**UNIVERSITY VALUES IN A CHANGING WORLD  
On the way towards a revised version of   
the Magna Charta Universitatum  
Salamanca, 17-18 September 2018**

***The Magna Charta Universitatum:***

***the original aims and the outcomes: retrospective from authors***

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To better understand the project to develop a Magna Charta Universitatum in 1988, we have to mention two important events which happened in the late eighties. Indeed, in 1968, the Single European Act (SEA) set a deadline for the creation of the Single Market: the first of January 1993. This new treaty required the member states to commit to establishing a Europe without internal borders by that date. No restrictions could delay the establishment of a genuine European internal market. The Single European Act was signed and ratified by the twelve-member states of the Community on July 1, 1987.

Moreover, in 1987, for first time the European institutions decided to intervene the higher education field. In fact, on 14th May, the European Council adopted an ERASMUS project of direct interest to 6 million students in the 12 Member States. The project aimed – and aims - towards the creation and development of a cooperation network between universities. The programme enforced the role of the Universities beyond their borders and the regulations of the European government.

I would like to underline the importance of that move which seemed to strengthen the will for ‘a Europe of the citizens’. Such a positive feeling, at that time was very much shared by university leaders and it spread an optimistic vision of the European dream.

These circumstances explain the initiative of the rector of the University of Bologna, Professor Roversi-Monaco, to convene a meeting of about thirty European universities, some days after the approval of the Erasmus Programme, under the subject *Oltre Erasmus*, ‘beyond Erasmus’. The meeting was the second one after the University of Leuven organised a first one in November 1986.

There, in Bologna, a committee was appointed to sketch out a draft of Magna Charta Universitatum. The text was written by the committee in the University of Barcelona in January 1988.

Probably the background idea of the Bologna meeting was to renew the university tradition much touched by the turmoil of the late 1960s. There was the suspicion that maybe we threw the baby out with the bath water. This concern of the University of Bologna for the future of universities was due to its special responsibility as the oldest of the European universities, just when the University was preparing to celebrate its nine hundredth anniversary The document of the Magna Charta Universitatum was approved and signed by 388 rectors and heads of universities from all over Europe and beyond on 18 September 1988 in a very moving ceremony in Bologna Piazza Maggiore.

Subsequent events enhanced the importance of this document. Effectively in 1989 there was the end of the division of Europe and the universities of the Central and Eastern Europe saw in the MC the project of the university which they longed for. Many universities subsumed the document or took account of it when drafting new regulations for their universities in those countries.

Let me consider two aspects of the MC that deserve special care today.

First, the definition of genuine universities among the higher education institutions. According to the M.C., universities are “autonomous institutions, independent of political authorities and economic powers” … “where teaching and research must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demand of the society and advances in scientific development”.

Second, to envisage the university as “the trustee of the European humanistic tradition, taking care to attain universal knowledge; to fulfil its vocations it transcends geographical and political frontiers…”.

I have chosen these two points of the text because I would like to make two suggestions.

1.- To avoid a short-term approach.

The excessive focus on short-term results at the expense of long-term achievement is a dangerous trend of our times where haste infects everywhere.

Since its origin, the concept of a university is that of a community of teachers and scholars with the purpose of generating and imparting knowledge through generations. It is difficult therefore to apply the notion and the formula of a private business or a merely vocationally-oriented school. Nor it is possible to impose on a university system the concept of the market, as it is debatable whether the conditions for a competitive market exist. Seeing universities in market terms does not recognise their fundamental role of creating an environment in which the creative tension between students, the academics and the institution itself is held together thanks to the common commitment to a love of learning.

In fact, the development of humanism in parallel with the scientific revolution set up a new idea of truth as a provisional statement, not derived and given from above, but something to be discovered and then applied. The enlargement of the horizons of higher education in order to respond properly to the new social demands increased the number of the students and teachers. On the other hand, the joint venture of the new scientific discovery with the humanistic approach to the problems of mankind promoted both the practice of the social criticism and the capability of the university to nourish the technical and economic innovation. But this practice can be applied also to the institutions and social relations, supplying a rigorous basis to the social criticism.

Actually, research – a characteristic of the university among other institutions of higher education- spreads creativity as far as the students and future professionals become habituated to throw doubt upon previous knowledge and the traditional skills. This creativity is the required condition to display ability to innovate in the laboratories as well as in the process of production in the society after the Industrial Revolution.

Today different actors, public and private, are engaged in the innovation process, and their role has changed over the time. Universities and public agencies now fund the science base. Universities in particular could proudly promote the pursuit of knowledge and ensure the continuity of generating knowledge through their time-honoured hotbed, without worrying about generating immediately profitable patents and spin-off companies.

2.- To resist tight budgets.

An ideological trend not very deferential nor consistent with the achievement of the welfare state has been to impose tight budgets. Such a policy has imposed a transition in the university sector, whereby income from tuition fees has gradually supplanted direct government funding over the last few decades and lead to a conception of the student as a customer.

As the tuition fees have increased dramatically, the volume of student loans in some countries has reached an important weight in the indebtedness system.

One of the effects of the financial restraint has been to bring together the universities with commercial enterprises in order to launch joint activities. Very recently a possible abuse of such a collaboration has just been detected in a prestigious European university and has received some criticism in the media.

But we need to pay attention to an even more dangerous impact. The cost of education will probably grow in the future. That imposes a huge inequity on those who are not qualified for financial aid. If you add legacy preference to diversity, you find a shrinking space for meritocratic admission. As it has been commented “what is happening to college admissions offices, mirrors larger trends in society. As people lose faith in meritocracy they turn to identity politics, nihilism, or apathy”.

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New challenges demand perhaps risky decisions. To keep the tradition, means sometimes to throw out the bath water.