SOMETHING GREATER THAN OURSELVES: TOWARDS GOOD ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT*

Jerzy Kociatkiewicz
Institut Mines-Télécom Business School, Évry-Courcouronnes
Université Paris-Saclay, Évry-Courcouronnes

Monika Kostera
University of Warsaw
Södertörn University, Huddinge

/// The University: An Evolving Organisation

Universities have been with us for centuries if not millennia (dating at least from the Greek Ακαδημία). The academy is one of the oldest organisational types (Mintzberg 2023) still in existence. Its European traditions link ancient Greece, the medieval *studia generalia*, the universities of the Age of Enlightenment, and the Humboldtian universities to today's dilemmas and uncertainties (Collini 2012; Fleming 2021; Ginsberg 2011). Some of the actual incarnations of the organisations founded in radically different circumstances are still with us, having undergone many shifts and changes while holding on to the central ideas of the academy. The University of Bologna was founded in 1088 and is getting ready to celebrate a millennium of its existence; Jagiellonian University, the first such institution on

Polish soil, was founded in 1364. Universities have been constantly evolving throughout their history, experimenting with new forms of organisational structure: they have functioned as student associations, as private companies, and as ecclesiastical, state, and local government institutions. Their management and governance structures have changed just as drastically and have included collectives of peers, centralised hierarchies, loose federations of faculties, and deeply democratic collegialities.

The university does not produce things or services in the same way as a business does. Nor is it a public institution in the strict sense of the term, that is, an institution serving as an administrative *dispositif* of state power (see, e.g., Mintzberg 2023 on the different types of organisations). Its functioning requires its members to have an ethos and a calling (Giza 2019), as in religious organisations, which is a category to which it does not belong either, because it does not serve the purposes of religious worship. Like artists, scholars often do not know what the exact results of their work are supposed to be, either in teaching or in research: both are creative and exploratory activities. In scholarly work, proficiency requires not only mastering the established principles, but also rising above them, as the brothers Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus described in their model of skill acquisition (1980). However, much more than in the case of craftspeople, for scholars the principles themselves are particularly relevant and require constant re-examination: it is through them that the parameters of legitimate knowledge are defined (Kuhn [1964] 1970).

In Poland, a series of reforms of the higher education system have been presided over by a succession of ministers hailing from different political parties and often professing strongly opposed convictions, as is the case for the most relevant politicians involved: Barbara Kudrycka, Jarosław Gowin, and Przemysław Czarnek. These changes have put universities under severe pressure to conform to outside demands, including, most significantly, by adapting their services and structures to the expectations of the so-called global education market (Giza 2021). As Anna Giza argues, there is a need to reflect critically on how these ambitions intersect with the long-standing aims of academia. Furthermore, it is worthwhile – as Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) advises in such a situation – to ask the socio-political question: why? Why and in whose interest will this change take place? Who will gain from it and who will lose? The most common justification for far-reaching reforms appears in very different statements and discussions and is more or less on this order: "Polish science is of low quality, as can be seen from the low position of Polish universities in international rankings, and therefore we

must take decisive steps to finally catch up with the West" (cf. Giza et al. 2019). In the present text, we wish to discuss this fundamental proposition, examining it in a larger sociological, moral, and managerial context.

/// To Manage or Not to Manage?

The main direction of managerial changes that have been imposed on universities almost globally (though in strongly varying degrees) follow the tenets of New Public Management (Broucker & De Wit 2015; Giza 2021), and use the toolkit of audits (Power 1997) and metrics/rankings (Muller 2019). Such an approach requires quantifiable measurements of the factors deemed relevant. In the context of evaluating Polish academia, the most important are university rankings published by *Times Higher Education*, *Quacquarelli Symonds* (QS), *Reuter's World*, or the *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (ARWU) compiled by Shanghai Ranking Consultancy. It is important to note that these lists were not created as an aid for improving education; instead, consulting and media companies developed them for branding and managing brands in the global student market. Building brands, equipping them with financial value, and subordinating them to financial transactions is the very essence of modern management. At this stage of capitalism's development (or decline), the main measure of success is the financial value of the brands under a specific management's control, not the health of the company, the innovation of its operations, the quality of its products, or the efficiency (or even profitability) of its production (Mazzucato 2018). The global success of companies such as Tesla or Meta (formerly Facebook), which had not recorded profits before achieving a dominant position on the market, serves as a flagship example. The switch of focus towards branding is certainly a modernising strategy, albeit the question of whether it is the right one for universities (Giza 2019) does not evoke an immediately positive answer.

The managerial value of a university brand is boosted by ranking positions, accreditation certificates, and recognition among potential customers, but not necessarily by their loyalty. Media presence, flashy campus buildings (preferably designed by world-renowned architects) and, of course, extensive advertising help to boost these values, which are also dependent on the indicators used to construct university rankings. This is where a number of problems arise. As early as the 1970s the British economist Charles Goodhart (1975) noted that any economic indicators (and

not solely economic indicators) are useful only if the actors – in this case, organisations – under scrutiny do not specifically target those values. In other words, if universities consciously try to bump up specific indicators while ignoring outcomes that are not measured, the usefulness of indicators as stand-ins for general quality diminishes considerably. Aspects of the academy that are not included (or are undervalued) in the rankings are inevitably neglected. Thus, for example, the working conditions of academics are not a particularly significant concern for contemporary global universities. It is increasingly common to hear stories about precariously employed British or American lecturers at prestigious universities who live in cars because they cannot afford to rent even a room, while the deans of those universities boast that they are constantly reducing the share of salaries in the operating costs of the institution. Some of the universities that consistently excel in various rankings employ the highest percentage of staff on precarious contracts. In the case of a prestigious institution such as Oxford University, this figure is as high as 70% of staff, one of the highest rates in the UK (Williams 2023).

The "tyranny of metrics" (Muller 2019) brings with it an even more rudimentary problem. The logic of management by metrics is based on the ability to find a common denominator by which to compare all the evaluated institutions. Such an approach inevitably leads to the formation of winning strategies, and this in turn drastically reduces diversity. However, in both sc and advanced education, diversity is crucial not only for a specific institution, but also for society as a whole. In addition to promoting uniform patterns of success, international rankings also assume homogeneous, global students who can choose whether to study in Kielce or Shanghai. Rankings tracking the careers of graduates ignore local context and economic conditions, and undervalue the contribution of smaller universities from poorer regions – and in such comparisons, most of Poland forms a relatively poorer region.

Finally, while alternative rankings have been developed, their media presence in the official discourse is minimal. It is possible, after all, to rank universities according to a very wide range of assessment criteria, measuring, for example, adherence to values specific to the scholarly community, such as those formulated in the Magna Charta Universitatum (1988), which contain a commitment to protect the autonomy of universities and research, and a commitment to a broad social mission, or in the UNESCO document (1997) defining positive principles for universities, which cites scholarly autonomy as one of the key quality criteria. In an independent

research report, Terence Karran and Lucy Mallinson (2017) developed a ranking of universities based on a set of criteria drawn from these two documents, and in particular on the autonomy of science, understood as a requirement for the professionalism of the academy. In these rankings, Polish scholarship was among the European leaders (before the most recent wave of reforms). However, the Anglo-Saxon universities generally turned out to be a source of concern (Karran et al. 2022), and yet it is precisely this model that is being imitated and "benchmarked" in Kudrycka, Gowin, and Czarnek's current reforms.

A managerial approach focusing on ranking, branding and marketing is not good news for the quality of learning (Giroux 2007). Marketing in the global education market today is an extremely costly investment and requires focused effort and specialised knowledge, techniques, tools, and networks. Executing a marketing strategy in a highly competitive industry such as global higher education is not a task that can be solved by a top-down reform ordering universities to "catch up" with the West, even when, as is the case in Poland, the authorities are willing to sacrifice a largely functioning local system in the process. Brand management in the higher education business is a highly specialised and resource-dependent management machine. The success of Western universities is built upon very high expenditure, generally from public funds (though, it must be noted, the endowment and student fee funding structure of the top-performing American universities requires relatively little direct public expenditure). Lucrative income from tuition fees, particularly from international students, is also a very important consideration (both as a source of funding and as a reward for success). But even successful execution of this strategy brings huge human costs, which are rarely taken into consideration when assessing strategies for higher education (Fleming 2021). These include the passing on of risk to employees, an exponential rise in very serious and growing mental health problems among academics and students (Fleming 2021), and private devouring of the common good (Standing 2019). Students are turned into customers and no longer regarded as participants in the academic community (Giroux 2007). The work of academics in universities that have been thus reformed is increasingly associated with alienation, and with the abandonment of professional standards and university values (Docherty 2014; Hall & Bowles 2016). While the brands are overvalued, the work that academics do is typically not valued. This management strategy results in a "product" that is dramatically expensive: the average UK student graduates with almost £50,000 worth of debt (which they are unlikely to repay throughout

their professional lives) (Sellgren 2020). The process of repaying the debt (and its possible statute of limitations) is regulated by statute, so today's students are unsure of either the terms of the loan or its interest rate. Some of the student debt owed to the state has already been sold by the UK government to private companies.

The university, once a bastion of ethos and meaning, has, in an era of neoliberal globalisation, become a hollow brand, a shell without content (Ginsberg 2011). Investing in the higher education brand has, finally, a huge and fundamental cost – the loss of identity (Docherty 2014). Universities-brands have become pseudo-businesses, designed to compete with real businesses, at which they lose from the start. A business is by definition a better business than a university, which has never been a business and whose main "products" – truth, enlightenment, radical criticism, creativity, and imagination – are not in market demand, because they cannot possibly be; the university has no sustainable meaning except in being what it is (Izak et al. 2017).

When the institution's shared values and academic ethos are missing, the functioning of the university must rely on regulation and administration (Fleming 2021). In UK universities, administration now accounts for more than half the workforce, and often three-quarters of the workforce or more (Spicer 2017). This by no means entails a relieving of academics from administrative work: on the contrary, one of the university administration's major occupations is the outsourcing of administrative work to academic and teaching staff and the supervision of its completion. As a result, it becomes indeed crucial to translate all the goals and outcomes of scholarly work, as well as teaching, into the institution's standardised language of administration. The metrics make it "easy" to manage things that are unmanageable. This is of course a superficial ease, which covers utter managerial irresponsibility: a good manager should never attempt to manage something he or she does not understand (Mintzberg 2019).

We argue that there must be two factors at the heart of any real, non-superficial reform of the management of Polish academia and higher education. These factors point to two fundamental directions for seeking solutions to the perceived problem of the poor quality of Polish scholarship, and they are (1) funding and (2) democratisation. Academia must have stable funding because universities depend on a funding institution outside of themselves, and their functioning should be free from the current constant disruptions and managerial impulses. And democratisation is necessary in order to help universities become more sustainable and adaptable to the environment and

context. We propose that the university should be democratised not by destroying its structures and institutions but in accordance with them, in building on the existing institution of university governance – that is, collegiality.

The issue of providing funding for universities does not mean solely increasing the share of spending on science and higher education in the state budget, although this too is necessary to maintain and improve the quality of research and teaching. It is also important to create conditions in which students, faculty, and staff can devote themselves to their work, which is understood to be learning, teaching, and research. Here the example of Anglo-Saxon universities, where there is incessant distraction, precarisation, and attacks on attention, shows the path towards the death of the university – an outcome we should avoid at all costs (Fleming 2021). We have already mentioned the UK's prohibitive prices, which most students pay by taking loans. On the side of the employees, the situation is not much better. More than two thirds of the UK's research staff and almost half of teaching-only academics are employed on fixed-term contracts, and the proportion of the precariat in university employment has only recently stopped increasing (University and College Union 2021). Crucially, this state of affairs is not linked to the poor financial situation of universities. On the contrary, it is the richest and most prestigious universities that are most likely to turn to various forms of precarious employment, following the logic of treating staff primarily as a source of costs (Blackham 2020).

As for the second proposition, collegiality remains, despite the de facto abolition of decision-making collegial bodies in many countries, the typical management system for universities (which is a pretty good measure of the vitality of the institution of collegiality). Recently, Swedish scholars have been exploring and analysing the subject. With recent Swedish governments diminishing the pressure on universities to become more like businesses, we see a return of collegial structures in many Swedish universities. Kerstin Sahlin and Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016a), management scholars and experienced academic leaders, identify the basic principles of democratic collegiality as a modern form of governance. These include a focus on the overarching, guiding value of knowledge and truth, a professional group making the most important decisions (the collegium), an elected leader – the *primus inter pares*, and a separation between academics and line management (administration) dealing with a sphere of activity unrelated to the professional core. The fundamental core is defined as knowledge-creation and teaching.

Universities, from a managerial point of view, are similar to guild and craft organisations, which are based on skill, tradition, invention, and advancement (Sennett 2008). As the Dreyfus brothers (1980) show in their model of learning, once individuals have reached a certain level of competence – that is, a mastery of rules and regulations – they can move to more advanced levels only if they can distance themself from the rules, see the big picture, make intuitive decisions, and navigate the situation. A master is like a great actor on the theatre stage, for instance, like the Polish actor Janusz Gajos who, when performing a role, remains an indivisible presence, simultaneously bringing the characters he plays into existence while never ceasing to be himself. He does not accentuate his position or focus on it, yet he inspires the audience and his colleagues. Similarly, there is a need for mentoring of this kind in academia: dedicated, experienced scholars should not be "entrepreneurs" but should offer their example to younger scholars, inspire others, and be living symbols of the profession. Therefore, at a certain level of scholarly development, the ability to define one's own work and the area of knowledge one is working in is very important (Hasselberg 2012).

In a university system, equality does not mean that everyone is the same or that their knowledge counts equally. For this reason, university collegial bodies are not just the implementation of the demands of workplace democracy. Neither should universities turn into political systems, because that does not further the advancement of knowledge. Collegial bodies are not meant to represent the interests of different staff groups or their research and teaching areas. The special characteristic of collegial bodies should be their subordination to, and shared respect for, the common overarching good, which is science and knowledge. The purpose of collegial structures is first and foremost to foster organisational and institutional respect for these values. Hence, participants who have achieved the level of masters have more say in the collegial council than the beginners. It is crucial that an accumulation of power is actively avoided. Mastery of knowledge should be a matter of profession and devotion – not power. To repeat once again, the main responsibility of academic leadership is to make sure that issues of micro-politics, power, and personal advancement are avoided and ideally eliminated from collegial processes. The reality is of course often far removed from this ideal, and thus the disciplining mission of eldership and academic leadership is the more urgent. This naturally includes setting a good example and sincerely leading by example, but such an approach is possible only with a strong ethos and high autonomy. Academia is a strong

profession with its own standards, rules, and moral integrity, which provide the members' inner motivation and morale (Svallfors 2020).

Collegiality itself has its dark sides. The most obvious one is the drift towards politicisation, which should be monitored and actively counter-balanced on a constant basis (Engwall 2016). It has to be remembered that whenever there is too little conviction and inspiration, collegial man-agement degenerates into a micropolitics where cliques and coteries com-pete and fight with each other. A good academic leader needs to cultivate academic values consistently and inspire people to respect and even love the common good and to have a sense of being part of something larger than themselves (Sandén 2007). Another detrimental tendency of colle-gial management is to become a dead, formal mechanism where no one has the motivation to express different or dissenting ideas and the col-legial body serves basically as a "voting machine." Sometimes it becomes a structure that blocks the advancement and initiative of the young; it may become overly conservative, focused on form and not very interested in content. All these issues can and should be remedied with communication, openness, and leadership with the right balance between trust and control (Bjuremark 2002).

For these reasons, collegiality does not work all by itself. It is a very intricate institution, based on particularly strong values, and requires so-cialisation and acculturation as well as something more – an ethos, a voca-tion (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist 2016a, 2016b). This is why universities such as respectable, large, old Uppsala University and the smaller, newer Södertörn University in southern Stockholm offer training in university and academic values for new employees. The collegiality that we have is only as good as we are ourselves and as our colleagues are. If we let psycho-paths, sociopaths, and cynical people (by no means in the ancient sense), who are interested only in their own success, into the structures, we will not build a good university. This is increasingly a challenge because in neo-liberal, reformed universities, bullying is increasing dramatically and other pathologies are common (West 2016). However, if we allow academia to be open to people from different social classes, from different backgrounds, all genders, and different social temperaments – and if these are independ-ent people who are not willing to submit to a conformist culture of power but who believe in knowledge and truth and have a sincere vocation to the academy – then we will have a vibrant academic community (Bjuremark 2002; see Jaquet 2014 for an argument about the benefit of openness to class issues). Such an academic community is strongly needed.

The university is a common good to which we all can and should contribute (Sahlin & Erikson-Zetterquist 2016a). It is far more important than anything we can achieve on our own, under our own name and for our own success. A scholar who has not acquired the discipline to control personal ambition will not be a good colleague. Often one overly ambitious person is enough to capsize the entire boat. The university can be regarded as a sailing vessel where everyone needs to cooperate, not compete. Competitive and selfish behaviour (Smyth 2017), or much worse, a management style that encourages such attitudes, is strongly disruptive and destructive even though highly lucrative for those who practise it (Standing 2019).

This brings us to the important question concerning the larger whole, the common good – the university's identity. Why insist on it, rather than "modernising" and "rebranding" it according to the principles that are currently popular in the world of business and administration? To borrow the excellent expression from the title of Stefan Collini's (2012) famous book: what is a university for? To answer this question, we need to accept and appreciate organisational diversity as a value in itself. Organisations need to be diverse in order to thrive and flourish in their proper context (Mintzberg 2019). Creating the impression – and then succumbing to it – that there is only one "right" form of organising (whether business-led, as now, or planned from the top down, as in the times of state communism) is very damaging. Martin Parker (2018) points out how business schools bring about a seriously flawed and limited framing of the world of organisations. Contemporary management education encourages students to regard all species as one. In calling for the demolition of business schools, he argues that the curricula prevalent in globalised business schools are responsible for the pathologisation of management prevalent today not only in corporations but in organisations of all types. This is the result of forcing incompatible and diverse organisations into the Procrustean bed of the "good-for-everything" business management philosophy.

This fate has also befallen universities. Yet a university is, by its very definition, a highly complex organisation. What is more, it is an organisation whose most valued outcome, even under current conditions, is to find new solutions and to allow a disciplined diversity of voices to be heard in order to make a contribution to knowledge. For this to be possible, it is necessary to provide conditions of security and stability for employees, who need to work in demanding social and intellectual conditions. Human beings are consensual, and culture is based on conformism; therefore, an orchestrated non-conformism and disagreement is extremely difficult to

achieve. Even in the best of times there is a risk of stress, burnout, and violence In ordinary organisations such as businesses, as Albert Hirschman (1970) demonstrated, loyalty is the traditional norm. A dissenting voice is relegated to the outside of the organisation (exit) or, as is common in contemporary Western academia, drives the employee into internal exile. Universities are workplaces where disagreement is part of the job and has to be made acceptable and normal. In order to achieve this, top-down or regulations-led management styles are not functional. Such an administration will not work in the development of an agonistic (albeit civil) culture, because it operates on procedural bases, and needs strong mechanisms of conformism to be functional. Introducing administrative rules and norms for whole university communities on such a large scale as is currently the case in the neoliberal academy is unprecedented. It is a dysfunctional management system: the sense of the activities performed is lost in a sea of procedures and indicators (preferably quantifiable, preferably easy to standardise). Small wonder people in academia now inhabit communication bubbles and are unable to exchange views with those holding different views – this is a sinister side effect of the NPM management of universities.

The neoliberal academy as a whole has turned into a "productivity machine" for pursuing various measures, metrics, and "key performance indicators" (Muller 2019; Aronowitz 2001). Academics are mobilised to publish more and more texts, and it is the ambition of Polish reformers to have Polish academics meet this requirement as well. And yet, the world is already flooded with a wave of formulaic publications that are no longer read because nobody has the time or inclination to do so (Alvesson & Gabriel 2013). After all, there is no metrics for reading, let alone thinking, and so they seem to have fallen out of the definition of a scholar's work. Under the constant pressure to acquire grants, researchers increasingly pride themselves on the amount of money they get, while the actual academic work comes second – at best. A huge amount of time is spent writing proposals, which are for the most part not awarded funding. When the funding is awarded, projects require a significant organisational and administrative effort. This is how substantial amounts of academics' time – and thus public funding – are spent. This is a good example of Witold Kieżun's redeployment of objectives (1971). Academic teachers, meanwhile, are held accountable for their work not by internal standards of the teaching and learning process, but based on student surveys and grades. In Anglo-Saxon universities, where a significant part of the institution's income comes from tuition fees, an academic tourism industry

has grown in which lecturers function as tour guides and entertainers. Small wonder there is an inflation of grades and a decline in actual learning outcomes (Schneider 2013).

We, Polish social scientists, should be well aware of the pitfalls of the game of metrics. After all, we are familiar with it from the recent history of our country, when the economy was managed by a system of metrics and plans. The indicators and metrics were often satisfactory, while everyone was aware of the inefficiencies of the system, which were not represented by the indicators (see, e.g., Kieżun 1971).

Democratic collegiality can provide an antidote to such pathologies. To begin with, in order to develop workable management processes, the participants of the academic community, in Polish universities and research centres, must lead the discussion around the failings and successes encountered so far. Round tables are a necessary starting point. We should not rely on media or political images, which, on the one hand, present a steady procession of academic celebrities, who are rewarded, publicised, honoured, and constantly valorised, and, on the other hand, promote harsh anti-intellectualism (cf. Rigney 1991). This is not to paint an overly rosy picture of the status quo, or of the state of Polish academia before the reforms: a variety of problems, both structural and local, have been identified and described (e.g., Zawadzki & Jensen 2020), and many more are certain to be brought to light given the opportunity. The blame for the pathological incentives and double binds imposed on the higher education system lies mainly with the decision-makers (Giza et al. 2019). The steadily worsening working conditions mean that there is an underlying strong proliferation of burnout (Han 2015). All that gives meaning to the pursuit of knowledge is increasingly missing: there is no enthusiasm, no conviction, no dedication, no amazement, no passion, no enthusiasm, no risk of ridicule, no vocation. The public gets to see lifeless faces and ossified, uninteresting research results. They see prominent individuals, who are often notorious for bullying and using force to emphasise their position, demanding obedience. They also see numerous powerful "academic feudal lords," who are disdainful of anything they perceive as making a person vulnerable, which includes honest dedication to the profession. These lords are always ready to fight for further impact and influence, and thus they make the entire culture demoralised and corrupt. This visible core is sterile but increasingly influential. It is not beneficial for academic work. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that it is precisely this core of power that defines management

indicators and metrics. Such a situation is typical of any centralised reform, which brings about a consolidation of power (Chang 2010).

/// Some Reflections and Implications

We would like to share some of our reflections on teaching and forms of employment in connection with our experience working at universities in different countries. We are choosing this focus in order to present a relatively simple and clear case. The same point can be made regarding research and the university's broader missions, but these have already been discussed on the basis of arguments made by other authors. Whereas research is regarded as a "noble" task of the university, and one which may be difficult to manage, teaching and employment issues are often considered mundane and practical and thus perfectly manageable. We disagree and this is precisely why we would like to devote special consideration to them. Most of the material in this section is based on our own experience but reflects back on it critically, in light of what we are presenting in this essay. This section can be said to be an autoethnographic reflection (Zawadzki 2015).

The teaching engagement of academics is based on their relationship with their students. Students used to be considered participants in and co-creators of the university community. Their participation was primarily limited in time, but they had the rights and responsibilities that came with it. Currently, they have been cast out of the institution and are assumed to be "customers." This has dramatically reframed the role of academics who are teachers – from being mentors they have become service providers. In Anglo-Saxon countries, the roles are immediately related to the market, as students indeed pay high tuition fees and there the market model is taken as literally as possible. But this shift in roles exists even in those countries where students do not pay for their studies. Students' rights are increasingly considered in terms of customer rights, for example, the right to rate the "product" they are buying in a similar way as, for instance, hotels are rated on booking.com. Students are able to make complaints (which are very often successful) when they do not like the behaviour or even the outlook of a lecturer, or when they feel offended by the demands made on them, even if those demands are legitimate according to the requirements of learning. They also usually "gain" a massive debt, as paying the ever-increasing tuition fees is beyond the financial means of most students and their families.

Instead, they have lost the right to make a mistake, to learn from their mistakes, to search for answers, or to have the special protection of a discreet learning situation (classes are increasingly recorded and made available on the internet, or at least the intranet). The right to study has been lost to marketised roles. The responsibilities of students are also limited. Only staff are expected to "protect the brand" of the university; the former duty of students to care for the good name of the university has been blurred or disappeared altogether.

Studentship comes with the precarisation of an entire group of staff who used to be called assistants: early career participants working on the preparation of their doctoral theses. Today, the members of this group have become doctoral "students." In Anglo-Saxon countries, they pay tuition fees. At the same time, however, they are effectively part of the university staff: as teaching assistants, they compete for the opportunity to earn an income with those who already hold a doctoral degree and who must apply for employment at the university. In addition, teaching assistants used to have a limited – but nevertheless extant – influence on the content of their courses; today they are mostly only passive executors of the instructions they are given. At the same time, in order to have any chance of being hired, they also have to publish and earn credits for their publications. Yet doctoral programmes allow neither the resources nor the time for such work. This period of employment is currently being extended to scholars holding a PhD. The situation of the "post-doc," which is typical of neoliberal academia, is increasingly reminiscent of that of the pre-doctoral staff.

The conditions for university promotions in general are rather strict. It is not enough to have a body of work. A candidate has to keep publishing, because the achievements of a few years ago have no value. The practice of "point scoring" reigns supreme, as converting anything into points (even if the conversion criteria are absurd) facilitates seemingly objective decisions. In addition, student evaluations in surveys often have an effect on the decision to refuse to promote or extend the employment of a lecturer (even though many studies have shown that gender, age, and the perceived attractiveness of a lecturer make a significant difference in the marks they receive).

Even a professorship does not erase the insecurity and dispossession of our academic home, as the professor also has to continually demonstrate increasingly difficult quantitative achievements, both in terms of publications and in the amount of money gained for universities. As late as the beginning of the twenty-first century, the professor was in many countries an appointed

state employee with a guarantee of employment, but this is now increasingly rare. In some countries, there is a growing precarisation of professors: instead of conducting research and teaching students, they are expected to win grants that finance their own salaries and the activities of the university administration. When they fail to secure external funding, they can simply be dismissed (the term is "made redundant"). But a professorship is the most stable position available for academic staff: at the lower levels of the university career ladder, job stability is even more difficult to find.

Of course, the precarisation and alienation of the workforce is taking its toll on students, who are also struggling under increasing pressure to perform above average or even excellently if they want to get a job after graduation and be able to start dealing with debt. Their former right to be in more or less constant contact with tutors is being replaced by various inadequate constructs. In the Anglo-Saxon system these are often called "tutoring," but they have little to do with the original meaning of the word, which referred to a system involving deep, long, and direct conversations between student and teacher. Today "tutoring" is rather a kind of highly formalised service. Lecturers are also obliged to simulate academic life in order to provide the "student experience" – a significant element in the marketing of the university. This manifests itself in organising trips to theatres or galleries, trips abroad, and visits to historical monuments. These initiatives are rarely linked to the curriculum and rarely provide a basis for discussion or in-depth analysis; they primarily serve the purpose of providing "customers" with entertainment that is commensurate with the amount spent on tuition fees. Referring to students as customers and describing studies as an amazing experience is mainly the domain of Anglo-Saxon countries, but this terminology can also be found in other contexts, even in Scandinavia, where studies are free of charge and customer-product categories can only make sense in a deeply metaphorical sense.

However, in spite of this increasingly marketised structural context, it is extremely difficult to turn higher education into a product in any meaningful sense. In general, the concept of "market" used in the context of the university is a metaphor, and a very poor one at that. A university is a very complex institution, and even in the educational part of its activities (universities also conduct research and disseminate the results) it is not easy to clearly define what is a "product": does the university "sell" diplomas to students? Students to employers? Citizens to societies? Skills to students? Knowledge to the world? The list could go on for a long time. And yes, probably all these are products of the university – after all, different groups

(students, the state, entrepreneurs) turn to the university to obtain some kind of benefit (i.e., a product). But at the same time, it is difficult to actually speak of a product in any of the cases mentioned, because descriptive categories only make sense when they illuminate the situation, allowing analogies to be built. If the product is underdetermined, if the student is at the same time a "customer," a "product," and a "participant" of the university (as well as its "co-creator"), such a term has no cognitive or utilitarian value.

The more explicitly product-oriented activities of universities, in the form of MOOC courses, have not caught on – even if the classes themselves, and above all the course materials prepared for them, have their enthusiasts. However, these are mainly hobbyists, people looking for accessible knowledge on new topics, who are not very interested in systematic learning or in diplomas and certificates of completion (which were supposed to be at the heart of the online simplification of university courses).

The state also plays its part here. The principles governing higher education remain heavily regulated; this also applies to the awarding of diplomas, degrees, and titles. Moreover, it is possible that deregulation would not lead at all to a flourishing of private initiatives providing education services at competitive prices but to an implosion of the system. If a diploma does not guarantee the maintenance of external standards, why have one? This is why we do not expect or fear the Uberisation of universities through the introduction of a new technology that subverts the status quo. There will be a place for classroom lectures and seminars, for mentoring, for consultations, and also for on-line teaching that is not fully automated but demands active personal participation. The use of new technologies does not necessarily threaten personal teaching and learning relationships – a point which we think can be more or less considered to have been made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The practices of the modern university are far removed from the aims and objectives of the original. Yet, even in this context, there is an explicit need for at least some of its original functions to continue. This is the moment that can be regarded as a turning point. We will address this reflection in the concluding part of the essay.

/// Concluding Thoughts on Identity and Management

The university is suspended between various promises, ideals, strategies, and goals, and at the moment it is sorely lacking institutions and mechanisms to support its functioning. The massification of university education

in the last few decades has succeeded as a business project, but essentially failed as a society-based education one. The main cause is the lack of an entity willing to fund a massive global university (Connell 2019). This situation has coincided with other global crises and is not unique to universities. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is no funding for such a university to operate in the form of a traditional Humboldtian system, while still providing mass higher education. Added to this is a related identity crisis, a crisis of social legitimisation for the role of the university, and increased individualisation of educational achievement: universities are presented, in media and policy papers, as serving the individual advancement of their alumni rather than as contributors to societal advancement.

Above all, the agenda of mass university education as a route to a modern economy and state model is problematic. Most of the professions available to society do not require the level of education that is offered today. The crisis of labour and economic mechanisms goes well beyond educational programmes. Innovation, scientific development, and preparation for participation in civil society require different conditions and skills than those that have been implemented and reinforced for years (for example, competitiveness and individualisation are considered by many cited authors to be counter-productive or even harmful). However, at the moment, it is mainly the lack of institutions and mechanisms to manage and support the functioning of the university that is brought up whenever a critique is directed at neoliberal reforms of universities.

But some paths have already been taken. The first and most obvious one is proposed by the neoliberal reformers. Anglo-Saxon countries and their followers have moved away from the traditional identity of the university and seek funding from whatever sources are willing to provide it, that is, from private business and the students themselves, understood to be largely customers of foreign origin (primarily from Asian countries). This path is often portrayed in the Polish media as "inevitable," "exemplary," or otherwise worthy of emulation. However, it is important to remember, first, that Poland's context and that of the Anglo-Saxon countries is quite different due to language, brand management (the latter's huge efforts and funds aimed at achieving higher rankings, which is a matter unrelated to the core business, but requires separate resources and commitment), accreditations, and finally, mere marketing activities and contacts with global business. Second, and very importantly, this is by no means the inevitable or most modern path, but rather has recently become increasingly controversial and, in the view of academics themselves, is increasingly considered to be destructive.

Third, the price for following this path is abandonment of the university's identity. Funding from the "outside" means letting the "outside" into the university, and thus more or less gradually eroding academic institutions and turning them into a mass business providing dubitable services that rely on the promise of enabling future careers for students via "training." This is becoming increasingly contestable and he services themselves are growing ever more expensive. Anglo-Saxon universities have abandoned their autonomy and self-governance. Their internal governance structures have become dependent on the interests of external economic and political forces, and thus they are deprived of agility and prevented from realising their social role as a great buffer and independent frame of reference in society's search for direction (Docherty 2014). At the same time, universities in Anglo-Saxon countries have lost their uniqueness and can easily be replaced by more efficiently organised and cheaper businesses. The working conditions and ethos of the academic profession have been greatly eroded in these countries and replaced by other systems and structures. There, for several years, words such as "teaching," "professor," and "research" have been filled with a different content than in, for example, Poland or Sweden.

But the Scandinavian countries have been experimenting with a different path. They aim at a return to the identity of the traditional university and to qualities typical of academe, such as collegiality, and to work on adapting them to the requirements and conditions of the present day. A university understood in this way must be funded by the state and by local governments. Studies have to be free of charge for students, and the state needs to provide space and finances for research. There must be a gradual move away from individual grants to institution-focused financing plans designed to provide autonomy for individual researchers and teams. Through such arrangements, academic research can retain its independence and allow for the kind of blue-sky and serendipity-oriented projects (Merton & Barber 2004) that are not possible in other types of innovation-creating frameworks. Such arrangements dovetail with a return to autonomous, collegial forms of management. There is also frequent talk of the need to provide funding for research without shifting the extremely time-consuming and labour-intensive work of administration and proposal-writing onto researchers. Currently, these activities probably consume the majority of researchers' time, and this is an inefficient and wasteful approach to the public funding of science. For several years now, Scandinavian academics (e.g., Pallas & Wedin 2017; Svallfors 2020) have been exploring and discussing the possibilities of broadening collegiality, bringing

greater inclusivity to university organisation and governance, and replacing traditional academic "feudalism" with an active democracy tailored to the needs of the academic profession. It is our conviction that Poland would do very well to explore this possibility while there is still some institutional memory left in the system, and while some of the structures are still functioning. We only need to fill them with meaning. In emulation of the above-mentioned Swedish authors, we believe that the academic leadership should adopt this goal and that it is an urgent one.

Let the following citation serve as a compass for those who wish to prepare the ground for good university management practices in Poland.

> The university in its spiritual dimension exists only through a community which upholds in its actions the values on which it is founded. The organisation of the university, which is so readily changed and reformed, can of course make it more or less difficult to act in accordance with the academic ethos, but it does not touch the essence of the university. The real danger, then, is precisely the erosion of the ethos, taking place not under pressure from external actors, but through the "ethical spotlighting" of a different system of motivation. (Giza, 2019: 167)

Bibliography:

/// Alvesson M., Gabriel Y. 2013. "Beyond Formulaic Research: In Praise of Greater Diversity in Organizational Research and Publications," *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, vol. 12(2), pp. 245–263.

/// Aronowitz S. 2001. "The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating and Co-Optation," *Critical Sociology*, vol. 47(7–8), pp. 1111–1124.

/// Bjuremark A. 2002. *Att styra i namn av akademisk kollegialitet*, HLS Förlag.

/// Blackham A. 2020. "Unpacking Precarious Academic Work in Legal Education," *The Law Teacher*, vol. 54(3), pp. 426–442.

/// Broucker B., De Wit K. 2015. "New Public Management in Higher Education," [in:] *The Palgrave International Handbook of Higher Education Policy and Governance*, eds. J. Huisman, H. de Boer, D.D. Dill, M. Souto-Otero, Palgrave, pp. 57–75.

/// Chang H.-J. 2010. *23 Things They Don't Tell You about Capitalism*, Penguin.

/// Collini S. 2012. *What Are Universities For?*, Penguin.

/// Connell R. 2019. *The Good University: What Universities Actually Do and Why It's Time for Radical Change*, Zed Books.

/// Docherty T. 2014. *Universities at War*, Sage.

/// Dreyfus S.E., Dreyfus H.L. 1980. *A Five-Stage Model of the Mental Activities Involved in Directed Skill Acquisition*, Defense Technical Information Center, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA084551, accessed: 29.07.2023.

/// Engwall L. 2016. *Universitet under uppsikt*, Dialogos.

/// Fleming P. 2021. *Dark Academia: How Universities Die*, Pluto Press.

/// Flyvbjerg B. 2001. *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*, Cambridge University Press.

/// Ginsberg B. 2011. *The Fall of the Faculty*, Oxford University Press.

/// Giroux H. 2007. *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*, Paradigm.

/// Giza A. 2019. "Uniwersytet, czyli o 'upartym obstawaniu przy regułach dobrego używania intelektu,'" *Kultura i Rozwój*, vol. 7, pp. 151–170.

/// Giza A. 2021. "Modernizując uczelnie: Polskie szkoły wyższe po 1989 roku," *Nauka*, vol. 2, pp. 131–159.

/// Giza A., Karwińska A., Zielińska M. 2019. "Nowa ustawa, nowa uczelnia. Przemyślenia po dwóch latach od przyjęcia konstytucji dla nauki, po roku od przyjęcia statutu i po trzech miesiącach pandemii," *Kultura i Rozwój*, vol. 7, pp. 191–208.

/// Goodhart C. 1975. "Problems of Monetary Management: The UK Experience," *Papers in Monetary Economics*, vol. 1(1), pp. 1–20.

/// Hall R., Bowles K. 2016. *Re-Engineering Higher Education: The Subsumption of Academic True Higher Learning*, Beacon Press.

/// Han B.-C. 2015. *The Burnout Society*, Stanford University Press.

/// Hasselberg Y. 2012. *Vetenskap som arbete. Normer och arbetsorganisation I den kommodifierade vetenskapen*, Gidlunds.

/// Hirschman A.O. 1970. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations and States*, Harvard University Press.

/// House of Commons Library. 2022. *Research Briefing: Student Loan Statistic*, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01079/, accessed: 28.07.2023.

/// Izak M., Kostera M., Zawadzki M. 2017. "Introduction: The Future of University Education," [in:] *The Future of University Education*, eds. M. Izak, M. Kostera, M. Zawadzki, Palgrave, pp. 1–16.

/// Jaquet C. 2014. *Les transclasses ou la non-reproduction*, Presses Universitaires de France.

/// Karran T., Beiter K., Mallinson L. 2022. "Academic Freedom in Contemporary Britain: A Cause for Concern?," *Higher Education Quarterly*, vol. 76(3), pp. 563–579.

/// Karran T., Mallinson L. 2017. "Academic Freedom in the UK: Legal and Normative Protection in a Comparative Context," *UCU Report*, https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8614/Academic-Freedom-in-the-UK-Legal-and-Normative-Protection-in-a-Comparative-Context-Report-for-UCU-Terence-Karran-and-Lucy-Mallinson-May-17/pdf/ucu_academicfreedom study_report_may17.pdf, accessed: 18.08.2023.

/// Kieżun W. 1971. *Autonomizacja jednostek organisacyjnych: Z patologii zarządzania*, PWE.

/// Kuhn T.S. (1964) 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

/// Magna Charta Universistatum. 1988. Magna Charta, https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/mcu-1988, accessed: 29.07.2023.

/// Mazzucato M. 2018. *The Value of Everything: Making and Talking in the Global Economy*, Penguin.

/// Merton R.K., Barber E. 2004. *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science*, Princeton University Press.

/// Mintzberg H. 2019. *Bedtime Stories for Managers: Farewell Loft Leadership… Welcome Engaging Management*, Berrett-Koehler.

/// Mintzberg H. 2023. *Understanding Organisations… Finally! Structures in Sevens*, Berrett-Koehler.

/// Muller J.Z. 2019. *The Tyranny of Metrics*, Princeton University Press.

/// Pallas J., Wedin L. 2017. *Det ostyrda universitetet? Perspektiv på styrning, autonomi och reform av svenska lärosäten*, Makadam.

/// Parker M. 2018. *Shut Down the Business School: What's Wrong with Management Education*, Pluto Press.

/// Parker M. 2021. "The Critical Business School and the University: A Case Study of Resistance and Co-Optation," *Critical Sociology*, vol. 47(7–8), pp. 1111–1124.

/// Power M. 1997. *The Audit Society: The Rituals of Verification*, Oxford University Press.

/// Rigney D. 1991. "Three Kinds of Anti-Intellectualism: Rethinking Hofstadter," *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 61(4), pp. 434–451.

/// Sahlin K., Eriksson-Zetterquist U. 2016a. *Kollegialitet – en modern styrform*, Studentlitteratur.

/// Sahlin K., Eriksson-Zetterquist U. 2016b. "Collegiality in Modern Universities: The Composition of Governance Ideals and Practices," *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, vol. 2–3, 33640.

/// Sandén T. 2007. *Lust att leda i lust och leda. Om rektorers arbete under en tid av förändring*, Åbo Akademi University Press.

/// Schneider G. 2013. "Student Evaluations, Grade Inflation and Pluralistic Teaching: Moving from Customer Satisfaction to Student Learning and Critical Thinking," *Forum for Social Economics*, vol. 42(1), pp. 122–135.

/// Sellgren K. 2020. "Student Loans New Repayment Tool 'Irresponsible,'" BBC, https://www.bbc.com/news/education-53388524, accessed: 29.07.2023.

/// Sennett R. 2008. *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press.

/// Smyth J. 2017. *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars, and Neoliberal Ideology*, Palgrave Macmillan.

/// Spicer A. 2017. "Universities Are Broke: So Let's Cut the Pointless Admin and Get Back to Teaching," *The Guardian*, https://www.theguar-

dian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/21/universities-broke-cut-pointless-
-admin-teaching, accessed: 29.07.2023.

/// Standing G. 2019. *Plunder of the Commons: A Manifesto for Sharing Public Wealth*, Penguin.

/// Svallfors S. 2020. *The Inner World of Research: On Academic Labor*, Anthem.

/// UNESCO. 1997. *Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*, https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-status-higher-education-teaching-personnel, accessed: 29.07.2023.

/// University and College Union. 2021. *Precarious Work in Higher Education: Insecure Contracts and How They Have Changed over Time*, https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10899/Precarious-work-in-higher-education-May-20/pdf/ucu_he-precarity-report_may20.pdf, accessed: 29.07.2023.

/// West D. 2016. "The Managerial University: A Failed Experiment?," *Demos*, https://demosproject.net/The-managerial-university, accessed: 29.07.2023.

/// Williams T. 2023. "Oxford Sued by Tutors over 'Uberisation' of Teaching," *Times Higher Education*, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/oxford-sued-tutors-over-uberisation-teaching, accessed: 14.08.2023.

/// Zawadzki M. 2015. "Autoetnografia," [in:] *Metody badawcze w zarządzaniu humanistycznym*, ed. M. Kostera, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Sedno, pp. 61–70.

/// Zawadzki M., Jensen T. 2020. "Bullying and the Neoliberal University: A Co-Authored Autoethnography," *Management Learning*, vol. 51(4), pp. 398–413.

/// Abstract

Universities have been with us for centuries if not millennia. The academy is one of the oldest organisational forms still in existence. Throughout their history, universities have evolved, experimenting with various kinds of organisational structure: from student association, through private company, to ecclesiastical, state, or local government institution. They have been continually altering their management structure: from a collective of

peers through a centralised hierarchy and a loose federation of faculties to a structure based on deeply democratic collegiality. Currently in Poland, as in many other countries, a series of reforms have put universities under pressure to "marketise." This paper discusses some of the urgent dilemmas that have arisen after the transformation of the sector and offers some ideas for where sustainable managerial solutions could be sought.

/// **Jerzy Kociatkiewicz** – professor of management at the Institut Mines-Télécom Business School in France. Previously, he worked at universities in Great Britain, Sweden and Poland. His scholarly interests include the study of organisational space, meaning-making processes, and the narrative underpinnings of organisational realities. His work has been published in journals such as *Human Relations*, *Organization Studies* and *Annals of Tourism Research*. He is also a co-editor of the book *How to Do Social Science that Matters* (2024).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6449-1185

E-mail: kociak@kociak.org

/// **Monika Kostera** – professor of economics and humanities. She works at the University of Warsaw Faculty of Sociology and Faculty of Management. She was employed as a full-time professor at universities in Great Britain, Sweden and France. She has published more than 50 books as well as numerous scholarly articles and poetry. She has co-edited international academic journals. Her current research interests include management sociology, labour disalienation, and ethnography.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5303-5544

E-mail: m.kostera@uw.edu.pl