Unintended consequences from the mass participation in higher education: A Global sociological perspective

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Introduction

• The rapid growth and expansion in higher education should be seen beyond ideological lenses that revolve around the discussion of neoliberalism.

• A realistic approach sees the expansion of higher education and mass participation as a pragmatic response to a growing market demand.
• There are at least two aspects of this expansion.
  a) the development of a **private sector** in higher education
     • framework
     • social conditions within which this growth takes place
  b) the parallel development of **public institutions with market conditions**
     that usually refers to the imposition of tuition fees
     • transfer of part or all of the cost of studies to the beneficiaries rather than the taxpayer.
Questions

• To what extent can the expansion of higher education be regarded as a legitimate field of economic development?

• What are the unintended consequences of the expansion of higher education?

• To what extent do existing social inequalities persist, thereby limiting what can be achieved through education, in terms of promoting social justice?

• How is Brain Drain affected by the extension of higher education?
Policies for expansion of Tertiary Education

• The widening participation in higher education is an important component of educational policy in Europe during the last decades.

• Widening participation in higher education in most European societies is associated with
  "the economic necessities created by global competition, technological changes and the challenges of the knowledge economy, AND the shift in focus on individual responsibility, self-improvement, employability and social inclusion."
• According to the Council of Europe
  "the goal of securing increased and wider access to education is a means to
  fulfil the hopes and aspirations, providing a means for social mobility at a time
  when economic inequalities widen."
Importance of Higher Education

• Higher Education is extremely important both at the societal but also at the individual level.
  • Societal level → ensuring high quality human capital that can form the basis for high performance economic activity
  • Individual level → a necessary ingredient for finding a high-paying job and ensuring the perspective for a comfortable lifestyle and social mobility
Unintended Consequences

• The term was introduced by Robert Merton in his book "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action" (1936).

• Merton applied a systematic analysis to the problem of unintended consequences of deliberate acts intended to cause social change.
• In our case, even though the overall intention of policy makers was to enhance countries’ human capital capacity in the end it produced at least two outcomes:
  • **New Forms of inequalities** which are not based on exclusion
  • **Brain Drain**
Social mechanisms that explain persistent social class inequalities

• Central to an analysis on class inequalities in education is the vital role of the family and its resources in educational processes.

• Since the 1970s Bourdieu’s concepts of “habitus,” “field,” and “forms of capital” have helped sociologists examine class inequalities within the educational system’s cultural and symbolic processes.
• The covert workings of social class advantage and disadvantage (through the direct or indirect effects of capitals and resources relevant to educational outcomes) make sociological research into these effects timely and important.

• “Social class” may not appeal to the neo-liberal narrative, thus casting as outmoded sociological research that focuses on social class differences.
The Role of social Class: Is it still relevant?

• The family diversifies its various forms of capital that are available to its young members and provides them with real and symbolic resources which affect their life opportunities in the social arena.

• The presence or absence of these familial resources shape specific forms of discrete habitus that is present in the decision-making process at the end of secondary education when dealing with relevant dilemmas and various available choices.

• The middle/ professional class has the potential to capitalize on their capital more efficiently and additively performing what Bourdieu (1986) has described as the conversion of one form of capital into another.

• Thus, the middle classes often make choices for higher education within broad horizons for action whereas the respective choices of the lower social classes seem to be made within restricted horizons.
• The ratio of students coming from upper-classes in universities compared to lower-class students is 8 to 1 (England and France), 7 to 1 (Belgium and Norway) and 5 to 1 (US).

• These are often the outcome of the differences in their values and norms shaped by previous experiences. Often to succeed working class children must adapt to the "culture of success" that characterizes the middle class.

• This implies that schools are institutions of the middle class and that success means compliance with the values of the middle class.

• So "success" is not only related to social class but to whether parents socialize their children to the values of the middle class.
• The massification in the participation to higher education seems to have shifted the interest to another framework.

• Nowadays inequalities are not the product of exclusion from higher education but are found in the **unequal pattern of choices** regarding where one has his/ her studies (symbolic capital) and in which field.
Social justice model
Social inequalities
Does mass participation in higher education have positive effects for all?

- From what we saw earlier in many countries, official statistics present a picture of relative openness in higher education, in the sense that they show an increasing number of students (male and female) from various social backgrounds progressing to higher education.

- For a long time sociological research has focused on the exclusionary mechanisms with which lower-class students were not equally participating to higher education.

- In mass participation system while more lower-class students enter university, inequalities seem to arise from the unequal horizons for choice making.
The emergence of private sector Universities

- The emergence and growth of a private universities when driven by economic rationale often does not meet with resistance on ideological or political grounds
- Often it is actively promoted by left and right wing governments
- The expansion of higher education is primarily driven:
  - by the existence of a real demand by lower middle class families’ aspirations to build high value cultural capital which were not met by traditional choices by a rhetoric which sees higher education expansion as a field of economic growth
  - As a way to contain the inevitable quest of higher education in other countries often resulting in brain-drain at the end of the studies
The Profile of Students attending to a Private University

- Cyprus: 67.3%
- Greece: 24.8%
- Other countries: 7.9%
Social Class Background: Father’s Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Class</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Upper middle professional</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lower middle class</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Manual working class</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unemployed</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not classified</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Profile of Social Class Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE</th>
<th>Upper middle professional</th>
<th>Lower middle class</th>
<th>Manual working class</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Medicine</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law (LLB)</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiotherapy</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIS (Web Technologies)</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Education</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary Education</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social hierarchy of choices

- Multiple levels of choice - making
  - Destination for studies/academic institution
  - Field of study
  - Private/ Public
  - Employment prospects
A complex picture

- **By destination**
  - Central/old universities
  - Provincial/new/technical universities
  - Traditional elite universities

- **By study field**
  - High prestige fields of study
  - Lower prestige fields of study
  - Technical/vocational fields

- **Employment prospects**
  - In demand in labour market
  - Saturated fields

Public Vs Private
Structural stratification Vs self-selection

• Not all respond to the challenges in the same way

• Strategies shape according to
  • The historic period
  • The available opportunities
  • The forms of available capital which shape distinct familial strategies
Brain Drain

• Brain Drain imposes a burden to reaching sustainable levels of growth *if the highly educated and trained young people who could pioneer growth and high value economic activity migrate.*

• **Source countries** are deprived of essential human capital, while at the same time more value is added to the **destination countries** which already possess strong human capital.

• At the same time there is inbound migration of lower skilled workers.

• Human capital replacement.

• For source countries “brain drain” constitutes a serious obstacle to growth and prosperity.
The case of Greece

• A country in a protracted economic crisis since 2008
• 75% of people who migrated because of the economic crisis in the past decade were university graduates
• 53% of them were post-graduate degree holders
• 8% of them were PhD holders
• By comparison in the 1960’s only 6% were university graduates
• A medical doctor to be trained costs 200,000 Euros to the source country
• 1.5 to 2 Billion Euros are deprived from the National Insurance System
• The vast majority of them will never return
Concluding remarks...1

• The expansion of higher education and mass participation should be seen both as a pragmatic response to a growing market demand but also through ideological lenses that perceive education as a commodity and a field of private investment.

• In countries where demand for higher education is growing rapidly the expansion of higher education may cause unintended consequences.
Concluding remarks...2

• Expansion policies of higher education systems do not necessarily maximize social equality prospects. Despite the expansion of higher education, inequalities are still present.

Inequalities are found in the unequal patterns of choices
Concluding remarks...3

• Overt or covert mechanisms of stratification provide sociological inquiry with an emerging field to study inequalities under a new perspective.

• While more lower class students enter university, inequalities arise from the unequal opportunities for choice-making.

• These are produced by
  • stratified social backgrounds and
  • stratifying structures of higher education destinations, which include public/private distinctions
  • these are intensified by different fields of study and
  • the perceived hierarchies of institutions and
  • hierarchies of qualifications gained.
Concluding remarks...4

• As always, larger social inequalities set limits on what education can achieve in terms of producing social equity of outcomes.

• On top of the above Brain Drain deprives source countries of high value human capital thus impeding sustainable growth.
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