

Ceremony 1
Academic Oration
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JESUITS' CHURCH – VALLETTA

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L-Università fl-Ewropa: Lil fejn?ⁱ

F'hafna pajjiżi l-edukazzjoni oghla tinsab taht attack. Minflok inwessghu d-diskors sabiex l-universitajiet u l-istituzzjonijiet tal-edukazzjoni oghla jwiegħbu għall-bżonnijiet demokratiċi tas-soċjeta`, qed nipprezentaw dawn l-istituzzjonijiet bħala forma oħra ta' kummerċ immexxi mil-liġi tas-suq miftuh. Dawn l-istituzzjonijiet jixirqilhom rwol akbar minn dak ristrett għall-oqsm ta' ekonomija u l-impieg. Hemm letteratura vasta internazzjonali li tikkritka il-merċifikazzjoni ta' dawn l-entitajiet. Din il-letteratura twissina dwar il-periklu li l-edukazzjoni tinbidel minn mezz li tagħti sehemha għat-tiħiħ tal-isfera pubblika għal sempliċi agenzija ta' taħrig. Dak li qed jinkiteb f'din il-letteratura kritika jorbot ma' dak li qed iseħħ fl-Ewropa anki permezz tad-diskors dominanti u linji ta' tmexxija mfassalin mill-Unjoni Ewropeja.ⁱⁱ

Izda, b'xorti tajba, hemm kontestazzjoni qawwija dwar din il-kwistjoni li għadni kif semmejt f'hafna rkejjen tal-kontinent, bi protesti, 'sit-ins' u okkupazzjoni ta' dawn l-istituzzjonijiet minn-naħa tal-istudenti. Dawn l-azzjonijiet mgħandhomx jinfatmu mill-azzjonijiet u aġir politiku li nsibu f'hafna pajjiżi Ewropej rigward id-dejn, il-limiti ta' demokrazija rappreżentattiva, il-korruzzjoni politika, il-politika mingħajr sisien morali, l-għixien imwiegħer. Nikkwota student attivista li qed jissielet kontra r-riformi neoliberali tal-Università ta' Vjenna li jsostni li "ser niksbu hafna aktar kwalifiki mill-ġenituri tagħna mingħajr ma ngawdu l-istess livell ta' għixien".ⁱⁱⁱ

L-universitajiet u l-istituzzjonijiet l-oħra ta' edukazzjoni oghla huma mħegga biex isiru ċentri ta' thejjiġa mprenditorjali u biex jippreparaw iż-żgħażaġh u nies oħra għax-xogħol. Qed naraw proċess ta' armonizzazzjoni bħala parti mill-hekk imsejjaħ proċess ta' Bologna. Dan il-proċess iġib miegħu numru ta' proċeduri burokratiċi. Din is-sitwazzjoni mejlet, mhux ftit, il-bilanċ ta' poter favur l-amministrazzjoni ċentrali għas-spejjeż tas-settur akkademiku. Il-kejl jifforma parti integrali minn dan il-proċess. Għalhekk il-kwalita` titkejjel primarjament permezz tat-trasformazzjoni ta' proċessi kumplessi ta' taġlim f'numru ta' indikaturi kwantitattivi- niġġudikaw kollox fuq il-bażi ta' riżultati ('outcomes') li nistgħu nkejlu faċilment.

Korsijiet li darba spikkaw minħabba t-tul u l-profondita` tagħhom qsaru fil-kredits u saru jibbażaw biss fuq 'outcomes'. Membri tal-korp akkademiku jsiru 'accountable', jwiegħbu għal għemilhom billi jikkonformaw ma' sistema ta' proċeduri burokratiċi li jehdu hafna hin. Mhux qed inhallat 'accountability' ma' responsabilita` morali. M'għandi xejn kontra din tal-aħħar! Dan inaqqas mill-hin u enerġija biex l-akkademiċi jwettqu dak li normalment hu l-aktar mistenni minnhom, jiġifieri li *joholqu* u jiddiseminaw l-għerf – li jagħmlu riċerka u jipprofessaw. Hafna mir-riċerka li takkwista sostenn finanzjarju

tiehu il-forma ta' R & D - riċerka u żvilupp. Il-kejl prinċipali hu l-ammont ta' flus li kapaċi tattira. Xogħol komunitarju ma jingħatax ir-rikonoxximent akkademiku li jixraqlu, jekk mhux ukoll insibu min jistmerru. Tista' tkun xi ħaġa li nassoċjaw ma' universita` tat-tieni jew tielet livell f'sistema diversifikata li tikklassifika l-istituzzjonijiet tal-edukazzjoni oġhla f'kategoriji differenti: ċentri ta' riċerka mondjali, ċentri bl-enfasi fuq taġħlim u ċentri reġjonali.

F'dan ix-xenarju, hemm il-periklu li ssir separazzjoni bejn it-taġħlim u r-riċerka. Insibu enfasi kbira fuq il-privatizzazzjoni. Id-distinzjoni bejn il-privat u l-pubbliku qed tiċċajpar, dejjem b'xaqliba lejn tal-ewwel. Fondi pubbliċi jservu b'żonnijiet privati. Dan kollu għandu implikazzjonijiet għall-akkademiċi, speċjalment dawk f'teaching universities' (dawk fejn l-akbar enfasi qiegħda fuq it-taġħlim), għax iridu jħabbtu wiċċhom ma' numri kbar ta' studenti u lezzjonijiet. Għall-kuntrarju, dawk li jinsabu f'universitajiet hekk imsejha ta' klassi mondjali jgawdu minn ħafna faċilitajiet u anki assistenza għar-riċerka. Toqla kbira ta' taġħlim u superviżjoni thalli ftit spazju għar-riċerka u għall-kontribuzzjonijiet fl-isfera pubblika. Jibqa' ftit hin u nifs għal tiżib f'inizjattivi li joffru aċċess lill-membri differenti tal-komunita`. Jibqa' ftit hin u nifs sabiex akkademiċi jstendu l-faċilitajiet u xogħol tal-universita` f'komunitajiet differenti (outreach). L-istess jista' jingħad għall-kontribuzzjonijiet bħal kitba ta' artikli u blogs fl-istampa u online.

Proċeduri ta' assessjar ta' riċerka jwettqu pressjoni fuq akkademiċi biex jipublikaw f'rivisti tal-oġhla kategorija, u dan biex wiehed ikun jista' jżomm il-programm għaddej u mhux sempliciment għal skopijiet individwali. Għalhekk jonqos il-hin għall-impenn pubbliku li ma jwassal għal ebda rikonoxximent u rikompens akkademiku. Dipartimenti universitarji kapaċi jiddegeneraw f'appendiċi ta' kumpaniji u ministeri li jipprovduhom il-flus. U hekk il-kontribut soċjali f'sens wiesgħa li kien wiehed mis-sisien tal-universitajiet, jispiċċa fix-xejn.

Dan kollu ma tantx jawgura tajjeb għal oqsma bħal dawk tal-istudji umanistiċi u x-xjenzi soċjali li, għalhekk, isiru dipendenti fuq sorsi ta' fondi li min-naħa taġħhom jistgħu jillimitaw jew anki jiddeterminaw x'isir fir-riċerka u x'isir minnha meta titlesta. Min jiffinanzja r-riċerka (eż. Korporazzjoni) jista' jżomm ir-riċerkaturi milli jipublikaw ir-riżultati tar-riċerka, speċjalment jekk dawn jifgħu dawl ikrah fuq l-azjenda.

Dan ix-xenarju mhux differenti minn dak li wiehed jiltaqa' miegħu fl-Istati Uniti li, flimkien mal-Asja tax-Xlokk, titiqies bħala wiehed mill-kompetituri ewlenin tal-Ewropa għal dak li għandu x'jaqsam mal-'internazzjonalizzazzjoni' – il-ħila li tattira studenti minn pajjiżi barra l-Unjoni Ewropeja. Dawn l-istudenti jistgħu jħallsu miżati għoljin u b'hekk iżidu l-introjt tal-Universita`. Il-preżenza ta' universitajiet privati f'ħafna pajjiżi, bħat-Turkija, Ċipru, Estonja, Ungerija u membri ġodda oħrajn tal-UE, twassal għal aktar importanza mogħtija lill-profitt. Kollox juri li hemm tnaqqis sostanzjali fir-rwol tal-istituzzjonijiet tal-edukazzjoni oġhla fl-iżvilupp tal-isfera pubblika demokratika. Dawn l-istituzzjonijiet ikomplu jservu bħala aġenziji ta' taħrig f'sistema li qed tfalli fil-ħolqien ta' impiegi u fejn it-tort jitneħħa minn fuq is-sistema li ħolqot din il-kriżi u jintefa' fuq in-nies li, skont ma jingħad, m'għandhomx il-ħiliet meħtieġa.

Dawk l-oqsma akkademiċi li ma joffru skop utilitarju jsufu f'dan it-tip ta' xenarju. Id-Dipartimenti akkademiċi rilevanti jridu jivvintaw lilhom nfushom mill-ġdid

f'termini ta' impjegabilita`. Meta l-profitt isir l-aktar haġa importanti, speċjalment f'universitajiet privati li jibbenefikaw minn finanzjament indirett mill-istat (eż. boroż ta' studju, tnaqqis fit-taxxa u rikompens fil-hlas tat-taxxa), l-enfasi tkun fuq taġħlim li jwassal għal suċċess fl-eżamijiet –sempliċement biex jgħaddu mit-test. Ftit li xejn insibu bilanċ bejn taġħlim u riċerka.

Madanakollu, hafna Ewropej mhux qed joqogħdu għal dan. Speċjalment dawk li jaħdmu għall-ġustizzja soċjali qed iqisu hafna minn dan id-diskors u għemil bħala wieħed neoliberali. Fl-Ewropa ċentrali, dan id-diskors qed igib fix-xejn kunċetti kemxejn elitisti bħal dawk ta'bildung u l-idea ta' Humboldt dwar kif kellha tkun l-universita` Germaniza. Jekk il-kunċett antik tal-universita` hu wieħed elitist maqtuġħ mir-rejaltajiet ta' llum, għandu jinbidel f'wieħed li għandu konnotazzjonijiet aktar demokratiċi u wisgħin. M'għandux jidjieg bħalma qed jidjieg il-kunċett attwali tal-Istat, speċjalment fejn jidhlu programmi soċjali (Alla jbierek, m'hemm l-ebda djuq meta l-istat jidhol biex jagħmel tajjeb għall-banek f'mument ta' krizi fiskali). F'dawn iċ-ċirkostanzi, jitwarrab l-element kritiku, ingredjent ewlieni f'kunċett ta' ċittadinanza tassew demokratika.

Studenti fl-Awstrija, l-Ungerija, il-Kroazja u partijiet oħra tal-Ewropa fehmu dan. Inghaqdu ma' akkademiċi biex jieħdu azzjoni kontra din is-sitwazzjoni.^{iv} Hafna drabi dan il-ferment u ċaqliq jieħu xejra internazzjonali, hekk kif ġara meta studenti Ungerizi mblukkaw tren li kien qed iġorr esperti fl-edukazzjoni oghla lejn Vjenna, fejn kienu se jiltaqgħu. Studenti fiż-żewg pajjiżi, iġifieri l-Awstrija u l-Ungerija, ikkordinaw l-isforzi taġħhom. Dan ifakkarna f'dak li ġara fil-Greċja fit-8 ta' Ġunju, 2006, meta 20,000 student hađu parti f'marċ fiċ-ċentru ta' Atena. Dan il-marċ kien l-akbar wieħed organizzat minn studenti f'dawk l-aħħar għoxrin sena. L-edukazzjoni oghla toffri spazju pubbliku li hafna lesti jiggieldu għalih. Il-Greċja kienet waħda mill-aħħar pajjiżi li rreżistiet il-mewġa ta' riformi li kienet għaddejja fl-Ewropa. Bħala parti mir-reżistenza għall-ġunta militari (1967-1974), sezzjonijiet kbar tas-soċjeta` Griega ddfendew bil-qawwa l-edukazzjoni oghla bħala ġid pubbliku, u prinċipju mnaqqax fil-Kostituzzjoni tal-pajjiż. Ir-riformi li l-gvern li twarrab is-sena l-oħra pprova jdaħhal, bħala parti mill-miżuri ta' awsterita`, kienu ta' theddida għal dan il-prinċipju. Kif indikat f'stqarrija li harget mingħand akkademiċi Griegi u li rċeviet appoġġ minn numru kbir ta' persuni mid-dinja kollha, il-Gvern Grieg ipprova jnaqqas l-baġit għall-edukazzjoni b'rata ta' ħamsin fil-mija. Dan il-baġit kien fost l-anqas fil-UE. Il-Gvern uża l-iskuża tal-bżonn ta' titjib fil-kwalita` tal-edukazzjoni u anki l-bżonn ta' armonizzazzjoni ma' livelli internazzjonali. Kellu jkun hemm tnaqqis sostanzjali fl-ingaġġ ta' nies akkademiċi godda b'rata ta' 1:10. L-abbozz għadda minkejja l-protesti mill-komunitajiet akkademiċi Griegi u internazzjonali. B'xorti tajba, l-awtoritajiet kellhom iċedu aktar tard minħabba pressjoni popolari – rebħa kbira għall-attivizmu mill-qiegħ (grassroots).

Dawn ix-xenarji, li nsibu f'pajjiżi mgħarrqa fid-dejn, dak li bl-Ingliz jissejjaħ 'debtocracy', johlqu kuntesti sabiex studenti u akkademiċi jissieħbu f'muviment li jaħdem id f'id ma' muvimenti oħra. Hekk kien il-każ fi Vjenna fejn għalliema tal-Kindergarten inghaqdu ma' studenti u akkademiċi mill-universita` (iż-żewġ truf tal-firxa edukattiva) fl-azzjoni magħrufa bħala "Unibrennt" (L-Universita` qiegħda taqbad in-nar). Dan ifakkarna f'avvenimenti reċenti barra mill-Ewropa, speċjalment il-protesti ta' l-istudenti fiċ-Ċile u dawk fil-provinċja ta' Quebec, ġewwa l-Kanada, f'Marzu li għadda u li baqgħu sejrin sas-sajf.

Anki fil-protesti tal-indignados insibu diversi ghaqdiet u movimenti soċjali jaħdmu flimkien. Anki hawn l-edukazzjoni oghla tinghata prominenza, flimkien ma' kwistjonijiet bħal korruzzjoni, qgħad, faqar antik u ġdid, spekulazzjoni finanzjarja–jwasslu għall-espressjoni pubblika ta' għadab kontra l-istrutturi soċjali u politiċi ngusti.^v Din is-sitwazzjoni toħloq kuntest fejn studenti u akkademiċi jġibu ruħhom bħala 'intellettuali pubbliċi'.

Nizbaljaw jekk nizvalutaw ir-rwol tal-istudenti hawnhekk. F'ħafna pajjiżi, ħargu diversi intellettuali pubbliċi mill-korp tal-istudenti. Ir-riformi neoliberali tal-universitajiet jagħtu opportunita` lill-akkademiċi u studenti biex jingħaqdu bħala 'intellettuali pubbliċi' u mhux biss jiddenunzjaw ir-riformi iżda anki jitrattawhom bħala kwistjonijiet pubbliċi wesgħin, kwistjonijiet b'ħafna mplikazzjonijiet soċjali. Dan ifisser li rridu nimpostaw il-kritika tar-riformi fl-edukazzjoni oghla bħala parti mill-kritika tal-politika neoliberali ingenerali, politika li kull ma tmur tkompli tinxtered. Din il-politika twassalna biex inħarsu lejn is-soċjeta` bħala suq bla limiti. Permezz ta' din il-politika, l-isparzi pubbliċi jsiru ċentri ta' konsum, li jinbiegħu u jinxtraw –spazji maħkuma mill-forza tal-korporazzjonijiet kummerċjali. U dawn huma l-istess entitajiet li daħhluna f'waħda mill-akbar krizijiet ekonomiċi u soċjali fl-istorja tal-umanità`. Għalhekk, issa li nafu fiex wassluna dawn ir-riformi neoliberali għandna aktar u aktar raġuni ma nergħux nirrepetuhom.

Akkademiċi, studenti u l-bqija tal-popolazzjoni ingenerali għandhom jimpenjaw ruħhom fi sforz kollettiv ħalli nibdew nikkonċepixxu mill-ġdid l-edukazzjoni oghla bħala spazju pubbliku ta' ħtiega kbira u li mingħajru ma ngħaddux. L-edukazzjoni qiegħda hemm mhux biss għall-impjegabilita`, li mhux bilfors tfisser impieg, iżda bħala element kruċjali fl-iżvilupp ta' demokrazija komprensiva u b'saħħitha li tinkludi wkoll l-iżvilupp tal-individwu kollu jew kollha u mhux parti minnu jew minnha. L-istudji umanistiċi u x-xjenzi soċjali huma importanti għal dan il-għan u għandna niddefenduhom bil-ħegga kollha. Dan l-isforz għandu jitwaħħad ma' sforz ieħor li jista' jseħħ fi ħdan movimenti soċjali u istituzzjonijiet tal-edukazzjoni tal-haddiema sabiex jinholqu forom alternattivi ta' taġġim f'dawn l-oqsma. Ħafna mill-istudenti li pprotestaw go Vjenna u oħrajn f'pajjiżi oħra fittxew toroq godda għat-tifrix ta' din it-tip ta' edukazzjoni demokratika.

Bħala parti mill-protesta generali nholqu attivitajiet edukattivi ta' xejra mhux formali. Rajna attivitajiet simili wkoll fl-okkupazzjoni ta' Wall Street u ta' Londra u bnadi oħra. L-okkupazzjoni ta' Londra tat bidu għal Tent University, sit ta' taġġim 'grassroots' non-formali, waqt li 'Unnibrent' fi Vjenna wasslet għall-ħolqien ta' universita` alternattiva mmexxija mill-istudenti.

Dawn l-esperjenzi jgħinuna nfittxu toroq godda fil-qasam tal-edukazzjoni oghla. Dawn jinkludu l-possibilita` li nieħdu lura ħafna mill-istudji umanistiċi u tax-xjenzi soċjali, kif ukoll studji interdixxiplinari (bħal studji kulturali), lejn il-qasam fejn spikkaw fil-bidu–l-edukazzjoni tal-adulti. Dan għandu jkun impenn fuq żewġ naħat, fil-kampus universitarju u fil-komunita`. Il-provvista komunitarja barra mill-universita` m'għandhiex tkun alternattiva għal dak li toffri l-universita`, ħlief fil-mod kif noħolqu l-ambjenti ta' taġġim – b'aktar enfasi fuq djalogu u edukazzjoni parteċipattiva milli nistennew li nsibu f'ambjent tradizzjonali universitarju. Għall-kuntrarju, f'dan iż-żmien ta' qtugħ drastiku fil-finanzi għal dawn l-oqsma, l-provvista komunitarja tkompli turi l-importanza ta' dawn l-oqsma ta' studju fil-proċess kontinwu ta' żvilupp soċjali. Akkademiċi u studenti li

jemmnu f'edukazzjoni oghla demokratika għandhom jaçcettaw din l-isfida u jipparteçipaw bi shih f'din it-tip ta' azzjoni pedagogika.

Naħseb li fejn tidhol l-edukazzjoni oghla, ninsabu f'salib it-toroq. Għandna sfidi u għażliet importanti quddiemna. Importanti li nixtarru sew u nagħzlu fuq bażi ta' prinçipji demokratiçi sodi u mhux nimxu skont il-moda u b'hekk naqgħu għal prinçipji neoliberali dojq mingħajr ebda bażi etika.

Noti

- i. Niżzi ħajr lill-Professor John P. Portelli tal-kummenti tiegħu għall-abbozz ta' dan id-diskors.
- ii. Mayo, P (2009) Competitiveness, diversification and the international higher education cash flow: the EU's higher education discourse amidst the challenges of globalisation, f' International issues in Sociology of Education, Vol. 19, Nu. 2, pp. 87-103.
- iii. Ara English, L u Mayo, P (2012) Learning with Adults. A Critical Pedagogical Introduction, Rotterdam u Taipei: Sense.
- iv. Kościelniak, C (2012) University, student activism and the idea of civil disobedience, f' C. Kościelniak and Makowski, J (edituri), Freedom, Equality, University, Warsaw: Civic Institute.
- v. Mayo, P. (2012) Politics of Indignation. Imperialism, Postcolonial Disruptions and Social Change, Zer0 Books/John Hunt Publishers.

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Whither European Universities?

Higher Education (HE) is under attack in many countries. Rather than being widened to render the university and other HE institutions more responsive to the democratic needs of society, the discourse is being reduced to one regarding another form of business governed by the principles of the market. And yet one would expect these institutions to serve much wider purposes than those of the economy and employment. There has been much writing, internationally, lamenting these trends. The writing spells out the danger of these institutions' conversion into training agencies rather than serving as places that contribute to the generation of a healthy public sphere. Much of what is written connects with what is going on in Europe, not least through the language and guidelines provided by the European Union.¹

And this state of affairs has been and continues to be contested in many parts of the continent with protests, sit-ins and university occupations. It would not be amiss to regard these actions as an integral part of the many actions, occurring in several European countries, regarding "debtocracies," the limits of traditional representative democracy; political corruption; a politics devoid of morality; precarious living; and, in the words of one student protester against university neoliberal reforms in Vienna, a situation whereby "We will have higher educational degrees than our parents, but we will never attain their standard of living."ⁱⁱⁱ

Universities and other HE institutions are by and large being encouraged to undergo a transformation into places for "entrepreneurship" and to prepare people for jobs. Harmonization processes are being established throughout the European Union, as part of the Bologna process. These changes bring with them a series of bureaucratic procedures. This has shifted the balance of power between academia and administration in favor of the latter. Measurement becomes a very important aspect of this situation where quality is judged primarily through the transformation of complex processes into quantitative indicators - everything is judged in terms of easily measured outcomes.

Courses once lauded for their length and depth of analysis have been shortened into credits and are outcomes based. Academics are meant to be made accountable through compliance with time-consuming bureaucratic procedures. Furthermore, most funded research by and large takes on the form of R&D (research and development) and is often evaluated in terms of the amount of money it manages to attract. Community work is frowned upon or is confined to second- or third-class institutions in a proposed diversified system intended to classify higher education institutions into different leagues-world class research, teaching and regional universities.

In this proposed scenario, one also observes a possible separation between teaching and research. Privatization is encouraged, and the distinction between private and public is blurred as public funds are often siphoned for private needs. All this has implications for academics who, in several universities, notably "teaching universities," have to cope with large numbers of students and a large teaching load. A small elite is ensconced in "world class" universities, enjoying all the necessary facilities and

assistance for research. Overburdening with teaching often results in few research opportunities and less time for contributions to the public sphere. There is less time for involvement in initiatives providing open access to members of the community, to engage in outreach work within communities and to make other contributions such as writing articles in a variety of media. Research assessment exercises exert pressure for one to publish in highly ranked journals to keep one's program going and not simply for promotions. Time for non-rewarded but publicly useful commitments is denied. Departments often become little more than appendages to companies and ministries that provide the funding

This does not bode well for such areas as the humanities and social sciences that are vulnerable to alternative funding sources that can apply brakes to the range and uses of research. The corporation can prevent the results of research from being published because they might appear damning to the company itself or possibly incriminating.

This scenario is not so different from that prevalent in the United States, identified together with South East Asia as among Europe's main competitors with regard to "internationalization" - the ability to attract students from outside the EU. These students can pay high fees and, therefore, help raise university revenue. The onset of private universities in many countries, including countries such as Turkey, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, and other new EU member states, renders the bottom line the key feature of university education provision. The signs all indicate that the university's and other HE institutions' roles in contributing to a democratic public sphere are being severely curtailed. HE institutions continue to take on the roles of "training agencies" in a system which fails to provide jobs, but which promotes the view that the fault lies with people lacking the necessary skills.

Areas which do not have an immediate utilitarian purpose suffer, and the relevant departments have to reinvent themselves in "employability" terms. When the bottom line becomes the key factor, especially in private universities, with many of them benefiting from indirect state funding (e.g. scholarships for students, tax deductions and rebates), then much emphasis is placed on teaching to the test rather than on a balance between teaching and research.

And, yet, many Europeans are not accepting this state of affairs. Much of the higher education discourse coming from the EU and member states is easily perceived by those embracing a social justice perspective to be neoliberal in overall tenor. In Central Europe, this has made a mockery of those concepts, albeit elitist and problematic, such as *bildung* and the Humboldt conception of the university. If the old university is elitist and not in tune with present-day realities, it requires a transformation which renders it more democratic and expansive in conception. It should not be lean in the same way that the state is said to be 'lean' only in so far as social programs are concerned; it is not lean when it bails out banks in moments of crisis. Criticality, an ingredient of a truly democratic critical citizenship, becomes a casualty in these circumstances.

Students in Austria, Hungary, Croatia and other parts of Europe have understood this, and joined forces with academics, to mobilize against this state of affairs.ⁱⁱⁱ The mobilization often becomes international, as with protesting Hungarian students blocking a train of HE experts trying to make it to Vienna for a meeting, as students in both countries coordinated their protest efforts. This echoed what happened in Greece on June

8, 2006, when 20,000 students took part in the largest student march for the past two decades, which made its way through downtown Athens. HE becomes a public space for which it is worth fighting. Greece was one of the last countries to resist the reforms being carried out throughout Europe. As a result of resistances to the military dictatorship (1967-1974), Greek HE has been defended by large swathes of Greek society as a public good, a notion enshrined in the Greek constitution. This situation was seriously being jeopardized by the ousted government's proposals for reform which also had to be seen in light of the austerity measures being introduced because of the 'debtocracy'. As indicated in a statement, issued by Greek academics and supported by a number of people worldwide, the previous government drastically cut down on public funding for education to the tune of 50 per cent. This was considered amongst the lowest in the EU. The government used the pretext of enhancing 'the 'quality of education' and its 'harmonization' with 'international academic standards'. New hiring of teaching staff was to be carried out at a ratio of 1:10 relative to staff retirement. The bill was passed despite the protests from the Greek and international academic communities. Happily, it was recently repealed as a result of popular pressure, a tremendous fillip for grassroots activism.

These type of scenarios, which are now writ large in the "debtocracy countries" provide the context for students and academics to stand out as a social movement that forges alliances with other movements, as was the case in Vienna with kindergarten teachers joining university students and academics (the two ends of the education spectrum) in the "Unibrennt" (University Burns) actions. Outside Europe, this brings to mind the recent protests in Chile.

The coming together of various forces was presumably also the case with the "debtocracy" protests of the indignados where higher education is included among many other issues, such as corruption, unemployment, general impoverishment of several sectors of the population, as a source of indignation.^{iv} It also provides the contexts for students and academics to stand out as public intellectuals.

One should not underestimate the students' role here. Students have played a significant role in furnishing countries with a stream of public intellectuals. The neoliberal reform of universities offers a splendid opportunity for academics and students to continue to join forces as "public intellectuals" and not only denounce university neoliberal reform, but also turn what is already a public issue (education as a public good) into a broader all-encompassing public concern. This entails that we connect critiques of this reform with the broader critiques of the neoliberal reforms, reforms that have been sweeping across countries and continents, and which have turned society into one large marketplace. These reforms and developments often lead to public spaces being turned into commodities, to be bought and sold - spaces that are encroached by corporate forces. And these are the very same forces which have ushered in one of the deepest economic and social crises in the history of humankind.

Academics, students and the population at large need to engage in a struggle for a rethink and renewal of HE as a vital public space within a democracy. Education is important not for simply employability, which does not necessarily mean employment, but also for the development of a genuinely democratic public environment. The humanities and social sciences need to be defended at all costs. This struggle must also be complemented by action on the part of social movements and workers' institutions to

create alternative forms of provision in these areas. Some of the students protesting in Vienna and other students elsewhere have been exploring a variety of alternative paths to pursue.

A number of educational activities were organized during the protest activities that attest to the emergence of albeit short-lived capillary forms of power within the context of grassroots democracies, the sort of situation being witnessed in other parts of the world, including Occupy Wall Street and Occupy London, the latter inaugurating Tent University, an alternative more grassroots oriented site of learning, while 'Unibrennt' in Vienna gave rise to a 'student self-organized' university.

These paths lead us to contemplate pursuing several routes. This would include taking back many of the humanities and social sciences, as well as interdisciplinary studies (e.g. cultural studies), to their places of origin - adult education. This should, however, be a struggle on two fronts, the university campus and the community. The community provision outside the university should not serve as an alternative to university provision, except in the way learning settings are created and learning takes place - more dialogical and participative than your conventional HE classroom setting. On the contrary, in this age of draconic cutbacks in these areas, community provision would keep indicating the importance of the humanities and social sciences in the ongoing process of social development. Academics and students committed to a democratic HE should play their part in this struggle and type of alternative provision.

Notes

- i. Mayo, P (2009) Competitiveness, diversification and the international higher education cash flow: the EU's higher education discourse amidst the challenges of globalisation, in *International issues in Sociology of Education*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 87-103.
- ii. Interview with student protester against neoliberal reforms of the university in Vienna, carried out electronically, August 2011.
- iii. Kościelniak, C (2012) , University, student activism and the idea of civil disobedience, in C. Kościelniak and Makowski, J (eds.), *Freedom, Equality, University*, Warsaw: Civic Institute.
- iv. Mayo, P. (2012) *Politics of Indignation. Imperialism, Postcolonial Disruptions and Social Change*, Zer0 Books/John Hunt Publishers.