Chapter 2
System Blockages for Access to Education in Europe: Paper Commitments and Substantive Gaps

2.1 The European Union’s Strategic Priority on Paper of Access and Lifelong Learning as a Means of Fostering Social Inclusion: Falling Between Two Stools in the ET2020 Targets?

An array of diverse calls for the encouragement of continuing or lifelong education and the creation of a ‘Learning Society’ have come from international organisations, including UNESCO, the European Commission and the OECD, as well as national governments across the world (Faure et al. 1972; Delors 1996; Tight 1996; Belanger and Valdivielso 1997; Elliot 1999). Developments at European Council level regarding access to education and lifelong learning include the EU Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’) (2009/C 119/02). Significantly the EU Council (2009/C 119/02) agrees on a range of strategic priorities for lifelong learning that go far beyond simply employment goals to include social cohesion, personal and social fulfilment and active citizenship:

1. In the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring:
   (a) The personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens
   (b) Sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue

1 The Council recognised that the earlier ‘Education and Training 2010’ work programme established for the first time a solid framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, in the context of the Lisbon Strategy. This was based on common objectives and aimed primarily at supporting the improvement of national education and training systems through the development of complementary EU level tools, mutual learning and the exchange of good practice via the open method of coordination.
Setting out ‘a strategic framework spanning education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective’, the EU Council (2009/C 119/02) goes on to state:

Indeed, lifelong learning should be regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts—whether formal, non-formal or informal—and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies
2. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship (p. 3)

This statement amounts to a reiteration of the wide scope of lifelong learning explained in earlier documents of the EU Commission (2000, 2001).

There is a strong commitment on paper to access to education for marginalised groups in this important Council document. Under ‘Strategic objective 3: Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship’, the EU Council (2009) seeks ‘to foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue’. The key dimension of access to education is made an explicit priority as follows:

Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners—including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants—complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second-chance education and the provision of more personalised learning. (p. 4)

Referring to Strategic objective 1: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, EU Council (2009/C 119/02) commits to Expanding learning mobility as follows:

Work together to gradually eliminate barriers and to expand opportunities for learning mobility within Europe and worldwide, both for higher and other levels of education, including new objectives and financing instruments, and whilst taking into consideration the particular needs of disadvantaged persons. (p. 9)

Moreover, a European Commission staff working document (2009) highlights that ‘education and training is identified as a key element throughout the renewed Social Agenda for opportunities, access and solidarity. This stresses the role of education and training in relation to...combating poverty and social exclusion’ (p. 8).

The EU Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011) specifically makes a call to:

encourage higher education institutions to embrace less traditional groups of learners, such as adult learners, as a means of displaying social responsibility and greater openness towards the community at large.

In its Annex, highlighting priority areas 2012–2014, it invites Member States to focus on ‘Promoting flexible learning pathways for adults, including broader access to higher education for those lacking mainstream access qualifications and diversifying the spectrum of adult learning-opportunities offered by higher education institutions’. Again recently, the European Council conclusions on investing in education and training (2013) invite EU states to ‘ensure that...equal opportunities for access to quality education are provided’. However, despite all this momentum of commitments at European Council of Ministers level, it is important
to contextualise the still limited scope of the expansion of access to higher education and lifelong learning in a European domain.

In a summary of high educational attainment of the adult population (20–64-year-old) between 2004 and 2009 in the EU, the Commission staff working document (2011) observes that:

despite this overall increase, when considering the high educational attainment of the 25–64 years old adult population in 2008... the EU is still performing well below some key competitors. For instance, with 24 % of the working age population having high educational attainment, the EU lies 25 percentage points below Canada (49 %), 19 percentage points below Japan (43 %), 17 percentage points below the USA (41 %) and 12 percentage points below Australia (36 %). While only the best performing EU countries manage to compete with Australia, the worse performing EU countries present high education attainment levels ranging between the ones of Brazil (11 %) and Mexico (16 %). (p. 74)

Significantly, the Commission (2006) recognises:

increased participation in tertiary education in Europe has not enhanced equity. It has improved the absolute prospects of those from less advantaged backgrounds, but it has not improved their relative prospects. The average annual increase in the participation rates of young people from low socio-economic groups has in most cases failed to keep up with the increase in the total participation rates. The participation of young people in tertiary education has a strong correlation with the educational attainment of their parents and the socioeconomic background of their families. In many countries, those whose parents have completed some tertiary education are twice as likely to participate in tertiary education as those whose parents lack upper-secondary level qualifications. (p. 23)

Whereas the European Council (2009, 2011) and this earlier Commission document both raise concerns about the equity of access to higher education across social classes, this issue has fallen off a cliff into a distinct vacuum in the 2011 Commission staff working document. Mobility of higher education students examined in the Commission staff working document (2011) (p. 36) employed four indicators, focusing on foreign and Erasmus students, with nothing on social class mobility within countries. Its chapter on ‘Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship’ examined migrants and lifelong learning though not migrants’ higher education participation. Of further concern is that this document is deafeningly silent on social class dimensions to higher education participation, as is the subsequent Commission Communication (2012) Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes. This latter document does, however, cite as ‘evidence of underperformance’ (p. 2) that ‘alarming low’ (p. 5) participation in lifelong learning is only 8.9 % of the population across Europe.

ET 2020 sets five major benchmarks, or outcome indicators, in relation to education. These are regarding early childhood, basic skills, early school leaving, tertiary education and lifelong learning. This extension of the Lisbon strategy to go further in relation to lifelong learning and social inclusion in ET 2020 amounts to an implicit recognition that, in the words of Nicaise (2010a), ‘Lisbon 2010 has failed to achieve more inclusion/cohesion because this dimension was neglected’. From his analysis of EU social inclusion policy in relation to education, in a keynote address for the EU Belgian Presidency Conference in September 2010, Nicaise
further concludes that ‘there is room for stronger coordination between social inclusion and education policies at EU level’. Nicaise (2010b) highlights the overall picture of growing income inequality in the EU, based on OECD (2008) research, and reiterates that ‘recognising the failure of the Lisbon Strategy to reconcile both objectives [of economic growth and social cohesion] is a first step towards a smarter strategy for the future’ (p. 20).

Two of the five EU benchmarks for Education and Training ET2020 are central to the issue of access to education for marginalised groups and are prima facie relevant to a view of access to education being an EU strategic priority on paper. These are that (1) the share of 30–34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40% and (2) an average of at least 15% of adults aged 25–64 should participate in lifelong learning. The first of these is viewed with especially high strategic priority, as the Commission Staff Working document (2011) highlights:

two of these five benchmarks—to reduce the number of early school leavers; and to increase the share of young adults holding tertiary education qualifications—have been given further importance having been selected headline targets for the Europe 2020 for socio-economic development to 2020. These benchmarks link education and the labour market and have great importance for employability and jobs. (p. 10)

Yet even this high strategic priority is being met with a caution of system inertia at national levels:

The new benchmark for tertiary attainment levels among the young adult population foresees that by 2020 at least 40% of 30–34 year olds should hold a university degree or equivalent. The trend since 2000...would suggest this is attainable by 2020. Member States’ targets, as set out in their first provisional National Reform Programmes, are by and large very cautious and would suggest a lower rate of progress, possibly leading to non-achievement of the target by 2020. (p. 19)

Of additional concern is the situation in Europe regarding the lifelong learning target:

Participation in adult lifelong learning improved in the period 2000–2005 but has since slightly declined and currently reaches a level short of the benchmark of 12.5% agreed for 2010 and significantly below the 15% target for 2020. (Commission Staff Working Document 2011, p. 7)

As Ulicna et al. (2011) highlight, due to considerable investments and new financial resources, mainly due to EU structural funds, the participation rates in adult education in the New EU Member States have increased in the period 2000–2007. Nevertheless, they recognise that this needs to be balanced with the fact that over the period 2003/2004–2008, several new Member States have actually seen a negative change

---

2 The other three ET2020 benchmarks are that:
- At least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education.
- The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%.
- The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%.
in the participation of adults which could indicate that the injection of new finances only led to an increase over a limited period of time.

The Commission Staff Working document (2011) highlights the investment gap in higher education across European countries, when set against an international backdrop:

While public investment in tertiary-level education in the EU is only slightly below the level in the USA, it is nearly twice as high as in Japan. However, private investment in higher education is much higher in both the USA and Japan. As a result, total investment in higher education institutions in the EU (for all activities, including both education and research) was in 2007, 1.3 % of GDP, well below the level in the USA (3.1 %) and also lower than in Japan (1.5 %), Russia (1.7 %), and Korea (2.4 %), but higher than in Brazil (0.8 %), China (0.5 %, 2006) and India (0.4 %, 2006). (p. 64)

Though needing to be balanced against priority investment at other levels of the education system, this investment gap translates into real consequences for levels of population with higher educational attainment in Europe.

Not only is there an investment deficit in higher education across Europe, but there is also a strategic deficit in relation to access to education for lower socio-economic groups. Not only is there a need for interrogation of the European countries’ comparatively poor performance internationally in developing participation in higher education, there is a need to place opening up barriers to access to higher education more firmly on the policy agenda at EU level and across national levels in Europe. It appears that the equity, social cohesion and active citizenship issue of access to higher education for lower socio-economic groups is currently falling between two stools in relation to the ET2020 targets. It is relevant on paper to both higher education and lifelong learning benchmarks but arguably being sufficiently prioritised by neither.

An encouraging and significant step forward that has taken place in the Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011) document—under the ‘Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning’ heading, in its Annex—is the invitation for Member States to focus on ‘Addressing the learning needs of...people in specific situations of exclusion from learning, such as those in...prisons,’ and providing them with adequate guidance support’. This is the first Council Resolution in the area of lifelong learning to explicitly embrace prisoners within its scope of relevant target groups, via a social cohesion and active citizenship lens.

It is notable that the EU Council’s ‘Youth Guarantee’ (April 2013) explicitly recognises the need for a differentiated approach to engaging young people experiencing social exclusion. In the words of the Council Recommendation (2013), this ‘Youth Guarantee’ refers to a situation in which young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education’; this Council Recommendation (2013) goes on to state that ‘When designing such a Youth Guarantee scheme, Member States should consider overarching issues such as the fact that young people are not a homogeneous group facing similar social environments’.

3As well as hospitals and care homes.
The Commission (2006) distinguishes a number of different dimensions:

It is useful to distinguish between equity in *access* (the same opportunities for all to access to quality education), in *treatment* (quality educational provision suited to individuals’ needs once in the system) and in *outcomes* (the knowledge, competences, skills learnt and qualifications achieved within an educational system). In places, this paper and Communication also consider equity of *participation* in education and training, which means a combination of access to education and treatment of an individual once inside the system. To focus solely on equity in access without taking into account a number of variables including the socio-economic background of the learners, the type of institution or its location could lead to the compounding of existing social and educational inequalities (independent from the potential of the individual learner). (p. 7)

Equity in access is formal equality in the Aristotelian sense of treating like cases alike, and unalike to be treated in an unalike fashion. While this Aristotelian formula masks the assumptions in the selection process for the criteria under which the like and unalike are to be judged, it is evident that the European Commission is committed to a wider conception of access to education than simply that of formal equality. The concern with individual differences and needs, as well as with participation and outcomes, provides a broadening of focus into more substantive conceptions of equality of opportunity and outcome. The need to challenge the effects of social exclusion in society through pathways which include access to education is a key assumption; it is also evident that access issues underpin the key strategic priorities of promotion of democratic values, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue, as well as of employability and personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens throughout the EU.

*The European Platform against Poverty* proposes the development of innovative education for marginalised communities in order to enable those experiencing poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to take an active part in society. The Commission (2006) also emphasises poverty-related barriers to access:

- evidence shows that the most disadvantaged are also the most risk and debt averse and, without a family culture of learning, they often prefer to begin earning straight away rather than enter higher education. (Davis and Lea 1995) (p. 25)
- … In systems without loans, students have to rely heavily on their families’ income to pay for accommodation, transport and food which has clear consequences for equitable access and participation. (Barr 1993; Dur and Teulings 2004; Greenaway and Haynes 2004) (p. 25)

Even from this brief review of European Council and Commission documents pertaining to lifelong learning and access to higher education, it is evident that the EU is committed—on paper—to a wider conception of access to education than simply that of formal equality. The concern is not only with the degree of such a commitment to be implemented in reality but also with the need for greater focus on a strategy for overcoming system blockages to implementation of access to higher education and lifelong learning issues as a priority.

Wolter’s (2012) observation of notable changes in the past decade or so in German higher education, nevertheless, notes a resistance to reforms to open access to higher education:

- Unfortunately, lifelong learning oriented indicators play only a minor role in the new funding and allocation procedures so that there are not really any additional incentives for higher education institutions to extend their activities in this area…Regrettably, adopting lifelong
learning structures, opening up for non-traditional students…have often been eyed suspiciously as detrimental to the achievement of academic excellence. (p. 47)

In Sweden, Thunborg and Bron (2012) highlight that since 2001 there is a legal obligation for universities to have 10% of non-traditional students, but in practice some universities do not accomplish this and meet some resistance from lecturers.

Slowey and Schuetze’s (2012) international review suggests that ‘overall, higher education has been slow to adapt its missions, structures and understanding of knowledge and learning—in short, its culture—to the demands for a more open, flexible and egalitarian system’ (p. 4). It is also notable that international research using large-scale surveys to examine inequality focusing on income inequality suggests that the middle classes have been the main beneficiaries of the expansion of higher education (Blanden et al. 2005). Schuetze and Slowey (2002) cite their research from ten countries (Austria, Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, the UK and the USA) on the reluctance of the more elite universities to open up access for non-traditional students, while emphasising that in some countries, it was ‘largely state policy which was seeking to intervene to encourage—or even push—universities to open their doors to new types of students’ (p. 316). This conclusion of the key role of the State in setting an agenda for access to higher education has implications also for Central and Eastern European countries which were not part of Schuetze and Slowey’s (2002) and Slowey and Schuetze’s (2012) studies. It is also notable that in the context of Poland, Heyns and Bialecki (1993) observed at an earlier date that ‘the elite universities, however, have remained highly selective in Poland with relatively stable enrolments and with little variation over time’ (p. 307).

Lunt (2008) observes that in the UK context, the total increase in participation rates at higher education masks a considerable variation by social class, with a perceived trade-off between excellence and equity. Severe barriers to higher education in the form of radical increases to university fees have been introduced by the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government in Britain. This is less a shadow of inertia blocking access to education than a direct ideological attack on the idea of university education being available to those without extreme wealth. This radical distancing of the current Conservative-led government in Britain from social inclusion concerns in education is also manifested in it being the sole EU country to refuse to sign up to the Council Recommendations on Early School Leaving in June 2011. It awaits to be seen if this policy direction in the UK is not for turning, thereby leaving Britain outside the Pale of a European consensus in this area.

Hoelscher et al. (2008) found that the most common reason given by students in England for choosing an institution (university or further education college) was its location (though, importantly, this does not concern distance learning). This was mentioned as a single reason for choice by one third of students regardless of the educational pathway chosen. Good location was defined as proximity with home or with family, proximity with a big city or well served by transport. This access concern lies in some tension with a currently fashionable drive to merge higher education institutions to maximise their research capacities in an international environment.
The UNESCO Faure report (1972) develops a concept of blocked societies and blocked educational systems which preserve the privilege of an elite. The established elite offers a convenient and formally equitable method of recruiting its successors across generations, through educating those from its own social class while picking out a selected few from the less favoured social classes. This method offers a number of advantages for the ruling social classes: It gives society a safety valve; it makes sure of fresh blood for the elite, while giving them a good conscience through the provision of formally equal opportunities. Blocked educational institutions are also thereby somewhat reminiscent of the static society in Plato’s *Republic*, where political and thus educational power resides with the class of guardians, in contrast to those of the common people or the soldiers—with the proviso of Plato that, in exceptional cases, a promising student may be promoted from the other social groups into the guardian class.

The question arises not only as to whether European countries are blocked societies, containing blocked higher educational systems. A blocked society with regard to access to higher education exists along a continuum of blockness, with varying degrees of inertia to change. A basic focus of this book is on sites of blockage regarding access to education for marginalised groups and how to overcome these—whether for access to higher education, non-formal education or prison education. This book by no means purports to offer a comprehensive account or description of the European systems in these areas. Rather it seeks to illustrate a range of concerns regarding the shadow of system inertia and solutions to overcoming such blockages—concerns which arguably have much resonance internationally beyond their immediate illustrative contexts.

### 2.2 Access to Education for Marginalised Groups: A Neglected Focus in University Rankings

Diversity of social classes and ethnicities offers the potential for an improved learning and discursive experience of students in areas of the humanities and social sciences in particular, where cultural dimensions are major aspects of knowledge development. In other words, domains such as law, psychology, history, geography, social work, sociology, politics, education, literature and business can significantly benefit from interrogation through a learning involvement with diverse voices rather than through participation from a largely homogenous, dominant culture of students. At least in many such domains in the humanities and social sciences, quality and access can be not only reconciled but can be argued to require each other. This is a clear consequence of a Vygotskyan framework for intellectual development which prioritises socio-cultural interaction as pivotal to learning.\(^4\)

---

\(^4\)This argument can go beyond a Vygotskyan framework to engage with a level of *challenge* to cultural assumptions and cultural conformity—a challenge that may not be possible within a Vygotskyan framework (Downes 2009).
Moreover, Reay et al. (2007) interrogate ‘the ability to move in and out of spaces marked as ‘other’’ (p. 1047) as a feature of cultural capital. While Gibbons (2002) argues that the global economy requires individuals who can interact with people of other races and nationalities openly and respectfully, this position could lead to the danger of universities simply seeking out international students who would pay higher fees and take university places of those citizens from the home country experiencing social marginalisation. An advocacy of the need for embracing ‘otherness’ as a feature of a university’s cultural capital (at least in the humanities and social sciences) would require the safeguarding of ‘otherness’ in relation to social class in its allocation of university places. This ‘otherness’ also requires more than simply assimilation into a homogenous university culture but rather to provide for diversity of subcultures at university level to then move beyond treating difference as ‘otherness’.

Against this backdrop, a university institutional culture needs to be evaluated with regard to its fostering of capacities in its students for relations with diverse ‘others’. This invites the need for an accessibility index as an indicator of university quality internationally, at least for the humanities and social sciences. In other words, international university rankings need to include an access and diversity ranking not simply to promote access issues but also as an indicator of the quality of the learning environment for students. In doing so, it is to be recognised that this requires a significant broadening of the criteria for international rankings of universities, as currently the focus of such rankings is narrowly on areas such as maths, science, medicine and engineering, with other major dimensions of university work such as quality of teaching excluded from such rankings.\(^5\)

Based on a social contract framework that shifts the domain of the social contract away from an ancient mythical prehistory (invoked by Rousseau and others\(^6\)) to a current ongoing and future societal agreement, Rawls’ (1971) principle of open position\(^7\) provides an important rationale for such an access strategy concentrating, especially, on specific departments and professions in the arts, humanities and social sciences, where humans are the subject matter and their subjective vantage points contribute to its knowledge base:

\(^5\) There are three worldwide university rankings initiatives regularly published: the Academic Ranking of World Universities from Shanghai’s Jiao Tong University, the World University Ranking from the Times Higher Education (THE) and since added, the QS World University Ranking. In the ‘Shanghai’ ranking, institutions are ranked according to six criteria mainly related to their scientific production. The ‘THE’ ranking on the other hand applies criteria covering the international dimension of staff and students, teacher to student ratios and peer reviews.

\(^6\) And beyond a simply empirical social contract criticised, for example, by Durkheim (1893/1984).

\(^7\) This key principle of open position does not necessarily require commitment to Rawls’ (1971) overall social contract framework in his classic work, A Theory of Justice. For example, his assumption of a veil of ignorance in the formation of the social contract implies an abstract, impersonal other which is open to critique from the perspective of relational conceptions of morality and justice, such as those of Gilligan (1982) and Benhabib (1988). Other avenues for critique of Rawls (1971) include his liberal emphasis on equality of opportunity, while neglecting an equality of outcomes focus (Zappone 2002).
the principle of open position…expresses the conviction that if some places were not open on a basis fair to all, those kept out would be right in feeling unjustly treated even though they benefited from the greater efforts of those who were allowed to hold them. (p. 84)

Yet Rawls’ principle goes further to implicate other helping professions, such as medicine. It critiques a paternalistic approach to ‘helping’ the other, while excluding the other.

A report by Usher and Cervanen (2005) exploring global higher education rankings has sought to develop indicators in order to provide the ‘first systematic and rigorous exploration of the affordability and accessibility of higher education within an international comparative context’. It develops a composite affordability ranking for 16 countries, though none are from Central and Eastern Europe. Usher and Cervanen (2005) state at the outset that their set of indicators of affordability and accessibility are simply a first step towards a ‘more nuanced and accurate exploration of indicators’ to inform comparative analysis in this area.

The six indicators of affordability constructed by Usher and Cervanen (2005) are as follows: education costs as a percentage of ability to pay, total costs as a percentage of ability to pay, net costs as a percentage of ability to pay, net cost after tax expenditure as a percentage of ability to pay, out-of-pocket costs as a percentage of ability to pay and out-of-pocket costs after tax expenditures as a percentage of ability to pay. These indicators are granted different weightings of importance. Usher and Cervanen (2005) recognise the complexity within terms such as ability to pay and explore pathways for cross-cultural comparison.

The four indicators of accessibility constructed by Usher and Cervanen (2005) are as follows: participation rates, attainment rates, gender parity index and what they call the Educational Equity Index (EEI). As with affordability indicators, the accessibility indicators are granted different weightings. This affordability and accessibility index focuses on data at the national level rather than offering direct examination of universities at the institutional level.

These indexes offer a promising basis for moving further to an institutional and not simply a national focus on accessibility and affordability indexes. There is a need to develop an integration of a university’s performance regarding accessibility and affordability with its research performance, teacher to student ratios, etc., so that all these dimensions can be part of a composite score in international rankings of universities, especially in relation to the humanities and social sciences.

The need for broader criteria for university rankings has been recognised at EU Commission level. The Commission has launched an initiative ‘for the design and testing of a new multidimensional university ranking system with global outreach’

---

8The countries ranked for affordability (as distinct from accessibility) of higher education are as follows, in a sequence where the first on the list is the most affordable and the last the least affordable based on their composite indicators: Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium (Flemish Community), Ireland, Belgium (French Community), Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, Australia, the USA, Britain, New Zealand and Japan. This order of ranking, being prior to the current economic crisis, may now have changed. Finland and the Netherlands emerge as the two countries consistently scoring highest when both accessibility and affordability are combined.
that is also independent from public authorities and universities. According to the 3rd Annual Symposium on University Rankings and Quality Assurance in Europe, held in June 2011 in Brussels, by the Centre for Parliamentary Studies, its aim is the design and testing of a new multidimensional university ranking system, one with a more global outreach. The symposium organisers hoped that with its emergence on the EU higher education agenda, a new comprehensive ranking system would not only facilitate greater transparency and accountability of universities but also help policymakers to develop longer-term strategies as part of the broader HE modernisation agenda for Europe. Launched in February 2013,9 the Commission’s U-Multirank proposes to rate universities in five separate areas—reputation for research, quality of teaching and learning, international orientation, success in knowledge transfer and start-up contribution to regional growth. A glaring omission here is a focus on access for diversity and community engagement. This is indicative of the lower level of priority currently given at European Commission level to access to education issues for marginalised groups.

In the context of Canada and the USA, Schuetze (2011) observes the need to provide incentives to universities to recognise what he calls ‘regional engagement and service as a university mission’. In doing so, this recognition would serve as a counterweight to university preoccupation with research rankings. Schuetze (2011) cites the US example of the Carnegie Foundation’s Elective Classification of Community Engagement as an example of indicators to analyse and recognise university engagement with the community. These indicators operate under four basic headings, namely, institutional identity and culture, institutional commitment, curricular engagement and outreach and partnerships. These offer an important potential step forward also in a European context. However, it is notable that despite the 50 indicators developed under these four categories for community engagement in the Carnegie Foundation’s Classification, none of these directly address the issues of either accessibility or affordability. This is a significant vacuum. The framework of structural indicators for access to education being developed for current purposes may inform international perspectives on intergenerational social mobility and accessibility beyond a European context. However, this framework is not contingent on expansion of the European Commission’s U-Multirank to include an access/diversity agenda.

Against this backdrop, it is clear that any common analytical framework to interrogate system reform for access to education needs to incorporate a perspective on system inertia—on system blockages to reform. A problem-solution focus needs to be held throughout to locate enduring features of system resistance to opening access, whether in Europe or beyond.

**Summary** Two of the five EU benchmarks for Education and Training ET2020 are central to the issue of access to education for marginalised groups and are prima

---

9The U-Multirank has already been criticised by the influential League of European Research Universities which represents 21 leading research-intensive universities, regarding the reliability and validity of the data sought to be collected, as well as raising concerns about the burden this data collection puts on universities.
facie relevant to a view of access to education being an EU strategic priority on paper. These are that (1) the share of 30–34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40% and (2) an average of at least 15% of adults aged 25–64 should participate in lifelong learning. There is a need to place opening up barriers to access to higher education more firmly on the policy agenda at EU level and across national levels in Europe. Despite a number of commitments in EU Council and Commission documents in the past decade, it appears that the equity, social cohesion and active citizenship issue of access to higher education for lower socio-economic groups is currently falling between two stools in relation to the ET2020 targets. It is relevant on paper to both higher education and lifelong learning benchmarks but arguably being sufficiently prioritised by neither.

It is evident that the EU Commission is committed—on paper—to a wider conception of access to education than simply that of formal equality. The concern is not only with the degree of such a commitment to be implemented in reality but also with the need for greater focus on a strategy for overcoming system blockages to implementation of access to higher education and lifelong learning issues as a priority. Regarding prison education, the EU Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011) is a significant step forward as the first Council Resolution in the area of lifelong learning to explicitly embrace prisoners within its scope of relevant target groups, via a social cohesion and active citizenship lens.

Diversity of social classes and ethnicities at university offers the potential for an improved learning experience of students in areas of the humanities and social sciences in particular, where cultural dimensions are major aspects of knowledge development. Domains such as law, psychology, history, geography, social work, sociology, politics, education, literature and business can significantly benefit from interrogation through a learning involvement with diverse voices rather than with a largely homogenous, dominant culture of students. In many such domains in the humanities and social sciences, quality and access can be not only reconciled but arguably require each other. This is a clear consequence of a Vygotskyan framework for intellectual development which prioritises socio-cultural interaction as pivotal to learning. A university institutional culture needs to be evaluated with regard to its fostering of capacities in its students for relations with diverse ‘others’. This highlights the need for an accessibility index as an indicator of university quality internationally, at least for the humanities and social sciences.

The EU Commission’s U-Multirank (2013) proposes to rate universities in five separate areas—reputation for research, quality of teaching and learning, international orientation, success in knowledge transfer and start-up contribution to regional growth. A glaring omission here is a focus on access for diversity and community engagement. This is indicative of the lower level of priority currently given at European Commission level to access to education issues for marginalised groups. Despite the 50 indicators developed under four categories for community engagement in the Carnegie Foundation’s Classification in the USA, none of these directly address the issues of either accessibility or affordability.
References


Access to Education in Europe
A Framework and Agenda for System Change
Downes, P.
2014, XVIII, 267 p. 2 illus., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-94-017-8794-9