HIGHER EDUCATION AFTER BOLOGNA
Challenges and Perspectives
CHAPTER 7

THE ANTINOMIES OF POST BOLOGNA HIGHER EDUCATION CRITICAL APPRAISALS ON THE “SOCIAL DIMENSION” OF THE REFORM

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This chapter seeks to reflect critically on the (indirect) effects of Bologna’s Process namely associated with the teleological orientation of what is taught and researched in high education institutions, as well as the impact of these debates in extra European countries like Brazil. Additionally it is discussed the presupposition of equality in the access and attendance of high education in the European higher education area and the issues associated with the so-called social dimension of the Bologna Process, either in a historical, or substantive perspective.
Introduction

Higher Education Institutions, especially Universities, have been playing and consolidating, throughout History, a crucial role in defining guidelines and models of social and scientific progress. The axiological pillars of modern societies, in particular, and the possibility they opened for the universalization of knowledge found, in universities, the essential mainstay for the promotion of Reason as the basic principle of social, political, scientific and economic organization, notably in the last three centuries.

Similarly, social transformations, *lato sensu*, have over time, in a more or less explicit or implicit way, determined a wide range of adaptations and changes in higher education institutions. These changes, however, did not call into question, at least until the last decade, the core values and organizational principles, which have historically legitimized the scientific and social role of higher education institutions, and, as such, have contributed to the consolidation of their identity. In fact, not neglecting the enormous diversity and pluralism that always existed between higher education institutions, in terms of organizational and structuring models of their teaching and research – diversity which is the translator of the heterogeneity of their own socio-political contexts and founding ideologies -, the University constituted itself as the bulwark of freedom (and, consequently, of pluralism) and of the supremacy of knowledge and science in the face of the determinants and needs of the market and politics. Knowledge held, therefore, a value in itself and not a utilitarian and cyclical value associated to functionality and employability criteria. The search for knowledge, entailing time for reflection, consolidation of ideas and sharing, was assumed as a premise of quality and construction of a consistent, consequent and coherent science. A science dissociated from assumptions of “excellence” proven
by: a) measuring what is produced, instead of the quality and importance of what is published and taught; b) the amounts of funding and “technification” of scientific research projects, instead of the prioritized appreciation of the relevance of their objectives and the effective impact they cause in terms of progression of knowledge and social relevance, and c) the publication of results, allegedly striking but quickly disseminated and quickly forgotten. Actually, results that only validate (in some cases) ratings and rankings (of higher education institutions and regions) based on impact criteria and rules that are, finally, defined by some organizations that wish to preserve their own favorable position on the rankings. Contemporary science seems to be, therefore, carried out in accordance with a kind of “contingent poietics”, if we consider the Aristotelian categories of human activity, as Michel Messu underlines (2015, p.77).

In fact, over the course of the last decade, it has become clear that the challenges faced by higher education institutions, following the so-called Bologna Process, are not only a set of organizational and functional readjustments but also, and above all, an axiological and normative transformation that tends to produce impacts on the identity of the institutions themselves and, consequently, on the teaching they provide and the science they develop (Gumport, 2000).

Within this scope, new values and principles, substantially different from the founders, seem to emerge in the “Bologna’s” context. Tapper & Palfreyman (2000) refer to the major challenges that higher education institutions face today, which cluster under what the authors designate by the three “M’s”: marketization, massification, and managerialism. In fact, at the heart of the Bologna process, the employability of graduates and the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European area are constituted as two of the basic and priority axes. To this end,