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Participatory Democracy in Higher Education in International Perspective

based on intellectual and cultural subistence production as resistance and alternative to the subsumption of education, sciences and culture under corporate capital and the capitalist state

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I

History in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century shows that movements for participatory democracy and self-government in education, culture, the sciences and profession need a politico-economic foundation within or at the margins of the dominant capitalist economic system and its political regimes allowing for a limited independence. Otherwise these spheres of cultural and intellectual production and reproduction will be dominated, exploited and integrated or subsumed completely into capitalist accumulation under the rule of economic and political power elites.

In the European past there have been pre- and proto-capitalist economic foundations for education, culture and science: at first, the princely and aristocratic courts and feudal and ecclesiastical regimes of exploitation, then the emergent bourgeois class linked to commercial capital and the early modern territorial state. Marx speaks of professions and sciences as being based in ‘ständisches Kapital’, allowing for a limited and only formal subsumption under the rule of capital and the capitalist state. The early approaches and experiments with participatory democracy and self-governance in education, academia and the professions were linked to bourgeois elites and status groups and movements for a limited and male self-government and civic rights and were based on philanthropic foundations and on the tax money of cities or a few partly democratic states, like the establishment of the land-grant colleges, city universities and even negro colleges after the North-American Civil War as well as a number of city universities based on foundation and tax money in Britain and in Germany (Frankfurt/Main, Hamburg). In Prussia only one of the philosophers advocating university reform, Friedrich Schleiermacher, drafted a programme for academic self-government similar to municipal self-government. (cf. Nitsch et al. 1965, pp. 18-28). A parallel but different approach to participatory democracy or self-government in higher education developed in many Latin American countries, where the professors as part-time lecturers were linked closely to academic professions. Thus, an early model of tri-partite self-governance of universities by professors, alumni and students emerged as part of
a broader movement of intellectuals and workers for radical democracy and against the post-colonial corrupt upper-class, dictatorships and US-imperialism (International Student Conference 1961).

A paradox and ambivalent case of participatory democracy in academia developed in Berlin during the hot phase of the cold war, in 1948 when anti-fascist and anti-stalinist reeducation officers in the U.S. forces and the Ford Foundation joined with students and young scholars who seceded from the Humboldt University in the Soviet Sector of Berlin in order to establish a Free University in the US-sector, based on an alliance of these students, professors and representatives of the City in West-Berlin. Thus, the first university with full student participation in all governing bodies was established and became a provocation for the mostly conservative and Nazi professors in West-Germany’s universities during the fifties and sixties. I have been an elected member in the student self-government and a student journalist, first in my school in the fifties and then in the Free University in the early sixties, as well as an activist in the German Socialist Student Federation (SDS), when we drafted a programme for a radical reform of higher education (“Hochschule in der Demokratie, publ. in 1961). We started campaigns for student self-government and independent student research and education and were involved in establishing a Critical University on campus run by the student governments in West-Berlin for two years in 1967/68. (Leibfried 1967). We also started an exchange of experiences with student governments in Latin America and the U.S. and especially with our counterpart organisation in the U.S., the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), part of a radical and antiracist movement for Civil Rights and Industrial Democracy, a socialist organisation established before World War I (Upton Sinclair and Jack London were among their members. Cf. Altbach 1974).

Many American and West European student associations had discovered that they needed an independent financial or economic foundation and they established networks of mutual support and self-reliance and student unions with cooperative ventures of and for students (food coops, student media and learning material coops) and cultural and tutorial services for students. This partly became one of the roots of the broad movement for using universities and student unions for support and incubators for a solidarity and cooperative sector of the economy mainly in Latin America in recent decades (cf. Altvater 2005).

II

There are very different historical and more current roots of theoretical political and economic concepts of participatory democracy in education, culture, the sciences and professions.
(1) Syndicalist and anarchist theories of workers’ co-government and self-government within a mixed economy or trans-capitalist economy extended to intellectual and cultural producers (Geistesarbeiter) and their alliance with industrial and agricultural producers (emerging in the twenties and influential most prominently in Republican Spain until 1936 and in Yougoslavia after World War II).

(2) Radical democratic theories of civil rights and a democratic decentralisation of government, strengthening self-government of municipalities and other public corporations like those of the professions and of private and public employees (Arbeiter-und Angestellten-Kammern), extended to universities, schools, academies, hospitals, theatres – the Austrian Hochschülerschaft seems to be an example.

(3) Anti-capitalist and radical eco-feminist theories of the liberation and extension of subsistence production based on the non-capitalist moral economy of cooperatives, households, self-reliance networks, women movements, extended also to intellectual and cultural production for the common good and welfare (Cf. Mies 2009).

(4) A more moderate, liberal concept of extending the model of self-governance of the professions to the self-government of universities including limited student participation or even to schools with parent-and-learner participation as part of broader liberal movement for limiting state intervention and for civil governance of free markets, however de facto also including lobby work in the interest of professional oligopolies.

(5) A conservative Christian paternalistic concept of protecting the rights of and activating groups depending on subsidies of the welfare state in order to participate in self-assistance practice, applied to families, recipients of welfare aid and also to students who are depending on support.

(6) Finally new advanced strategies of corporate and public management by negotiation, contracting and self-responsibilities of employees and self-employed workers as entrepreneurs or intrapreneurs of their services, advocated as participatory governance within a democratic society and as a counter-movement against authoritarian models of fordistic industrial management.

Parallel to these alternative politico-economic paradigms for participatory democracy in academia three completely different concepts have been voiced, all referring to conflicts or differences between older and younger generations of intellectuals and/or generations of technologies affecting intellectual work:
(7) In the aftermath of revolutions, wars and civil wars many of the young soldiers surviving and coming back as partly wounded or traumatized veterans do no longer accept or tolerate to be treated like infants or dependent pupils in vocational and higher education by members of the old elites who have been involved in staging these wars or oppressive regimes. Therefore these young veterans and also partly their younger brothers and sisters advocate and work for student self-governance and independent peer education (In fact in my case, being a so called war-orphan added to my motivation for revolts against the old ex-Nazi elites).

(8) Secondly, in times of semi-apocalyptic catastrophes endangering the future of the younger generations, like the holocaust and other attempted genocides or the imminent nuclear warfare during the cold war, young intellectuals voiced their radical distrust and rupture with the ruling academic and political elites and their extremely dangerous knowledge and technology systems responsible for or involved in these catastrophic or dangerous developments, and some gave this as reason for their struggle for student self-government and co-government in colleges and universities (cf. United States National Student Association 1961). In my case again, I participated in the civil disobedience campaigns against nuclear armament in the early sixties in England and West Germany.

(9) Finally we could argue today that a new type of informal or diffuse participatory democracy is spreading or even exploding already through the new worldwide web and related ‘generations’ of advanced communication technologies connecting intellectual and cultural producers especially of the younger generation outside the established oligopolistic institutions and undermining the control and ownership claims of privileged academic managers. But at the same time this seems to work as an outlet of steam from a steam-box under pressure and it is already exploited by a new type of enterprises (harvesting profits from the free software movement and adding crowd sourcing to outsourcing). And it serves as a pretext for blocking democratic participation inside schools and universities.

III

Comparing these different approaches and paradigms of participatory governance and democracy it should be clear that most of them rest on different assumptions or interpretations in critical or in mainstream politico-economic theorizing on what kind of value production and / or resource consumption education, culture, the sciences and professions are based or should be based on. On a fairly abstract level of reasoning we can conceptualize that these processes and practices can either be seen as completely unproductive when and in so far as they do not commonly add anything to capitalist value
generation directly or they can be understood as productive in the sense that they contribute to the common wealth and to the personal development of individuals and their relationships and communities, depending on whether we apply the principles and criteria of the first or capitalist economy or of the second, the common wealth or moral economy. Theorists of eco-feminist economics and subsistence production speak of the struggle between the two economies (Cf. Mies 2009, Altvater 2006).

It is important to be aware that by defining and labelling a particular practice as being only unproductive and consuming private and public resources or being an risky investment in non-transparent future rewards – articulated as part of a self-evident dogma believed by a dominant majority- the people involved in these practices will internalize this and shape their activities more and more in such a mode even if the dominant definition is not valid and they thus mis-interpret their own living practice.

If nearly everybody tells a student his or her learning practice is only a transfer (into his/her brain) of knowledge and well defined skills produced somewhere else, by experts and collected in information media and that it has to be saved and rest until, just in time and on demand, by an entrepreneur (or herself/himself as entrepreneur), it may be applied and absorbed in some value-adding practice, then this student will believe he or she is only the recipient of a knowledge and skills transfer and he or she will start to behave in a particular way that deforms and reduces his or her capacities of active and creative practice and relationships with collaborators.

If, in contrast to this, in a particular social minority context this kind of hegemonic thinking and deformed practice is questioned and substituted by an opposite interpretation and practice, a student belonging to this milieu will act accordingly. If the student’s work is recognized and valued as productive activity, adding to the resources and public goods of the commons and to personal development and wealth, then this student will become more active, innovative or creative and will collaborate with peers and will create social relationships challenging non-innovative and monopolistic practices limiting productivity for the common or personal good.

However, today students are also confronted with a paradox and schizophrenic pressure and double-bind message: on the one hand students are told that they have to look for some income for their cost of living, accommodation and transport, and because they have to pay fees for consuming knowledge and services as recipients or clients of an educational enterprise and its teaching and managing employees, in order to get a license for becoming a productive practitioner in a distant and risky future. On the other hand and at the same time they are told that according to psychological research and theorizing learners are...
constructing their knowledge and work for internalizing and exercising competences and that input of information is not creating knowledge and competences, and in addition they are told that they have to be active entrepreneurs of their own learning process and their capabilities in saving and marketing their knowledge and competences – however without generating any income from it.

This schizophrenic situation can be characterized as a role-back to pre-modern capitalist times when un-free labourers were forced because of their low status to work without salary for a feudal lord or the church and at the same time had to reproduce themselves by subsistence production for their mere survival. In fact the private or public enterprises employing or paying for the services of educated and licensed professional practitioners are privileged to be exploiters not only of the current work of these practitioners within or for their enterprise, but they exploit also seven types of other work processes through which the capabilities, knowledge and competences of the practitioners have been generated and which have been enabled from other resources:

(1) the upbringing, care and education work in their parental families, mainly by mothers, based on their parents’ social and cultural capital,
(2) the care and social support they got and get as adults in their relationships with partners and friends,
(3) the support they received from their peers and peer communities and from the social relationships they participated in,
(4) their own personal work in co-producing their own knowledge and competences and co-producing research processes and research results,
(5) the voluntary extra-care and support they got from some of their teachers beyond their formal duties,
(6) the teaching and management work of teachers and scholars employed in schools and universities (paid from public tax-based funds) for co-producing the knowledge and competences of the students and future practitioners,
(7) the work processes generating the income from which the cost of living, accommodation and transport of the student are paid, contributed mainly by parents or/and, through jobs of the students and only secondary from philanthropic and public funds.

All these categories of work going into the production of a competent and knowledgeable young professional are never compensated for by the future employers or clients. And since the people contributing with their reproduction or subsistence production work to the development of these professionals are anticipating this, they will reduce and limit their engagement and feel ambivalent about it. Especially parents will put pressure on students to go into more profitable careers in order that their support can be limited or even compensated.
Partly in response to such a critical analysis student unions and associations, especially the French UNEF (in their Manifesto of Lyon 1946) put forward radical programmes for financing vocational and higher education (Morder 2006). Based on a system of progressive income taxation the state should pay a so-called pre-salaire to all students in secondary and tertiary education and training, thus substituting at least for the volume of salaries and other remuneration their future public and private employers or their clients would owe to them for their work as learners, apprentices and students producing the knowledge and competences needed and thus indirectly compensating their families and peers for their contribution. At the same time this would liberate both the learners or students and their parents and peers from struggling about the sense and the rewards expected from their education in order to compensate for the support given and received. The SDS included this in the programme of 1961 as the advocacy for a ‘Studienhonorar’, cf. in detail Nitsch 1965 and Leibfried 1967).

Even though this programme sounds utopian, considerable parts of it have been realized in many countries: employers pay a kind of presalaire to apprentices or trainees, partly based on a levy collected by the state or chambers of industry and commerce, Scandinavian countries, Britain and Canada have or had systems of financial aid for students and high school learners excluding only those from very wealthy families.

As a consequence of these programmes, defining or understanding learners and students as responsible co-producers of their own knowledge and competence and of their mutual contributions in peer collaboration, as young intellectual and cultural workers, student unions advocated with more legitimate arguments that students as co-producers should be entitled to self-government of a part of their work process (extending the work of student governments on the department level) and to co-government of their cooperation with teachers and academics, partly in the same manner as workers should co-determine the management in public and private enterprises In addition this would enrich their capabilities and competences in managing cultural and intellectual collaboration, public discourse and networking with civic groups within a democratic society.

IV

Now, you may ask what about our present situation in European higher education which is characterized by a hegemony of neo-liberal ideology and internalized oppression or clear-cut oppression without cultural hegemony, of millions of learners, students, apprentices, interns, volunteers getting no
remuneration for their living, transport and accommodation, let alone a salary or pre-salary in exchange for all their useful intellectual and cultural work? (Cf. Nitsch 2005).

In such a situation, I think the following practices and strategies of action are important:

(1) You or we should insist on your own intellectual and cultural counter-hegemony in defining your valuable contribution to society and your identity as intellectual and cultural producers, who however are systematically exploited in multiple ways and treated like dependent infants or like housewives or to some extent even like intellectual house-slaves in the Roman empire.

(2) Secondly, it is decisive to struggle, even with civil disobedience, for limiting the time spent for enforced intellectual slave-work and for working in de-qualified and dependent jobs for your livelihood, in order to create locations and times for your self-determined intellectual and cultural subsistence work, shared with peers and related to the cultural and intellectual commons or Allmende. You have developed survival skills in creative subversive time management and in intellectual civil disobedience, for instance by informally re-defining academic tasks and channelling resources into intellectual subsistence networks.

(3) Thirdly: do not go into individual retreat or isolation, but try to create stimulating examples of collective or cooperative subsistence work within or beyond schools and universities like in the case of the collaborative incubator centres for establishing and supporting cooperatives as part of a second economy of solidarity and subsistence in many Latin American countries.

(4) Finally, part of the independent intellectual subsistence work should be focussed on criticizing, analyzing and evaluating mainstream research and education, in order to learn from relevant results even though they are produced under perverted conditions of work and connected with problematic and dangerous objectives and interests.

For all these liberating and independent practices you will find valuable examples and pioneering models in the past in many countries: from the early attempts at establishing free urban medical and law schools like in Bologna in the 12th century, partly free from the authority of Pope and Emperor (Prahl/Harzbach 1981), to the bourgeois critical clubs and salons in the age of the enlightenment, to the democratic parliament of students and young scholars during the German revolution in 1948, to the experimental liberal arts colleges and free schools during the American progressive education movement, to underground circles or apartment universities during Nazi occupation and under Stalinist rule, to the Free and Critical universities or independent socialist study
programmes emerging as part the student and peace movements in the sixties and seventies in Berkely, New York, Paris, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Berlin and other places, followed by the independent study centres and summer schools and resistance camps of the new social movements and the movements against capitalist globalization, warfare and workfare today.

V

But in addition to these struggles and practises of alternative intellectual subsistence work other campaigns and limited alliances for more pragmatic and partial reforms within the system should be staged. Let me name a few examples:

- programmes for creating far more educational and managerial payed jobs for students on campus: for assisting in research, tutorials, guiding peer-projects, moderate e-learning and e-communication; work in practice-internships; thus the status of students as proto- or pre-professionals or practitioners could be extended and the timetables and workloads and time limits for study programmes would have to be adapted;
- in connection with such a new emerging status of students as co-producers the competences and programmes of student governments, especially on the departmental level could be extended into the role of a co-provider of student education and student-research including networking and exchange with departmental student projects in many other campuses or in virtual intellectual communities;
- as a consequence, more non-earmarked funding from different sources could be raised (from trade unions, NGOs, foundations, non-profit enterprises) for independent supplementary study programmes and student research projects.

Measures and activities like these - from civil disobedience and subversive time and workload management to academic job creation for more and more students during or parallel to their course work to funding for independent student research and study programmes - should result in a gradual, step-by-step shift –

- from the status of the students as dependent and fee-paying consumer and client to that of a part-time employed assistant or tutor in peer-education and student-research,
- from corporate capital and state domination of intellectual work and learning to more intellectual and cultural subsistence work,
- from dominance of the older generation of academics in management and teaching to more jobs and impact of younger scholars and student tutors,
- from a fusion between academic research entrepreneurs with corporate capital and government research centres to more cooperation and partnerships of students and younger academics with a diversity of NGOs and social movements (cf. for similar programmes put forward in 1990 by the GEW and in: Nitsch 1991).

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