

STUDYING IN THE ERA OF POSTMODERNITY ON THE FADING AWAY OF THE STUDENT COMMUNITY – AN ATTEMPT TO DESCRIBE AND EXPLAIN THE PHENOMENON

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Abstract. In the conditions of dynamic demographic, technological and structural-market changes, as well as socio-cultural transformations, education is more often treated instrumentally as another task to perform and pass. This approach to education also causes changes in interpersonal relations. This article attempts to describe and explain one of the more visible occurrence in the area of academic education, which is the disappearing of the students' community. The discussion is the background to planned research and further explorations

STUDIOWANIE W DOBIE PONOWOCZESNOŚCI O ZANIKANIU WSPÓLNOTY STUDENCKIEJ – PRÓBA OPISU I WYJAŚNIENIA ZJAWISKA

Słowa kluczowe: uniwersytet, kształcenie akademickie, wspólnota studencka, wspólnota akademicka, student, nauczyciel akademicki

Streszczenie. W warunkach dynamicznych zmian demograficznych, technologicznych i strukturalno-rynkowych, a także przeobrażeń społeczno-kulturalnych edukacja coraz częściej traktowana jest instrumentalnie, jako kolejne zadanie do wykonania. Takie podejście do kształcenia i samokształcenia powoduje zmiany w relacjach międzyludzkich. W niniejszym artykule podjęta została próba opisu i wyjaśnienia jednego z coraz bardziej widocznych zjawisk w obszarze kształcenia akademickiego, jakim jest zanikanie wspólnoty studenckiej. Podjęta dyskusja stanowi tym samym tło do planowanych badań i dalszych eksploracji badawczych.

Academic majesty and study ethos

The significance of the name „university” stems from the fact that since the beginning of history, the university has been a symbol of tradition, an Ivory Tower. The Magna Charta Universitatum¹ underlines the uniqueness of this institution in many dimensions. In the social dimension, the university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies, organised in a variety of ways according to geography and historical heritage; it creates, researches, evaluates and communicates culture through scientific and didactic activities. In order to meet the needs of the world around us, its scientific and didactic activities must be morally and intellectually independent of political and economic power². On the other hand, in an individual dimension, linked to a unique and academic-specific relationship between master and student, university is the best meeting place for lecturers who are able to pass their knowledge and are well prepared to develop it through research and innovation, and for students who, in turn, are able and willing to enrich their minds with this knowledge³. To become a university, applying for this protected and honourable „title” and being able to define oneself as such, especially in Poland, required many efforts and the fulfilment of specific conditions⁴. As the author points out, this was mainly due to historical and social factors.

The university’s strength lies in tradition and customs, research, dissemination of truth, ethics and specific attitudes and behaviours of members of the academic community. The University Majesty is built through costumes, symbols, diplomas, titles and degrees. One of a kind and unique are in the context of the setting and atmosphere academic ceremonies: graduates, doctoral promotions, honorary doctorate ceremonies, award ceremonies, the content of recited promises and vows, membership in scientific bodies and student organizations. The sublimity and rank of these events is inseparably connected with the respect and celebration of the principles of academic freedom, autonomy, the artistry of the

¹ The Magna Charta Universitatum (Bologna Charta), which was signed on 18 September 1088 by 388 university rectors, commits itself to the academic values of tolerance, respect and openness, while giving universities an important role in social life and its transformation (A. Śliz, M. Szczepański, *Dostojny Uniwersytet?* Ofic. Nauk., Warszawa 2014, s. 26).

² Magna Charta Universitatum, 1088, p.1 <http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/the-magna-charta/polish> (20.03.2020).

³ Ibidem.

⁴ S. Nicieja, *20 lat Uniwersytetu Opolskiego* [w:] A. Śliz, M. Szczepański (red.), *Dostojny Uniwersytet?...*, s.12.

word and the culture of language. Universities are places and spaces that we sometimes fail to see because they are so obvious – majestic buildings and edifices that are impressive in their appearance, inspire respect and admiration, but also, to a certain extent, humility. It is also the richness of philosophical thought, the abundance of mathematical, physical and chemical formulas collected and protected for centuries in academic libraries, as well as the effects of breakthrough experiments and tests carried out in laboratories and scientific centres. These are hundreds of thousands of works from the area of social sciences and humanities describing, explaining and predicting the development of humanity.

The university as a higher education institution, in comparison to other economic, political and religious institutions, has always been distinguished by the system of values, majesty and limited access, but it was thanks to the universities that the cities were vibrant with life – they attracted young people and students⁵. Participation in academic life required multiple confirmation of personal and intellectual predispositions by the candidate⁶. Obtaining an index was a challenge for candidates, and graduation from university ensured employment at a very good position⁷. For decades, having the status of a student and being able to study was a great honour and distinction. As Malewski writes, “education, especially higher education, is an important instrument for the structural allocation of individuals and social groups and an effective programme for achieving its associated attributes – income, prestige and a socially valued lifestyle”⁸.

The study period is characterised by a characteristic course, a ceremonial inauguration of the academic year and a symbolic, albeit celebratory, discharge. Studying is a process that does not begin or end with lectures or conversation classes but continues uninterrupted⁹. According to the Humbolt principle of unity of research and didactics, „studying should involve active participation in scientific activities, active participation in the research process, and at the same time, apprenticeship, practicing with a master, learning a scientific workshop

⁵ S. Nicieja, *20 lat Uniwersytetu Opolskiego...*, s. 11–15.

⁶ Z. Melosik, *Uniwersytet i społeczeństwo*, Impuls, Kraków 2009, s. 130.

⁷ B. Ostafińska-Molik, *Studenci wczoraj i dziś. Refleksja o etosie*, [w:] D. Pauluk (red.), *Student na współczesnym uniwersytecie. Ideały i codzienność*, Impuls, Kraków 2010, s. 175.

⁸ M. Malewski, *Edukacja akademicka w pułapce pozornego egalitaryzmu*, „Terazniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja” 2011, nr 3 (55) s. 110.

⁹ W. Żłobicki, *Podmiotowość człowieka jako podstawa edukacji akademickiej*, [w:] A. Szerląg (red.), *Problemy edukacji w szkole wyższej*, Impuls, Kraków 2006, s. 193.

from him”¹⁰. In the pedagogical dictionary, we read that studies in the general sense are process cognitive activities of people studying at universities, exploring some field of knowledge under the guidance of academic teachers¹¹. Studying requires maturity and self-discipline. It is a process of deepening knowledge, readiness to ask questions, seek answers, but also to accept them despite the lack of conformity with the assumptions. The study ethos is related to the autonomous delineation of paths of development, broadening of own areas of interest, independent thinking, shaping of character, independent search and acquisition of materials, separation of essential and irrelevant content through a critical approach. Studying is an activity that goes beyond lecture halls and its inherent and extremely important part is the use of a wide cultural offer, and participation in literary and artistic events. It is an effective participation in student organizations, science circles, theatres, cabarets, discussion clubs¹². It is a time of general development, shaping the world view and acquiring knowledge, which takes place through individual and group work, implementation of projects, creation of presentations, public speeches, editing of scientific texts. It is participation in academic life, membership in scientific circles, student organizations, participation in student exchanges, research, conferences, seminars and disputes. Education at the academic level was inseparably connected with taking the oath and its respect and realization during the course of study.

“By joining the academic community ... I vow: to relentlessly seek the truth, to diligently acquire knowledge and skills to serve people and the Homeland well, to act with integrity and courage, to show tolerance and kindness towards others, to be faithful to myself and my ideals, to recognize the laws of academic authority and good manners of the academic community, to defend the dignity of my university and the good of the entire academic community”¹³.

“I solemnly swear that I will persevere in my efforts to acquire knowledge and develop my own personality, to respect the university authorities and all members

¹⁰ A. Sajdak, *Paradygmaty kształcenia studentów i wspierania rozwoju nauczycieli akademickich, teoretyczne podstawy dydaktyki akademickiej*, Impuls, Kraków 2013, s. 108.

¹¹ Cz. Kupisiewicz, M. Kupisiewicz, *Słownik pedagogiczny*, Wyd. Nauk. PWN, Warszawa 2009, s. 168.

¹² M. Małewski, op. cit., s. 111.

¹³ The content of the vows from the indexes from one of the Poznań Universities.

of its community, to respect academic laws and customs and to care for the dignity and honor of the student of the University of Silesia¹⁴.

The words of the vows were contained in the indexes. Each time they were opened, their meaningful and noble content appeared to them. Currently, it dies somewhere in a pile of signed documents, contracts, appears on the websites of the university, and, as I believe, is not recorded in the memory of the students. Moreover, the students' instrumental treatment of the period of studies (in terms of services, tasks to be performed), passive participation in the life of the university is noticeable, which does not allow to appreciate its enormous value and the influence it has on further life¹⁵. This is indicated by P. Stańczyk's research from 2007, which shows that studying is not considered a value in itself. Studying and a diploma are a springboard for faster promotion, higher salary, better position, etc.¹⁶ More than a decade later, the aforementioned instrumentalism does not disappear, it takes on a slightly different form. Studies do not guarantee jobs, prestige and a place in the social structure, but in the final analysis it is better to „have them than not to have them”. The change that has taken place and is still taking place is in no way reflected in the language description – the studies defined as deepening knowledge are replaced by „doing studies”, in many cases connected with undertaking studies in one, two or even three fields simultaneously. There is also a reflection that anyone can be a student, but not everyone can study. At present, the time of studies becomes to some extent a supplement, an addition to the activity on the labour market, or simply a biography of life. Professional activity, which for many years was the domain of part-time students, applies equally to full-time students. Students apply to the dean's authorities for the FGD or ITS¹⁷ motivating them in an increasing number of cases with full-time employment. So how to get involved in student activity building an individual educational strategy while working full-time?¹⁸

¹⁴ The content of the vows taken by students in accordance with the Statute of the University of Silesia.

¹⁵ M. Barańska, *Być na studiach a studiować. Refleksja o projektowaniu przyszłości edukacyjno-zawodowej młodych ludzi*, [w:] D. Kukła, W Duda (red.), *Poradnictwo zawodowe – rozwój zawodowy w ujęciu przekrojowym*, Difin, Warszawa 2016, s. 249.

¹⁶ P. Stańczyk, *Wykształcenie, rynek pracy i „lepsze życie” w perspektywie znaczeń nadawanych przez studentów studiów zaocznych*, „*Teraźniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja*” 2007, nr 1 (37), s. 42–53.

¹⁷ IOS – Individual Study Programme, ITS – Individual Study Programme/Mode.

¹⁸ E. Solarczyk-Ambrozik, *Kształcenie ustawiczne w perspektywie globalnej i lokalnej. Między wymogami rynku a indywidualnymi strategiami edukacyjnymi*, UAM, Poznań 2009, s. 197.

Student community – yesterday and today

Dunaj emphasizes that a community means having common features; a connection through having common features. It is a community of goals, aspirations, desires. To feel the spiritual communion with someone. (...) It is a group of people connected with each other by something common, e.g. origin, culture, interests, property¹⁹. In turn, according to the dynamic theory of community, it is an exclusive human collective, which is connected by some kind of permanent spiritual bond; its characteristic features include durability, non-accidentality, tradition. All the theories of community discussed by the authors are linked by the necessary reference to the background from which, as they write, the community must separate in order to gain awareness of its own specificity and cohesion²⁰. Following this line of reasoning, a social bond should be created between the members of the group/community, which in a specific way regulates the behaviour of the members of the group and thus influences its sustainability²¹. Moreover, the academic community, including the student community, is also accompanied by a specific kind of sociability, scientific sociability, which, as M. Czerapaniak-Walczak stresses, is expressed in unrestricted, sincere, cordial meetings, exchange of ideas, thoughts and scientific views²².

How to define a student community? If the community is to distinguish itself from the rest of the society, then what is it that distinguishes contemporary students from the rest of society? In the era of postmodernism, do students have something in common? Do we have a community without a community, according to contradictory trends in postmodernity? Do they live “together but separately” because, as Bauman states, “we live in the age of deregulation”?²³. By entering the term student community into the browser, the first three entries refer to parish and pastoral communities. The fourth item is a short article entitled Does the student community still exist? from 2003 by Magda Pilarska²⁴.

¹⁹ B. Dunaj, *Słownik współczesnego języka polskiego*, Wilga, Warszawa 1996, s. 1294.

²⁰ Z. Musiał, B. Wolniewicz, *Ksenofobia i wspólnota*, Antyk, Kraków 2003, 29–45.

²¹ Cz. Kupisiewicz, M. Kupisiewicz, op. cit., s. 190.

²² Statement by Prof. M. Czerapaniak-Walczak on the occasion of the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the Polish Pedagogical Society.

²³ Z. Baumann, *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, Sic!, Warszawa 2000, s. 8.

²⁴ M. Pilarska, *Czy wspólnota studencka jeszcze istnieje*, <https://nauka.trojmiasto.pl/Czy-wspolnota-studencka-jeszcze-istnieje-n9816.html> (20.03.2020).

The next item concerns housing communities and the church organizations are displayed again.

The historical analysis shows that the beginnings of the student community can be found in the Middle Ages. It was at this time that a kind of “subculture” began to develop, distinguished by customs, uniqueness, rituals and shared living with the Masters. Then, the Renaissance brought the manners of noble life to the student community²⁵. In later years, the socio-political situation was an integrating factor, with student strikes, demonstrations, and a struggle against the hated authorities. Contemporary changes affecting higher education in recent years, such as the massing of higher education, the decline in the value of diplomas (“diploma inflation”), structural, legal and organisational changes, also had an impact on student activity, including the discussed sense of community building. Is it possible that the mediocrity of academic education affecting the mediocrity of students²⁶ has also caused an unwillingness to build community with other students? T. Szlendak believes that student culture no longer exists, so it can be concluded that the community does not exist either. He quotes student music groups, theatre groups, literary magazines, cabarets, festivals, which are not to be found today. He also stresses that it is difficult to distinguish student tastes and tastes from those young people who do not study²⁷. Further on, the article attempts to characterize the most visible phenomena indicating the disappearance of the student community.

The disappearance of the student community – a few reasons

I will begin my reflections with a description of the everyday life of a student. The most visible and popular phenomena that allow us to conclude that the student community is disappearing are small but very meaningful behaviours of students. The first one is undoubtedly the anonymity of people in the group and I do not mean friendship relations. The aforementioned anonymity directly translates into the quality of students’ work. More and more often it happens that students do not know who is in their group, how many people are in the

²⁵ J. Dybiec, *Od biernego żaka do aktywnego słuchacza – student w tradycji życia uniwersyteckiego*, [w:] D. Pauluk (red.), *Student na współczesnym uniwersytecie. Idealy i codzienność*, Impuls, Kraków 2010, s. 117–123.

²⁶ K. Denek, *Uniwersytet, Między tradycją a wyzwaniem współczesności i przyszłości*, „Edukacja Humanistyczna. Studia i Rozprawy” 2013, nr 1(28), s. 13.

²⁷ J. Podgórska, *Wszystko o studentach dzisiaj*. *Niezbędnik Inteligenta*, „Polityka” 2014, nr 4, s. 86.

group, or who is an alderman. This is undoubtedly due to the process of individualisation of education, the possibility of arranging a schedule for other duties (often already professional), optional classes in the curriculum or approved applications for an individual course of study. In response to the question about the size of the group, students provide the number of people in the group registered on a social networking site, most often on Facebook, which differs from the number of people attending classes. Moreover, by participating in classes with different groups, they do not integrate, but come and “serve their time”. The unwillingness to carry out joint group credit projects and, in the end, their quality is another disintegration factor that clearly merges. While the situation may be more understandable in the case of part-time students who commute from different locations, often very distant from the university, for whom it may be difficult to meet in one place and time in order to perform the task, in the case of full-time students (mainly local) the reality should be different. Aversion to group projects is openly manifested. Students point to lack of time for group work, irresponsibility on the part of group members reflected in passivity, careless and unreliable preparation of projects, lack of contact with a group member and antipathy. The process of dividing conversation or workshop groups can be a challenge. The project work is then divided into “parts” for the individual members of the group with one person responsible for establishing the individual parts in their entirety. The result is that the assembly of the whole project consists in pasting the sent fragments of the project without checking the stylistic and linguistic correctness, as well as graphic and visual elements, uniform fonts, colours and graphics. It happens that the project submitted for credit has the form of a working script. There are also known cases of removing someone from a task group without their knowledge, absence of a member of the group responsible for a given “part” of the project or presentation on the day of credit (without prior notification to the group or the leader). Situations of this type create a nervous atmosphere, put the whole group in a negative light, but very clearly indicate the lack of responsibility for the task and the work done, and loyalty to colleagues. A situation related to mutual obstruction of access to information, keeping important information for oneself or lack of its flow and distribution was also observed. Numerous requests addressed to didactic and scientific employees, relating to the re-sending of materials, information or other important documents result mainly from the notorious removal of messages from the common mailbox. It is difficult to assess whether this behaviour is caused by fierce competition for grades that translate into the possibility of receiving

a scholarship, malicious intentions, or perhaps carelessness or thoughtlessness. Students are also affected by the parameterization aimed at assessing scientific and research and development activities. Membership in a scientific circles, discussion groups, associations or student organisations is an asset in the process of applying for a scientific scholarship. Contrary to common sense, the number of scientific circles is increasing, but their activity is decreasing. The circles are involved in a smaller number of scientific undertakings. A part of them are the so-called “dead circles”, existing in the lists, but in the reports they do not present any activity. Individuals act as part of the ubiquitous ‘rat race’, which is beginning to affect students and sometimes even pupils. Looking through the Internet forums and reading students’ statements, one can notice that the more prestigious the university and the more popular the course, the more manifestations of a ruthless struggle for the best grades and the highest possible scholarships. This is evidenced by the following entries²⁸.

[...] writing notes in pencil or light on blue paper so that they cannot be copied [...] before the colloquium or during an exam. The friends they have met so far suddenly become suspicious, they are reluctant to help in learning and do not admit that they have completed their notes. It even happens that they give wrong books or conceal important information

[...] my name has been removed from the project credits

As can be seen, the borderline between entrepreneurship, caring for one’s own development and the future of education and work and unhealthy competition is becoming increasingly thinner and takes on different forms. In the scholarship applications, the most important are scientific achievements, while the activities of an integrative, social and cultural nature, related to animation of the local community, which undoubtedly contribute to building a sense of community and belonging, are the least scored, i.e. they are unprofitable. In contemporary academia, much attention is paid to building international teams, interdisciplinarity, cooperation, we emphasize their importance due to globalization processes, but unfortunately we cannot appreciate them. J. Kostkiewicz also notes the “great absence of students” in the public domain²⁹ some students do not have

²⁸ Statements taken from Internet forums; original spelling maintained.

²⁹ J. Kostkiewicz, *Wspólnota akademicka i tożsamość studenta w kontekście zjawisk, ofert i skutków oddziaływania dominujących ideologii*, [w:] J. Kostkiewicz, A. Domagała-Kręcioch, M.J. Szymański (red.), *Szkoła wyższa w toku zmian. Diagnozy i konstatacje*, Impuls, Kraków 2011, s. 126.

elementary knowledge about the surrounding reality, do not take any initiatives, do not comment on and do not refer to the proposed solutions in personal, economic, social and political issues. In turn, they become active when their student rights are threatened. Proposals to introduce mandatory attendance to lectures will be met with opposition and protest on the part of students, as it interferes with their non-university activities, mainly professional ones³⁰. Obviously, gaining experience during the education period is worthy of recognition, but one should remember about the obligations resulting from the status of a student, all the more so in the case of full-time students. As the literature on the subject indicates, clothing is one of the elements building a sense of community. It is worth looking at contemporary jackets also from this point of view. We observe total individualism in the context of clothing and the elements associated with it, such as jewellery or tattoos. Issues related to the adjustment of clothing to the occasion are also debatable. As demonstrated by the conversations among academic teachers from various academic centers throughout Poland, conducting classes and exams, the issue related to the behaviour of students and their dress during exams, colloquia and credits is often addressed. This is undoubtedly related to the relaxation of customs in general. At western universities, the outfit (colour, university sweatshirt, flag, ...) is emphasized as belonging to a fraternity, university, community. Distinction and a sense of pride gives the opportunity to wear the colours of your Alma Matris. In different European countries, student (graduate) hats of different types are or have been worn as signs of common identity or to identify a user as a member of a smaller body in a larger group. The lack of integration and a sense of community also applies to the completion of the study process, which is reflected, among other things, in the unwillingness to participate in the discharge. Discharge as a symbolic end of studies is becoming less and less popular among students. The arguments put forward by students in favour of absenteeism at the ceremony include reasons related to lack of time, or more precisely wasting time on a few hours of celebration and special arrival during a day off, professional duties and not infrequently preparing for final exams, credits and defending bachelor's and master's theses. The symbolic dimension of this stage of studies, in which the students meet for the last time loses its significance. The situation is all the sadder because, as M. Iwaszkiewicz writes, discharge is a ceremonial which is an addition for young people, contrary to their

³⁰ *Studenci UAM będą protestować? Nie chcą obowiązkowych wykładów*, https://epoznan.pl/news-news-57465Studenci_UAM_beda_protestowac_Nie_chca_obowiazkowych_wykladow, (12.12.2018).

parents – for whom it is a huge experience. It is a momentous event, for many it is their debut in the encounter with the hermetic, scientific world³¹. Initiatives connected with the preparation of the tabloid, which was often an unforgettable souvenir, are increasingly rare. It included photographs of the university and faculty authorities, as well as photographs of the entire year or specialization. The last page intended for signatures usually contained numerous wishes, sentences and congratulations. Currently, there is no one to prepare it, and those who should be most interested do not have time to go to a photographer, moreover, they treat it as an additional, unnecessary expense. The emotional element disappears. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find information about „winter-proms” or graduation balls, which were a peculiar and inseparable part of the study process. There is no one to organize them, no volunteers, no time, no willingness to engage and these are additional costs. Furthermore, the places dedicated exclusively to students disappear from city maps, as exemplified by academic or student clubs, which could only be entered upon presentation of a student ID card. On the other hand, clubs and associations of university graduates are established. However, what is their main goal? The idea of their creation is extremely noble, because they are to form and maintain bonds. They organize lectures, seminars, competitions, festive and jubilee meetings. They take care of the youngest graduates and provide substantive support. Some associations follow the professional lives of graduates, which are a kind of self-promotion, become a showcase and a bargaining chip in the struggle for students. Looking at the age structure of associations, it is definitely “silver”. Looking through the photos from the meetings of graduates, which Polish universities boast about, it is easy to notice that the ranks of associations are built by graduates who graduated in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. They lack young people.

Conclusions

University is first of all about people, it is a “community” that needs to function as a whole. It is the entire academic community, it is scientific and didactic employees, administrative employees, doctoral students and students. It is the *universitas doctorum et scolarium* or fraternal community of people focused

³¹ M. Iwaszkiewicz, *Alfabet dobrych manier profesora Iwaszkiewicza*, Ośrodek Badania Rynku Sztuki Współczesnej, Poznań 2013, s. 277.

around the search for knowledge and truth³² Without the community, without being together, it would be impossible to accomplish one of the fundamental tasks of the university, which is to maintain tradition and culture. It would be untrue and unjust to say that there are no more student communities, they have disappeared completely. Students are able to activate themselves, act together, take important and necessary initiatives. They participate in Juwenalia, concerts, sports and other events. However, the arguments mentioned above point to disturbing changes taking place in the academic community, which in their clarity sound the alarm. As successors of such an important and sublime task as academic education with all the characteristic and dedicated accompanying events, we cannot passively stand by and watch. Social ties are loosening, making communities less permanent. It seems that the decline in the value of diplomas and the mass of studies also entails a decline in interest in participating in events dedicated to students. Modern education can be instrumental and practical, with a great emphasis on its individualisation. “[...] Human relationships break up into a series of meetings and interactions”³³. This sentence seems to be a sad but very accurate summary of the phenomenon described above. The issue discussed is extremely important from the point of view of the individual and the institution of University. It is undoubtedly socially and scientifically important, requiring exploration and explanation.

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³² D. Antonowicz, *Uniwersytet. Od korporacji do instytucji*, CPP RPS, vol. 70, Poznań, 2014, s. 9.

³³ Z. Bauman, op. cit., s. 49.

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