

Zbigniew Rykiel

Locality vs universality

Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space) 2/1 (3), 14-19

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Locality vs universality

Zbigniew Rykiel

Editor-in-Chief

Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)

socialspacejournal@gmail.com

The tenth anniversary of the Rzeszów University in 2011 was celebrated by a publication of a book on region and regionalism. The volume was intended as a uniformly edited collective work meeting the requirements of scientific books. The starting point was a conference consisting of 53 relevant papers. Only 42 papers, or 79% of their potential number, were, however, submitted for publication consideration.

The understanding of three terms, i.e. *book*, *scientific*, and *editing* turned out not to be generally understandable as was first assumed. The *book* is understood by the present author not as a product of material culture, i.e. composed and framed sheets of printed paper, but rather a product of ideal culture, i.e. a literary work, even though a scientific work is under consideration herein. *Editing* is understood as a preparation of other persons' writings in a way suitable for publication. The fact that in many contemporary Polish publications editing is understood as a mere insertion of the so understood 'editor's' name on the front page of the volume is meaningless, however. *Scientific* is understood as compliant with the principles and methods of science. The related term *science* is, in turn, understood as orderly and systematic knowledge.

The above presented understanding of the three, if not four, basic terms meant that authors of individual articles were expected to submit manuscripts that would meet the standards of science, including logic and – relative at least – precise argu-

ments, as well as lingual correctness. The authors could, in turn, expect from the editor a careful analysis of their texts in this very respect. These expectations proved to be, however, difficult to meet for a substantial part of the authors. More than half of them in fact submitted texts that did not meet the expectations of the editor. Improvements of the submitted texts were proposed to most of the authors but some were not willing or even able to attempt changes. The other half of the authors submitted texts that required only slight editorial interventions or at least suggestions that their authors were willing to incorporate – sometimes repeatedly – until a mutually acceptable result was reached.

As a result, 21 out of 42 submitted papers, i.e. a half of them, were not accepted for publication by the editor. The reasons were diverse. They included: (1) hardly any connection with the subject of the volume; (2) the style diverging from scientific conventions; (3) very poor language used in otherwise interesting texts; and (4) the author's inability or unwillingness to improve their texts. As a result, 21 out of the potential number of 53 papers, i.e. 40%, were included in the volume.

These figures, and particularly their context, provide an interesting illustration of a cultural phenomenon, which is a pattern of thinking and behaviour or – more extensively – the cultural code or the organisational culture of the Polish scientific milieu. The pattern includes an atrophy of the scientific discussion, allergy to criticism arising from its personalisation, and, as a result, defensive reactions in the form of withdrawal, adoption of an attitude of indignity, a reversal of social roles or resignation. Generally, the authors of papers considered for publication adopt the following strategies:

- (1) ignoring most of the comments and submitting subsequent versions of their texts with the same errors;
- (2) a lack of reaction, including ignoring correspondence, i.e. breaking contacts;
- (3) expressing dissatisfaction with criticism or outrage at it, and a discontinuation of further cooperation;
- (4) a reversal of social roles, which consisted of either informing the editor what the author 'does not intend' to do or accusations of editor or reviewer incompetence;

- (5) efforts of a mechanical introduction of corrections indicated by the editor without understanding of its context;
- (6) an argumentative and courteous polemic with the editor or reviewers;
- (7) a critical re-evaluation of the previous versions of their texts.

There are reasons to think that the initial four strategies are typical for the Polish – and post-communist in general – cultural code of the scientific milieu, while the latest two are characteristic of Western academic culture, especially in Anglo-Saxon, societies. We had also observed this phenomenon in the earlier editorial activity of the *Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)* journal.

This phenomenon seems to result from relative cultural peripheralisation of the societies in question. The peripheralisation may be overcome by either dependent development, also referred to as the way of the reformed continuation (Szomburg 2012), or a change in the cultural code. In the case of Poland, the former way was adopted – over 20 years ago in the economy and now in science – as easier and providing a faster achievement of the desired results, even though sentencing the applicant to the eternal dependence or semi-peripherality. This model resulted in a spectacular success in the economy, now, however, its potential seems to run out with the general – social rather than economic – collapse of the neo-liberal model. In science, this model has not yet produced visible positive results while it transmuted in the bureaucratic degeneration very quickly, which reduced the idea of the university to the level of a special school for the mentally sluggish – under the pretext of the developing of competitiveness and introduction of the Bologna system, however in a version rather far from the original assumptions. The bureaucrats responsible for the implementation of the system wish to move in the normalised, parametric, and generally boorish world while the world of science is complex, multidimensional, and unpredictable (Jałowicki 2012).

As Jan Szomburg (2012) reasonably argues, nations compete mostly by their cultures. It is therefore in this area that long-term social and economic development, international competitiveness, and civilisation progress occur. Universities in a given country are culturally conditioned, they should thus form cultural people – well-rounded educated citizens – rather than give excessive weight to the opinions of

employers who think in terms of today's labour market (Jałowiecki 2011). Universities are not essentially mass institutions, they should therefore accept would-be students merely on the basis of competitive entrance examinations and compete in quality (*ibidem*) rather than in – the favourite measure of politicians and bureaucrats – scholarisation indices, changing themselves into diploma mills.

The latter phenomenon seems an unavoidable result of the reformed continuation, which can – with some simplification – be reduced to the adaptation to the requirements of the financial markets (Szomburg 2012). This means an acceptance of the, dominant in Polish institutions, manorial cultural code (Szomburg 2012), including science, the phenomenon pointed to by the present author quite a time ago (Rykiel 1983, 1988), incidentally with far-reaching personal consequences. 'This trend is unable to compensate the negative psychological results of the growing alienation of state institutions, from which the public ethos leaks in direct proportion to the number of the applied measurements and indices' (Szomburg 2012), and tries to reduce science to the Ministry's scores gathering (Jałowiecki 2012).

The case of the reaction of the potential authors of the jubilee volume for the critique of their papers, and – more extensively – their strategies, reflect a wider phenomenon of the cultural code. It is related to the lack of abilities of (1) training and use of talents, (2) conversation and discussion, (3) exchange of information and ideas, and (4) sincere cooperation in groups and teams (Szomburg 2012). It is in this very context that 'school suppresses the development of personal subjectivity and creativity, teaching conformism, schematic thinking, and solving tests rather than problems' (Szomburg 2012), neglecting independent thinking, reflexivity, civic activity, empathy, cooperation, the understanding and development of one's own talents, and the ability to learn (*ibidem*), while universities after the newest pseudo-reform are induced to qualify graduates to meet the needs of today's labour market. The undereducated – as a result of the doubtful experiments with the GCE exam and successive education reforms in general – classes of graduates, devoid of critical thinking skills, unable to read, for whom the Internet is a basic source of knowledge (Stopa 2012), are being prepared for the profession of sociologist. Children are expected to obey, students to be conformists, employees to possess special executive powers while no one is expected to evidence his/her subjectivity, imagination, and

social skills.

The new model of development postulated by J. Szomburg (2012), based on a change in the cultural code and organisational culture, seems to be aimed at the imitation of norms (Rykiel 2011a, b, c) rather than behaviour, forms, and institutions, with the development of one's own meta-competences. The unconventional, if not anarchic, thinking out of the box, characteristic of Polish culture, as well as the art of improvisation, i.e. also institutional flexibility, provide an opportunity to surpass the West without catching it up if only the prevalent anachronistic post-Enlightenment education system will not disturb to reach this goal. The education authorities and those supervising science should thus be engaged in removal of these obstacles rather than in the invalidating of the role of the Polish language as the main means of public communication in Poland (Jałowiecki 2012; Uchwała..., 2012). The point is that the publication process is determined not only by substantive criteria, but also by non-substantive criteria, including group participation, disciplinary culture, and the expertise authors have. A superficial treatment of the issues of the publication strategies, in which they are reduced to publication in English, result from the ignorance of the sociological elements of the publication process and the mechanisms for the academic career implemented in the areas of national languages (Wagner 2012) – not only Polish but even more obviously French, German, Spanish, and Chinese (Jałowiecki 2012).

The *Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)* journal intends to support this course of action while respecting the norms of Western civilisation and finding an obvious place for Polish culture within it rather than distancing itself from it. We do believe that science, including social science, is a creative activity, the scholar's output is thus to be measured not so much by the scores the Ministry stresses to gather but certainly by 'the impact of his/her publications, which are read and cited' (Jałowiecki 2012). The current extent of the impact of our journal indicates that this belief is correct.

References

Jałowiecki B., 2011: Misja uniwersytetów, a efekty kształcenia. „Bistro.edu.pl”,
2011-12-08 <http://www.bistro.edu.pl/artypul,Misja-uniwersytetow->

[a-efekty-kształcenia.html](#)

Jałowiecki B., 2012: Nauka punktowana. „Bistro”, 2012-04-25 14:15:36,

<http://bistro.edu.pl/artypkyl,Nauka-punktowana.html>

Rykiel Z., 1983: Przemiany paradygmatu polskiej geografii społeczno-ekonomicznej. Referat na Ogólnopolskiej Konferencji Metodologicznej „Podstawowe problemy rozwoju geografii polskiej”, Rydzyna, 27-30 czerwca 1983. Komitet Nauk Geograficznych PAN.

Rykiel Z., 1988: The functioning and the development of Polish human geography. “Progress in Human Geography”, 12, 391-408.

Rykiel Z., 2011a: Norms rather than score. „Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)”, 1, 11-14.

Rykiel Z., 2011b: Norms and forms. „Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)”, 2, 7-13.

Rykiel Z., 2011c: Norms vs conventions. A commentary on Ulrich Best. „Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)”, 2, 14-19.

Stopa M., 2012: Po co socjologia. „Bistro.edu.pl”, 2012-01-22 07:03:06,

<http://bistro.edu.pl/polemika,O-socjologii-s%C5%82ow-kilka,Po-co-socjologia.html>

Szomburg J., 2009: Wielkie przewartościowanie. „Rzeczpospolita”, 08-02-2012,

ostatnia aktualizacja 08-02-2012 19:23; <http://www.rp.pl/artypkyl/809031.html>

Uchwała Zarządu Głównego Towarzystwa Kultury Języka w sprawie ochrony polskiego języka naukowego, 28 lutego 2012. Warszawa: Towarzystwo Kultury

Języka; <http://forumakademickie.pl/aktualnosci/2012/2/28/1153/uchwala-zarządu-glównego-towarzystwa-kultury-jezyka-w-sprawie-ochrony-polskiego-jezyka-naukowego/>

Wagner I., 2012: Selektywna analiza problemu publikacji humanistów i przedstawicieli nauk społecznych w języku angielskim. „Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej”, 8, 1, 166-187; <http://www.przegladsocjologiijakosciowej.org>.

Wpłynęło/received 12.05.2012; poprawiono/revised 18.05.2012