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THE ECONOMIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Almost ten years have passed since the reform of higher education in the Republic of Serbia, conducted under the banner of the Bologna process. This paper gives a critical insight into some aspects of changes which resulted in the economization of higher education in the Republic of Serbia, such as the establishment of private universities, ranking and market competition among higher education institutions, the management of universities and faculties in accordance with managerial principles, the issue of the ways of promoting professors to higher positions and the like. The idea to write a paper providing a criticism of some aspects of the economization of higher education is not new. In the last couple of years, a great number of journals and books have been published in the country, the region and abroad, in which authors tried to provide a critical insight into the current state of education in the context of the changes of educational paradigms. The subject of this paper is the economization of higher education in the Republic of Serbia and the analysis of the consequences that occurred in this field due to the spreading of the principles of neoliberal ideology. The final part of the paper emphasizes the fact that university professors need to have a critical attitude towards what educational policy has to offer. Through their intellectual work, a resolute and critical constructive analysis of what an educational policy has to offer, they need to stand up for universities as the driving forces of the highest academic education.

Keywords: education, higher education, university, economization of education

JEL Classification: I20, I21, I23

INTRODUCTION

Education has the social character and it shares the fate of the society. In the era marked by the glorification of the market and the neoliberal paradigm that has become interwoven with all spheres of social life, it stands to reason that the educational system must be observed in that context. For that reason, opening a debate on the position and role of higher education in the Republic of Serbia in the light of changes in the educational paradigms that have occurred in the past ten years in Serbia seems quite reasonable.

The idea that knowledge is the basic resource of the global economy became wide-spread when it was first introduced at European universities in the 1960s. Its strength continued to grow during the 1980s. In the past ten years, the application of the Bologna Declaration has initiated the idea to base the Serbian universities' programs on the above-mentioned

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principle. We are rushing to "McUniversity" (Parker & Jary, 1995) – "widely available and standardized service" (Dolenec, 2007).

The impact of neoliberal ideology in the field of education is manifested through the economization of higher education institutions. In the Republic of Serbia, this process started with the introduction of tuition fees and the opening of the first private universities and faculties. The modern era is characterized by university and faculty rankings at the international and national levels, the strengthening of a competitive spirit among the faculties and academic staff, the establishment of universities and faculties functioning as enterprises due to the fact that they are run in accordance with managerial principles. It can be seen that higher education is now based on business logic. "The key novelty within this university concept lies in the tendency to treat universities as enterprises that produce knowledge and sell educational and academic services on the free market" (Lolić, 2006, 122). In the past, the ideal used to be reflected in the transfer and acquisition of knowledge and competences and in the strengthening of human potentials. Nowadays, when we talk about the ideals and goals of education, we often use economic terms or "market lexis": efficiency, mobility, productivity, competitiveness, market.

The educational system is the key issue of the survival and efficient development of a society, which is why it is inseparable from the economic, political and cultural development. It would be unreasonable to view the educational system and educational institutions in isolation from the economic environment and its factors. Nevertheless, posing the questions at which point higher education becomes a type of business and what the consequences of such education are is quite sensible. If education is treated as a commodity, then it "as such, becomes less of the common good and a public affair, as it is traditionally defined, and more of a private matter and a traded commodity. In that concept, which occurs as a result of the current educational reform at all levels, students are turned into customers, consumers, faculties and universities become the producers and suppliers that advertise their commodities reflected in the programs for the production of high-quality professionals for the labor market" (Laušević, 2010, 11).

Reforms that started at the beginning of the twenty-first century brought about a wide range of changes in the structure of studies, the course content, the rationalization of the study plans and programs, a higher level of mobility etc. All these changes preceded certain positive changes in many fields of higher education. This paper focuses on the analysis of all these changes and their consequences stemming from the ideas of neoliberal ideology.

The subject of the research is based on the economization of higher education in the Republic of Serbia and the changes that occurred under the impact of the principles of neoliberal ideology and intensified after the application of the Bologna Process principles.

The aim of the paper is to provide a critical insight into the position of higher education in the Republic of Serbia, to point to certain negative effects of the economization of higher education and to stress the importance of the task given to academic staff and broader academic community – to act responsibly and give recommendations with respect to possible solutions.

The starting hypothesis of the paper is that the reform of higher education in the Republic of Serbia, guided by the European Education Concept, marginalized the primary humanistic and emancipatory dimension of education and reduced education to its economic dimension.

An additional starting hypothesis is that the system of higher education reducing education to economic laws and the values of quantitative and calculative nature cannot stimulate students to develop a critical thought of the problems inherent in their reality on the basis of long-lasting humanistic values and the ideals of education.

With respect to the subject, aim and the research hypotheses, the paper will attempt to synthetize the existing theoretical and empirical research of this problem. Starting from the specifics of the problem and the subject of the research, the description method will be applied.

On the basis of the subject, aim and research hypotheses, the first part of the paper will focus on

the concepts of education and educatedness in the contemporary society. The second part of the paper will provide a critical insight into some manifestations of the economization of higher education in the Republic of Serbia. It will also deal with the consequences of reducing the system of education to economic laws and values. The conclusion will point to the fact that university professors' reaction to different forms of degradation of higher education is necessary.

ON EDUCATION AND EDUCATEDNESS

Education and educatedness, in French: *formation* – education and *former* – educate: in German: *Bildung* – education and *Bilden* – educate: in Russian: *образование* – education and *образован* – educate: in English: education and educate (M. Ivković, 2004).

History proves that there is a wide range of thought on education and educatedness that have developed in the field of philosophy, pedagogy, psychology, sociology and later in economics. The category of education occupies an important place in the work of many representatives of social thought, including Plato, Aristotle, J. J. Rousseau, E. Durkheim, M. Weber, K. Mannheim, F. Znaniecki and many others. The initial thought on education focused on the values, virtues or ideas that an individual was supposed to adopt. Within that focus, the rich treasury of human thought was created, which was primarily oriented towards creating a man that could be described as good, noble and exalted (Flere, 1976).

A big shift in the field of education occurred when the science was given a new social role, particularly in the field of material reproduction. At that point, authors started connecting education, knowledge and economics and writing about the scientific-technological revolution that changed social relations. Some of these authors were J. Galbraith, M. Duverger, D. Bell, R. Aron, E. Crosland and P. Drucker.

P. K. Liessmann claims that education was the field from which people expected the most. "Education was the hope of the working class who believed that they could use knowledge to reach the power that the failed or absent revolutions took away from them; education was and still is the tool for emancipating and integrating lower classes, women, migrants, eccentrics, people with disabilities and oppressed minorities; education stands for the desired resource in the struggle for information society destinations; education is the tool for removing prejudices, discrimination, unemployment, famine, aids, inhumanity and genocide, the tool for overcoming challenges of the future, making children happy and preparing adults for employment" (Liessmann, 2009, 43).

Education has a social character and stands for an important factor in the process of social and human development. It has the humanistic, civilizing and emancipatory dimension, which makes it very complex. Plenty of factors exert an impact on the process of education in the modern society. These factors open the issue on the way of harmonizing the requirements of economic development and humanistic ideals in the field of education. During the 1980s, S. Flere (Flere, 1976) discussed this issue, which has remained relevant to this day.

The European Education Concept, guided by neoliberal principles, does not acknowledge the humanistic and emancipatory dimensions to a sufficient level and rather supports economic dimension of education. The Emancipatory and humanistic dimensions of education do not have a primary role any more. "For educated citizenry, education did not use to be the prerequisite of economic development but the value itself, whose adoption was supposed to be rewarded with social or monetary recognition" (Liessmann, 2009, 56). In his Metaphysics, Aristotle claims that the purpose of education cannot be found in its usefulness only. Education does have its useful value, but it must not remain its primary value.

The definition of education, on the basis of which education includes two structural elements, knowledge transfer and acquisition and the development of competences and habits, prevails in the sociological literature (Ivković, 2004). As a specific social process, education involves the state of educatedness in which an individual's relative totality (system) of general knowledge and expertise (truths), information, competences or skillfulness is at a relatively high level

in relation to a particular society and culture, which results in the creation of a comprehensive world view (Flere, 1976, 17).

Education is a complex and multidimensional process which results in a particular level of educatedness of an individual. Educatedness is expressed in the form of a particular sum of the general knowledge and expertise, competences, skills, talents and other characteristics that a particular individual possesses. However, people today identify their acquired knowledge with information they find on the Internet, in the magazines, newspapers, on television, sometimes in journals and rarely in books. Information that is quickly obtained is even more quickly forgotten. "It is to be expected that the crisis of education should coincide with the crisis of the printed media (books). The annual analysis of the work of higher education libraries in Vojvodina, issued by Matica Srpska Library every year, shows that, for example, the number of borrowed books in 2010 decreased by 45% in relation to 2007" (Nenadić, 2011, 76). Information must not be identified with knowledge. "Knowledge must be authentic, it must be obtained methodically, and it has a more permanent value than information" (Flere, 1976, 19). In the ever-increasing society of paradox, in which knowledge is presented as the resource of the future on a daily basis, it can be seen that education and knowledge "are falling at a breathtaking pace" (Liessmann, 2009).

Within that "frame of reference", a different or better situation in the Serbian educational system and therefore the system of higher education cannot be expected.

The ideal that Ortega and Gasset talked about was lost a long time ago. According to that ideal, the university is a place where an ordinary man can get the highest education, which is why the primary aim of the university should be to create a cultured man, lift him to the level of times and enable him to make judgments on the latest events so that he can become a responsible participant in these events (Uzelac, 2009, 69).

When Ortega and Gasset's ideal of professors and students replaces competitiveness, mobility, efficiency and productivity which stand for the final outcomes of higher education in the modern era, education and educatedness will get their true role. Until then, the economization of higher education will occupy their place.

ECONOMIZATION OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In October 2012, students put up a poster over the wall of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade on which it was written that Knowledge is nod a commodity! Those who dwelled upon the poster could realize that the situation was much more serious than these words could express.

The numerous changes that occurred when the principles of the Bologna Declaration were applied are evident. They affected the modernization of education. They also spurred the process of thinking about educational methods, goals and "the affirmation of quality in education" (Kulić, 2008). It stands to reason that reforms cannot produce the same results in all countries. Therefore, during the reform process, the respect of "the diversity of educational systems", reflected in the political, cultural, religious and other types of diversity, was required. This important fact resulted in the rationalization of study programs, the higher mobility of students and professors and the higher efficiency of studying.

However, all reforms, including the reform of higher education, are accompanied by certain negative effects. Therefore, a discussion on the other side of the reform process seems quite reasonable.

S. Žižek (Žižek, 2010) wrote about the second death of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, we are still under assault of neoliberal ideology, due to which the modern state withdraws from various spheres of social life, including education (Tripković, 1982). We can see that the market, as the mechanism of social resources distribution, manifests itself in the field of education through the economization of higher education institutions, i.e. through university and faculty rankings, the functioning of universities and faculties on the basis of managerial principles, the enrolment policy based on acquiring a profit etc.

Until ten years ago, the economization of higher education in the Republic of Serbia involved

the establishment of private universities and faculties. Nowadays, this is one of the segments of the economization in higher education which is expanding. On the basis of the report published by the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in February 2013, there are eight accredited state universities in the Republic of Serbia: University of Belgrade, University of Kragujevac, University of Niš, University of Novi Sad, State University of Novi Pazar, University of Priština, Kosovska Mitrovica, University of Arts in Belgrade, University of Defense in Belgrade. In addition, there are eleven accredited private universities in Serbia: Singidunum University, Megatrend University, Educons University, University Business Academy, Union University, Metropolitan University, Union University – Nikola Tesla, Alfa University, European University, Academy of Fine Arts, University of Novi Pazar.

In this *mélange* of institutions of higher education, there is a market competition which creates not only market problems, but structural problems as well. There is a whole range of undesirable consequences of this situation. S. Ivanović mentions the following (according to Đorđević, 2008, 835):

- The financial position of the family is the main factor in the selection of school (education), which results in the social reproduction through education;
- The choice of school (education) has a crucial effect on the choice of job, the amount of salary, the social status etc.
- These changes that occurred in the process of transition worsened the social structure and increased the self-reproduction of class structures etc.

A great number of universities and faculties create a wide range of new problems. One of the most significant ones is the problem of finding the teaching staff. It is believed that at the nineteen accredited universities and certain non-accredited universities in the Republic of Serbia, "it is not possible to have a high percentage of high-quality cadre (it is claimed that there is enough cadre for five universities)" (Avramović, 2012, 241). A certain number of professors from the accredited state universities work at some private faculties as well, in case this is in accordance with legal regulations. In this way, private faculties are enabled to accredit their studies.

Being part of the European Higher Education Area, our country adopted the Education Development Strategy up to 2020, which reflects that by 2020, the number of students will have increased from 6 to 20 percent. Some theoreticians claim that this will result in a further deterioration of the situation in the system of higher education.

That kind of environment is characterized by specific market competition in which all factors, including the state, private, accredited and non-accredited universities and faculties participate. The struggle fought every year in the period of entrance examinations among the state, private, accredited and non-accredited faculties over the number of enrolled students is becoming fiercer as the years go by. Since this struggle is conducted in accordance with the market principles, the faculties use all the benefits coming from the modern society, with the purpose of making their campaigns "more transparent". There are a great number of advertisements on television, in newspapers, on billboards, education fairs in which faculties promote their programs. Faculties' management teams often engage professional marketing agencies or marketing experts with the purpose of ensuring the best possible promotion of their faculties. Trained marketing teams sell their services in the field of education and offer education services in the way all other types of commodities are offered. Faculties' management teams tend to obtain the best ranking and the most competitive position at education fairs. For that reason, they are often busy making statistical reports on their quality, efficiency and modernity. All this supports the belief that knowledge is regarded as a commodity that is produced, packaged, advertised, sold and purchased. The academic community is the only one to pose the issue of the type of the background that future students bring to the faculty. Therefore, according to Lj. Mitrović, "today, universities educate one-dimensional experts… As a rule, these people have a technocratic and pragmatic orientation and are incapable of developing critical self-awareness. These cadres are imprisoned by professional narrow-mindedness, lack

a wide world view and critical relation to reality/ modernity" (Mitrović, 2011, 38).

Higher education cannot be viewed in isolation from the impact exerted by the market and the market laws. Management teams are forced to be market-oriented due to a high level of competition in the system of higher education. This is a logical result of the aforementioned situation. Nevertheless, marketing services should carefully be approached by educational institutions since a profit is not and must not be the final goal of education. Therefore, marketing services should be adjusted to the institutions of higher education.

Students themselves are the ones to whom education services are offered and promoted and they warn us that knowledge is not a commodity. As M. Uzelac points out, "the fact that education stops being education when it stops dealing with education in the original sense of the word, i.e. with the shaping and building of personality", must not be disregarded (Uzelac, 2009, 60).

Reforms in the structure of the educational system, plans and programs as well as the initiation of new strategies have the same goal: ranking must be improved (Liessmann, 2009). In 2012, the University of Belgrade was found on the Shanghai list of the world's 500 best universities for the first time. Moreover, universities in the Republic of Serbia are competing among themselves as well, with the purpose of obtaining the best possible position. For that reason, many faculties publish information on the best professor and associate on their websites, as well as information on where and to what extent their professors and associates publish their academic papers, data on the categories of those journals, information on the most cited professors or associates etc.

Competition among the universities and faculties exists on the international stage as well. The greatest rivalry exists between the two world's leading university ranking systems – British (THES – Times Higher Education Supplement) and Chinese (SJTU - Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities). Universities and faculties are competing among themselves with the purpose of obtaining the best possible position within the Shanghai ranking system, Webometrics list and many other lists. For example, the first place has for a long time been occupied by unrivalled Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Berkeley, Cambridge, California Institute of Technology, Princeton, Columbia, University of Chicago and Oxford.

In the process of constant assessment, ranking, counting, testing and evaluation, it is questionable whether anyone can pose the issue of the evaluation of the work of professors, associates and other academic staff on the basis of their reputation, responsible work, educational ethics, publication activity and recognition by their colleagues. It seems that again we are stuck in E. Fromm's dilemma between "to have and to be".

What matters the most in the work of a university professor is the quality and number of their published academic papers and projects. This work must be evaluated objectively by leading experts in a particular field. It has to be done on the basis of the evaluation rules standing for the basis of a university professor's further progress. However, the quantity of a professor's work expressed in points and diagrams is what is often evaluated today. The category of the journal in which the paper is published and the number of points a professor obtains by publishing a paper in a particular journal is the only thing that matters. For that reason, it is necessary to open a debate on the publishing of papers in some scientific journals that charge the "costs" of publishing. It is a well-known fact that a lot of journals with a high impact factor on the SCI list charge the costs of publishing, pay for reviews, check the originality of papers and add a bibliometric dimension to the published papers. Since many professors and associates publish their papers in the so-called "predatory journals", i.e. journals belonging to the SCI list, charging the costs of publishing but not adding the bibliometric dimension to the papers, is it justified to ask for the price of obtaining the academic title in Serbia?

Opening a public debate on this problem and many other painful issues regarding higher education in the Republic of Serbia would seem quite reasonable. All scientists must engage in the public, objective and critical evaluation of the problems in the field of science since they are not bureaucratic workers supposed to blindly obey the rules when they know the rules do

no good. Scientists stand for the intellectual force of the society and should be supported by the academic community in the process of solving the current problems for the purposes of forming a better and more responsible society.

It can be concluded that "in the past, politics used to strive towards exerting an impact on the internal organization of universities, whereas today, it is the market that does that. Universities marginalized their primary educative and critical functions, as well as their principle of existence, autonomy, thus becoming just another element on the market" (Popović, 2008, 104).

One of the primary requirements of the reform of higher education system, led under the banner of the Bologna Process, is the higher mobility of students and professors. We are witnesses of a plenty of scholarships offered to students and professors directed towards the continuation of education and the professional development of teaching and non-teaching staff in the European Union countries and America. Erasmus Mundus, DAAD and Fulbright are some of a wide range of scholarships on offer. This situation has resulted in the opening of the international higher education market. "Thus, countries such as the USA, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Holland and Germany sponsored the education of students from the third world countries in their advanced higher education systems. The significant stimulus to the spreading of Western universities at the global level, especially across countries in development, where the needs for education are constantly increasing, lies in the fact that, due to their large population, these countries are regarded as the unlimited resources of students and revenue. The population of the most developed countries in North America, Europe and Asia is becoming older, whereas countries in development in Asia, Africa and Latin America are characterized by a young and increasing population. Nowadays, there is a striking imbalance between educational needs and educational capacities" (Radinović, 2011, 112).

Finally, if the economization of institutions is taken into consideration, the issue of the functioning of universities on the basis of managerial principles with the purpose of reducing costs and increasing profit should be brought to light. Management teams are constantly trying to engage their own efforts or professionals from the field of management with the purpose of reviewing the achieved level of expertise, forming internal quality control commissions and making new management models.

The need for improving the quality of studies at institutions of higher education has never been questionable. However, a special focus should be placed on the way of achieving that. We can see a great number of commissions starting to lose their primary function and becoming bureaucratic commissions establishing new rules and procedures.

"Thus, the modern reform of higher education – "in accordance with the Bologna Process" – gave birth to a wide range of "commissions" and "bodies" having their own "prerogatives" that make decisions on the important matters regarding educational processes without consulting professors simultaneously creating and transferring knowledge. Leaving the teaching and academic "staff" on the margins in the process of deciding on the organization of educational institutions or the teaching process within these institutions creates a disharmony and a gap between the content of education and its organizational form" (Milošević, 2011, 168).

Unfortunately, as D. Bok points out, the commercialization of higher education institutions can be seen to be the shape and content of education as well as the role of university staff in a regrettable way (Derek Bok, 2003). Many consequences have already become visible, but people constantly try to disregard them. The process of accreditation freed the courses from "unnecessary knowledge" on the basis of the exact number of pages a professor can cover during a school class. The literature needed for the preparation of exams has been minimized whereas the evaluation of knowledge that students should adopt and understand has been reduced to mere testing, whose results are expressed in points. All this has been done with the purpose of reaching efficient, productive and competitive higher education. The economic aspect made people forget that education is based on its own long-lasting humanistic values such as knowledge seen as a value, justice, freedom, the equality of people and the like. "Education, as one of the greatest goods, offers the possibility of becoming

honorable, developing the sense of the good, real, just and beautiful" (Gvozdenović, 2009, 62).

Education is driven by humanistic ideals reflected in knowledge transfer and acquisition and the strengthening of human potentials, which is why it cannot be reduced to the market and economic laws. Due to its quantitative and calculative nature, the market cannot reflect the humanistic values and ideals of education without impoverishing them.

Everything that has been mentioned so far is aimed at confirming the starting hypothesis on the basis of which the higher education system reducing education to the economic laws and values of a quantitative and calculative nature cannot stimulate students to examine the problems of the society which they live in critically on the basis of the long-lasting humanistic values and ideals of education. That is the greatest consequence of the economization of higher education.

Speaking about the consequences of corporate values in the process of education, "Richard Hofstadter recognized the dangers of corporate values in the process of education and claimed that the best reason for supporting higher education institutions should not lie in the services that they could deliver but in the values that they represent. Values of justice, freedom, equality and the rights of people as equal and free human beings are of key importance for the role that higher education has in the process of educating students on management, social citizenship and public democratic sphere" (Aronowitz and Giroux, according to Baatjes, 2005, 116).

CONCLUSION

Starting from the analysis of the visible consequences of the economization of higher education which marginalized the basic humanistic values inherent in education, the paper provided a critique of the current educational policy and the passive position of university professors in the process of higher education reform.

The issue of the university reform in the Republic of Serbia should again be the focus of the academic community. The higher education reform is desirable, but what is also needed and left to be accomplished is the development of a critical attitude towards what is offered. Many faculties failed to develop this critical relation at the start of the "Bologna Reform", i.e. during the period of the harmonization, changing, and accreditation of plans, programs, modules and the like.

The higher education institutions are in the process of reaccreditation. Enough time has been given to the process of recognizing the good sides and weaknesses of the previous accreditation. This is the right moment to change everything that has proved to be unreasonable in the past few years.

The first thing that should be done is setting the clear goals of higher education. The clear goals of higher education form the shape of education that should be strived for and on the basis of which students, the future intellectual elite of the society, should be educated.

The Education Development Strategy up to 2020 that the Serbian Government has adopted is based on the premise that "the educational needs of Serbia, stemming from the assumed choices and further development of the Serbian production system, must be based on knowledge, the entrepreneurship of the educated population, their own and transferred technological innovations, the market economy and international business, technical and other types of cooperation. Therefore, the concept of the "entrepreneurial university" should be supported so that these universities could become the nuclei of the creation of new industries based on knowledge. All higher education institutions should focus their teaching process and projects on the training of students for the development of innovations and entrepreneurship" (Education Development Strategy up to 2020, 2012, 123).

If we agree with the goals set before higher education institutions, a debate on the economization of education makes sense.

However, the "entrepreneurial university" and "knowledge for the labor market" are not and must not be the goal of education towards which all higher education institutions strive. Now is the perfect moment for the university staff to use their knowledge and competences with the purpose of redefining the

goals of education. This process requires a higher level of political engagement and a more decisive intervention on the part of intellectuals, professors, students and civil society, as well as the development of the critical thought of all citizens (Baatjes, 2005).

This recommendation opens a debate on the ways of defining the goals of higher education which should be balanced in relation to the modern standards at European universities and which should focus on the improvement of higher education in accordance with the needs of a democratic society without renouncing the long-lasting humanistic and emancipatory values of education. This issue might become the subject of future scientific and practically useful studies.

The aim of this issue is to motivate university professors to a further debate on the current state of higher education in the Republic of Serbia, along with a proposal for reading The Code of Ethics of the Education Profession, which contains the set of ethical principles, rules and duties that the academic community should follow (www.kg.ac.rs/Docs/etickikodeks.pdf.).

Finally, it should be mentioned that numerous issues related to the economization of education and the uncritical acceptance of trends in higher education have remained open. These might become the subject of future studies or public debates.

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