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## Norms vs appearances

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## Norms vs appearances

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On 23 October 2001, the first iPod entered the market. This fact went unnoticed because of the involvement of the Western world, especially the United States, in the ‘war on terrorism’ in Afghanistan. The appearance of the iPod resulted in a change in the mode of the consumption of civilisation, culture, and art, as well as of the transmission of information and culture (Gądek 2012), although some authors are more sceptical about this impact (Białek 2013). Łukasz Turski thinks this means a civilisational revolution of more far-reaching proportions than even the Gutenberg revolution (*ibidem*). The army ceased to be the driver of technological progress, instead entertainment became it, with far-reaching social consequences. The paradigm for the functioning of civilisation is therefore changing.

This was, of course, a process. Ł. Turski reminds that Czesław Niemen’s recording studio was a more developed computer centre in the 1980s than the command headquarters of the Warsaw Pact (Gądek 2012). This process was, however, overlooked by the bureaucratic systems of the management of science and higher education. At the level of the European Union, the Bologna process was applied which introduced a three-level university education, i.e. bachelor, master, and doctoral studies. This made little sense in the social sciences. At the level of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education in turn, a model of the modernisation by – declared – dependent development and – undeclared but certainly unavoidable in this context – bureaucratisation, often exceeding the limits of absurdity, was applied. The fiasco of the Lisbon strategy, based on the very same rules, seemed, however, not

to spoil the complacency of the bureaucrats, abstracted from these civilisation changes.

The civilisation changes are responsible for an unavoidable virtualisation of universities. In the autumn of 2011, two scholars from Stanford University offered internauts a course at their university. The course included lectures, homework, partial tests, independent activities and a final exam. A solid foundation in mathematics was necessary in order to participate. Ca 160 000 people from 180 countries enrolled in the course (Hołdys 2012), of whom 20 000 completed it. Those who graduated received a certificate of course completion, paving the way for full free virtual university studies. The number of courses increased to 11 the following semester, with high standards required of candidates.

This challenge has been taken by several leading American universities: Stanford, Princeton, Harvard, Pennsylvania and Michigan State, as well as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The virtualisation of universities will inevitably lead to their polarisation. The best universities will maintain their positions because, apart from virtualisation, they offer a creative atmosphere resulting from direct interpersonal contacts. The weakest higher schools, which offer archaic knowledge, poor preparation and hardly any professional perspectives are, on the contrary, threatened with collapse (Hołdys 2012). This applies to many Polish higher schools which are based on the culture of pursuit of multiple sources of personal income of lecturers and reverential respect for nonsensical bureaucratic regulations rather than the culture of the Grove of Academe.

The future of not only higher education lies in its individualising rather than its mass-character, a fact not inconsistent with the mass demand of virtual education, i.e. teaching people rather than subjects, as well as life-long education. In this context, the GCE exam becomes anachronic (Gądek 2012, Ziemiec 2013), especially if reduced to solving tests skills which would replace a competitive university entrance exam. The future of university education is an individual course of study, designed on the basis of the history of the candidate's Facebook activities (Gądek 2012), as well as a preparation of a Wikipedia entry instead of a schematic BA thesis (Hasło..., 2013).

In Poland, a demographic depression has already reached higher schools. This factor is impacting upon the process indicated above. In this context, the development of mass higher education during the last two decades could be easily recognised as 'a great deception' (Tomaszewicz 2012). It was based on the now clearly visible fact that private diploma mills advertised as universities despite typically being quasi-educational institutions of second choice, attracting students unable to enter more prestigious universities, the vast majority of whom were neither predisposed nor likely to become successful students. Buying their diplomas by fees, the graduates from these institutions were leaving them convinced of their good education, and frustrated in the labour market where similar holders of junk diplomas abounded (Ziemiec 2013). This practice was authenticated by the state. Until 2011 all diplomas bore the national emblem, suggesting some sort of equivalence. The state presided over the degeneration of the education system at all levels (*ibidem*). The higher education reforms introduced competitive mechanisms into the education market, but their success is hard to assess yet. It is also difficult to overlook the neo-liberal ideology which these mechanisms are based on. As an interenaut indicated in his/her comment on the text by Ewa Tomaszewicz (2012): 'universities were changed into factories, scientists into proles, and students into raw material, albeit shoddily produced. And still it is to be cheaper and even cheaper'. As Bogusław Śliwerski states, the sphere of education resembles thus a Chinese factory in which price and quantity counts while quality is of secondary importance (Drzewiecki 2013).

Interestingly, the legacy of communism was that many people were well educated in the system which, even though ideologically biased, reproduced the intelligentsia's ethos. Those people were professionally prepared to consume the telecommunication revolution at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, which resulted in generally free access to the Internet in agro-tourist farms in Poland, a phenomenon not seen in hotels on the Mediterranean (Ziemiec 2013). The post-communist reforms of education on all levels resulted, on the contrary, in the development of stress free tests solving schools, in which teamwork skills (Polak Polakowi..., b.d.) and, especially, independent thinking, as well as learning and studying were lacking, a fact that resulted in 'complete educational collapse' (Tomaszewicz 2012). 'Practical teach-

ing', i.e. training rather than education, is recommended to universities (Gądek 2012) so that they are to adjust to the current needs of the labour market. This is accompanied by a bureaucratisation of science and higher education, implemented under the pretext of their parameterisation, based on the bookkeeper's mentality, with – according to Ewa Nawrocka – books replaced by bills of exchange (Tomaszewicz 2012).

The reforms are based on a modernisation project implemented by dependent development which results in a permanent and systemic developmental backwardness of Poland compared to the core of the world capitalist system (Rykiel 2012). During the two post-transformation decades, the management of science in Poland has been based on a deepening of her peripheralisation rather than modernisation, permanently decreasing expenditures on science expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product (Rykiel 2005). The present government increased expenditures to the embarrassing level of 0.4% GDP, as if that would guarantee success. According to the budget plan for 2013, the expenditures for science were to increase, in absolute values, by 1.3%, and by 1.1% for higher education, with inflation of ca 4% (Komisja senacka 2013). The proposal of Ewa Nawrocka is thus worth considering that 'since the state has no money for science, let it get away' by a liquidation of universities and, above all, the Ministry (Tomaszewicz 2012).

This supposedly obvious model is not, however, a pro-modernisation activity. A question of cultural identity is related to modernisation. The complex of developmental backwardness is responsible for the fact that a peripheral national mentality is recognised as the reason and modernisation by de-Polonisation is seen as a tempting way to cope with it (Krasnodębski 2011). Such a strategy of modernisation was known on the western Polish ethnic borderland, especially in Upper Silesia, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the Nazi German *Generalplan Ost* of the 1940s was its most radical expression (*ibidem*). Objections to such a modernisation strategy lead to a clash of cultures as the contemporary version of the *Kulturkampf*, in which universities are perceived as culture creating institutions, functioning in the context of the national and European cultures, i.e. institutions intended to educate rather than to train. Our journal *Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)* participates in the clash by objecting to a selective adaptation of Western cultural patterns, especially if appearances rather than

civilisation norms are adopted. It means disagreeing with the Ministry's depreciation of the role of Polish as a scientific language and with its incentive to publish in pidgin-English.

The extent to which the imitation of modernisation by de-Polonisation is a deliberate project of the Ministry is debatable. One must also ask to what extent it is a result of the incompetence of its officials. The Council of the Polish Language reviewed the websites of some ministries (it was not disclosed whether or not the Ministry of Science and Higher Education was included), stating that there are numerous violations of the standards of the Polish language, including an excess of foreign words, spelling, and punctuation errors (Urzędniczy..., 2013). The Council of the Faculty of the Polish Philology, the Jagiellonian University, expressed its concern thus, noting 'an imposition by the Ministry in the documents and reports [...] schemes which reduce severe cognitive problems to trivial simplifications and infantile phrases, insult the rules of proper Polish, hav[ing] lingual culture for nothing' (Uchwała..., 2012: 1).

This included the Ministry's pressure to publish in English-language journals, provided, however, that the journals' expectations of authors are not too high. Journals that reject no more than 30% of the submitted texts are therefore preferred in the Ministry's scoring. Our journal *Przestrzeń Społeczna* (*Social Space*) gets dangerously close to this limit. If it passed anywhere above this it could be negatively evaluated by ministerial officials, even though it would be appreciated on the international intellectual market. If, however, this appreciation resulted some day in an inclusion of the journal in the Philadelphia list, the prestige level of the journal would automatically cease to bother the Ministry.

In this way the notion of the reflected self, i.e. one's own idea of how one is perceived by others, is included in the debate. The discourse of pop-culture fun in which there is no place for a realistic assessment of the situation then takes precedence over real life (Stec 2013). Erich Fromm's (1979) dilemma - 'to have or to be' - loses its importance. Another modus appears: i.e. to look and to make an impression (Stec 2013). This fact paradoxically reduces social behaviour to the categories of George Berkeley's (1710) subjective idealism: *esse est percipi* (to exist is to be per-

ceived). Fear of negative self-perception is thus frustrating. The present education system serves thus merely to meet the needs of EU experts and do well in their indicators (Drzewicki 2103). The common man and his mentality accepts, if not promotes, mediocrity, ignorance, ugliness, and vulgarity (Legutko 2012). It triumphs while the intelligentsia's ethos is reduced to the category of the *intellectual minority* (Chwin 2013).

While being fascinated by the forms and appearances of the scientific culture of the world capitalist system's core, one can overlook or underestimate its relevant norms. These include plagiarism and cheating during examinations. Both of these ailments, regarded as forms of intellectual theft in Anglo-Saxon culture, are recognised as manifestations of resourcefulness in Poland and East-Central Europe, if not the European continent more generally. While most Anglo-Saxon universities threaten expulsion from the university for cheating during examinations, it is condemned verbally – at the most – in Polish higher schools. In practice detection of fraud tends to have unpleasant consequences for the 'inhuman' examiner rather than the 'unfortunate' student. This results from the fact that the Polish education system involves manipulating indicators rather than educating of young people (Drzewiecki 2013).

This is a part of a more general phenomenon, referred to by Andrzej Zybertowicz as the culture of tolerance for mediocrity (Sieradzki 2013). It results from the reluctance to enter into conflicts with others or, more generally, a limited skills of civilised response in conflict situations, associated with high emotional costs. In cases of plagiarism, a question of the complex of insufficient recognition for own achievements should be added in the context of information redundancy. A plagiarism is therefore recognised in this context as a perverse form of the recognition of the plagiarised text (*ibidem*), a fact also pointed to by Yi-Fu Tuan (1977). Ewa Nawrocka suggests that change in this situation is hardly possible without structural changes in Polish science (Tomaszewicz 2012). Andrzej Zybertowicz maintains that, on the contrary, the development of modern civilisation development begins when clear standards are successfully (and strictly) applied. These are, however, not possible with-

out significant political changes (Sieradzki 2013), which are difficult in the context of the dominant ethos of non-political scientific community.

A relatively easy hacking of governmental websites is one part of the culture of tolerance for mediocrity since 99% of employees in the public sector express their undisguised reluctance to change (Marek 2013). One element of this culture at the scientific and political levels was the auctioning of the Minister of Science and Higher Education's (else a full professor) personally dedicated book, which turned out to be authored by someone else (Minister Nauki..., 2013). This is an illustration of the situation under discussion: a professor having no book of her own becomes a cabinet minister and is engaged in writing regulations rather than scientific books.

But what of the world and its standards? Bureaucrats like blissful ignorance – they do not want their worldview troubled. They dislike having it disrupted by too much important information from outside. Our 'global village' is becoming in fact less and less global and more and more rustic (Lis 2013), but ever so homely. And this very detail distinguishes our journal *Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)* from those institutions mentioned above. We share the view that what is needed is more humanity and less technocratism, more equilibrium and less quantitative growth, more investment in social capital and less in hardware, more self-responsibility and less improvement of others (Jakich postaw..., 2013). We also share the view that 'the aim of science is[,] firstly, the search for the truth about the world outside, in other words[,] the discovering of new, previously unknown things, and secondly, the use of these already known things to discover their new applications. [...] What is not the aim of science is [...] bidding on impact factors [...] nor] obtaining grants (Wróblewski 2012).

The argument that competition within the capitalist system leads inevitably to innovativeness seems invalid. Firms, which seek to generate a profit, cannot be the basis of innovativeness because their goal is to make money rather than solve problems (Białek 2013). The expectation that private firms will serve as a driver of science is thus as groundless as measuring of the effectiveness of science with the level of the commercialisation of discoveries. It is the state that should be capable of long-term planning while citizens have the right to require this from the state. If the state is unable to do so or if it gave way to capitalism, let it perhaps get away indeed.



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