

## TOWARDS A UNIVERSITY AS AN INSTITUTION OF THE COMMON: CRITICAL AND MARXIST HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

An INTERVIEW WITH KRYSZTIAN SZADKOWSKI

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**CIMEAC:** *Over the last years you have been working on the various problems of higher education systems. Could you explain the emergence of higher education research and its major theoretical frameworks?*

**Krzysztof Szadkowski (KS):** What we understand today as mainstream higher education research has been developed in response to the problems generated by the processes of the extension of mass access to higher education, which was demanded and achieved in the period of student movement struggles in the US and Western Europe. Second, its development was partially due to the increasing importance of innovation and knowledge in the advanced capitalist economies. Of course, the idea of a university as an institution was the point of reference for various thinkers much earlier.

Higher education research emerged and became important in times of economic and political unrest similar to the period in which we are now living – that is, in times of crisis. On the one hand, there was the crisis of the higher education sector caused by the activities of civic and student movements emerging on campuses together with the explosion of massification in the West. On the other hand there was the economic crisis that the global economy entered at the beginning of the 1970s, and which put an end to both the Fordist model of production and the project of the welfare state. In the mid-1990s, Ulrich Teichler (1996, p. 434) argued that “it is obvious that a sense of crisis as regards higher education was a major factor or possibly the most important single factor stimulating the promotion and the institutionalization of higher education research

in Europe.” A similar sense of crisis in the field of higher education today is driving the development of critical higher education research.

It would be difficult to extract precisely all of the major theoretical currents present in contemporary higher education research. This is a very heterogeneous field, due to the fact that it is not yet constituted as an independent discipline. The isolation of this area is difficult because the references to higher education may be made on the basis of various disciplines (educational studies, sociology, pedagogy or economics), and moreover because it is hard to separate research on this sector from evaluations performed for legislators (governments and ministries) and institutional practitioners (such as university presidents and representatives of the administration of higher education institutions). Ulrich Teichler (2005) has identified five types of researchers and institutional embedment of higher education researchers, and it seems to me that this type of categorization allows us to capture an important aspect of the organization of the field.

Let's focus on at least some of them. On the one hand we have “disciplinary-department-based occasional researchers on higher education,” the kind of theorists like Jürgen Habermas or Louis Althusser. On the other, there are “continuous discipline-based higher education researchers” that took up the question of higher education on a continuous basis in their careers. These are people like Burton Clark or Martin Trow, who laid the foundations for institutionalized higher education research. The next group consists of “scholars who are based in higher education research institutions.” Here we have individuals such as Guy Neave, Philip Altbach, Alberto Amaral, Jürgen Enders or Ulrich Teichler himself. This group played or currently plays a leading role in the dynamically developing landscape of mainstream higher education research nowadays. A separate area consists of people engaged in practically oriented, applied research on higher education, most often carried out by government agencies or by ministerial institutes created specifically for this purpose; they supply the necessary data and the empirically supported justifications for the decisions. The last group consists of reflexive practitioners undertaking research only occasionally, such as the famous Clark Kerr, the author of the *California Master Plan for Higher Education* or the former president of Harvard University, Derek Bok (TEICHLER 2005, p. 460).

Personally, I consider Burton R. Clark to be the most important and most inspiring figure of classical research on higher education. He was first associated with the University of California at Berkeley, then Stanford, Harvard and finally Yale, where he created a school of higher education researchers, composed mainly of historians, political scientists and sociologists. His major works were devoted to the issues related to the structures of higher education systems, international comparisons of systems, entrepreneurial institutions, professional everyday life of academics and problems of students in the system of mass higher education. He is considered to be one of the founders and inspirers of theoretical

higher education research. He was most fluent in the field of sociology of organizations. He elaborated his research methodology and its main concepts between 1956 and 1980. The summary and the culmination of this period of his work, *The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective*, was published in 1983 and is considered to be Clark's greatest contribution to the study of higher education.

Clark used the ethnographic method based on in-depth interviews and participant observation, creating high quality case studies of schools and higher education institutions. First he undertook fieldwork, and later on the base of the results he was trying to develop (mostly successfully) concepts. Some accuse them of being a-theoretical, and indeed they are not too embedded in any theoretical or philosophical discourse. Deleuze and Guattari once said that philosophy is primarily the task of the creation of concepts. In this sense, Clark was a kind of a philosopher in higher education research. But certainly he was a person who made unique achievements, both in research and in organization, the results of which were extremely important for the formation of the field.

It would be difficult to trace all the main currents of contemporary theoretical research on higher education. But I would like to draw your attention to four critical trends that most inspire me and which I consider to be the most interesting proposals within the field.

First, is the work of Simon Marginson, who is a leading figure in today's mainstream higher education research. His Braudelian understanding of the markets in higher education, extensive discussions on issues of public good(s) in the local, national and global contexts, and especially his research on the global dimension of higher education, including the questions of rankings and student mobility, are breakthroughs for the whole discipline. His combination of theoretical subtleties with a broad orientation in the empirical issues of the functioning of higher education systems and a classically understood socialist political position, sensitive to equality and empowerment, are qualities that make him rather a rare higher education researcher.

Another important point of reference are certainly theories of academic capitalism (LESLIE, SLAUGHTER, 1998; SLAUGHTER, RHOADES, 2004) and transnational academic capitalism (KAUPPINEN, 2012). They provide an analytical framework that allows for a certain kind of reflection on the capitalist transformations of the higher education sector and, by now, they constitute a reference point for almost all researchers looking at marketization, commodification, corporatization or neoliberalization of the sector. It seems to be a paradox, however, that over the years this theory has been used for the enthusiastic promotion of marketization of the sector, but at its core lay a real trade-unionist focus on the negative changes in the daily working environment experienced by the academic staff (RHOADES, 1997). Fortunately, some researchers have recently tried to reconstitute its critical dimension (CANTWELL, KAUPPINEN, 2014).

The third area worthy of note consists of the proposals that grew out of the academic staff protests, academic trade union movements, student protests and movements in favor of unionization of doctoral candidates. The list of authors here is very long, and consists of very diverse full-size analyses (ARONOWITZ, 2000; BOUSQUET, 2008), manifestos, pamphlets and visionary projects that have been produced as a part of their activity. It's hard to say, therefore, that we have here a uniform stream of theories. However, what all these proposals have in common is the experience of fighting against the expanding subsumption of higher education under capital and changes experienced by supposedly the weakest links in the chain of academic work: students, doctoral candidates and academic staff employed in precarious conditions. Whether it be material created after a student occupation of the Warwick University (THOMPSON, 1970), an academic journal *Workplace* that was launched as the result of a wave of protests in favor of graduate student unionization (BOUSQUET, 1998) or Croatian student democratic takeover of the university (OCCUPATION COOKBOOK, 2009), everywhere where those who are working academically (HARNEY, MOTEN, 1998) within universities raise their heads, one of the effects is always critical knowledge of how the system operates, and suggestions for how to go beyond the rule of capital.

Finally, we have Marxist currents of higher education research, with Gigi Roggero (2011), Paolo Do (2015), Harry Cleaver (2004), Joss Winn (2014), Richard Hall (2015) and Mike Neary (2013) as the most well known examples. Of course, we could also go back to the great works by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), Ernest Mandel (1978) or E. P. Thompson (1970), to evoke some of the existing classics. However, today's Marxist scholars researching higher education are not so much interested in the place and function of higher education within and for the capitalist economy (including the one based on knowledge production), but rather in the consequences of the capitalist structuring of the higher education system as one or another sector of production. With the help of a Marxian apparatus they highlight different aspects of higher education, critically using the theory of value (or postulate the need to go beyond it), at the same time, not losing sight of the horizon of alternatives, not only for the university subsumed under capital but for capitalism itself.

I describe all these four areas as critical higher education research. It is research that applies categories and models of explanation, which brings to the surface the hidden relationships of domination and exploitation within the system, trying to shed light on the characteristics and reasons for the relationship of subordination and subsumption. Critical research on higher education is thus the name of interdisciplinary research focused on the ways in which contemporary transformations of the university “serve power or wealth and contribute to the growth of injustice and inequality” (WILLIAMS, 2012). Whether it be a structure of inequality and exploitation that constitutes the differences between systems and academics in the global division of labor or between institutions within a

national system of higher education, whether it be the difference between representatives of the research or teaching-oriented institutions, or between the diverse populations of students in the framework of universal access to higher education, all of these areas are within the interests of mainstream critical research on higher education. Personally, I feel most connected with the Marxist tendency.

But there are a lot of problems here. Almost all of these theories come from the capitalist center and were developed in relation to the changes that took place at the most developed capitalist universities. However, their authors are to some extent sensitized to peripheral differences. Our task, as I understand it from the perspective of a peripheral researcher, however, is to develop our own theories, rooted in local and remote contexts, yet remaining in constant and intense dialogue with the currents sketched above.

**CIMEAC:** *The debates around the questions of post-Fordism and cognitive capitalism point out a historical and sociological rupture with classical patterns of modernization. There are impacts over the whole of society, especially over education systems. Could you talk more about this?*

**KS:** I think that the most important discussions on cognitive capitalism are those that start with the research program initiated by the Franco-Italian followers of the regulation school (CORSANI, 2001). Although we could locate the source of this discussion much earlier, like for example in the work of Lorenzo Cillario (1990), however, as rightly observed by Alberto Toscano (2007), he was primarily concerned with the changes taking place within the factory, that is within topologically located site of production. Using a conceptual distinction, introduced by Michel Aglietta, between, on the one hand, the model of production, the regime of accumulation on the other, and finally bonding both of the concepts within a general system of regulation, the authors from ISYS (*Innovation Systèmes Stratégies*) offered a way to analyze the emergence of the cognitive capitalism, which cannot be reduced to a simple technological change. Certain ways of applying technology and methods of organization of labor, put together with a specific division of labor, are associated with the specific mode of absorption and distribution of the surplus, and both are stabilized by the political system of regulation (RATAJCZAK, 2015). It is within these three areas that we are dealing with the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism and the emergence of cognitive capitalism in its mature form.

Without a doubt, we live in an age when several modes of production coexists. However, like Karl Marx, and long afterwards, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (2000), we can point a hegemonic mode of production, that is, one that largely imposes its dominant characteristics onto the others. Today this sector is a biopolitical production, based on a “cooperative work of human brains

linked together in a network through ICT tools”. Whereas, as for the mode of accumulation, its subject “includes knowledge that becomes the primary source of value and the main location of the process of valorisation” (MOULIER BOUTANG, 2011, p. 57). The importance of intangible factors of production is increasing constantly, partly in result of the development of large, computer-mediated and networked digital data. Along with this growth the importance of the processes of capture of innovation for economic growth has also increased. One of the tools in this process is of course a form of intellectual private property – one of the mechanisms that undermines the potential for the development of cognitive capitalism in the long-term. In addition, some hindrance from the perspective of capital is determined by the fact that technological development is increasingly difficult to carry out in the confined space of a single company or corporation, and assumes rather the form of a network or system in which a key role is played by the so-called positive externalities (MOULIER BOUTANG, 2011, p. 50-56), or what other theorists call “the common”.

It is the development of production and accumulation based on knowledge that has given rise to new and stable forms of domination of capital over labor related to the assimilation of the most human aspects of social life: knowledge, language, affects and communication itself. Some scholars define this noticeable shift in capitalist economies as a move towards biopolitical production (HARDT, NEGRI, 2009). This means that all that is lived and experienced during non-work within Post-Fordist capitalism enters into the sphere of production and constantly increases the use value of the labor force.

Many theorists, like for example André Gorz (2010, p. 55), believe that cognitive capitalism defines the fundamental crisis of capitalism as such. Andrea Fumagalli and Stefano Lucarelli (2010) indicate that the main problem plaguing cognitive capitalism is the lack of a stable regime of regulation that could hide internal antagonisms and foster the further undisturbed development of the economy.

Now, we might ask a difficult question: what this is all about? As you have indicated at the very beginning, these changes are fundamental in nature and have very serious consequences. One of the most important aspects of the theory of cognitive capitalism developed by the Italians and the French is the emphasis, different from so many other theories of the so-called knowledge-based economies, on the antagonistic (class) dimension of production and accumulation based on knowledge. In the emerging sectors, living labor (or, as Gigi Roggero (2011) or Vercellone (2007) would call it, the living knowledge) still generates surplus, that is more and more artificially captured and expropriated by capital. What is even more important, is that knowledge incorporated into living labor exercises hegemony over knowledge objectified in fixed capital and in the ways of organization of companies, that is dead knowledge. The theories of cognitive capitalism are not only able to explain processes of valorization and the capture of value that are of key importance for contemporary capital, but are also able to

justify a claim for establishing a cooperative autonomy of producers, which could be generalized for the whole producing population. The conflict that takes place in the area of production of knowledge is not unique in the capitalist economy. Just it is a place where antagonistic and parasitical relationship between capital and living labor can be seen in the clearest way. It is also where the relationship of conflict has precisely the greatest importance for the maintenance of the whole system of capitalist exploitation.

But where in all of this could we situate the higher education and science that interests us the most? For the capitalist economy, understood in an above-mentioned way, universities are crucial at least in a double sense.

On the one hand, as often emphasized by Carlo Vercellone (2007), the massification of access to higher education, associated with the development of the post-war welfare state (whether in Europe or in the United States), provided the very basis for cognitive capitalism. Mass protests of students and workers from the 1960s and 1970s combined with the general development of working class demands in the West, as well as allegedly its criticism of the methods of scientific labor management, contributed heavily to the emergence of this form of capitalism (MOULIER BOUTANG, 2011). A large contribution to its development was also the expansion of social security and collective services, as well as the constitution of what Vercellone called “diffuse intellectuality” in consequence of the democratization of education (mainly, the massification of higher education) and the improvement of the overall standard of education. Higher education and science represent, therefore, the foundation of cognitive capitalism.

On the other hand, the reality of the academy (both in terms of research, education and so-called third missions) is that it is a field of the constant activity of capital. It is not only interested in knowledge produced in networks connecting higher education institutions and the multitude of flexible and well-educated students, but also uses the mechanisms of motivation in science (*libido sciendi*) as the matrix of its relations of exploitation (MOULIER BOUTANG, 2011, p. 76-79). While Western universities evolved rapidly since their first direct contact with the interests of capital during the first half of the nineteenth century (ETZKOWITZ, 2002), it is only the emergence of mass higher education (TROW, 2010) that has contributed to raising the profile of the sector to the role of being a condition of the formation of cognitive capitalism. The further transition to universal higher education transformed the sector as a whole into a necessary condition for the possibility of its continuity and development.

The contemporary university is today both a laboratory where tests of the new kind of measures of cognitive labor efficiency take place (DO, 2015), as well as a node that concentrates precarious workers, or as some theorists call it “the factory of precarious workers” (CALELLA, 2011). It is also a place of experiments with different tools of discipline, of which the most severe is discipline enforced through debt (WILLIAMS, 2009). One could certainly write about it for ages, but briefly speaking, the contemporary conflicts and antagonisms specific to the

phase of cognitive capitalism pursued in the context of the university are that between living and dead knowledge, between the common and the mechanisms of measure and the empty form of intellectual property, between autonomous labor and heteronomous capital.

But if you ask about the consequences of these changes to the classic mechanisms of modernization I would answer that this is the question that has bothered me for some time in the context of peripheral societies and economies. There is no Lenin's *Development of Capitalism in Russia* for peripheral versions of cognitive capitalisms. There is no analysis of the seeds of cognitive capitalism, which reveals the paradoxes and contradictions associated with the process of applying this mode of production, accumulation and regulation to the periphery and semi-peripheries. What remains of the cognitive capitalism in post-socialist countries, de-industrialized and subjected to brutal neoliberal policies of austerity? What is the function of a fully universal (or universalizing – depending on the country) access to higher education under these conditions? What are the implications of knowledge-based development artificially steered by the state and usually underinvested? Unfortunately, only a few people are interested in answering these questions nowadays.

An interesting area where you can look for answers to these questions is certainly contemporary China (but also other BRIC countries), where the vast economic expansion is accompanied by an unusual boom of education and massification of access to higher education, as well as rapid growth in their research potential (MARGINSON, 2011). China is not only Foxconn factories crowded and filled with the dust from the polished LCD monitors, but also the suburbs filled with millions of graduates working in precarious conditions, facing real housing problems on a daily basis and having high aspirations. The so-called “ant tribe” (*yǐzú*) (JACOBS, 2010) creates a mass educated precariat in China. However, the development of Chinese higher education and science is not just a problem concerning the consequences of massification. Let's take for example Project 985, that is, the government initiative to create world-class universities and improve the reputation of Chinese higher education system, inaugurated in 1998. Indirectly, we owe this initiative to the emergence of global university rankings (LIM, 2015). As is well known, the first global ranking of universities, the Academic Ranking of World Universities, was created as academic exercise to measure the distance that separates China flagship universities from American universities. When it went public it became an essential mechanism for regulating prestige in globalized higher education. It was thus to China's race for perfection and development of the knowledge economy that we owe the measurement and comparisons device that today govern, in a very complex way, the reality of academic labor at many colleges and higher education systems throughout the world.



**CIMEAC:** *One of the most striking consequences of all those transformations is a turning point for the universities: from social institutions to entrepreneurial organizations. How do you analyze this process? There are far-reaching implications...*

**KS:** The answer to your question should be formulated in two steps. First, you need to dismantle the passage itself – from social institutions to entrepreneurial organizations – and show its ambiguity, as well as multidimensionality of the university itself. Second, we need to put more emphasis on the existence of different levels at which these undoubtedly important transformations taking place today are to be analyzed. For this purpose I will refer to the *glonacal* analytical framework proposed by Simon Marginson and Garry Rhoades (2002). But let's start from the beginning.

The university is primarily a field of ongoing struggle between different, sometimes opposing, sometimes allied, forces. An analytical tool used widely in higher education research to explain the complexity of this field of forces is a Burton Clark's triangle of coordination (1983, p. 136-181). In order to illustrate the processes of integration and coordination of higher education systems Clark used the field in the shape of a triangle with angles created by the state and bureaucracy, the market and mechanisms of competition and the academic oligarchy and the right to self-regulation of the scientific community. The situation is dynamic, and higher education institutions in the context of the national systems are played out and are playing within the field. They are rushed once to this pole, next time to the other pole, but a situation when the location can be clearly attributed to only one of them never occurs.

Although Clark's triangle of coordination has a number of shortcomings, and has been repeatedly modified or criticized, it recognizes the situation of the universities in the framework that exceeds the typical dualistic opposition between the state and the market. And that obviously provides enormous analytical benefits. We could of course point out the missing elements of the triangular field, such as the omission of coordination through stakeholder society (MAASSEN, CLOETE, 2006), social pressures, student politics or the politics of the common (HARDT, NEGRI, 2009) that is different from a corrupted form of the hierarchical government of academic oligarchy (CLARK, 1977). We could discuss whether the pole determined by the market and competition should be replaced or supplemented with the ideal type of coordination by capital, or to what extent nowadays we experience far reaching hybridization of coordination mechanisms of state and the market, in the so-called "steering at a distance" paradigm (MARGINSON, 1998). But this is completely separate discussion.

Coming back to your question, it seems that you have aptly pointed to the contemporary pole of attraction of the majority of academic institutions. The organizational structure of universities around the world, both public and private, increasingly resemble a more or less smoothly functioning enterprise. And even if they are not exactly like them today, the governments that coordinate the

systems are usually doing their best to transform them in this direction, as a part of numerous reforms, so that they will start to reflect this structure in the coming future. However, we need to make some reservations here. Marginson and Rhoades, more or less in line with this analysis, stated that “universities have not been reduced to businesses. If the profit motive has been inscribed in these not-for-profit entities, higher education institutions nevertheless continue to be many-sided entities performing a wide variety of roles for various constituencies. They are public and private, spanning the boundaries between these sectors and performing functions for each” (MARGINSON, RHOADES, 2002, p. 287). The question is therefore: why did this happen? It is precisely the fundamental contradiction of cognitive capitalism that in the context of the university (but also other sectors of immaterial production) the effective production of knowledge and education must involve a high level of socialization (to be embroiled in numerous networks and social ties) as well as the relatively high level of autonomy of the field or sector. However, such a change within the basic coordinates of exploitation does not push it aside. I think that these issues will become a little clearer when we go to the next step explanation.

In the abovementioned text by Marginson and Rhoades (2002) we find a breakthrough for the field at the time, that is a call for a more complex processes of analyzing higher education. The authors suggest that previous studies global dimension was underrepresented, so we should look at all the transformations through a glonacal perspective (that is, at the same time global, national and local), because universities are immersed, to a lesser or greater extent, in all three contexts at the same time.

Although it sounds seemingly paradoxical, the main idea behind the concept of “entrepreneurial university,” spread by Burton Clark (1998) was an attempt to create conditions conducive to the autonomy and empowerment of institutions of higher education. The institution which in a large extent depends solely on one method of funding (whether it is predominantly public and originating from the state, or is generated from private sources within the framework of market-mediated activity or whether its source lies in the wallets of private donors) is more vulnerable to turbulence and crises occurring at the source of this income. The idea was therefore first and foremost about creating a framework for the stability of institutionalized academic projects implemented by the academic faculty, or rather, Clark’s academic oligarchy. This is one of perspectives through which you can look at this passage at the local level. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) presented the transition to “academic capitalism” in the same terms. For them this is first and foremost an area of often spontaneous activity undertaken by the authority of local institutions of higher education or individual academics. It should be added that entrepreneurship is one of the ways in which institutions react, for example, when they face serious constraints on public funding.

At this point we enter the second level of analysis: the constant process of weaving the universities into the fabric of national economies by governments. Treating them as a kind of a tool for the realization of political goals which have come increasingly to be the promotion of economic growth. Also in this context, the rulers believe that the entrepreneurial university model, more than institutions focused on achieving and developing social goals, is the more appropriate tool to achieve these goals. In Latin America, where national and regional higher education development trajectories are underpinned by a more socially-oriented sets of assumptions, the incompatibility of this framework is probably much more socially inconvenient.

The third level of analysis is global. I believe that it is essential to pay attention to how the model of a large entrepreneurial research university was disseminated and made almost a project without an alternative. In the global landscape of higher education we deal with the processes of the formation of hegemony (MARGINSON, ORDORIKA, 2011), that resemble structures of economic and political hegemony, exercised primarily by Anglo-Saxon countries in the capitalist center. Currently, the most important mechanism of exercising hegemony in the area of higher education is global university rankings. They promote one uniformed model of the university, which is that of a large, mostly American, research university, with plenty of research-focused doctoral candidates and a small staff/student ratio, and not, for example, the *Universidad Autónoma de México*, a giant and socially embedded, state-building university (ORDORIKA, LYOD, 2013). The rankings are the core tool for the development of far reaching global institutional isomorphism (DI MAGGIO, POWELL, 1986). But this of course is only one of the contexts of this passage.

But why are rankings successful? Both policymakers responsible for the higher education system, as well as senior executives of universities are interested in possibly the most simple information about the position of the system or institution in the global, national or local field. This is one of the reasons why all kinds of rankings, comparisons and tables enjoy so much popularity. It is often believed that the tools used in preparing the rankings allow for objective measuring and comparisons in terms of the quantity of things and the aspects related to quality, that is excellence. This is of course one of the problems and a contradiction related to the use of this tool. However, this is, broadly speaking, the contradiction inherent in the capitalist mode of production and organization of social life itself.

The global market needs information. Roger King (2009) in his book looked carefully from just this angle at the compilers of global university rankings. Significantly he uses the term “embedded knowledge regulators”, an extension of the phrase “embedded knowledge networks” of the world of financial markets, coined by Sinclair (2005) for the need to discuss the major credit rating agencies (such as Moody's, Standard & Poor's or Fitch). He is interested in the issue of regulation, because it focuses primarily on analyzing the impact of governance

and the establishment of standards by the global rankings as a “form of private regulatory power” (KING, 2009, p. 154). He states that “university rankings particularly operate as ‘status-reproducing’ regulators for institutions at least as much as influencing prices and similar economic market values such as the commercialization of intellectual property” (KING, 2009, p. 154). The function of the rankings in the regulation of the academic field is similar, though not identical, to the functions exercised by rating agencies in the market economy.

However, in my perspective, processes of institutional isomorphism driven by the variety of agents operating at global, national and local level outlined above should be considered primarily as functional for contemporary processes of accumulation and valorization of capital. But that's another story.

**CIMEAC:** *There are market-oriented neoliberal approaches that see the university as an engine for a knowledge-based society. Could this mean a kind of “privatization” of public universities disguised by the expression of establishing “knowledge-based economies”?*

**KS:** Universities around the world are certainly objects of interest of the ruling classes. In many countries, the most common model of constructing the university under a neo-liberal reforms regime is that of a tool for the realization of government agendas (MAASSEN, OLSEN, 2009). These agendas, of course, are typically related to the economic sphere and the problems of its development and growth. We are dealing with a paradox which can be certainly seen more clearly from the perspective of neoliberal peripheral countries such as Poland (though, is not limited to them). As repeatedly stressed by the Polish Marxist of the younger generation, Jan Sowa (2015), today the erstwhile periphery are laboratories of economic policies and strategies that may soon be implemented in prosperous countries in the center. Therefore, it is from the margins or peripheries that we can learn much more about capitalist development today.

But let's get back to the issue. With all the vast and ubiquitous discourse on “knowledge-based economies,” saying that we are living now in the era when knowledge becomes a central productive force and so on, we see that, at least in the peripheral countries, the interest of capital and private companies in the production of knowledge or development of new technologies seems to be small or nearly non-existing. You can see it perfectly in a country like Poland. If we choose the region of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe as a point of reference it is Poland where we find the smallest share of private investment in research and development, locating the country far below the EU average. Therefore capital seems to be not interested in the transformation of science and higher education. Recently, even the director of Polish National Centre for Research and Development, the largest grant distributing agency in Poland, said it openly: no matter how confusing it is for the government, it is public science

nowadays that financially supports business in Poland, not the other way round. This stems, among other things, from the fact that Polish capital is concentrated mainly in small and medium-sized enterprises, which are interested solely in the exploitation of a cheap labor force. The same is true for foreign capital, which is the dominant player in the Polish economy. Here you can see that Poland is primarily an area of low-cost subcontracting, and this type of manufacturing does not require a comprehensive local system of research and development. However, so far, Polish universities, despite the accusations of the public and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, are satisfying the needs of capital perfectly.

I think this situation is perfectly depicted in a short film, prepared by the Polish Agency for Information and Foreign Investment. It is not particularly long, so try to watch it (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBbtig6-kFQ>). You will see how the Polish government and its agencies imagine what makes Poland attractive in the eyes of foreign capital. The main advantages that the country has to offer are thus its flexible students. Graduates produced at Polish universities will obediently work in a call center, that is tedious, schematic and monotonous work involving a high level of affective engagement. Moreover, they will do that with a smile on their faces and according to the rhythm of music played by capital. Pay attention to the words that the lady says during the video: “workforce productivity in Poland is increasing faster than salaries. As result, labor costs are one of the lowest in Europe.” There is hardly a more emphatic expression of the essence of the Polish economy based on knowledge.

So I would not agree that we are seeing a kind of “privatization” of public higher education. What we observe is rather a change of its functions and roles in relation to capital. They differ, of course, depending on the central or peripheral status of the system. At the same time it is worth noting that even Philip Altbach (2004) claims that within higher education systems of full developed capitalist economies of the center we can see the center and the peripheries. But most important, however, is that according to the intuitions of cognitive capitalism theorists, capital is not interested in the direct involvement in the organization and control of the higher education sector and science. The strong presence of the state in this area is clearly beneficial for capital. This is obvious especially in the area of production of basic knowledge and innovation, as Marianna Mazzucato (2013) showed recently. Production of new knowledge, that is of the key importance from the point of view of basic research innovation processes, is associated with a great deal of risks, uncertainties, experiments and the need for long-term investment. Capital is not at all interested in this kind of responsibilities. Therefore, I would say that under the guise of rhetoric of “knowledge-based economies” we observe not so much a “privatization” of public universities but their far-reaching subsumption under capital, which is extremely comfortable for capital and which allows for the privatization of profits and socialization of costs favored by neoliberals.

**CIMEAC:** *You're writing a book dealing with a theoretical convergence between higher education research and the idea of "the common" developed by Negri and Hardt, aren't you? How do you analyze the possibilities of this convergence in social research?*

**KS:** In the *University as the common. Foundations of critical higher education research* (SZADKOWSKI, 2015), which is the result of the work summarized in my PhD thesis, I present autonomist Marxism as an alternative to the theoretical frameworks currently used in research on higher education. Moreover, I discuss the theoretical tools developed in critical higher education research. My main problem is the inadequacy of the modern dualisms, like this of the private and the public, private property and public good, coordination through the mechanisms of state or market for study of contemporary higher education. The philosophical roots of this problem were discussed by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in the *Commonwealth* (2009). In contrast with their considerations of more or less universal relevance, my intention is to develop their thesis within the field of higher education research. I think that nowadays higher education research are poorly advised by the modern dualisms, but at the same time they are able to diagnose quite accurately the problems arising from their incompatibility with what is happening "on the ground".

Pointing at the reforms conducted in New Public Management paradigm higher education researchers emphasize hybridity, or the mixing up of what is public and what is private. It is stressed that today the state is responsible for installing the markets and quasi-markets in public higher education, or promoting models of knowledge production based on intellectual private property rights. It is in the context of this kind of action, post-operaist thinkers, such as Hardt and Negri, or Gigi Roggero, postulate an end of the productive dialectic between the public and the private, which means the end of a situation where the solution for market deficiencies or hyperactivity of capital may be far-reaching state intervention and vice versa. Mainstream higher education research only diagnoses the problem associated with the hybridization of public/private dichotomy, and then, as if nothing had happened, calls for the return to a strong public university. This leads us nowhere.

This theoretical clinch demands a reformulation. I believe that it is much better to analyze the current processes as a results of a broad conflict between capital and the common. Similarly, as in the case of post-operaist Marxism, the starting point for the thesis of the growing importance of the common in higher education is, already discussed above, the theory of cognitive capitalism.

The autonomist position has been well-defined recently, albeit in the context of research at the interface of education and technology, by Richard Hall, who said that: "the Autonomist position therefore offers mechanisms through which one might challenge, resist and push-back against the marketisation of

public education, indentured study and the hidden curriculum that asserts the primacy of value-for-money, impact metrics, productivity and efficiency [...] this tradition does help to reveal how the effects of such technologies across an increasingly global, social field like education might be inverted and resisted.” (HALL, 2014, p. 15) I think that the best way to sum-up the specificity of the critical higher education studies that I research and develop is to use, like Joss Winn and Richard Hall do, the modified operaist phrase: “in, against, beyond” capitalist university and academic labor subsumed under capital. It grasps the three most important elements of analysis that should always stay in balance. As Michael A. Lebowitz put it “*Capital* was Marx’s effort to make the proletariat conscious of its own conditions of emancipation” (2003). Without the demystification of capital’s forgery (transposition of general social productive power into power of capital itself) that it establishes during its development, there is, in no way, a possibility for any move beyond capital’s rule. Marx’s *Capital* was not only a moment in understanding of capitalism as an organic whole, but also the moment in revolutionary struggle of workers for emancipation. In higher education research, also in its critical counterpart, we usually face either complete ignorance of one of the parts of this theoretical-practical chain (“in-against-beyond”), or the insufficient development of all of them.

A particularly neglected part is this “beyond”, that is the specific indication of the possibility of exceeding the current organization of the university. I think that the common creates such an alternative horizon. It is also the ontological foundation of what the university, learning and knowledge production have always been and continue to be: the main driving force feeding parasitical capital.

**CIMEAC:** *There’s an analogy between the university and the factory based upon social and political components (forms of resistance and class struggle). The Brazilian public university system, for example, is still a place for the social, cultural and economic elite. Instead of debating social and political issues, the universities have been largely focused on the market. In this scenario, how do you see the production of “the commons”?*

**KS:** The first part of your question touches a very important issue. I do not know how it looks like in Brazil, but the phrase “university as a factory” has become quite popular in Poland as tool for criticism of the current relationships within the public higher education, a tool that, unfortunately, does not always produce politically and analytically fruitful results. It is very often used, especially in journalistic discourse, as a metaphor to describe the fall of the university. It evokes a barbarous state of industrialization that kills bygone excellence, trampling the temples of knowledge. This kind of conservative approach should be rejected at the very beginning.

However, looking at the educational institutions through the metaphor of factory has its own long history. Karl Marx in *Capital*, when trying to provide examples that labor under the capitalist mode of production is not only the production of material goods, and consists primarily of producing surplus value for the capitalist, gave an example from the sphere of immaterial production. He referred to the labor of a teacher as productive and conducted within the private knowledge factory.

In 1909, the apparent similarity between the burgeoning MIT and large companies prompted its president, Henry S. Pritchett, to consider experiments with Taylorist methods of management. At this point, the metaphor of the factory served actually as a model for the future practice of managing the university. Morris L. Cook (1910), a pupil of Frederick Taylor, just in few months, prepared a substantial report on the similarities and differences in industrial and academic methods of performance management by providing a number of recommendations and suggestions for managers of the university. However, the results of his research and analysis conducted have never been put into practice.

The year 1968 is the moment when student movements around the world began to use the metaphor of the university as factory for unmasking the dehumanizing conditions prevailing in universities. The university was seen as a massive factory that produce diplomas and unified students. Recognizing the factory or even machine-character of universities had consequences for the approach to the practice of resistance. Since the university functions like a factory or a machine, it is possible to stop its cogs, strike or to take over control. Many years later Harry Cleaver (2004) said that university-factory is similar in some ways to other factories, and Marxist analysis provides useful tools for understanding it.

Recently, a successful use of this phrase was made by transnational collective Edu-factory (2009). Members of the collective asked whether what once was the factory for industrial capitalism, the university is for cognitive capitalism of today? Can we see similar mechanisms of exploitation and control of labour within it? Can the university be an effective space of organization of resistance, similar to the factories of the industrial era? Finally, one of the leading representatives of the collective, Gigi Roggero (2011), said that although the metaphor of the factory university focus our attention on important aspects it is analytically insufficient. On the one hand, it highlights the directly productive aspects of the university (its centrality and functionality for the modern form of capitalism), and is able to identify the specific methods of organization, control and discipline of living labor within it (ROGGERO, 2011, p. 72). On the other hand, however, it is insufficient because it does not take into account the whole range of differences between Ford's factory and the university. I fully agree with him, although I think when it comes to the details we differ slightly.

I think that there are at least three analytically productive strategies to use the metaphor of the factory in the context of the university. The first strategy, let's



call it the “economic strategy” (or the perspective of “inside”), would treat the university-factory as a key sector in the development of cognitive capitalism, where certain kinds of labor would be subsumed under capital (in formal or real terms). Therefore, based on the method of critique of political economy we could look for mechanisms that capital uses to develop and strengthen its domination in the sector and to install its processes of accumulation, valorization and production of value.

The second strategy, which we might call the “political strategy” (or the perspective of “against”), will state that in terms of the topology of resistance, the university, analogously to industrial factories of the previous phase of capital’s development, is a place of spatial concentration of dispersed and rebellious mass of intellectuality or living knowledge. This type of reading will be interested in all the expressions of mobilization and resistance acts taking place in the higher education sector.

Finally, the third strategy would be a “strategy of the alternative” (or perspective of “beyond”), that takes attempt to conceptualize a model exceeding the limitations of capitalist entrepreneurial university while maintaining the potential it produced. It starts from the assumption that if the university has a key position in the contemporary economic system, we need to find a non-capitalist application that does not assume a return to its pre-capitalist feudal reality based on the corrupted form of the common.

While only the complementary use of these perspectives can provide analytically and politically fruitful results, it appears that all of them are somehow inadequate. The first obscures the public nature and, above all, public financing of higher education, and the fact that only a small part of higher education (in Europe even marginal) is formally profit oriented. It does not provide, therefore, an appropriate framework to explain the whole transformation processes in contemporary higher education systems. Moreover, the focus on individual institutions and the individual organization of labor within them, not only overlooks the systemic nature of exploitation, but also avoids confrontation with processes of a global character. The second strategy has a primarily political character and while it may appear to be functional in the context of mobilizing students and workers at the universities (which in the course of the history of numerous student protests often proved to be successful) its explanatory function is rather limited. The third strategy is primarily a tool for drafting an utopian horizon and scenario. All of them together focus on the local dimension of topologically concrete, particular institution and I think that nowadays this completely obscures the relations of exploitation that are taking place within higher education. It seems, however, that the critical intention behind of authors that use the metaphor of the university as factory still calls for further consolidation and this is certainly worth it. However, in order to achieve this we have to change the analytical framework a little bit.

As I mentioned in the answer to the earlier question, I think that the situation of universities should always be analyzed from the *glonacal* perspective; we also have to locate the fundamental conflict that takes place in higher education in the struggle between capital and the common. However, the dimension of the conflict, which could provide a key to understanding of a large part of the remaining elements of the process is first and foremost global.

Marginson (2002) recognizes that as a Weberian ideal type higher education is structured like a pyramid, at the bottom of which there is a large sphere of autonomously organized, day-to-day educational practices and processes of knowledge production. Further layers consists of all another activities, such as the struggle for status between institutions and individual researchers, market competition and finally, at the top of the pyramid, the capitalist market, although in recent texts he rejects the possibility of existence of purely capitalist markets in higher education (MARGINSON, 2013). What interests me is how these layers function and interact. And especially how this area at the very bottom, the area of production of the commons, is subsumed under capital and how it could be organized autonomously beyond its rule.

At the starting point I assume that the effects of all fundamental activities associated with the institution of the university (research, education and activities related to the so-called third mission) at the most basic, ontological level, take the form of the common. I mean that they are produced for sharing while keeping open, equal access, and their maintenance is usually carried out autonomously (managed democratically by the community involved in its production). It can be said, recalling at this point Robert Merton's observations, that not only science, but also the university as an institution is immersed in "communist" ethos, that is oriented towards the production, maintenance and self-regulation of the commons.

However, it is also useful to look who is on the other side of the barricades. In order to describe the consequences of involvement of universities in the network of economic relations I use the term coined by Richard Hall, namely "transnational associations of capitals" (2013). Based on the Stephen J. Ball's (2012) diagnosis that national public policy-making in relation to the education sector (including higher education) is dominated by "transnational policy networks", Hall noted that in a similar way we should approach the role of capital in the global higher education landscape. According to the post-operaist observation that in the era of cognitive capitalism capital is increasingly located outside the direct production process, referring also to the Marxian distinction between three basic types of capital, Hall pointed out three main components of the "transnational associations of capitals." He therefore distinguished between productive capital, or private for-profit universities and transnational for-profit activities of public universities and private not-for-profit, money capital, namely commercial banks offering student loans, and merchant capital, that is large multinational corporations, or, for example, large academic publishers.

Today the area of value creation in higher education is dominated by merchant and money capital. They are not necessarily interested in the direct control of the production process and the organization of the commons. Therefore, they are able to co-exist with or be based on the existence of a large public sector in higher education. What capital is up to – understood as a transnational associations of capitals – is the organization of the conditions of the capture of surplus value generated in the process of production of the commons. In the case of the sector of science and higher education on a global scale it is indeed a major effort. Capital is able to capture surplus only in so far as it is able to measure it. This process takes the form of an unbridled proliferation of the measures, criteria, global comparisons and rankings that invade the national systems of higher education systems nowadays under the banner of the struggle for maintaining the excellence of research and education. However, the common always exceeds these measures and is never fully covered by them. But that is the subject for a completely separate discussion.

To summarize our long conversation, I want to emphasize that today we face a huge challenge. The basic conflict within higher education is global, because capital acts globally. We can put an end to domination, exploitation, inequality and expropriation only by uniting in a struggle over borders of nation-states. This is the only way how we can bring to life the popular university of social movements (SOUSA SANTOS, 2011), or the university as an institution of the common.

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