Chapter 22
Higher Education and Lifelong Learning: Renewing the Educational and Social Mission of Universities in Europe

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Introduction

The view that higher education in Europe finds itself in a critical period of structural change imbues current research and policy debate across Europe. Modalities of governance, funding, internal organisation and qualifications are seeing considerable reframing and reform. The key drivers are deregulation and harmonisation.

Deregulation takes varying forms. In those countries where modern universities (but not necessarily higher education as a whole) were established as directly state-regulated public institutions (broadly termed the Humboldt model), policies increasingly foresee autonomous public higher education institutions that enter into periodic service contracts with the competent ministry or its equivalent. In those countries where universities were never directly part of the state apparatus (broadly termed the Anglo-Saxon model) and have relied on various kinds of mixed funding models, policies have increasingly led to quasi-market models of provision. Throughout Europe, private-sector higher education provision is also on the rise.

Harmonisation refers to the restructuring of higher education degrees into the three-tier B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. introduced by the intergovernmental Bologna Agreement and the processes it engendered for mutual recognition of European higher education qualifications. Many European higher education systems have formally completed the transition, some are still in the process of doing so and there are some instances of non-standard transition, as in the case of Greece, which, for example, demands a 4-year B.A. degree (240 ECTS, instead of the standard 3-year 180 ECTS B.A.) for entry to an M.A. degree course.

It is much less widely realised that the Bologna Process equally enjoins universities to integrate lifelong learning principles and practices into their structures of

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provision, into their admission and assessment procedures and into course content and pedagogy. These issues are understood as linked with the policy priority (at both European Union level and to varying extents at national level) accorded to the 'social dimension', which translates most directly into the aim of widening access to higher education and making its courses relevant and attractive for the population at large and throughout life. The social dimension was first mentioned explicitly under the Bologna Process in the 2005 Bergen Communiqué (with particular respect to encouraging mobility between higher education systems), was strengthened in the 2007 London Communiqué (introducing reporting and monitoring on national strategies) and brought to forefront in the 2009 Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, which defined lifelong learning as an important mission for higher education and enjoined all 46 countries participating in the Bologna Process to set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing the participation of under-represented social groups in higher education by 2020 (EACEA 2010; see also the European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning, EUA 2008).

All three aspects of current reframing and reform have been accompanied by considerable controversy and unrest, both within universities themselves and in academic and public debate. The burning points coalesce around concerns that together, these policy changes dismember the European vision of *universitas* – an independent community of scholars devoted solely to the pursuit of knowledge – and its humanistic tradition of education and scientific endeavour, whilst simultaneously endangering academic standards and undermining collegial professional relations. Lifelong learning is here seen to be synonymous with the injunction that universities equally regard employability as an important mission – and indeed, in the 2009 Communiqué these two terms appear in tandem, which does reflect a widely held view in European Union and international policymaking circles as well as in some national policy strategies that lifelong learning is above all about work-related continuing education and training for adults. The risk of foreshortening the reach and meaning of lifelong learning to overly instrumental perspectives towards higher education is by no means a mirage, as numerous educationalists have trenchantly observed (see e.g. Field 2006).

The Bologna Process spearheads ongoing efforts to create an open European higher education area (EHEA) and the European Commission is a full member. Paradoxically, it was a group of national governments that set the Bologna Process into motion, but the initiative meets with widespread suspicion of what is understood as standardisation imposed by 'Brussels' (i.e. the European Union institutions), which serves but to erase valuable national diversities in the interests of economic efficiency in a globalising world. With the notable exception of the Nordic countries, this all takes place against a backdrop of now chronic public underinvestment in higher education (and in some countries, specifically of universities) across much of Europe.

In autumn 2009, rumbling discontent surfaced into an acute crisis in Austrian universities, spreading rapidly to campuses in Germany and finding resonance in the Baltics and parts of southeast Europe. The student movement 'university in flames' (*die Uni brennt*) forced a broad set of grievances within and beyond the

universities into the forefront of national political and public attention, making it clear that a reformulation of the educational and social mission of higher education is the fundamental issue at hand.

On the surface, making lifelong learning a reality in higher education has played no role in this debate. The movement sought to reclaim the concept and practice of the humanitarian educational tradition and the democratic university in the face of utilitarian reforms and deteriorating conditions of study. Inadequate funding (leading to poor staff-student ratios and too few courses on offer), the transition to 'Bologna degrees' (seen to over-standardise and restrict free choice of studies) and the prospect that *numerous clausus* (system capacity-based ceilings on student numbers, generally regulated by the standard reached in the upper- secondary school certificate, the *Matura*) could be widely introduced – these became the core symbolic expressions of the policy-induced dissolution of *universitas*.

Redressing social inequalities in higher education access, participation and outcome were also taken up by the movement, but generally from the perspective that it is precisely these utilitarian reforms that decisively deepen, if not expressly produce, social inequalities in higher education. In this scenario, lifelong learning – a suspect template that adopts a different, though no less critical, diagnosis of causes, corollaries and effects of current higher education ills – becomes part of the problem rather than a contribution to the solution. In this sense, the Austrian student movement agenda – which found much sympathy and support amongst university staff and in progressive political circles – mirrors a set of quandaries with respect to the relations (or more accurately: the largely absent relations) between higher education and lifelong learning. This chapter seeks to consider the tensions and contradictions embedded in these 'non-conscious relations', and argues that higher education must engage constructively with lifelong learning if it is to renew its educational and social mission appropriately in response to the educational needs and demands of contemporary democratic societies.

Adult Learning and Universities

European first modernity created education and training systems that are fundamentally structured by age and stage (of life and of development), whereas modern educational theories took their cue from theories of child development and specific historical constructions of childhood and youth. Andragogy (teaching and learning for and with adults) is a marginal concept in most European research and policy discourses (the Baltic states, Hungary and Denmark are exceptional in this respect), whilst education and training systems and pedagogies are built on the assumption that it is the young who need to learn and in principle (should) want to learn. That children, young people and adults have differing learning needs and demands goes largely and ultimately strangely unquestioned, yet relatively little attention has been devoted to adult learning and adulthood itself is a poorly theorised notion.

Universities position themselves in relation both to the level of knowledge (higher education) and to the kind of knowledge (abstract and discipline based) with which they are concerned. They do not see themselves as providers of adult learning – this term signifies lower-level, more concrete and thematically organised knowledge and learning that is closer to everyday life. Universities thus cater to adult learners of a very specific kind. They offer theoretically based higher education studies to those who, at first admission, have successfully completed a designated type of upper secondary education (or its recognised equivalent).

It follows that those eligible to enter university will be at least 18 years old, which is also the legal age of majority in Europe: university students are adults, although universities as organisations and as learning environments may not always treat them as such. University students over 40 remain a rarity in most European universities and in most degree subjects, including through to Ph.D. level. The tradition of extended initial higher education studies in some countries (such as Germany and the Nordic countries) means that above-average proportions of the student population are aged in their mid-to-late 1920s. As reported for 2006 (EACEA 2009), participation rates in tertiary education reaches a peak for those aged 20–24, falling rapidly from this point onwards; 7 in 10 full-time higher education students in the European Union are aged between 18.7 and 27 years old. Universities hence still cater largely to 18–30-year olds, most of whom hold conventional entry qualifications. However, as Teichler (2004) points out, normative entry ages and qualifications were introduced only relatively recently in order to improve efficiency and quality through standardising the level and kind of knowledge with which students begin their courses.

Despite higher education expansion from the 1960s onwards, standardised access routes remained firmly in place until the 1990s, when widening access policies brought greater flexibility. Education policy in the Nordic countries had long since set its sights on a genuine democratisation of access to higher education, not only by increasing the supply but also by widening access and with generous arrangements for study leave, grants and allowances. Nordic countries return the highest rates of university students aged over 30 (in 2006, at least 15% of the student population; in Iceland, 15% are aged over 35), just as they achieve high participation rates in all forms of adult learning, both general and vocational (Kailis and Pilos 2005; Pont 2004). The shift in the UK from binary to unified higher education provision at the end of the 1980s prompted rapid diversification of course provision within the universities, old and new: interdisciplinary degrees and courses combining general and vocational specialisms, together with a wide variety of continuing professional education diplomas, have proliferated. In addition, some new universities are consciously committed to bringing higher education into the community and to making university studies feasible and attractive for older age groups and the socially disadvantaged.

However, in countries whose university systems have experienced little structural change in the past 30 years (Austria and Germany are paradigmatic examples), general higher education participation rates are comparatively low, social inequalities in access to university education remain exceptionally strong and opportunities for

adults to take up university studies after a period of working and family life are relatively constrained (see OECD 2009). In addition, the continuing diplomas and certificates that such university systems offer are typically detached from the mainstream degree system, that is, they do not form part of an integrated qualifications currency that provides for straightforward exchange and progression between sectors and levels. This kind of problem is proving to be a stumbling block for the development and the acceptance of national qualifications frameworks in several parts of Europe, since these are predicated on the assumption that a common currency is possible (with the European Qualifications Framework as a translation instrument).

Extramural studies is the traditional model of university-based adult learning provision, largely serving relatively well-educated, older adults with time to invest in learning for purely intrinsic purposes; in recent years, it has typically lost ground to specialist adult learning providers outside the university sector. Two models are now replacing it: second-chance access routes for those without conventional entry qualifications (via recognition of prior learning, preparatory courses, mentoring and counselling) and professional development courses for maintaining, enriching and upgrading occupationally relevant knowledge and competence. Both developments accelerate modularisation and part-time study options, which offer much greater opportunity to structure and to time higher education studies according to personal circumstances and preferences throughout adult life. This reframes the concept of *universitas* in terms of what, how and when people participate in the community of scholars – they once more do so of their own will and to their own taste, which was indeed the original idea.

Open Universities, Open Societies

Universitas signifies a European vision of an open community that is committed to the discursive and open pursuit of knowledge und innovation. However, under first modernity, universities became highly institutionalised within the bounds of nation states and increasingly insulated from wider society, which in practice – despite the quantitative expansion of higher education – produced deformations that can be traced via closure and exclusion tendencies. Today's societies are becoming ever more open in a variety of ways, and universities can no longer avoid the question of what this means for their educational and social mission.

The principles of diversity and social relevance place the sustainability of first modernity's *universitas* in question. Thus, Barnett's (2003) account sees universities on the threshold of a structural change to 'multiversities' characterised by supercomplexity and engagement. In principle, universities symbolise autonomous spaces that are open to and belong to all citizens. They are indispensable for the cultural, political, social and economic survival capacity of contemporary societies (Kalleberg 2000; Clark 1997). But the structure and composition of contemporary societies and populations are changing apace: objective and subjective heterogeneities together with multifaceted old and new inequalities set the contours of the social environment,

and universities are slow to respond. For Scott and Harding (2007), openness towards the social environment is now the core challenge for European higher education systems, and it is universities' response to this challenge that will decisively frame their social legitimacy in the coming decades.

European higher education traditions are not all of a piece and national policy strategies place distinct accents, but all systems face three kinds of challenges: massification (higher student numbers), diversification (internal differentiation of systems, institutions and course provision) and rationalisation (organisational structures and working cultures). Trow's (1974, 2006) threefold typology presaged these developments: (1) university as an elite institution (education of the upper class), (2) university as mass education (preparation for professional occupations in economically and technologically advanced societies) and (3) university as universal education and qualification. This last category approximates to Barnett's multiversity, which offers differentiated and flexible study options, so that all citizens can keep up with the multifaceted challenges of modern life – including universities as spaces for learning and living active democratic citizenship.

This ideal typology is not necessarily chronological, but in Europe the first two have emerged consecutively and the third is on the doorstep – and in North America long since a reality. The three types also cumulatively coexist. Trow's empirical analysis concluded that elite university systems can absorb up to 15% of the relevant age cohort before internal structural changes become mandatory in order to continue to provide effective and appropriate education. This marks transition to mass higher education capable of absorbing up to 30% of the relevant age cohort. When higher education systems take in more than half of the relevant age cohort and seek to attract a socially broader public, transition to universal higher education takes effect and restructuring is once more inevitable. This may well encounter ideological resistance within the universities (see Streeck and Thelen 2005; Shore 2010), and policymaking may adopt delay and avoidance strategies, not least because universal higher education is an expensive proposition and new, often controversial, funding formulae have to be devised.

The rationalisation of higher education organisation cross-cuts deregulation and harmonisation; it is directed in the first instance to improving efficiency rather than strengthening effectiveness and social relevance. With few exceptions, new public management practices are gaining strong foothold in the universities and are changing established organisational cultures and working contracts and conditions (Enders and Musselin 2008). Critical analysis of these developments abounds, but little attention has been paid to the challenge of external democratisation of the university, that is, towards the society in which it exists. Higher education research may have become more prevalent and incisive, but in the main it has focused on universities as institutions and organisations *sui generis*, that is, from the internal perspective. Given the lack of focus on higher education's educational and social mission, lack of engagement with the theoretical and practical implications of lifelong learning for universities in the research literature is unsurprising (Teichler 1999). Barnett's analysis would conclude that university actors are insufficiently engaged, thus placing their social legitimacy at risk.

Comprehensive research-based analyses and studies that consider university perspectives and practices in adopting lifelong learning principles remain rare. Most information derives from policy studies commissioned by the European Union and its agencies or carried out directly within their orbit. Dunkel et al. (2009) make the connection via the importance of improving arrangements for progression and transfer between subsystems, specifically between general and vocational higher education and training. They identify generalised trends towards convergence, complementarity and what they term mutual 'friendly takeovers' between the two subsystems, which lead to a certain de-institutionalisation – links between specific kinds of institutions and specific kinds of degree courses are weakening, boundaries between higher education and upper-level vocational education and training are blurring and courses that combine elements from both subsystems are multiplying, within an overall picture of two-way drift between academic and vocational content and purpose. On the whole, this is a positive account of transition to the multiversity, albeit possibly an unpalatable vision for university actors working in more classical institutions and systems.

The latest European Universities Association Trend Report (EUA 2007; see also EACEA 2010) concludes, however, that by and large Europe's higher education institutions still cannot collectively visualise lifelong learning as a principle for the comprehensive restructuring of education and training systems and processes. The study analysed questionnaire responses from over 900 individual institutions in the Bologna Process countries and made 15 site visits to higher education institutions in ten countries. The majority of those responding regard lifelong learning as a significant strategic planning issue, but rarely as a top priority. Given that there are some 4,000 higher education institutions in the 27 European Union Member States alone, it is likely that this presents a comparatively optimistic picture, since universities little interested in the topic will have been less likely to respond to the survey in the first place. National lifelong learning strategies are under way in most countries, but universities do not take a very active role in the relevant policy consultation and development debates. Nor have they noticeably taken up the cue to give greater priority to the social dimension, to which the Bologna Process also lends explicit priority.

The social dimension essentially refers to system openness in terms of making education and training through to the highest levels possible and attractive for the population at large – it forefronts inclusion and recognition, and this can only work via the provision of multifaceted, differentiated structures and contents, in higher education as in other subsystems. Europe's higher education institutions – according to the EUA 2007 Trend Report – regard these aims as at least important, but fewer than one in five expect the present situation to improve, whereas over half take the view that their institution has already adopted sufficient measures. Clearly, universities do not see themselves here as key actors – responsibility and competence rests in the first instance elsewhere in the education and social system. Furthermore, universities are inclined to view diversity and quality as incompatible antipodes, and this is hardly surprising, given the narrowly defined quality indicators to which higher education institutions must respond in order to maintain levels of public funding in many European countries.

A recent Lisbon Council Think Tank study (Ederer et al. 2008) returns interesting and provocative findings in this respect. It developed a composite indicator to index higher education system performance – not the aggregate performance of individual actors in these systems. In contrast to existing international ranking indices (such as the Shanghai index), it privileges the social dimension. Inclusiveness (participation rates relative to the relevant population), access (the ability to accept students with lower levels of scholastic aptitude) and effectiveness (graduate salary advantage as a measure of labour market integration) are the most important features, joined by attractiveness (proportion of students from abroad), age range (registered students aged 30–39) and responsiveness (stage of transition to Bologna degrees). Inclusiveness, access and student age range are key issues for lifelong learning implementation strategies; the extent to which higher education systems are attractive to students from other countries can also suggest the extent to which they respond to heterogeneity.

Evident methodological problems (operationalisation and validity) notwithstanding, broadening concepts and measures of higher education quality and performance is an important agenda. From the 17 OECD countries for which data was available, the index places Australia, the UK, Denmark and Finland at the head of the ranking. Their higher education systems are open to participation and diversity without sacrificing academic quality. Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Spain take up the rear: their higher education systems are relatively closed in several ways, university continuing education is underdeveloped and taking up university studies beyond young adulthood is difficult. Despite the provisional and incomplete nature of the social dimension index, the contrasts point to clear system differences in capacity to adapt to universal higher education and the emergence of the multiversity.

Open Architectures of Higher Education

The need for greater openness towards new ways of structuring fields of knowledge together with more diversified, autonomous and action-oriented modalities of learning pose considerable challenges to the discipline-based, theoretical and reproductive traditions of academic culture as these have developed in Europe's first modernity. Enabling learning and qualification biographies that facilitate fluid movement between different fields of knowledge and competence, between different contexts of their application in personal and professional life and between different levels of development and accomplishment – all these demand universities that, as systems and as cultures, are genuinely open settings for adult learning across a much broader spectrum of purpose and benefit than has been the case.

The transition to the multiversity thus implies 'positive borderlessness' as a core feature, since narratives of separation do not sit well with the realities of people's learning lives in second modernity. Contemporary life-course flows and contingencies clash with rigid divisions between general and vocational education and training

and between initial and continuing education and qualification. Aims and motivations, needs and demands are essentially and demonstrably mixed (Chisholm et al. 2004). Barrier-free architectures better suit societies of flows and networks, in which personal, social and professional trajectories are much more differentiated and individualised in terms of their subjective meanings and objective features.

Ultimately, this implies not relinquishing, but reclaiming and reshaping the classical concept of *universitas* to render it once more consciously responsive to today's *multiversitas*. Bringing lifelong learning into a conscious and actively constituted relation with higher education is inherent to this transformation, which equally sets relevance at the core of renewal. Unless people see the relevance of higher education for their lives in the here and now, they will generally not see it as an attractive and worthwhile prospect. Relevance can take on many forms and meanings – it does not automatically privilege instrumental as opposed to intrinsic motivations for shaping provision or taking up studies, though it does give space to both. The more heterogeneous higher education communities become, the more differentiated their constituent understandings of relevance are patterned.

It is unclear whether the transition to the Bologna three-tier degree system will shorten the average length of initial university studies in those university systems whose previous structures foresaw 5 rather than 3 years to first degree completion. Initial unsystematic information suggests that students registered under old regulations are completing a little earlier and students under new regulations are more likely to complete 'on time'. However, such systems are prone to have defined the new B.A. and M.A. degrees as directly consecutive, expecting and encouraging students to complete them as such, and in these parts of Europe there is continuing uncertainty about how the labour market and employers will respond to B.A. graduates. For Europe overall, the length of initial studies is unlikely to fall significantly in the short term, but 'punctuated' trajectories of higher education studies throughout life are likely to rise in the medium term as people return to follow a first or second M.A. or Ph.D., including in order to change their specialist field of knowledge and work, but equally in combination with personal and family exigencies. The student body is destined to become more heterogeneous for these reasons alone, and demographic change in Europe is more likely to lead to a wider spread of age groups and life phases in higher education than to a fall in student numbers (Vincent-Lancrin 2008). This will inevitably shift the profile of demand for higher education, with rising emphasis on further degrees and continuing education.

European universities face a future in which adults of all ages, and in diverse circumstances, will come to their studies with diverse needs and purposes. Some will be hoping that higher education can help them to change the course of their personal and professional lives, others will be focused on becoming higher qualified in their chosen field, some will want to make up for what they could not achieve earlier in life and others will have purely personal and hedonistic reasons. Changing life direction demands time for reflexion and experiment; professional advancement needs targeted response and part-time courses; second-chance students benefit from tailor-made advice, accompaniment and mentoring opportunities and intrinsic education aficionados insist on the freedom to choose what and how they

will study. Providing quality and relevance in diverse ways will also improve higher education experience and outcome for young adults entering university in conventional ways – and all the more so, should it prove possible to dismantle social inequalities of higher educational access at the beginning of adult life. All the evidence available indisputably shows that the best predictor for continuing to participate in learning of all kinds throughout life is successful and satisfying participation in initial education and training from preschool onwards. The more higher education can succeed in bringing young adults into the university, the more likely it is that they will return to the university as they move through their adult lives.

Under current circumstances – not least the deepening consequences for public and private expenditure of the global financial crisis since 2009 – the extent of restructuring of resources, provision and mindsets needed to achieve the multidimensional openness to which this chapter has referred is likely to be seen as way beyond Europe's capacity to deliver in the foreseeable future. The pace of higher education change and development in Asia and on the Pacific Rim, generally less affluent than Europe and less constrained by ingrained patterns of provision, could suggest that mindsets ultimately pose the most entrenched obstacle.

At first glance, lifelong learning seems to have little to do with higher education and much more to do with early childhood education and with adult learning – especially work-related learning – outside universities. From this standpoint, universities do not really need to review their mission. Negatively interpreted, the incursion of lifelong learning is to be actively resisted by the universities – it appears as the neoliberal Trojan horse that will undermine humanistic educational tradition and standards of excellence. From this standpoint, universities must protect and defend their mission. That lifelong learning also symbolises an essentially positive paradigmatic change across education and training systems as a whole and in which universities are inherently and crucially implicated – this is an argument still to be made and won, for universities are still, for the most part, set somewhat apart from the mainstream of the societies that nourish them. Academic freedom demands institutional and professional autonomy, but autonomy does not require separation from the social environment. Opening up participation in the academy as a responsive, democratic space not only for excellence but also for inclusiveness – each as multifaceted concepts and practices – is a challenge that Europe's *universitas* can and must meet, if it is to live up to its own original aspirations and those of the world in which today's Europeans live.

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Key Weblinks

ASEM-LLL, http://www.dpu.dk/asem/aboutus/
Bologna Process and EHEA, http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area bologna-process/
EU: Education and Training 2020, http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm
EU: European Qualifications Framework, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/vocational_training/c11104_en.htm
EU: Higher Education in Europe, http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc62_en.htm
EU: Lifelong Learning in Europe, http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.htm
EUA – European University Association, http://www.eua.be/about-eua/
OECD: Higher Education and Adult Learning, http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,3373,en_2649_39263238_1_1_1_1_37455,00.html
UNESCO: Global Report on Adult Learning 2009, http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/grale/