

Summary

Popular scepticism and discontent towards representative democracy was prompted by the recent economic crisis in the West. But yet another, more or less related problems, smouldered all along: the problems of public education in general, and especially the problem of higher education. From 2009 onwards students in Europe organized a number of strikes challenging alleged commercialisation of universities and the move of governments towards alleged “neo-liberalism”. Target of the strikes was a perception that the state is withdrawing from public financing of higher education. Who should finance, and to what extent, the growing costs of higher education? Can governments and taxpayers afford these rising costs? These are at present the primary concerns of the governments and academia. How should we measure the outcomes and benefits of such expenditures? Several other questions have been raised in the recent discussions: do such expenditures belong to “human rights”? And how do we square the tendency to make governments more efficient with the public claim to such — allegedly growing — benefits?

At the same time, Bologna process, which became an overall framework for higher education in Europe, brought about a rather strict set of regulations about how teaching at universities should be organized. Instead of greater liberty in designing courses and study frameworks, instead of swift adjusting and adapting of curricula to the faster changing world, it generated more or less universal and rigid strait-jackets, at least in some parts of Europe. Universities were obliged to appoint a number of bureaucrats at all levels to make sure that provisos “of quality” from Bologna process were carried out. However, it is highly doubtful whether quality control bureaucracy, and growing bureaucracy in general, created quality stipulated by such regulations. Further, instead of making students more employable according to the documents, conventions and regulations such as Lisbon Agenda and Bologna declaration, Europe at the same time witnessed the highest percentages of unemployed educated youth in its newer history. Bureaucratic regulations did nothing to avoid the s. c. “European paradox”, a term which signifies an inability of European societies (in comparison to other regions in the world) to translate

its academic achievements into public wealth. If anything, it boosted the disparity further.

And especially for the less developed countries and for the countries burdened with a larger public debt ratio, even more essential question became apparent: if such countries cannot keep up with the more developed ones in covering the growing costs of education and scientific research, what exactly can they hope for? What should be the rationale for public education financing in such an environment? Taking globalisation and the increasing opportunities for employment anywhere in the world into account, should local governments sponsor public education that is likely going to end up as a benefit for — or as a social capital of — the more developed countries and environments?

All these problems and social manifestations provide a rich background for discussions provided in the book. In the papers presented in the book I take a stand: in the debt ridden countries university institutions should take the burden of the overall populace. If governments acted irresponsibly in the past by accumulation of public debts, then (public) universities should take its share of the burden. This is the only responsible and ethical way to think about public financing.

However, this contention, that scholars and universities in countries with high public debt ratio should bear their share of “austerity” measures is still rather uncommon in the academia. One would have expected that ethical and responsible views were more widespread among intellectuals, and that such an “austerity view” towards public financing was more typical among them. But this is not the case. We see just the opposite: it is precisely among intellectuals at universities, in the academia, that we typically encounter scepticism towards “austerity measures”, that we meet intellectuals claiming that governments should “end the crisis now!” by pouring more money into public education system, into the sector that has so far, at least in the less developed countries of Europe, proved its efficiency only to a very limited extent. Universities and faculties, especially in the less developed countries, have not excelled in cost and curriculum management. Cost efficiency has never been their priority. And it is my view that it would not take too much of a burden to make substantial improvements in cost-efficiency.

The main focus of the book is precisely this point: academia, scholars at universities, the bulk of intelligentsia and public intellectuals generally prescribe wrong cures to ill-devised diagnosis, for the present symptoms of maladies. By claiming that “now” is the proper time to boost public financing in (higher) education, these intellectuals are not only behaving irresponsibly and unethically. One can easily see how their ideas and prescriptions to the governments — to spend *more* money on public education “now!” instead of less — are not only financially self-serving. Such claims are also structurally ill-devised, since with the same level of expenditure or

higher, members of the academia, unlike all the other social strata would not be forced to adapt to the state of public finances, to the public expectations and to the new global environment. They show thereby their unwillingness, and possibly also their inability to change. Members of the academia in many countries therefore in effect belong to the most conservative social strata, precisely a stratum, being normally taken care of by the taxpayers, for which Acemoglu and Robinson recently coined the term — “extractive class”.

At the same time, this is a class or a stratum quite able to frame a smoke screen for its self-serving, selfish, and more or less latent ideology. But what is their manifest ideology? It is quite annoying to follow the contradictions between their latent i.e. self-serving financial interests and their “manifest” ideology. The “intelligentsia ideology” usually takes several forms. The first and the most common one in the public discourse is: “Never question the rationale for public expenditure of education!” as if the expenditures will capitalise themselves in any circumstance.

Second form of the same “ideology” may take one of the following forms: “Higher expenditures for higher education are always justified, since they provide greater public goods, notwithstanding its quality and quantity!” Quite often (in such an ideological discourse) it takes a following form: “Private education and institutions of private education do not belong to public goods. They serve only particular individuals, or school owners, unlike public institutions and scholars in public education, which serve everybody!” The manifest ideology of the academia claims that its members — by virtue of its very existence — provide a public good (i.e. education) which should therefore necessarily be financed by the taxpayers. This conservative, rent-seeking behaviour and the ideology of the intelligentsia stands in a striking contrast to its manifest side, which boosts the parlance of the “public good”.

But is public education and “investment” in public education necessarily a public good? It is a question that should be decided empirically, and we should refrain to answer the question by saying that it is “necessarily” so. And empirical data provided in the book at least for some countries show that it is not necessarily so. Even more problematic is the opposite side of the coin: the claim that private education is a priori NOT a public good, by virtue of the fact that it is not “public”. This dichotomy of “public vs private goods” in the ideology of intelligentsia is problematic in more than one sense. Suffice it to say, for this summary, that if private education provides better education than the public one it would enhance public good more, by virtue of being potentially more useful to more people.

None of these “arguments” for public education is necessarily true, and in the book I provide several proofs that they are not. But they are “understandable” in terms of the selfish interests of their claimants. The most unfortunate side of this

ideology is that students often play a starring role in its enforcement. It was primarily the students who accepted and promoted such claims. They organized public demonstrations all over Europe asking for “universally free education for everybody”, and declaring “higher education to be a human right”. And regretfully, it is precisely students who bear all the non-monetary costs of such an ideology.

Of course, education on all levels IS a human right, but not in the sense students and scholars usually take them to be. What they usually mean by the claim that education is a human right, is that if education is a human right it should *ipso facto* be taken care of by the government, or be a standard cost for taxpayers (which in Europe it *de facto* always was). Until recently, however, public financing of higher education was not justified by such a grand claim (“because it is a human right!”). In recent public discussions about the public status of higher education some more elaborate definitions and justifications of human rights almost never surfaced. Education IS a human right as a “liberty right”, in the parlance of Wesley Newcomb Hohfeld. It means that nobody can stop/prevent a person to exert his/her right to educate him/herself. But at the same time it is not a “claim right”, meaning that *somebody else* should necessarily provide it for me, or take a financial burden for it instead of myself. So, even if education was (or is) a liberty right, that right cannot be automatically translated into a claim that somebody should provide it to me, or even less — to everybody.

Secondly, economic analysis of public finances in education typically shows that having a prudent policy of education financing, using various forms of private financing, and/or a combination of private and public financing provides from the standpoint of “public good” a far better service. It is more cost efficient, it lowers public debt, and in the most environments it is even educationally more efficient, in the sense that it provides a better education than its public counterpart, or in the sense that it is more adaptable to new social conditions and to the new scientific discoveries and frontiers.

Be that as it may, for the time being, governments in most European countries, with very rare exceptions, yielded to majority claims (the ideology) of the academia and students. Discussion on the merits of public/private financing in higher education since then became politically virtually dead almost everywhere. This is rather unfortunate in the light of the fact that such governmental decisions only aggravated the overall bad shape of public finances in most countries, and in European Union in general.

Those were my reasons to label my book “*Contra paedagogicos*. A liberal justification for higher education”. The arguments provided in the book stem from the “classical liberal” tradition, “liberal” in the European sense of the term. This standpoint is the most evident in papers which argue against student/demonstrator’s re-

quirements for the “sea social change”, or against representative democracy. In these papers I argue that we have very good evidence that “direct democracy” as a model for the whole of society, a model which was suggested by students and some intellectuals, has typically brought about totalitarian outcomes. I provide several arguments why this is so, why the law of unintended consequences is likely to take effect. Another important reason is that such claims are very poor policy proposals for a number of pragmatic problems which students and members of the academia are faced with. A pledoyer for a liberal justification for higher education focuses on the notion of accountability and responsibility of every actor involved in the educational process, and most notoriously — I argue — of the institutional managers, a stratum which is (bureaucracy not with standing) strikingly absent in our educational system. It is precisely in this realm, in the realm of institutional management where a host of educational problem arise, and this should be the proper place to solve them. I do take into account that sometimes an accumulation of problems lead individuals to the perception that one should “change the whole system”, or to build it from scratch, but at the same time I claim that educational problems and societal problems more generally are more likely to be solved in a piece-meal fashion.