

**EQUNET SEMINAR
FINAL SESSION**
(Impressions and illustrations)

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Inequality, Pleonexia and Hubris

The ancient Greeks had a word for it – *pleonexia* – which means an overreaching desire for more than one's share. This vice was often paired with *hubris*, a form of arrogance directed especially against the gods and therefore doomed to fail.

Power serves greed and so to tame power, one must tame greed.

The Price of Inequality, J. Stiglitz

Stiglitz passionately describes how *unrestrained power and rampant greed* are writing an epitaph for the American (and the European) dream.

In 2001, Stiglitz won the Nobel prize for economics for his theory of "asymmetric information". When some individuals have access to privileged knowledge that others don't, *free markets yield bad outcomes for wider society*.

The Price of Inequality, J. Stiglitz

The Price of Inequality is a powerful plea for the implementation of what Alexis de Tocqueville termed "*self-interest properly understood*". Stiglitz writes: "Paying attention to everyone else's self-interest – in other words to the common welfare – is in fact a precondition for one's own ultimate wellbeing... *it isn't just good for the soul; it's good for business.*"

Unfortunately, that's what those with hubris and pleonexia have never understood

“SQUEEZE”

Probably, the most important factor of change, that appeared before 2008 but in that year became “the most important issue of the year”, is the financial crisis that affected practically all countries of the world. The disruptive consequences of this crisis are still to be properly measured, and are still being produced in a good part of the world, but they affect not only the wealth of nations and common people, but also *equity and social cohesion, re-distribution of income and the inequality gap.*

Lessons learnt (1)

- We still know very little - research is still scant and piecemeal. However, we know enough to conclude that we face a very serious issue in Europe.
- Inequality is an issue that hits hard at the core of our European values and civilisational grounds. Therefore we need more and better evidence-based public policies in HE.
- We suffer from the lack of reliable data especially microlevel data bases – adress accessibility to *public* data bases (collected with public money).
- Increasing concerns on the viability of matching *excellence* with *equity* in a general context of decreasing public funding for Higher Education is framing the Higher Education landscape.

Lessons learnt (2)

- It pays to conduct research with rigour and robustness (quantitative and qualitative methods)
- Problems of comparability – must start to improve background and supporting systems – Equnet represents a seminal research and has helped make clear many shortcomings of existing data
- Institutional leadership and awareness can make a difference
- Interesting focus on migrants and *descendants* – a major challenge facing Europe (is there an effective policy on migrants?)

A fresh research agenda (1)

- Processes are as important as outcomes to understand fully the whole student's reality and to welcome interdisciplinarity – open research to methods based on narratives (story-telling).
- Collect new knowledge on the proper functioning of education as an important social subsystem and inter/correlations with other social subsystems.
- Revisit Bourdieu - forms of capital - Human (Economic) capital alone is insufficient. Need to further knowledge on the impact of cultural capital, i.e. follow up studies in the labour market and measuring returns of natives vs immigrants with same HE attainment
- Explore further longitudinal surveys over time
- Further research the role of APL and RPL in addressing inequalities in HE

A fresh research agenda (2)

- Need to know more on *double* discrimination and to propose European policies addressing extreme, compounded exclusion, *recentring* the margins
- Explore the use of Lorenz Curves and calculations of Gini coefficients – finding out whether there are European, national or sub-national improvements on equity over time
- The determinants of inequality: Social deprivation vs. ethnic origin. Is inequality the consequence of poverty? or race? or migrant status? or belonging to a minority? or religion? or gender? ...
- Diversity – are there trade-offs?

Putnam on diversity, equity and pay-offs

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- R. Putnam spoke at the inauguration of a joint project between Harvard University and University of Manchester. His Manchester talk (E Pluribus Unum: Immigration, diversity, and community).
- He was totally misunderstood in a FT article published october 9, 2006, “Harvard study paints bleak picture of ethnic diversity”, that painted a misleadingly “bleak portrait of his research findings”, as Manchester Dean Alistair Ulph noted in a subsequent letter to the editor
- Putnam gave several interviews (namely BBC) on his favorite subject of research: social capital and how it may be influenced by migrants and enhanced diversity

Learning to Live Together ...You've Got a Friend ...

Thank you !



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