

The Post-modern Rhetoric of Recent Reforms in Greek Higher Education

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Abstract

In the last few years, radical neo-liberal reforms have been introduced in the Greek Higher Education sector. The new 'reforms' challenge the traditionally high autonomy of Higher Education (HE) institutions in matters of administrative regulations, study structures, assessment of students and teachers.

The new rhetoric of the Greek government is based, on one hand, on a neoliberal ideology which emphasises 'decentralisation of decision-making', 'consumerism', 'accountability' and 'efficiency' in HE. On the other hand, it employs a post-modern discourse, which emphasises the multiple identities that individuals carry with them, denies 'grand narratives' and promotes a continuous 'upgrading' of knowledge and skills through the creation of Life-long Learning (LLL) opportunities.

This paper will examine how the configuration of the specific rhetoric is being constantly re-contextualised and supported by the policy makers, highlighting the importance of the immensely 'centralist' Greek State, which is assuming a 'regulatory' role, but only when it deals with 'structures' and 'legal framework' and not when it comes to safeguarding the –constitutionally prescribed– 'free' character of HE by providing the necessary funding, or when it comes to matters of upholding democratic participation by giving power to the various stakeholders of the academic institutions (faculty, students, administrative personnel). It will also stress issues arising from the globalization of educational policy-making and of the homogenisation of assessment practices in HE (e.g. the so-called common 'European Higher Education Area'). Additionally, the paper will link the new post-modern rhetoric of individual 'choice' and

'emancipation' to global needs of capitalist production, which has witnessed a tremendous transformation in recent decades and is currently in the midst of a financial and fiscal turmoil. In connection to this, the recent austerity measures imposed from March 2010 will be commented upon and possible future consequences on HE structures will be suggested.

1. Introduction

In the last few years –especially from 2005 onwards— tremendous changes have been imposed in the Greek Higher Education sector. New legislation (in 2005, in 2007 and in 2011) has been introduced, which challenge the traditionally high autonomy of universities and other institutions of Higher Education (HE) in matters of administrative regulations, study structures, assessment of students and teachers, financial provisions.

The most recent legislation (2011) clearly promotes the restructuring of Greek HE according to the Bologna Process standards (1999), that is a radical transformation of HE on issues such as *new types of studies, degree structures, funding arrangements, new labour relations* for academic as well as for administrative personnel, stricter regulations governing *students' obligations* and many more. These developments seem to bring Greek HE in track with similar changes at European level, and they are a clear reminder of common trends in educational policy making across the European Union (EU), especially those related to the so-called 'European Higher Education Area' (EHEA), that is the creation of a European framework for HE qualifications and a network of 'quality assurance agencies'.

This paper will examine how the specific 'Bologna' rhetoric has been *transplanted onto the Greek HE field*, and is being constantly *re-contextualised* and *supported* by the policy makers, highlighting the importance of the immensely 'centralist' Greek State in an attempt to impose policy initiatives and targets at European-wide level. It will be stressed that the Greek State is assuming a 'regulatory' role (Gouvias, 2007b), but only when it deals with 'structures' and 'legal framework' and not when it comes to safeguarding the –constitutionally prescribed— free character of HE by providing

the necessary funding, or when it comes to matters of upholding democratic participation by giving power to the various stakeholders of the academic institutions (faculty, students, administrative personnel).

The main focus of the paper will be the examination of the *post-modern rhetoric* dominating official documents produced by either the Greek Government ('Green' or 'White Papers', Parliamentary Acts) or the European Union authorities (e.g. the Commission's Communications on the future funding, quality assurance and governance of HE), which will be scrutinized and critically examined in order to highlight the most prominent discourse dimensions. The paper will attempt to link the new post-modern rhetoric of individual 'choice' and 'emancipation' to global needs of capitalist production, which has witnessed a tremendous transformation in recent decades and is currently in the midst of a financial and fiscal turmoil. The recent austerity measures, imposed by the Greek government in May 2010 in return for a promised bail-out provided by the so-called 'troika' (the EU, the ECB and the IMF), will be also referred to, at least as far as it concerns their consequences on HE funding.

Post-modern rhetoric in Education

Post-modernism, as a philosophical and ideological current in contemporary discourses, focuses, as Apple & Whitty (2002, p. 68) aptly showed:

[...] on the 'pragmatic' and on the 'micro-level', [...] the illumination of the utter complexity of the power-knowledge nexus [...] the stress on multiplicity and heterogeneity, the idea of 'decentred subject', where identity is both non-fixed and a site of political struggle, the focus on the politics and practices of consumption, not only production [...].

As Patti Lather put it, 'the essence of the post-modern argument is that the dualism which continues to dominate Western thought [...] (such as social class) [...] is inadequate for understanding a world of multiple causes and effects interacting in complex and non-linear ways, all of which are rooted in a limitless array of historical and cultural specificities' (Lather, 1991, p. 21). The starting point in linking the postmodernist claims to the role education plays in contemporary societies is their

perception of knowledge and of the ways this is transmitted. As Lyotard claimed, the scientific rule ‘as long as I can produce proof it is permissible to think that reality is the way I say it is’, is being currently challenged by the rule ‘(valuable) knowledge must be considered only what can be applied and measured according to predetermined performativity criteria’ (1984, p. 53).

This kind of *philosophical* and *epistemological* principles have been consistently promoted and valorised in the Anglo-Saxon world (e.g. England and Wales, the USA, Australia) from the late 70’s (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Ball, 1998; Levin, 1998), and recently in former Eastern & Central European countries, as well as in many EU countries (Serrano-Velarde and Stensaker, 2010; Gouvias, 2012). Whereas for many decades, following World War II, the State and the Local Education Authorities had remained the principal providers of basic schooling, that changed radically with the gradual discursive shift in public debates (e.g. for England & Wales, see the debates surrounding the 1988 reform and especially after the New Labour took office in 1997) from notions of knowledge as a ‘public good’ and an inalienable social right, to a ‘commodified’ knowledge; from a stress on ‘solidarity’, ‘democratic institutions’ and ‘collective action’ towards a exaltation of ‘individual choice’ and ‘individual freedom’ within a market system (Apple and Whitty, 2002; Cole and Hill, 2002; Lipman, 2011).

This is not to say that post-modern notions of ‘multiple identities’ have not contributed to raising public awareness of several ways of oppression and exploitation around the world (‘sexual’, ‘racial’, ‘linguistic’, ‘cultural’ etc.) (Castells, 1997). However, as some commentators put it, stressing individual choice ‘facilitates a denial of importance of structural disadvantage’ (Apple and Whitty, 2002: 74). Furthermore, by stressing the importance of ‘individual choice’ –therefore ‘responsibility’ for that ‘choice’— the postmodern rhetoric gives human substance to ‘market’ as the only powerful response to a whole set of technical, managerial and ideological problems’ of mankind. Additionally, by valorising ‘otherness’ in all forms, it precludes ‘the search for a common good that can engender solidarity ... [and we] will be left with a cacophony of voices that disallow political and social action that is morally imperative’ (Beyer and Liston, 1992, pp. 380-381). Furthermore, some radical-marxist critics rightly point out that post-modernism is a rather ‘reactionary’ and

‘anti-emancipatory’ ideology, since it denies the existence of *structural barriers, class struggles* and *inequalities* based on various collective characteristics, such as *colour, race, gender* etc. (Apple and Whitty, 2002; Cole and Hill, 2002; Allen and Ainley, 2007; Lipman, 2011). As M. Cole and D. Hill put it (2002, pp. 92), ‘[G]iven postmodernists’ insistence on anti-representationalism (the rejection of the view that reality is directly given, without mediation, to subjects) and their consequent reliance on ‘textualism’ (seeing the text as the only source of meaning), it would seem that the possibility of structural analysis and structural change is further removed from the agenda’. Additionally, the acceptance of ‘uncertainty’, the continuous acknowledgment of ‘diversity’ (e.g. Butler, 1990; Lather, 1991; Atkinson, 2000), and the stress on ‘segmentation’, ‘differentiation’ and ‘collective disempowerment’, serves well the ‘purpose of justifying and adumbrating marketized projects of capital’ and lead to a disempowerment ‘of the oppressed’ (Cole and Hill, 2002, pp. 95 & 97).

The ‘European Higher Education Area’ and the Globalization of Educational Policy-making

The so-called common European Higher Education Area (EHEA), refers to the role of Higher Education in the new century at European and international level. The main framework and aims of this EHEA were laid out in the Sorbonne (1998) and Bologna (1999) Declarations, and in the Prague Summit Conclusions (2001).

More specifically, in the Joint Declaration of Ministers of Education of 29 European countries (EU members and non-members), met in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999, it was stated that the signing countries should aim at ‘increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of Higher Education’. This was also linked to the commitment towards the Lisbon Strategy’, that is the target, set by the European Council (23 and 24 March 2000), for the European Union to become ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’.

The main aim of the so-called ‘Bologna Process’ is the harmonization of educational systems with the more general reforming measures promoted by the EU –and not only—institutions, something that requires a degree of ‘convergence’ of the various HE systems. The European Commission stated clearly that ‘the European universities

are called on to “restructure”, in order to ‘foster [...] the coherent, compatible and competitive European Higher Education area called for by the Bologna Declaration [...]’ (CEC, 2003, p. 3). Restructuring has become evident in various reforms of HE across the globe (see Suspitsyna, 2010; Christensen, 2011; Karakhanyan *et al.*, 2011) and recently across Europe, spreading a new institutional ethos that stresses accountability, compatibility, comparability, new ways of funding, and new management and/or governance practices of HE institutions (Giesecke, 2006; Stankovic, 2006; Federkeil, 2008; Aamodt *et al.*, 2010; CHEPS, 2010; Frølich *et al.*, 2010).

Post-modern rhetoric in Greek Education

In the reforms introduced in Greece in the last decade, the central State mechanisms played a major role (see Gouvias, 2007a,b). The rhetoric adopted by governmental agencies, academics, various think-tanks and NGOs active in educational provision was revolved around certain themes.

Criticism against the teaching profession

The main line of argument in the criticism against teachers have been the deteriorating results in the school-leaving examinations (i.e. at the end of the upper-secondary school, the *lyceum*, at the age of 17-18) (for a review see Gouvias, 1998a, chapters 3, 4 and 6; Gouvias, 1998b). In February 2002, the Ministry of Education passed an Act through the Greek Parliament, regarding the general framework of teachers’ in-service training and evaluation, and, shortly afterwards, circulated a White Paper that constituted a detailed manual describing the competencies that should be demonstrated and obligations that should be met by teachers and schools alike (GMNERA, 2002a & 2002b). Although the White Paper was postponed indefinitely, still the emerging picture is not a rosy one for teachers, especially after recent legislation for public sector employees, which set performance ‘standards’ and ‘indicators’ according to which future promotion and salaries will be determined (see Lyotard’s ‘performativity criteria’). If through the whole process of teachers’ in-service training and evaluation of their work, someone is found to be ‘not up to the standards’, s/he may: a) continue to work in school, but be required to attend regular

training seminars, offered and supervised by the regional education authorities; b) temporarily be suspended from his/her teaching duties and be assigned to purely administrative posts; c) get fired, after a proposition by the competent disciplinary body is made to the Ministry of Education, on grounds of ‘teaching incompetence’ and ‘administrative inefficiency’ (see GMNERA, 2002b, p. 16).

Predominant economic emphasis

The more general reforming measures promoted by the EU institutions, have been placed high on the agenda of the Greek State, especially through the ‘Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training’ (OPEIVT II, 2000-2006), which is one of the Third Community Support Framework’s 24 Operational Programs.¹

The major ‘players’ in this lucrative game (for the period 2000 - 2006 the Programme’s co-financed budget amounts to €2,484.6 million) are the Ministries of National Economy and of National Education and Religious Affairs (the so-called ‘Final Beneficiaries’), as well as the implementing agencies responsible for executing the projects tendered by the Managing Authority. There are also the so-called ‘Contractors’, which might be enterprises or natural and legal entities that are entitled to undertake the implementation of projects tendered by the ‘Final Beneficiaries’. The rule according to which all (participants, procedures and outcomes alike) will be judged—in sharp contrast to a traditionally centralised system of financing public schools—is that, independently from the particularities of various sub-systems, ‘the final evaluation of “products” is what counts’ (Gouvias, 2007a, p. 32). As Gouvias claimed (2011), the *economic sphere* is progressively taking precedence over other ‘elements’ of the Greek socio-economic formation, and dominates the educational ‘arena’, in clear contrast to the post-war regime, where the *political sphere*, and its concomitant egalitarian policies was of paramount importance. To this process, he also stressed the increasing importance that EU funding is having on the smooth functioning of even basic dimensions of public education, since it constitutes, not a mere mechanism of technological ‘modernization’ of the Greek educational system,

¹ One of the main eligibility criteria for implementing such ‘Community Support Framework’ programmes is that the per capita GDP of a specific region should not exceed the 75% of the average Community per capita GDP (Council Regulation EC 1260/99, L. 161/26.06.1999, p. 3).

but rather a mechanism of educational restructuring in Greece (see also Kyriazis and Asderaki, 2008, pp. 129-135).

Employability

A further point –relevant to the previous one— in the ideological weaponry of the proponents of ‘individualized’-‘micro-level approach that has been adopted in educational policy-making in Greece, is the ‘need’ to put forward urgent solutions in order to enhance student outcomes in employment related skills and competencies.

In the light of the EU states’ commitment towards the ‘Lisbon Strategy’, one of the main pillars of educational reforms in recent years has been the improvement of the ‘employability’ and ‘movement’ of the graduates –of the secondary or tertiary education. In secondary education, for example, new curricular content has been developed, which could enhance the school-work link, and new textbooks have been written in accordance to the rapidly changing needs of the workplace in an era of ‘increasing competition in every social field’ (Pedagogic Institute of Greece, 2001, Preface). The new rhetoric of the ‘market school’, however, is crystallised mainly in a variety of secondary and post-secondary institutions of technical, vocational, continuing and distance education, in the public and the private sectors alike.

Furthermore, the recent legislation for radical overhaul of the Greek HE system (see below for details) adopted a rhetoric of ‘radical restructuring of HE institutions, something that –among other things— means the abolition and/or amalgamation of existing departments or even whole HE institutions that do not adequately prepare young people for the labour market (GMNELLRA, 2010b, 19; for critical comments see Gouvias 2012; Sotiris, 2012).

Reducing the cost of education

Related to the aforementioned concerns is the emphasis on reducing the cost(s) of education to governments.

An ‘independent’ committee, set under the auspices of the National Education Council’s Committee on Higher Education, and started its deliberations in October 2005, published its final conclusions and recommendations on the 18th of April 2006.

The members of the Committee were all academics appointed by the Greek government in order to make proposals for a new institutional framework in Higher Education –with special reference to University Education. In their final recommendations they acknowledge that none of the proposed reforms of University Education could be feasible as long as there is not any long-term commitment for increasing public (i.e. State) funding of universities (NECCHE, 2006, p. 1). The Greek government adopted more of the recommendations that were –directly or indirectly— linked to the reduction of the cost of educational provision (GMNERA, 2007). For example, it welcomed measures to restrict prolongation of higher studies beyond a certain time-limit (article 14). It also upheld a proposal for a compulsory four-year economic contract (of ‘academic development’, as it is titled), agreed between each HE institute and the Greek government (i.e. the Ministries of Education, of National Economy and of the Interior), which would prioritize the targets that each HE institute has set for the respective period.

In that report, there were also recommendations for construction of indicators reflecting the ‘quality’ of Higher Education provision and the implementation of continuous assessment of the Universities and the Higher technological Institutes, both through ‘internal’ (i.e. self-evaluation) and ‘external’ procedures (evaluation by outsider experts) (NECCHE, 2006, especially in pages 12-17), something that eventually became mandatory after the most recent legislation (L. 4009/2011, more on this below).

The new legal framework and its rhetoric

We will examine the new legal framework recently created in Greece, by focusing on two main documents concerning the HE system. On the one hand, we will deal with the White Paper² published by the Ministry of Education in early autumn 2011, according to which new proposals were made to the HE institutions, concerning a radical overhaul of the HE system (GMNELLRA, 2010b). On the other hand, we will

² A ‘White Paper’ – in various countries, including Britain and Australia— is an authoritative report or guide that helps solve a problem. The publishing of a white paper signifies a clear intention on the part of a government to pass new law. This can be compared with a ‘Green Paper’, which is a term used mainly in Britain, and denotes a document prepared by the government for anyone interested to study and make suggestions about, especially before a law is changed or a new law is made (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, or <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>).

focus on the ensuing legislation in August 2011 (Parliamentary Act No 4009/2011), whereby there are clearly outlined political plans for a radical reorganization of HE institutions across the country (23 universities and 16 higher TEIs).

We will try to show how the new *neoliberal ideology* rhetoric of the Greek, which emphasises ‘decentralisation of decision-making’, ‘consumerism’, ‘accountability’ and ‘efficiency’ in HE, is being progressively cultivated alongside *postmodern* arguments about ‘segmentation’, ‘diversity’, ‘multiplicity’, ‘heterogeneity’, ‘micro-level’ and ‘non-fixed identities’.

Initially, we will try to shortly describe the ‘field’ of Higher Education (Bourdieu, 1988, 1993, 1996) in Greece, as it has existed until the recent legislation (2011).

The properties of the HE ‘Field’ in Greece

The guarantee given by the Greek Constitution (article 16) of ‘free education for all’ (the so-called *Dorean Paedea*), at every level of the education system, is something that clearly differentiates Greece from most neoliberal policy paradigms of educational provision. In Greece, for example, HE textbooks are provided free of charge for all students, while a considerable number of them are also entitled – depending on income and other social criteria— to free accommodation and lunches. In that sense, the Greek case is one of the most characteristic examples of resistance against the introduction of neoliberal reforms in education (for details see Gouvias, 2007a).

The *degree structure* in Greece, as amalgamated since the beginning of the eighties, is based on two main cycles. The first cycle leads to the first degree, called *ptychio* or *diploma*, obtained in principle after four years of studies in both sectors of higher education in Greece. The second cycle leads to the second degree, which is called ‘postgraduate specialization diploma’, and to the third degree, which is called ‘doctorate diploma’.

Parliamentary Act 1268/1982, which set the framework for the modernization of the *operation of higher learning*, attained a large-scale reform in Universities. This was

modified and further supplemented by a series of important laws, which provided for the establishment of Technological Education Institutions (TEIs) and, later on (1992) promoted the organization of postgraduate study programs. In 2001, the Parliamentary Act 2916 was enforced, pursuant to which tertiary education consists of the university and technology sectors, which are governed by the same constitutional provisions as regards their organization and operation.

Access to HE is done through a very competitive system of national-level entrance examinations that take place each year at the end of May till the middle of June. The system was undoubtedly strict (the so-called the *numerus clausus* policy) during the seventies and early-eighties, with the number of entrees remaining at, more or less, the same level (30-35% of candidates finally succeeded to enter a HE Institute). However, since 1998, through the financial support of various EU programmes (see Gouvias, 2011) ninety (90) new HE departments have been established (from 376 in academic year 1998-99, they jumped to 466 in academic year 2005-06, that is an increase of 24% or more than 10 academic departments per year). The number of students followed the same pace. As a result of this policy, Greece has now one of the highest participation ratios in Higher Education throughout Europe. In 2005, the percentage of young people in the age cohort between 18 and 22 years registered in HE institutions exceeded 58% (GMNERA, 2006).

Nevertheless, the *numerus clausus* policy is still in place, and although opportunities for access to HE substantially increased over time for social strata that had hitherto little or no hopes for entering a university or TEI, there are still wide disparities in the distribution of higher education places, between students with different socio-economic (e.g. family income or parental occupation) or educational (e.g. parental educational level) characteristics (Gouvias, 1998a,b, 2002, 2010; Gouvias, Katsis and Limakopoulou, 2012; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2006, 2010; Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides, 2009).

The HE *institutional framework*, especially its *administrative* dimension, was radically transformed in the early '80s (Parliamentary Act No 1268/1982, as amended thereafter), whereby HE establishments gained an unprecedented degree of academic autonomy. Extensive decision-making powers were transferred –at least in theory— from full-professors to the departmental General Assembly, which includes a

substantial number of students' representatives. Structures and content of studies are defined by each department, through the decisions of its administrative bodies. HE authorities (rectors and vice-rectors) are elected by an electoral body, in which students' votes have an almost equal weighting to that of the academic staff. Academic planning rests with the democratically elected HE bodies (i.e. the University Senate or the TEI General Council, and the departmental General Assembly).

However, *no similar degree of financial autonomy* has been given to HE establishments. Budgetary decisions have been and still are the sole responsibility of the central State (Ministries of Education and of National Economy). Spending (concurrent, capital, research) is tightly controlled by an auditory mechanism, which is independent of HE Institutes and is subordinate, not to the Ministry of Education, but to the Ministry of Justice.

The New Framework

Among the proposals put forward was the abolition and/or amalgamation of existing departments or even whole HE institutions (GMNELLRA, 2010b, p. 19; also in article 7, par. 6 of the new law [L. 4009/2011]). Another –radical by traditional administrative standards of the Greek HE— provision of the law is the mandatory participation of *outsider experts* (i.e. academics from other HE institutions in Greece and abroad or representatives of professional associations and local businesses) in the administrative bodies of the HE establishments (article 8, par. 5). This would allegedly enhance *transparency, social accountability* and *effectiveness* and would do away with previous phenomena of bureaucratic inertia, opaqueness and nepotism (GMNELLRA, 2010b, pp. 7-11). The 'performativity' criterion, valorised by post-modern thought (Lyotard, 1984) is here evident. 'Transparency' supposedly leads to a less 'opaque' functioning of the HE institutional mechanisms, and, therefore, can bring about a more precise measurement of what is happening in HE, a more 'quantifiable' picture of what *should* be going on in HE, on teaching, learning, administration, funding etc.

Additionally, the standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance promoted by the recent legislation of the Greek government stress the need for ‘efficient and effective organisational structures’ and for promotion of ‘institutional autonomy’ in terms of enhancing each HE institution’s discretion to ‘diversify’ its *programs of study* and its *procedures for assessing teaching and learning* (GMNELLRA, 2010b), in sharp contrast to the past when there have been a homogenous system of *entrance, study structures, assessment processes* (for students and teachers alike), *state-guaranteed employment rights* etc. This is reminiscent of the *multiplicity* and the *heterogeneity* rhetoric, a famous ‘trademark’ of postmodern discourse.

The setting up of *quality assurance processes*, something that is increasingly dominating the European agenda of intergovernmental cooperation (see ENQA, 2005, p. 13; CHEPS, 2010, pp. 8, 18, 19), is also clear in the new legislation, not only in the 2011 Parliamentary Act, but also in the 2005 corresponding one. More specifically, in the Parliamentary Act No 3374/2005, there were requirements for the construction of indicators reflecting the quality of HE provision and the implementation of continuous assessment of the universities and the TEIs, both through ‘internal’ (i.e. self-evaluation) and ‘external’ procedures (evaluation by outsider experts). In the 2005 Act it was clearly stated that, if the HE institutions do not comply with the procedures concerning assessment laid down framework (especially the four-year economic contract), public (i.e. State) funding will be *withheld* – except for the staff’s salaries, something that was reiterated in the recent legislation as well (see L. 3374/2005, article 5, and L. 4009/2011, article 76).

In both Acts, there are new provisions for the introduction of *a new system of funding HE*, which will be based on a certain formula; a formula that would include, apart from the traditional indicators used so far (i.e. aggregate numbers of registered students and teaching and administrative staff), more detailed and specified indicators of ‘quality’, such as the number of graduates per year and students who are within the time limits for their course programmes, the amount of external research money acquired, the number of doctorates and habilitations awarded etc (article 63). We should bear in mind that similar funding systems have recently appeared in many EU countries (see Efinger, 2003, Hufner, 2003 and Schulte, 2003 for Germany;

Treuthardt, Huusko and Saarinen, 2006 for Finland; Scott, 2003 and Fried, Glass & Baumgartl, 2006, for the Eastern & Central European countries), as well as in mostly non-EU ones, which have been or currently are candidates for entry (e.g. Miclea, 2003, Milenkovic, 2003 and Stankovic, 2006)

Of course, no reference is made to inequalities already existing among the secondary education graduates or the HE students themselves, and how these inequalities is linked, not to the restricted access to universities or TEIs, but on disparities based on socio-economic (e.g. family income or parental occupation) or educational (e.g. parental educational level) characteristics (Gouvias, 1998a,b, 2002, 2010; Gouvias, Katsis and Limakopoulou, 2012). The official documents sketch a over-optimistic picture of masses of general population entering HE through the LLL programs, ignoring the fact that these programs will be almost exclusively funded on fees, given the dramatic decrease in state financing of all institutions at national level.³ To this end, references to a ‘situation of very austere fiscal discipline’ (GMNERLLA, 2010, p. 4) is made, as it was a natural disaster for which no political decision was taken and no one can do anything about. In this sense, the ideology of ‘less State’ is ‘naturalised’ and it is attempted to become a ‘non ideological “common sense”’ (Fairclough, 2010, p. 30); from the moment less public money is poured into HE, then *other sources* of income must be found.

What is of utter importance here is that the payment of fees is made possible even *for the fourth year of higher studies*, something that has no precedence in Greek HE. Under the new Act, ‘undergraduate studies’ is considered as that time-period that comprises *3 academic years* (or 180 ECTs, according to the European Credit Transfer System), while in the past the norm has been *4 academic years*. In other words, the Greek government decided to adopt the Bologna degree structure, which was decided

³ Budgets of all HE institutions (i.e. universities and TEIs) were cut by more than 50% in 2011 compared to the previous year. That affected mostly the everyday functioning of HE, since it downsized crucial bits of concurrent expenditure such as student welfare, or overhead costs (e.g. rent, gas/electricity and telecommunications bills, office supplies). In addition, after the recent (February 2012) public-debt restructuring and the infamous PSI, millions of Euros of deposits held by Public Entities such as Pension Funds and HE establishments, were used by the Bank of Greece in order to buy Greek State bonds and then trim them down by more than 50% of their face value. That caused unprecedented losses in the overall financial balance of Greek HE.

in 1999, that is a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. According to the ‘Bologna Declaration’ (June 1999):

Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a *minimum of three years*. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries. [author’s emphasis in italics]

The adoption of this structure of higher studies in Greece, has so far been met with resistance given, not only the aforementioned constitutional prescription, but also the academic tradition of decades of four-year higher studies. It is characteristic to see what was the official response to the specific requirement, as it was outlined in the Greek government’s ‘National Report for the Implementation of the Bologna Process’ (GMNERA, 2003, pp. 3-4):

There is a wide consensus in Greece on the currently existing degree structure [...] According to this consensus, the first cycle degrees should continue to be obtained in Greece after at *least four years of studies*, and any ideas for first cycle degrees obtained after three years of studies are totally rejected. [author’s emphasis in italics]

Another important dimension of the radical overhaul of the Greek HE system is the stress on ‘individual differences’ and/or ‘needs’, since now it becomes *mandatory for HE institutions* to set up Life-Long-Learning (LLL) programs, which will be offered at Faculty-wide level (there will be special LLL Schools at each university or TEI) (L. 4009/2011, articles 7, 12 & 43). This emerged after five years of foot-dragging regarding the respective provisions of a Parliamentary Act (L. 3369/2005), which introduced for the first time in Greece LLL programs at higher level, although it did not make their creation mandatory for HE institutions (GMNERA, 2005). The argumentation behind the introduction of those LLL programs is that HE *should be available*, apart from the ‘traditional’ student population (usually 18-24 years of age), *to every citizen*. As it was stated in the 2010 consultation document (GMNERLLA, 2010), HE ‘should become accessible to wider social strata and age-groups, while at the same time being able to promote excellence in research’ (p. 4).

The ‘Lifelong Learning Institutes’, and the new ‘Higher Schools of LLL’, which may be established at every HE institution of the country, are intended to broaden, enrich and modernize the knowledge of the adult members of the population. They will operate within the existing institutions of university education, while their purpose is to facilitate the process of LLL. Learning will be based on specially designed programs, which are to be organised in a way to ensure the *flexibility* of the content and the *mobility* of students/learners, so that the skills acquired will meet the economy needs (GMNERA, 2005, p. 5; GMNERLLA, 2011a, p. 2; GMNERLLA, 2011b, article 4). What is valorised is the existence of a ‘multiplicity’ of HE and LLL programs, with minimum inter-disciplinary ‘boundaries’, something that would allegedly enhance people’s ‘adaptability’ and ‘employability’ in a rapidly changing labour market (GMNERLLA, 2011a, p. 2).

Last, but not least, *competition* between the HE establishments is adumbrated as the only way for the HE institutions to ‘survive’ in a rapidly changing world (GMNERLLA, 2011a, pp. 4-5). HE institutions are called on to respond to the commitments towards the ‘Lisbon Strategy’⁴, one major pillar of which is the ‘strengthening of human resources at the universities by promoting [...] competitive procedures’ (CEC, 2005).

Issues of Concern

Social justice

If it is that Greek H.E. institutions should be considered as being ‘accountable for the way they operate and manage their activities and budgets to their sponsors and to the public’ (CEC, 2003, p. 9), that automatically implies a gradual predominance of market-oriented target-setting in HE planning, and excludes hundreds of academic departments (in universities or TEIs), which have so far provided the opportunities for higher studies –and consequently better job prospects—for tens of thousands of students.

⁴ Where the European Council (23 and 24 March 2000) set out the target –to be met by all member states— for the European Union of becoming ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.’

The required restructuring of the curricula will result in a restriction of the academically oriented courses and a preservation of those courses which have a more or less direct relevance to the employment 'needs'. Accordingly, H.E. establishments will end up operating as (large or small) 'shopping malls' that will have to compete with each other in order to attract a rather demanding clientele. Of course in such a 'consumerism-led' situation those with the biggest amounts of capital (financial and symbolic) would be in an advantaged position when 'buying' educational services. Evidence from countries that introduced a market approach to higher-education provision show that financial hardship, derived or simply reinforced by existing admission requirements, may produce new types of inequalities or perpetuate existing ones (e.g. see the case of English universities with the post-1998 introduction of tuition fees; in Allen & Ainley, 2007, especially chap. 5 and in Callender, 2008).

Especially as the post-graduate studies are concerned, there is a pressure on the Greek HE institutions to employ strict eligibility criteria of quality for each post-graduate program. In that sense, a widespread practice of the Greek Universities to grant scholarships and other financial aids to students according to income level, physical or mental handicaps, and/or academic performance, is being currently under criticism and review. The question that promptly arises is what kind of new types of social exclusion and inequalities would these policies create among the graduates, given the almost total dependence of the new post-graduate programs on: a) European funding, and b) introduction of (invariably high) tuition fees⁵.

Academic knowledge

An immanent risk of discriminating against certain 'non-tangible' and 'market-orientated' academic disciplines (e.g. Humanities and Social Sciences) is becoming evident in new initiatives in Higher Education. The 'need' for a change in the 'funding ethos' of the Higher Education institutes, in the sense that funding implies the acceptance of a 'value for money' mentality, means that HE is treated similarly to other public-sector services that are believed to be 'poorly managed' and 'lacking

⁵ A Parliamentary Act in 2008 (L. 3658/2008) on post-graduate studies legalised the –hitherto illegal, but invariably practiced by various departments and tolerated by the State— imposition of tuition fees at post-graduate level (master's or doctorate degrees). Thus, the recent (2011) Act simply legalised a common practice.

clear objectives'. The changes need to apply not just to attracting private sector investment in (public) education, but also to the treatment of students as 'customers' who are supposed to pick up those higher studies that better suit to their needs and the 'needs' of the labour-market.

The 'right to knowledge', or the 'right to learning' (implying life-long learning opportunities), is presented as an unalienable right, which *should be exercised* by each individual within the limits of a life-span, but with no guarantees of actually this happening, given certain restrictions and obstacles that deal with personal, familial and wider socio-economic specificities.

Education as product (see 'globalization of educational services – GATS)

The term 'sponsorship' was used by Ball (1998) to highlight a trend that is attributed to the increasing role assumed by international organisations and multilateral agencies, which impose new 'orthodoxies' in educational planning (p. 124). Such multilateral agencies are the World Bank, the OECD, or the UNESCO. What these agencies often do is to press national governments to adopt reforms in education that promote and 'nurture' economic antagonism, commodification of knowledge, and 'micro-economic reform, with educational activities being turned into saleable or corporatized market products as part of a national efficiency drive' (Ball, 1998, p. 124; see also Welch, 1998; Gouvias, 2007a).

Here we must also keep in mind the World Trade Organization (WTO) 'rules', which prevent members from maintaining or adopting measures that restrict the entry of foreign providers into the domestic market, or treating domestic suppliers more favourably than suppliers from other member (i.e. of the WTO) countries. Especially the USA –a country with vast interests in educational service provision— repeatedly requests from the EU countries to 'liberalize' their educational systems. From the Greek government, it is 'demanded' to recognize degrees issued by accredited institutions of Higher Education (including those issued by branch campuses of accredited institutions); and adopt a policy of transparency in government licensing and accrediting policy with respect to HE and training'. Given the 'monopoly' that state institutes enjoy in the provision of HE studies in Greece (as mandated by the Greek Constitution, ar. 16), on the one hand, and the increasing demand for higher

studies in the Greek populace, on the other, it is expected that the pressure put upon the national government and the academic establishments will be immense in the next few years.⁶

The LLL rhetoric and its hidden assumptions

Quite often, as the key-point of the LLL discourse –in conjunction with respective changes in the dominant mode of production-- is perceived the increasing cultivation of the idea of ‘personal responsibility’. In the new models of lifelong learning, some critics argue that an overarching emphasis is given to a very simplistic version of the ‘human-capital’ theory (Selwyn and Gorard, 1999; Rees, Gorard, Fevre and Furlong, 2000). The ‘human capital’ is now the key-word, and it is the tool –the only tool, some might say– that a person can ‘trade’ in order to survive in a world of uncertainty and high risk (Beck, 1992). Individuals –and not citizens– are being seduced to ‘invest’ in their future well-being, by accumulating ‘credits’, ‘learning units’, ‘training certificates’, ‘diplomas’ and many other ‘trading tools’, which, in turn, will have to present to their prospective employers. ‘Flexibility’, ‘adaptability’ and ‘openness to the labour market’ in teaching/learning are the main driving forces in the quest – for the EU— to becoming ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’.

The bulk of the official documents stress the ‘employability’, ‘flexibility’ and ‘adaptability’ of the (rather vaguely defined) ‘national workforce’ (GMoE, 2003; GMNERA, 1997, 2003, 2005b; GMNERLLA, 2010, 2011a,b). Very few references are made to what a former Commissioner for Education & Culture envisaged of the role of Education and Training (V. Reding, ‘Preface’ in CEDEFOP, 2001), namely that it is ‘not merely necessary to sustain employability of wage-earners and their ability to adapt to labour market requirements’, but a mechanism for the promotion of ‘active citizenship and strengthening social cohesion’. As Borg and Mayo (2005) put it, ‘the neo-liberal set of guidelines, contained in the *Memorandum* [on lifelong learning] serves to heighten the member countries’ and candidate countries’

⁶ The Greek Prime-Minister, C. Karamanlis, announced in February 2006 minor constitutional amendments, among which the abolition of the state monopoly on university education was a major issue. The changes, however, were not implemented –at least in a straightforward way— because the amendments did not secure the (required by the Constitution) bipartisan support.

competitiveness in a scenario characterised by the intensification of globalisation' (p. 218).

What is usually brought forward is an invariably social, economic, as well as technological, *determinism*. It is widely proclaimed that promoting LLL opportunities, especially through the use of ICTs, is the only means of overcoming existing barriers to participation, particularly barriers of 'time, space and pace' (Edwards, Sieminski and Zeldin, 1993; Essom and Thomson 1999).

As some critics stress, the whole discursive basis of lifelong learning rhetoric remains 'ostensibly white, middle-class, Euro-centric (in alphabet and language-use at least), male artefacts', ...[and] many of the technologies that will form the backbone of on-line adult learning (in particular the Internet) are not necessarily likely to be dominant or familiar technology with working class, older, female and some learners from local ethnic minorities' (Selwyn and Gorard, 1999, p. 3).

Discussion

As we have seen by examining the recent policy reforms and developments, the Greek HE institutes (universities and TEIs) start losing their 30-year-old academic autonomy, while, at the same time, coming under an immense financial pressure in order to survive.

The new role assumed by the State includes, on the one hand, a number of legal interventions in academic as well as in administrative matters; on the other hand, it clearly seems to enforce a very tight fiscal discipline in Higher Education, by the introduction of a series of very restrictive auditory operations and long-term financial planning, something that has been unheard of a few years ago. Given the fact that the above long-term financial planning is linked to the recently established 'quality-assurance' mechanism (i.e. assessment), it looks like a paradigmatic shift is now emerging in Greek HE; a shift whereby the final evaluation of 'products' (or 'outputs') of HE institutions will determine the scope and targets of the corresponding funding of education. These reforms are in fact in line with general and far-reaching developments worldwide, where 'knowledge capitalism' (Harvie, 2000; Burton-Jones,

2003; Rikowski, 2003) reigns, where the ‘legacy of public discourse appears to have faded...’ and HE institutions are called on to ‘reinvent’ themselves by ‘giving way to the demands of the marketplace’ (Giroux, 2003, p. 182).

The most important feature of the recent reforms, however, is that this ‘erosion’ of academic autonomy comes to complement and/or facilitate the imposition of a vast array of measures that will entirely transform Greek HE. Transformations will materialize on issues such as: new *types of studies* offered in H.E. institutes (part-time courses, long-distance courses, adult-education courses and e-learning courses); *degree structures* (progressive introduction of three-year degrees, if not directly through the recognition of private colleges that collaborate with foreign universities); *funding sources* (more role for private investment, competitive bidding for research funding, introduction of a ‘pay-by-results’ mentality in State funding); *new labour relations* for academic as well as for administrative personnel (changes in academic tenure, increasing reliance on short-term contracts); stricter regulations governing students’ obligations (e.g. length of study) etc.

These changes could not be brought about without a organized strategy of ‘preparing’ the public (i.e. the taxpayer) by establishing a ‘public debate’ framework, in which all the social partners would take part and submit their proposals –even if that meant a few months deliberations of a government-appointed committee.⁷

Most of all, the changes could *not* be implemented if the corresponding *public discourse* had not already been dominating educational policy-making. The rhetoric of ‘restructuring’, ‘quality assurance’, ‘flexibility’, ‘diversity’, ‘comparability’, ‘recognition of degrees’ ‘adaptability’, ‘life-long learning’, ‘linking education and ‘labour-market’ etc., had been dominating public debates on the future of HE since the 1999 Bologna Summit, despite the fact that there had been struggles against those developments. Nevertheless, the Greek government reached a point where no other policy-making lever was available apart from enforcement of what had already been agreed upon by the Greek State authorities and the respective authorities of the other partners in the European Union, and which had been in the (political) agenda of

⁷ For a comparative analysis of the ‘social partnership’ model of educational policy-making, and the role played by various government-sponsored ‘independent agencies’, see Gouvias, 2007b.

successive Greek government –not only the current, but of the previous ones— a long time ago.

After Bologna, the role of Education – especially that of HE— at a global level seems to balance in favour of servicing the economy, instead of promoting social cohesion of redressing social inequalities and of assuming wider developmental responsibilities. Stamelos & Vasilopoulos (2004) referred to a past decision of the European Court of Justice (1988) on the role of the post-secondary education, according to which university-awarded degrees are labelled as ‘vocational qualifications’, something that put into question a long-standing tradition that defended the academic character of Higher Education (p. 84).

The view that education is simply another market commodity has become normalised in policy and public discourses. Schools run purely as businesses are a growing phenomenon within and without Europe, and there is an increasing expectation in several countries that schools and universities alike will supplement their income from private sources, even though they are within the state sector (Castells, 1996; Ball, 1998; Hill and Cole, 2001; Rikowski, 2002).

The Greek State seems to be responding –not without resistance, contradictions and even regression—to global needs of capitalist production, which has been in an unprecedented transformation in recent decades (Bell, 1976; Castells, 1996). By using its dominant position in the political sphere of the Greek social formation, it set the agenda for wider changes in educational restructuring, which is actually an ‘alignment’ of the functioning of educational institutions to the rapidly changing and fluid economic ‘necessities’, not only at national, but also at international level. In that sense, it does not simply reproduce the dominant position of certain social classes or groups of interests (which surely exist *inside* or *around* the State mechanisms). It reflects, in the given *time* and *space*, the existing power-balance in the economic and political, as well as cultural and educational fields, between groups with varying degrees of possession of ‘allocative’ and ‘authoritative resources’ (Giddens, 1984). The postmodern rhetoric that has accompanied a series of reforms, especially in HE, in the last decade seems to ‘mask’ the *neoliberal project of* ‘decentralisation of decision-making’, ‘consumerism’, ‘accountability’ and ‘efficiency’ with the magic

cloak of ‘social partnership’, ‘individual choice’, ‘multiplicity of interests’, ‘diversity of programs’ ‘micro-level approaches’ etc.

This rhetoric, however, has its limits. It has been used as the first part of a ‘carrot-and-stick’ strategy of successive Greek governments, but when that failed to win the support of the various ‘stakeholders’ (most of all the academic community itself), then just the ‘stick’ was finally used; that is the enforcement –without any serious public consultation process— of a law that will entirely transform Greek HE along the neoliberal ideological mandates.

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