

THE CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYABILITY AND CITIZENSHIP IN EDUCATION  
– TOWARDS A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING

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## ABSTRACT

*This special issue of Annales emerges from an initial, exploratory screening of the connection between employability and citizenship in the field of education. This introduction briefly sets out the main dilemmas and research questions in the field, locating them within the broader framework of current trends in citizenship education and the development of (higher) education policies. It chiefly focuses on the intersection between two seemingly conflicting concepts of employability and citizenship, which has not been, is not currently, and should not always be the case as a certain contribution to this volume indicates. This introductory part, as well as the special issue as a whole, attempts to put forward conceptual foundations to provide the grounds for the two concepts to speak to each other and signal premises that endanger either the economic, but primarily the civic function of educational institutions, primarily universities. The authors warn that reducing education systems merely to their economic utility may impair their democratic potential significantly.*

**Key words:** citizenship, citizenship education, employability, higher education, education-job transition, academic profession, knowledge economy

LE SFIDE DELL'OCCUPABILITÀ E DELLA CITTADINANZA NEL CONTESTO  
DELL'ISTRUZIONE – SULLA STRADA VERSO UNA COMPrensIONE COMPLETA

## SINTESI

*Questo gruppo di articoli è frutto di una comprensione esplorativa del punto d'incontro tra il concetto di occupabilità e cittadinanza nel contesto dell'istruzione. L'editoriale presenta in breve i dilemmi principali e le domande di ricerca in questo campo, ponendole in un ambito più ampio di trend attuali nel campo dell'educazione civica e dello sviluppo delle politiche d'istruzione. Il messaggio fondamentale della focalizzazione sul punto d'incontro tra occupabilità e cittadinanza è che questi due concetti sono opposti solo apparentemente, il che viene chiaramente presentato in alcuni articoli di questo gruppo. L'editoriale e tutti gli articoli presentano soprattutto le basi concettuali che permettono di comprendere in modo complementare questi due concetti e al contempo di fare in modo che si affermino. Inoltre avvertono sui pericoli, legati alla funzione economica, ma soprattutto civile, delle istituzioni del sistema d'istruzione. In questo contesto gli autori sottolineano il pericolo della sottomissione dei sistemi d'istruzione esclusivamente alla loro funzione economica, poiché con ciò è in grave pericolo il loro potenziale democratico.*

**Parole chiave:** cittadinanza, educazione civica, occupabilità, istruzione superiore, passaggio tra l'istruzione e il mercato del lavoro, professione accademica, economia della conoscenza

## INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY CITIZENSHIP AND EMPLOYABILITY IN EDUCATION?

This volume has two ambitions: to show how important it is for citizenship studies to understand the role of education, particularly higher education, and the role it plays in the creation of a virtual citizenry and a democratic society. This is primarily the case in an era of multiple crises that have left their marks on how entire societies and their subsystems function. On the other hand, one cannot fully comprehend these processes without a deeper understanding of the changes happening in the economy and their effects on the function of education and the university in modern societies in general as well as changes in the academic profession, curriculum definition, spatial conceptualisations and, ultimately, individual lives.

In the last decade, higher education institutions across Europe have been increasingly introducing a range of new activities such as: internal and external evaluations, accreditations, outcome-based monitoring, the promotion of problem-based learning and competency-based curricula, transparency, competitiveness in research funding, and support for student practices. These processes are supposed to increase the quality and functional dimensions of higher education systems, especially in terms of supporting graduates' careers and cooperation with industry. So far, the question remains open of how aligned these processes are with some more traditional functions of higher education – teaching students to understand and master academic theories, methods and knowledge domains, strengthening students' self-reflections and critical positions on technological and social phenomena and contributing to their cultural enhancement and personality development. In that sense, the consequences of higher education reforms for the frequently disregarded perspective of citizenship also need to be addressed.

Namely, since these reforms try to (re-)orient higher education developments in line with the Napoleonic models of higher education (see Zgaga, 2009), the question regarding the extent to which current trends have hampered higher education's potential to 'produce' competent and critical citizens seems at least just as important for the functioning of democratic societies as university-industry cooperation and graduates' work placements.

## EDUCATION AND ITS LINKS TO DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Education has proven to be an instrument for nurturing social cohesion and deepening democracy ever since compulsory education was introduced (Dewey, 1916) and has been credited for significantly contributing to the development and sustainability of democracy (e.g. Lipset, 1959). Formal, non-formal and informal educational processes function to provide the tools citi-

zens need to fully perform their roles in a democratic society. To be precise, regardless of socialisation in or an allocation outlook on citizenship education, educational attainment has been shown to have an important demographic effect on political attitudes (Ichilov, 2003), as confirmed by the positive correlation between formal education and active citizenship (see Hoskins et al., 2008). When looking at the period of early adulthood, universities play a vital role in the political socialisation and shaping of virtuous citizens. Hoskins et al. (2008) stress the importance of higher education by pointing to the increased political participation of individuals with a higher education compared to others with a lower educational attainment. The authors conclude that many benefits are associated with education. While most of the economic literature emphasises the monetary returns to education, they indicate that formal education, in particular tertiary education, promotes Active Citizenship (Hoskins et al., 2008, 19).

Building on the civic education tradition of Machiavelli and Rousseau, as well as Condorcet's (1982) deliberation on education for democracy, education has therefore become a common tool for shaping the citizenry also from the perspective of higher education. This is also one of the main justifications of the massification of higher education, which is as strong as the economic argument (Hoskins et al., 2008). When examining the effects of higher education, Hillygus (2005) established that higher education influences the political engagement of graduates in the future in line with their studied curriculum since students of the social sciences and humanities are more likely to become politically engaged than others. However, Galston (2001) argues that participation in the university community itself may socialise individuals to become politically engaged or impart some of their basic associational skills required to function in public. In effect, both participation in an educational community and specific curricular content geared towards the liberal arts provide an important link between higher education and democratic citizenship, hence showing that higher education contributes to the quality of citizenship in many direct and indirect ways. This has been consistently established by a number of authors and studies (e.g. Gardner et al., eds., 2000; Crick, 2000; Arthur and Bolin, eds., 2005; Ahier et al., 2003).

Citizenship literature across the spectrum is concerned with the creation of a virtuous citizenry as a precondition of a functioning democratic society. According to Dewey (1916, 99), a democratic society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and habits of the mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder. It is only then that society will make provision for participation in its good governance for all members and on equal terms.

An important strand in the citizenship education literature focuses on education for citizenship as a deliber-

ate learning process to attain the knowledge and skills needed to competently perform the role of a citizen. Gutmann (1987, 15) asserts that, by concentrating on practices of deliberate instruction by individuals and on the educative influences of institutions designed for educational purposes, citizens are empowered to influence the education that determines the political values and behaviour of future citizens. In effect, this has a significant impact on the knowledge of citizenship and government in democracy, on cognitive skills of citizenship in a democracy, on participatory skills of citizenship in a democracy, and on the disposition of citizenship in a democracy primarily by promoting general welfare and the public good (Patrick, 2000, 8). There is no doubt that schools represent a critical link between education and citizenship (Niemi and Junn, 1998; Birzea, 2000; Dewey, 1916), that education directly influences the individual's tendency to participate in the political realm (Hillygus, 2005; Dewey, 1916; Hoskins et al., 2008), and that education is in fact the strongest predictor of political participation even when other socioeconomic conditions are taken into account (Verba et al., 1995; Birzea, 2000).

#### HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE 'MAKING' OF CITIZENS

As we have already established, universities play an important role in the 'making' of citizens. Higher education institutions can influence citizenship in various ways. Annette and McLaughlin (2005, 61) distinguish two general possibilities. The first is education for citizenship – the process of making citizens – which consists of a multitude of possible influences universities may exert on students, from specific study programmes to engagement in various activities of student government, associational activity, community engagement etc. The second way describes the influence of higher education institutions in much broader terms that moves beyond the mere specific and intentional social reproduction with the aim of educating students to become virtuous and competent citizens. The tradition of public work (see Boyte and Kari, 1996) highlights the centrality of work for citizenship and thus focusses on the potential of public work in higher education, including a re-examination of traditional pedagogy, scholarship, the public traditions of disciplines and systems of reward (Annette and McLaughlin, 2005, 62). The tradition of linking civic engagement and higher education also has a long history. This 'pragmatic' tradition dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, chiefly the works of John Dewey, and seeks to promote the link between higher education and citizenship through experiential learning (*ibid.*, 63). The key question in this tradition concerns the construction of a curriculum that enables the civic education of students through forms of active, problem-based and service learning. Integrat-

ing classroom instruction with work within the community by sending students out into the community at large enables experience to be transposed from service to academic work (Crittenden and Levine, 2013). This tradition, which has of late most frequently been called active learning in the community, community-based learning or service learning, acquired its present relevance with the study of social capital (see Putnam, 2000) and the conviction that it may develop the capacity for active citizenship (Annette and McLaughlin, 2005, 65).

In terms of higher education institutions' broader impact on citizenship, moving beyond the mere 'making' of citizens, we may note several points of influence. One of them is certainly the preservation and development of critical traditions of thought that produce resources for the flourishing and re-conceptualising of the notion of citizenship in any given society (Annette and McLaughlin, 2005, 61). This is consistent with Hillygus' (2005) results which directly show that relevant disciplines, such as political science, political philosophy, sociology etc., are the most valuable for creating a virtuous citizenry. However, other disciplines also contribute to citizenship as long as they cultivate the tradition of critical enquiry and maintain a forum for exploring unfashionable and unpopular ideas not labelled as mainstream. Graham (2002) argues that universities also perform the role of cultural custodian by maintaining and revitalising cultural inheritances that are very significant for every citizenship regime due to their embedment in the cultural models of the political community, giving a society a cultural direction (see Delanty, 2001). In addition, the university is also frequently portrayed as a major contributor to civic virtues in terms of the diffusion of practical wisdom in society as well as an indicator of social justice, which is often related to questions of funding and its relationship with equality of opportunity (see Annette and McLaughlin, 2005, 62). We should not forget the important function of universities of educating and training professionals dealing with topics relevant to citizenship. These primarily include teachers who, albeit to different degrees, play perhaps the most important role in social reproduction through various forms of citizenship curriculum. Finally, universities also have a considerable impact on local communities by introducing and nurturing higher moral and ethical values and standards, whether in terms of their internal functioning or dealing with the external environment (see Gardner et al., eds., 2000).

There is a general notion that, irrespective of any direct intervention by higher education in the process of making the citizenry, the university's influence on the general development of students as citizens is undeniable. Along these lines, Annette and McLaughlin (2005, 68) argue that, in terms of the university's formal curriculum, the study of any serious subject may lead to the development of critical understanding and sensibility because criticism will inevitably arise in the context of a

general commitment to the pursuit of truth and freedom of enquiry. The literacy of students in a broad sense and the experience of university life as a whole hold rich implications for citizenship. The question thus arises about the need for the university's direct intervention in the process of 'creating' citizens. Nevertheless, Graham (2002) believes that a concern for the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake has always coexisted along with a concern for some external practical end.

However, there is also a widespread belief that the university's broad and indirect involvement in the creation of a virtuous citizenry is by itself not enough. Hence, many argue for a more comprehensive role of the university. Nussbaum (1996) stresses that universities should build on the foundations of the ideal of liberal education and modify this ideal in order for it to cope with contemporary life. She believes universities should engage in a widespread curriculum reform so as to achieve the capacity for a critical examination of oneself and one's tradition, the development of students' capacity to see themselves as cosmopolitan citizens, and the development of an ability to put oneself into the shoes of another (critical narrative imagination). Annette and McLaughlin (2005, 72) believe that the obstacle to this integrative perspective is the absence of the identification and achievement of a holistic and integrative direct role of universities in the making of citizens. As a result, there is hardly any chance to identify, specify and enact the core curricula in order to promote a liberal education to the desired extent. In addition, implementation of Nussbaum's cosmopolitan programme for civic education also demands a substantial revision of the core curricula and is thus fairly unrealisable, particularly in the context of current trends in higher education where the trends of specialisation and compartmentalisation dominate (see Teichler, 2008). These processes may well be traced to the employability framework.

#### EMPLOYABILITY, EDUCATION AND THE CONTEXT OF AN ECONOMIC CRISIS

One of the key European policy reactions to the current economic crisis relates to the question of how to strengthen the professional relevance of secondary and tertiary education in order to support employers' needs. This issue can be placed within the framework of mainstream research questions such as: "what are the key competencies graduates need to function well in the workplace and in society", "which actors are mainly responsible for competence development", "what are the most important teaching and training modes for the development of competencies" or "what path should education systems follow to foster the development of competencies" (HEGESCO, 2014-). Policymakers would like to know if curricular reforms, as a response to the deprofessionalisation and precarisation of work, should seek more general programmes or more specific ones:

should schools produce readymade skills, or should they be oriented to preparing youth for a lifelong career.

To a large extent these questions remain empirically unanswered, even though some researchers (e.g. Allen et al., 2011) have generated some premises for how to foster the development of key competencies in education and thereby support employers' needs. Examples of these recommendations in the area of higher education based on a large-scale survey of approximately 45,000 graduates include (ibid.): fostering students' motives and talents, making higher education more demanding, alerting employers about underutilised human capital or informing them about what they can expect from graduates and encouraging relevant work experience. At the DECOWE conference, Teichler (2009) asked what do we really know about educational institutions' successful measures in terms of the role they play in graduates' employability. Some of his concerns were later elaborated in the DEHEMS project (2014-) that focused on graduates' early career success in selected professional domains, guided by the following conceptual questions:

What is the overall idea of (higher) education institutions concerning how their studies take the future professional activities of their graduates into account?

- What do (higher) education institutions do to successfully help graduates make the transition to work (short term) and their professional career (long term)?
- Where do (higher) education institutions see major developmental needs?
- What is the role of employment-related guidance services in a successful transition to the labour market?
- What are the differences and similarities among countries and professional domains?

Although these questions were chiefly placed in the higher education context, the issue could be equally (or even more) relevant to vocational education and training (Hordosy, 2014). The time is hence appropriate to reassess the main functions of education institutions in relation to the labour market – even though this has already been on the research agenda for a long time with the human capital, credentialist, signal or certificate theories approaches (e.g. Collins, 1979; Choo and Bonitis, 2002). In simple words, the issues in these theories were linked to the relative effect of globalisation trends, economic cycles, education curricula, work experience and students' origins on professional or career success. At the same time, other authors (e.g. Pavlin et al., 2010) claim that education systems not only have to react to the changing formal context of work but also to changes at work itself in terms of professionalism as a personal value (Evetts, 2004).

Employability and professional success are to some extent related terms. Following Teichler (2008, 300), when looking at the outcomes of teaching and learning in higher education one does not primarily look at grad-

uates' job performance but at the overall impact of their study which can be described by: a) the smoothness of the transition from higher education to the labour market; b) income and socioeconomic status; c) a position appropriate to the level of educational attainment; d) desirable employment conditions (independent, demanding and responsible work); and e) a high degree of job satisfaction. Another model of career success components has been identified within the DEHEMS project (2014-): status, skill and qualification matching, autonomy, innovation and satisfaction. Researchers in the project (*ibid.*) have studied how each of the mentioned determinants is impacted by graduates' career success determinants (e.g. past education and work experience, type of HE qualification and study, educational characteristics, modes of teaching and learning, international experience, study success).

As a result, the current research and policy questions are related to paradoxes and causalities of employability as individuals' potential to find a meaningful job versus actual registered employment, employability in the context of deprived youth in terms of obtaining a job at all versus the further prosperity of privileged youth (Teichler, 2008, 302), employability as a skill-supply phenomenon versus a skill-demand phenomenon as measured in skill shortages versus skill surpluses (Allen and Van der Velden, 2001) or employability as individual factors (e.g. skills, qualifications, socio-biographic characteristics) versus personal circumstances (e.g. access to resources, work culture, household circumstances) (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005, 209). In general terms, the employability concept can also be related to (human resource) management concerns and changes in individual needs, motives and network organisations. As claimed by Thijssen et al. (2008, 168-169), the evolution of graduates' employability can be marked by the following milestones:

a) in the 1970s predominantly for resolving problems with school leavers and underprivileged people, with political ambitions to attain full employment and cut public losses;

b) in the 1980s for restructuring companies with corporates' ambitions to achieve efficient human resource management; and

c) in the 1990s for individuals as motives for developing successful career opportunities in segmented and ever more flexible labour markets.

The concept of employability in relation to education is always defined as being multidimensional. It explains on one side individuals' capabilities to retain a self-rewarding job but also educational legitimacy to prepare young people for their short- and long-term careers.

The described ideas lead us to the question of whether there is a trade-off in terms how education systems shape their curricula on the basis of employability or citizenship principles. With the new scenarios of the

future of work such as for example 'capitalism without work', 'sustainable work' or a 'multi-activity society' (Beck, 2000) we may speculate that the need to merge both perspectives is emerging – particularly if we try to believe that individuals and employers have similar expectations of education.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The times we are currently living in offer an opportunity to reveal which decisions, actions or patterns, if any, regarding the course of citizenship and employability in higher education may prove detrimental to both the democratic nature of society and the state of the economy.

Several contributors to this special issue discuss potentially damaging patterns that European and global (higher) education are witnessing. Nafsika Alexiadou and Sally Findlow discuss the changing frameworks for the roles of universities in Europe and England by exploring questions of citizenship and the role of universities in the context of the policy changes in the UK and in Europe over the last two decades. They perceive contemporary Europe as more united than ever before, which is creating new political, social and economic conditions and along with them new pressures and expectations for the citizens and various institutions. The authors illustrate these tensions by presenting the case of England and the struggles faced by English universities to strike a balance between traditional humanistic visions of universities and the visions universities have in the project of creating the 'knowledge economy'. Observing the same set of processes, Samo Pavlin, Tomaž Deželan and Ulrich Teichler see a redefinition of roles within higher education systems as they present relevant discourse about higher education, the labour market and graduates' 'employability'. They in particular discuss general changes in the work of academics and administrators, and problematise the characteristics and particularities of their hybridisation. Building on this, they generate a holistic conceptual and research model that questions how the external 'employability' societal and policy drivers are related to a wide range of work in academia, and explore differences and similarities among academic, administrative and hybrid jobs.

Jason Laker, Concepción Naval and Kornelija Mrnjauš round up the employability debate with a conceptual essay on youth unemployment and the traps of the employability discourse. They argue against the present approach to crafting economic, educational and employment policies and structures, and stress the need to recast the 'market' approach by placing workers at the centre in order to guarantee stronger and more sustainable economic returns whilst developing strong social capital in the process. Having these processes in mind, initially Samo Pavlin and Julian Stanley explore the learning and working activities of vocational edu-

education and training students and observe big variations in learning patterns across Europe. Drawing on information process and social learning approaches, they make recommendations for a better understanding of vocational education and training learners' as individuals with a range of activities, interests and attachments rather than perceiving them as customers or clients, particularly in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional organisation and pathways. On the other hand, the remaining two articles look at various – albeit very different – aspects of higher education. Tomaž Deželan and Maja Sever concentrate on the higher education curriculum, particularly the formal curriculum, and by analysing 140 undergraduate programmes offered by the University of Ljubljana attempt to fill the gap in the academic literature when it comes to empirically examining the citizenship education curriculum in the higher education context. They demonstrate the strong influence of disciplinarity and the prevalence of the civic society and systems content dimension in the curricular documents. Conversely, Matjaž Uršič, Karien Dekker and Maša Filipovič Hrast cover the informal aspects of the higher education curriculum. To be precise, they focus on the influence of spatial organisation on participatory patterns of university students. Building on the notion that higher education institutions offer valuable opportunities for participation learned and fostered, they emphasise the ways spatial organisation can foster or hinder civic virtues and pay special attention to the physical organisation of universities and their social/functional organisation.

#### CONCLUSION

With the rise of neoliberal policies and employability in political discourse, education is strongly portrayed as an investment in future employability or an improvement in human capital (see Biesta, 2011). However, as also stressed by Teichler and Kehm (1995), engagement

in education might also be a consequence of personal fulfilment and the intrinsic rather than the exchange value of a particular certificate of education. It is no secret by now that educational institutions contribute to the quality of democratic life and democratic processes. The employability hysteria thus tends to divert the focus away from the civic role of higher education and favours the economic one. Yet the university's function in terms of the maintenance and development of democratic societies dates back to Von Humboldt's idea of "enlightened citizens" who serve as the basis of the state. It is such an education system, informed by the ethos of scholarship oriented towards the pursuit of truth and grasping a reality in the totality, that would cultivate a universal rationality in academics and students alike.

In addition to what was mentioned above, employability also prevents freedom from external intervention – something Von Humboldt prioritised very highly. And, as a result, the pursuit of truth that would result in the enlightenment of the individual student, academic, society, the state and humankind as a whole may be averted (Simons, 2006). Of course, the well-being of society and humankind will not be hampered by paying more systematic care to students' successful transition to the world of work and career success; however, the recent discussions on education's contribution to democracy are also largely based on the education of enlightened, informed and critical citizens. In the circumstances of reducing the education system to its economic function, the image of educational institutions and the university in particular, as a site for public discourse, may suffer. It is therefore extremely important, particularly under an economic spell, that (higher) education's primary function is not transformed into the mere training of a highly skilled workforce. There is nothing wrong with universities serving the idea of the knowledge society; however, the production, transmission and dissemination of high quality knowledge are simply not enough for the well-being of a democratic society.

## IZZIVI ZAPOS LJIVOSTI IN DRŽAVLJANSTVA V KONTEKSTU IZOBRAŽEVANJA – NA POTI K CELOSTNEM RAZUMEVANJU

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### POVZETEK

*Ta sklop člankov je plod eksploratornega pogleda na stičišče med konceptoma zaposljivosti in državljanstva v kontekstu področja izobraževanja. Uvodnik v ta sklop na kratko predstavi pglavlitne dileme in raziskovalna vprašanja, ki se porajajo na tem področju, pri tem pa jih tudi locira v širši okvir aktualnih trendov na področju državljske vzgoje in razvoja izobraževalnih politik. Temeljno sporočilo osredotočanja na presečišče med zaposljivostjo in državljanstvom je, da sta si ta dva koncepta nasprotujoča zgolj na prvi pogled, kar jasno identificirajo nekateri prispevki znotraj tega sklopa. Uvodnik, kot tudi celoten nabor člankov, predvsem odstirata konceptualne temelje, ki omogočajo komplementarno razumevanje teh dveh konceptov in hkratno delovanje v smeri njunega uveljavljanja. Obenem pa tudi opozarjata na nevarnosti, povezane z ekonomosko, še posebej pa državljsko funkcijo izobraževalnih institucij. V tem kontekstu avtorja poudarjata nevarnost podreditve izobraževalnih sistemov zgolj njihovi ekonomski funkciji, saj je s tem močno ogrožen njihov demokratični potencial.*

**Ključne besede:** državljanstvo, državljska vzgoja, zaposljivost, visoko šolstvo, prehod med izobraževanjem in trgom dela, akademska profesija, ekonomija znanja

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