

**“Equity in European Higher Education: State of the research,
problems, ideas and perspectives”**

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Times are changing:

**Do we need to reconsider our approaches how
to achieve equity in higher education?**

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Promoting equity in education as an educational policy aim

A “universal” participation in primary and secondary education was achieved already during the 20th century.

What about higher education?

“An increase of participation in education is directly linked to the growth of equal opportunities.”

A “dogma” to be questioned today?



Paradoxes?

During the last decades we have been witnessing an exponent growth of students worldwide.

On the other hand, social inequalities have also increased.

What living standards in 2020?

We can expect “both more highly skilled jobs at the top and more low skilled jobs at the bottom, while jobs in mid-level occupations are in decline” (Brewer et al., 2012).



It is a crisis, you fool!

In the present times of a deep and perpetuating economic crisis this policy goal seems seriously endangered and there are fresh data which support our fears.

Not only that we can expect stagnation or even a decline in number of students from lower classes but we can also expect a decline in number of students from middle classes.

A few years ago it was unimaginable to think in these terms. How to respond these new trends from the perspective of equity in higher education?



Considering a changed role of education

During the last century and a half, primary and secondary education, one by the other, have developed into a “mass” and “universal” systems.

Is it reasonable to expect that tertiary education will become "universal" in the same way?

Could such a shift *directly* contribute to equity in our societies?

Education has changed from “a privilege” and later “a right” to “an obligation” nowadays.

In other words, education has been shifted from a “realm of freedom” to a “realm of necessity”.



Challenging the “notorious truths”

- (1) *“Higher participation in higher education we achieve – more equitable our societies are.”*
- (2) *“We need to further increase participation in higher education; in particular among less represented groups.”*
- (3) *“Systems with no fees are not fair: taxpayers from lower classes pay for students from upper classes”.*
- (4) *“Higher education is the strongest instrument to strengthen employability and economic growth”.*



Conclusion

Ignoring the role of education in societies is an equal fault as if we exaggerate it.

Education is not all-powerful magic wand, even in the developing “knowledge economies” it is not.

The proper functioning of the education – as an important social subsystem – depends on proper functioning of other social subsystems.

We need an agenda for future research and policy development.

