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WORKING PAPER

Council of Europe: Mobilising Democratic Values for a European/Global Higher Education Governance Model

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1. Introduction

The paper examines the discourse of democracy that is promoted in the context of the work of the inter-governmental organisation Council of Europe (CoE) in the field of higher education and research. Taking a New Regionalism Theory perspective (Hettne 2005; Hettne and Söderbaum 2000, 2002) to processes of region-building in the European continent, I argue that it would be important to further knowledge on how other regional organisations than the European Union (EU) contribute to processes of conceptualisation and communication of the transnational character of the region. These processes would imply work on the creation of a common language that participants in the regional society would define and use for advancing a common regionalist project. This kind of work characterises most part of the activities on higher education that were carried out in the context of the CoE during the 2000s. These activities contain an underlying goal to achieve an agreement on a wide range of meanings associated with the urge on the European higher education sector to 'modernise' and re-structure. More specifically, they are interrelated with the EU discourse of higher education reform as being critical to the achievement of the 2000-10 Lisbon Strategy's goal to "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs". They are also interrelated with the process of construction of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that was initiated in 1998 and became known as the Bologna Process.

In exploring the discourse of democracy in relation to higher education, my aim is to gain an understanding of the dynamics between changes and apparently prevailing continuities in the political project for building the European region. The idea of "democracy as the unifying norm of the new Europe" has been advocated by multiple regional actors since the late 1980s (Clark, 2007, p. 164). But, how should be this norm followed in on-going processes of transformation of public institutions? The CoE is a place in which this question is accounted for, and therefore it is a relevant entry point to inquiry on the topic. Founded in 1949, the CoE is an inter-governmental organisation that was created specifically for the purpose of ensuring that liberal democratic principles and practices are respected amongst its Member States. In the 1990s, it promoted a 'policy of openness' and co-operation in relation to all former Soviet bloc countries that would opt for democracy (CoE, Vienna Declaration, 1993). This implied that the CoE grew from 23 Member States by 1989 to 47 by 2011. It also presupposed the development of expertise on facilitating a common understanding of the meanings of democracy in multiple societal contexts in the last twenty years.

The paper is informed by my on-going doctoral research project on the role of the Council of Europe in regional/global governance of higher education¹. It builds on a total of seven months of critical political ethnography conducted at the CoE between 2008 and 2010. Critical discourse analysis was used on official documentation related to European higher education, and semi-structured interviews with Council of Europe officials, academic representatives, and advisors. The documentation consists of publicly available policy texts (reports, communications, journals, recommendations, conference agendas, and so on) issued by the CoE, the European Commission, and the Bologna Process Secretariat between 2001 and 2010.

2. Theoretical considerations

In order to investigate how ideas of ‘democratic Europe’ are mobilised for the formulation and dissemination of a common regional approach to university² politics and governance in the CoE discourse of higher education, I draw upon a New Regionalism Theory (NRT) understanding of processes of regional formation (Hettne 2005; Hettne and Söderbaum 2000, 2002). Arguably, this is an investigation on intended and formally institutionalised region-building processes that affect the higher education sector in particular, but are related to a general goal to further regionalise Europe.

NRT focuses on ‘regionalisms’, i.e. state-led projects of co-operation that are aimed to ‘regionalise’ a geographical area on the basis of a common agreement on economic, organisational, political, and/or social dimensions ideas and strategies (Hettne and Söderbaum 2002). These projects may or may not lead to the creation of formal institutions, i. e. regional organisations with a mandate to advance a vision, programme, and strategy for regionalising a certain geographical area, which becomes defined as a formal or *de jure* region, limited to the national territories of the member states. NRT views these formal institutions as playing a critical role in the formation of a ‘regional society’, that is associated with an increasing level of ‘regionness’ (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000, pp. 464-65). A regional society is constituted through complex, diverse and multidimensional processes of communication and interaction between a multitude of state and non-state. These processes would imply a gradual construction of the region as an organising basis for the relationships within the region. They could also lead to the emergence of the idea of the region as a relative autonomous identity in relation to the rest of the world. The former can be associated with political processes of

¹ I would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council for doctoral funding (Award number EDUCSC18026510) and the personnel of the Council of Europe Higher Education and Research Division that made this research possible.

² In this paper “university” refers to all higher education institutions, irrespective of their name and status.

'de-statization of politics' (Jessop, 2004, p. 7). These denote the assumption that the sovereign state is still the political unit that governs on its own territory, but consider that there are state functions such as the formulation of economic and social policies that could be co-ordinated at the regional scale and with the participation from a wide range of official, quasi-official, private economic interests, and representatives of civil society. The latter presuppose that the increasing and widening of relationships evolve in a complementary and mutually reinforcing direction. In sum, the convergence of ideas and processes within and about a particular region is important. And, regional organisations are understood to play a crucial role in providing an organisational framework that facilitates the attainment of a 'regional' orchestration of norms, values, meanings, and political action.

To date, NRT has only briefly explored the case of 'multiregionalisms' defined by geographical proximity, and created at different historical moments (Hettne, 2005). This would be for instance the case of co-existence of the CoE, the EU, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) projects. Although these organisations define the limits of *de jure* region differently, there is a significant overlapping of their membership that suggests that these projects are not conflicting. Moreover, they tend to promote a discourse of 'European region' that is often notably oblivious of explicit demarcation of borders. In fact, in adopting a NRT approach, it would be reasonable to expect that the political work that is carried out in the context of these organisations is interrelated and to some extent cohesive. The previously mentioned complementarity and mutually reinforcing direction that characterises the evolution of the relationships in the 'making' of a regional society are theoretically considered to feature the relationships between existing regionalist projects for the construction of the 'same' (meta-?) region as well. However, this is an empirically under-studied area. In the field of European Studies, for example, an over-emphasis on the idea of the EU as a sui generis entity has had as a consequence little knowledge on other existing regional arrangements that constitute and are constituted by the development of the 'European region' (cf. Warleigh-lack and Langenhove, 2010, p. 553). Therefore there is a lack of understanding of the assemblage of possibly interrelated organisational frameworks and regional programmes for increasing 'regionness' in Europe that would need to be overcome.

My case study of the CoE promotion of democracy through higher education aims to make a contribution to furthering this research agenda. Debates on democracy promotion in the European continent since 1989 often overlook the work of the CoE in this area. Yet, the study suggests that an inquiry on the work of the CoE on democracy can provide a basis for a broader comprehension of the conception of 'being democratic' and 'promoting democratic practices' that is advocated. In

considering other political processes that aim to further regionalise the higher education sector in Europe, the study points out to a formulation of ideas on democracy that is similar to the CoE official texts, and thereby illustrates an orchestrated communication of 'democratic higher education'.

3. Methodological resources

Methodologically, I draw upon a concept of 'space' and 'place' to the study of the political processes that take place in the context of the CoE. Firstly, the concept of 'space' implies above all the understanding of space as a product of social relations (see Harvey, 2006, pp. 273-74). For example, a European higher education space is a product of ideas produced and reproduced through social relations that are established at different political geographic scales (local, national, regional, global). Secondly, 'place' denotes an open, porous and hybrid place in which trajectories of all kinds (people, ideas, commodities, and so on) collide (Massey, 1999, p. 22). When conceptualised as a locality – for instance, the CoE situated in Strasbourg, France - a place refers to a unit of space that has discrete boundaries, shared internal characteristics, and that changes over time and *interacts* with other similar units of space (Gregory et al, 2009, p. 539). From this angle, it becomes relevant to consider that a detailed examination of the CoE as a place may bring about an understanding of its mutual and broader relationships to other places; as a place in which ideas from other places intersect and become internalised in specific processes through time. It is also a perspective that helps to move beyond a conceptualisation of the CoE as a regional or even global actor. The idea is look at the CoE as a 'meeting place' in which processes of communication and interaction are facilitated, and contribute to the construction of regional space(s) in a particular, path-depend way.

Based upon this understanding of the CoE, I take the theme of democracy through higher education as an entry point to further knowledge regionalisation processes of communication that might lead to a convergence of ideas in the European political space. I undertake an in-depth discourse analysis of how democracy is perceived in the conception of higher education and in practices at universities in the context of the CoE. In addition, I account for possible converges in the discourse of higher education produced in other places, namely, in the European Commission and the Bologna Process.

4. Dialogues about higher education in the CoE

Since 2001, the activities in the field of higher education in the CoE are shaped by three main dialogues with other events. Firstly, they account for the programme of activities of the Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport, as well as for the overall programme

and strategy of the CoE. The latter are decided by the Committee of Ministers of the CoE, the executive statutory organ, and ultimately determined by decisions taken at the Summits of Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the CoE. These Summits do not take place on a regular basis, and the most recent was held in Warsaw, in May 2005. Secondly, decisions about what activities are to be initiated take into consideration the developments of the agenda for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which became gradually represented as 'the most important' in various higher education policy decision-making processes at all scales. In this sense, the work on higher education at the CoE is conceived as a contribution to the successful implementation of the EHEA agenda, but also as a means to influence the process of formulation of the agenda itself. It is important to note that the CoE is a consultative member of the main governance structure of the EHEA, the Bologna Follow-Up Group. Thirdly, the CoE agenda for higher education is legitimated by the approval of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR, *Comité Directeur de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche*), which is directly answerable to the Committee of Ministers of the CoE. The CDESR is composed of governmental representatives designated by the CoE Member States that are signatories to the European Cultural Convention, but also national academic representatives, who are usually - but not necessarily - nominated by a national rectors' association experts³, and multiple observers, including the European Commission, the European Student's Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), Education International, and UNESCO. The CDESR meets once a year in plenary session and nominates a Bureau with six members, responsible for steering the work of the CoE Higher Education and Research Division and representing the CDESR in other regional and global initiatives.

In addition, a large number of activities on higher education are carried out by a group of selected participants in the CDESR with the support of CoE officials. These activities consist of projects that contain the underlying goal to establish a common understanding of the language that is used at present to conceive higher education reform. For example, the meanings of 'participation of all stakeholders', 'public responsibility for higher education', 'governance', 'democratic culture' are established in these projects in a more or less clear way. The projects follow a very similar working method. There is usually the creation of a Working Party that is responsible for determining the approach to the project, supervising the production of texts on the selected topic, and setting the agenda for a conference that is eventually organised to discuss the issues related to the topic and

³ Field notes, Strasbourg, February 2009.

ensure that several recommendations are approved by a wider, but nevertheless targeted group of actors. The members to these Working Parties are usually experienced in higher education policy-making processes at the national and regional scales and highly mobile across the different places in which European higher education is conceived. In other words, they are often members of the political and intellectual elite that characterises the European regional society. Hence, from the viewpoint of these individuals, the activities that are carried out at the CoE are 'meetings' for continuing the work that they develop in other localities. However, this does not mean that particularities of the place (the CoE) are not accounted for. The following comment is from a meeting I observed and is illustrative of the general opinion CDESR participants have of the CoE:

The Council of Europe is an Ombudsman for overarching higher education values; this is the role of the Council of Europe in the Bologna Process and in the [European] region; in driving transversal action based on values in higher education; values as a guidance of all the [policy] tools. (Field notes, Strasbourg, March 2010)

The most important point to make about these dialogues is that they play an influence in the formulation of the CoE discourse of higher education.

Taking into consideration the internalisation of ideas on democracy in the discourse of higher education in texts published in the 2000s by the CoE, there is a significant connection to an aspect that characterises the overall programme of activities of this organisation. The CoE was an inter-governmental organisation that was founded for the purpose of ensuring amongst its member states "the spiritual and moral values which are common heritage of their peoples and the true sources of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, principles which form the basis of all genuine democracy" (Statute of the Council of Europe, Preamble) are respected". In today's CoE's self-promotion materials, this purpose became rephrased as follows: "to create a common democratic and legal area throughout the whole of the [European] continent, ensuring respect for its fundamental values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law" (Council of Europe, 2009, no page). So, democracy is a long-standing aim of the CoE political project for the European region, and the CoE programme is conceived accordingly.

There is also a relation to the strategy defined in the 1997 Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe Member States in which it was established the following:

"[We,] aware the educational and cultural dimension of the main challenges to be faced by Europe in the future as well as of the essential role of culture and education in strengthening mutual understanding and confidence between our peoples express our desire to develop education for democratic citizenship based in the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the participation of young people in civil society." (CoE, Strasbourg Declaration, 1997, p. 4)

And, as a part of the Action Plan that was defined in this Summit, it was launched a major, transversal initiative, the *Education for Democratic Citizenship* programme, “with a view to promoting citizens’ awareness of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society” (*ibid*). This programme was carried out between 1997 and 2009, and included a 2005 Council of Europe Year of Citizenship through Education, that was aimed to "draw attention to the key role of education in fostering democratic culture" in a context of elections in most European countries that "show worrying deficit of interest and participation in political and public life" (CDESR(2004)9, pp. 1-2⁴). Consequently, the CDESR was under pressure for setting an agenda that included interrelated activities with this political vision of the role of education in Europe. The response was a series of higher education projects that would discuss higher education reform while at the same time advocate that higher education is important for promoting a ‘democratic culture’. In particular, the projects *Universities as Sites of Citizenship* (1999-2002), *Higher Education Governance* (2003-2005) focused on this issue from two different angles. On the one hand, they discussed the role of higher education in promoting ‘democratic citizenship’. On the other hand, they brought about the question of how decision-making processes about the direction and strategy of universities follow democratic principles. The following section is informed by a detailed examination of the official documentation related to these two particular projects and discusses the relationships between democracy and higher education that became discursively established.

5. The democratic purpose of higher education and its governing

The debates about the role of higher education in promoting democracy are above all focused on students. Students are represented as having a ‘deplorable’ lack of interest in participating in university politics; they suffer from ‘passivity’ and ‘apathy’. This is understood to occur in a societal context where there is

a dominant belief and fear... that a continuing steady decline in civic and political participation threatens the long-term stability and health of cherished democratic institutions and traditions... decline in political participation – not only in declining turnouts in elections, but in alternative methods of engaging [in the] political issues of the day; and a general deterioration in respect for the agents and agencies of government. (Final General Report of the project *Universities as Sites of Citizenship*, 2002, p. 64)

There is therefore a concern about the disruptive effect of non-participation of the population in political life on the legitimacy of political decisions and state institutions, and subsequently on the maintenance of peace. In this context, it is thus important above all to preserve the liberal *status*

⁴ CDESR(2004)9, *European Year of Citizenship through Education*, CDESR 3rd Plenary Session, 21-22 September 2004.

quo and attempt to change attitudes. Universities are thus considered a place in which attitudes can be changed. This viewpoint draws upon liberal civic virtue theories that have been advanced since the late 1980s. They propose that the system of education has the role of facilitating the development of the ability to question authority in order to monitor the elected representatives who govern on behalf of the citizens, and to engage in public discourse (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994, pp. 224-226).

Stimulating students to take on their 'civic duties' and acquire 'civic virtues', so that they become 'active citizens' is then advocated to be a purpose of higher education. Importantly, the CoE discourse of 'civic duties' underlines essentially the duty to 'participate', and the discourse of 'civic virtues' tends to be limited to ensuring that there are student representatives in decision-making processes because it contributes to "develop not only skilled representatives but a much wider group of committed, interested citizens who will feel that their contribution to society matters" (Bergan, 2006, p. 7). This explains why the promotion of a 'democratic culture' by the universities is reduced to the idea that it would be important to follow three main principles.

Firstly, it is understood that there should be a legal framework that would ensure that students can organise themselves in students' unions, and that students' unions candidates should be allowed to be affiliated to political parties. This defines a liberal democratic institution. Secondly, the participation of student representatives in the decision-making processes at the different levels of the university administrative hierarchy should be encouraged. Finally, student participation in the governing of universities implies voting rights, but *not* full voting rights.

Drawing upon a survey on this topic that was supported by the CoE⁵, it is noted that a common feature of legal regulations in Europe is that students hold a minority number of seats in university decision-making bodies. This is related to weighting of votes according to competence or function in relations to the missions of the university – teaching and research, and the academic staff has arguably more competences regarding these missions. Weighting of votes, it is argued, does not contradict democratic principles because:

It is found in a variety of contexts ranging from commercial companies (voting in relation to the number of shares owned) to diocesan councils (with separate representation of clergy and laity)... Weighted representation of specific groups is generally regarded as undemocratic but is none the less seen as acceptable in certain circumstances, generally in terms of geography or to increase the

⁵ Persson, A. (2004). "Student participation in the governance of higher education in Europe: results of a survey." Council of Europe Higher Education Series 1: 31-82.

representation of an under-represented group (such as specific quotas for women) to ensure representation of a group whose voice may otherwise not be heard... (CoE official, 2004)

This line of argument is oblivious of a reasonable link that could be established between weak influence and lack of interest in participating in the university political life. It is evident that weighting of votes in the university context is pursued for the purpose of making sure that the academic staff has more power to govern than other groups. The principle of 'good' democratic practice that is advanced supports this distribution of power. Although students often constitute the most important group of the academic population in numeric terms, it is 'acceptable' that they have little influence. Hence, the main suggestion is to promote democracy at universities is to invite student representatives to decision-making processes whilst keeping the same power relations.

However, this issue gains in complexity if most recent changes in decision-making processes at universities are taken into consideration. A broader picture of the 'democratic culture' at European universities would also need to include the question of how democratic the governing bodies are. The ideas discussed in the *Higher Education Governance* project point out to difficulties in maintaining a dividing line between public service and private interests. Tensions thus emerge regarding the democratic ideal of a public sphere in which deliberation on common ends takes place.

Although the *Higher Education Governance* project was conceived as a contribution to the above mentioned 2005 European Year of Citizenship through Education, it departs significantly from discussions about democratic citizenship. Instead, the underlying aim to undertake this project was to achieve a consensus about the best approach to drive higher education reform at the university level. This was perceived as important for the implementation of the agenda agreed in the context of the Bologna Process. The following is illustrative of this point:

"... it also seems that we have reached a point in the process of the creation of the European Higher Education Area in which it seems that there is a rather clear idea of what changes are necessary... In most cases,... the planning phase is over. The question is no longer is "what" but "how". And this where the issue of governance comes to the forefront." (General Report⁶, no page)

⁶ CoE Higher Education Governance General Report, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Governance/GOV_report_EN.asp#TopOfPage, accessed on 20/06/2011.

In analysing discourse of higher education in this project, there is evidence of resistance to fully adopt Burton Clark's model of entrepreneurial university⁷ and the New Public Management principles for re-structuring and redefining state institutions as if private, 'effective', and 'efficient' corporations. There is a recurrent differentiation between 'internal stakeholders' (students, academic staff) and 'external stakeholders' (representatives of the business and 'civic' sector, local and/or regional authorities) that signals a transition from an 'old' to a 'new' paradigm rather than a taken-for-granted state of affairs. The 'old' paradigm is represented as one in which the state directly controls how universities would govern themselves, but also protects universities from market forces. Universities could rely on public funding to pursue their fundamental mission, that is, "allowing the minds to explore its limits, examining and critiquing the common wisdom and the inherited truths, accepting no other authority than the power of reasoning" (CoE Contributor 1, 2006). The 'new' paradigm is perceived as one in which the state draws upon surveillance mechanisms (quality assessment exercises, indicator-based performance 'contracts', and so on) to 'supervise' the self-government of universities without however ensuring that universities can be materially self-sufficient. As a consequence of increasingly scarcity of public funding, the state becomes one among other actors universities need to respond to. The 'new' paradigm is also understood the dominant at present and thereby universities need to 'adapt'; 'to adjust'; to take on the 'challenge' of dealing with market forces rather than "close from the external world" (CoE Contributor 2, 2006) more rapidly than they are doing. Universities also need to include *all* 'stakeholders' in their decision-making processes. Putting in a different way, it is advocated to move beyond the 'internal' and 'external' dichotomy and begin to conceive the 'external' as part of the whole intervening actors in the process of governing a university.

However, it is noted that this shift implied in some cases a re-structuring of decision-making processes as follows:

...in many European countries, the central administration of the higher education institutions was strengthened, in some cases "external stakeholders" were appointed to the directive boards as "representatives" of different sectors of the society and of the market, forcing the marketization of universities (or shall we call it "privatisation"?), so that they could "contribute to the development of the economy of the country" and obtain funding from market-oriented activities, instead of protecting them from that same market..., the internal stakeholders were kept away from the decisions or saw their influence decreasing. (Contributor 3, 2006)

⁷ Clark, B.R. (1998). *Creating entrepreneurial universities: Organisational pathways of transformation*. Oxford: Pergamon.

This cited contribution is from one of the project participants. It can be interpreted as a critical understanding of an aspect of the context of change. Not only students play little influence in decisions, academic staff also seems to be losing influence in favour of private actors. Other contribution further clarifies the reason for being concerned about this change. It accounts for the novelty of having a Board of Trustees as part of the university life, and how that was enforced after legislative changes in several continental European countries. A Board of Trustees is a top decision-body that approves annual budgets and financial reports, endorses the strategic plan, deliberates capital investments, and alike. In this way, it functions as a ‘supervisor’ of the top management of universities, as well as a ‘mediator’ between universities and the ‘outside world’ (Contributor 1, 2006). It is composed by non-academic representatives.

Moreover, one of the outcomes of this project was a policy text of considerations and recommendations on ‘good higher education governance’⁸. These do not purport concerns about the negative impact that private actors’ involvement in university decision-making processes may have on state institutions that are to be democratic. Rather they advance two main proposals for embracing the ‘new’ paradigm. On the one hand, it is considered that clearly defined purposes of higher education are crucial to respond to the ‘nothing-to-do-about-it’ change. These were agreed on previous work that was carried out at the CoE and acquired an itemised form particularly after the project *Public Responsibility for Higher Education*⁹. Henceforth, they are presented as being consensual amongst all partners at the European regional scale. Table 1 summarises the purposes and the relationships that are established with values, which can also be taken as demands.

⁸ Council of Europe Higher Education and Research Division, *Higher Education between Democratic Culture, Academic Aspirations and Market Forces*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 22-23 September 2005. *Considerations and Recommendations*, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Governance/GOV_recommendations_EN.pdf [accessed on 21/06/2011]

⁹ The CoE project *Public Responsibility for Higher Education* (2003-2007) had as an outcome the Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6. In this document, it is established that ‘public authorities’ should have: “substantial responsibility for financing higher education and research, the provision of higher education and research, as well as for stimulating and facilitating financing and provision by other sources within the framework developed by public authorities”.

Table 1. *The purposes of higher education*

<i>Purposes</i>	<i>Values/Demands</i>
Maintenance and development of a broad, advanced knowledge base	'liberty' Take on autonomy in decisions and ensure academic freedom in research; Self-government
Preparation for the labour market	'loyalty' Respond to 'societal needs'
Personal development	'competence' Develop students' intellectual, emotional, interpersonal competences
Preparation for active citizenship	'equality' Stimulate student's learning of 'civic duties and responsibilities', and their participation in voting and consultation procedures; Social cohesion

The formulation of these purposes contains the CoE agenda on 'active citizenship' through education, but as previously mentioned this is focused on students. The proposed four purposes are not prioritised. It is assumed that the various 'stakeholders' will prioritise them differently. Therefore, it is implicitly suggested that the relative dominance of one purpose depends on the decision-making dynamics and sources of funding of each university. Following this line of thought: if private business 'stakeholders' favour one of the defined purposes of higher education and provide a particular university material resources for its achievement, the possibility that they determine the primary purpose of higher education of that university is high. Taking into account the already mentioned argument on weighted voting, further questions arise. If 'external stakeholders' are to participate in decisions and become viewed as the group that has more competences (or interests?) regarding some of the defined purposes of a particular university, how public is that university? And thereby how 'public' is the democratic culture it is expected to preserve?

In addition, it is considered that in order to pursue the purposes of higher education, it would need to be ensured that universities are "sufficiently flexible to adapt to diverse contexts on the basis of common principles." (Contributor 4, 2006). This 'flexibility' is better achieved the more a university is 'autonomous':

Autonomous universities are better because “they have a strong top-down decision-making process which allows them to fix clear priorities” and “they can be more proactive and entrepreneurial in positioning themselves in the competitive environment; in other words they are in a better position to lead the change than simply adapt to it” (Contributor 5, 2006)

It follows that ‘micromanagement’ configurations are viewed as an obstacle to attain the purposes of higher education. Centralising public institutions administration is viewed as ‘good’ and ‘necessary’ even if that implies a decrease in the potential to influence decisions on the part of both students and academic staff. Would this be a way to stimulate their participation in university politics?

6. Final remarks

To conclude, I briefly point out to instances of mutual reinforcement of the CoE discourse of good higher education and democracy in EU official texts and in the Bologna Ministerial Conference communiqués after 2005. It is difficult to determine that this occurs because the CoE as a regional actor could transfer its discourse to other places. More importantly, there are similar ideas that are formulated in a similar way at the same regional scale and this can be understood as the result of the workings of regionalisation processes that are centred on the construction of a conceptual cohesiveness. As previously mentioned, orchestrated ideas contribute to a rise in ‘regionness’ insofar as they facilitate communication in a regional society.

Firstly, I refer to an example found in the EU discourse of higher education. The call upon Europe’s universities to ‘modernise’ in order to make the Lisbon Agenda a success prevails in all European Commission communications on higher education issued after 2001. In 2006, however, after the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy, a ‘new’ idea was introduced in relation to *how* to ‘modernise’ universities (COM(2006) 208 final¹⁰). EU Member States would need to ensure ‘autonomy’ and ‘accountability’ for universities and guide the higher education through a general regulatory framework, policy objectives, and funding mechanisms for education and research activities. The rationale for this standpoint is that this would facilitate universities’ innovation and their ability to respond to change. In return, universities would be

¹⁰ COM(2006) 208 final, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation*, Brussels, 10/05/2006.

... freed from overregulation and micro-management [and] should accept full institutional accountability to society at large for their results. This requires new internal governance systems based on strategic priorities and on professional management of human resources, investment and administrative procedures. It also requires universities to overcome their fragmentation into faculties, departments, laboratories and administrative units... (*ibid*, pp. 5-6)

The coincidence in the promoted attitude towards micro-management is clear. There is a reinforcement of the idea of centralising administration as a means to account for 'societal needs', that is, to account for the higher education purpose of 'preparation for the labour market' and eventually the purpose of 'advance a broad knowledge base'. Following the idea that the purposes of higher education are associated with 'values' that are prioritised differently, the European Commission could be seen as giving priority to the value of 'loyalty'; the demand from universities to respond to the needs of the European Union socio-economic project.

Secondly, there is the case of the construction of the EHEA. In the 2007 and 2009 Ministerial communiqués and the 2010 Budapest-Vienna Declaration, there is a recurrent use of the phrase "all stakeholders". There is also a statement of the purposes of higher education that draws literally upon the same wording of the CoE formulation. Likewise, there is the idea of a 'necessary' reform "firmly embedded in the European values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and social equity... [that] will *require full participation of students and staff*" (my emphasis, 2009 Leuven communiqué). In addition, EHEA Ministers responsible for higher education "underline *the role the higher education institutions play in fostering peaceful democratic societies* and strengthening social cohesion" (my emphasis, 2010 Budapest-Vienna Declaration).

These phrases and poorly argued statements would appear to be empty nutshells; a recurrent European-speak; political rhetoric. Nonetheless, they could also be understood as 'tags' to already negotiated meanings. In this case, they are 'tags' to debates that took place at the CoE, and containers of tensions regarding the promotion of democracy through higher education.

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