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Lifelong learning from a social justice perspective

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, a set of globally converging discourses on lifelong learning (LLL) has emerged around the world. Driven mostly by inter-governmental organizations, these discourses have been largely embraced by national and local education systems seeking to reflect local traditions and priorities. This paper argues that these discourses tend to look remarkably alike, converging into a homogeneous rationale in which the economic dimension of education predominates over other dimensions of learning, and in which adaptation takes pre-eminence over social transformation as a goal of LLL. It also shows how these converging discourses are embedded in the logic of the knowledge economy, driven by concern for human capital formation as dictated by the changing demands of the global labour market, and can neglect the learning needs and interests of local communities. The paper concludes that the globally converging discourse of LLL tends to serve the interests of the market ahead of those of the community, and argues that an alternative characterization of LLL, anchored in social justice, is necessary in the light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and especially Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

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INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning (LLL) is not a new concept. The idea of learning throughout life has been present in educational thinking and embedded in education systems and policies for centuries. Its precedents can be traced back to ancient cultures and civilizations all over the world, but there are perhaps four moments in history when the concept gained currency and specificity. The first was during the *Enlightenment* in the 18th century, the philosophical precepts of which underlined the role of science and reason in individual and social progress, providing a fertile climate for the cultivation of knowledge and the practice of thought which, in turn, required permanent education for the citizens. The second came after the *Industrial Revolution* in the 19th century, when new forms of production and mechanization required workers trained to use the new technologies who were able and willing to learn on a continuous basis. The third moment was the first half of the 20th century, which witnessed two world wars and the blossoming of adult and continuing education to face the emerging problems. This period saw the publication of John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) and the ensuing development of instrumentalism and pragmatism in education, which suggested that the purpose of education could only be defined by the educational act itself; thus, the purpose of education was to prepare learners for lifelong education. A few years later Basil Yeaxlee published *Lifelong Education* (1929) and argued for the amalgamation of formal, non-formal and informal learning to encompass the different dimensions of life and education, i.e. wisdom, work, and leisure.

The fourth period was the second half of the 20th century, which is probably the time when LLL consolidated into a guiding principle for educational efforts. After World War II, following the impetus gained by adult and continuing education, and guided by the need to reconstruct Europe, nation-states and civil society worked actively to find ways to promote more just, democratic and humane societies. One such effort was the foundation in 1945 of the United Nations and its Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Organization's stated mission was "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion" (UNESCO, 1945). The values guiding its action therefore naturally revolved around the principles of equity and equality of opportunity. For education, this meant enhancing lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities for all, especially for groups that had been excluded from education in its Member States.

In this respect, one of UNESCO's most relevant initiatives was the establishment in 1971 of an International Commission on the Development of Education. Also known as the Faure Commission, after the name of its president, the Commission was tasked with reflecting upon possible solutions to the major challenges in the development of education in a changing world. In its final report *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow* (1972), the Commission proposed lifelong education as an organizing principle for educational reform and as a means of producing the kind of "complete person" needed to construct a learning society. After this seminal report, many other intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) undertook efforts to propose similar formulae. That was the case, for example, with the Council of Europe's *Éducation Permanente*, which aimed at preserving and renewing European cultural heritage and promoting cultural integration, and the OECD's *Recurrent Education* (1973), which set out to bridge the gap between education and employment and create flexible pathways between education, employment, leisure and retirement.

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ECONOMIC RATIONALISM AND THE EROSION OF LIFELONG EDUCATION

Those early views of LLL as a broad concept with varied purposes encompassing the multidimensionality of education and social life itself have, however, narrowed since the 1970s, to focus primarily on its importance for economic performance. The rise of education as an economic policy tool is due to the expansion of economic rationalism and human capital theories since the 1960s, and especially their amplification since the onset of neo-liberalism in the early 1980s (Desjardins, 2009). The changes brought forth by this economic perspective contrast with a long social tradition

since the formation of the nation-state in which education was viewed as a means to consolidate national identity, citizenship and moral values (Green, 1990). Instead of these grand values, human capital theory (cf. Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1962) conceptualized education as an investment inasmuch as it yielded economic benefits for both the state, in the form of economic growth, and individuals, by means of better wages and upward social mobility. Since then, education policy in much of the world has been informed by – and responsive to – economic imperatives like promoting employment, fostering competitiveness and innovation, and economic growth.

Recognizing the challenges posed by technological and social change in the mid-1990s, and the growing emphasis on competition and economic instrumentalism in education, UNESCO established an International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century. It was "a time when educational policies [were] being sharply criticized or pushed – for economic and financial reasons – down to the bottom of the agenda" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 13). The outcome of the work of the Commission, captured in the seminal report *Learning: The treasure within* (UNESCO, 1996), proposed an integrated vision of education based on the concepts of "learning throughout life" and the four pillars of learning: to be, to know, to do, and to live together. This humanist vision was recently reaffirmed by UNESCO in revisiting the 1996 Delors Report and rethinking the purpose of education and the organization of learning in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and contradiction (UNESCO, 2015).

However, although the Delors Report confirmed "the role of UNESCO as the advocate of a humanist and utopian vision of education" (Elfert, 2015, p. 91) and "offered a different vision for education from the dominant utilitarian, economic tone prevalent at the time" (Tawil and Cougoureux, 2013, p. 4), the full-blown dissemination of economic rationalism continued in the 1990s. This trend was further reinforced by globalization in general and the intensification of international trade and transnational economic relations in particular.

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One key development that shaped the understanding of education in and for the global era was the revitalization of the "knowledge society" and the intention to create "knowledge-based economies" – a reference to the changing value of knowledge for industry and work in the light of technological developments and changing employment conditions. It acknowledged that traditional educational patterns had to change, to produce "knowledge workers" who would be able to adapt to the changes in employment patterns, and to change jobs and careers throughout their lives. This understanding of education as a vector of adaptability was reinforced by the idea of the post-industrial society (Bell, 1973). In both industrial and post-industrial theories, education – understood as human capital development – had a role to play, from a lifelong perspective.

The idea of the knowledge society, and how education must be reformed to keep up with societal and economic changes, was strengthened by IGOs (e.g. UNESCO, OECD, World Bank, European Commission) by means of influential reports that used the concept of the knowledge society and/or of the knowledge economy to argue the urgency of reforming education policies and systems. The policy influence exercised by these IGOs was twofold. On the one hand, it underscored the role of education in economic development and performance, while on the other it created an idea of a global education polity; in other words that education, much like the economy, is a global policy field. In practice, the latter assumption implies that educational decision-making is no longer an exclusively national concern, and that there are different policy actors who can – and do – help define the purpose of education and the organization of learning beyond national boundaries.

It is against this background that education and learning have become the foundations for competitiveness and economic growth in the global arena. This logic, coupled with the fact that labour markets are also becoming global, and that the changing nature of work itself necessitates learning throughout the human lifespan as well as up-skilling, has paved the way for lifelong learning to become a dominant discourse, albeit one that favours its economic dimension. This dominant notion of LLL has gained currency under the auspices of IGOs that have, in recent years, presented it as a "master concept" or "organizing principle" for education policy to adapt to the changes brought forth by globalization and the imperatives of an alleged new social order: the global knowledge economy.

As a result, national governments have adopted the narrative of the knowledge economy or knowledge society when producing educational reforms and orienting their efforts towards the development of LLL systems, programmes and strategies. Because IGOs use strong political mobilization and cooperation mechanisms, national and regional authorities have embraced the globally converging discourse of LLL, but have adapted it so as to accommodate local traditions and aspirations. However, in the interplay between local ideals and the global LLL discourse, unresolved tensions have arisen between economic growth and social cohesion, between employability and citizenship, and, ultimately, between competitiveness and equity as the drivers and contexts of LLL.

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Indeed, this converging discourse was aided by the global financial crisis of 2008 and the resulting job losses. Since then, many claims and justifications for LLL as a policy solution have articulated the need to develop, generalize and systematize lifelong learning as a response to unemployment and to allow individuals to change jobs three or four times in their lifetime. This approach to LLL as an instrument for adaptability to the labour market is reflected in multiple education policy documents around the world. Within these policy documents, it is clear that social cohesion and active citizenship have become functions of economic growth instead of ends in themselves. Both objectives are reformulated into utilitarian notions of wellbeing in which social cohesion and active citizenship are valued inasmuch as they provide a better framework for economic growth.

As a result, numerous education policies around the world have embraced vocational education and training as a solution to the problems of unemployment, and have prioritized occupational courses and competences within compulsory and adult education, sometimes narrowing the curriculum to hard skills[2] or disciplines that are thought to produce better chances of employment. The same is true of the renewed emphasis on 21st century skills, transferrable skills, and the teaching of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) around the world, which is now encouraged "not for its own sake or for better understanding of the natural world, but to take advantage of the new opportunities associated with the knowledge economy, and to contribute to the national productivity and innovation agendas" (Rizvi, 2017, p. 7).

THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE OF LIFELONG LEARNING

From a plethora of scholarly works, four main purposes emerge for LLL: (i) promoting economic development and employment; (ii) social inclusion, cohesion and democratic participation; (iii) personal growth and self-fulfilment; and (iv) cultural development and enrichment. These objectives are valued and assessed in different ways by both IGOs and governments, which tend to stress or prioritize certain goals over others, depending on their interpretation of societal needs. It can be argued that while IGO or governmental formulations tend to retain the main characteristics of LLL, namely learner-centredness, universal participation and learning in non-formal settings, their emphasis varies and increasingly tends to fall within the economic domain.

A set of tensions can be identified that might cause LLL to shift from the social and cultural to the economic realm, and cause IGOs and governments to prioritize the latter. Among them are the tension between learning and education as paradigms that guide lifelong education or LLL policies and strategies; the tension between adaptation and transformation as the ultimate goal of LLL; and the tension between the knowledge society and the knowledge-based economy as the backdrops – and desired scenarios – against which LLL is offered. These tensions are addressed below.

2 UNESCO's International Bureau of Education, in its Glossary of Curriculum Terminology (2013) defines hard skills as "skills typically related to the professional or job-related knowledge, procedures, or technical abilities necessary for an occupation. Normally they are easily observed and measured".

TENSIONS BETWEEN EDUCATION AND LEARNING

A definite feature of the converging notion of LLL is the shift from education to learning in educational discourse, a shift that acknowledges learning as connatural to human existence, a lifelong process that transcends education systems, placing the learner and their needs and aspirations at the centre of the process and focusing on the importance of individuals taking responsibility for their own learning throughout their lives. While education and learning are terms sometimes used interchangeably in education policy, learning has been favoured over education in LLL policies and initiatives. The transition from education to learning is justified by some authors and IGOs as a shift that focuses on the results of education, and on the learners rather than the teachers or education providers. While there are good arguments for this shift, perhaps the most common being the empowering nature of a learner-centred approach and the avoidance of possible power imbalances and authoritarianism on the part of the teachers, it has consequences that are not so much pedagogical as political in nature.

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Some authors argue that dropping the term "education" in favour of "learning" in education policy may disguise a major political shift, i.e. the shift from a social democratic tradition to a neoliberal concept (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). This emphasis on learning rather than education shifts the responsibility from the state (as bearer of the duty to fulfill the right to education) towards the market (i.e. demand-driven versus supply-driven education) and the individual, who is now "burdened" (Biesta, 2015) with the duty to learn and to do so throughout his or her life, something Griffin (2000) has identified as the "moral bullying" of the lifelong learning discourse. This shift in responsibility comes with an underlying argument: that the responsibility of individuals and organizations for their own learning means that public forms of education seem increasingly incapable of meeting their needs (Griffin, 2000).

Indeed, the discrediting of education systems and policies is a common practice among "learning" enthusiasts. "The rhetoric of lifelong learning policy often includes the premise that public education has failed, or at least could not succeed in the future, either in meeting peoples' learning needs or in promoting access and equal opportunity" (Griffin, 1999, 2000). This raises questions about the validity of that assumption and the evidence base that might support it. According to Griffin (op. cit.), there is certainly reason to believe that lifelong learning – within this conceptualization – may form part of a much wider policy for reforming the welfare state itself. One of the main concerns here is that a neoliberal, market-oriented view of lifelong learning may open the door to the widespread privatization of education, and that this, in turn, may have serious consequences for access to, and equal opportunity in, education, since markets reproduce inequality and only governments can redistribute opportunities (Griffin, 2000, p. 6). As put by Griffin, "the policy discourse of lifelong learning usually projects it as an expansion of learning opportunities, but not always as the expansion of public provision" (ibid.).

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In addition, another concern arising from the systematic substitution of the term learning for education is that learning is a much more ambiguous concept upon which to base public decision-making. Learning is a vaguer policy objective. Indeed, while, it is easy to say who benefits and who loses from policy decisions in public education, "lifelong learning apparently advantages everyone and disadvantages no-one" (Griffin, 2000, p. 7).

Gert Biesta has referred to this phenomenon as the "*learnification* of education discourse and practice" (2015, p. 76). He identifies a number of discursive shifts (e.g. the use of "teaching and learning" instead of "education" or the use of the word "learners" instead of "students") that have taken place recently, and explains the perils of confusing education and learning. He posits that learning is a process that is "individualistic and individualizing" and as such undermines the relational nature of educational practice; also that learning is a neutral term that denotes neither

its content nor its purpose (2012, p. 7). Lacking content, purpose and relationships (Biesta, 2015, p. 76), learning by itself appears to be a rather void concept, and lifelong learning (on this understanding) to be a superfluous policy objective: we may have a choice between means alone, but we cannot choose the ends of education policy (Griffin, 2000).

According to Biesta the language of learning prevents people from asking the key educational questions about content, purpose, and relationships or, in other words, the threefold purpose of education that entails qualification, socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2012, 2015). This typology is helpful in understanding how the values driving education might be simultaneously complementary, contrasting or contradicting. For example, successfully pursuing a qualification, depending on the pedagogical approach that a given education provider or teacher adopts, might have positive or negative effects on the socialization of a student, and the construction of their subjectivity. Therefore, the author suggests bringing the question of purpose into the discussion of lifelong learning so that the policy-making agenda and the direction in which lifelong learning is steered become visible and can be the subject of debate (Biesta, 2012).

According to Lima (2014), this discourse of LLL posits modernization and functional adaptability to the learning economy and society as the main objectives of learning policies, rather than the – previously more common – educational ideals of developing critical thinking or enabling social transformation. One interpretation of the shift from education to learning is proposed by Griffin (2000) and Biesta (2006), among others, who see it as a symptom of the erosion of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberalism. This erosion, according to Milana (2012), affects the role of the state in redistributing wealth through public provision, and privatizes the relationship between the state and its citizens (p. 105). On this view, the citizen is understood as a consumer and education as a commodity that, as such, can be purchased, sold, or exchanged in the market. This privatization and commodification of education and learning erodes the welfare state and undermines the responsibility of the state to respect, protect, and fulfil the fundamental right to education. The transition from education to learning, in this understanding, suggests a new mission statement for LLL "as a management tool of the work force; as a means to prevent forms of social conflict; and as a tool for adaptability" (Barros, 2012, pp. 125-126).

TENSIONS BETWEEN ADAPTATION AND TRANSFORMATION

A particular and limited concept of learning has prevailed over education as a guiding paradigm for LLL. This has been the choice of recent discursive and policy constructs that steer LLL towards the adaptation of individuals and societies to the alleged changes in the world today and the speed at which they occur. This translates, mostly, into adaptation to the new conditions imposed by economic globalization. In this approach, LLL is viewed as the preferred formula for preparing individuals and societies for a life of uncertainty and insecurity, unstable jobs and changing work profiles and locations (World Bank, 2003). This vision of the nomad worker requires people to adapt constantly to new living conditions, new technologies and new work requirements that enable them to adjust to a world in constant evolution. But adaptability as an objective of lifelong learning goes beyond the labour market. Most flagship initiatives and policy documents, from both IGOs and governments, posit adaptation to different societal scenarios as their main goal. This zest for adaptation – and sometimes resilience – suggests that LLL may be helpful in adapting to changes in technology, the economy and the labour market rather than in critically analysing the causes and consequences of those changes and the differentiated impact they have on the wellbeing of individuals and societies (Vargas, 2013).

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Adaptation as a goal of LLL has come to replace a previous emphasis in lifelong education on social transformation. While the Faure Report underlined the role of education in the transformation of individuals, institutions, education systems and societies, the Delors Report focused rather on adaptation to new times, and to change. *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1996, p. 18) suggested the need "to rethink and update the concept of lifelong education so as to reconcile three forces: competition, which provides incentives; co-operation, which gives strength; and solidarity, which unites". The introduction of competition as an incentive in education and of LLL as a means to adapt to the changes in the labour market was construed by some critics as an ideological shift from the Faure Report, which underscored the transformation of social structures, and as a vision "influenced by conventional development discourse" (Tawil and Cougoureux, 2013, p. 4).

However, the tension identified in the Delors Report between competition and equality of opportunity was rather a call for caution in the face of the increasingly popular economistic views of education, and its call for adaptation was twofold: on the one hand, the adaptation of lifelong education to changes in the nature of work, and on the other, adaptation as a tool for individuals to maintain and exercise self-determination:

> There is a need to rethink and broaden the notion of lifelong education. Not only must it adapt to changes in the nature of work, but it must also constitute a continuous process of forming whole human beings – their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act. It should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community (UNESCO, 1996, p. 21).

There is little mention in global education policy of the role that LLL might play in questioning the nature of the changes to which societies are supposed to adapt, and even less in the role that LLL might play in helping transform the structures that produce individualism and inequality.

Unfortunately, only one of these dimensions has been captured in the globally converging discourse of LLL, that of functional adaptability to the market. There is little mention in global education policy of the role that LLL might play in questioning the nature of the changes to which societies are supposed to adapt, and even less in the role that LLL might play in helping transform the structures that produce individualism and inequality. As noted by Nesbit, according to this notion lifelong learning "is individually focused, acontextual and adopted a little too readily by those who believe education entails adherence to, rather than challenge of, social orthodoxies" (Nesbit, 2006, cited in Boshier, 2011, p. 82).

THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND THE ROLE OF LIFELONG LEARNING

The globally converging discourses of LLL are embedded within a social concept that is closely tied to an understanding of the knowledge economy, that interprets the role of education in market terms, based on an assumption that continuous learning is essential for the changing demands of the global economy and for forming the human capital, knowledge and skills it needs.

The changes in the economy brought forth by globalization and by a neoliberal understanding of the role of knowledge and education in the production and distribution of wealth have given birth to the Knowledge Based Economy (KBE). The liberalization of trade, changes in production, consumption and distribution of goods, the deindustrialization of the economy, and rapid technological change have been adopted as the main reasons why people need to continue learning throughout their lives if they are to remain employable. These changes, and the rise of the KBE, have produced profound transformations in the nature of work (e.g. casualization) and education. It is now presumed that new skills are needed to navigate these transformations, and thus re-skilling, up-skilling, and LLL have been deemed not only to solve unemployment and the risk of redundancy but also to promote widespread wellbeing.

Raising educational standards and "excellence" are part of the changes pervading education policy under the influence of the KBE. In the belief that cognitive skills and higher education levels will directly lead to more jobs, more growth and more wellbeing, education systems have transformed the content and pedagogy of education and learning so as to serve the interests of the economy. Inspired by human capital theory, the idea of the KBE rests upon three main postulates that seem to find no clear confirmation in current patterns of employment and growth. First, that the attainment of higher education levels will invariably result in better job prospects for the learners; second, that higher skill levels or more specialized knowledge will bring higher earnings to those who have accumulated knowledge or developed highly specialized skills; and third, that economies are increasingly becoming non-industrial service economies as a result of the speed of technological development and the changing nature of the production process – that is, that there is a higher proportion of jobs in the market requiring qualified rather than unskilled labour. These assumptions are

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being challenged by patterns of graduate unemployment as well as by the growth in low-skilled employment observed in many parts of the world.

Despite this, the discourse of knowledge-based economies has helped shape education policies and particularly lifelong learning, for knowledge is viewed as the principal source of capital and production; consequently, education becomes paramount to improve productivity and competitiveness by enhancing the employability of individuals. In this approach, unemployment becomes a problem of lack of qualifications and skills (in the personal realm) and thus different formulae have been proposed to address the problem of skills mismatch and outdated knowledge, and to produce the right set of skills for work. Among these formulae are lifelong learning, work-based learning and vocational education and training which hold the promise not only of providing learners with the "right mix of skills", but also of helping society adapt to the "learning society" or the knowledge-based economy.

It may be argued that discourses around the "information society" have only diluted the economic determinism of global education policy that has been widely criticized in the past fifteen years. These discourses, however, are also articulated in notions of the KBE. As a result, there is no distinction – but rather a degree of ambiguity – between information and knowledge; between knowledge and learning; between the different kinds of knowledge and their usage; and most importantly, between the economy and society. This amalgamation of the idea of society with the economy has played a very important role in the normalization of the KBE concept and in the establishment of a "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1980) around the idea that education should adapt to the needs of the market and the economy, and that these needs are the same across countries and around the world.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A MORE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF LIFELONG LEARNING

It may be argued that the globally converging nature of the LLL discourse is evident from the fact that it serves the interests of the market ahead of those of the community, and has the potential for producing communities that are driven by individual self-interest and rampant inequalities. But an alternative characterization of LLL, anchored in the values of equality and inclusion, is not only possible but also desirable.

One of the main concerns about the globally converging discourse of LLL is that it conceives of education as a private affair instead of viewing it as a public and common good (UNESCO, 2015). This has serious implications for public policy for it drives education out of the public sphere and, as such, it is increasingly viewed not as an object of public concern (i.e. one that affects society as a whole) but of private benefit. The conceptualization of education as a service or a commodity that is subject to transaction assumes that it yields individual benefits and represents an advantage for individuals to position themselves better in the social realm than others who do not acquire such a commodity, or who cannot afford it. On this understanding of education as a positional good, it is argued that individuals who gain from education should pay for it. This presupposes the existence of a market that can provide whatever individuals are willing (and able) to buy. This is the reasoning behind the arguments for the privatization of education and against its free-of-charge provision. Likewise, the promise of employability makes this commodity all the more appealing, hence the reiterated emphasis.

There are other equally important concerns. For example, when education is seen as a private good, public policies prioritize efficiency over equity since it is assumed that social and economic progress can only be achieved through education systems that aim at satisfying the needs of the market, particularly those of the knowledge-based economy. Accordingly, educational purposes are defined instrumentally, in terms of their ability to prepare workers with a solid base of literacy and numeracy, who are flexible, creative and knowledgeable in ICTs, and who can work in culturally diverse environments. On the other hand, seeing LLL as a public and common good not only means that it is a public responsibility, but also that education can be shared by all members of society and that it contributes to generalized societal wellbeing (Rizvi, 2010). LLL as a public good plays an important role in reducing poverty because it prepares individuals to exercise citizenship and democracy; it protects the most vulnerable groups of society and it encourages greater equality in access to opportunities and

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wellbeing (Vargas, 2014). From this perspective, LLL policy can contribute to social cohesion and inclusion if it pursues equity in the access, treatment and outcomes of education, and if it attempts to avoid the reproduction of inequalities in employment and in civic, cultural and political participation. In this way, education can also contribute to economic growth and employment, but without necessarily being considered a private good and, most importantly, without doing so at the expense of others, their development and wellbeing.

Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good? (UNESCO, 2015) also highlighted the need "to reassert a humanistic approach to learning throughout life for social, economic and cultural development" (p. 37) and to integrate the social, economic and cultural dimensions of lifelong learning in order to reaffirm its relevance as the organizing principle for education. The publication goes on to suggest that education be considered not only as a public but as a common good so as to transcend instrumentality and to cater for "the growing demand for voice in public affairs […] and for greater accountability, openness, equity and equality in public affairs" (p. 72).

In crafting an alternative characterization of LLL, one that is different from "the discourse of competition, of personal striving, of constant becoming, of inclusion and exclusion, of stratification […] that hides beneath the cloak of the 'inherent goodness' of LLL" (Brine, 2006, p. 663), the concept of social justice may be an appropriate anchor value around which the multiple purposes of LLL can be articulated.

Nancy Fraser (1995, 1996, 2008) defines justice as "parity of participation" and explains that "overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction" (Fraser, 2008, p. 16, cited in Tikly and Barrett, 2013, p. 13). These institutionalized obstacles are the economic structures that deny them access to resources, the institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value that may deny them standing, and exclusion from the community where just claims can be made and injustice contested. Accordingly, Fraser (1996) identifies three dimensions of social justice – redistribution, recognition, and representation – which correspond to different axes of injustice, namely economic, cultural and political, and goes on to suggest remedies accordingly: redistribution for socioeconomic injustice (e.g. exploitation, marginalization and deprivation); recognition for cultural or symbolic injustice (e.g. domination, non-recognition, disrespect); and representation or parity of participation which includes elements of both recognition and redistribution so that people have the material resources necessary to develop a sense of agency, to have voice and "institutionalized [cultural] patterns of interpretation and evaluation" that ensure that people receive social respect for their difference and can achieve social esteem (Fraser, 1995, p. 141).

If applied to LLL policy, redistribution would imply securing access to educational opportunities for all throughout life, guaranteeing the possibility for learners to access, remain in and enjoy these opportunities, and ensuring that the outcomes of education can be achieved and enjoyed with relative equality. Recognition may be understood as identifying, acknowledging and addressing the claims, needs, desires and aspirations of those who have been marginalized from education, and participation would entail "the right of individuals and groups to have their voices heard in debates about social justice and injustice, and to actively participate in decision-making" (Tikly and Barrett, 2013, p. 13). In education, this means having a say as to when to learn, what to learn, how to learn, and most importantly why to do it; in other words, issues of content, pedagogy, curriculum and purpose.

Considering the aim in *Transforming our world: The 2030 Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015) of "leaving no one behind", and that SDG 4 aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", giving priority to those with lower qualifications, those at risk of social exclusion, and those with special learning needs (UNESCO, 2016), a different assemblage of values in which social justice is central might not only be welcome, but necessary. Such an approach would be helpful in order to redistribute opportunities, enhance participation, and recognize the structural reasons behind the exclusion and marginalization of such groups, thus acknowledging that their claims and needs may not be addressed solely by promoting LLL as leading to integration into the world of work or employability.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2016), which is inspired by a humanistic, rights-based vision of education and development based on the principles of dignity and social justice, also calls for a holistic vision of education and warns against "a narrow focus on work-specific skills" (p. 43).

Indeed, the promise of work and the role attached to it by society as a means of social integration, a way of giving meaning to personal life, a space for civic participation, and an engine for material progress is deeply problematic in today's society. The description of work as a "noble and ennobling activity" (Bauman, 2005, p. 8), so common in pre-modern times and modernity, does not sit easily with the reintroduction of, and the appeal for, a work *ethos* in

the 21st century. Besides the gap between the needs of consumption and production and the alienation and exploitation of workers, work can no longer provide a safe zone in which the self can be defined and developed, in which identities and life projects may be forged (Bauman, 2003). This is so not only because of the changes in the economy and the forms of production, but also because these changes have been accompanied – if not fuelled – by growing unemployment, the polarization of income, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and the casualization of labour and working conditions. Against this backdrop, the importance attached to work and employability as engines for self-realization and social cohesion becomes extremely dubious, especially in a context in which more education does not guarantee access to better jobs, or in some cases to the labour market at all.

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Educating for the sake of employment seems to be a contradiction at a time when there is more education but fewer jobs, an enhanced desire for autonomy but fewer opportunities to achieve it, greater access to information but less access to the places where decision-making occurs, and greater dissemination of civil and political rights (especially individual freedom) and democracy as the pathways of government, but at the same time less respect for economic, social and cultural rights (CEPAL, 2007). Although these asymmetries are pervasive across the social spectrum, they disproportionally affect those who are less privileged in socioeconomic and cultural terms. If these groups are to be prioritized as a target population of LLL and education policy, steps need to be taken, beyond employability, to promote their effective personal development and social inclusion.

> An alternative characterization of LLL that seeks to promote social justice must therefore simultaneously address the interdependent dimensions of redistribution, recognition and participation of marginalized groups. In so doing, it must go beyond employment, or explore how it might enhance other capabilities more closely attuned to these needs for recognition and participation.

Analysed from a social justice perspective, the emphasis on LLL for employment might fit the purpose of redistribution at the affirmative level[3], as it is thought that economic injustice might be redressed by employment or, at least, that individuals might improve their condition by entering the labour market. But employment alone, as a strategy, certainly does not address the need for the recognition of the most vulnerable groups and their cultural practices and understandings, or the need to enhance their participation in decision-making. An alternative characterization of LLL that seeks to promote social justice must therefore simultaneously address the interdependent dimensions of redistribution, recognition and participation of marginalized groups. In so doing, it must go beyond employment, or explore how it might enhance other capabilities more closely attuned to these needs for recognition and participation.

Opening up the social and cultural dimensions of LLL might promise a broadening of horizons in terms of how educational opportunities of a different kind could support the politics of recognition, which might in turn lay the ground for the appropriate politics of redistribution. From a social justice perspective, this involves cultural and symbolic changes in the way that certain social groups are constructed. According to Fraser this could involve "upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups […] and positively valorizing cultural diversity" (1996, p. 73). In practical terms, this means recognizing what people want beyond social mandates, global concepts and dominant discourses; that is, a process of lifelong learning that can provide different elements of wellbeing, beyond redistribution. This includes developing the tools to identify, analyse and "problematize" the social, political and cultural structures that support poverty and marginalization, and that represent barriers for people in achieving their desired situations.

In terms of representation and participation, LLL processes may also help exercise the capacity to aspire by cultivating the voice of the poor and the marginalized (Appadurai, 2004). While the "the oppressed, if given the chance, can speak and know their conditions" (Spivak, 1995), their chances to "speak" most often tend to be neglected as result of misrecognition and misrepresentation. The effects of misrecognition in education can vary from lack of access to certain forms of

3 Nancy Fraser proposes two kinds of remedies for socioeconomic and cultural injustice. Affirmative remedies, she argues, consist of "remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them" while transformative remedies aim at "correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework" (1995, p. 82).

education (or the favouring of certain groups over others), to "the various subtle ways in which the content of education reflects particular dominant values and silences or misinterprets the values of culturally marginalized groups" (Power and Taylor, 2013, p. 468).

Recently, Conradie and Robeyns (2013) examined the potential role of voicing and examining aspirations in their possible fulfilment and in breaking adaptive preferences. They discovered that the process of voicing aspirations reflexively among one marginalized group led to the birth of new aspirations or the discovery of "latent aspirations" i.e. aspirations that are believed to be out of reach but are actually accessible. The authors also argue that aspirations can play two roles in human development: a "capabilities-selecting role" by which the capabilities to be developed – by a small human development intervention – may be selected by the target group, and an "agency-unlocking role" which consists of triggering action leading to the materialization of aspirations, based on awareness raising and reflexivity.

Grounded in critical pedagogy and common in popular education, these kinds of practices provide examples of how LLL can play an important role in addressing and surmounting social disadvantage by promoting not only people's capacity to aspire, but more importantly, their chances of escaping marginalization. If LLL is to truly promote social justice through policies of redistribution, recognition and representation, the ultimate objective of LLL would need to shift from the adaptation of people, policies and systems to economic mandates, to the transformation of the conditions that such mandates impose upon us all, but most importantly upon the poor and the marginalized. In this alternative conceptualization of LLL, the capacity to influence, modify and transform reality and the self would be the core of the curriculum and the pedagogical approaches.

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A social justice approach to LLL would also reconcile economic growth and social cohesion, and would uphold the latter not as a function of the economy or a prerequisite for it, but rather as the amplification of what is collective, common and social, including a sense of community. For the state, this would mean a central policy focus on combating inequalities in and through education, and opening up learning opportunities that simultaneously promote the development of skills and competencies for decent work, social and political participation, cultural development and self-fulfilment. Such learning opportunities, based on the needs, interests and characteristics of local communities, could promote a critical awareness of the sources and effects of inequalities, as well as a realization that reality is not a given, but a social construct which, as such, may be challenged and transformed in a lifelong process of discovery, questioning and judging; in other words, in a lifelong learning process.

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