

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE GROWTH OF MENIAL JOBS

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Abstract

Young people are confronting a world in which they may not achieve economic strides their parents did. Almost all will have been awarded university degree, worth far less (in the terms and conditions of their employment) than that of their parents, if they themselves graduated from university. In the article the author discusses the relationship between higher education and stratification. The concepts of meritocracy and credentialism are considered and a particular attention is paid to an equal/unequal access to education dilemma. Discussed is why a liberal arts education is losing ground and why it is being made a scapegoat for graduate unemployment. Does the nightmare of Weber's "iron cage of rationalization" come true and is the contemporary university in the service of an economic order with all the related technical requirements of machine production? In the second part of the article the role of meritocratic discourse and educational credential inflation is considered as well as the growth of menial jobs for young people as a case in Poland.

Key words: education at post-secondary level, liberal arts, youth unemployment, inequality, Poland.

Introduction

In a very short piece of writing, Charles Fourier (1980, p.323) addresses the pertinent question of who will do the dirty work in a humane society. His answer was as shocking as it was not very serious. In the half-baked idea of the socialist colonies he envisaged, little children would do the dirty work because children just love to play with dirt. Fourier, among most classic authors within the utopian socialist tradition, writing in the age of the Industrial Revolution, focused much of his attention on the impact on the human condition of the new industrial mode of production. In this little essay, he arrived at a concrete problem that would arise in the perfect world. Writing roughly a century after the Industrial Revolution, Thorstein Veblen was in any doubt as to whether humankind would be always divided between those who toil and those who manage to appropriate enough of the product of work for them to live a life of leisure. His severe depiction of the lifestyles of the upper classes has greatly inspired subsequent criticism of the ways of the affluent. Most recently the theory of a leisure class has enjoyed something of a renaissance, because of the bitter parody of the "one-percenters" within the American public discourse on issues of income and social inequality (Albański, 2014).

The stratification system with its "reward packages" of unequal value has been always under sociological investigation and the patterns of considerable inequality have been vividly described (Grusky, 1994). So far, all known societies have been characterized by inequalities of some kind, with a privileged few enjoying a disproportionate share of the total wealth, power, or prestige. Some of the ideas of social inequalities have been even deeply ingrained in the tradition of public discussions. Despite general animosity towards inequalities, many people can accept all kinds of inequalities as long as they can imagine different outcomes. There are no obvious external barriers forcibly preventing them from assessing personal and social development. The restricted opportunities just made their possible success more of a challenge.

One of the most compelling universal expectations is future occupational achievements and material success based on educational attainments. This societal expectation has been

reinforced by studies that show the economic value of an education (OECD, 2012). It is reasonable to assume that occupational outcomes rely solely on a work of true merit, which can be broadly defined by educational attainment. Open and meritocratic distribution of credentials can legitimize the system of social stratification, in as far as formal education is socially seen as a channel through which social and economic equity for the general population can provide a pathway for economic security and social integration (Brown 2001). Thus, the idea of education as human capital investment constitutes the litmus test for meritocratic rule in societies (Becker, 1964). Moreover, a social system where people get power on the basis of their ability provides a sort of solution to Fourier's provocative question.

The logics of efficiency, however, let many people see a university degree primarily as a ticket to a better life, and when higher education is more readily available to the population at large, there is also a public concern on spending tax money on more practical and result-oriented outcomes of expensive educational investments. In difficult financial times, there is a great deal of pressure on young people to pick degrees that promise tangible benefits and vocational training. The most recent economic downturn has tended to reinforce such claims, especially with the hampering of employment opportunities for young people.

There has also occurred a polarization with better-paid jobs and menial jobs, which has created a further demand for economic servants (Autor & Dorn, 2013). Perhaps, it is hardly surprising that many graduates are engaged in the most elementary of occupations as a result of the increase in work menial in nature rather than being involved in professional employment. Then, if one was to add rising youth unemployment it might be expected rightly that many more young adults will become either angry or depressed (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Meanwhile, public support for higher education has weakened, because people have increasingly blamed university for not being well-suited for labor market challenges. In respond to public grievances, the politics of education is further and further subjected to economic systems, political ideologies and dominant worldviews. Especially humanities and social sciences programs have been targeted as those which hamper the full development of market forces (Côté & Allahar, 2011).

The analysis considers the issue of undermining liberal arts education at the post-secondary level. This fact is even more disturbing if someone is attached to the belief that liberal arts education can set us free from the confines of human ignorance. Nonetheless, the liberal arts bias has enveloped the politics of education. Consequently, general university education is perceived as if it had the same marketability as an applied education has. In addition, there is a widespread mismatching of credentials in the labor market. As it happens, the collapse of higher educational standards is driven by misguided policies. The research aims to explore meritocratic discourses at play in the Polish context of credentials, the image of students as economic units and investments in workforce. It argues that higher education principles are reduced in contemporary policy context, dominated by neoliberal influences of reform and competition, to pseudo-vocational training. In doing so, the second part of the article presents some dominant views on higher education drawn from news websites of the leading Polish daily newspapers such as *Gazeta Prawna*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*. It also provides a basic insight into published data by the CBOS (Centre for Public Opinion Research) on the university attendance and attainment in Poland.

(Un) equal Access to Higher Education

Higher education is perceived as one of the solid foundations of the welfare state. The way in which university performs its public functions has undergone a profound transformation in the past decades. What was once the privilege of a few affluent members of society has become a broadly social entitlement, thanks mainly to governmental support. The transformation has long attracted the interests of sociologists of education, because it arranges the basic interests in stratification processes to socio-economic issues in the organization and management of universities (Calhoun, 2006). The body of sociological literature has had as its mission to

deconstruct the notion of university as an institution of men of status and property (Bourdieu, 1996). Some studies have demonstrated that substantial academic advantages accrue to the children of better off families (Furlong, 2009). The wider democratization of higher education has brought important advances in a detailed knowledge of educational inequalities, but it has also brought about a monumental challenge to the system of higher education: how to make access to higher education more socially inclusive yet maintaining high standards high when it is the affluent who can afford better schools and learning opportunities.

Broadened access to higher education available to the public at large does not imply automatically any meritocratic distribution of the existing credentials. Instead of an educational equality of opportunities, what is being observed is that the rising costs and escalating debts to gain individual advantage through higher education degrees are likely to impoverish many young people and their families even further, in what becomes a path to graduate unemployment (Houle, 2013). The educational arms race has narrowed down educational possibilities to an inflation of credentials and a new emphasis on credentials with high prestige and limited availability. Randall Collins (2002) has warned that the easy availability of credentials can trigger their inflation. When white collar jobs are scarce, many young adults perceive continuing study as one of the last palatable options they have, thereby motivating them to stay on in university longer. They predict that what will likely come next is a difficulty in finding secure jobs and the actual impossibility to find the jobs they may have once aspired to. In the meantime, they hope that the best response to the declining job value of their education will be the obtaining of even more education.

However, when tertiary education increasingly helps in the absorbing of the labor surplus by keeping young adults out of the labor force, this also raises public concerns. The public is traditionally suspicious of the “true” beneficiaries of university education (Calhoun, 2006). There is no difficulty in viewing university as removed from the discipline of production and hence wholly devoted to the cultural standards of the leisure class. In the public mind, university is perceived as a not very practical-oriented place with its specific old-age customs, that is, too often, a wasteland for taxpayers’ money. Most taxpayers who graduated from university long ago or who never attended university whatsoever are not attuned to what happens there, but they just want to see the practical outcomes of the government’s spending of their taxes. In fact, many potential students and their parents are asking the question as to the economic credibility of higher education, especially in societies where the price of a degree is rising, as a result of falling government subsidies (“Briefing”, 2014, June 28). There is the spread of public sentiments in favor of utilitarian considerations. The issue of university is therefore apparently limited to the returns in investing in a university education. Moreover, the question as to what constitutes a high quality in higher education is narrowly addressed to the rate of youth unemployment.

Increasingly the dominant idea of university has been rebranded to academic programs that produce tangible results. At the same time, the channeling of students into academic programs and the decline of vocational programs have raised the political question of the promotion of pseudo-vocational training at post-secondary education level. Eventually many new academic initiatives to combat unemployment among graduates have drifted towards the course of pseudo-vocational training. Some academic programs have been reinvented to promise that they will give students an edge in the competition for jobs. There has especially been a constant drive to intensify the pressure of accountability on humanities and social sciences programs. Although this ideology of higher education is based on the false premises that a more rational-choice logic in education will produce more equality of opportunities and better economic performance, it does provide some degree of a political solution to the introduction of new meanings in educational inequality and graduate unemployment.

An Unshakable Belief in Human Capital?

The commercialization of higher education goes counter to the idea of university as a public institution, thereby eclipsing the education of citizens. The driving ethos of today's public university is to be trapped in the mindset of the corporation (Côté & Allahar, 2011). Firstly, there is an expectation that academic scholarship will have clear quantifiable aims. Then, a university education is instrumentally geared towards the specific needs of vocational training. Thirdly, the "quality" in education is associated too often with accountability. Fourthly, in the pursuit of its result-oriented mandate, university will follow the example of a business-run organization. A corporatized type university will become engaged fully in commercial markets, because each corporation thinks in terms of profits. The idea of education is thus justified by their direct usefulness to the market.

The recognition that a university is a corporation will provide a growing sense of disenchantment with some democratic and egalitarian concerns in society. On the contrary, the elevation of democratic and egalitarian concerns in higher education lies at the bottom of academic debates over the contemporary project of a university (Scott, 2006). It is important to acknowledge that the university (perceived as a public institution) ought to embrace the broad interest of the public at large. For social scientists, higher education has never been reduced to the result of rational calculations. Neither has higher education primarily intended to develop vocational skills. The focus is on the promotion of the education of citizens, who will constitute an intelligent electorate (Calhoun, 2006).

Many social scientists tend to define education as "intellectual engagement." For them, the role of university subjected to the economic order with all the related technical requirements of machine production depicts Max Weber's iron cage of rationalization. In many ways, the contemporary currents in the social sciences take issue with the reasoning behind the rational-choice logic that is an important part of the discipline of economics on the meritocratic rules over an individual's achievements in education and occupational advancement. In particular, the postmodernist party of academics sets fire to the concept of objective knowledge in favor of socially constructed truths (Smith & Webster, 1997). In this process, however, postmodernist academics are entirely preoccupied with identity debates. The fundamentals of social authority are subject to contestation by identity politics and academic requirements are questioned as a result of bitter accusations of being biased against educational minorities. In their efforts, postmodernist academics want to believe that they are fighting for a more diversified and hence a more justifiable education. In fact, the humanities and the social sciences are strongly tied up with distinct cultures and selected identities, but this fact is publicly recognized as a political commitments dictate. In the eyes of the public, the liberal arts have been increasingly influenced by political desires, associated with the privileged interests of distinct groups (gender, gay, ethnic rights etc.), while they have forgotten about the universal values represented by an entire society. Thus, paradoxically, those who initially promoted political correctness and social justice are themselves accused of political biases (D'Souza, 1991). However, the core of public criticism towards the humanities and social sciences is that they stop producing knowledge and go into politics. Moreover, it does not help either that the language of academic debates often becomes too socially hermetic and sophisticated to attune in any outsider.

An unintended side effect of permissive attitudes towards educational minorities driven by the postmodernist agenda is that there is a general public perception that standards in universities are falling, because they have to be lowered in order to accommodate the special rights of minority groups. Especially, when academic credentials are no longer as solid and as impeccable, the public want to be ensured greater transparency and accountability of higher education. This means that students gaining access to a university education have the necessary motivation and ability for the pursuit of higher education. They think of higher education in terms of individual and societal investments. The result-oriented public mandate goes along with the views on a university centered around rational business models. It is assumed that

the government and the taxpayer (subsidize higher education) should have a voice in the decision-making process on how the public money is spent on universities and thus on how universities are run, what kind of knowledge universities produce and on how responsible they are to those who subsidize them (Calhoun, 2006). The public will is that the ethos of a modern university embraces the vocational policy premised on the human capital dictate. Moreover, a more corporate university body seems to be well attuned to public demands (“Briefing”, 2014, June 28). It seems to many people that the human capital accumulation process based on meritocratic selection procedures will not abuse an individual’s sense of injustice, while affirmative actions in higher education based on the collective rights of minorities will be forced against academic standards and requirements and hence cost the individual advantage associated with higher degrees. The corporate-type university appears to be well suited for such claims. While the traditional idea of the university is understandably identified with a link between the beneficiaries of university education and wealthy elites and the postmodernist idea of the university identified with identity politics, the corporate-type university is overly preoccupied with the bottom line (Scott, 2006). The pure business orientation does not seem to involve any discriminatory measures against any particular group, because it is primarily focused on profits and thus there is an assumption that in the market discrimination costs money, because a discriminatory preference will affect productivity and profits. Moreover, the ceaseless quest for profits suggests the greater propensity for the individual to ingratiate themselves within the idea of university as a corporate. Multinational corporates provide the most striking instance of a homogeneity of standards and procedures, otherwise work in a diversified environment.

Nevertheless, the main driver of the strong belief in human capital is the labor market. The concept of human capital is narrowly applied to individual and societal investments in education, which yield economic returns for those individuals and groups (Becker, 1964). Even the recent economic downturn has not seriously renounced the commonly held belief in the standard model of human capital in education, that is, a higher degree is an entry ticket to the professional classes. The thinking of higher education in terms of the rational-choice logic that is central to the human capital concept has become only more narrowed to be applied. As innovations and job automation erase some job positions and change others, people will need to top up their human capital throughout their entire lives (“Briefing”, 2014, June 28). The dominant view is that university graduates have lower unemployment rates and higher salaries than the overall population. The value of a degree is treated in the same way as anything else in neoliberal economics, being boiled down to the supply and demand principle (Arrow, 1976). The more persons who obtain advanced degrees, the more fierce competition among them for elite jobs and the higher the educational requirements that can be demanded by employers. The trend is considered as a part of the human capital logic, since firms seek to hire ever more of the best educated workers and in fact, this is an endless process, while another look at the endless pursuit of more education might bring more credential inflation to mind as well.

The logics of efficiency which are fundamental to the human capital approaches do not necessarily describe a liberal arts education (Côté & Allahar, 2011). The concept of human capital is successfully invoked to explain the outcomes for applied degrees, which are focused on the concrete skills sought by employers. The humanities and the social sciences are not defined well in terms of rationally strategic calculations. Neither is either of them primarily dedicated to develop vocational skills. Although there are some efforts to assess their market value, the humanities and the social sciences are applied to non-material based value systems. As a result, one can be only educated (not trained) in the liberal arts. This means that the acquisition of technical knowledge and the details instrumentally geared to meeting definable goals do not envisage the humanities and the social sciences coping with the problems of humanity. However, the human capital approaches which focus on the competency enhancing potentials of vocational-type programs at university are intentionally blind to recognize that education is also reliant on non-material values and norms that are not to be justified by their marketability (Côté & Allahar, 2011). The humanities and the social sciences are usually framed

in the same scheme of evaluation so as to allow for the technical ascendancy of the applied sciences. It is not surprising that popular understanding elevates both mechanical culture and practical knowledge with utilitarian concerns far higher than the stock of human knowledge in the service of the liberal arts. The dire consequences of such preferences result in the sticking of a label on the humanities and the social sciences as being intellectually inferior to the so-called rocket sciences.

The logic of efficiency based on human capital advances a plausible explanation for the gaining in popularity of the liberal arts programs though (Côté & Allahar, 2011). Due to the facts that academic streams in the liberal arts are the cheapest to offer and the minimum entrance requirement seems to be lower, it is more efficient to drag students into them than provide the opportunity of increasing a number of students on applied science programs. Still, the human capital approaches claim that these credentials are positioned as having a quality in the status competition for jobs that employers use in selecting prospective employees, but the emphasis is on jobs which do not require specialized and professional skills. Though this raises several questions of integration into the workplace, underemployment and the signaling effect of credential attainment. The notion that more education is better regardless of the type of that education is here on shaky ground.

However, perhaps, what makes the belief in human capital so uncritically taken for granted is that the concept of human capital offers a great degree of ambiguity about the course of individual lives. More precisely, there is an abstract belief in possibility, which relies on the confidence of individuals that they will be fully responsible to fulfill their socio-economic destiny. However, the increasing complexity of the world economy means they will never afford a knowledge of benefits and costs (Beck, 2000). A certain portion of uncertainty makes it difficult to predict long-term outcomes. The very source of ambiguity is that the human capital approaches to create the narrative about successful individuals who find themselves overwhelmed by the prosperity they pursued and ultimately attained. Those people who failed should blame themselves, because they located their individual resources in a bad investment.

The Role of Meritocratic Discourse and Educational Credential Inflation in Poland

In Poland, university attendance is 52% of the youth cohort, and it is on the way to become commonplace in the education system. 74% of high school graduates go on to higher education. 78% of the respondents perceive access to tertiary education as open and inclusive, and thus they maintain the belief that there is mass tertiary education in Poland. Especially, those who have a university degree (93%) are confident that everyone is able to be enrolled on a university graduate program. In addition, they usually complain about academic requirements and standards (51%). In their view, the academic standards are lowered in order to accommodate the masses of students. The same opinion is accounted for by 47% of the respondents in general. Among the critics of mass tertiary education, a distinct group is made up of employers (45%) (CBOS, 2013a, CBOS, 2013b).

Nonetheless, the majority of the respondents (82%) still perceive educational degrees as a currency of social respectability that can be profitably traded for access to better-paid white collar jobs, yet an increasing number of university graduates emphasize the limited purchasing power of their higher education diploma (57%). In this case, they think about pursuing the ever more contested supply of rewarding jobs. 64% of the respondents believe that an engineering diploma is a most valuable asset on the labor market. Roughly 50% of the respondents lay great emphasis on prestige differentiations among identical credentials (CBOS, 2013b).

Roughly 85% of the respondents want their child to receive a university diploma. Moreover, there are no significant differences between the respondents who are skeptical about the value of higher education and those who remain confident. In fact, the respondents who have a university diploma are highly motivated to give their child higher education opportunities. In addition to their confidence, they often declare high expectations for a doctoral degree for

their child. Overall there is a declining number of respondents who are satisfied with technical secondary education (from 24% in 1993 to 9% in 2013) (CBOS, 2013b).

The social surveys show that educational credential inflation builds on itself (CBOS, 2013a, CBOS, 2013b). Although an increasing number of the respondents criticize the mass character of tertiary education and at the same time perceive the declining value of their diploma, they do not resign from obtaining a university diploma for themselves and their children. The educational aspirations of the respondents, apart from their own experiences with tertiary education, seem to remain at a substantial level. They rightly expect that the more persons there are who hold a university degree, the more competition there is among them to get a white collar job. As long as such achievements or failures are understood rather individually than structurally, the human capital narration is central to how individuals think of honing personal careers. According to the respondents, it is clear enough that over their life careers, university graduates generally do better than non-graduates occupationally and economically.

The Political Ideology of Higher Education

The topic of higher education regularly features in public and political debates. The background of these debates lies in, on the one hand, an increasing focus on pressing problems relating to demographic changes in the age structure of Polish society (especially fundamental differences in universities' revenues, employment in the higher education industry and the number of institutions), and, on the other hand, rising costs, changing labor demand and stagnant productivity, which have become prominent political issues. A common conclusion drawn by politicians and policymakers is that the Polish higher education system failed to meet labor market demands, and that a new set of reforms is needed. This does not mean, however, that anyone suggests a revised approach to human capital and educational credential inflation (Lewandowski & Magda, 2014). The logics of human capital led many policymakers to be even more narrow-minded. There are no problems with the youth labor market, but universities ignore the competency-enhancing potentials of vocational-type programs (Wesolowska, 2011, Sendrowicz, 2014).

Two particular discursive frameworks play a significant role in constructing their belief in education economics, one that emphasizes individual responsibility, and another which problematizes youth unemployment and the poor marketable quality of universities. They have come to increasingly dominate and shape the policy approach adopted. When it comes to the discourse that emphasizes individual responsibility and critiques dependence on social welfare provision, this provides an important part of the framework for graduates of the humanities and the social sciences. Any liberal arts academic program does not adhere closely to job marketability and hence liberal arts graduates must acknowledge that their university credentials are not easily converted into job opportunities. In fact, their hopes for employment are usually located within very limited and lower-paid institutional contexts such as the state bureaucracy, art institutions and schools. Thus, the discourse generally emphasizes individual responsibility for potential difficulties in finding a permanent job as well as generates feelings about expected earnings and occupational outcomes ("Absolwenci idą na bezrobocie", 2009, October 19, Wielgórska 2012). At the same time, however, the discourse stresses that individual effort is all that is required for success and continuously dismisses damages resulting from educational credential inflation ("Absolwenci źle oceniają", 2013, April 18). As a result, many liberal arts graduates downplay the possibility of their education as a mobility trap factor and make a general assumption that even good white collar jobs are scarce for them, those who can afford them have to pay for more education in the hope of obtaining at least entry level jobs. This discourse sits within a broader ideological framework, focused on the idea that individuals should take greater responsibility for their situation. It defines a half-baked theory that everything that happens has been decided in advance by the course of individual actions. Yet the same logic is used to stick on the label of graduates of general programs as passive and

welfare dependent, and it places a specific emphasis on the belief that they feel confident in choosing their path to unemployment. One might easily perceive the background of a political-economic transformation reliant on strengthening the role of the market while reducing welfare support. This makes a certain link to human capital policies by suggesting that graduates of the humanities and the social sciences have abused the opportunities (being more successful and economically independent) they have been granted by the market, and created for themselves the individual's economic misery of an uncertain future ("Absolwenci idą na bezrobocie" 2009, October 19).

As a part of that, the complexity of higher education and its relation to the labor market which result in graduate unemployment/ underemployment is downplayed in favor of an argument that points to the tendency within liberal programs to ignore vocational training initiatives and to produce ideological warfare instead. The focus on marketable quality, where education and research are geared to the market, is driven to abandon publicly unpopular and too abstract questions. The most recent turmoil of gender studies in Poland shows almost a clash of civilizations between political and academic circles (Mikulska, 2014; Terlikowski, 2014). Regrettably, much debate on the issues of gender has to do rather with ritualistic affirmation than intellectual rigor. However, the very nature of politics itself is to demonize those who are considered to be one's political opponents. It is no wonder that for the general public, gender has become a catch-all term for radical ideas around sexual reproduction, homonormative and other social trends they do not approve of, while a liberal education hijacked by a leftist and gender bias has been exposed as morally reprehensible.

The mission of university to provide a liberal education that contributes to the production of a citizenry that is capable of being engaged in value-based discussions has been negated in favor of the vocational function of a university. Those who define education primarily as serving the needs of economy can play the card of youth unemployment to promote corporate universities and vocational training over social responsibility and intellectual engagement. That tendency has been prominently on display to show that departments of the humanities and the social sciences wage ideological wars, while the question of a business engagement in commercial markets is seriously neglected. It has emphasized the fact that public universities do not have to bear the costs of their actions, as they would in the private sector (Łoskot-Mirowska, 2013; Voelkel, 2014). This includes the assumption that the rise of corporatized universities with the demands of corporate sponsors or donors would play the significant role in the normalization of value-based conflicts. Academics would be asked to provide compelling material justifications for their teaching and research, especially in times of an economic downturn when the competition for resources is fierce. The marketplace of ideas is premised on utilitarian considerations that financial interests would give universities the incentive to focus on beneficial results. The utilitarian approach to ideas would show clearly the price of unpopular ideas as the profit that must be forgone.

There are certain claims to confirm rational business models with their instrumental decision-making practices as a panacea, sufficient for addressing and solving all the problems of higher education. It also rests on assumptions about individuals, seen to make rational choices. Thus, such self-definitions are arguably significant to imply that firstly, individuals have come to see themselves as having a choice, which reinforces a tendency to understand one's educational attainment and occupation outcomes in terms of individual achievement or failure (while disregarding the broader picture of structural inequalities). Secondly, the casualization of the labor market and educational credential inflation mean that individuals experience persistent insecurity, yet individuals are positioned as if in charge of their personal situation. This comes as a result of regarding one's situation with naïve faith in personal achievement or failure.

The Rise of Menial Jobs and Almost Compulsory Tertiary Education

If current labor market trends continue, paradoxically, the university sector will transform itself into almost compulsory tertiary education. Moreover, the mindless pursuit of another diploma will become a dismal picture of the fall of higher education standards. Especially, when the education system is based on the false premises that a credential constitutes a ticket into decent white collar jobs and the ultimate level of the experience. Such credential approaches create a vicious circle of students seeking job opportunities and attempts to attract new recruits to courses of study begging for high numbers of students. One consequence is that there has been seen an increasing flow of students through universities, the principal purpose for being there is to receive a credential (Markiewicz 2013, "Najważniejsza powinna być jakość", 2014, August 13). This means that many university students are alienated from the process of learning, because they are likely to demonstrate a lack of intellectual engagement in the courses that have to be taken in order to obtain the credential (Błaszczak, 2013). In many ways, it is assumed in the mindset of modern consumerism that university education is just another product to be delivered to its consumer's satisfaction. Another consequence is that universities have attempted to change a liberal education into more profitable and persuasive forms of vocational training legitimated by a corporate mandate. The basic pedagogical principles of a liberal education associated with its Latin meaning of freedom are, regrettably, forgotten. Especially, when educational standards slide into marketable credentials. In addition, it helps students to maintain an unwavering belief in the power of customer relations that they are consumers purchasing their education. After all, they are convinced of the student-customer model by the dominant discourse on higher education that position universities as suppliers of easy-to-reach credentials. In particular, when students pay for their university tuition.

However, tertiary education is commonly perceived as a protective cocoon against the violence of adult life. For many students, their continuing education means that the period of youth has been intentionally prolonged (Sałek, 2013). Moreover, the dominant discourse on human capital encourages them to believe that their decision is rational enough. Firstly, the extension of educational system is believed to correlate with longer human lifespans. As a result, the phenomenon of mass tertiary education is likely to be explained by the prolongation of youth in human populations. Thus, students just want to benefit from a longer period of maturation and to obtain a better education. Secondly, the corporate model of university is focused on profit calculations. The system is rewarded by the number of students who are willing to continue their studies. Consequently, university degrees are offered as if they were an upgraded product. Many students are likely to buy into this idea, because it has its cultural references in the world of high-tech gadgets. They live in a world filled with constantly upcoming devices that promise to bring large changes. They often read the message literally. We are upgraded to obtain a better position for job competition. However, due to credential inflation their hopes for being offered good and steady jobs through more education are a forlorn attempt to reassure them they are not passive. Thirdly, some students will combine study with work (roughly 40% in the age of 18-24 and 76% in the age of 25-29, CBOS, 2013c). They are usually engaged in the most elementary occupations, because of their lack of necessary qualifications or their youthfulness to work in prestigious jobs. Nevertheless, many students do not complain about the kind of work they do. Even if they do menial work, this is acceptable, because the driving ethos of such work is that you earn your own money and get a work experience. After all, many young people conclude that in maintaining their status of student they will be able to minimize their needs in comparison to those young adults who decided to struggle to maintain their households and bring up children without secure employment and wage. Moreover, some students can count on being helped out by parents (76% at the age of 18-24 and 52% at the age of 25-29, CBOS, 2013c). Then, if one is to add experiencing a bottleneck on their way to the labor market and rising youth unemployment, further education is perceived as a haven to refugees from the hostility of the labor market (Sałek, 2013).

While decent white collar jobs are exceptionally limited, there has been a rise in menial jobs such as working in a coffee shop, serving fast food, filling shop shelf space and shipping packages in warehouses (Lewandowski & Magda, 2014, pp. 35, 39-40). A large number of such jobs are provided by international supermarket chains, fast food restaurant chains and large online-based retail companies. They bear all the hallmarks of cheap prices, being poorly paid and easy rotating jobs. In contrast to many European Union countries where the activities of such companies are strictly regulated by law, they have been given a free hand in designing their sales monopoly in Poland (Solska, 2014). Consequently, they use their impregnable position to get rid of local businesses as well as exert a strong influence on local producers. Moreover, they are very reluctant to invest money in the local labor market, while the enormous gains from sales in Poland are transferred abroad. Furthermore, they dominate the social landscape in Poland, because they are able to create a vicious circle of symbiosis between them and destitute young adults who provide both cheap labor and the customer. It is no wonder that many young adults may feel alienated. In particular, those, who invested in higher education in the hope that they would avoid menial jobs (after all, one hardly needs a university diploma to ship packages to the right address, make coffee or serve customers politely).

The dominance of the market ideology combined with reduced welfare support creates a growing demand for part-time workers to be employed to do work which would have been done within the family before (for instance, caring for children during the day, or looking after parents when they are old). Other combined factors such as an almost lifelong commitment to work, work conditions and the ageing Polish society just ensure the continuation of this trend. The employment of domestic workers constitutes a category of highly gendered labor that has come as a result of the intersection of gendered cultural norms that define housework as tasks for women and professional employment for women who in hiring baby-sitters or maids can free themselves from housework to keep their job position. Domestic work is marked by a hierarchy of work tasks, and of formal and informal modes of employment. In many cases, liberal arts graduates are preferred for babysitting due to their better education and communication skills, because they are usually hired by upper-middle class families that are driven by the ethos of child investment. However, domestic work has been increasingly formed through a competition for part-time jobs. If students/ graduates decide to repair the holes in their household budgets, they will displace others who could have worked in those jobs. It is also possible that many liberal arts graduates will choose to migrate in search of domestic work abroad (Błaszczak, 2014, Mai 24).

For an increasing number of young people, emigration is seen as being an option (Błaszczak, 2014, September 12). There is an enormous hiatus between the dominant view of higher education as a persuasive alienation from doing menial jobs and the striking reality with its package of low-skilled service jobs. Therefore, many young Poles will reduce the obvious mental discomfort by making migratory decisions. In some way, migration can be perceived as the source of oppositional youth culture (roughly 60% young people at the age of 18-24, and 40% aged 25-34 declare that they want to migrate abroad, CBOS, 2013d). The mass tertiary system with its dominant ideology of human capital promises students an access to elite jobs, but they are instead pushed into an economy where menial work is all there is available. The broken promises have brought increasing alienation from official adult standards which promote both education and work. Thus, migration carries a simple message "I am leaving." Nonetheless, migration is usually interpreted in terms of the dominant discourse on individual achievement or failure. Many young adult migrants simply believe that their migratory decisions will impact on leverage over individual resources such as work experience in a new environment, foreign language fluency etc. It can be questioned though if they obtain such resources with them usually going for menial and routine jobs. It is important to note, however, that filling shelf space in a British and a Polish Tesco is not perceived in the same way. Migration and its material and symbolic dimensions play a role through individuals developing a new sense of self. It is linked to particular discourses that make possible certain subjectivities over others.

The combination of experiencing migratory insecurity and regarding one's situation through the lens of a free choice to shape individual achievement or failure is a part of the dominant discourse on youth, education and unemployment that positioned young people in charge of their personal situation. It involves certain social pressures on migrants, including precisely the concern to present the self as a cunning, industrious, self-made person. In other words, it encourages them to normalize their migratory situation through ways of thinking and acting that support their beliefs that thanks to migration, they avoid sharing the frustration of many of their peers at home and fully embrace the ethos of autonomous individuals.

Conclusions

Fourier (1980, p.323) begins his essay with the following words: "fresh souls, especially those of the young, possess energy in the exercise of patriotic virtues which is not found in people of the world, who are ready to waver and tuck about to obtain a sinecure." Ironically, one might envisage the current situation of young people. Since the early 1990s, significant transformations in the labor market in Poland have taken place (from industrial to post-industrial), which have had an impact on the labor market position of young people. Moreover, there have been fundamental changes in the broader political and economic contexts, and these profound changes have determined social and educational outcomes. Universities have produced graduates in record numbers to feed the appetite of the labor market. The relationship between the educational and occupational levels of the population has been chosen as an excellent marker for assessing development opportunities. Furthermore, the assumption that future occupational achievements and financial success relied on higher educational attainments has been universally accepted. The normalizing function of discourse has focused on the idea of a self-made individual who has the power to influence their life situation. This is essential to common sense conceptions of higher education as a ticket to a better life in terms of material and economic success.

The mass expansions of higher education in Poland see the recent cohorts of young people looking for a haven there from a stormy labor market that does not have generous offers for young workers in terms of opportunity, remuneration, or respect for their feelings. Especially, when common sense conceptions of higher education provide a pervasive alienation from doing menial jobs, it highlights the tensions and contradictions. More vocational-type oriented programs are invoked as a solution. In particular, liberal arts programs are undermined by such thinking behind human capital ideology. In attempts to conserve the tertiary education system, however, the pseudo vocational trainings at university bear all the hallmarks of a Weberian iron cage controlled by spiritless specialists.

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