

## **Facing the Corporate-University: The New Wave of Student Movements in Europe**

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### **Abstract**

*The transformation of the historical functions and goals of the European university is producing the transition from mass university to what has been called “corporate university”. With this goal, I will examine how the new functions of the university are aimed at providing services and precarious workers to the labor structure of post-Fordism in the context of the growing importance of the “knowledge-based economy”. These changes have provoked a new wave of student protests. This new mobilization cycle has been based on the emergence of a new student subjectivity: the “precarious in training”. However, I claim that this wave of mobilization can be explained by the characteristics of the Fordist model that still applies to the European university. This model of university in extinction has facilitated a student response that can be characterized in terms of the classical Fordist patterns of collective action. At the same time, these patterns of action are being adapted to the emergence of the post-Fordist corporate-university through specific repertoires of action.*

**Key words:** corporate-university, post-Fordism, precarious work, social movement, student movement.

### **Introduction**

The changes produced within the capitalist economy have meant deep transformations of the University. The current mutation of higher education has provoked a wave of student mobilizations against the Bologna Process. This new social movement has opened a broad debate on the situation of European universities and consequently on the student condition,

which is very different from how it was in previous student cycles of mobilization (mainly the one of 1968).

In this paper I will analyze how the transformation of the historical functions and goals of the European university is producing the transition from mass university to what has been called “corporate university” (Sevilla: 2010). I claim that this transition shows remarkable parallelisms with the Fordism-Post-Fordism evolution in industrial relations. With this aim, I will examine how the new functions of the university are aimed at providing services and precarious workers to the labor structure of Post-Fordism. Furthermore, this mutation, mirroring the Anglo-Saxon model of university, has provoked huge student protests. The new student criticism has been mainly directed against the mercantilist orientation of the university, but also against the assimilation of the university as a device of knowledge production in the era of “flexible production” (Harvey:1993). This new mobilization cycle is claimed to be based in the emergence of a new student subjectivity: that of the “precarious in training” (Calella: 2008). However, I argue that this wave of mobilization can be explained by the characteristics of the Fordist model that still applies nowadays to the European university.

This model of university in extinction has facilitated a student response that can be characterized in terms of classical Fordist patterns of collective action. At the same time, these patterns of action are being adapted to the emergence of the Post-Fordist corporate-university. From this perspective, the last cycle of student resistance appears to be the twilight of the student protest inside the Fordist university, and anticipates, at the same time, some elements on how the student struggles will be in the new context of the university as a device of flexible production of knowledge.

## **The Transformation of University: Towards a University in Service of Post-Fordism**

Since the “oil crisis” of 1973 and the later neoliberal reorientation of economy, capitalism has experienced deep changes in its own nature and forms. These changes have also affected the technical composition of work and the new ways for capital appreciation. Within this context, in the last years, some theorists have developed the idea of cognitive

capitalism<sup>i</sup> to explain the new era of capitalism and the increasing importance of knowledge (and affects) for the capitalist accumulation. Most of these theorists belong to the post-workerist tradition (Negri, Virno, Fumagalli or Mezzadra, amongst others), and are influenced by the workerist emphasis on the ‘real subsumption’ of labor. In this subsumption, the collective social intellectual productive ability is one of the main subjects of exploitation, including the collective cognitive capability – what Marx referred to as the “General Intellect” in the Grundrisse fragment on machines. This idea leads the post-workerist theorists to suggest that since capitalism is based in the use of scientific knowledge, it can be considered as a cognitive process. According to these ideas, the production of knowledge plays a central role for the capitalist accumulation. Within this theoretical framework, universities also become a strategic sector in the increasingly important global market of knowledge.

On the other hand, the deregulation of the labor market has led to a degradation of labor, specially for young people who, due to the current economic crisis, see how precariousness is the present and the future context for their lives.

Because of this transformation of labor, the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism (from material to immaterial-cognitive capitalism) has not been immune to the University. In the context of enhancing knowledge as a basic strategy for accumulation, the University has become a central institution in this transformation. In this sense, the deep transformation of the labor market and the changes produced inside the industrial organization (two of the main characteristics of Post-Fordism) have also reached the University. Moreover, in the general context of the “knowledge based economy<sup>ii</sup>”. In fact, knowledge production is located in the heart of what is called the “new economy”, which is generating, amongst other things, a significant impact on universities. Thus, universities should in principle adapt themselves to these new demands and to a new situation of extreme competitiveness which forces them to produce mainly “profitable” knowledge.

The pressure over every public service to be commodified has also affected university. And, of course, the University has also had to face the tensions derived from the general transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism. And it has also opened the chance for new student struggles.

## **How university adapts to Post-fordism: the importance of neoliberalism**

In general terms, in what sense can we say that University has been adapted to the basic requirements and logics of post-Fordism?

According to Bousquet (2011:514), during the 1980's a new culture (namely administrative culture) appeared in the universities, in direct relationship with the theories inspired in the Taylorist organization of labor. These theories also promoted a new paradigm in the management of corporations. In this way, the restructuring of the labor market, the implementation of neoliberal policies oriented to reduce the public services, and the implementation of concepts from the “new management in public administration” made the deep mutation of universities possible. This mutation was accompanied by two parallel processes described by de Sousa Santos (2005:20): (1) a high reduction of public investment in universities, and (2) the development of a global market of knowledge and of the university sector.

As a result of these two processes, University, as a social institution, has gone through three different crisis during the last two decades:

- 1.- A crisis of hegemony, due to the increasing presence of other private institutions with which it is necessary to be in competence.
- 2.- A crisis of legitimacy due to the breakdown of previous basic consensus on university's functions.
- 3.- An institutional crisis, because of the increasing pressure to subject(ing) university to the criteria of productivity and efficiency.

In the words of Sousa Santos (2005: 21), the combination of these processes and the economic crisis has caused the transition of university from a public service into a wide range appreciation of educative capitalism. In this context of “academic capitalism” (Slaughter and Rhoades: 2004) a new model of university emerges: the corporate-university. I claim that the main goal of this new corporate-university is to be directly orientated to the post-Fordist and precarious labor market. I do agree with Calella (2008:72)

when he claims that universities have become “public agencies for the precarisation of labor.” And also, in this new context, University makes possible to corporations the “primitive accumulation” of knowledge. However, we should try to avoid to focus these changes in a deterministic way. In the current agonistic democracy, the project of university is under struggle. As Sotiris (2012) claims:

the turn towards the entrepreneurial University should not be seen ‘one-dimensionally’ as the result of Universities being turned into private businesses, but as the condensation of class strategies related to the imperatives of hegemony in a period of capitalist restructuring and deterioration of the balance of forces between capital and labor. It does not mark a simple process of privatization but a more complex transformation of a hegemonic apparatus in line with the changes in bourgeois strategy, exemplified in the hegemony of neoliberalism.

### **How mass-university becomes corporate-university**

After the wave of struggles of 1968, a new way of capitalist domination replaced the three pillars of capitalism (namely, factory, school and family) (Zizek 2011: 166). In the case of education, lifelong learning and flexible education is replacing the public universal education. Indeed, in the postmodern capitalism, the market has invaded new areas which until then were considered as privileged functions of the State. Toscano (2011b: 260) reminds us how Vercellone describes the mass university (a consequence of the “thirty glorious years” after World War II) as both the product and the site of the real subsumption of labor that had characterized an expansive Fordism (through a “passive revolution”, in Gramsci's words). Moreover, Toscano (2011b:261) explains how

the mass university is functional to the designs of both the state and private managers of this real subsumption, but at the same time it very rapidly generates a powerful criticism of those designs themselves not just in terms of the hiatuses between the modernizing project and its institutional reality (critique of authoritarianism and elite selection), but as questioning of the control of labor-power itself (critique of technocracy, of the instrumentalisation of academic disciplines, of the relationship between the university and the labor market).<sup>iii</sup>

The transition towards the corporate-university seeks to make functional the higher education to the new economy and the new social and technical composition of workers. This new corporate-university is oriented to respond to the demands of the post-Fordist

labor market, namely to teach students how to be flexible, precarious and available for any job. Actually, it is the whole system of university that has become a post-Fordist device. In this sense, there are some nuclear elements of the corporate-university that connect it with the general post-Fordist re-organization of labor. According to Sevilla and Urbán (2008:64) some of these elements would be:

- The trend to have, annually, an amount of graduates in correspondence with the dominant class demands of intellectual work.
- An increasing association of university research projects to the needs of multinational corporations.
- The improvement of the techniques of fragmentation, partialization and hyper specialization that facilitate the use of trained technicians.
- The growing importance of general skills instead of knowledge in order to train flexible workers able to shift jobs very easily.
- The generalization of precarious material conditions of life for students, researchers, scholars and other university workers. In this sense, university itself becomes a factory of precariousness.

According to these elements amongst others, this restructuring of higher education can be defined as the “corporate welfare” university (Bousquet: 2008:5) or simply as the adaptation of the University to the requirements of the new way of organizing economy and the work-world. Thus, University inserts within the overall device of "flexible accumulation" through the downgrading of the new workforce and the general commodification of university research. In this sense, university becomes an assembly line just-in-time by means of the construction of two different channels in the students training: the degree and the post-degree.

In a similar way, another fundamental issue to understand the current situation of the university is the student (or educational) debt. One of the main characteristics of the new era of capitalism is its financialization, that is the quick transit from a real-material

economy to another one based in a speculative-fictitious economy. The global growth of the student debt has become a new concern for students. The importance of this mechanism is explained by two factors: firstly, as an insertion of higher education into the logics of financialization of the economy, and secondly as a chance to open a new process of student resistance (as we can see these days in several universities of the USv). Moreover, the problem of the educational debt allows us to link the student struggles with a broader social unrest. Indeed, as Williams argues (2010), the student debt is becoming the new paradigm of life for young people and offers some lessons to students about the world they live in. This is the real “pedagogy of debt”: it shows that education is just another consumer good, teaching which is the real role of the State, and also adding an extra-stress for students who are concerned about their present but still more worried about their future. However, as McClanahan (2012) claims, living indebted can also be a chance to create new solidarities and social resistances against, precisely, the effects of the increasing tuition fees.

### **The New Wave of Student Movement and the Fordist-Post-Fordist Transition**

The transition from mass-university to corporate-university has opened a wave of transnational student protests. We can locate the symbolic beginning of this wave in the so-called "millennium strike" that was organized by the General Strike Council (CGH) in Mexico in 1999. This strike was able to keep the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) paralysed during nine months. Since that time, several student conflicts began to spread like wildfire throughout the world, drawing a "rare geopolitics of resistance" (Bensaïd, 2003). These resistances were developed in particular scenarios and situations, but all of them had the common goal of fighting the neoliberal model applied to higher education. And also in clear harmony with three aspects of the “anti-globalization movement”: the criticism to neoliberal capitalism, the emerging transnational coordination (in this case, European) and the contentious repertoire of protest.

The transition from the mass university to the corporate-university has caused a cycle of transnational student mobilizationvi. In this new student movement wave, the factors facilitating the emergence of mobilizations have varied -inevitably- from one context to

another, and in terms of intensity, objectives and motivations. However, I believe that there is a certain shared corpus and heritage among all the protests of recent years which is linked to the social condition and position of precarious workers-in formation.

### **Looking for a possible genealogy of the new wave of student mobilizations**

The transition from mass-university to corporate-university has opened a wave of transnational student protests. We can locate the symbolic beginning of this wave in the so-called "millennium strike" that was organized by the General Strike Council (CGH) in Mexico in 1999. This strike was able to keep paralyzed the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) during nine months. Since that time, several student conflicts began to spread like wildfire throughout the world, drawing a "rare geopolitics of resistance" (Bensaïd, 2003). These resistances were developed in particular scenarios and situations, but all of them had the common goal of facing the neoliberal model applied to higher education. And also in clear harmony with three aspects of the anti-globalization movement": the criticism to neoliberal capitalism, the emerging transnational coordination (in this case, European) and the contentious repertoire of protest.

In this first phase (1999-2004), in Europe, some significant changes in the dynamic of the student movement start to develop. Indeed, the process of the European Social Forum (ESF), becomes a framework for exchange of experiences for the student movement and also a network to articulate struggles. Thus, one survey, conducted during the first ESF in Florence in November 2002, shows that 57.5% of respondents claimed to belong to student groups. This process created the conditions for a "Europeanization of protest" (Della Porta, 2008:33) and to establish the "Bologna process" as the unifier of the resistance. And also to target the European Union as a strategic framework of confrontation, and, as we shall see later, to show the chances for the European coordination of the movement.

On the other hand, the dynamics of sectionalism ESF (health, education, migrants, climate change, public services, women, war) set the conditions for the convergence at a European level between the different sensitivities of the movement, the student unions (European Student Union) and teachers' unions.



On the other hand, at a European level, in a competitive/cooperation relationship with the Social Forums, the European Forum for Education was developed. Its first edition took place in Berlin in 2003 during the same days as the official summit of education ministers of the European Union. The second edition, as "counter-summit" to the ministers of the European Higher Education held in Bergen (Norway) in May 2005.

In this second phase of the new wave of student protest (2004-2010) the already existing trends in the previous mobilization cycle definitely emerge at a European level. The student movement becomes "cosmopolitan by the base", according to Tarrow. The shared experience of the European Social Forums (Florence 2002, Paris 2003, London 2004, Athens 2006, Malmö 2008), and the development of the European Forum for Education (Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005) led to a radicalization of the left wing of the student movement. This new political experience set the conditions to determine the common goal of opposing the "Bologna process" and the birth of a European coordination of the movement beyond the traditional student union structured in the ESU.

Continuing with this brief review of the student protests in Europe in the recent years, the European student movements burst onto the stage again in 2005 and 2006. In this academic year we witnessed the following demonstrations: against school and college reform in Italy (2005), against the Bologna process in the Spanish State (2005-6); against reform prohibits collective college exams in Denmark (2005), with the partial success of the student and workers movement against the First Employment Contract in France (Kouvelakis, 2006), against the law of higher education in Greece (2006).

The dynamics of university mobilization were reactivated in the last quarter of 2007 with the protests against the Pécresse Law of Autonomy of universities in France, the continuity of the struggle in defense of free public university in Greece and the "focus" of resistance to the implementation of the "Bologna process" in the Spanish State.

In the academic year 2008-2009 the protests at the European level were accelerated with the "anomalous wave" of the Italian student movement in the fall of 2008 (AAVV, 2009). The "revolt-signal" from the Greek movement after the murder of the teenager Alexander Grigoropoulos by the police in December 2008, led thousands of students to occupy

universities and even the television studios for weeks. This revolt appears as the first outbreak of "system"discontent around precarity, stated in terms of massive and sustained confrontation against two symbolic targets: banks, accused of being responsible for the crisis, and the police. Also the student mobilizations in Spain against the Bologna Process, which were particularly conflictive in Catalonia.

With the collapse of the global and financialised economy a new wave of protests has emerged. The general attack against the public services has included the education, showing the great impact of neoliberalism in education (Hill, 2012). Thus, during the last few years, England (Solomon and Palmieri [eds.] 2011; Hill, D., 2010) but also Spain, Italy and other peripheral countries of EU (such as Serbia) have led the protests against the cuts in education of the austerity measures dictated by the governments. In these cases, a new symbolic repertoire of the movement was created: the "book block"vii, which, as we will see, is a perfect and visual example of the conflict around knowledge, precarity and education.

During the last years the student wave has also come back to Latin America. The student struggle in Chileviii has been one of the most intensive protests in the country since the breakdown of Pinochet's dictatorship. In Colombia there has also been a huge mobilization against the marketization of higher education. In Mexico the burst in of the #yosoy132 movement against corruption and the political system has been mainly conducted by the student activism. In this sense, we address the key role played by the student movements in the resistance against the neoliberalism, particularly in those latin american countries where the hegemony of neoliberalism is still alive.

Finally, after the emergence of the "Indignados movement" in Spain we have also seen the birth of a "new global rebel cycle" with mobilizations in several countries and contexts (Antentas and Vivas, 2012). In these different movements, we can see the key role played by student activism and, in general, by a new generation of social activists unhappy with their situation under capitalism and radically against the current model of democracy. Moreover, the "Occupy movements" have placed the precariousness and the huge problem of the student debt in the public debate (Graeber, 2012). During this cycle of protests the student movements (sometimes we should consider them as youth movements) have had a

significant role what allows us to think of students “as being part of a potential anti-capitalist social alliance, without having to discursively transform them into workers.” (Sotiris, 2012).

### **Finding common elements to the new students protests**

As we have seen, broad student movements have been active in very different contexts and situations. But, is it possible to find common elements to all these student protests? Despite the natural differences of the student movement in each country, Roggero<sup>ix</sup> argues that it is possible to find common elements to all these student protests, namely: (i) the assertion of a new hybrid figure of student who moves permanently between lifelong learning and the labor market; (ii) the precariousness as the contextual framework and also as a factor for a new student subjectivity; (iii) the downgrading processes and (the) several mechanisms of differential inclusion where the distinctive factor is no longer what it has been studied but primarily where; (iv) and, finally, the reconfiguration of the space-time in the production of autonomous knowledge, through measures oriented to control and quantify the production of knowledge.

However, over and above describing these mobilizations and their common elements, what is really important here is to observe how the student/youth mobilizations have been developed before the general mobilizations of other social actors. This allows us to claim that during recent years (and as it happened during the 1968 cycle), the student/youth mobilizations have acted as a “tactical vanguard” and as a catalyst for social antagonisms in very different demographic contexts and political situations (such as Arab countries, France, England, Portugal (or) Spain, or the US). And it's happening because, at this time, the following changes have turned into mobilizing factors: On the one hand, the rise of "cultural capital" of youth, that is: the skills and abilities acquired and derived from the forced versatility of living labor; and, on the other hand, the applied technopolitical digital media networks and virtual organizational form that hybridizes with cultural and political alternatives from social networks.

Precisely, the concept of “youth” has been used in some way as an “empty signifier” (Laclau: 1996), becoming a legitimizer for contentious mobilization. For instance, in the

Spanish case, the appeal to the term “youth” was used successfully in the demonstrations that preceded the 15-M by the “Juventud Sin Futuro” (“Youth without future”) student platform<sup>x</sup> on April the 7th. In this case, the term “youth”, acting as an "empty signifier", encapsulated much of the social reality and the collective imagination that allowed to justify such a mobilization. This use was also applied in Portugal by the “Geração a Rasca” movement. These examples show that, in the battle for legitimacy and social hegemony, the role of the student movement and youth in general is still key. In the last months, the appeal to the condition of youth has been instrumental in articulating broad movements that undermine the dominant discourse on the economical crisis and the austerity measures.

But how and why has this new student unrest been developed? And how can we relate it to the Fordist-post-Fordist transition?

### **The chances of the mass university for student activism**

Even I claim that the transition from mass-University to corporate-University is a fact, it would not be correct to claim that University, nowadays, is a total post-Fordist context where the social bonds have disappeared and there's a total individualization of relationships. Thus, some structural and inherent elements of University remain and allow this institution to have certain peculiarities. Peculiarities that make social activism easier.

In this sense, the new emergence of the student movement can be explained by several reasons. Among the different existing approaches for the social movements study, the resource mobilization perspective on social movements seems to be the most appropriate to explain this new wave of student movements. Thus, the persistent mass university offers tangible and intangible resources (Freeman: 1979:170) for the self-organization of the student movement. In contrast, these resources are not available for workers in the context of the typical post-Fordist labor market. And here we can find the explanation of the advantage taken by student movements, in the last years, as a “tactical vanguard” (Mandel, 1973: 33) in the mobilization process in Europe or in other regions.

In the case of intangible resources we can find the partial homogeneous identity or, at least, the common interests shared by the students inside the faculties. This fact is really

interesting because, as Toscano claims (2011: 83): “At once reflecting, and at times exacerbating, the divisions and contradictions in society at large, the university can also unify students in ways that corporatist or fragmented interest cannot”.

Obviously, as Bourdieu (2004) claimed, education is a central institution for the reproduction of social divisions, where the students mainly accumulate a “symbolic and relational capital”. But this is not contradictory with the idea defended by researchers as Sevilla:

students do not constitute a class, rather they find themselves situated in a temporal condition: they are apprentice intellectual workers who, the moment they gain self-consciousness as a community, are dispersed and find themselves neutralized. But, in the brief interlude of their preparation, they constitute a compact group which has demonstrated an enormous political impulse in various countries.

On the other hand, the tangible resources available for the student movements are directly linked to the “student environment”. In this case, the two main resources are the available time, and the shared physical space. Both of them imply a great chance to achieve the goal of organizing and mobilizing students.

Regarding time, the particular student condition allows many students to have their own time released from work (not alienated time) which becomes an opportunity for collective self-organization, to develop a collective diagnostic and discourse on their own interests, and to have enough time to agree on a repertoire of actions to be displayed in order to defend these common interests. Indeed, the introduction of ECTS credits through the "Bologna process" as the unit of time to measure the student work, seeks to impose rates of study that are in fact rhythms of work. The application of ECTS credits is leading to the succession and proliferation of courses, seminars, modules, tests, projects and required courses that make difficult to combine the studies with having a job or any extra-curricular activity. University, in this sense, looks a just in time assembly line.

This neo-Taylorist educational model allows the mutation from potential critical time for self-formation into alienated work time: the work to become future precarious. Because of this, the expropriation of the student’s lifetime is the central element, form and content of the new student condition. This dominion over the lifetime has two main meanings. Firstly,

the orientation of the studies according to the special requirements of corporations, that means that specific skills should be developed by the workforce to be marketable.

Secondly, the central element in practice is to discipline the future workforce and the elimination of the right to organize one's own life. In general terms, we can say that studies are orientated to learn how to be precarious, and above all, how to be available for any job.

On the other hand, we find the availability of a common physical space located in universities and faculties. This shared space makes it easier for students to be in touch, to establish relationships and bonds within the movement, and to develop formal and informal networks of activists. In turn, this makes easier what Klandermans (1988) defines as the "formation of consensus"<sup>xi</sup>, which is one of the central elements for the creation and re-creation of social movements. Within the student activists networks, the formation of consensus seems to be elaborated easier than in the individualization of labor relations.

This individual disconnection and fragmentation caused by neoliberalism and post-Fordism has had a direct impact on the possibilities for workers' organization. In general, it has meant an expropriation of (the) life-time and of a shared physical space, among other new difficulties for precarious workers. Indeed, the overcrowding of universities has provoked a homogenization of the student condition which is not derived from the social origins or the common uncertain future. Rather, the "mass student" shares a social space which is the faculty, which makes him/her an organizable social subject and allows to develop a dynamic of self-organization. In the fragmentation of society caused by instability and precariousness, this is a common aspect of the student condition with a great potential for contentious.

In summary: the organizational resources available to the student movement still allows it nowadays to be an active agent in social conflicts, with some hardly existing resources in the current labor market, especially for precarious and the working poor I claim that we can understand these resources as the fordist reminiscences still alive in University. According to this thesis, it might be said that the late transition of the University to the post-Fordist labor market means, through the evolution of the university into a model of corporate-university, a change of this pattern, modifying the ways in which the student movements are used to organize themselves. However, the survival of shared subcultures and of the

physical spaces still maintains the chance to define common identities and interests, which are key to ensure the organizational forms of the student response.

### **Confronting the knowledge factory: precarious in training**

As we have seen, the resources of time and common space have made easier the development of resistance undertaken by student movements against the deep mutations of the functions of the University. Thus, if in the cycle of 1968 the protest was against the lack of democracy inside the University, now the student movement is oriented against the precariousness offered during and after the years at the University<sup>xii</sup>.

In fact, as claimed by Kouvelakis (2006), during the student struggle against the First Employee Contract in France, “the students have acted as part of world of work” linking directly their student condition to their condition of precarious workers. Because of that, as Sotiris (2011) defends:

in the current struggles students tend more easily to associate with the labor movement, to think in terms of common demands, to create forms of solidarity. Student movements are not just a reaction to the devaluation of degrees but are a part of greater social mobilization against the neoliberal restructuring of the totality of capital – labor relations.

In this sense, Kouvelakis argues that there has been a “reduction of the gap between youth in school and universities and young workers due to the increase in wage-earning activity among lycée and above all university students”. Because of that, unlike the 1968 movement, this transformation has not only facilitated the collaboration with workers, but it has made it a common struggle.

In fact, what is really new here is the articulation of a discourse capable of combining this double condition of student and the working poor. A discourse able to better understand the new condition of students and the new functions of universities.

According to Vercellone (2008:121) we cannot consider the "constitution of the labor force (supposedly in training) through the old lens of Fordism: that is, thinking in the student as an inactive and unproductive figure, which not deserves to be paid. The figure of the student as the employee, or the working poor, are increasingly confused". Thus, students as

producers of knowledge would be already in production, regardless of the concrete existence of a working relationship: "Today, the student is immediately precarious as a producer of knowledge and wisdom" (ESC, 2006). As Calella (2008: 75) claims:

students are certainly precarious, but not simply because they produce knowledge. They are being exploited as temporary workers with cost zero in the mandatory practices or in the thousands of precarious jobs with no rights to which they have been constrained. But, above all, they are a means of production, a particular commodity.

I do agree with Toscano (2011b: 258) when he defines the new situation of the student body as a "re-proletarianization derived from, for instance, the graduates working jobs that previously only required a high-school degree"<sup>xiii</sup>. Thus, University is becoming a factory of precariousness for most of the students who see how degrees lose their contractual capacity and "exchange value".

Nowadays, the deterioration of students life conditions has meant a common self-identification as "precarious in training" that has been one of the main discourses which have federalized the student movement around the world. And, indeed, this new collective consciousness has linked the economic transformations to the deep mutation of universities and, finally, to a new student condition that has been processed by the student movement activists as a general framework of injustice.

### **The repertoire of action of the new student mobilizations**

The repertoire of mobilization of the student movement is quite odd. On the one hand, because it often displays a non-institutionalized political action, and, on the other hand, "because student movements develop a very diverse and flexible repertoire of actions: occupations of university spaces and streets, breaking of academic regularities, development of several forms of counter-information, and so on" (González Calleja, 2009:53). In the last period of mobilization of the student movement, these repertoires have evolved and adjusted to the different contexts in which they have been developed. Similarly, there have been significant innovations in the forms of action. This shows the organizational flexibility of the movement and the ability to interpret the social and political context, as well as the opportunities it provides.



This cycle has also developed a specific repertoire of action of the movement. Due to their symbolic impact and the high diffusion they have had, I will attend to two of the repertoires that have been repeated in different contexts: (1) the faculty occupations and blockades, and (2) the development of the initiative of the “book block”.

## **Faculty occupations and blockades**

The occupation of faculties have been a symbol of the movement and, in the case of Europe, they have had a specific political meaning. There have been occupations of faculties in England, Germany, Austria, Greece, Spain, Croatia, etc.<sup>xiv</sup> In every country where there has been a student mobilization this has been the most repeated repertoire. As we have previously seen, the expropriation of time is a central element in the new student (and precarious) condition. Through the occupations, the student movements tried to free time for themselves and for social activism. As activists recognize, in the case of the protests against the Bologna Process, occupations were also the way to have enough time to study the education reforms, with a very technical content and, as the movements criticized, mostly approved in a non-democratic way. Developed as “Japanese strikes” (in the Spanish case), these occupations had the goal to achieve the social time necessary to articulate the protest and, at the same time, to break with the faculty daily routine and visualize the conflict inside the institution. Furthermore, occupations acted as a mechanism to build up the movement and the opposition discourse.

In the same way, the tactic of blocking faculties (developed mainly in France) was a repertoire oriented to make possible the right to strike in universities, but also the most advanced example of how students have acted as a part of the world of work. The blockades pursued the objective of short-circuiting the assembly-line of universities and breaking the flow of knowledge production (Sevilla and Urbán, 2008: 71).

## **The “book block”**

The most visual repertoire used by the student movement has been what is known as the “book block”. This repertoire was firstly put into practice by Italian activists in 2010. Later, it spread to other countries, being adapted by student movements in Madrid or London, in

what is a clear case of diffusion and transnational activism (Tarrow, 2011). As one of the activists of “Juventud Sin Futuro” in Madrid explains, the meaning of this repertoire:

[...] is a nod to the various student struggles and precarious youth that have developed around Europe and that have also used this symbol. Young people also read. And there is a connection between the consciousness that gives us something so fundamental as a book and the defense of culture and knowledge against the marketization of the university<sup>xv</sup>.

Moreover, this repertoire is thought for urban demonstrations, for urban conflicts and as a way to defend activists from police, always as active non-violent disobedience.<sup>xvi</sup>

Symbolically strong, the “book block” emerges as an opportunity for the legitimization of the movement and it appears linked to knowledge and as the symbol of a generation with high levels of education but doomed to precariousness. The symbolism of the book block and its sense also means that the contradictions involved in the University cannot be solved, exclusively, inside the university itself. And this is impossible because of the subsumption of university inside the global market of knowledge and because the condition of “precarious” develops inside and, even more, outside university.

## **Main Findings**

In this paper, I have briefly reviewed how universities have been transformed in parallel to the Fordist-post-Fordist transition of the labor market, at least in the new management and goals of universities. I have claimed that the new functions of universities are directed to satisfy the needs of the labor market and of corporations, inside the tensions derived from the increasing global market of knowledge. This evolution of universities has provoked a new emergence of student discontent. This discontent has been possible to be expressed and organized because of the resources available for students, specially the time and the common physical space which are still present (despite both are decreasing in the corporate-university) in the student life. Despite the evolution towards the corporate-university, the structure of universities still offers the student movements objective chances to organize social protest. In fact, the mass university associated to Fordism is still allowing the development of some social mobilization repertoires that, on the other hand, the post-Fordist labor market inhibits or, at least, makes much more difficult to articulate.

My main conclusion is that the mass university, associated with a Fordist model of production, might explain why the student subject has been, in the last years, one of the most important actors of contentious social mobilization. In fact, the student protests have acted as a “catalyst movement” for a broader process of social mobilization. At the same time, the construction of a common identity (“precarious in training”) has also allowed this emergence of a new student collective subject, a new identity for new struggles in the new era of universities. Finally, this diagnostic of the student condition has had two main impacts over the recent wave of mobilizations: (i) firstly, the link of the current student movement with the world of work, or at least, the articulation of a movement acting inside and outside university as a hard critique to the situation of precariousness; (ii) secondly, putting into practice some repertoires oriented to visualize this condition and trying to avoid the measures of control and discipline implemented by the new corporate-university.

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<sup>i</sup> Vercellone (2007: 14) explains clearly the meaning of cognitive capitalism: “(i) the notion of 'capitalism' defines the enduring element in the change of the structural invariants of the capitalist mode of production: in particular, the driving role of profit and wage relation or, more precisely, the different forms of dependent labor on which the extraction of surplus labor is founded; (ii) the term 'cognitive' emphasizes the new nature of the conflictual relation of capital and labor, and of the forms of property on which the accumulation of capital rests.”

<sup>ii</sup> In fact, cognitive capitalism would be the critical version of this knowledge based economy.

<sup>iii</sup> In fact, this is what was questioned during the emergence of student movements during the 1960s, when the diffusion of education and knowledge inside the mass university allowed the crisis of the first dimension of real subsumption (Cohn-Bendit et al, 1969: 377).

<sup>iv</sup> See: [http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2012/01/10/actualidad/1326174143\\_330152.html](http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2012/01/10/actualidad/1326174143_330152.html)

<sup>v</sup> See: <http://www.diagonalperiodico.net/El-problema-de-la-deuda.html> and the website of the campaign: <http://www.occupystudentdebtcampaign.org/>

<sup>vi</sup> A cycle that begins in Mexico with the General Strike of the Autonomous University of Mexico in 1999

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and still goes on with the open and deep student conflicts in several countries.

- vii For a genealogy of the book bloc, see: <http://libcom.org/library/book-bloc%E2%80%99s-genealogy>
- viii See: <http://www.fundacionbetiko.org/index.php/es/anos/2011/442-movilizaciones-estudiantiles-en-chile-2011>
- ix See: <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0707/roggero/es#redir>
- x See Errejón (2011) in: <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=126259>
- xi That is: the collective formation, within certain social networks, of a common definition on a particular (supposedly unfair) situation.
- xii Needless to say that what is really different among the two cycles is the material situation of the two generations. As Bensaid explained (2008) we can find in these waves the transition from the 'getting better' of the 1960s to the 'getting worse' of the new times.
- xiii This is absolutely contradictory with what happened after the 1968 wave of protest in the universities of Spain, Italy or France, where many student activists decided to leave universities to proletarianize themselves working in big factories and changing their life conditions and their social expectations.
- xiv A map of universities occupied in Europe in November of 2009 can be found here:  
<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?hl=de&ie=UTF8&oe=UTF8&source=embed&msa=0&msid=116283369278129786033.0004778dfa81fb402d565&ll=49.781264,12.348633&spn=13.632758,28.125&z=5>
- xv See: <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=128668>
- xvi See: [http://www.unicommon.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2646:presentazione-di-book-bloc-project-&catid=132:book-bloc&Itemid=324](http://www.unicommon.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2646:presentazione-di-book-bloc-project-&catid=132:book-bloc&Itemid=324)