only be effective when the entire social system succeeds in reproducing its values and ideas. In other words, when value and belief contradictions are prevalent in society, cultural policy mechanisms will cease to play their effective role.

Based on the above-mentioned approach, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between the cultural policies of universities and the socio-cultural attitudes and tendencies of students.

Methodology

To assess the degree to which cultural priorities outlined in reference documents have been internalized by students as habitus and taste, two methods were employed concurrently. The first method involved a documentary study, where the main and secondary topics in policy text were extracted, and the cultural policy foundations relevant to universities in the country were identified. To this end, the following texts were examined:

- The document outlining the principles of cultural policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Enactments of the Cultural Revolution Council
- The cultural engineering map of the country
- The comprehensive scientific map of the country
- The cultural section of five-year development plans
- The socio-cultural strategic document of the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology
- The Islamic University document

In the second stage, a systematic review of the findings from national surveys was conducted to identify specific aspects of students' attitudes and behaviors that were highlighted in the context of cultural policies. By

comparing the research findings with the policy text, the extent of the gap between cultural reality and the desired situation was determined to some degree.

Findings

An analysis of the reference cultural documents reveals an emphasis on several criteria, including:

- Strengthening the religious commitment of students and promoting Islamic culture in universities
- Upholding revolutionary and anti-Western societal values
- Demonstrating loyalty to the country and the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Prioritizing scientism and striving for scientific growth and development

The documents make it clear that the values and ideological expectations of the university have been clearly defined and expressed by the political system. Academic staff are expected to abide by these values and expectations, following established administrative procedures. However, data from national surveys on religiosity, national identity, social assessment, and certain family values indicate a difference between the cultural ideals associated with ideal student behavior and what is observed in practice. This difference is evident on two levels:

1. Compared to the general population, students tend to have a more critical attitude towards religious ideas and social and political objectives.
2. Compared to their past intellectual positions, students' attitudes have become more centrifugal, suggesting that they have drifted away from their previous positions.

The observed difference between the cultural ideals and practices of students may be attributed to various factors. One possible cause is the improper cultural goals and expectations set for universities and students, along with the poor quality of cultural activities and programs implemented. Another contributing factor could be the direct involvement of the government in cultural policy at universities. Another possibility is that the transformation of the structure and functioning of universities, accompanied by the significant social and cultural transformation of Iranian society, has led to a collapse of cultural values. As a result, universities have become mass-oriented, quantity-oriented, and highly influenced by economic relations. Furthermore, the acceleration of the globalization process, easy access to transnational media, and exposure to different ideologies and value systems can challenge the solidity of domestic culture components. The observed gap may also be related to societal conditions. Inefficient institutional mechanisms and poor

functioning can increase dissatisfaction and weaken social bonds, exacerbating the gap between cultural ideals and practices.

Conclusion and suggestion

Considering the university as an open and dynamic system that is constantly connected with its environment, it is important to recognize that equipping the next generation with a set of moral and cultural competencies cannot be achieved through the university alone. Other institutions and organizations in the country must also provide appropriate structures to increase the compatibility between cultural ideals and existing realities. It is necessary to focus on more fundamental cultural goals and investigate the content and methods of reaching these goals through continuous discussion among scientists.

To improve cultural policies, various research centers affiliated with the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology can evaluate their effectiveness and make improvements. Rather than having broad cultural expectations of the university, it is recommended to set limits and instead focus on reforming higher education development policies. This will allow science to fulfill its main role of educating a specialized, committed, and educated generation without being limited to economic and political requirements.

The quantitative and qualitative development of scientific associations will lead the way for cultural dynamism and strengthen the scientific community, as well as the development of professional ethics among the academic community, including students and professors. Students will naturally grow in a dynamic cultural space if they can interact with intellectuals, philosophers, artists, poets, writers, film producers, and members of the media who produce thought and meaning in public.

Finally, society's gradual movement towards justice, security, combatting poverty, and recognizing intellectual freedom has cultural effects and moves society to a higher cultural level, free from the domination of force and money.