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ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION - FROM THE ORIENTATION TO ELITE THROUGH DEMOCRATISATION TO PARENTOCRACY

ABSTRACT. Sobczak Anna, *Access to Higher Education – From the Orientation to Elite Through Democratization to Parentocracy* [Dostęp do szkolnictwa wyższego – od orientacji na elitę poprzez demokratyzację do parentokracji]. *Studia Edukacyjne* nr 50, 2018, Poznań 2018, pp. 121-133. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 1233-6688. DOI: 10.14746/se.2018.50.8

The article aims to describe the changes that have taken place in access to higher education over the years. The author began her reflections from ancient times, when higher education was initiated, and ends in modern times, characterized by mass education at a higher level. The article points out that the university and higher education system has undergone many transformations over the centuries, and elite studies have evolved into egalitarian ones. The phenomenon of parentocracy, which is more and more common in the current conditions of general education in higher schools, is also discussed.

Key words: higher education, elite, university, democratization of education

In all contemporary societies education plays a very important role in the socio-professional biography of individuals, and on a macro-scale also in the social and economic development of countries. This particularly applies to the higher education system, and therefore the problem of access to this level of education is in the focus of interest of both education sociologists and educational politicians. The former make further attempts to explain trends in this area.

The symbol of academic education at the higher level is the university. In the past, higher education, besides the guarantee of achieving a high social position, was a value in itself. Józef Górniewicz points out that higher education was elite for many centuries. In the past, the majesty of the university, which was the third value in the country, was exhibited. Almost on an equal footing with the political (royal) and clergyman (papal and bishop's) power

stood the university with its authorities, staff and appropriately selected students, who were to constitute the state elite in the future, holding the highest offices and occupying a high position in the social hierarchy.¹

Currently, in the social and educational discourse, the issue of the so-called "crisis of the university" is more and more frequently raised, which is related, among other things, to the general, almost unlimited access to higher education, resulting in transformations of ideas and its functions. In this context, we can discuss Lucjan Suchanek's thesis about the fact that in the past the socialisation function of the university, consisting in educating and shaping the awareness of individuals, used to play a greater role than today.² There is also talk of the phenomenon of overeducation of society caused by the overproduction of people holding an academic diploma. The aim of the article is to describe how access to higher education has changed over the years, as well as what social and economic effects were caused by the discussed transformations.

Although the institutional form of a university was born in the Middle Ages, I will start my considerations from ancient times, when the foundations of a modern university were laid in ancient Greece. It was in this country that higher education began in 387 BC. It was represented by philosophical schools in classical Athens, including the so-called Academy and the Lykeyon school. The Academy was founded by Plato in 387 BC. It is considered to be the first officially established higher education institution in the Western world.³ Education at the Plato's Academy consisted of aesthetic, military and mental education. Philosophy and mathematics played an important role in the education process.⁴ Education at the Academy was based on the idea of the master-student relationship. Plato included his curriculum, which was defined in great detail, in his great utopias, namely in the works entitled: "The Republic (State) and Rights".⁵ He described how an ideal state should be organized, which will consist of the following three states: ruling philosophers, guards and providers. In Plato's opinion, only the two highest states, id est ruling

¹ J. Górniewicz, *Stare i nowe problemy szkolnictwa wyższego – wprowadzenie w problematykę* [in:] *Szkolnictwo wyższe wczoraj i dziś. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Eds. J. Górniewicz, M. Warmiński, Olsztyn 2017, p. 7.

² Por. L. Suchanek, *Studia masowe i elitarne. Jaki ma być homo occidentalis*, [in:] *Szkolnictwo wyższe w obliczu zmian*, Tomaszowice 15-17 listopada 2014, t. II, Ed. Sz. Biliński, Kraków 2015, p. 47.

³ W. Mingqin, S. Jing, S. Yuanping, *Research on the Higher Education Ideas in Ancient Greece and Its Modern Values*, Cross-Cultural Communication, 2015, 11(8), p. 11.

⁴ S. Litak, *Historia wychowania*, t. 1 – *Do wielkiej rewolucji francuskiej*, Kraków 2006, p. 29-30, Quote for: P. Mazur, *Zarys historii szkoły*, Kielce – Myślenice 2012, p. 17.

⁵ H.I. Marrou, *Historia wychowania w starożytności*, Warszawa 1969, p. 113, Quote for: P. Mazur, *Zarys historii szkoły*, p. 18.

philosophers and guards, needed education.⁶ According to his assumptions students were selected during school education, which began at the age of 10. Those who were described as less talented were to become representatives of the second state, id est guards. On the other hand, the more talented were to continue learning. According to Plato, the most talented of them, especially in mathematics, as well as the most physically resistant should continue their studies until the age of 30, so that at the end of this educational “path” they would become part of the state of ruling philosophers, id est the group leading the state.⁷ Therefore it should be concluded that in ancient times higher education had an elite character, and its aim was to select persons belonging to the highest state. W. Mingqin, S. Jing, S. Yuanping note that one of the main tasks of higher education in ancient Greece, in addition to spreading knowledge, was to create a social hierarchy.⁸ In later years more philosophical schools were established, including the aforementioned Lycéeon founded by Aristotle in 335 BC. It is claimed that they ceased their activity at the beginning of the 6th century A.D., so they functioned and set the directions of social stratification for over 900 years. It is emphasized that ancient philosophical schools in Greece played an important role in the history of higher education.⁹

The idea of higher education, which was born many centuries ago in ancient Greece, directly influenced the formation of medieval universities.¹⁰ Their origins were in the 11th century, and their formation was associated with the growing society’s needs for educated staff at that time.¹¹ An intensive development of sciences such as law, philosophy and medicine began in the Middle Ages. It was necessary to increase the number of years of studies, as well as to create masters in these fields in order to obtain this type of education. Universities were developing in urban centres, which were inhabited by both a number of learned professors and an appropriate number of young people. Cities also served as a model in terms of an organisational structure corresponding to the guild at the time. In the same way as the guild gathered craftsmen, which included masters and students, universities gathered professors and students in individual cities.¹² Katarzyna Duras points out that the term “university” initially meant a corporation of teachers (guild) and students (it was common to say: *universitas magistrorum et*

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Por. S.I. Możdżeń, *Zarys historii wychowania*, Kielce 1999, p. 33-34, Quote for: Ibidem.

⁸ W. Mingqin, S. Jing, S. Yuanping, *Research on the Higher Education Ideas*, p. 13.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 11.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Z. Drozdowicz, *Ludzie uniwersytetu*, Nauka, 2013, 3, p. 37.

¹² K. Dormus, *O szkole dawnej i współczesnej – ewolucja instytucji szkolnej od starożytności do dnia dzisiejszego*, p. 4, <http://utw.up.krakow.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/o-szkole-dawnej-skr%C3%B3t.pdf> [access: 16.11.2018].

scholarum), while over the years it became a term for the university itself and all the education taught at it. The author also stresses that the medieval university had a two-level and four-majors structure. At a lower level there was the so-called atrium major, which meant liberated arts (philosophy). After graduating from a lower level of university education, the student was entitled to undertake higher education and could choose between law, medicine and theology.¹³

The first university was founded in Bologna in 1088, the next one in Paris around 1150 and in Oxford around 1216.¹⁴ These universities were established as a result of the transformation of existing cathedral schools (as was the case with the University of Bologna and the University of Paris, among others), or were created as new institutions (for example, the University of Cambridge and the University of Padua). The university community has included both teachers and students of these institutions since the first years of their activity.¹⁵ Medieval education, also at a higher level, was addressed to people from all social classes.¹⁶ University education in the Middle Ages, as is the case today, was therefore theoretically available to every person who wanted to study at the university.¹⁷ The situation was different in the later period of functioning of universities, most of which were established at the turn of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.¹⁸ Piotr Mazur pointed out that "the Renaissance was connected with a certain aristocratization of culture and intellectual environments. (...) fewer children from the lower social stratum reached a relatively high level of education. Schools were oriented towards education of youth from higher social stratum: nobility and bourgeoisie".¹⁹ Zbigniew Drozdowicz, on the other hand, using the words of R. Romano, emphasizes that the intellectual "atmosphere" at the then universities was characterized by the fact that they were "extremely conservative institutions, where it was not easy to get, nor especially nice".²⁰ Such a state of affairs was also desirable

¹³ Ibidem, p. 4.

¹⁴ S. Wołoszyn, *Dzieje wychowania i myśli pedagogicznej w zarysie*, Warszawa 1964, p. 84, Quote for: D. Hejwosz, *Edukacja uniwersytecka i kreowanie elit społecznych*, Kraków 2010, p. 74.

¹⁵ Z. Drozdowicz, *Ludzie uniwersytetu*, p. 37.

¹⁶ J. Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, Warszawa 1993, p. 329-330, Quote for: P. Mazur, *Zarys historii szkoły*, p. 58.

¹⁷ D. Hejwosz, *Edukacja uniwersytecka*, p. 114.

¹⁸ E.W. Orth, *Die Kulturbedeutung der Universität*, [in:] *Die gute Universität. Beiträge zu Grundfragen der Hochschulreform*, Hrsg. A.W. Müller, R. Hettich, Baden-Baden 2000, p. 39-40, Quote for: A. Kobylarek, *Uniwersytet – zarys ewolucji idei podstawowej*, Nauka i Szkolnictwo Wyższe, 2002, 1(19), p. 90.

¹⁹ J. Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, p. 329-330, Quote for: P. Mazur, *Zarys historii szkoły*, p. 58.

²⁰ Por. R. Romano, *Włochy Renesansu*, Warszawa 1978, p. 101, 104 i d., Quote for: Z. Drozdowicz, *Ludzie uniwersytetu*, p. 44.

by representatives of the thinkers of those times, who while considering the issues of upbringing and education, directed them, in particular, to people coming from "good families". It is worth quoting here the views of Sebastian Petrycy from Plzeň (1554-1626), according to whom noble youth should be educated in secondary schools. Moreover, he was convinced that bourgeois youth should be educated more comprehensively and at a higher level. He believed that bourgeoisie should study theology or medicine.²¹ From these remarks emerges a picture of the Renaissance elite higher education, access to which was largely restricted to the lower social classes.

An important period in the history of higher education is the 19th century, when a scientific discussion on the idea of a university began again in Germany and England. Wilhelm von Humboldt, who at that time was the Minister of Education of Prussia, established a university in Berlin as the embodiment of the new idea of a university proclaiming freedom (independence) of teaching and research in 1809. The so-called Humboltonian concept of the university was born from his name.²² According to its assumptions, higher education had an elite character; the university was accessible only to the chosen ones.²³ Also the then widespread English idea of the university, which was in opposition to the Humboldt's research activity of the university, considered the function of shaping the personality of students (upbringing a gentleman) as the most important. Andrzej Kobylarek emphasizes that it consisted in educating the intellectual elite, and according to its assumptions, "the completion of studies should be a great ennoblement and testify to the status of man as a kind of chosen person, just like their beginning, which was also given to only a few".²⁴ Access to higher education still remained limited in the 19th century. Secondary and tertiary education was dedicated to the higher social stratum, despite the fact that it was a period of certain popularisation and democratisation of education, as well as more and more frequent demands for free education for all, which at that time was provided to the whole society, but only at the level of elementary school.²⁵

Summarizing the first part of my article I am able to state that the availability of particular levels of education for different social groups/classes definitely for centuries confirms Ralph Turner's concept of sponsored mobility, according to which the current elite gives individuals social status, so the selection

²¹ S. Litak, *Historia wychowania*, p. 11, Quote for: P. Mazur, *Zarys historii szkoły*, p. 58.

²² A. Kobylarek, *Uniwersytet – zarys ewolucji*, p. 92.

²³ Ł. Stankiewicz, *Krytyka umasowienia szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce i Stanach Zjednoczonych – analiza dyskursu mediów masowych*, Forum Oświatowe, 2016, 28(1), p. 110.

²⁴ A. Kobylarek, *Uniwersytet – zarys ewolucji*, p. 92-93.

²⁵ K. Bartnicka, I. Szybiak, *Zarys historii wychowania*, Warszawa 2001, p. 161, Quote for: P. Mazur, *Zarys historii szkoły*, p. 95.

process (also for higher education) is controlled²⁶ (the selected have the privilege of education in separate school institutions, which are not available for people without specific credentials²⁷). Formal and legal barriers existed in most societies hindering or precluding access to higher education for people of low background, as well as for women and racial and ethnic minorities over many centuries. Socio-educational practices during these periods have also strongly confirmed Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural and economic reproduction, which states that the position of individuals in society depends on the capitals they hold. According to Pierre Bourdieu, in addition to economic capital, social capital and cultural capital also belong to these capitals.²⁸ Generally speaking, it can be pointed out that economic capital is the material goods, cultural capital – knowledge, and social capital – the position in the social network.²⁹ These capitals determine the educational success of individuals, influencing, among other things, access to the best and most prestigious higher education institutions.

Increasing access to secondary and then higher education in the 20th century, and especially after the Second World War, is connected on the one hand with economic needs, on the other hand with emancipatory movements, as well as a broadly understood struggle for equal rights. Over time, education began to lose its sponsored character and became more and more part of Ralph Turner's theory of contest mobility, according to which obtaining high social status and well-paid professions takes place in a process of "open" competition within the education system,³⁰ with the same chances of success for each child.³¹ Liberally oriented theorists and ideologists began to expose the concept of meritocracy, which assumes that the task of education is to create preliminary principles of equality as well as possibilities of social mobility on the ladder of professional hierarchy, and the achieved level will result from personal

²⁶ R.H. Turner, *Sponsored and contest mobility and the school system*, [in:] *Readings in the theory of educational system*, Ed. E. Hopper, London 1971, p. 74, Quote for: Z. Melosik, *Współczesne amerykańskie spory edukacyjne (między socjologią edukacji a pedagogiką postmodernistyczną)*, Poznań 1994, p. 23.

²⁷ M. Huberman, *Learning, democratizing and deschooling*, [in:] *Deschooling*, Ed. I. Lister, Cambridge 1974, p. 47, Quote for: Z. Melosik, *Współczesne amerykańskie spory*, p. 23.

²⁸ P. Bourdieu, *The forms of capital*, [in:] *Handbook of theory and research for sociology of education*, Ed. J.G. Richardson, New York – London 1986, p. 241-258, Quote for: T. Zarycki, *Kapitał kulturowy – założenia i perspektywy zastosowań teorii Pierre'a Bourdieu*, *Psychologia Społeczna*, 2009, 4, 1-2(10), p. 12.

²⁹ I. Szelenyi, D. Treimana, E. Wnuk-Lipiński, *Elity w Polsce, w Rosji i na Węgrzech. Wymiana czy reprodukcja?* Warszawa 1995, p. 11, I'm quo te: A.M. Kola, *Problemy kształcenia elit. Przypadek studiów doktoranckich w Polsce*, p. 20-21, <https://repozytorium.umk.pl/handle/item/2737> [access: 26.11.2018].

³⁰ R.H. Turner, *Sponsored and contest*, p. 74, Quote for: Z. Melosik, *Współczesne amerykańskie spory*, p. 23.

³¹ M. Huberman, *Learning, democratizing*, Quote for: Z. Melosik, *Współczesne amerykańskie spory*, p. 23.

achievements of individuals. According to these assumptions, the educational system is therefore responsible for situating individuals in the social structure.³² However, it should be noted that alternative analyses indicated that education still serves the economic and cultural reproduction of dominant classes.

In the second part of my article I will present the phenomenon of democratisation and dissemination of higher education, which has taken place over the last decades. Increasing access to higher education, as it has already been mentioned earlier, occurred after the end of the Second World War. Higher education in the world experienced many important changes at that time, gradually moving away from the elite nature of higher education to the egalitarian model of education, which was becoming increasingly subordinated to the needs of the labour market. Higher education in both Europe and the United States has undergone a number of transformations since the middle of the 20th century, including its dissemination as well as the associated new role for higher education.³³

The massification of higher education had three main objectives: economic, respect for individual rights and mass education for democracy. The first one was related to the hope that access to higher education would increase the value of human capital. It was assumed that universal access to academic education would result in the attainment of higher education by a significant part of talented people from all social groups. Andrzej Radzewicz-Winnicki, citing Elżbieta Wnuk-Lipińska, points out that “systems talents were wasted in elite school, both in workers’ and peasants’ circles, as well as among national minorities”. The author adds that the assumption of this approach was to combine investment in human capital with an increase in labour productivity.³⁴ Undoubtedly, this position is in line with the human capital theory having its origins in the 1960s, which states that people develop their competences, as well as technical skills in the process of education, thus increasing their productive potential as a labour force in the labour market.³⁵ The source of the second of the objectives of massification of higher education was the

³² T. Bilton (red.), *Introductory sociology*, London 1987, p. 314, Quote for: T. Gmerek, *Edukacyjne kredencjaty i sukces życiowy młodzieży współczesnej*, [in:] *Młodzież wobec nieogócinnej przyszłości*, Eds. R. Leppert, Z. Melosik., B. Wojtasik, Wrocław 2005, p. 205.

³³ M. Dybaś i in., *Szkolnictwo wyższe*, [in:] *Kontynuacja przemian. Raport o stanie edukacji*, Eds. M. Federowicz, A. Wojciuk, Warszawa 2012, p. 122.

³⁴ E. Wnuk-Lipińska, *Innowacyjność a konserwatyzm: uczelnie polskie w procesie przemian społecznych*, Warszawa 1996, p. 20-22, Quote for: A. Radzewicz-Winnicki, *Przeobrażenie się współczesnego uniwersytetu (w przywołanych ocenach ekspertów)*, [in:] *Edukacja akademicka. Między oczekiwaniami a rzeczywistością*, Ed. A. Ćwikliński, Poznań 2014, p. 104.

³⁵ J.U. Ogbu, *Investment in Human Capital: Education and Development in Stockton, California and Gwembe, Zambia*, [in:]: *Opportunity, Constraint, and Change: Essays in Honor of Elizabeth Colson*, Eds. J. Glazier, M. Lowy, K.T. Molohon, J.U. Ogbu, A. Peterson Royce, *The Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers*, 1984, 63 – 64, p. 104.

conviction that every person should have the opportunity to undertake education which would correspond to his or her talents and ambitions. According to this, any discrimination on grounds of race, sex, age, ethnic and social origin and material status is unacceptable. However, the last objective, was based on the assumption that the education system should enable all citizens to become familiar with national culture. Knowledge of the cultural heritage of a nation is to provide the basis for being a citizen of a democratic society.³⁶

As a result of easier access to higher education both in the USA and in many European countries, also in Poland there has been a significant increase in the number of people undertaking higher education. For example, the number of students was 8.5 million in the United States in 1970. Ten years later, it was already 12 million, while as many as 15.3 million Americans studied at this level in 2000. There was a record number of students attending American colleges and universities in 2010. At that time, 21 million people were studying.³⁷ In the case of Poland, the process of massification of higher education began in the last decade of the 20th century, namely in 1990, when the new Act on Higher Education came into force, breaking with the socialist legal system. More and more people have gradually undertaken higher education since then. The number of students exceeded 2 million in Polish universities in 2006, which meant an increase by over 400% compared to 1990. It should also be pointed out that in the same period the growth of the academic staff was only 70%, which largely influenced the form and quality of higher education. Despite the fact that there has been a decrease in the number of candidates for studies in recent years caused mainly by demographic decline, a significant percentage of each year of secondary school graduates is studying in the Polish higher education institutions. According to data from the Central Statistical Office, there were 1,348.8 thousand students in 390 higher education institutions of all types in Poland in the academic year 2016/2017.³⁸

It is worth stressing that the idea of democratisation of education, including higher education, which eliminated a number of formal and legal barriers, not only increased the overall number of students, but also contributed to increasing access to university education for social groups which have been discriminated against for a significant period in the history of academic education. One of them are women who once did not have full rights to undertake studies. We can now speak of equality between women and men in access

³⁶ E. Wnuk-Lipińska, *Innowacyjność a konserwatyzm*, p. 20-22, Quote for: A. Radziejewicz-Winnicki, *Przeobrażenie się współczesnego*, p. 104.

³⁷ *National Center for Education Statistics*, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_303.10.asp [access: 23.11.2018].

³⁸ Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Szkoły wyższe i ich finanse w 2016 r.*, Warszawa 2017, p. 25, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/szkoły-wyzsze-i-ich-finance-w-2016-r-,2,13.html>, [access: 23.11.2018].

to higher education. What is more, in quantitative terms, women represent a growing majority of the total number of students.³⁹ The analysis of women's access to higher education on an international scale by Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik showed that women constitute the majority of the total number of students in 51 countries of the world (out of 74 analysed).⁴⁰ Moreover, the author referring to the 2008 UNESCO report, indicates that "while there were 96 women for every 100 men studying in 1999 on a global scale, there were 105 of them in 2005".⁴¹ Our country does not differ from the majority of countries in the world in this respect. At present the female element predominates in higher education also in Poland. More than 387.5 thousand people graduated from higher education institutions in Poland in the academic year 2016/2017, of which 63.3% (245.4 thousand) were women.⁴²

Undoubtedly, it should be stressed that the above statistics confirm that there have been positive changes in access to higher education in recent decades, which enabled groups previously discriminated against to undertake the academic education. It is also worth mentioning that in some situations, in conditions of far-reaching political correctness so-called "positive" discrimination for young people with different skin colours was applied in the recruitment processes for the best universities in order to introduce forced equality in access to higher education (this applies, for example, to American universities, especially at the end of the 20th century).⁴³ Positive discrimination, also referred to as "reverse", consists in offering special privileges to groups previously discriminated against.⁴⁴ In the case of the United States, it concerned the situation in which young from ethnic minorities were awarded additional points by universities during enrolling for studies for the very fact of belonging to a given minority group.⁴⁵

To sum up, it seems that the history of the higher education system can be considered in the context of the dichotomy of inclusion - exclusion. On the

³⁹ A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Edukacja i nierówność społeczna kobiet. Studium dynamiki dostępu*, Kraków 2011, p. 103.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 130.

⁴¹ Raport UNESCO: Gender parity in education: Not there yet, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, March 2008, 1, p. 2, Quote for: A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Edukacja i nierówność*, p. 135.

⁴² Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Szkolnictwo wyższe w roku akademickim 2017/2018*, 15.06.2018 r. (dane wstępne), <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/szkolnictwo-wyzsze-w-roku-akademickim-20172018-dane-wstepne,8,5.html>, [access: 26.11.2018].

⁴³ Por. J.K. Wilson, *The Myth of Reverse Discrimination in Higher Education*, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 1995-1996, 10, p. 88-93.

⁴⁴ *Krajobraz dyskryminacji I*, Instytut Polityki Społecznej, Raporty Migracyjne nr 1/2003, <http://www.ips.uw.edu.pl/pliki/publikacje/migracje/raportm1.pdf> [access: 26.11.2018].

⁴⁵ M.M. Wiszowaty, *Sprawiedliwość ślepa czy wrażliwa na kolory? Akcja afirmatywna a zasada równości w najnowszym orzecznictwie Sądu Najwyższego Stanów Zjednoczonych dotyczącym preferencji rasowych przy ubieganiu się o przyjęcie na studia*, *Gdańskie Studia Prawnicze*, 2016, XXXV, p. 490.

one hand, it undoubtedly served more and more as a mechanism for opening up opportunities for representatives of disadvantaged groups to obtain a high social status and material level (income), but on the other hand, in the sociological context, it led to a large extent to the reproduction of social and financial status - from generation to generation. In this context, the theory of maximally maintained inequality developed by Adrian E. Raftery and Michael Hout can be recalled. According to the theory in the current conditions of universal education, including academic education, social inequalities are being created at ever higher levels.⁴⁶ This is why today, as Beata Gofron rightly points out, "«the rescue» at the level of higher education for individuals from groups highly placed in the social hierarchy can no longer be the creation of the next level of education. Therefore, the status of a diploma is confirmed by stratification within universities - then the divisions of universities are deepening due to their level, exclusiveness, prestige".⁴⁷ It follows that the dominant class ensures access to excellent credentials and, consequently, power and privileges in one way or another regardless of changes in access to the education. Another mechanism which serves this purpose is the elite secondary education with a boarding school, because, as Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik shows in her research, "in the labour market, due to the growing number of graduates of very good universities, it is the diploma of an elite secondary school that determines (...) the success in taking up the highest positions".⁴⁸ Finally, the results of many studies indicate that even in the case of the best universities, social and professional success is determined by social origin - the concept of parentocracy can be recalled here, which more and more often replaces the ideology of meritocracy, because now it is parents and their financial background, network of social contacts and life wisdom have a greater impact on the socio-professional success of their children than the academic diploma.⁴⁹ In other words, the children of parents with a high social status have more opportunities to use their diploma in the fight for professional success than other children. In a more illustrative way, for sons and daughters of doctors, lawyers, professors or senior managers, a diploma from universities such as Harvard, Oxford or Heidelberg enables much "more" than children from the working class.

⁴⁶ A.E. Raftery, M. Hout, *Maximally Maintained Inequality: Expansion, Reform, and Opportunity in Irish Education, 1921-75*, *Sociology of Education*, 1993, 66(1), p. 41-44.

⁴⁷ B. Gofron, *Funkcjonalizm i teoria konfliktu wobec idei równości w edukacji*, *Podstawy Edukacji*, 2008, 1, p. 63.

⁴⁸ A. Gromkowska-Melosik, *Elitarne szkolnictwo średnie. Między reprodukcją społecznokulturową a ruchliwością konkurencyjną*, Poznań 2015, p. 45.

⁴⁹ O. Kivinen, *Graduate Credentials in a Changing Labour Market*, *Higher Education in Europe*, 1997, 22, 4, p. 452-453; O. Kivinen, S. Ahola, *Higher Education as Human Risk Capital*, *Higher Education*, 1999, 38, p. 204, Quote for: Z. Melosik, *Uniwersytet i społeczeństwo. Dyskursy wolności, wiedzy i władzy*, Kraków 2009, p. 137, 138.

In today's conditions of mass higher education,⁵⁰ we are therefore faced with a fundamental (renewed) increase in the role of social origin in defining the opportunities for social and professional success of university graduates. Nevertheless, in the final summing-up, an optimistic conclusion has to be drawn: the history of higher education is determined to a large extent by increasing access to education and diplomas. Nor does it seem that these trends will be reversed in any way, as they are part of the broader idea of democratisation of life in Western societies.

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⁵⁰ See: M. Tomlinson, *Education, Work and Identity. Themes and Perspectives*, Bloomsbury Academic, London - New York 2013, p. 192.

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