The University as Institution with an Idea
A Symposium

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Abstract

Higher education is a global phenomenon. It is found in almost every country of the world: some two hundred million people are directly involved. It consumes billions of dollars in some countries alone. It is engaged with economic and social institutions and is a matter of public and political debate both nationally and internationally. Under neoliberalism, it has recently become central to debates concerning the engine of innovation and its contribution to the economy. Disputes over higher education have even played a significant role in leading to the overthrow of governments. Every major town looks, it seems, to have its own university. As an institution, therefore, higher education has to be considered a major force.

Separately, there is the very idea of the university, the idea that generated the university’s modern development, an idea furnished by around two hundred of literature. However, this literature is seldom a point of reference in the contemporary debates over higher education. University systems have mushroomed and universities have been established and developed with very little consciousness that there is a long-standing literature with a vested interest in the fate of the subjects of this debate. There is a blankness towards this literature. The university qua institution takes little heed of the university qua idea.

The symposium will engage this problematic through highlighting what the history of the idea of the university might contribute to current debate on the role of the university. New and complex questions need to be posed about the meaning of innovation, the role it plays in guaranteeing the production function which the institution has been made to serve, and how this apparatus might be dismantled and transformed in relation to ways of learning that might be more congruent with the demands of the future.

Key words: The idea, university, innovation, problematic

This symposium follows the recent publication of: