Chapter 27 – The rise of the student estate

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Introduction

Since the emergence of the first medieval universities student involvement in governance and management of higher education institutions has been a prevalent feature in colleges and universities across the world. Higher education students have always had distinct rights and roles as students in higher education. Sometimes students also have distinct authority to take part in decisions of the governing bodies and management structures of higher education institutions. When this is the case, student representatives taking such positions of authority typically come from the ranks of representative student associations. Student representative associations – such as student governments, councils, unions, parliaments, guilds – aggregate, organise interests of the entire student body and intermediate these interests towards institutional leaders or the government or other higher education stakeholders. In this chapter, I refer to *this set of students' rights, roles and authority, and forms of organisation of student interests within higher education (institutions or systems) as student estate*. Student estate implies a distinct social status and political identities of students as a distinct social category.

Student rights, roles and authority in higher education, and models of organising into representative student associations vary across higher education systems ('space') with their distinct historical, cultural and socio-political characteristics. Variations exist also across higher education institutions ('place') within the same higher education system and possibly even within the different submits of the same higher education institution. Finally, student estate has developed over time, but forms of this development are necessarily conditioned by space and place. In modern times, since the establishment of nation states with their distinct national higher education systems, higher education policies developed by the governments have had impact on student estate along with the policies and strategies developed by higher education institutions.

This chapter advances the proposition that 'new policies create a new politics' (Schattschneider, 1935) and that "policy choices are highly consequential for political life" (Hacker and Pierson, 2014, p. 1). Higher education policies not only influence higher education practices, but shape a wide range of political forces from the organisation and mobilisation of groups, such as students, to the formation of (student) political identities to the strategies of students as political actors (cf. Skocpol, Weir & Orloff, 1989). With new policies comes 'policy feedback' (Pierson, 1993) signalling policy objectives and resources, i.e.,

expected policy benefits or burdens, which stakeholders interpret into political opportunities to pursue their interests.

In this chapter, I argue that the contemporary reforms of higher education governance and management – from bureaucratic and state-centred to corporate and student-centred – (Amaral, Jones & Karseth, 2002; Amaral, Fulton & Larsen, 2003; Amaral et al., 2003; Gornitzka, Kogan & Amaral, 2005; Amaral, 2008; Paradeise et al., 2009) have strengthened students' political agency, that is the capabilities of students to influence higher education institutions at which they are enrolled and the higher education systems in which these institutions are embedded. These reforms have been manifested not only in the changes in governing and managerial arrangements described in detail in this *Handbook on Management and Governance in Higher Education*, but also in three other distinct yet interconnected higher education developments: introduction of student-centred learning and teaching as dominant educational philosophy (Hoidn & Klemenčič, 2020), enhanced accountability measures (Neave & van Vught, 1991; Neave, 1998, 2012) along with the attention to quality assessment (Amaral, 2007; Stensaker, 2007; Westerheijden, Stensaker & Rosa, 2007; Sarrico et al., 2010), and marketisation of higher education (Dill, 1997, 2001; Amaral, Meek & Larsen, 2003; Jongbloed, 2003, 2004; Teixeira, 2003; Teixeira & Amaral, 2001; Teixeira et al., 2004; Teixeira et al., 2005). Taken together, these developments have resulted in profound changes to the student estate, and arguably to its empowerment, especially vis-à-vis the academic estate (Neave & Rhoades, 1987).

The chapter explores the effects of higher education reforms on students as a distinct social and political class in higher education governance and management. The focus of the chapter is on the collective rights of students, their authority and form of organisation of student interest in the context of higher education governance and management, which I refer to as *student estate*. Governance of higher education refers to the structures and processes of decision-making on the direction of the institutions or systems and overseeing their operations (Klemenčič, 2020b). Management refers to the operationalisation and implementation of decisions taken by the governing bodies. The chapter first discusses the conceptual tools to aid our understanding of developments in student estate. Next, the chapter revisits the key historical developments in student estate from medieval universities until present times. In the concluding section, the contemporary developments are discussed.

Key conceptual tools to understanding developments in student estate

Defining student estate

Within the higher education institutions as well as within broader societies, students have emerged as a distinct social and political class with various forms of student 'capital' (Altbach, 1989, 1991, 1992, 2006; Lipset & Altbach, 1969; Lipset, 1967; Klemenčič, 2015; Lum, 2017). Student capital comprises students' distinct knowledge and information about higher

education gained through first-hand experience of it. Such professional expertise and information can be valuable to developing higher education policies and strategies, and for accountability checks. Student capital also comprises students' political resources as a collective body and a prime constituency in higher education, who can, if they choose to do so, legitimise higher education policies and strategies or undermine these (Klemenčič & Palomarers, 2018; Klemenčič & Park, 2018). The notions of students as a distinct social and political class leads us to the conception of *a student estate* (Ashby & Anderson, 1970; Fonseca, 2012) which I refer to as *a set of rights, roles and authority, and forms of organisation of student interests that are common to collectives of students within higher education institutions or higher education systems*.

Student estate is a part of the political organisation of higher education institutions and higher education systems which is manifested in these institutions' governance and management arrangements. Student estate is a political institution in itself. This is the case even if students are not organised into representative student associations, i.e., even if student estate is not incorporated into an organisational form of a representative student association. The existence of student estate as a political institution is implied in the existence of some formal documents that stipulate *rights of students*, be that national higher education laws and regulations and or statutory or other formal documents of higher education institutions.

The same formal documents that stipulate rights of students typically also discuss expectations of students' behaviour as students, i.e., *their roles and responsibilities.* The most common definition of students is that these are persons that are enrolled at a higher education institution in a study programme pursuing a degree at that institution. This definition then distinguishes higher education students from other learners who might be following a professional development programme or be involved in other educational activities at that institution but not pursuing a study programme accredited to confer a degree to students who fulfil academic requirements. These learners and other individuals in higher education institutions too have rights and roles, but these are different from the student rights and roles.

Students as a collective also have *authority* in the context of higher education management and governance. I define authority as the legitimate, that is socially approved right of individuals to (co)decide on issues with impact on others (cf. Christiano, 2020). In the case of students, authority then implies students' legitimate right to representation in governing bodies and or in management decision-processes at higher education institutions and or in national or supranational higher education political processes. Authority is a separate, but related concept to power. Whereas authority is inherent in a particular position or function and gives rights to the holder to act, power is relational capacity or ability to act. Authority bears with itself responsibilities to act, power (unlike a right) does not imply such responsibilities.

Critical condition for authority is *legitimacy*. Authority gets legitimated by (1) rules and regulations ('bureaucratic authority') as described by Weber (1918), by (2) the rulers ('conferred authority') when those in authority decide to share authority with others and thereby confer certain rights to others; (3) by invoking certain social norms and values common to the particular organisation or system (cf. Christiano, 2020). In case of student representation, legitimate right comes from the belief of both students themselves and belief of other higher education stakeholders that students have rights to be represented in governing structures and processes (cf. Peter, 2017). Such belief is distinct but often related to the perceived legitimacy of representative student association.

Finally, typically, however not necessarily, student estate is *incorporated into a representative student association* with its own set of governing structures and processes, rules and norms and other defining organisational characteristics. When student representative organisations exist and are internal and externally perceived as legitimate, their elected representatives take positions in the governing bodies of higher education institutions or in public policy processes.

Legitimacy of representative student associations refers to the belief of the student body that the student association is representing their interest truthfully and effectively, is governed democratically and according to the principles of good governance (Klemenčič, 2014). If students hold such beliefs, then they are willing to trust it, engage in it and obey the rules set by it. This is the *internal legitimacy* aspect of student representative associations. *External legitimacy* of student representative associations is reflected in beliefs of stakeholders other than students, i.e., university leaders, academic staff, government officials, that student associations can truthfully and effectively represent student interests, are governed democratically and according to principles of good governance and can effectively contribute to the decision and policy processes. External legitimacy is often assessed by representativity, structural and procedural democracy, but also expertise, constructiveness, reliability, and trustworthiness of elected student representatives. Relationships to external actors, in particular political parties, are also relevant to legitimacy (Luescher & Mugume, 2014; Luescher & Klemenčič, 2016). While student governments may form alliances with political parties or other actors, or sympathise with some informally, the question at hand is whether their structures and processes are strong enough to prevent their primary locus of interest and activity to be moved from students to the outside actor (Klemenčič, 2014). This would, of course, undermine their unique ability to perform representational functions.

Student estate exists within the multilevel governance and management of higher education and in the complex set of relations within politics of higher education at each level: within a department or other institutional subunit, on the level of a higher education institution, on the level of a higher education system, and within supranational (both international and global) higher education polity. Students, individually and as a collective, are afforded

different sets of rights, roles and authority within the governing and managerial structures and processes at each level. And the student estate might be or not incorporated into organised student interest, i.e., student representative associations at these different levels.

Where student representative associations exist, *the multilevel governance of representative student associations* tends to reflect the multilevel governance of higher education in that country or global region. This is clearly depicted by the existence of five distinct regional student associations: All-Africa Students Union (AASU), Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA), European Students' Union (ESU) and the Latin-American Student Organisation (OCLAE) which have jointly formed the Global Student Forum (GSF).[1] Each of these regional associations represents national representative student associations (i.e., national student unions), which in turn represent student associations within higher education institutions. Often representative student associations at a university or college are composed of representative student bodies from different schools at that university or college and those are composed of representative student bodies or elected representatives within the academic departments.

There can exist both *convergences and divergences in student estate manifestations across (political and cultural) spaces and (institutional) places*, and also across *time*. In other words, student estate is an inherently dynamic concept with variations across time, space and place. In the next sections, I conceptualise the variations in the rights, roles and authority of students, and in organisation of student interests before turning to historical developments.

Collective rights, roles and authority of students

Students' collective rights, roles and authority are derived from the legal position of students stipulated in the higher education laws and regulations and translated into institutional statutory and strategic documents. Legal provisions also regulate the formation and operations of representative student associations, either explicitly or implicitly with the regulations on non-governmental civic society organisations.

Legal position of students: rights and roles of students

There are two overarching approaches to understanding the legal position of students, each of which provides a variety of national and institutional interpretations (Klemenčič, 2015).

One approach is common to countries which conceive higher education as a public good and thus hold it a right (in some countries even constitutional right) for students to access it. There is *an implicit social contract between state and students* evident in higher education legislation, which stipulates that access is granted to all that are academically apt and aspire to higher education. The presumption here is that higher education not only confers private benefits to graduates in terms of employability and earnings, but that there exist also significant societal benefits of higher education (Teixeira & Klemenčič, 2021). Hence, the state

establishes, owns and provides funding to public higher education institutions with the expectation that higher education institutions will deliver expected socio-economic outcomes. In turn, public higher education institutions are accountable for quality education not only to students (who may be paying some tuition fees or not), but also to the state that funds them and to other interested stakeholders, such as employers.

Accordingly, the state requests from the universities to demonstrate responsible use of public funds through various quality assurance frameworks, performance evaluations and or participation of external stakeholders representing 'public interest' in governing bodies of higher education institutions (Neave & van Vught, 1991; Neave, 1998, 2012; Amaral, 2007; Stensaker, 2007; Westerheijden, Stensaker & Rosa, 2007; Sarrico et al., 2010). When governments grant higher education institutions more autonomy to manage and decide on their own operations typically also impose more accountability checks for these institutions to demonstrate that they fulfil the 'societal' expectations for students being able to access quality higher education and complete such education.

Given the implicit social contract between the state and the students, the accountability checks necessarily require some form of student involvement. Afterall, students are not only the primary beneficiary of higher education but also have first-hand experience of the higher education institutions' fulfilling such a societal obligation. Such involvement varies between involvement in institutional and external quality assurance agencies (QAA) structures and processes; and between involvement of student representatives, student experts and the involvement of everyday students.

This distinction becomes clearer if we consider the four degrees of intensity of student involvement in quality assurance: (1) to provide information, i.e., students serve as data source for data collected through student surveys; (2) to conduct quality assessment, i.e., students serve as expert evaluators in QAA panels; (3) to contribute to quality improvements, i.e., student serve as consultants in institutional QAA bodies; and (4) to develop QAA systems, i.e., students serve in a political role typically performed by student representative associations in developing higher education policies and strategies (Klemenčič, 2018, p. 334). In practice, these degrees of intensity of involvement are interlinked and students can also be simultaneously involved in several of these processes albeit in different roles and with different degrees of authority.

To understand the impact of these policies on student estate, we need to explore the new opportunity structures and processes for student involvement (Klemenčič, 2012b), new roles for students as expert evaluators and consultants and possibly new forms of authority for student representatives to co-decide with institutional leaders, academics and governments on the standards and guidelines for quality assurance evaluations.

The second approach suggests that upon a student enrolling in a higher education institution *an implicit contract is created between the student and the institution* through which the

higher education institution has obligated itself to provide a certain standard of quality of education provision to the student and the student has committed to payment of a necessary fees for this education provision (Buchter, 1973). Even if no specific contract document is signed at the time of admission, the admission itself can be regarded *as a formation of a symbolic contractual relationship between an individual student and the higher education institution as a corporate body*. This contractual relationship is in the sense a promise of providing quality educational experiences to the student (however not a promise of necessarily conferring that student a degree in case the student does not fulfil academic obligations). This symbolic contractual relationship is implied in the various university publications, such as course catalogues, student handbooks, institutional policies and websites. These publications include disclaimers of obligations of the institution towards students and also the requirements and expectations of the student. Common initially to the Anglo-American context and to the private higher education sector worldwide, this model is slowly diffusing also into the public higher education sector elsewhere (Klemenčič, 2015).

The conceptualisation of students as consumers, and consumerist discourse in higher education in general, has been linked to the introduction or strengthening of competitive elements in higher education along with the changes in funding arrangements (decrease in public funding, rising tuition fees, recruitment of foreign fee-paying students) and institutional governance (towards applying management principles from business to higher education governance structures and procedures) (Naidoo, Shankar and Veer, 2011). The neoliberal policies that reinforce student-consumer conceptions thus have multiple implications on student political agency within higher education (Wright & Raaper, 2019; Raaper, 2018, 2019; Thomlinson, 2017; Naidoo & Williams 2015; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005), even if the degree to which the policies resulted in student-consumer agency undoubtedly varies across countries (Brooks, 2021).

Student authority in higher education governance and management (Klemenčič, 2020c)

It is a common practice worldwide to have students represented in the governance (and management) of higher education in some form. This is especially the case in the higher education institutions, and less so in the national higher education decision bodies. Especially in the case of the European Higher education Area (EHEA), we also observe strong student involvement in the supranational intergovernmental processes (Klemenčič and Palomares, 2017). Students – individually, collectively, or by proxy student representatives – are generally considered a valuable source of information to institutional leaders or government administrators about student experiences, satisfaction, and behaviours. The differences in opinion arise when determining *how exactly students ought to be involved, and what formal authority students have in the governing bodies and decision processes*.

The practices of involving students to be represented in governing bodies and processes of higher education institutions (or in national or supranational higher education decision bodies) vary notably across higher education institutions and higher education systems. One major distinction is between private (i.e., independently financed or endowed) and public (i.e., state-funded or otherwise state-supported) higher education institutions. Another distinction is between states with more corporatist or pluralist arrangements to state-society relations and practices involving civil society (e.g., representative student associations, associations of university rectors, teacher trade unions) in public policy structures and processes. The differences come also with the political regime, and whether such a regime is democratic, illiberal democratic or autocratic, each of which implies different approaches to democratic participatory governance of higher education institutions and civil society involvement in public policy. Diverse are also the degrees of intensity of student involvement in governing bodies. As discussed earlier in the case of student involvement in quality assurance, such provisions range from one-way information provision (i.e., students are surveyed for information or asked for input to departmental meetings), to regular and structured consultation (i.e., student representatives have regular meetings with university officials), to partnership whereby students are formal members of governing bodies and have decision rights and responsibilities equal to other members.

There exist two main models of involving students in higher education governance. First, the democratic participatory governance model places significant decision authority in the hands of academic staff and students as key internal constituencies of higher education institutions. In such a model, significant decision authority rests with senate-type bodies that include representatives of the academic staff and typically also students. There might be a prescribed share of student members, and students have either full voting rights or no voting rights or only voting rights on issues directly relevant to students. Students can also have a vote in the election of academic leaders, such as rectors or deans. Public institutions in most parts of the world tend to broadly follow this model, and in many countries, such arrangements are stipulated in higher education legislation. This model is largely a consequence of 1960s protests calling for the democratisation of university governing structures (De Groot, 1998; Luescher-Mamashela, 2010; 2013; Klemenčič and Park, 2018).

Second model exists in the corporate type of shared governance arrangements common to private higher education institutions. In such governance arrangements, the authority lies in the board-type bodies, such as board of overseers or board of regents, which appoint academic and professional administrators – professionals. Academic ('faculty' in the United States) councils and student representative bodies have only consultative roles. In some cases, the executive leaders delegate authority to academic committees and these can further decide to involve students. However, the executive leaders retain authority for final decisions on the recommendations or policies prepared by these bodies. While such higher education boards tend to have more diverse membership, which often also includes external

members, student participation is, however, not a given. In many countries and institutions, board-type governing bodies do not include students. If student representatives are appointed to the governing board, they tend to be ex-officio to inform the decisions but without voting rights.

In sum, in higher education institutions, student representative associations engage in claim making through formal university structures, such as having a seat in the university board or holding informal consultations with the academic department (Klemenčič and Park, 2018). The role of national student associations in national-level higher education governance is less formalised and less institutionalised. Most frequently, student representatives participate in consultative capacity in national bodies, such as higher education councils or quality assurance agencies. The models here are a reflection of the state's direct involvement with the higher education institutions as well as state-society relations. Countries with strong corporatist traditions of involvement of public interest groups in bodies that advise the government on public policies (as is the case especially in Nordic European countries) also involve students in the national higher education advisory bodies. In contrast, in countries with weak corporatist relations and predominance of privately funded institutions, student involvement in consultative bodies to the state is less likely to occur. The likelihood of student involvement also depends on the existence of representative student associations active on the regional or state or national level that are perceive legitimate and can appoint student representatives and can demand such involvement.

Four overarching arguments in favour of student involvement in higher education governance emerge from the literature (Klemenčič, 2020b; Menon, 2005; Pabian & Minsova, 2011; Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999; Luescher-Mamashela, 2010, 2013; Lizzio & Wilson, 2005). First, in line with democratic ideals of higher education governance, students are the primary benefactors of the education provision and as such, they are the main internal constituency, indeed the main stakeholder. This position gives students a democratic right to be involved in the decisions that will ultimately affect them. Thus, institutions have to ensure that students can safeguard their interests in decision processes, which is important both for the legitimacy of these decisions and for community building. Second, insofar as they are the primary beneficiaries of the education provision and are also directly affected by the quality of the education provision, students have first-hand information on the effectiveness of institutional practices and policies. A better understanding of the demands and experiences of students yields better decisions to meet these demands. Both of these two arguments affirm the case of student involvement as important or necessary for the legitimation of decision processes and outcomes. Whereas the latter allows for weaker forms of involvement (only seeking student data or consultation with students), the former makes the case for necessary democratic involvement.

Third, student involvement can be an effective deterrent of student unrest. If students have multiple channels of voicing their concerns, they might be less likely to resort to protest. Fourth, student involvement in governance contributes to the learning objectives of developing students' dispositions toward and skills for active citizenship. So, creating pathways for student involvement in governance allows students to exercise active citizenship and reinforces the conception of higher education institutions as sites of citizenship and civic involvement. Both the third and fourth arguments are premised on the notions that student involvement in governance gives students a sense of efficacy in institutional matters and thus may strengthen their sense of ownership of and of belonging to their higher education institution.

There exist also several arguments against granting students the authority to be represented in institutional or national decision processes or in favour of weaker forms of student involvement. First, students' ability to effectively contribute to decisions has been questioned on several grounds. The transient nature of studentship prevents students from having the expertise that is gained with experience and results in a lack of a long-term institutional vision. Students have, it has been argued, difficulty in understanding the complexity of factors that affect institutional performance and the multiple demands coming from various stakeholders. Students' preferences in institutional decisions might be clouded by their immediate self-interest, which can go against the need for long-term quality improvements. Second, students often hold adversarial positions that disrupt or stall the – essentially – consensual mode of institutional decision-making. The more formal powers student representatives have, the more disruptive to decision processes they can be. Third, representative student associations are often lacking external legitimacy to represent the student body. The voter turnout in student elections is typically low. Student associations can be tainted by poor governance practices, financial scandals, or lacking autonomy from institutional leaders or political parties or the state. The more domesticated student representatives appear vis-a-vis institutional leaders, the less internal legitimacy student representatives have vis-a-vis the student body and the less engaged student body is with the student associations and the student leaders. I am now turning to key concepts that can help understand representative student associations.

Student estate organised into representative student associations (Klemenčič, 2020b)

Student representative associations, variably called student councils, guilds, parliaments, unions, or governments have the primary aim to represent and defend the interests of the student body. They do so especially by seeking representation in governing bodies and processes of higher education institutions (or within national-level higher education governance structures). All these student associations are similar in that they organise, aggregate, articulate and intermediate student interests in the context of a higher education

institution or a higher education system, along with providing various services and organising student activities (Klemenčič, 2012a).

Their organisational characteristics, however, vary. Typically, representative student associations are autonomous student-run organisations with necessarily democratic governing structures and procedures for the election of student representatives. They can be financially and legally independent or not (in which case they are effectively organisational subunits of their home institutions). The institutional-level representative student associations may be associated into regional or state or national (and also supranational) representative student associations. Commonly, these student associations are asked to appoint student trustees to the institutional or coordinating governing boards, and they choose from the ranks of elected student representatives to do so.

Organisational resources, such as membership, financial resources, employed staff, and governance structures are significant for student governments' capabilities for interest intermediation (Klemenčič and Palomares, 2017) as well as for the provision of student services and activities. Membership structures are relevant since they define student associations' mobilisation potential, determine their representativity and may influence their financial resources. Employed staff in the secretariat aids institutional memory and professionalisation. Governance structures impact efficiency of decision procedures and democratic legitimacy. Significant are also student associations' capabilities to generate expertise, gather information and send informed and competent representatives to meetings with university or national officials.

The organisational resources of institutional student representative associations as well as their bureaucratic structures and professionalisation vary significantly within and between countries (Klemenčič, 2014). These differences are even more pronounced among national student associations which can operate more like interest groups or more like student movement organisations (Klemenčič, 2012a, 2014). They all, however, have to balance between the 'logic of influence' and the 'logic of membership' and these two logics influence their organisational characteristics and political agenda (Klemenčič and Park, 2018). The potential resources that student representative associations can possess and supply into policy processes and that gets them access to policy making include professional expertise, legitimisation of policy outcomes, social control of member students, as well as other services, such as projects (Klemenčič, 2012a; Klemenčič and Park, 2018). In turn, student representative associations expect access to decision processes, funding and other material or symbolic resources.

Representative student associations often supplement student services provided by the institutions, including peer counselling, assistance with academic, personal, and administrative problems and the provision of financial assistance. Some offer study facilities and services, and run businesses such as book and stationary shops, internet cafés, photocopy

services, shops, and restaurants, or oversee the provision of such facilities and services to students. They finance their activities from membership fees, allocations from the university budget, business income and levies on campus business activities, and fund-raising activities. Their operations are typically structured along various functional spheres of the higher education institution's operations.

Regardless if students are organised into student representative associations or not, they have individually and collectively political agency, i.e., capabilities to participate in and influence politics of higher education institutions and country politics at large (Klemenčič and Park, 2018). Their main mode of political action is representation, as discussed earlier, and activism (Klemenčič and Park, 2018; Luescher, Klemenčič and Jowi 2015, 2016; Luescher and Klemenčič, 2016). I turn now to the discussion of student political agency.

Students' political agency to empower student estate

Finally, students do not only passively adapt to the evolving higher education policy regimes, acting on the new political opportunities and political resources afforded to them. Students also exercise their political agency to instigate the policy changes that will ultimately grant them extended roles and authority in higher education.

Drawing on Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003) social realist explanation, we can conceive the relations between students (student estate as a social institution) and higher education as another social institution of which student estate is part as one of alternation between the conditioning of student estate by 'structures of higher education' and the elaboration of 'structures of higher education' by student estate (cf. Archer, 2003). Students enact their agency when demanding for more rights for student representation or protesting against a specific grievance (such as increase in tuition fees). Their political action might be directed at empowerment of student estate in political processes of higher education, authority to co-decide on issues concerning quality assurance in educational processes or fixing a problem experienced by students or a combination of these. Student activism in the 1960s and 1970s that brought about significant changes to governance arrangements in many higher education institutions in the Western world is one important example of students enacting political agency to strengthen student estate. Another example is the European Students' Union pushing for changes in European approach to quality assurance and partnering in developing new guidelines and standards for quality assurance in higher education in Europe (Klemenčič, 2012a, 2012b).

When analysis students' political agency we must consider who is enacting a political agency, who is acting on behalf of the student body: is it an individual student, a small group of students, is it a representative student organisation on behalf of students or a large student movement? These questions are important since the political mobilisation of the student body depicts the political potency of student estate and conditions the impact of students on

higher education. We also must consider what mode of political action is being utilised – representation or activism? What political resources student use and who is supporting them in the process? Research on these questions has been summarised in a chapter on *Student Politics – Between Representation and Activism* by Klemencic and Park (2018).

I now turn to a brief overview of the developments in student estate from medieval universities until the higher education expansion after WWII.

Developments in student estate until 21st Century: a brief overview

Student estate in medieval universities

In the earliest forms of student organising, students in medieval Bologna University (founded around 1088) were organised into 'nations' which initially offered them mutual welfare, protection, and collective security against the local authorities, following the example of the guilds already common in Italian cities (Haskins, 2007/1923; Cobban, 1971). These nations eventually developed into control of the academic affairs of the overall university (Kibre, 1948; Schwinges, 1992). Student nations approached the Holy Roman emperor, Frederick Barbarossa (1122-1190) who granted students, represented in nations, the right to elect 'Dominus Rector'. The Rector, who was a student, imposed strict controls over teaching doctors' activities, such as when they teach, when they could be absent from town and levies in case they did not meet the rules (Cobban, 1971). This decree created a type of university in which sovereign power resided in the student body, the student estate associated into nations, and these effectively controlled the university. In a way, the arrangement aligned well with the origins of a university, or as Rashdall (1936, pp. 161-162) put it: "To appreciate the fact that the university was in its origin nothing more than a guild of foreign students is the key to the real origin and nature of institution". However, by the 16th and 17th century this model ceased to exist and with some exceptions was not replicated elsewhere (Rashdall, 1936). The downfall of student-governed universities was prompted by academics threatening migration and seeking supplementary financing from town officials and private donors, which gradually led to establishment of new bodies in institutional governance and to destruction of student autonomy in governance (Rashdall, 1936). By the sixteenth century, the few remaining student nations acted "as units of administrative convenience, not as organs of student power" (Cobban, 1971, p. 55).

As discussed by Cobban:

> The universities, overwhelmingly orientated towards the professional needs of society, became increasingly reflective of the establishments which they served. The unsettling nature of student power, with its weapons of the boycott and the migration, posed too great a threat to the more ordered, sedentary character that the universities were acquiring in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Society expected an adequate return for the investments sunk in the universities, investments in the form of endowed

> lectureships, colleges, permanent university buildings and so forth. That return was deemed to be put in jeopardy by the machinations of student politics. The indifferent student record in university administration provided the secular and ecclesiastical authorities with a more immediate reason for the phasing out of student participation as a vital force in west European universities (Cobban, 1980, pp. 6-7).

The more widespread and lasting was the Parisian model where student nations did not have an official status (Cobban, 1971), but students could elect a student rector who shared decision rights with the teachers' guild (Haskins, 2007/1923). In England, Oxford and Cambridge largely adopted this model, as did subsequent foundations in the rest of England, Wales, and Ireland (Day and Dickinson, 2018). In contrast, Scottish governance arrangements maintained some aspects of the Italian model with more power in the hands of students (*Ibid.*).

Students in modern university

In the spirit of times, students in 18th century Europe were interested in and active in political movements of the day. Given the elite nature of higher education institutions and (mostly) elite background of students enrolled at these institutions, there was an implicit expectation that these students are educated to become future elites. As emerging elites these students often had a heightened sense of their political role to instigate desired social and political changes. Furthermore, in absence of work or familial responsibilities, and less concerned about their job prospects, they also had the leisure of time to engage in political debates, organising and mobilising in political and social movements of the time.

Nineteenth and twentieth century gave rise to political and religious student associations as well as representative ones (Gevers and Vos, 2004). In the early twentieth century some of the oldest still-existing national student associations were created by congregations of university student councils (Klemenčič, 2012a). Among the most detailed and well researched accounts about the emergence of representative student associations exists for Britain. As described by Ashby and Anderson (1970) in *The Rise of Student Estate in Britain*, the earliest forms of student representation in university governance in The British Isles was achieved in Scotland. In 1834, Henry Cockburn, Lord Rector of Glasgow, wrote of the role he believed students should play on University Court, which in Scotland is the supreme governing body (Ashby and Anderson 1970, p. 19; cited also in Day and Dickinson, 2018): "...the voice of students ought to be very distinctly heard in it. It should contain one person, at the very least, directly elected by them … I am not, at present, prepared to specify the exact particulars in which I think it defective, except that, in general, I think that the students have too little say in it, and the ex-officio members rather too much."

A provision that there should be student representative on each University Court was enshrined in the Scottish Education Act of 1858, even though there was at that time no formal

student representative body yet established (Ashby and Anderson 1970; Day and Dickinson, 2018).

Student estate in age of massification of higher education (Klemenčič, 2019)

An expanded and more diverse student body in high-participation higher education systems altered the collective social position of students and their political power, as much as it affected access and student experiences and outcomes. From early post-World War II – which in many countries of the world coincided with colonial and early post-colonial phases – students as a collective social group underwent significant transformations. They started off as an educated elite, which represented only a small fraction of the national population that was highly homogenous in terms of (male) gender, (high) socioeconomic status and ethnic (majority) background. As emerging elites these students had a heightened sense of civic responsibilities and role in developments of their countries and often brought upon themselves to bring about political and social change (from either left or right of political spectrum) (Weiss, Aspinwall and Thompson, 2012).

Students entering higher education institutions from modest backgrounds faced striking alienation in institutions which were created to serve elites. The radicalisation of the student body and the worldwide spread of student protests in the 1960s and 1970s were in many ways a reflection of a clash of values between the students and the academic spaces they entered. Rising in numbers, students became a powerful political force. Transition to mass higher education altered the students' status as 'marginal elites', as producers of collective goods and enjoying community support and special privileges (Weiss, Aspinwall and Thompson, 2012). Students lost their privileged social status associated with their prospects as emerging societal elites. In expanded higher education systems, students are associated more with the professional class. Collective political identity based on shared values and interests is more difficult to establish.

The 1960ies student protests in many universities in Europe, United States and some parts of the British Commonwealth resulted in changes in legal and institutional provisions on student representative associations granting students more formal rights in the shared governance of higher education institutions (De Groot, 1998; Luescher-Mamashela, 2010; 2013; Klemenčič and Park, 2018). In some parts of the world, like Europe, these changes were long lasting and significant. Elsewhere, the changes were less pronounced or short lived. However, by the 1980s the spirit of student activism waned. New higher education policies emerged putting emphasis on vocational outcomes of higher education, students' private benefits of higher education as rationales for tuition fees and introducing management principles from private sector

to higher education. Reign of many conservative-leaning governments and earlier global financial recessions reinforced this trend.

Towards the turn of the century, internationalisation of higher education became prominent. With rising economic power in the developing countries, the demand for higher education in the West rose, and with it, international student mobility. In some countries, higher education became an important segment of the export industry, and international students became a notable subgroup on college campuses. These policy shifts created different politics with new opportunity structures for student political agency. I discuss these developments and their implications for student estate in the concluding section.

Conclusion

The shift from democratic principles of shared governance into more corporate models has been observed globally, more in some regions and institutions than other. Such shift has undermined the political and civic roles of students (and academic staff) and turned communal rights and practices to neoliberal practices that advance individual consumer rights and choices. However, these reforms have been accompanied with three other distinct yet interconnected higher education developments, which off-set the diminishing power of student estate. My argument is that looking at the combination of these developments, student estate is changing, but ultimately it is emerging stronger especially compared to the academic estate.

First, the liberal education movement highlights the centrality of students as actors in learning and teaching processes. The movement is concerned with the constitution and construction of student actorhood, indeed enhanced student actorhood, in student-centred learning and teaching in higher education. Student-centred learning and teaching approaches that have emerged from this movement place emphasis on the acts of learning as opposed to the acts of teaching (Klemenčič, 2020a). In other words, students are conceived as active participants, as agents in their own learning and education pathways, not passive recipients of knowledge disseminated through teaching by their teachers. Students have agency in the sense that they have the capabilities to participate in the construction of knowledge and of their learning environments. The constitution of students as actors in teaching and learning processes has implications for how we conceive the balance of power between teachers and students in terms of the degree of their control over teaching-learning processes, the division of responsibilities in teaching and learning processes, and students' autonomy (Klemenčič, 2020a). In brief, students are gaining agency in teaching and learning, arguably curbing teacher's autonomy in these processes.

Second, as quality assurance and accreditation became important instruments of accountability measures utilised by higher education institutions and by the governments and other stakeholders funding higher education, students are constructing for themselves new roles and new types of authority in quality assessment, accountability, and performance (Klemenčič, 2018). Students continue to be the prime data source for measures of quality of education provision (for example, through course evaluations or student experience surveys). However, students are also adopting new roles as 'student experts' serving in bodies conducting institutional evaluations. For example, the European Students' Union (ESU) selects and trains a 'ESU Quality Assurance Student Experts' Pool'. Students selected for the pool are eligible to be nominated to join quality assurance review panels including the Institutional evaluation programme conducted by the European University Association.[2]

Students are also claiming authority in setting standards and guidelines on quality assurance procedures and structures. Effectively, they are using their representative function to co-decide on policies and strategies on quality assurance in higher education in Europe. This is exemplified in the case of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) where student unions have played a prominent role in political processes instigating the quality reforms in the framework of the intergovernmental Bologna Process. The resulting European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Europe essentially made student involvement in external and internal higher education quality assurance mandatory (Klemenčič, 2012a).

Furthermore, student administrator roles are offered to students as part of campus student employment opportunities. These too afford students capabilities to influence institutional programmes and services. Campus employment opportunities serve as a form of financial assistance, as educationally purposeful opportunities linked to academic experiences or as professional training, and as a form of reducing cost of hiring full-time workers (Klemenčič, 2020d). With the notable exception of work colleges and residential private colleges in the United States, most undergraduate campus employment opportunities worldwide amount to low-skill labour rather than professional roles (Klemenčič, 2020d). Most teaching and research assistantships exist for graduate rather than undergraduate students. Also, other professional roles are more common for graduate students than this is the case for undergraduate students. However, this trend is also changing (Klemenčič, 2020d). With the emergence of professional employment opportunities available to students at higher education institutions, these new roles also afford students new avenues to influence operations at the institutions. In short, the traditional roles of student representation are being redefined with the insertion of new public management doctrines into institutional governance. Students are redefining their roles and authority from representative to expert consultative or professional roles.

Third, the marketisation of higher education too is redefining student roles and authority. Major change can be described as a shift from student representative associations defending collective rights of students through student representation and pursuing collective student interests to protection of individual 'consumer' rights through student complaint procedures and attention to student expectations and satisfaction measured through student market research surveys and student satisfaction surveys. The fierce global competition for students (especially tuition-paying students) enables students – who are signalling their consumer preferences – to influence the institutional strategies of higher education institutions that seek to recruit them. This is how higher education institutions in countries like the United States choose to make investments into luxury student apartments, or athletic and recreation facilities which are considered a 'student consumer' pull factor. Institutions create student complaint offices to signal access to student consumer protection and address issues of student dissatisfaction.

The neoliberal policies that reinforce student-consumer conceptions have multiple implications on student agency within higher education (Wright & Raaper, 2019; Raaper, 2018, 2019; Thomlinson, 2017; Naidoo & Williams, 2015; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009), even if the degree to which the policies resulted in student-consumer agency undoubtedly varies across countries (Brooks, 2021). The neoliberal higher education policies imply that students – as consumers – ought to have more voice through course evaluations and course choice, but also possibly in curricular decisions within a course. Critics point out that one consequence of such policies is that they undermine academics' freedom to teach (teachers' agency), i.e., having control over the curriculum (MacFarlane forthcoming). Lowering of academic standards to satisfy expectations of student consumers, and to raise student satisfaction, are also often mentioned as consequences. The opposing views contest the assumption that conceptualising students as consumers leads to such consequences. The argument is that, with more choice, clearly set standards to help students know what to expect from the institution and clear procedures to complain when these expectations are not met, students are granted more control over their education, which in turn makes them more responsible for own learning and more engaged, as discussed in Van Andel, Botas and Huisman (2012). The assumption here is that students will apply pressure on the institutions to strive towards high-quality provision, thus reinforcing the institutional attention to quality of teaching and learning, support service and overall learning environment (discussed in Naidoo, Shankar and Veer, 2011).

Student representative associations tend to adapt to these new opportunities and expectations, resulting in changes in their organisational structures, practices, priorities, and orientations (Klemenčič, 2012b; Brooks, Byford & Sela, 2015; Raaper, 2018). As Stensaker and Michelsen (2012, p. 29) report for the case of Norwegian

student unions, "[s]tate reforms moving in the direction of a more integrated and marker-oriented higher education field have provided important conditions for a more encompassing student union and a stronger re-institutionalisation of student interest", which indeed is characterised by the co-existence of democratic and consumer dimensions of student interests. Even within the new doctrine, students present themselves as legitimate political actors in management and governance of higher education institutions (and higher education systems). They request 'student voice' in governance and management based on their inherent self-interest in institutional quality as primary beneficiaries of it and 'expert' knowledge of higher education through first-hand experiences of institutional quality of higher education provision.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I argue that the contemporary reforms of higher education governance and management – from bureaucratic and state-centred to corporate and student-centred have strengthened students' political agency, that is the capabilities of students to influence higher education institutions at which they are enrolled and the higher education systems in which these institutions are embedded.

Notes

[1] https://www.globalstudentforum.org/ (last accessed 23 March 2022)

[2] https://www.esu-online.org/?news=call-for-esu-quality-assurance-student-experts-pool-and-the-institutional-evaluation-programme (last accessed 23 March 2022)

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