Liberal Arts to the Rescue of the Bachelor's Degree in Europe

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Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the importance of the liberal arts model as the most suitable to fulfil the potential of Bachelor studies, as well as argue that the moral element as part of any quality education will be crucial for the future challenges that Europe faces. One of the aims of the European Union educational policy has been coordination and synchronisation of its diverse systems, in order to promote student and academic exchanges and diploma recognition. This became particularly poignant after the fall of communist regimes in 1989 when a great diversity of university systems existed across the continent. The Bologna Declaration signed in 1998 introduced a 'credit system' where each course taught at any university would be easily transferable to another university in another country. This has been hailed as great success, but it has not materialised in its envisioned potential. The reformed undergraduate education, refurbished through the liberal arts model, would assure not only education with depth and breadth but also the moral aptitude and the cognitive capacity of students, enabling them to confront an uncertain future. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 allowed the Bachelor's-Master's division; it is time, this paper argues, to allow the Bachelor's stage to fulfil its full potential.

Keywords

liberal arts – future – Europe – morality – education

1 Introduction

Educational institutions have globally become immensely important and seem to be always in some kind of crisis. And even during a temporary calm, academia seems to be either recovering from or heading toward a crisis – financial, structural, or existential. These institutions have grown in size and

number as demand for university education has grown exponentially during the last fifty years. In fact, schools are, as Ivan Illich (1970) reminds us, the most universal institutions – more than any church or industry – transcending geographic and ideological boundaries, embracing every country in the world (p. 44). They devour huge chunks of national budgets and are deemed by politicians to be a tool to make their country competitive, innovative, and modern. The more educated its population, the more likely is a society to be perceived as potentially prosperous. The concern about the state and status of educational systems always provides an excuse for government intervention. And politicians feel obliged 'to solve' these crises with some long-needed reform, innovative plans, and periodic restructuring. Thus, educators either complain that the interference by government is too intrusive or that it neglects their needs and demands. Sometimes it seems that the best scenario is to leave this rather conservative and mighty educational apparatus on its own, leaving its structure intact while enjoying state funding. And yet they are never to be left alone because every society and its educational sector are locked together to face an uncertain future and to deal with the purpose, direction, and costs of their universities and various research institutes.

As in every state sector that demands funds, be it industry, the defence sector, healthcare, culture, or schools, the crucial question is priorities. In the case of higher education in Europe, it is a faculty's research potential and publications that represent the most prestigious part of academia. The others, the students, seem to be at the service of university administrators and educators, and not vice versa. Historically, this is an anomaly that requires explanation and demands correction. The reasons for the current status seem simple. Universal literacy and huge increases in the number of university students require a mammoth effort for administrators to balance their task to maintain high university rankings while expanding the number of students in order to receive state funding. Often quality suffers from the pressure of quantity, and the biggest loss is suffered by the undergraduate sector where students can be mass-lectured and mass-examined. Such massification of undergraduate education does not influence the ranking of a university much, and, hence, there is little incentive to concentrate on the status of students' learning. Rather, priority is given to the quality of research, publications, and PhD programmes. Not surprisingly, even at prestigious European universities, it often seems that an undergraduate student is just a number to justify the research status and existence of a professoriate. The attempt to deal with the *status quo* on the European level has mixed results and requires much rethinking and reform.

The European Union is an ideal supranational institution that offers a huge opportunity for centrally initiated changes in the form of standardisation,

approximation, and in the variety of innovative educational models. Besides alleviating the discrepancies of national educational structures, Brussels thinks that there is an urgency to make Europe competitive vis-à-vis the USA and other non-European countries. The last major educational reform was instituted through the Bologna Declaration signed in 1999, which, among other things, initiated the creation and Europe-wide implementation of the Bachelor's degree. Yet this major structural reform was not followed up by the necessary debate among educators about the nature and content of the newly created Bachelor's stage, or about the purpose and structure of higher education in the 21st century. This debate about a new strategy has been badly needed considering the immense increase in the number of undergraduate students. In addition, with the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, seemingly much has been reformed but, in reality, very little has changed because universities are by nature conservative institutions and have managed to preserve the old departmental structure as a sort of 'national defence' against 'supranational intrusion' from Brussels. The least affected by the reform was the undergraduate studies' content, structure, and process of education; and the narrow specialisation of studies within single subject departments have remained intact.

The three-year-long Bachelor's degree has been introduced as one segment of the Bologna Declaration to replace, along with the Master's degree, the old five-year-long programmes of studies. It has been in a state of crisis ever since. The reasons are manifold and the purpose of this chapter is to point out the background and the causes of the dismal state of the undergraduate studies in Europe today. It will cover the historical aspect of higher education and explain why Europe has neglected its own tradition of *Bildung* that was instrumental in the formation of educational systems in Europe in the early nineteenth century. Next, this chapter will describe the existing models of Liberal Arts education in Europe. It will also propose a way to reform the Bachelor's degree, offering structural changes in order to make it meaningful and useful for millions of high school graduates entering universities throughout Europe. It will be argued that the preservation of the current status of the Bachelor's degree would cause a decline in the quality of education, increase the costs, and eventually undermine its operation in numerous countries. Paradoxically, it is a return to the Liberal Arts educational model, originating in Europe centuries ago, that can offer restoration of the position of the undergraduate degree as a suitable preparation for further postgraduate studies. In addition, it would prepare students for the occupations gradually unfolding during the twenty-first century. The liberal arts model stresses not only the content of what is studied but also the structure of classes as well as the method of teaching and learning

where primary focus is on students' cognitive competence and, importantly, moral stance.

2 The *Status Quo* of the Bachelor's Degree in Europe

One of the aims of the European Union's educational policy has been the coordination and synchronization of its diverse systems in order to promote student and academic exchanges and diploma recognition. This became particularly urgent immediately after the fall of communist regimes in 1989 when a great diversity of university systems existed across the continent. Although each country preserves sovereignty over its accreditation process and the shape, size, and number of its universities, the interest of all has been to allow students and academics to participate in exchanges and cooperation. In order to achieve this, the main provision of the Bologna Declaration signed in 1999 by all EU ministers of education was the introduction of a so-called 'European Higher Education Area', which primarily allowed a 'credit transfer system' where each course taught at one university would be transferable to another university in the same or another country.¹ This led to an explosion of student exchanges where millions of students within Europe receive a stipend to spend a semester or year of their study at another university abroad. This has for years been hailed as the greatest success of the Bologna process and was particularly beneficial for young scholars and PhD students in expanding their knowledge, establishing contacts, and enhancing their research. Scientists from former communist countries could work with their Western colleagues using sophisticated equipment not available in their home institutions. Scholars from social studies and the humanities could enrich and compare their research during extended trips, workshops, and conferences. The EU has been providing generous travel and research funding for these academic activities. This has been arguably one of the most positive developments of European integration.

Another aim of the Bologna Declarations was the division of university studies into Bachelor's and Master's degrees as the Declaration divided the old five-year-long education and PhD studies into undergraduate and graduate cycles.² Allegedly, the division was only a last-minute decision amidst tense

¹ Information on the Bologna Process and its evolution is found on the website, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en.

² The text of the Bologna Declaration is found on https://www.eurashe.eu/library/modernising-phe/Bologna_1999_Bologna-Declaration.pdf.

negotiations.³ The reason for this division was to differentiate undergraduate and graduate studies, the same as it has been the case in Anglo-Saxon countries, and in particular to be compatible with the USA system. Also, the old five-year degree seemed too long for certain professional studies and for job training. In theory, a Bachelor's degree could be a terminal degree as has been the case in Anglo-Saxon countries. However, there, the Bachelor's degree has a different structure and traditionally lasts four years in contrast to the three-year-long degree that has been a standard in Europe.

The division into Bachelor's and Master's studies in Europe could have been of great benefit to students if the focus and purpose of the two had been clearly delineated. For example, if the first degree offered more general education, cognitive competence and training in so-called 'intellectual skills', while the Master's degree offered a professional degree, or a preparation for PhD studies. This reform has never happened. The politicians signing the Bologna Declaration created the division, but it was not followed by a sufficiently broad discussion among educators about the content and purpose of the two degrees. regrettably, as of now, in the overwhelming number of institutions of higher learning there is no difference between the current Bachelor's degree and the previous first three years of study of a five-year-long programmes. The old system has remained intact, and that is the source of substantial tension. Students start to specialise from day one of their Bachelor's studies and cannot depart from this path without starting their studies all over again. After graduating, they continue in the same field of study, usually at the same department, for another two years to complete a Master's degree. And this is currently considered at many European universities as a redundant arrangement obliging administrators to organise an extra Bachelor's thesis for each student and an extra graduation, which, understandably, is deemed costly and time-consuming.

The functioning of the Bachelor's degree has been problematic because it is spread and compartmentalised along the thousands of specialised departments. The old design of departmental division has survived intact, undermining the whole system. To undo this, as will be argued later, would require restructuring the departmental division and that would mean a major reform of the European university system. Suffice it to say that with respect to the Bachelor's degree the survival of departmental divisions is an anachronism. As Stanley Katz (1996) argues: 'The current departmental structure has outlived the rapid increase of information and knowledge ... [T]he departmental structure of today's research universities is largely an artefact of branches of

3 Personal communication with Milan Ftáčnik, then Minister of Education of Slovakia and the signatory of the Bologna Declaration.

knowledge that seemed distinct at the turn of the [nineteenth] century but have remained distinct only for reasons of academic and administrative convenience' (p. 84). This prevailing anachronism of departmental division is, as will be explained later, particularly damaging for the current status of the Bachelor's degree.

Paradoxically, if this inherently flawed design survives permanently, the introduction of a Bachelor's degree in Europe will seem redundant and will be tolerated only as a structural imposition through the Bologna process. The Bachelor's stage has already been considered a failure by many prominent educators, who consider it as an enforced division that goes against tradition and even against common sense. It is often viewed as incomplete university studies to be finished with a Master's degree. Some countries even contemplate ending the division and returning to the five-year-long degree.

The mechanical division of studies is not the only major problem of the Bachelor's degree. There are several others that will need to be addressed during any reform of higher education in Europe. One is the role and relationship of student and teacher; the other is the latter's institutional affiliation and personal attachment. As Ernest L. Boyer (1996) stresses, in Europe an old German tradition prevails, 'with its emphasis not on the student but on the professoriate; not on general but on specialised education; not on loyalty to the campus but on loyalty to the guild' (p. 145). Indeed, in the age of narrow specialisation and the unwritten rule of 'publish or perish', teachers focus predominantly on research and publishing and consider teaching often as a necessary burden. The doyen of liberal arts education in Europe, Hans Adriaansen (2017), points out, with some vexation, the current status of university teachers who 'have shifted their focus from teaching to research, which is, in fact, a form of goal displacement similar to the shift bankers have made from clients to bonuses' (p. 29).⁴ Those most affected by this trend of lectures-exams and the research-publishing academic (vicious) cycle are undergraduate students who come less and less in contact with their research-driven professors who often ignore and disdain their teaching responsibilities.

Another and related problem of the Bachelor's degree today is that undergraduate students are not instructed and trained to acquire the intellectual skills so important for further studies, research, and employment prospects in a systematic way. The reason is that European universities, mostly state-funded, select as many Bachelor's students as possible because their state financing depends on the sheer number of students admitted. What, and how, teaching

4 In Europe it is often called 'Liberal Arts and Sciences' in order to stress that liberal arts should contain sciences, as historically they always did. I will use the term 'Liberal Arts'.

is done, and what a student learns, seems secondary to ministries of education and thus not a priority for universities. In addition, the academic ranking of the universities is not dependent on quality of teaching and time dedicated to Bachelor's students but on a number of publications, level of research, and the prominence of professors. This arrangement has a positive effect on PhD students, partially on Master's students, but is definitely harmful to undergraduate students. Even the most prestigious European universities that boast top academics, scientific research, and excellent MA and PhD programmes, offer predominantly mass Bachelor's programmes. In such an environment, even excellent lecturers would not have enough time to provide feedback on student work, with hundreds of students in a lecture course. Besides, at large research universities, professors would surely prefer scholarly discussion with their postgraduate students who specialise in the same field and not with Bachelor's students. In addition, if there are large classes, it is common to hold only multiple-choice tests at the end of the semester, or one major paper with little supervision or feedback. Teaching assistants from among the PhD and even Master's students are beneficial but do not compensate for the expertise of professors who are, however, usually not available to their students on a regular basis. In many post-communist countries, there still exists an oral exam practice where the students are questioned randomly, often at the whim of the examiner. All these are most unfortunate educational practices in Europe that need to be addressed and corrected.

Another issue is the importance and proportional weight of the humanities, social and natural sciences, and vocational studies. Universities in Europe are under political pressure to prepare their graduates for employment, and hence natural science and vocational education enjoy a great advantage with respect to funding over the humanities and social sciences. This, of course, is a global trend, but in Europe there is little discussion about what this shift implies. Universities offer fixed, specialised programmes and are often presented as job-training centres. And yet, paradoxically, as Stanley Katz comments: 'Post-industrial economies place little value on the retention of specialised knowledge but instead emphasise basic numeracy and literacy (including computer literacy). The situation strikes me as a tremendous opportunity for a humanist to claim more space and time in the undergraduate curriculum...' (p. 82). Still, there is little debate among either academics or politicians about what the purpose of a university in contemporary society is, or what should be the role of the humanities in our turbulent and crisis-ridden societies. A suggestion that a university graduate, as a result of their studies, should become a responsible citizen would be considered an inapt, even tactless, intrusion into the private realm of an individual. University education today is considered a sacred

right that no one is going to alter and diminish in any major way. In fact, if there is any change it will be rather toward shifting more resources to research and development, to natural sciences, or to vocational education. Indeed, if university studies are considered merely as job preparation programmes, the cognitive and ethical element of humanist studies will be deemed by many to be a wasteful inheritance from the past. This is an alarming prospect not only for higher education but also for the condition of democracy in Europe.

It is in this area of making the Bachelor's degree meaningful that Liberal Arts studies can provide substantial improvement. But, before we discuss how Liberal Arts could make Bachelor's degrees in Europe self-contained, meaningful, and overall beneficial, it is important to examine first the nature and purpose of education in our time and look at historical developments that show how the old European tradition of *Artes Liberales* and *Bildung* was displaced and replaced with narrow specialisation, preference for vocational training, and why academic studies have led to the gradual marginalisation of humanities.

3 Education

Each epoch views education differently, reflecting social and political conditions, and the priorities and concerns specific to it. Curriculum in the first universities was divided between theology and *Artes Liberales*, the latter to acquire broad knowledge in philosophy and natural sciences as well as to master the art of disputation. Later, liberal education added 'three philosophies' – natural, moral, and metaphysical – to provide students with comprehensive education, moral foundation and the intellectual skills of writing, oratory, and scholarship (Kimball 1996, p. 16). It had been believed that the knowledge and the skills were worthy in themselves, although they would also prepare for professional training. In other words, such an education was considered to represent the ends, constituting a meaningful and good life, and not the means to it.

Many educators today question such spiritual and moral dimensions of education, stressing, instead, the priority of mastering a certain field of study or being skilled in a professional subject, for example law, medicine or business. They see the old concept of education as something redundant in today's technology-driven, fast-advancing, and changing societies. There is nothing wrong with the old way, but there is simply no time today, they argue, for such a noble but old-fashioned endeavour as searching for 'the good life'. Educators, students, and politicians increasingly perceive universities as a vehicle to secure employment, financial security, and professional prestige. Education in this perspective becomes a commodity, a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Hence, those aspects of education that do not fit this 'modern' end are deemed superfluous. And, the result is disastrous. Today one can spend five years studying at university, obtaining Bachelor's and Master's degrees even in the social sciences, let alone the natural sciences, without taking a single course dealing with history or covering any moral, spiritual, or artistic dimension that formed the humanistic tradition in Western civilisation. And yet, it is so important for the intellectual, cognitive, and moral development of a young individual to study these subjects. It provides a base for life-long learning, independence of thinking, and a moral foundation to face up to the challenges presented by currently diminishing solidarity, economic disparities, or political radicalisation. At the moment, humanistic and moral aspects are absent during Bachelor's studies, and there are wide ranging negative consequences to this development. Let us explore the background and value of this type of education.⁵

The original purpose of education has not become obsolete with the rise of modernity and technology. On the contrary, as we witness how obstinately politicians, intellectuals, and scholars approach contemporary moral and ethical dilemmas and problems, there is a need to offer education that contains moral and philosophical dimension. John Henry Cardinal Newman, in his *The Scope and Nature of University Education* (1852), explores the purpose of education when he states: 'I am asked what is the end of university education, and of the liberal or philosophical knowledge which I conceive it to impart: I answer, that ... it has a very tangible, real, and sufficient end, though the end cannot be divided from that knowledge itself'. And then adds his famous conclusion: 'Knowledge is capable of being its own end' (p. 83). Hence, for him education and knowledge are intertwined, both having a moral and ethical base without which knowledge is just something cunning and education encyclopaedic and shallow. Newman's words may sound old-fashioned, lofty, and redundant, but they gain a new meaning in today's crisis-ridden, radicalising world, plagued with political corruption and looming environmental disaster. Knowledge 'capable of being its own end' feels like a sanctuary of sanity and decency in a world of legitimised vulgarity, a world where an ever more overbearing advertising industry dictates the tastes and trends to the same young people who should be able to resist this attack on their senses and sensibilities. The absence of these ideals is most vividly exposed as many politicians, public figures, and religious leaders who call for justice, tolerance, and moderation are in despair facing the crowds of those who cannot distinguish these terms from the calls

5 In the past, secondary school education provided comprehensive courses in philosophy, history, and art as well as improved skills in critical thinking, writing, and oral presentation. While that may have been true in the past, data indicate an erosion of this kind of learning at the secondary level.

of injustice, bigotry, and uncontrolled rage invoked and instigated by populists and racists. The struggle for the moral foundation of our societies is not what is said by the elite but what is being heard and understood by the population. Thus, an educated individual as invoked by Cardinal Newman is and will be the crucial barrier facing populists and bigots.

One often hears that knowledge of virtues and vices are to be acquired at home, through spiritual guidance rather than during university studies. Although partially valid, there are at least two objections to this claim. First, the traditional institutions of family, church, and civil society have weakened in our post-industrial, fragmented world facing trendy and ephemeral standards, religious radicalisation, and the clash of identities politics. Second, it is increasingly difficult to hold onto one's own value-system while facing a world that is changing so fast, and is becoming more complex and divided. No wonder that the beginning of twenty-first century has seen an increase in the number of populist and radical nationalist movements. They are able to exploit the confusion and fears of people who are unable to digest and make sense of social, economic, and political turmoil. Even in Western societies, an increasing number of people turn to fraudulent and obscurantist political preachers who promise safety, protection, and final victory of whatever bigoted and selfish cause. One remedy for these ills – even one that is not fool-proof, as will be argued – is good education, open to questioning prevailing stereotypes and clichés, encouraging criticism of one's own society if the latter fails to meet the high moral standards known and cultivated – with varying success – for millennia. Such an education cannot just be a means to some end but must be an end in itself for young people if they are to recognise truth from lie, hoax, and deception.

The philosopher Isaiah Berlin quotes in one of his interviews how an old philosophy professor commenced his philosophy class:

All of you, gentlemen [sic – ed.], will have different careers – some of you will be lawyers, some of you will be soldiers, some will be doctors and engineers, some will be government servants, some will be landowners or politicians. Let me tell you at once that nothing I say during these lectures will be of the slightest use to you in any of the fields in which you will attempt to exercise your skills. But one thing I can promise you: if you continue with this course of lectures to the end, you will always be able to know when men are talking rot.

This suggests how relevant the knowledge of philosophy is for young students studying a variety of subjects. Berlin adds to this: 'One of the effects of philosophy, if it is properly taught, is the ability to see through political rhetoric,

bad arguments, deception, *fumisterie*, verbal fog, emotional blackmail and every kind of chicanery and disguise. It can sharpen critical faculty a very great deal' (Jahanbegloo 1991, p. 29). It should be added, and Berlin would surely agree, that critical faculty is also sharpened through study of literature, art, and history.

The contrast between the critical education so necessary for recognising the 'rot' and the conduct of contemporary Bachelor's level of education is staggering. What defines and dominates the vast majority of European undergraduate studies after the introduction of the Bologna Declaration is still narrow specialisation, fixed programmes from day one, and a limited scope of courses all provided by a single department. As Boyer (1996) argues, 'The tendency of the disciplines has been to isolate themselves from one another, with academic departments becoming political bases, not centres of intellectual quests' (p. 149). Large departments having hundreds of students but, surprisingly, even small departments, lack space, time, and often the will needed to refine intellectual skills and train critical thinking through conversation, argumentation, and disputation among students and with their teacher. Boyer (1996) and Adriaansen (2017) both lament the retreat of the teaching profession, the key aspect of university life. It is worth quoting both:

The simple truth is that almost all of us are where we are today because of the inspiration of an inspired teacher. Yet, on far too many campuses, it is deemed better for a professor to deliver a paper at the Hyatt in Chicago than to teach undergraduates back home. And it's really sad the way we speak of research 'opportunities' and teaching 'load'.

BOYER 1996, p. 151

Teaching at university colleges⁶ requires a special kind of teacher: teachers who understand that the chance that one of their students will win the Nobel Prize is much bigger than that they themselves will end up as Nobel laureates. University colleges need teachers whose pride lies in the career of their students (Adriaansen 2017, p. 30). It is often argued that a heavy 'teaching load' comes at the expense of 'research opportunities'. Indeed, good teaching requires more hours spent talking to students, and providing feedback on their papers, but should not scholarly life also include sharing one's knowledge and experience with students? Is not teaching a meaningful application of one's research?

A Bachelor's degree student graduating from a narrow study department often enters a graduate programme without acquiring intellectual skills and

⁶ The third part of this chapter explains the concept of 'University College'.

broad academic competence. He or she continues to study in a narrow field of specialisation and research while not having been better equipped to properly comprehend and analyse the complexities of social and moral dilemmas facing their societies. The German language has two fitting expressions related to this issue. One is *Bildung*, an old term based on conceptions of education by Herder, Hegel, and von Humboldt. It is related to the above description of the Liberal Arts model in which research is closely connected with teaching, stressing also students' free choice in shaping their educational path. According to *Bildung*, the ultimate aim of education is also self-knowledge. In parallel with the Liberal Arts, *Bildung* includes a moral dimension because, as previously argued, it 'includes the ability to engage in immanent critique of one's society, challenging it to actualise its own highest ideals' (Eldridge). The other German term is *Fachidiot* referring to narrow specialisation in a single discipline where scholars are unable to connect dots with other subject studies and remain ignorant of the social conditions surrounding them. If students versed in *Bildung* are able to resist the siren call of populism, bigotry, and 'saviours' of various ilk, *Fachidioten* are, at best, oblivious to the social compact around them and, at worst, lacking any moral and social bearing; therefore, they are easily swayed and even become supportive of extremists, chauvinists, and tyrants of this world.

So what kind of Bachelor's degree is needed for in the twenty-first century? On the one hand, there is a need for specialisation in certain field or subject areas but that should follow after undergraduate students have mastered subjects enhancing their cognitive skills and moral outlook. The main aim of the Bachelor's stage should be to deepen and broaden various aspects of knowledge, and to cultivate critical abilities enabling one to defend one's moral position. In fact, all these skills and the acquisition of a moral compass provide students with the tools to be innovative, discerning, and creative in those specialised fields studied in post-graduate studies. Educator and former President of Harvard University, Derek Bok (1986), discusses the importance of 'critical education' that creates an autonomous individual, necessary for any society, at any period. He claims that, 'A critical mind, free of dogma but nourished by humane values, may be the most important product of education in a changing, fragmented society' (p. 47). There is no doubt that it is an undergraduate education that is most suitable for inculcating critical knowledge. The young mind between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one is mature enough and prone to certain ideals without worrying about immediate mundane needs. Such an idealistic mind still perceives its well-being and being good as closely connected vessels. The timing seems to be crucial. In fact, later in life there may rarely be a chance for a majority of citizens to reflect objectively and openly about

the complex web of the world's predicaments. Stanley Katz (1996) stresses the importance of instilling critical education at a certain age: 'It is my conviction that undergraduate education often serves as the last and the best chance post-secondary students have to broaden their intellectual horizons and to prepare for the great demands that society will place on them. In addition, undergraduate education provides the best circumstances in which democratic values can be inculcated or reinforced' (p. 79).

It is a broad Liberal Arts education that provides the best opportunity for a young mind to expand its intellectual horizons and to internalise democratic values. It is superior to even such studies as philosophy, sociology, psychology, or political science, which predominantly contain the study within their own disciplines, and any interdisciplinary component is absent or minimal. Liberal Arts studies contain elements of disciplines and enhance the content of their curriculum with a specific structure of seminar studies and comprehensive teaching methods that focus on student-based learning rather than lecture-type teaching common in other programmes. It is simply not enough to digest relevant bodies of knowledge through texts and lecture because at the current rate of change that knowledge is likely to be obsolete within the next few years. Liberal Arts prepare students to adapt, adjust, and keep on learning through a process of teaching in which this transformation and internalisation of knowledge takes place. The triad of content, structure, and process, or as Adriaansen (2017) calls it 'programme, scale and pedagogy' (p. 28), together represent a combination conducive to quality learning that equips students for further scholarly studies as well as professional or vocational studies. It also prepares students for employment thanks to critical thinking and intellectual skills. It is not surprising that numerous corporate CEOs see the long-term value of Liberal Arts education, understanding that they benefit from having employees who can 'think, write and present' (Yarmolinsky 1996, p. 134; Adriaansen 2017, p. 30).⁷

4 Liberal Arts as an Opportunity for Europe

The second half of this chapter will describe the historical foundation of this model and a short history of the reintroduction of Liberal Arts to Europe as well as articulate the reasons why Europe should embrace it for its undergraduate

7 Even engineers need intellectual skills for the modern economy. As Schneider (2005) observes: 'Engineers and technology employees also need strong communication and collaborative skills; knowledge of social, global, and diversity issues; ethical reasoning; and the ability to integrate these different kinds of knowledge with engineering solutions' (p. 65).

studies. Finally, it will offer a few Liberal Arts models – from modest small-scale ones to a more radical comprehensive one that could be utilised for such reform and transformation of universities in the future.

Liberal Arts education, and the concept of *Bildung* already mentioned, are concepts of education that, in the course of the nineteenth century were replaced in Europe by rigid departmental structures, gradually moving toward narrow specialisation and, above all, toward an emphasis on research. This model has prevailed at the vast majority of European universities and continues to the present. Paradoxically, this focus on research evolved at German universities that claimed *Bildung* as their foundation but prioritising only the research component rather than acquiring the self-knowledge devised by von Humboldt who stressed both. He also believed 'that teachers and learners are jointly doing research and that it is this form of jointly acquiring knowledge that defines university education' (Adriaansen, 2017).

A much older concept than *Bildung* is *Artes Liberales*. It originated from a combination of two streams of the Ancient Greek approach to education. One was Plato's (1955) search for the truth through philosophy; the other was Socrates' stress on rhetoric, ethics, and virtue. The former was thought to be an instrument for acquiring knowledge, and the latter was a path how to become a better and virtuous human being (Zakaria 2015, pp. 42–44). These two streams were the foundation of what evolved into the seven Liberal Arts of the *Trivium* and the *Quadrivium* that, as mentioned above, later evolved into Liberal Arts programmes in early modern Europe.

The Liberal Arts model moved to the United States in the seventeenth century and evolved and survives there to the present day. There are today around five hundred private colleges that are mostly residential, and about half of them are relatively small Liberal Arts colleges. Almost exclusively, Liberal Arts studies in the USA are undergraduate four-year-long programmes.⁸ Even the most famous so-called Ivy League universities in the USA have undergraduate programmes based on the Liberal Arts model.⁹ It is far from being a rigid model and has been evolving continuously with respect to the content of subjects and method of study, as historian Bruce Kimball argues (Kimball 1996, pp. 22–26). Hence, it is a flexible model of education with respect to the content, as long as it emphasises the methods of learning and teaching.

8 There are a few exceptions, for example the Master's Degree in Liberal Arts at The New School for Social Research of New York. Usually, the argument is that it offers a broader perspective to students who had narrow specialisation during the Bachelor's stage.

9 The Ivy League Universities are considered Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and the University of Pennsylvania.

The Liberal Arts studies were introduced in Central Europe after the fall of Communist regimes and in the Netherlands, also in the 1990s.¹⁰ Initially, they all had a strong American connection either through personal ties or through institutional initiatives.¹¹ In 1996, the Education Leadership Program, on the initiative of Julie Johnson Kidd of The Endeavor Foundation, started a network, *Artes Liberales*, in order to promote Liberal Arts in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. This lasted for five years.¹² From this initiative later emerged Liberal Arts programmes at Warsaw University taking the name *Artes Liberales* and later, in 2006, the *Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts* (BISLA), based in Slovakia. Almost parallel to *Artes Liberales* in Central Europe, the Dutch professor of Sociology, Hans Adriaansen, after involvement with Liberal Arts at Smith College in the USA, singlehandedly initiated the introduction of this model in the Netherlands. The first so-called university college at Utrecht University under his leadership was created in 1998 and since then there have been ten such programmes in that country. There are several other Liberal Arts programmes, the fastest growing number is in the UK and there are a few such programmes also in Germany.¹³ More than twenty European Liberal Arts programmes collaborate through the European Consortium of

10 There have been several Liberal Arts colleges previously but they had been accredited in the USA and have not been part of the European educational system simply because there was no Bachelor's Degree before the Bologna Declaration. They are excellent private, rather expensive, institutions and only marginally cooperate with their European partners. They are *American University of Athens*, *American University of Paris*, *John Cabot University of Rome*, *Franklin University in Lugano*, and *Webster University* in Vienna; in the 1990s the *American University of Bulgaria* was established.

11 *Vytautas Magnus University* in Kaunas, Lithuania, was initiated as a restored university in that city in 1989. It was financially supported by Lithuanian émigrés in the USA and unofficially based on a Liberal Arts model.

12 The Founding members of *Artes Liberales* in 1996 were Samuel Abrahám (Slovakia), Jerzy Axer (Poland), Cesar Birzea (Romania), Serhiv Ivaniuk (Ukraine), Peteris Lakis (Latvia), Rein Raud (Estonia), Jan Sokol (Czech Republic), and Julia Stefanova (Bulgaria). The USA was represented by the Director of the Educational Leadership Program (ELP), Nicholas Farnham and his associate Professor Adam Yarmolinsky. The Educational Leadership Program was an activity that existed within the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation of New York, now renamed as The Endeavor Foundation. The goal of the ELP initiative in Europe was to bring an understanding of the Liberal Arts curricular approach and pedagogy to Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet States after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

13 See the list of various Liberal Arts programmes in Europe at the web page of The European Consortium of Liberal Arts and Sciences (ECOLAS) www.ecolas.eu a network based in Bratislava, Slovakia.

Liberal Arts and Sciences (ECOLAS), cooperating to shape, define and advance Liberal Arts in Europe.¹⁴

The introduction of Liberal Arts studies encountered substantial difficulties in Europe. It has been either unknown or viewed with suspicion, even disdain among many European educators. There are several reasons for this unfortunate reception. One is that it is incorrectly perceived as a USA import unfit for the European educational scene. The other is that it is a model in sharp contrast to current early specialisation at European universities. Liberal Arts is wrongly perceived as an “anything goes”-programme, which, particularly in times of economic crisis, wouldn't help students to get a decent job' (Adriaansen 2017, pp. 29–30). Still, other sceptics view it is a small, somehow elitist programme, unfit for large-scale undergraduate education in Europe. Furthermore, it has been difficult to accredit Liberal Arts studies in an environment of fixed single-subject programmes because numerous national accreditation committees find it difficult to incorporate a complex and multifaceted programme such as Liberal Arts studies.

And yet, if the Bachelor's degree is to become a meaningful and useful component of the European higher educational system, and not perceived as an unwanted child enforced via the Bologna Declaration by politicians and 'Brussels', Liberal Arts programmes should be embraced wholeheartedly. Several reasons for this have been mentioned above; suffice it to say that undergraduate education, by incorporating a Liberal Arts model, would gain in several respects. First of all, these would be student-based and broad competence-based programmes that would replace the early narrow specialisation prevailing today. Second, students would be able to search for a specialisation gradually and could declare a major that best fits their abilities and preferences after two or three semesters of study. This would result in much smaller student dropout rates than is currently common throughout Europe. Third, the focus on intellectual development and curiosity, critical thinking, and effective communication is not a guarantee but it is conducive to the aims of educating citizens willing to sustain the common good in a civil society (Boetsch et al. 2017, p. 6). Fourth, students studying a variety of subjects, as well as taking common core courses of rhetoric, ethics, and methodology, would be able to cultivate critical thinking. Fifth, liberal arts would make the Bachelor's stage potentially a terminal degree giving students the choice of whether to continue in a more

14 ECOLAS – the initiative of Hans Adriaansen and Samuel Abrahám in 2009 and later joined by Laurent Boetsch – is based at BISLA in Bratislava, Slovakia, and has been lately supported by The Endeavor Foundation (USA) that has supported and promoted Liberal Arts in Europe since 1996.

advanced programme, or to enter a variety of jobs in industry, services, and management.

Before reviewing various available models of Liberal Arts studies, it is important to assess what represents a Liberal Arts programme and what only bears its name without fulfilling the basic preconditions of such studies. It is complicated by the fact that there are not *one* but *many* models of Liberal Arts. Still, there are several minimal standards that need to be met. It was stated above that the key to any of its definitions is the presence of three essential elements that differentiate it from the traditional, narrow specialisation, departmentally based, lecture-exam model of undergraduate education. The basic preconditions of Liberal Arts are diversity of content, limited scale of institution, and small classes, as well as a specific type of pedagogy. The programme or content must contain a wide range of courses from the humanities and the social sciences as well as the natural sciences.¹⁵ All these are necessary in order to attain what Derek Bok (1986) calls competency-based skills. Among them are so-called 'soft skills' that develop effective communication, improve analytical abilities, and strengthen problem-solving capacities. And then there are social and ethical skills enabling the student to make value judgments, improve facility in social interaction, achieve an understanding of the relationship between the individual and his or her environment, develop awareness and understanding of the contemporary world, and, finally, develop an understanding of and sensitivity towards the arts and a knowledge of the humanities (Bok 1986, p. 60).

There is one controversial caveat that should be stated clearly about the Liberal Arts: mastering the competency-based skills does not assure that a student becomes automatically a good citizen, as the countless mission statements of Liberal Arts institutions claim. No education can assure that. Liberal Arts allow students to differentiate between good and evil, to detect and analyse the intent and motive of peoples' action. It does not inculcate virtue. Turning again to Cardinal Newman (1958) who points out that:

Knowledge is one thing, virtue another; good sense is not conscience, refinement is not humility ... Philosophy, however enlightened, however profound, gives no command over the passions, no influential motives,

¹⁵ It is common in Europe to call this programme 'Liberal Arts and Sciences' in order to stress the fact that natural sciences have been part of *artes liberales* since the beginning and still hold their place. However, there are several programmes within the Liberal Arts, both in Europe and the USA, that do not contain natural sciences yet, thanks to the structure of the institutions and pedagogical process, as well as the great variety of course and co-curricular activities, these programmes are still part of Liberal Arts.

no vivifying principles. Liberal education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman (sic; eds.). It is well to be a gentleman, it is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life – these are the connatural qualities of a large knowledge ... still, I repeat, they are no guarantee for sanctity or even for conscientiousness, they may attach to the man of the world, to the profligate, to the heartless ... (p. 99).

It is important to acknowledge the limitation of even the best education. How students utilise this knowledge is up to their judgment and moral profile, and one must hope that it will lead him or her to become a decent citizen. Human nature is unpredictable and human *Eros*, as understood by the Ancient Greeks, and as Socrates reminds us while facing Calicles in the dialogue *Gorgias*, is the most difficult energy of all to navigate in the right direction. As Plato (1955) elaborates in *The Republic*, it is a duty towards oneself and towards one's society for a philosopher to become an educator in order to navigate the energy of young people to become virtuous human beings. To give this up would undermine one's own moral duty and betray young peoples' cognitive and moral potential. None of this is currently the goal of university education. It is the ambition of Liberal Arts education to do its best to help students to mature intellectually and become good citizens.

5 Current Liberal Arts Models in Europe

There are several models of Liberal Arts education that could be currently or gradually implemented by private institutions or state-funded universities in Europe. Some are small-scale and independent while the others are larger and based within large universities. There is a model that represents a radical solution for every undergraduate student and its introduction would literally cause an educational revolution and comprehensive restructuring of universities.

There are three models of Liberal Arts programmes operating in Europe – independent colleges, university colleges, and medium size universities embracing some aspects of Liberal Arts. The first two models offer education predominantly in English in order to assure a wide international body of students, whereas, the third model might vary in the language of instruction. Being grafted onto still-uncharted and often unfriendly territory, it is important to list both positive aspects but also some risks to what the foundation of Liberal Arts programmes encompasses.

The independent colleges are the most similar to the small colleges in the USA. These have state accreditation in their domiciled country and have also some USA accreditation.¹⁶ There are advantages and disadvantages to this model. The advantage is that there is no state interference shaping the programme and the colleges are free to create a model suitable for their mission adjusting to social and political conditions of the country in which they are based. There are a small number of students in seminar-type classes, and a good student-teacher ratio allows a tutorial system in which teachers closely supervise their tutees. Not having postgraduate programmes, the academic and social interaction between teacher and students is quite intensive. The disadvantage is that because of its small size, an independent college provides only a limited number of courses and majors. However, the intensity of study and the focus on social and intellectual skills compensates for a limited choice of programmes. One has to add that it tends to be rather a costly programme because such a college must fulfil all, often copious, bureaucratic requirements of ministries of education and accreditation bodies.¹⁷

The Liberal Arts scheme that has the largest potential to expand in Europe and that started in the Netherlands in 1998 is the University College (UC) model. It is a unit within a major university, having its own faculty and residences for students. In addition, the funding usually comes from the state distributed through the home university. Location could be either within a campus of the founding university, or geographically distant, connected only institutionally. The advantage of this model is that a UC can draw on the resources of a larger university and share space and social setting. It is an intensive programme for up to 600 students with core courses, a unique curriculum, and seminar-type classes.

Overall, the benefit to the home university is the presence of an excellent undergraduate programme that has a positive effect on faculty outside the UC itself. It seems that if the government is willing to support UCs, the benefit is substantial as is the case in the Netherlands where already ten universities have established UCs. It is a model worth emulating because it provides student-based learning and a relatively large choice of courses while students master intellectual and social skills. In addition, the close interaction between

16 There are three such colleges: *Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts* (Slovakia), *European Humanities University* (Lithuania), and the *European College of Liberal Arts* (ECLA), in Berlin, Germany (currently part of Bard College, thus Bard College Berlin).

17 The answer would be to increase the fees, but that would preclude admission of variety of students from multiple backgrounds. Besides, student fees in Europe are mostly low or non-existent. Thus, high fees would make these colleges, although providing thorough Liberal Arts education, not really very competitive, to say the least.

teachers and students, and core courses related to ethics, political theory and arts, in addition to extracurricular activities and community services are all conducive to educating students to obtain a more comprehensive education than regular students who study solely narrow subjects in a particular field. The disadvantage of the UC model might be the dependence on the home university's supervision and administration. The danger to the existence of the UC might be a change of leadership at the home university. A new rector might not view a UC as favourably as his or her predecessor and this might endanger the Liberal Arts programme because costs per student at the UC are higher than within the home university.¹⁸ Furthermore, finances are directed usually through the rector's office and this can cause a strain on funding.

The third model introduces some elements of Liberal Arts into the entire curriculum and method of teaching at established, medium-size universities. The set-up preserves the original, departmental structure while offering certain core courses common in a Liberal Arts setting. Students are encouraged to select courses from different departments in order to assure diversity in their curriculum. The size of classes might still be larger than what a Liberal Arts model recommends, because to divide the whole university into small classes while preserving students in individual departments would be financially unfeasible. There are some programmes that offer a traditional lecture-exam model but alter the course approach by introducing, for example, problem-based learning as opposed to the traditional lecture-exam model. This model is offered at some universities in the UK and Germany (Boetsch et al. 2017, pp. 21–30). It has a chance of expanding to some other countries where there is an effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to break the massification of lecture halls and the impersonal approach of undergraduate study. This laudable effort is, however, only a partial solution to improve undergraduate education. It can turn into only a formal reform of the educational model, focusing on a variety of offered courses, but only minimally adjusting the size of classes or the pedagogy. In addition, there would be constant tension between various departments 'feeling the ownership of students'. Thus, a multidisciplinary curriculum for students might be considered by a department to be at the expense of their full-fledged single discipline curriculum. Moreover, the great advantage that a student in a regular Liberal Arts programme does not declare the major immediately after entrance is lost in this model where students apply to departmental mono-disciplinary studies. This early specialisation is really not compensated for by the offer of a variety of core courses or courses from other

18 The Liberal Arts Program in the *New Bulgarian University* was terminated by a new rector who had not the passion, or understanding, for Liberal Arts as had his predecessor.

disciplines throughout the course of study. Finally, the pedagogical methods of teachers from various departments would not assure the commitment of teachers to the Liberal Arts pedagogy (Boetsch et al, p. 32). Hence, such partial reform must be constantly monitored, negotiated, and often imposed on the departments or otherwise the whole scheme can become rather costly and ineffective if such a model is devoid of a refined pedagogy and stresses competency-based skills.

All three models exist and function in different countries in Europe and through cooperation and exchange of experience they try to improve their individual models.¹⁹ The University College model is dominant in the Netherlands, whereas, the third model of implementing some aspects of Liberal Arts is gaining some popularity in the UK and Germany. Finally, the opportunity for creating independent Liberal Arts colleges in Europe is quite limited because it must be supported by private donors and there is no tradition similar to the USA where, starting in seventeenth century, either private donors, religious orders, or various churches founded so-called residential colleges.²⁰ Hence, the Liberal Arts models, as they presently exist in Europe, have a limited scope and involve only a fraction of undergraduate students. However, the quality of graduates from these models is much higher than from other schools and, for that reason, they are in great demand by graduate schools or employers. Also, they are the living proof that undergraduate education in Europe can be of the highest quality.

6 New Revolutionary Model

There is another model that could affect the entire educational system in Europe and, as mentioned, would mean a revolution in education. The scheme is radical yet relatively simple: first, to transform entire universities into university colleges and, then, at the college level, students would obtain an intensive and versatile Liberal Arts education. Needless to say, it would provoke resistance from several quarters, especially from the academic community that is by nature conservative. Thus, such a large-scale reform of the whole university

19 There were several common projects among European Liberal Arts programmes. First, one to establish ECOLAS (2010–2012) and another called BLASTER (2015–2017) to cooperate in three areas: teaching training, undergraduate research, and quality standards. See www.ecolas.eu.

20 Currently, in the USA, there are no new colleges being founded. On the contrary, some are having great difficulty surviving.

model could only be the result of a broad, Europe-wide discussion and political action on the scale of a New Bologna Declaration.

One might ask why such a radical reform is necessary. Well, if politicians, educators and employers want Europe to become innovative yet tolerant, prosperous yet having an educated class able to resist the anti-democratic forces currently on the rise, then education, and in particular, the undergraduate education must play an important role. And this reform has a chance only if it is based on the Liberal Arts model because only this type of study leads to cognitive competence and civic responsibility able to confront the challenges of the twenty-first century. The reform is also needed because at present each student has to face a most difficult choice of selecting one narrow departmental study out of many hundreds. 'For students at the age of 17 choosing one specific programme out of so many possibilities is more than just a challenge: it is almost impossible' (Adriaansen, 2017). Hence, the current system is not only unfair and difficult for students but it is also costly for the state that derives no benefit from a student who does not finish a degree. The reform might be complicated, maybe expensive, but it would significantly enhance the undergraduate study experience and would affect millions of students.

The transformation of the Bachelor's degree would be revolutionary yet would utilise existing models, structures, and philosophies. There would be a major change in the structure of the *whole* university and in the process of teaching. The first change would be structural – students would be admitted to university colleges and not to individual departments; the second would require a radical change in the role of the teacher in relation to students. Pedagogy would have to be altered from the current lecture-exam pattern to pedagogy aiming at student-centred learning; and, third, it would also require a review of the current obsession where the ranking of universities is solely based on the quality of research and not also on the quality of students' education. Student-centred teaching would thus be of the same importance as research. Finally, the most affected would be the departments that would lose a large number of students to colleges.

The most radical step would be to remove Bachelor's studies from the narrow discipline of departments and, instead, place undergraduate students into different university colleges. Division into a collegiate structure would actually imitate an old Oxbridge model of colleges still existing at the two great English universities, and at many large universities in the USA and Canada. Students entering a college within a large university would first study, and make choices and changes without committing themselves to a single departmental programme. Students at the same college would eventually disperse into a variety of subject areas, yet they would share a common core and a variety of

different courses, as well as a common social experience. The college setting allows students, who are generally more interested in solving and understanding different kinds of problems, to choose from a variety of courses offered by different departments. Furthermore, a college setting would be conducive to the creation of a community of scholars and students that would mutually benefit from academic and social interaction.

Another major change instituted by the new scheme would relate to the respective roles of teachers and students. Each college would have to have an adequate number of full-time professors with diverse academic backgrounds in order to offer tutorial services to students on their path to discovering new areas of study. Universities would have to improve both academic prestige and financially reward teaching, which would become a highly respected profession again. Currently, a young academic after finishing PhD enters the teaching profession with little teaching experience and hardly any pedagogical preparation. To reverse this trend, each teacher would be required to go through teachers' training in order to succeed in student-based programmes. Not surprisingly, all three existing Liberal Arts models in Europe are forming teaching centres that provide assistance and guidance for their teachers.

The new model would also involve introduction of undergraduate research as an integral part of collegiate education. It would require dramatic changes in the way research is currently valued at major universities. In their quest for prestige and funding, researchers working within a narrow discipline are often more attached to their fellow scholars from across the globe than to their home institution. Undergraduate students are the last to be asked to participate in their professors' research. The transformation of universities into colleges would not diminish the importance of research. It would only have to be slightly re-oriented by becoming an integral part of the pedagogy and of each college activity. Involving students in their research, professors would not only create crucial bonds with their students, they might also gain insights into how best to communicate the results of their research to a wider public.²¹ One should add that this model would also have a positive effect on professors whose research is generally enhanced if combined with teaching in an interdisciplinary environment.

21 Undergraduate research is also focus of current Liberal Arts schools cooperating in this area. See the booklet 'Current Undergraduate Research in Liberal Arts and Sciences' (CURLAS) produced by Warwick University (UK) and University College Roosevelt (the Netherlands) as part of the BLASTER project that involved cooperation in three areas – teaching training, quality standard, and undergraduate research www.ecolas.eu.

The new model would certainly weaken departments because they would see it as undermining their long-established privileged position. The departments in their silos of disciplines might be the toughest source of resistance to this scheme. As Katz (1996) remarked with some chagrin: 'If the academic department is not the enemy of knowledge, it is almost certainly the foe of pedagogical reform' (p. 85). The university college transformation, one should stress, would not abolish departments themselves, for they would remain available to Master's and PhD students while also serving the colleges with a variety of courses. What would change is the end of departmental monopoly over Bachelor's degrees as is universal throughout Europe today.

7 Challenges

The transformation of universities into colleges, to be sure, would require much research, debate, and preparation before it would be accepted by educators and politicians to replace the current departmental structure. The key question underlying the debate would revolve around the question: Whom does the university serve first, students or faculty? The current research-driven university setting heavily favours the professoriate, while the Liberal Arts perspective sees undergraduate students as equally important stakeholders in higher learning. It is the better academic results of students, as evident by the graduate school placement of Liberal Arts graduates that would legitimise the division into colleges, the enhanced status of teaching, and undergraduate research. Furthermore, high retention rates, already familiar among the existing Liberal Arts models, would be financially significant. And yet the change would be difficult. The leap might be, at the beginning, too radical for the rather conservative environment of universities.

The major hurdle to overcome, one that deserves some attention, is the question of costs. On the surface a collegiate setting, small classes, a tutorial system and large numbers of contact hours would demand much greater costs in comparison to massive classes and the lecture-exams model where hundreds of students are free to attend lectures during the semester and then pass the final exam or submit one long paper. Indeed, as Yarmolinsky (1996) claims, 'The central economic fact about liberal education is that its core processes consume as much labour as they did before the Industrial Revolution' (p. 126). However, Adriaansen (2017) argues that costs might not be higher; they might even decrease. He calculated that, for example, the University of Utrecht with 18,000 undergraduate students could be divided into 30 colleges with 600

students each. And the costs should not be higher than the same number of students currently divided into 44 separate departments with multiple academic and non-academic staff (p. 30).

Another objection to this radical change might be more mundane for it would mean for professors a different division of labour, more balance between teaching and research responsibilities. Indeed, teaching in a Liberal Arts setting is pleasant but quite time consuming, often challenging while reading multiple assignments, providing feedback, leaving ample time for tutorials as well as preparing joint undergraduate research projects. All in all, in the eyes of the scholar seeking 'research opportunities', all these 'teaching loads' would come at the expense of delivering another paper at a conference in a Hyatt somewhere in Europe. However, an alternative is the current situation, which often leads to what Murray Sperber et al. (2005) describe as a 'non-aggression pact' between faculty and students:

Because the former believe that they must spend most of their time doing research, and the latter often prefer to pass their time having fun, a mutual nonaggression pact occurs with each side agreeing not to impinge on the other. The glue that keeps the pact intact is grade inflation: easy A's for merely acceptable work and B's for mediocre work (p. 138).

One can object that it is not the common experience, and surely there are many conscientious teachers who do not practice this 'non-aggression pact' with their students. Yet, one can argue that the current system at large research universities is predisposed to such an arrangement and leads to a manifestly debased relationship and to a negative influence on the student's future.²²

Whatever the resistance to this new model, if implemented, it would constitute a major, positive change in the educational system. It would take several decades to realise and if it is to succeed, it would have to be a political and Europe-wide decision. Although the educational establishment today feels some crisis, the solution is not seen in reforming the Bachelor's degree but in having more students, research funding, and state of the art facilities. That is neither a solution nor is it sustainable. Pondering the future, Adriaansen (2017)

22 I was told by one of my former students, who is doing a Master's degree in philosophy at a prestigious university, that her teacher took her long paper and immediately handed it back without opening it, telling her smiling: 'you have an A'. She was supposed to be delighted. Having a Liberal Arts experience as an undergraduate, she was offended.

might be right, arguing that, 'unless universities go "collegiate", they will have trouble to survive' (p. 30).

Fortunately, thanks to Liberal Arts education, there is a recipe for major improvements in the European educational system. It is a matter of convincing politicians and educators that the European Bachelor's degree must be reformed. Parents must be informed that there is great disparity in the quality of higher education. For all high school graduates in Europe there is great opportunity and advantage in what Adriaansen (2017) called a Dutch Mix: a combination of the Liberal Arts model in combination with a collegiate division of the university. As often in history, the Dutch are at the forefront of educational reform. For the sake of the future of European education, those who care about quality undergraduate education must cooperate and reform the current university structure of hundreds of departments where seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds are slotted in the silos of one of the thousand departments.

8 Conclusion

All the praise of the Liberal Arts model, some could retort, is just lobbying for a change that is not that necessary. What is at stake, however? For one, complacency is always dangerous – the challenges facing the twenty-first century seem much more urgent than they were even a decade ago. Something has snapped in the Western political and economic model, and there is no clear path of development. Events are not moving upwards and to stability, rather they are in a state of frenzy, and the outcome is unknown. Universities – at the forefront of innovation, depositories of the greatest minds – can and must help face up to moral, political, and environmental crises that sooner or later, in the course of this century, Europe and the globe will have to confront. There will be great pressure on these institutions of higher learning to respond to emerging intellectual, political, and social needs. We can witness already that vocational training, in opposition to academic studies, has become ever more dominant, being prioritised by receiving the greatest amount of funding. Yet, with demographic, environmental, and, eventually, with political and economic crises, the challenges looming ahead are not short-term but medium- and long-term; and neither their magnitude, nor solutions to them, are yet known. Our current solutions are not sufficient to meet these future challenges. To be ready for these unknown crises, what is needed is an educated a younger generation that has the capacity, skills, and a sense of moral obligation to solve and to improve the conditions that they will inherit from the previous

generation, including our generations who are heftily contributing to the future malaise.

The universities for centuries helped to find solutions but at times also remained complacent, silent, and even, collaborated with the powers to be. The reformed undergraduate education, enriched through the liberal arts, would, under the right circumstances, assure the moral aptitude and the cognitive capacity of students, enabling them to confront an uncertain future. If successful, the future scholars, artists, and intellectuals would not be at the tail of, but would be at the head of political developments. The challenges in the past were in many ways very different from the challenges of the future. It is a truism to state that the scientific revolution and technology enhances as well as endangers our existence, and that the solutions remain within us humans. The ancient philosophers taught us that human nature has not changed neither will the difficulties to navigate it in the right direction diminish. We need new Socrateses to confront the *Eros* of smart, smug, and hot-tempered modern Calicleses. Liberal Arts education seems an old remedy for new challenges. The reason is not some miraculous property of such an educational model but rather its flexibility, its ability to adjust, learn from the past, and bring to the surface the best of human potentials.

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 made the Bachelor's-Master's division possible; it is time to allow the Bachelor's stage to fulfil its full potential. Universities owe that to the societies that finance them and protect them 'as *partly-protected* spaces in which the extension and deepening of understanding takes priority over any more immediate or instrumental purposes' (Collini 2017, p. 233). They also owe it to the current and future generations of students who will sustain universities and who will be able to keep the planet safe for the future. Let us finish with the words of Julie J. Kidd who for two decades has been supporting the revival of Liberal Arts in Europe. She wrote the following about the USA, but it is equally valid for Europe:

The healthy emotional, ethical, and intellectual development of our young people should be our first priority. Failure to focus on these key issues obviously does not emanate from venal motives, but rather, I believe, from a lack of recognition of the seriousness and depth of the ever-growing malaise around us. If we do not take time to address these issues collectively, we will be jeopardising not only the well-being of our nation but also the future of our children and, indeed, of our planet.

KIDD, 2005, p. 206

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