

Education economics

Commodification, fetishism and quantification

Hugo Harari-Kermadec
Université d'Orléans & ERCAE

M2 EPOG+

1 Ideology

- Academic enchantment
- Disenchantment
- Reenchantment

2 Effects

- Redefinition
- Reification
- Abstraction

Academic enchantment

Secularisation of the university with the enlightenment
⇒ academic values:

- Autonomy of Reason,
- Knowledge,
- academic autonomy,
- equality and evaluation among peers...



Academic enchantment

University is defined by its relative autonomy, from the State as well as from the market (and of course church). This means that its academics themselves -autonomously organised- and not State or Market's representatives, that define the criteria of legitimacy and the value of knowledge, [...] it's the condition for scientific fruitfulness and democracy
A. Caillé, Ph. Chanial, "Présentation", p. 5-30, Revue du *MAUSS*, n°323, "L'Université est en crise. Mort ou résurrection", 2009.

Disenchantment

Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848

For exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, [the bourgeoisie] has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation [...] all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

Disenchantment

Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848

For exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, [the bourgeoisie] has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation [...] all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

Evaluations, rankings and benchmarks appear as “objective” (since quantitative) valorisations of research and teaching, as opposed to subjective peer judgement.

Quantification and monetization

D. Harvey, 2003, p. 141

capitalism can [...] make use of some pre-existing outside [...] some sector within capitalism - such as education - that has not been proletarianised.

Marx, *The capital* (I), chap 3.1

It is not money that renders commodities commensurable. Just the contrary. It is because all commodities, as values, are realised human labour, and therefore commensurable, that their values can be measured by one and the same special commodity, and the latter be converted into the common measure of their values, i.e., into money.

Research Excellence Framework (REF) Funding distribution

Papers' evaluation

Category	world forefront	international excellence	international recognition	national recognition
Coefficient	7	3	1	0

⇒ Publication score

Research Excellence Framework (REF) Funding distribution

Papers' evaluation

Category	world forefront	international excellence	international recognition	national recognition
Coefficient	7	3	1	0

⇒ Publication score

Full assessment

Partial score	publication	impact	environment
weight	65%	20%	15%

⇒ Synthetic score

Research Excellence Framework (REF) Funding distribution

Papers' evaluation

Category	world forefront	international excellence	international recognition	national recognition
Coefficient	7	3	1	0

⇒ Publication score

Full assessment	Partial score	publication	impact	environment
	weight	65%	20%	15%

⇒ Synthetic score

Subventions = $\left(\frac{\text{synthetic score}}{\text{score}}\right) * \left(\frac{\text{Share of}}{\text{assessed researchers}}\right) * \left(\frac{\text{Market}}{\text{share}}\right) * \left(\frac{\text{cost}}{\text{coef.}}\right) \Rightarrow$ Monetary expression of research

And have you seen change in how the REF results are used either by the university or within the department? (Boulet, 2013)

Yes. So they are much more... they are regarded now as measures of individual performance in ways which can lead to HR, human resources, discussions with individuals. And that was also the case in the previous RAE, in 2008. It wasn't the case in previous RAEs [before 2008].
(academic)

Rankings

USN ranking of Law schools (Espeland & Sauder, 2007)

USN's goal in creating rankings was [...] to provide accessible information to educational consumers.

Ranks according to reputation (40%), selectivity (25%), employment (20%) and budget (15%)

French R& HE ministers

le classement de Shanghai [est] certes critiquable mais [...] nous devons gagner des places (2007)

les critères qui sont utilisés pour le classement de Shanghai sont des critères absolument partiels, malgré toutes ces réserves, la France ne s'en sort pas si mal [et] grignote des places (2015).

Benchmarking

Open Method of Coordination (Bruno et al., 2010)

European integration by means of numbers instead of law: statistics on R& HE are defined at the EU level and therefore induce comparability and rankings.

This also works within countries and even within universities, inducing competition among departments of laboratories.

Reenchantment :

Artous, *Le fétichisme de la marchandise*, 2006

Capitalist modernity is not only characterised by the “world disenchantment” [...], it is locked in the enchanted world of the commodity

Reenchantment :

Artous, *Le fétichisme de la marchandise*, 2006

Capitalist modernity is not only characterised by the “world disenchantment” [...], it is locked in the enchanted world of the commodity

Lisbon strategy (2000)

aims to make the EU ”the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world

Human capital, Becker, 1962, p. 9

Activities that influence future real income through the imbedding of resources in people. This is called investing in human capital.

Authority

- Quantification needs and expresses power
- Simplification makes information more authoritative
- “Objectivity lends authority to officials who have very little of their own.” (Porter, 1995)

Authority

- Quantification needs and expresses power
 - Simplification makes information more authoritative
 - “Objectivity lends authority to officials who have very little of their own.” (Porter, 1995)
- ⇒ Self-realisation: rankings reproduce and intensify the stratification they are designed to measure (through recognition and funding)

Redefinition

Quantification is always a redefinition and an homogenization.

USN Law school ranking

LSAT tests are available to quantify the quality of the student body.
It eliminates specifics criteria and social grants.

REF

Research quality is quantified as articles production \times journals citations.
Researcher value is given by the among of funding her REF scores brings.

Ranking universities produces a common norm, the best.

Redefinition

Quantification is always a redefinition and an homogenization.

USN Law school ranking

LSAT tests are available to quantify the quality of the student body.
It eliminates specifics criteria and social grants.

REF

Research quality is quantified as articles production \times journals citations.
Researcher value is given by the among of funding her REF scores brings.

Ranking universities produces a common norm, the best.
And a segmentation: in and out of the ranking.

Reification

Marx, *Productive and Unproductive Labour*

the means of production, the objective conditions of labour, do not appear as subsumed under the worker; rather, he appears as subsumed under them. Capital employs labour. Even this relation in its simplicity is a personification of things and a reification of persons.

Reification

Marx, *Productive and Unproductive Labour*

the means of production, the objective conditions of labour, do not appear as subsumed under the worker; rather, he appears as subsumed under them. Capital employs labour. Even this relation in its simplicity is a personification of things and a reification of persons.

- Low wage teachers, specially content producers for MOOC, do not control syllabus nor organisation of teaching
 - Large research programs are organised as sets of scheduled deliverables
 - Patents are university or company properties
- ⇒ taylorisation of labour by legal frame and quantitative management

Abstraction of academic labour

Quantification commensurate different fields and activities:
to improve a score or a ranking, actors move efforts and funding from an activity to another (close the philosophy dpt. to extend the chemics dpt; social grants → merit-based grants). REF costs indexes are conversion factors

Deepening quantification: REF

Measure is more precise: from 5% (2008) to 1% (2014). commensurability is extended: from 67 fields (2008) to 36 (2014)

Abstraction of academic labour

Quantification commensurate different fields and activities:
to improve a score or a ranking, actors move efforts and funding from an activity to another (close the philosophy dpt. to extend the chemics dpt; social grants → merit-based grants). REF costs indexes are conversion factors

Deepening quantification: REF

Measure is more precise: from 5% (2008) to 1% (2014). commensurability is extended: from 67 fields (2008) to 36 (2014)

Laval *et al.*, *La nouvelle école capitaliste*, 2012, p. 13

La forme valeur de la connaissance est l'effet de la normalisation qui lui est appliquée par les outils managériaux de sa gestion et de son évaluation.

First abstraction: Academic labour loose it's individuality, it's field specificity.

Monetisation

Second abstraction: commensurate academic labour with general labour.
Once the production is quantified, it just lacks a conversion in money.

Human capital (Gazier, 1992)

“Human capital is of productive capacities [...] : knowledge, skills, experience, [...] as valued on labour market.”

- Fees \Rightarrow teaching monetisation
- \Rightarrow split among dpts according to CATS
- REF expected funding \Rightarrow research monetisation

Profitability

MBA	Prix 2011	1 ^{er} wage	Profitability
ESCP	11 500 €	36 000 €	3,1
HEC	11 900 €	36 000 €	3,0
ESSEC	15 000 €	36 000 €	2,4

$$\text{Profitability} = \frac{\text{first wage}}{\text{last year tuition fees}} \quad : \text{ l'Étudiant.fr, 2013}$$

Profitability

MBA	Prix 2011	1 ^{er} wage	Profitability
ESCP	11 500 €	36 000 €	3,1
HEC	11 900 €	36 000 €	3,0
ESSEC	15 000 €	36 000 €	2,4

$$\text{Profitability} = \frac{\text{first wage}}{\text{last year tuition fees}} \quad : \text{ l'Étudiant.fr, 2013}$$

Enlarge reproduction of capital	C	M	C'
	investment	production	realisation

Profitability

MBA	Prix 2011	1 ^{er} wage	Profitability
ESCP	11 500 €	36 000 €	3,1
HEC	11 900 €	36 000 €	3,0
ESSEC	15 000 €	36 000 €	2,4

$$\text{Profitability} = \frac{\text{first wage}}{\text{last year tuition fees}} \quad : \text{ l'Étudiant.fr, 2013}$$

Enlarge reproduction of capital human	C	M	C'
	investment Tuition fees	production higher educ.	realisation wage

Profitability

MBA	Prix 2011	1 ^{er} wage	Profitability
ESCP	11 500 €	36 000 €	3,1
HEC	11 900 €	36 000 €	3,0
ESSEC	15 000 €	36 000 €	2,4

$$\text{Profitability} = \frac{\text{first wage}}{\text{last year tuition fees}} \quad : \text{ l'Étudiant.fr, 2013}$$

Enlarge reproduction of capital human	C	M	C'
	investment Tuition fees	production higher educ.	realisation wage

Misleading scheme: le fetishism obscures the exploitation.

Anticapitalist value? (Casta 2017)

Students produce value as they study.

Not as an investment for later (Becker) immediately.

Commission de l'éduc. nat. de l'assemblée (12/05/1951)

[...] as a direct increase in population's standard of living.