

THE "McDONALD'S-IZATION" OF EDUCATION: SEARCH FOR FAST RESULTS

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The pace of life forces us in getting everything quickly and preferably for free, i.e. the faster – the better. No matter that fast food from McDonald's simply kills the human organism. The crucial point is that the action itself is fast and cheap. However, I see no sense in discussing the topic of junk food. A better idea is the transformation of the above introduced term into the field of education and debates on "appetite" for learning rather than for fast food. Thus, what are the shown indications? First, it should be noticed that when considering the phenomenon of "fast" training, education fails to retain its purpose, and therefore the systems of comprehensive and higher education appear to be just a blur (Lamanuskas, 2011).

The current education system is significantly underestimated, which is supposed to be the time that makes natural changes in the conception of education. The formulation of education has varied throughout time depending on the culture and traditions of the society etc. Nevertheless, intellectual properties and ethics have remained the core components of education. Hence, the background of the present day is largely overlooked, sometimes, even in hardly understandable ways. What is more, such actions are taken by highly ranked officials or even representatives forming the policy of education. It seems to be that frequently at first glance significant declarations may act as tools for suppressing the real situation; for example, the Bologna process started in 1999 after the declaration *The European Higher Education Area* (EHEA) was issued and adopted by the ministers of education of 29 European countries in Bologna (Italy). A common European higher education area was expected to have been established up to 2010. However, the time of the period for the actions taken elapsed, and more problems rather than received results can be encountered. Thinking about solving the problems of unifying higher education is more than naive. Education offered by the so called "services providing" universities is not that attractive.

The statement "education has no impact on mind" is quite common and reveals some truth inside if we discuss anyhow and anywhere obtained pseudo-education. In case education is decent, it can be treated as a result of mind. These things determine and correlate with one another, and therefore I strongly disagree with such a superficial interpretation of education. Valid ground for reasoning is that the current situation rapidly changes, and therefore no possibility and need for fundamental education "for life" is required. It seems to be an illusion that prevents from understanding the essence. A number of followers simply have no wish or fail to perceive it. As a house having good foundations, human life has no sense without decent education. The same idea can be put forward defining the society as the wholeness because an educated society is a guarantee of state prosperity. Knowledge, abilities and values are the key stones of excellent education.

Some Sketches of University Education

Although a huge number of graduates are awarded diplomas of higher education, these certificates cannot be accepted as tools for measuring the level of mind. Without any doubt, a certain weak link exists. Along with an increase in the intensity of international competition,

universities frequently “fight and compete” for money rather than for intellectual potentiality. If you have enough money, you can study and be easily awarded a diploma. It is not a joke that a student appears at the University only at the very beginning of September for enrolment; later – the so called individual studies. The academic society long before has followed an unwritten rule that the students cannot be poorly evaluated as in this case, we can cut the same branch we are sitting on, i.e. no students – no bread. Though self-support is important, it is not the main point. If studies at higher school are on individual basis, then, what is the purpose for entering the university? The opponents should support this idea as they will provide a number of examples that university education does not make a sound impact on the material well-being of the person. Finally, everyone is somehow involved in self-education at a certain level. Individual studies are possible without any university, and thus plenty of people accept this idea.

The weight of education has remained considerably reduced for some time while some universities perform only a good imitation of the process. Certainly, strong universities are those carrying responsibility for full academic potential for science. Academic staff is the cornerstone of any university. However, in this case, “accidentally produced” scientists the number of which constantly increases should be mentioned. This is more than evident when discussing social sciences. Those “accident products” most frequently appear as extremely loyal and flexible persons. They are “beloved” by higher authorities as very often cause no problems and act as responsive promoters. The next stage is clear enough – a circle of followers is formed. Usually such “characters” stay far away from real science - they only perform an imitation of the process. The “personages” having low professional qualification work with students where requirements are reduced to minimum to reach “status quo”. A large part of students feel easiness when lecturers are not strict enough as in the majority of cases they are concerned about the diploma rather than about acquired intelligence. In turn, these lecturers achieve modest success, because the requirements imposed by the students are poor and they enjoy the so called “individual work”. Expert visits, curriculum accreditation, etc. are not effective tools for examining the true situation; all necessary reports are “made as required”. We know how to adapt *here & now*, and therefore are not tend think that similar activities can lead to very limited prospects. Thinking and acting to the principle *here & now* instead of *there and then* determine the “McDonald’s-ization” of education. *There and then* is rejected by the majority of people as in that case understanding requires mind and wisdom. Thus, is this the context for discussions about decent education?

The number of universities is another aspect that is worth being discussed. The debates on this issue never end and even are being artificially escalated, particularly in small countries. Competition in the field of higher education is obviously a hard task faced in the Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The conducted analysis of recent discussions held in these countries indicates a position supporting an idea of a drastic decrease in the number of universities thus merging a few smaller universities into a bigger one, etc. The quality of university education is determined neither by the number nor by the size or location of the institutions in the territory of the country. First, this is the government’s concern about how to raise the level of youth and public education and to promote intellectual growth. The artificial “optimization” of universities is not effective, except in case of finance. However, where is the starting point showing that education costs nothing and should be cheap? Good education costs plenty of money. What is more, direct and other sorts of investment not always bring benefit. This is a consistent pattern of unstable systems, i.e. the kind of education that really exists. We must invest maximum to expect minimum.

The duration of studies influences the quality of education. In this case, the logic of a common sense is also frequently neglected thus accepting an impact of wild competition. Certainly, the Bologna process simply included much inside. Though the intention was to better,

the results were as usual. There is no point of studying for four or five years if the process of receiving a diploma can be easily simplified and shortened. Without any doubt, obtaining a diploma is possible; nevertheless, this is not applicable to education. Therefore, this makes funny when different universities plan to pursue the same studies in a shorter period for the purpose of defeating a rival rather than of reaching noticeable quality effect.

A Diploma with No Knowledge and Values?!

As mentioned above, knowledge, abilities and values are the fundamentals of education. An appropriate combination of these three components ensures decent education. Moreover, either complete or in part integration of this pattern into the process of awarding the students diplomas could be a good idea. Unfortunately, we can only state that to service-oriented universities will never guarantee similar integration. An answer to the question *why?* is very simple: present universities are very remote from the idea put forward by V. Humboldt yet in the 19th century and explaining that universities must concentrate on public spiritual and moral education. Nowadays, money plays the crucial role. Prof A. Samalavičius suggests a remark that universities turn into individual holdings, the places where money makes the major part and which are after-effects of a new liberal policy (Samalavičius, 2011). In addition, some actions cannot be attributed to any kind of policy as they are cryptic to be easily perceived. Higher education became a massive phenomenon long time ago. Is this the real reason for triumph? The present university education has been converted into a social standard, and therefore the young generation is frequently involuntary involved into the educational process under the pressure of the family members or a wider social environment.

Thus, the international community accepts the idea that more or less the current society is not ready for challenges posed by the 21st century. The activity of being awarded "a rapid" diploma guarantees neither individual nor social progress. The universities supporting the concept of producing similar certificates take a position of self-defeating institutions.

Education Is Not a Game

With reference to the whole period starting from 1990, the education systems of a number of countries have experienced plenty of different changes a part of which has been essential, unavoidable and influenced by time. Still, a major part of the introduced actions have been ill-considered and unnecessary experiments. This period of time usually appeared to be as a game for education covered by mystical phrases such as balanced education of a versatile person, shaping a learning creative society, etc. Nevertheless, opinions about a responsible society are very rare. An educated person is first of all sensitive and obliged to other people. Education as such used for gaining personal benefit cannot be treated as education at all. We can count numerous "educated narcissists" these days; yet, those working day and night feel no difference.

Knowledge (particularly fundamental), basic abilities, skills and values have almost become a relic from the past and an extremely old-fashioned subject. On the contrary, a conception that learning/studying is serious, arduous and considerable effort requiring activity has practically disappeared. Those defending this position are like "dinosaurs" under the danger of extinction. Thus, "playable technologies" are rapidly moved to the field of higher education. Playing games are possible anyhow and anytime and even you can change the rules if found unacceptable. Although, certainly, these words enclose a fixed dose of "hyperbolization", however, in this case, the truth makes a substantial part. Higher education cannot be a result of the game. And without any doubt, this is not the game.

If we accept to be living in the 21st century information-based society, hence, knowledge

acquisition becomes the real foundation of such a society that requires systematic training, improvements in qualification, etc. Nevertheless, all above introduced ideas do not deny the essence of developed awareness. Recently, the world has counted more than 100 million people participating in e-learning. Moreover, the number of those is steadily increasing. We probably cannot take the position that knowledge and fundamental education are not required. Lately, the findings of the survey conducted by the British company e-Skills (<http://www.e-skills.com/>) have revealed that more than a half of IT experts in the country does not have appropriate qualification and fail to deal with encountered problems in daily activities. Obviously, consistent, systemic training, education and development are required. First, decent education nowadays means atypical nonstandard thinking and a high level of creativity and mental flexibility. For instance, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, U.S. has initiated a special curriculum that concentrates on transferring the courses of studies to virtual space with free access for everyone. It is supposed that for approximately 10 year period, more than 2000 different learning courses and curricula can be shifted. The experts of the institution have counted that a similar programme will cost more than 1000 million dollars. Another valid point is that the executives of the institution defend the position that such possibilities must be free of charge to anyone, which is direct opposition to the policy focused on the privatization of higher education where everything is only bought. The above mentioned institution is internationally ranked the best (<http://www.webometrics.info/top12000.asp>).

Hence, education is not a game, and universities are not “the playgrounds full of toys”. However, an impression that the number of such “playgrounds” increases along with a growth in the amount of “players” is formed. We can be taught by others; however, education is our personal business. Finally, an educated person who is acclaimed to be a self-determined, independent and strong-minded man the qualities of whose must be inherited by the nation as a whole is our primary goal.

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