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*The Amsterdam University Protests, 2015-2016*

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## Chapter 4

# **“We Are the University!” Campus Protest in the Context of Counter-Globalization Critique**

## *The Amsterdam University Protests, 2015–2016*

Christian Scholl and Annette Freyberg-Inan

### INTRODUCTION

Research on social movements in Europe is often preoccupied with the relationship between globalization and processes of social and political mobilization generally (Flesher Fominaya 2014; Rucht 2003), or with counter-globalization movements<sup>1</sup> in particular (Freyberg-Inan and Scholl 2015; Scholl 2012; della Porta 2007). In comparison, student movements and protests receive little attention, even though they once were the cradle of the so-called “new social movements” cycle (Scholl 2014). This has led to the neglect of important university-based developments in social movement research within the past decade: the growing dissatisfaction of employees who often remain precariously employed for long periods (Doerr and Mattoni 2007) and who increasingly organize together with students to denounce the neoliberalization of the university and of education in general. As Melucci (1989) pointed out, important movement formation processes still take place while movements seem to slumber, hibernating in so-called “latent structures.” This is easily overlooked when researchers focus primarily on the visible moments of activism (Hensby 2017). But social protests never completely disappeared from European universities and have recently connected broadside with the wider counter-globalization movement, as this chapter will illustrate.

We present a case study of the Amsterdam university protests of 2015–2016 as paradigmatic for the connection of contemporary university protests with a broader critique of neoliberal globalization. The chapter, first, situates the current university protest wave historically to contextualize the specific entanglement between university and counter-globalization protests. Second, we present a discursive analysis of the goals of this movement, in particular the struggle against financialization and the rise of new public management. Third, we describe the actions undertaken throughout the Amsterdam protest episode as well as the reactions of opponents. Fourth, we discuss the outcomes of these protests and point out their limitations. In conclusion, we argue that contemporary university protests can be seen as part of a broader resistance against the financialization of public goods and against managerialism—*New Public Management*—and in this sense can legitimately be framed as connected to the anti-neoliberal counter-globalization movement. Based on our study of the paradigmatic case of the Amsterdam university protests, we also provide building blocks for future research to examine the observed increasing transnational networking of anti-neoliberal (university) movements.<sup>2</sup>

We prefer the term “university movements” as opposed to “student movements” because it better captures the fact that these social movements often include both students and university staff (including professors)<sup>3</sup> and explicitly advocate concrete changes in university policies or management through a repertoire of means of social protest (demonstrations, occupations, blockades, campaigns in social media, etc.). Our focus on university as opposed to student protests, in which university employees do not have to take part, is significant, as the literature routinely limits the analysis to student protests (Hensby 2017) and thereby ends up underestimating the socially and system-critical character and implications of campus protest movements.

The term “university” has been used in a relatively unreflective and ambiguous manner in the university protest literature in recent years. However, to understand social mobilization processes and socio-critical discourses on campuses, it is important to distinguish three meanings of the “university.” In contemporary analysis, the cultural complex of the “university” is often presented as a social place (protests *at* the university), but also as a constructed community (protests *from* parts of the university) and as a topic of mobilization (protests *about* the university). The socializing role of the university is made particularly visible through protest at, from *and* about the university. This makes it all the more important for us to speak of university protests and not only of student protests.

The empirical analysis in this article concentrates on the outcry that emanated from the University of Amsterdam (UvA) in the Netherlands in 2015, which will serve as a paradigmatic case (Gerring 2006) for the New University (NU) protests. It is paradigmatic both in the sense of being illustrative and in

the sense of being exemplary for two core elements of our analysis: the clarity of the critique and the claims raised, and their embeddedness in broader social criticism. First, we demonstrate that the protests have been explicitly directed against increasing managerialism<sup>4</sup> and financialization<sup>5</sup> and, thus, against the rise of New Public Management at universities as a core element of neoliberalization. Thereby, they take up the discursive frameworks of the counter-globalization movement (Scholl 2013), which oppose the invasion of social contexts by neoliberal market logic. The ideals of university co-determination (transparency, democracy) and the protection of the university space from pure market thinking (the university as a commons) are held up as an alternative vision. These are normative reference points well established in the emerging value consensus of the counter-globalization movement (Freyberg-Inan 2006). Second, we show that the university activists, with their explicit rejection of New Public Management (managerialism, financialization), position themselves as part of the broader counter-globalization movement. They explicitly and independently classify themselves as anti-neoliberal and express solidarity with movements in other sectors which also define themselves as such. Also, the forms of action and organization of university protest are inspired by the counter-globalization movement and its direct action practices (Scholl 2012).<sup>6</sup>

To analyze the Amsterdam university protests, we draw on participatory observation, qualitative interviews with actors of the movement and their critics as well as media and document analysis. We have followed the relevant events and both internal and external communications of this and other relevant protests movements since the early 2000s. This allows us to embed the case-study central in this chapter both in its own context and in a broader historical context of university protests as well as to draw comparative and more general conclusions. However, since our analysis must be bounded, we do not cover ongoing developments since 2016.<sup>7</sup> In the following, we first describe the historical context of the NU protest movements in Europe. Then, we present our case study. Finally, we draw our conclusions regarding the content of the observed critique and its connections to the broader counter-globalization movement.

## UNIVERSITY PROTESTS IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Contemporary university protests in Europe should be understood in the context of a longer-term historical development that originated in the late 1960s.

### The 1960s

Although the iconic sit-ins on the University of California, Berkeley campus in the United States are perhaps the best-known example of the connection

between student activism and the broader protest movement of the late 1960s, connections in Europe were of comparable intensity. These shared connections were in part due to the lively exchange of European and U.S. students (often via Fulbright scholarships). This exchange also led to the spread of certain elements of the protest repertoire, such as sit-ins, which originated from the civil rights movement and were imported to Europe via the U.S. student movement (Klimke 2010; McAdam and Rucht 1993). In those days, student activism went hand in hand with a broader wave of anti-systemic social movement activity directed against the character of Western societies, which were perceived as authoritarian and even insufficiently emancipated from fascism. This social critique was further directed against educational institutions, the instrumental use of education, research, and knowledge to support a capitalist and consumption-oriented economy as well as against the general bureaucratization of public institutions, including universities (Arrighi 1989).

Especially the French student movement of 1968 against the country's rigid university structures attained world fame with its protests. At that time, the protest actions that started in universities spread to workers, leading to general social protest and political destabilization (Tarrow 1998). Of course, the scale and extent of the protests varied in different localities and reflected their specific national political contexts. Nevertheless, most of the student movements of that time were radical, socially critical and transnational in their orientation, which is why Katsiaficas (1987) also speaks of an "Eros effect" that encompassed the New Left and its students.

Student protests continued off and on between the 1960s and the emergence of the counter-globalization movement in the late 1990s. Particularly in Spain and Greece, governed autocratically until the 1970s, there were major waves of protest. In Greece, the student movement became significantly involved in the fall of the dictatorship, by, for example, occupying the Polytechnic University in Athens. Students also continued to sporadically—though often vigorously—take to the streets in other countries, for example in Germany protesting the employment bans in the 1970s, or in the Netherlands protesting a new student financing model in the 1980s. In general, these protests had a national frame of reference without a transnational perspective and were not part of larger system-critical movements. This changed, however, with the emergence of summit protests in the context of the counter-globalization movement.

## **The Counter-Globalization Movement as a New Context for University Protests**

The rise of the counter-globalization movement gave new momentum to anti-systemic activities at Europe's institutions of higher education. Since

the late 1990s, the counter-globalization movement repeatedly caused a stir with spectacular mass protests, often on the occasion of summit meetings of international organizations such as the World Trade Organization or the G8/G7 or G20 (Scholl 2012). Thereby, university activism could be embedded in broader social criticism, similar to the 1960s. It is now directed against neoliberalism and its profit-maximizing mantra of privatization, liberalization and, in the public sector, retrenchment, financialization, and re-regulation by New Public Management.

On the one hand, students and university staff are often actively involved in protests critical of neoliberal globalization, and universities have become important spaces for the elaboration and dissemination of globalization criticism (protests *at* and *by* parts of the university). On the other hand, students and university staff concerns often align with critique of globalization (protests *about* the university as part of society) (Zamponi and González 2017; O'Halloran 2016). The counter-globalization movement can be seen as a cross-thematic "movement of movements" (Mertens 2004) that unites various concerns, protest traditions and resistances under the shared frame "Our world is not for sale." At the center of this diverse movement is the criticism of neoliberalism as a purely profit-oriented and, therefore, depoliticizing logic that colonizes public space. In this broader movement, the concerns of students and university staff have also been well received. An example is the "Bildungsstreik" (German for education-strike) movement in Germany, which protested the introduction of tuition fees and, in 2007, joined the protests against the G8 in Heiligendamm.

The affiliation between university protests and the counter-globalization movement is supported by three central factors. First, the counter-globalization movement provided a simplifying and focusing framework for interpreting societal tendencies as a whole: the "neo-liberalisation of the university" increasingly became a buzzword to pillory various developments, such as the introduction of tuition fees or education cuts as well as an ever greater dependence on third-party funding for research projects. The emergence of a broader socio-critical framework of interpretation for the perceived grievances at the university helped the mobilizing students and lecturers—especially the many without an activist background—"to speak the new language of protest in no time" (Verkaaik 2015, 146). Second, the counter-globalization movement offered specific mass protest events that students (and university staff) could join and in whose mobilization phases university actors and spaces often played an important role. Activities focusing exclusively on the university became rarer. Third, the counter-globalization movement rediscovered militant forms of protest and civil disobedience and promoted a transnational orientation of protests via a growing conception of Europe (and beyond) as a common space for communication and action (Doerr and Mattoni 2007).

## Protesting the Bologna Process

Starting in 1999, the Bologna Process involved a series of ministerial meetings between European countries aimed at harmonizing the quality standards of higher-education qualifications. It resulted in the Bologna Accords, which created a European university area to which today fifty countries belong. The official objective was to “harmonize” the market for higher education in Europe in order to increase the mobility of students and highly qualified workers. Critics cautioned above all against undermining the quality of teaching due to the disproportional emphasis on efficiency criteria and the loss of democratic control over national higher-education policy (Lorenz 2008).

There have been protests in many European countries against the Bologna Process and its impact on higher education (including on its accessibility). However, the different pace in which the respective reforms were carried out in the participating countries was a major obstacle to a shared perception of the problems and transnational coordination of such protests. Moreover, the character of the reforms also differed. Some education systems had to change more than others, and the European Union (EU) treaties left some room for differences between the member states. Thus, protests initially remained strongly focused on and limited to the respective national context. Additionally, reforms were often carried out gradually, concealing the extent of the adjustments as well as benefiting from repeated demobilization of student protests, which are always difficult to carry over more than one academic year, given the annual attrition of the student population.

In 2009 and 2010, there was a simultaneous uprising in several European countries: widespread protests by students and (precarious) university staff (researchers and lecturers with temporary contracts and otherwise relatively poor working conditions) in the United Kingdom (UK) and Italy, as well as an outcry against the announced austerity plans in the higher-education sector in the Netherlands, led to a situation approaching Europe-wide coordination (Thorburn and Hugill 2011). This was expressed in several European-level meetings, for example, the “Bologna Burns” in Vienna, London, Paris, and Bologna in 2010 and the “European Meeting of University Movements” in Paris in 2011. The organizers explicitly established links between the struggles at European universities and other social movements, for instance against the prevalent crisis management in Europe:

From London to Vienna, from Rome to Paris, from Athens to Madrid, a new Europe is emerging. Students and precarious workers, citizens and immigrants, the multitudes are fighting for their lives and future in the front lines against the crisis. Struggling to reappropriate their rights and the shared wealth that they

create everyday. Rebellng against the austerity measures that exploit our present and rob us of our future. Raging against the arrogance of power.<sup>8</sup>

In autumn of the same year, the "Occupy Movement" stepped onto the scene in the United States, linking criticism of the neoliberal crisis management in the EU and its member states with the broader counter-globalization movement. The movement further expanded the framework for combining university protests with anti-neoliberal social criticism. University protests began to accumulate in Europe (and elsewhere in the world) in this context from about 2012 onward (Palacios-Valladares 2016; Skærlund Risager and Thorup 2016; Somma 2012). The following section will look at protest in (and around) the UvA in 2015–2016 as a case that can be seen as paradigmatic of this protest wave.

## THE RAISON D'ÊTRE OF THE AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PROTESTS

In higher education in the Netherlands, market-oriented thinking quickly spread beginning in the 1990s (de Blois 2017). Universities are largely financed by academic achievements of students, because government funding is allocated on the basis of so-called "education credits" achieved by students and diplomas awarded. This has created an incentive to channel as many students as possible through the courses as quickly as possible, putting selection and quality criteria under pressure. Degree programs are increasingly being streamlined and taught in a school-like manner. At the same time, solidarity between degree programs, disciplines, and faculties is undermined. Each program is asked to be financially sustainable on its own, independently and in the short term.

Financial pressure also takes its toll on the staff. The proportion of temporary employment contracts has risen continuously in recent years, as has the workload felt by employees.<sup>9</sup> There is also an increasing perception of a division of academic staff into research stars and teaching chattel: while academics who succeed in attracting external research funds can to some extent withdraw from university life and often hardly teach—thereby increasing their chances of receiving further research grants, their colleagues end up in the treadmill of chronic overload through teaching and administrative work and lose their chance to catch up on research. This development also endangers the close link between research and teaching which is rhetorically still advocated by most university top managers.

While financial bottlenecks arise in research and teaching, which are passed on to students and staff, it is difficult to claim that universities are



not well-endowed. Since the universities of the Netherlands were placed in possession and charge of their own buildings in 1995, much money has been spent on real estate and its maintenance. Decisions of university boards for expensive new buildings and relocations are often difficult for employees to comprehend. They involve taking financial risks and freezing considerable reserves as guarantees for expensive loans. This has fueled discord, especially at the UvA, where real estate is particularly expensive. Other costly initiatives, such as the currently increasing expenditures on digitalization and “blended learning,” are also sometimes criticized as managerial hobbies that divert funds from where they are most urgently needed.<sup>10</sup> These investments are expensive, and critics fear that they may be increasingly used as substitutes for face-to-face teaching, and not as the promised supplement.

A fundamental problem is the lack of transparency in the financial administration of universities. Often financial information at university and faculty level is simply not accessible, or comprehensible. This creates distrust whenever staff or students are asked to accept sacrifices on financial grounds. Thus, financial transparency became one of the main demands of the protest movement. Another is democratization: a greater right to be heard for staff and students.

This demand for more say is a consequence of the undemocratic structure, elitist composition, and autocratic or incomprehensible practices of university boards. For example, important decisions on the basic parameters for research and teaching (such as the semester structure, or how many courses can be taken at the same time in a degree program) are imposed from above. Departments and entire faculties are forced to move across town without any apparent necessity. Working environments are radically redesigned without any opportunity for voice from staff and students.

As a result of the problems outlined earlier, a broad wave of protest arose. The new protest movement took off with the slogan “*We are the university!*”. Complaints were clearly directed against the university-based manifestations of neoliberalism—especially financialization and managerialism in the form of *new public management*. In the preceding years, the perceived grievances attached to these social structures had worsened, which can be seen as a reason for the uprising.<sup>11</sup> At that moment, the protesters seized the discursive frameworks of the counter-globalization movement (Scholl 2013), which opposes the intrusion of neoliberal market logic into all social contexts. They held against this logic the ideals of university participation (transparency, democracy) and the protection of the university from pure market thinking (the university as a public good)—ideals which are also centrally anchored in the value consensus of the counter-globalization movement (Freyberg-Inan 2006).

## THE UNFOLDING OF THE AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PROTESTS

In November 2014, the university board (College van Bestuur) of the UvA announced major cut-backs. Especially large parts of the humanities fell victim to the "Profil 2016" restructuring plan. Several degree courses would be eliminated, in particular in languages. The university board also considered unifying all remaining humanities programs into one single "Liberal Arts"-program. Dean Frank van Vree argued that the education cuts were necessary due to the declining numbers of students in recent years and that a "rigorous reorganization" of the faculty was inevitable. Reacting to these developments, protest arose from the end of 2014. The group "Humanities Rally"<sup>12</sup> was formed by students and staff and initiated demonstrations and petitions to stop the announced changes.<sup>13</sup>

On February 4, 2015, the newspaper *Het Parool* published the leaked content of the by then adjusted restructuring plan, which ignored core demands of "Humanities Rally." In reaction, on February 13, 2015, a few dozen students and staff members occupied the Bungehuis, where the Faculty of Humanities was located, under the name "New University".<sup>14</sup> They demanded: democratic elections to the university board; a change of the UvAs financing model with greater emphasis on input rather than efficiency criteria; the cancelation of the restructuring plan "Profil 2016"; more long-term jobs for lecturers; an open debate on the costs of real estate compared to the cuts in teaching and research; as well as an end to real-estate speculation including a cancelation of the planned sale of the Bungehuis itself.

The occupiers sought dialogue with the university board and worked actively to ensure that their occupation would encumber research and teaching as little as possible. Nevertheless, the university board responded with filing charges and demanding fines of €100,000 per person per day of the occupation. This was widely perceived as an excessive response. The occupation received significant support from within the UvA, the national parliament, key public figures, and labor unions. A petition of the occupiers on Change.org collected over 7,000 signatures, including by internationally renowned scholars. On February 23–24, 2015, the occupants spent two days negotiating an end to the occupation with the university board, mediated by the mayor of Amsterdam, Eberhard van der Laan, but there was no agreement. During the subsequent eviction by law-enforcement officers, forty-six occupiers and bystanders were taken into custody. No further concessions were made in the restructuring plan.

On the same day, various student organizations and unions called for a demonstration. At the end of this demonstration with about a thousand participants, a group of demonstrators spontaneously gained access to the

Maagdenhuis, the central administrative building of the UvA. The building had acquired strong symbolic power for university protest, especially due to the first, much shorter occupation in 1969. This time the occupation would last for forty-six days. The next day, the university board offered modest concessions in an effort to end the occupation. However, these were rejected by the occupants.

The following day, the NU announced that it would extend its movement to other universities in the country and declared March 4 a national Action Day. This call was taken up by newly formed NU groups at the universities of Leiden, Groningen, Utrecht, Nijmegen, and Rotterdam. Even students at some vocational colleges declared their support for the NU movement. On the same day, lecturers and other university staff organized themselves under the name “RethinkUvA”<sup>15</sup> to support the NU movement. They explicitly supported activities such as strikes and occupations of UvA buildings in case the university board would ignore their concerns. A few days later, the FNV, a federation of Dutch unions, also declared its support for the protests and announced strikes if the claims of “RethinkUvA” were not met.

The occupation lasted until April 11, 2015, when a forced eviction brought even more public support for the occupiers—even in some of the country’s conservative media. Four aspects of dealing with the protesters enraged large parts of the country against the university board. First, the eviction was timed on the eve of a planned “festival of science.” This timing seemed symptomatic of the perceived alienation of the university’s managerial elite: they were apparently not interested in the university as a public space for innovation, creativity, and learning. This impression was reinforced by the large number and the martial behavior of the police forces during the eviction. Although none resisted, occupants were dragged and pushed. Nine people were arrested. Third, the university board again made exaggerated demands for punitive fines that were disproportionate to the damage actually caused by the occupation.<sup>16</sup> Fourth, the elitist style of Louise Gunning-Schepers, chairwoman of the university board, shocked many. Especially her snide comment to the protesters, “Go to The Hague and don’t sit in my [*sic*] building,” turned out to be a faux-pas.

The protest movement was well networked and coordinated both inside and outside the UvA. From the beginning, there was no apparent conflict of interest between students and staff. In contrast, representatives and activists among both students and staff worked, discussed, and marched together. In addition, the networking with like-minded movements at other universities in the Netherlands was striking. At almost all Dutch universities, similar organizations were formed soon, which then often adopted the same labels (“New University” or “Rethink”). Besides good domestic networking, we saw a growing awareness of a fundamentally transnational struggle in

solidarity with university protest movements in other countries. The transnational dimension of this local protest is already visible in the fact that the "official" language of the Maagdenhuis occupation was English. Students and lecturers from many countries participated actively.<sup>17</sup> Explicit references to a common fight for shared goals can be found in the publications of the NU, where, for example, reference is made to the protests at the School of Oriental and African Studies London and the Sorbonne, Paris. The Danish student movement "Another University" has kept in touch with the NU from Amsterdam (Skærlund Risager and Thorup 2016). Also, a small rectangular red piece of fabric which, pinned to one's clothes, was (and still is) the symbol of the protest, was inspired by student protests in Quebec, Canada (Peñafiel and Doran 2017). Originally published in Dutch in 2013, a manifesto of two co-founders of the "Platform for the Renewal of Dutch Universities" (Platform H.NU) was translated into several languages and circulated across Europe and beyond (Halfman and Radder 2013). The manifesto and its diagnosis also connected to anti-neoliberal struggles in other sectors, such as the *Nuit Debout* movement in France (Pickard and Bessant 2018).

The protests at the UvA and the forms of organization and action that were used clearly fit into the contemporaneous cycle of counter-globalization protests. In addition to the discursive proximity in the framing of critique, the forms of organization and action also reveal many similarities with that broader movement: direct action and civil disobedience as central elements of the confrontational provocation of neoliberal elites, and direct democratic, horizontal decision-making in the occupation plenum, which was fed by a variety of partly overlapping networks. (Transnational) networking is an important aspect of the movement's organizational repertoire. However, transnational cooperation so far appears to be limited mainly to mutual declarative support and exchange of information.

## OUTCOMES OF THE AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PROTESTS

One result of the protests and the ten-point plan the (reformed) university board drew up in response was the establishment of an investigative committee on "Finances and Facility Management" and another on "Democratisation and Decentralization," the latter with a subcommittee on "Diversity and Decolonisation."<sup>18</sup> Both committees included critical staff representation and actively communicated across the university to strengthen their legitimacy base.<sup>19</sup> Both wrote advisory reports for the university management, which implemented part of the advice. The protesters also succeeded in overturning the controversial N+1 rule, according to which faculties had only been paid

for graduates who had studied for no more than one year beyond the planned duration of their studies.

By and large, a slight increase in transparency and participation can be observed since the beginning of the protests, which functions as a foot in the door as the demand for greater participatory rights remains strong. This became apparent, for example, in the resignation of the external supervisory council of the university (Raad van Toezicht) in June 2016, after various co-determination bodies and committees of the university had criticized its appointment of the members of the university board and questioned the space for constructive cooperation given the council's (opaque and undemocratic) practices. The council, which is required by law, had to be replaced by the ministry of education. Since then, the university board itself has also become more transparent in its procedures and regularly meets with staff. However, its composition remains dependent on the supervisory council.

Supporters of the protests carry the content to other relevant bodies, such as the General Students' Association Amsterdam (ASVA) and the National Student Union (LSVb). The relevant discussions also continue during the elections for student councils. At the UvA, for instance, student parties that initially continued to uphold the demands of the protesters were the *Humanities Rally Partij* and *de Decentralen*. Furthermore, a connection to national party politics was visible. Parties such as the market liberal and value conservative VVD, which has criticized so-called recreative studies, were attacked. The Socialist Party, representing many of the demands made by the protest movement in parliament, received support. However, there were no signs of a party-political usurpation of the protest movement.

The critics are not satisfied with the legal changes to university administrative structures (*Wet Versterking Bestuurskracht*) that have been achieved so far. Although some left-wing as well as liberal and social-conservative parties (PvdA, D66, ChristenUnie, SP) advocated greater rights of co-determination for lecturers and students, the minister of education and cultural affairs was accused of blocking these efforts.<sup>20</sup> In any case, there is still no genuine co-determination on the budget,<sup>21</sup> major infrastructural decisions, or the landscape of degree and research programs. The student body can give its opinion on the profile of new top managers. However, decisions are then made without them. Despite all the democratization rhetoric, the central and faculty student councils still feel generally overlooked when it comes to important decisions, and so do many staff members.<sup>22</sup>

The financial pressure on teaching and research has not diminished, nor has the workload of employees. Promises to grant proportionally more employment contracts of indefinite duration have not yet been implemented. Students continue to feel the pressure to complete their studies as quickly as possible. Due to investments in real estate, the UvA held a debt of €216

million by the end of the protest wave analyzed here, and is continually taking on more debt.<sup>23</sup> While there is a scarcity of money for teaching and research, investments in buildings are perceived as profligate. There is also anger about the salaries of top managers, which at some universities can climb to almost €200,000, and about the high business expenses that they can charge, as newspapers report regularly by now.<sup>24</sup> It was perceived as symptomatically absurd when the UvA's university board in reaction to the protests hired an expensive reputation manager.

However, a broader discussion emerged around the protests, in which the meaning and purpose of university teaching and research are collectively reconsidered (Van Baardewijk and Verbruggen 2014; Collini 2012). For instance, Beatrice de Graaf, politician of the Christian Social Party (ChristenUnie) and professor of the History of International Relations and Global Governance at the University of Utrecht, sees the educational ideal of the university under pressure. According to this ideal, the university is "a space where norms, values, ethics and ideals can be developed, cultivated, and discussed by students and lecturers together."<sup>25</sup> Instead, she fears that utilitarianism has become rampant. This is to be evaluated positively in so far as it promotes the search for solutions to social problems. However, utilitarianism has now too strongly shifted into market-oriented thinking, which implies that scientists are only credited according to measurable benefit. The Emeritus professor of Political Science at the University of Twente, Jacques Thomassen, also considers one of the most important foundations of the university, the unity of research and teaching, to be at risk.<sup>26</sup> Scientists feel compelled to minimize their teaching obligations as much as possible, as they are judged primarily on their financial and reputational research achievements. Broader discussion about the role and situation of universities in Dutch society and beyond continues, as does the financial pressure on universities. The protest wave of 2015–2016 abated, but there remains considerable potential for further upheaval.

### **CONCLUSION: THE UNIVERSITY AS A MICROCOSM AND AN INCUBATOR OF COUNTER-GLOBALIZATION CRITIQUE**

We presented the events discussed earlier as paradigmatic for a wave of protests on contemporary European campuses, with regards to its non-locally specific content, its connection to broader social critique, its forms of protest, and its scope of networking. On the basis of our broader research, of which we could present only a fragment here, we propose that the features elaborated here can at least partially be generalized as characteristics of the

university protest of the present, at least in countries involved in the Bologna Process. To develop this project, we need broader systematic comparative research. The following specific observations based on our case study can inform such research.

In terms of content, protests are directed against four interrelated developments in universities: (1) the increasing managerialism of university administrations and the associated decreasing rights of co-determination and student and lecturer participation; (2) creeping financialization, above all in the sense of evaluating the output of teaching and research according to market-based criteria but also in the sense of the perceived alienation of university structures and resources; (3) the associated threat especially to the humanities and to critical and fundamental research, which by nature have difficulty demonstrating their market value; and (4) the increasing shift of costs to students (via fees and worsened study conditions) and employees (through worsening working conditions and precarity). In addition to greater transparency and democratization, what is called for is essentially protection for the university as a space for contemplation, experimentation, and learning in line with the Humboldtian ideal of higher education.

The university protests of our time can clearly be linked to a broader crosscurrent of protest against the financialization of public goods and against managerialism in the public sphere—*New Public Management*. In this sense, it can also be understood as part of the anti-neoliberal counter-globalization movement. The forms university protest takes are also obviously influenced by the legacy of the counter-globalization movement. In the Amsterdam university protests, for example, forms of action, such as occupations, of the counter-globalization movement were used, as well as similar forms of organization, such as plenary assemblies with hand signals and consensus-based procedures, alongside the same anti-neoliberal rhetoric. However, as in the broader counter-globalization movement, we can also see that there is often a local response to problems which are transnationally shared. The protests against the Bologna Process had already shown that pan-European coordination is far from easy. By now, the networking between the protests in different places is increasing, but so far it has mainly been limited to mutual declarative support and the exchange of information. The trend toward transnational circulation of programmatic documents is promising, as is the growing awareness among local protest movements that they have equivalents in other countries. Perhaps the connection to the broader system-critical counter-globalization movement can help to extend university protest to higher levels in the multilevel system of governance, while university protest can at the same time feed into the counter-globalization movement.

In conclusion, the contemporary university protest wave of our time, like that of the late 1960s, can be understood as part of a broader social movement.

The university protests of recent years are a clear sign that anti-neoliberal critique is still alive and interlocks with other fields of social conflict. In our view, it is no coincidence that universities are now again appearing as incubators and microcosms of social criticism. Here, sociopolitical contexts are (still) critically studied while also being experienced first-hand. The university is not only inhabited as a sociocultural system but is also defended against increasing market orientation. As the Dutch example demonstrates, the resulting awareness of sociopolitical problems and the creative potential for coping with them can sometimes achieve critical potential with unexpected speed and intensity. This in turn emphasizes the great importance of protecting our universities as public spaces for critical contemplation and critical action by responsible citizens.

## NOTES

1. We prefer the term "counter-globalization movements" over "anti" or "alter-globalization movement," because it stresses the oppositional character of the alternative practices and emphasizes the multiplicity of the movement(s).

2. Our research also investigated the element of transnational networking of and with the Dutch activists. Due to space limitations, we leave this aspect out of the discussion in this chapter.

3. In this chapter, the term "university staff" refers explicitly not only to so-called scientific employees, but to all persons who work for pay at universities.

4. Managerialism implies prioritizing efficiency and the use of management techniques and systems from the private sector. Universities are increasingly under the control of accountants, advertisers, PR and education experts and their familiar techniques of audit, output quantification, and performance measurement. Critics fear that this may lead to a loss of service and/or quality.

5. Financialization is "intrusion by financial metrics, values and professionals" and concomitant the "marketization and managerialization" of the higher-education sector (Engelen et al. 2014, 1072).

6. Of course, both programmatic and organizational similarities and connections to the broader counter-globalization movement can be found in other contemporary (anti-neoliberal) movements as well. However, these are not considered in this article.

7. Discontent has not blown over, protest in various forms continues to take place, and the complaints are much the same, with an added growing focus on supporting ideals of diversity and social safety.

8. Edu-Factory Post, January 17, 2011, on (<http://occupyeverything.org/2011/european-meeting-of-university-movements-paris-11-13-february-2011>).

9. For example: According to a report commissioned by the UvA in 2015, two-thirds of the staff employed at the university had a fixed-term contract; see: (<http://www.folia.nl/uploads/Flexibele%20dienstverbanden%20aan%20de%20UvA%20-%20AIAS%20WP%20160.pdf>). In 2016 a survey by the Socialist Party (SP) showed



that 50 percent of all scientists at Dutch universities felt that they are not able to manage their work well enough due to the lack of time; see: (<https://vragen.sp.nl/index.php/824514>)

10. “Blended learning” aims officially at linking classic face-to-face teaching with modern forms of e-learning such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) or webinars.

11. Providing a thorough explanation of why protests erupted here and at that time (not sooner, later or elsewhere) would be a complex endeavor. First and foremost, we try to indicate what perceived grievances motivated the protesters from their own perspective and what their interests were.

12. More information on <https://humanitiesrally.com/>.

13. Two Dutch initiatives were particularly important as precursors for the wave of protests that took place at the UvA in 2015. The first one was the so-called Platform for the Renewal of Dutch Universities (Platform H.NU), a movement of scientists from all Dutch universities launched in autumn 2013, which clearly opposed the previously outlined developments. The “Concerned Employees of the Free University of Amsterdam” (Verontruste VU’ers) at the other of the two universities in Amsterdam were the second initiative, started in 2012. These initiatives were known to many critics at the UvA, they had done important groundwork for the conception and framing of the relevant critique, and they inspired others to organize themselves as well.

14. More information on <http://newuni.nl/>.

15. More information on <http://rethinkuva.org/>.

16. A lawyer of the UvA claimed that about half a million euro of damage had been caused—an amount that seemed to be plucked out of the air. Critics were angered about the way the university board tried to cast a bad light on its own protesting students and staff. It quickly became apparent that the major part of this alleged damage consisted of costs for a security service appointed by the university board and expenses for internal removals, and not of damage to property caused by the occupants. This was confirmed by the newspaper *NRC* and the television station AT5. See also email newsletter “De Nieuwe Universiteit,” February 17, 2016.

17. Many of the protesting students in Nijmegen were and are German, as Nijmegen is situated close to the border and attracts many German students.

18. The reports and further information by the commissions can be found on their websites at (<http://cofh-uva.nl/> and <http://commissiedd.nl>).

19. The commission on Democratization and Decentralization was formed by a pre-commission in which the movements Amsterdam United, University of Color, New Urban Collective, Humanities Rally, de Nieuwe Universiteit, relevant labor unions, ReThink UvA and the official participatory bodies of the UvA were represented.

20. Email newsletter “De Nieuwe Universiteit,” February 17, 2016.

21. Although the faculties and the central student council have to approve the budget, they are not privy to the negotiations on how the money will be distributed and have no say in the process.

22. Email newsletter “De Nieuwe Universiteit,” February 17, 2016.

23. In February 2016. Email newsletter “De Nieuwe Universiteit,” February 17, 2016.
24. Email newsletter “De Nieuwe Universiteit,” February 17, 2016.
25. Cited in *Erasmus Magazine*, September 1, 2015; <https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/en/2015/09/01/we-moeten-bildung-niet-uit-het-oog-verliezen/>.
26. Cited on (<https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/news/europe/netherlands/2016/4/Terug-naar-de-grondslag-van-de-academie.html#sthash.gmicjJP9.dpuf>). See also José van Dijck and Jacques Thomassen, “Invester in vrij, vernieuwend onderzoek,” *De Volkskrant*, August 31, 2015; (<http://www.volkskrant.nl/ opinie/ invester-in-vrij-vernieuwend-onderzoek~a4132216>).

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