

Conversão e educação: modelo jesuíta e utopias pedagógicas globais

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«Smashing the glasshouse. Diminishing the prestige of measures of prestige in higher education»

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Abstract: Over the last three decades, higher education institutions have experienced dramatic changes. The causes are manifold, from the commodification of higher education, to the reduction of budgets, to new narratives establishing themselves in the public sphere about efficiency in the production of higher education and its usability in the job market. The changes may appear as the realization of the fears of Lyotard about the end of the paradigm of knowledge as a vector of personal maturation (*bildung*) and emancipation from fears and superstitions (Lyotard, 1979). Also Veblen comes to mind, where he noted the incompatibility between the ideals of the pursuit of knowledge and the business ethics pervading US universities (Veblen, 1818). Critics of capitalism will see in these changes the long wave of a neoliberal revolution and many among the authors quoted in the present work note the important linkages between a neoliberal worldview and the evolution of the mission assigned to higher educations. This is the case for example of historians such as Philip Mirowski studying the commodification of science (Mirowski, 2011, 2019) or educationalists as James Mittelman (2017) discussing the impossible dream of globalized world-class universities. While these appear to be profound and long-term drivers of change in higher education, it would be an error to discount the impact brought about in the last two decades by the new measures of the power of universities. Since in 2003 the Chinese University of Shanghai Jiao Tong first introduced its Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), followed by important competitors in the UK and in the US, the entire perspective of higher education, from both the inside (administrators, ministries of educations, senior staff) and outside (students and their families, the public sphere) has dramatically changed. New intellectual categories have been created, including the concept of ‘world class university’, underpinning a global market for higher education that has brought about substantial

change in the balance of power both internal to universities – between teachers and administrators, and in the relation between universities and society at large. The idea of world class university can be seen as a dream (Mittelman, 2017), as a vision of a globalized world of standardised knowledge, where knowledge workers are produced and prepared to take their place in the knowledge economy of the future. This vision clashes with reality in several respects – foremost with the true characteristics of the job market and its imperfections. The dream pushes higher education into a direction of enhanced social discrimination and inequality. To their proponents, these ranking are instrument of accountability that impose a competitive scheme to attract international students and have them pay for the increasing costs of HE and research, helping to create a global market for higher education. HE ranking cannot be held solely responsible for the financialization of HE, for government budget cuts; for the globalization and internationalization of higher education, for the increasing costs of research, for increasing student loan which in the US involves 45 million people who owe nearly 1.8 trillion dollars and the rising numbers of administrators among academic staff. Surely, rankings have co-evolved with these developments, possibly impressing an acceleration to change. Nor can the ranking themselves be perceived as exogenous to a neoliberal logic, as rating and management by objectives are themselves the product of a new public management (NPM) logic and policies. From this perspective, education is conceived as an investment valued in terms of an individual's current and prospective earnings and those who can afford them will pay the rising fees charged by prestigious, research-intensive universities to position themselves nearer the front of the job queue. HE metrics are strictly based on measuring quality and prestige of universities without considering fees cost or subsistence during undergraduate or public or private investment devoted to universities. People that cannot afford high fees are pushed toward taking a loan in order to compete in the labour market and this process feeds back into the financialization of higher education. Under these premises, our objective is to investigate if a multi-pronged action can be imagined to diminish the prestige of international rankings of HE.

Short-bio: Dr. Rosario Scandurra is Juan de la Cierva Postdoctoral Fellow and a member of the Globalisation, Education and Social Policies (GEPS) research centre at the Faculty of Sociology, Autonomous University of Barcelona and of CEG (Centro de Estudos Globais), Universidade Aberta, Portugal. His research has examined educational- and skills inequalities and how these inequalities are accumulated during the life course.

Multiple questions emerged from this work concerning the complementary sequences of effects embedded in individual contexts of skills formation. Dr Scandurra has examined extensively the school-to-work transition of young people in European territories, with a particular concern for educational opportunities and school segregation at the local level. Currently, Dr. Scandurra main research is to understand how education and labour market policy could be coordinated to improve youth opportunities. Under this broad topic, he has focused primarily on two dimensions: a) employability policy and higher education governance; and b) skills ecologies, specifically the interplay between territories and institutional design of education and labour market policies.

In addition, he has served as co-researcher on 15 medium and large-scale research projects at national and international level, where he was engaged in the design and execution of the research work. Currently, he is Principal Researcher for the UAB team of the project Employability in programme development (EPD), funded by the Erasmus+ Key Action 2: Strategic Partnerships. The aim of the project is developing a review of employability practices and constructing a prototype dashboard, which will enable HE staff to draw on labour market intelligence in the development of their educational programmes.