

## Editorial

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### Higher Education and Democracy: a work in progress...

The efficacy, applicability, and support of democracy in a given era or state has been historically dictated by prevailing political and economic trends. In supranational states such as the European Union, *democracy's* proponents work to voice their views on citizenship, equality and identity against a backdrop of the narratives of the “other”. Jürgen Habermas’ theory of *deliberative democracy*, which galvanized contemporary political thought and shook the European status quo to its core. His theories have heavily impacted higher education as well, paving the way for *deliberative communication* within the confines of its “ivory towers”.

It is, however, especially interesting to note that universities and democracy are only widely encountered in their modern European form following the French Revolution.

The Humboldtian university, on the other hand, represents the turn towards research and

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teaching where the subject matter is under perpetual development (Kiprianos 2016: 32-33). Somewhat later, around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studies connect the production of knowledge with entrepreneurship. In the years that follow, it has been argued by some that the connection and/or dominance of Market discourse in the European Higher Education arena will become the leading subject of study, relegating issues of education, democracy, and citizenship to the sidelines. However, forging linkages, promoting dialogue thereby imbuing the discussion with the study of democracy and its relationship to higher education, has the potential to provide the wherewithal to allow its principles of inclusion, reason, and respect among others, to be expressed as a means of preventing such marginalization (Huber & Harkavy, 2007, Thomas, 2011).

This special issue of *Academia* has as its focus ‘Democracy and Higher Education’ and includes articles from academics from Europe and Asia, who each approach the topic from their particular perspective.

### **Deliberative Democracy and Higher Education**

Questions such as “To what do I aspire?” and “How far do I expect to go?” are just some of the reoccurring considerations regularly found on the minds and lips of individuals entering higher education institutes. At this point, these somewhat nebulous considerations usually come face to proverbial face a sobering reality, over which individuals rarely have any substantive control. From as early as infancy, individual characteristics are largely defined by social ethics, moral codes, and predefined social horizons. Early schooling experiences are equally constrained by rules and regulations which, while not always conducive to the learning process, persist by virtue of

representing the quintessence of our conditioned belief that they are deeply rooted in democratic values of equality, tolerance and multiculturalism.

Higher education tends to deviate from this model. It is much more than mere venue for the exchange of ideas and hoarding of knowledge. Institutions of higher education eventually become the forum where future democratic discourse is born. Their practices are deeply rooted in *deliberative communication*, where an individual “develop[s] his or her view by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments and valuing, coupled to a collective and cooperative endeavor to find values and norms which everyone can accept, at the same time as pluralism is acknowledged” (Englund 2008: 103). Students tap into their creativity and knowledge of the world to explore uncharted terrains while becoming equally versed in tolerance and equality - values they then wish to pass on to future generations.

This body of assorted works, ranging from theoretical pieces to practical applications, has been collectively titled *Democracy and Higher Education*. The purpose of this book is to sensitize the reader to the role of *democracy* (in its broadest sense) in higher education, to trace the research that has been carried out in this domain and to present practical applications for current and future practitioners.

The works of Gil Batista Ferreira “*Deliberation in the classroom - on the potential of deliberative ideals for a more civic education*” and Henry Maitles “*What type of democratic citizenship education? What type of democratic citizen?*” form the theoretical backdrop of this special edition. Grounded in Habermas’ theory of *deliberative democracy*, Ferreira’s article centers on the role deliberative democracy plays in civic education, attempting to link the theory to classroom practice. Henry Maitles picks up the thread of this argument and focuses on global democratic

citizenship in higher education by critically examining university management commitment to democratic citizenship as understood by university academics committed to citizenship education.

Spinthourakis, Gouga and Kamarianos highlight the new forms of organization emerging as a result of the retreat of the welfare state in Europe. More specifically, the emergence of philanthropy as a regulatory discourse, which will find its place in universities, following the Market signals. The study's fundamental position is that the shift towards philanthropy and charity or, even moreso, the substitution of charity for the social state ultimately concerns the social subject's political alignment and the democratic makeup of its action. In this context, philanthropy becomes a constitutive reason for action that is implied by the social biopolitics as a process of normalizing the pathology of social exclusion and not as a process of reversal. Under this assumption, placing the University at the core of actions for survival and (lifelong?) development, the detached philanthropic narrative, implies a response to the social importance of the University and, by extension, to the politician in the public sphere.

In this context, philanthropy becomes a constitutive reason for action that is implied by the social biopolitics as a process of normalizing the pathology of social exclusion and not as a process of withdrawing it. Under this assumption, putting the University at the core of action for survival and (lifelong?) Growth, the detached philanthropic narrative, implies a response to the social importance of the University and, by extension, to the politician in the public sphere.

Two comparative case studies (Sandra Chistolini's "*The urgencies for educators in the society of knowledge and globalization in the context of dialogue between China and Italy*" and Kerry J Kennedy and Joseph Kui Foon Chow's "*Becoming Radical' in the*

*Academy: Trajectories of Civic Engagement for Hong Kong Youth*”) provide inter- and intra-national insight on the application of various constituents of *democratic education* and *citizenship* in higher education. Chistolini’s work centers on the triangle of progressive interaction (i.e. knowledge-education-innovation) and the relationships between societies of knowledge and globalisation in their contradictory effects of contemporary affluence within an international context (i.e. Italy and China). Kennedy & Chow’s work, on the other hand, is set in an intranational context, focusing on Hong Kong students’ attitudes towards democracy by drawing data from two cohort groups, tracing fluctuations in their attitudes over the course of a decade (1999-2009).

Finally, Wolfgang Berg’s work “*Students are citizens*” traces the development of democratic education practices in the German university system by delineating the innovations in higher education introduced by the German Ministry of Education.

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