

**KRYSTIAN SZADKOWSKI:
REGAINING EDUCATION. CASE STUDY: THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES IN ZAGREB 2009 – THE OCCUPATION COOKBOOK**

“The real education of the masses can never be separated from their independent political, and especially revolutionary, struggle. Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizon, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will”.

V.I. Lenin, *Lecture on the 1905 Revolution*¹

Lenin was absolutely right. Real education, the development of emancipated identity, cannot be separated from the political struggle itself and vice versa. One cannot separate the content of political emancipation from its form. Political practice, as well as political theory, is undergoing a qualitative shift.² Students and workers’ protests are no exception to this rule. This change can be depicted by the transition from the old Leninist question “*what* is to be done?” to “*how* is it to be done?” As long as the enemy, namely neo-liberal policies trying to privatize the common wealth, is well-recognized, seeking effective forms of struggle is a task of the greatest importance.

Since 2006, we have witnessed an enormous wave of resistance across university campuses all over the world, such as *onda anomala* in Italy, instances of campus occupation in California, protests in Puerto Rico or recent mass demonstrations of students and trade unions against budget cuts in Great Britain. The common features of all those protests are resistance to the mechanisms of privatization of higher education, making reference to a whole range of social protests and to a certain degree, making use of the method of occupational strikes to achieve their objectives.

In the structure of cognitive capitalism, the university takes the place of the factory.³ If we accept such theory, can university be perceived in the same way as a factory that can be occupied? Is it possible to take control over university and change the operating objectives of the entire structure, developing other types of identities by means of knowing how to create knowledge in the form of the common good? It is thus essential to understand the difference between occupying and taking control over a university or faculty.

The two longstanding occupations of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb in 2009 shed some light on these questions. The main aim of this case study is not to present the events themselves but the way the takeover was organized and control over the university maintained, which may be used as a point of reference for the organization of future protests. *The Occupation Cookbook*, a brochure written and published by the participants of the Croatian takeover forms the basis of this presentation.⁴

The Faculty was taken over for 34 days in April/May and later, in a similar form, for two weeks in November 2009. During the first occupation, nearly 20 university faculties in eight different Croatian cities joined the occupational strike in protest against higher education reforms and increases in tuition fees. ‘Occupations across the country were closely coordinated, thanks to the efforts of the FHSS occupants. The student takeovers has two common objectives: to resist the neo-liberal policies threatening free education for all, and a strong desire to experiment with direct democracy. However, the protests were also fought in the name of social equality and justice.

The students decided to take control over the only public space already available to them, as a means of opening a wider debate about the ongoing changes in higher education policy. Approximately 800 people took part on the first day of the occupation.

The difference between the occupation and the takeover was the establishment of the

¹ Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 23, p. 242

² See. M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Commonwealth*, where authors tries to formulate new *Tablaeu Economique* for biopolitical era. Claiming that old, quantitative categories, are not sufficient anymore for analysing the new forms of struggle against the rule of the capital. Compare also with Tiqqun, *How is to be done?*, which is an exemplary text with a model of thinking about political action in terms of *how*, rather than *what*, proposing a useful conception of *human strike*, a mode of resistance which suits a world where there is no more a possibility to divide between life and work, education and professional life.

³ See different investigations from the field of education on the website of Edu-Factory Collective: <http://www.edu-factory.org>

⁴ See. <http://slobodnifilozofski.org/?p=1915>

plenum, a collective open to all, a political body operating on the principles of direct democracy (majority vote) which legitimized the student takeover of the Faculty. The plenum decided that the Faculty should remain as open possible. Even though that policy of openness was controversial, it was generally deemed to be the right step toward gaining wide support from the Faculty's employees and the citizens of Zagreb. Regular lectures and activities were cancelled but the plenum allowed the professors to hold necessary exams in their own offices and all other facilities, such as the library or administrative office, functioned as normal. FHSS was closed at night, but everybody was allowed to sleep and eat inside the Faculty buildings. An alternative programme was established and classes and lectures on the most urgent social and political issues (such as the neo-liberal policy of privatization, the state of higher education or social inequality issues) were held.

The structure of the plenum and its technical character need to be clarified because it formed the core political identity of the protest in Zagreb. During the occupation, students rejected any need for a leader or representatives. They made every important decision collectively by a majority vote. The plenum was open to all (not only students from FHSS but citizens of Zagreb and other Faculties). Everyone had the right to vote and speak during the plenum. Decisions were binding for all. Discussions were managed by two moderators, always appointed at the end of the previous session. It was agreed that the position of moderator could only be held once in the academic year in order to avoid any personal pressure by the moderators. The plenum was able to establish working groups, though they were not given the right to make independent decisions; every decision had to be approved by the plenum. The task of each working group was to elaborate specific problems and suggest possible solutions during the plenum.

During the students' occupation, the working groups set up included an inter-plenary group (to establish communications among the occupied universities), a document analysis group (to give the participants of the protest full insight into government policies), a technical group to popularise direct democracy (in the workplace as well in higher education institutions), a mini-actions group (a specific group released from the obligation to notify the plenum about their decisions).

The plenum could delegate certain tasks that it could not be effectively carried out by its own decisions to a special team. Membership of that team was permanent and anonymous. However, the plenum could withdraw this mandate. Mandates were given to the following teams during the occupation: a team for operational tasks, logistics and security, a programme team (creating an alternative programme of lectures, classes and cultural events), a media team, a blog team, as well as a *Skripta* team (a student publication, the main organ for spreading awareness of the movement).⁵ Some of those groups are still active and growing today.⁶

Despite their understandable aversion to leaders, students from FHSS decided to establish the position of a delegate, responsible for communication or explanation of the plenum's decisions externally (during public discussions outside the Faculty, in meetings of different organizations or collectives or in conferences). This would only happen when the plenum decided to establish links with other organizations. The delegates had no right to make decisions in the plenum's name, but only to present its standpoint.

The events in Croatia can be a very good lesson for the Polish, almost non-existent student movements. The structural similarities between the two post-transitional countries, Croatia and Poland, in which post-political public life has been infected by a large dose of nationalism and where nobody is surprised by the neo-liberal economic hegemony, are obvious. In spite of the failure to attain the main political objective, namely a change in direction of higher education reform in Croatia, the very creation, from scratch, of a strong movement in a hostile political environment, should be seen as a great success. This cannot be achieved without developing a common language, space and time through long-term occupation.

On 7 December 2010, the 109th Plenum will be held in Zagreb. *Lotta continua!*

⁵ Last, 69th issue of *Skripta* was published on 10 November 2010 the archive is available at: <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/2009/04/anhiva-skripta.html>

⁶ See, for example, the Croatian version of the website <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/>