



A new old role for University.

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It is part of the accepted discourse that the welfare of a nation depends, in the long run, on the quality of human resources, that is, on people and their ideas. This linked with individual expectations has led to an explosion (massification) of Higher Education. However the sector was not prepared to

deal with the challenges of the increasing demand; consequently, during the last decade, the European higher education landscape has undergone tremendous alterations both at system and at institutional levels. Many of those were directly linked with, or driven by, the needs for efficiently qualifying the workforce, within an appropriate span of time, and equipping it with the skills required by a **global** competitive world market.

In the same span of time, unemployment increased (notably among the young population) across an ageing Europe facing workforce qualification problems, losing brains for emerging economies and no longer detaining the primacy of knowledge producing. By the end of the first decade into the XXI century, Europe is confronted with one of the worst economic and financial crisis since the great recession, together with very adverse demography.

What went wrong? Our endeavours to correct the trajectory, are they appropriate?

The **Europe 2020 Strategy**, the weakling successor of the Lisbon Agenda, does not look promising in dealing with such challenging environment! There are severe limitations to the success of the **2020 Strategy**, namely, those related to the **disparity of demographic trends within Europe** and the way governments are dealing with the economic crisis which is **impacting very negatively on European universities**. These issues undermine the overall objective of the realisation of a cohesive, inclusive and economically strong Europe. If demography is not directly responsible for the crisis is a powerful catalyst. Retraining actives, fighting unemployment and promoting a better integration of migrants are obviously necessary in the present situation.

What role is there for Universities and who pays for it?

There are a number of interrelated issues ranging from demographics to prioritization of certain fields of knowledge and league tables which are behaviour inducing. There is a need to understand to what extend these phenomena can be made compatible with (used for?!) better meeting societal needs.

Is it possible for a University to have a prominent position in the rankings and league tables and at the same time cater for the social improvement of its region? Why existing knowledge is not used in political decision making? Is it because is not in an appropriate format? Or are the reasons linked to a rather limited way of understanding the relationship between policies and partisanship. Shouldn't universities pay more attention to the promotion of the public understanding of Science?

University education must be about training sustainability aware citizens, be it as medical doctors, economists, layers, philosophers or physicists. Responses to the Grand Challenges cannot be found without the contribution of University research and research based education.