

Tackling knowledge ‘like a business’? Rethinking the modernisation of higher education in Poland

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The year 1989 marked the official end of communist rule in Poland and the replacement of 'Gosplan' by new instruments for liberal democratic governance. In terms of the economy this heralded a departure from Gosplan's five-year planning cycles, performance targets and the 'propaganda of success'. Paradoxically, however, twenty-seven years later, the marketisation of higher education in Poland has been accompanied by a continuation of Gosplan thinking. This is manifested in a neoliberal vision of the modern, 'corporate' university as a largely utilitarian enterprise, but subject to a style of performance management strongly resonant of the Soviet era. This article analyses the thinking, ideas and ideologies that have shaped contemporary higher education in Poland. It is contended that the rise of the 'corporate university' signals the twilight of the Humboldtian tradition and raises questions about what the corporate ideal of 'excellence' may mean for the future of the university.

Keywords: modernisation; Humboldtian tradition; Gosplan thinking; Bologna Process; corporate university

Introduction

In the Marxist-Leninist thinking prevalent in the Soviet Bloc pre-1989, the communist state represented the ultimate manifestation of 'modern' social relations, ostensibly founded on rationality and justice with the Communist Party as the custodian of the 'real' interests of the working class (Drybkowska et al. 1994). This thinking found its expression in the huge centralised bureaucracy known as 'Gosplan', which became the main instrument of state for managing the economy. In theory, rational, centrally-set targets for economic development would prevent both the chaotic 'boom-and-bust' cycles and class exploitation characteristic of capitalism. In practice, however, the

inherent complexity of the state-run economic system made effective centralised control impossible, particularly in the long term. As pointed out by Amann (2011, 289), in the centrally planned Soviet economy, 'no level of administration *really* knew what the level below it was actually doing or was capable of doing. The periphery knew that the centre didn't know and the centre knew that they knew'. The illusion of meeting performance targets was maintained through elaborate game playing and the 'propaganda of success' in which frequently falsified data were circulated as evidence of targets met or exceeded. Reams of paper reports produced as evidence of 'fulfilled' plans were contradicted by the grim reality of empty shops, growing national debt and the economy which was years behind Western European countries (Drybkowska et al. 1994; Hardy and Rainnie 1996). After the collapse of communism in 1989, the key goals of the new, liberal-democratic state were, therefore, to modernise the economy and revitalise pluralism in the socio-political sphere.

For higher education (HE) in Poland the year 1989 created the opportunity to ditch the influence of the communist ideology and redefine the role of universities in the development of a new socio-economic order. Prior to 1989, higher education had played a peripheral role in building a communist society (Krasnodębski 2006). The low (10% of school leavers) centrally-imposed quota for university admissions, combined with mistrust of the communist hegemony, had turned academics and university graduates into an intellectual elite almost by default (Sławek 2002). The communist establishment had been highly suspicious of the Polish 'intelligentsia', the university educated 'middle' class, as a potential source of dissent. This state antipathy towards the 'intelligentsia' was reflected in comparatively low academic salaries (Siemieńska n.d). In the ten years between 1989 and 1999, as a result of lifting of the Gosplan university admissions ceiling and allowing new providers to open new universities in the HE 'market' (Act on

Higher Education 1990), the participation of 19-24 year olds in higher education rose from 10% to 40% (Jablecka 2007). Most of this growth was associated with the formation of private institutions which, by 2014, educated 27% of the entire student population (Kwiek 2014). As in many other countries, this growth has been accompanied by a utilitarian vision of higher education as the 'engine of the economy' (Naidoo 2011).

This paper traces the transition of the Polish university from the Humboldtian ideal (Błędowski 2006) towards a neoliberal model of the 'corporate' university (Sławek 2002; Rolfe 2013) and highlights some salient similarities between Gosplan and neoliberal approaches to modernisation. Although premised on opposing ideologies, Gosplan and contemporary higher education policy have both sought to harness higher education for economic goals. Gosplan's exaltation of centrally controlled planning as 'modern' and 'progressive' has been recreated in the contemporary paradox of centralised education systems which simultaneously promote the dynamics of quasi-markets (Ainley 2004). In the Gosplan era, Polish HE proved its worth by developing economically useful knowledge in the technical sciences and adhering to the official party line in the humanities and social sciences (Kołakowski 1997). Ironically, under the current neoliberal modernisation, higher education is expected to go beyond mere compliance to demonstrate a proactive engagement in 'tackling science like a business' (Kudrycka 2008).¹ This phrase by Barbara Kudrycka, the Minister of Science and Higher Education between 2007 and 2013, epitomises three contemporary HE policy imperatives: producing knowledge of immediate economic utility value, educating the 'enterprising' graduate and creating a modern, 'businesslike' higher education. Modern Polish higher education is thus viewed predominantly in

utilitarian terms as an economic enterprise. This perspective is reflected more widely in the context of the Bologna Process, where HE is viewed as instrumental in building the competitive advantage of European Higher Education in the global knowledge economy (Haigh 2008; Kraśniewski 2009; Shields 2016). Other Soviet Bloc countries followed similar approaches to reforming their higher education systems (Slantcheva and Levy 2007; Surina 2014), to find out that ‘catching up with Europe’ (Dakowska 2014) may be more problematic than suggested by the themes of ‘progress’, ‘hope’ or ‘salvation’ permeating post-Socialist transition narratives (Silova 2010, 6).² The analytical framework adopted in this article focuses on the historical and current tendencies in Polish higher education and the dynamics involved. In order to understand these dynamics, we explore Polish history, current trends and their underpinning ideology. This article now turns to a brief examination of Polish HE in the post war Soviet era to develop the thesis that Gosplan-style thinking, with its core beliefs in highly centralised control, performance metrics and audit, was not abandoned in 1989 but has resurfaced, paradoxically, from opposing ideological roots.

Gosplan-style modernisation pre-1989

The Polish version of Gosplan between 1945 and 1989 was a replica of the Soviet model. The aims of Gosplan were couched in highly progressive language of industrialisation, the elimination of pre-war inequalities and the creation of a modern, egalitarian society. According to Krasnodębski (2006), rhetorically, the cultural code of communism in Poland was ‘hyper-modern’ in promoting the ideal of a self-regulated, ascetic individual who, as a ‘productive worker and committed party member’ is continually engaged in the collective mission of improving society. By the 1980s,

however, the ‘propaganda of success’ (Drybkowska et al. 1994) was no longer able to mask the serious negative effects of Gosplan such as widespread inefficiency, a continually deepening economic crisis and significant inequalities in the standards of living between the ruling communist elite and the rest of society.

Gosplan legislation for higher education reflected the highly regulative role of the state, with Higher Education Acts of 1951, 1958 and 1982 giving the Minister of Education powers to regulate access to higher education through student admission quotas, establish and liquidate departments, develop the curriculum and monitor institutional costs and personnel policies (Woźnicki 2007). In addition, the 1951 and 1958 Acts gave ministers powers to appoint or declare objection to the appointment of HEI authorities (top institutional administration). In practice, however, the peripheral role assigned to higher education by the Communist Party meant that, in the Gosplan era, the university became a unique space for freedom of thought and resistance. Higher education, as in other areas of Gosplan, was measured for compliance using the instrument of an audit. For example, periodical research plans submitted to the authorities had to assess the impact of proposed research on the national economy. However, pointed out by Kołakowski (1997, 30), these edicts were treated as an irritation by most academics and a relatively harmless by-product of the official Soviet system:

We used to invent absurd answers to absurd questions, but it must be said that practically no one was interested in our answers and did not take those absurdities seriously. Hence it was possible to pursue those researches without ideological obstacle on the condition that political issues were not involved.

Students were obliged to attend political training delivered by eminent party officials and, like academics, the vast majority distanced themselves from the official ideology

(Drybkowska et al. 1994). Although 'governance by audit' in higher education could be evaluated as a manifestation of the system's proclivity for self-deception in the face of its own incompetence (Amann 2011), the ostensibly benign character of the communist state masked a ruthless will to eliminate as the 'enemies of the state' all those who spoke out. The involvement of the academic community in direct action against the regime in 1956, 1968 and 1981 was met with direct use of force, arrests and other repressions. The casualties of direct action included student, working class and academic protesters. For example, professor Leszek Kołakowski (cited above) was expelled from the Communist Party as a punishment for openly critiquing the regime by 'straying from Marxist-Leninist ideology' (Kimball 2005). In 1968, he lost his tenure at the University of Warsaw and was prevented from securing any other academic post, with his books officially banned in Poland. Together with Zygmunt Bauman and other academics who fell from grace for speaking out, Kołakowski joined the generation of intellectuals supporting resistance against the communist rule from exile. An important feature of this resistance was a sense of solidarity, uniting the intelligentsia and working class at home and abroad, eventually leading to the formation of the *Solidarność* (*Solidarity*) movement and bringing the communist rule to its end in 1989 (Drybkowska et al. 1994).

Between the waves of protest and on condition that it appeared to be paying lip-service to the dominant ideology, the Polish university was allowed, for the most part, to sustain its Humboldtian tradition. Wilhelm von Humboldt's tradition was predicated on the view of knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) as a scholarly endeavour, leading to greater understanding, and on the concept of *Bildung* (the cultivation or formation of the self), which gives the students an understanding of culture and general knowledge (Delanty 2001; Johnston and Elton 2005). As pointed out by Harris (2012), while the English

word 'science' mainly has connotations of the natural sciences, in German a distinction is made between '*Wissenschaft*' (natural science) and '*Geistwissenschaft*' (human science). Because of the equal importance assigned to '*Geistwissenschaft*' and '*Wissenschaft*', the Humboldtian university sought to balance the extrinsic-intrinsic and economic-cultural value of knowledge. The Humboldtian university was also a 'protected space', insulated from the influence of the state (Neave 2002, 20).

Scholarship and teaching were seen as mutually enhancing and underpinned by a belief that university education has a spiritual, as well as cultural and economic role to play in the development of the individual and society (Johnston and Elton 2005; Sommerville 2013). Ironically, the Polish university in the Gosplan era operated within a 'protected space' of a kind, partly because the collectivist ideal inherent in the Marxist-Leninist ideology was also conducive to collective acts of solidarity and unofficial resistance of Gosplan thinking.

In its transition from a post-communist to a liberal democratic state, Poland turned to a market economy, democratic pluralism and human rights (Hardy and Rainnie 1996; Silova 2010). After fifty years of communist rule, freedom to choose to make a living by working for oneself rather than the state seemed to embody both pluralism and human rights. The collapse of communism was, therefore, followed by a vibrant growth of business, including private HE institutions. However, 'abandoning the socialist past' to embrace 'the logic of Western modernity' was more problematic than suggested by the themes of 'progress', 'hope' or 'salvation' that characterised post-Socialist transition narratives (Silova 2010, 6). The following section examines how centralised control, performance metrics and audit characteristic of Gosplan thinking emerged out of the neoliberalisation of Polish HE.

Polish HE 'market' and the Bologna Process post 1989

Post-Soviet modernisation has been characterised by two, apparently contradictory trends: an unprecedented growth of the HE 'market' resulting from the removal of the centralised admissions ceiling and granting universities more autonomy (Act on Higher Education 1990) and government regulation, increasingly under the auspices of the Bologna Process (Kraśniewski 2009). The main pieces of legislation introduced post 1989 included: Act on Higher Education 1990, Law on Higher Education 2005 and Higher Education Act 2011. According to Dakowska (2013, 6), while its main aim was to grant autonomy to HEIs, the most visible outcome of the Act on Higher Education 1990 was to 'pave the way for a far-reaching marketisation of the sector'. In 1989 there were 112 institutions in Poland, educating approximately 10% of 19-24 year olds (Jablecka 2007). As a result of removing the centralised admissions ceiling, by 2013 the number of state (public) institutions grew to 137 and the number of non-state (private) institutions to 307 (MNiSW 2013). As in other Soviet Bloc countries, the appearance and rapid expansion of private higher education took the post-communist governments by surprise (Slancheva and Levy 2007; Dakowska 2013).

Although often referred to as the Polish education 'miracle', the emergence of the HE market has had a number of negative consequences (Jablecka 2007, 304). The initial growth of privately owned institutions created a demand for academic staff, alleviated by public university lecturers taking on additional full time posts in the newly formed universities. This affected the quality of faculty teaching and 'research productivity' as academics increasingly diverted their energies to the new private sector (Kwiek 2014, 2). Most of the new HE institutions were small and therefore unable to offer a full range of courses, or create an academic climate favourable to scholarship

(Jabłocka 2007). Their offer was limited mainly to Bachelor degrees in subjects such as: economics, management, social studies and pedagogy, with some being able to offer just one degree programme. These programmes have been predominantly technician and practical, with the prevalent mode of delivery through evening and weekend classes.

A two-tier system thus emerged, with the new, private, for-profit, non-selective institutions accepting candidates who failed to secure admission to free, full time studies at public institutions. The inferior status of these lower tier graduates was often reinforced by employers who discriminated in favour of students from traditional universities (Jabłocka 2007). This situation raises the ethical question of institutions making a profit from an 'educational commodity' which may not bring the students the expected success in the graduate employment market. An 'overproduction' of graduates has been attributed to the irresponsible behaviour of some institutions:

numerous research... indicates that when launching new courses and setting out the number of places available for students, higher education institutions fail to consider the demand on the part of the labour market, driven by other criteria.
Jabłocka (2007, 291)

As noted by Surina (2014), the absence of regulation in the HE market and the resulting 'overproduction' of graduates in economics and the humanities was based on the popularity and increased supply of these degrees. For example, in 2010 the most popular degree choices studied by undergraduate students included: economics (23%); social sciences (13.9%); pedagogy (12%) and humanities (8.8%), whereas the least popular included: engineering and technical degrees (6.8%); medicine (5.8%); computer science (4.9%) and law (3.1%) (2014, 35). A paradoxical situation has, therefore, arisen whereby the employment market suffers from a severe shortage of graduates in these less popular, more demanding subjects, despite HE expansion. Surina (2014) points out

that, in 2011, 48% of employers declared problems with finding graduates with 'proper' qualifications, whilst at the same time one in two graduates had difficulties in finding employment and only 10% of graduates had a chance of finding a job in their profession. The situation has been worse for humanities graduates, 70% of whom 'feel useless', with 50% seeing no chance of having a graduate career in their profession in Poland (2014, 36).

Some of the negative consequences of marketisation post 1989 had been ameliorated by the *Law on Higher Education 2005*. For example, this legislative act introduced a restriction in the employment of academics to two full time lectureship positions. It also extended guarantees for continuing the studies to non-state students if their institution was closed down (Jabłeczka 2007). However, in parallel with other post-Soviet countries, Polish private institutions continue to struggle for social acceptance (Slancheva and Levy 2007). This struggle is reflected in the division in the academic community linked to the public - non public divide. Many academics express concerns about the negative aspects of the current modernisation (Sławek 2002; Szkudlarek 2012; Szwabowski 2012; Gadacz 2013). Traditional state institutions have, in turn, been criticised by the academic 'entrepreneurs' from the private sector for 'ossified' management structures and being unable to 'react to the new educational needs of emerging market economies' (Siwińska 2011a; Koźmiński 2010). Some supporters of for-profit education now call for equal access to public money for research and teaching for private universities (Siwińska 2011b). The key point here is that, in the first few years post 1989, the unrestrained growth of the Polish HE market resulted in a divided academic community and a proliferation of low-quality courses. In this regard, as early as 1995 an OECD report recommended that most private HEIs in Poland should not be

authorised to award Bachelor degrees, because of their excessively 'narrow, specialised' educational provision (Tomiak 2000, 183).

Since 2005, the growth of the private sector has been restrained due to declining demographics (Kwiek 2014) and increasing state regulation, much of which has been introduced as part of the Bologna Process (Kraśniewski 2009). As asserted by Dakowska (2013), one of the central aims of the Law on Higher Education 2005 was to develop the proposals of the Bologna ministerial meetings into a legal framework. The Bologna Process was initiated in 1999 under the auspices of the European Economic Union as a process of creating a 'barrier-free' European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and aiming at 'compatibility and comparability' between the HE systems of the signatory states (Papatsiba 2006, 95). Increasingly, however, the standardisation and harmonisation of higher education across Europe has been driven by the imperative to 'serve the needs of the economy' (Harris 2102, 29; Haigh 2008). For example, in response to globalisation, the European Council's (2000, 2) strategic goal 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' was translated into European education policy as reliance on competition, university rankings and diminution of academic autonomy (Erkkilä and Piironen 2013). In this context, outputs are the key measure of HE quality and this, in turn, reduces learning to competencies that can be easily measured and compared (Harris 2012). As argued by Antunes (2012, 449-450), education in Europe is now characterised by a democratic deficit and framed in purely administrative terms:

World ambitious educational models have thus been fostered, proposing regulatory frameworks based on technical and political *instruments* (qualification frameworks, credit transfer and accumulation systems, quality assurance systems) as well as curricular organisation and regulation principles, such as competencies and outcomes.

One of the key consequences of the Bologna Process in the Polish context has been an emergence of a 'new bureaucracy', which seems to replicate Gosplan-style management techniques of centralised planning, performance measures and audit. These techniques are augmented by the neoliberal emphasis on competition as a lever for driving modernisation. For example, the HE policies of the former Minister Barbara Kudrycka (2008) pivoted on introducing a wide range of competitive mechanisms, 'from the distribution of research grants to the development of academic careers'. This included the creation of an elite group of 'flagship' universities, with the status of centres for research 'excellence' and audit measures to control their quality and research agendas:

Academy institutes should focus their research on selected areas of science that correspond to our national strategic and priority areas. Some of these institutes are outstanding, some are not that good. We plan to audit the institutes, after which only the best will survive. (Kudrycka 2008)

One of Kudrycka's most controversial policies introduced through the Higher Education Act 2011, was a new points system encouraging Polish academics to publish in English rather than Polish, in journals included in the ISI Master Journal Database. Tackling knowledge 'like a business' means that research excellence is becoming a domain of those Polish researchers who seek 'international visibility' (Kwiek 2014, 5), even though this may impoverish academic debates at home. Another negative outcome of competitive research funding distribution introduced through Higher Education Act 2011, has been an increasing stratification of higher education into research-oriented and teaching-oriented institutions. For example, by 2014, most of the competitive research funding was secured by a few of the largest universities: 'the top 10 institutions have won 42% of all the grants' (Kwiek 2014, 9). As noted by Kwiek (2014), the

current formula for research funding distribution allocates approximately five times more funding for applied research and university-business links than for non-applied research. A ‘new geography of knowledge production’ is thus emerging, with two of the top 10 institutions, the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and the University of Warsaw engaged ‘in fierce competition with each other’ and receiving most of the 42% grants mentioned above (2014, 13).

A similar stratification has also occurred within degrees, with economically ‘un-useful’ subjects receiving less state funding. In order to rebalance graduate qualifications, the ‘programme of ordered specialties’ identifies subjects of ‘strategic’ importance for the state (Higher Education Act 2011). These subjects include IT, biotechnology, environmental protection and mathematics and are offered a greater share of state funding. Kudrycka’s fiscal policies also entail that public universities need to ‘plug the gap’ in state funding by generating their own revenue, through tuition fees, research and other income generating activities. In 2014, 77.3% of public universities’ budget was financed by student tuition fees (GUS 2014, 210). Despite a lower revenue of 14.9% generated through research, HE policies privilege research over teaching, as exemplified by Kudrycka’s (2008) definition of ‘flagship’ universities as centres of *research* ‘excellence’ above. These changes highlight growing inequalities within and between universities, with the humanities losing out not just because of reduced state funding for teaching but also diminished financial support for research, perceived to be of less commercial value. As discussed in the following section, the current strategy for Polish higher education is set to continue on this trajectory.

Polish HE within the European Higher Education Area

The policies of Lena Kolarska-Bobińska (2015), the Minister of Science and Higher Education between 2013 and 2015, followed the trajectory set out by Kudrycka, in seeking to increase the contribution of universities to economic life. As detailed in the *Programme for the Development of Higher Education and Science 2015-2030* (MNiSW 2015), they also aimed at greater integration within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In order to improve the international position of Polish HE, the Programme is closely aligned to the EU performance metrics and policies for the European Research Area and the Innovation Union. These metrics, adopted across the EHEA, are divided into 'enablers', 'activities' and 'outputs' (EC 2015). 'Enablers' include the percentage of doctoral and tertiary education graduates and 'open, excellent and attractive research systems', assessed through numbers of international publications, citation indices and finance for research. The 'activities' category includes Research and Development (R&D) expenditure, 'entrepreneurship' defined as public-private co-publications and 'intellectual assets' (patents). The 'outputs' category, defined as 'economic effects' is measured in terms of product exports, trade balance, knowledge-intensive services and patent revenues (MNiSW 2015, 58). Evaluating HE policies and knowledge 'outputs' in terms of 'economic effects', often as a percentage of the GDP, locates research and innovation in the paradigm of tackling knowledge 'like a business'. The wholesale adoption of commercial management systems can be illustrated by the following discourse on 'science-based entrepreneurship' in HE policy, reported to the European Commission in the *Country Report Poland 2014*:

Multiple dedicated measures facilitate the creation of university spin-offs and the related knowledge transfer. Commercialization of research results became one of core themes of science and higher education reform from 2010-2011, and subsequently new funding schemes were launched. (Kliniewicz 2015, 44)

The notion of 'science-based entrepreneurship' fuses scientific and economic discourse, implying that scientific knowledge is to serve entrepreneurship. In this paradigm, improving the quality of teaching and students' experience of higher education is confined within predetermined learning outcomes, developed in partnership with business stakeholders and centrally regulated through government competitions:

Higher education reform of 2010-2011 improved the quality of teaching, by focusing the education on the achievement of pre-defined learning outcomes, and involving stakeholders (including business community) in the definition and oversight of study programmes... MNiSW-coordinated competitions promote quality of teaching and innovative study designs. (Klincewicz 2015, 61)

Many of the recent policies and performance metrics have been developed under the auspices of the EHEA in the spirit of 'harmonisation' or 'integration' which appears difficult to challenge. For example, it is hard to disagree with the strategic priorities of the European Research Area (ERA) such as more effective national research systems, better transnational co-operation, more open labour market for researchers, gender equality in research and better access to scientific knowledge (EC 2015). ERA performance metrics, however, confine the European project within economic and techno-scientific modes of knowledge production, with educational factors such as the quality of student learning given secondary importance. Importantly, the *Country Report Poland 2014* does not refer to ERA's priority of gender equality in research, while the expectation of Polish academics to publish in international journals is in tension with the priority for improving access to knowledge at home.

The proliferation of centrally administered initiatives and performance measures raises the possibility that 'no level of administration *really* knew what the level below it was actually doing' (Amann 2011, 289). It is, however, also plausible that the metrics

encourage academics to be 'perpetually responsive' (Olssen 2003) to permanent reform deployed as a form of control. As pointed out by a number of commentators, by utilising Anglo-American corporate management techniques, the Bologna Process has played a dual role as both an agent of and response to globalisation, with the overall effect of bringing the European higher education closer to the neoliberal US and UK models (Olssen 2004; Haigh 2008; Shields 2016).

Gosplan-style and neoliberal approaches to modernisation

Despite opposing ideologies, Gosplan thinking displays characteristics which resonate with the neoliberal tendencies characterising the governance of public services modern-day Britain (Amann 2011). In contrast to Gosplan thinking, neoliberalism rests on the premise that private property rights, individual liberty, free trade and unencumbered markets provide a superior form of social organising (Harvey 2006). Consequently, the neoliberal state promotes market values and extends them to non-market contexts. As a social imaginary, neoliberalism claims that 'there is no such thing as society' (Thatcher 1987), whilst for the Communist Party, there was 'no such thing as the individual' (Kimball 2005). However, beyond these fundamental differences there have also been some remarkable similarities between the two systems, in relation to performativity, instrumentalist logic and totalising tendencies. This article will now examine each of these in turn, considering their impact on higher education as well as the 'historical Subject' (Marcuse 2002) promoted by each system.

Both Gosplan's and neoliberalism's focus on performativity can be traced to Taylorism, the 'scientific' approach to industrial management developed at the beginning of the 20th century in America by Frederic Taylor for maximising workforce efficiency (Scott 1998). Taylorist approaches to industrial management were

popularised in the Soviet Union under the rule of Lenin. On Lenin's (1918) account, like all capitalist progress, the Taylor system combined:

the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control, etc.

As argued by Scott (1998, 101), for Lenin as a 'high-modernist', a planned economy at the macro level and Taylorist principles of centralised co-ordination at the micro level combined to provide an 'attractive and symbiotic package' for building socialism. However, the disconnection between the management and the workforce, characteristic of Taylorism, meant that Gosplan administrators often guessed the actual capacity of individual state enterprises and routinely added a standard increment to previous year's targets (Amann 2011). Factories and collective farms aiming for 'easy' future targets would in turn confine their output to the basic plan fulfilment. The result was an economy that 'systemically underproduced and overconsumed' (2011, 289).

By contrast, the disconnection between the 'boardroom and the factory floor' in a neoliberal enterprise often leads to setting over-ambitious targets. Such targets may be unsustainable in the long term and lead to a decline in quality, as well as endemic 'cheating' or 'gaming' if they are too difficult or impossible to achieve (Seddon 2009, 97). An aggregate result in this case is an economy which overproduces and underconsumes. Despite official representations of standards as drivers of improvement in productivity and quality, in both systems a paradox has thus occurred in which the application of unrealistic targets has led to an actual decline in quality. The failures of the system are masked through the 'propaganda of success' (Drybkowska et al. 1994)

and 'rituals of verification' (Power 1997). Fiction seems to be more important than reality, because of its utility value in legitimating the system. This, in turn, institutionalises calculative, instrumentalist logic, whereby 'everything acquires value from its function in the impersonal engine of utopia' (Kimball 2005).

In both systems, the use of targets as measures of performativity results in the rise of a new 'social stratum' of managers and inspectors, who often use performance indicators as instruments of control rather than quality assurance (Amann 2011). The proliferation of quality assurance regulations and the concurrent production of performance data resonate with Lenin's recommendation for 'keeping account of everything' (Kimball 2005). In Gosplan, 'everything was subject to regulation from above because nothing had significance apart from the diktats of the Party' (Kimball 2005). A similar legitimisation of administration as indispensable in ensuring quality is associated with the rise of managerialism in higher education (Deem 2001; Deem and Brehony 2005). Traditional collegial relations are eroded as managers 'assert their right to manage over academics and other staff' to stay in control (2005, 231). Asserting control may take many forms, from quality assurance practices incorporating surveillance to management functions such as: 'strategies, coaching, corporate culture, visions, entrepreneurship, innovations, etc' (Alvesson 2013, 185).

The 'fundamental tasks of revolution' (Lenin 1918) and the 'long march of neoliberalism' (Hall 2011) also appear to display similar totalising tendencies, for example by introducing controversial policies on the basis that 'there is no alternative'.³ For Hannah Arendt (1953), totalising tendencies emerge when a single idea turns into a dominant ideology and is pursued at all cost as if it were the absolute truth and universal law. Arendt (1953, 307) argues that ideologies become destructive when they fail to translate the logic of universal lawfulness into 'standards of right and wrong for

individual behaviour'. Arendt explained that in Marxist-Leninist thinking, totalitarian logic was underpinned by the 'Law of History'. The Law of History rested on what was pronounced to be the inevitable historical movement of society towards the ultimate, ideal realisation of history, through the survival of the fittest, or the most 'progressive' class - the working class. The ideal historical Subject in Gosplan thinking was thus a 'productive worker-committed party member' (Krasnodębski 2006).

Neoliberalism could be understood as resting on what we would refer to as the 'Law of Individual Liberty'. The ultimate manifestation of this law is the 'manipulatable man' (Olssen 2003). The transition from the liberal to neoliberal state involved a transformation of the subject from 'homo economicus' to 'manipulatable man', created by the state and encouraged to be 'perpetually responsive' (Olssen 2003, 199). In alignment with this logic, the core task of education is to promote the self-sufficient, entrepreneurial individual, 'fittest' for surviving in the competitive milieu of the marketplace. 'Fittest' has a double meaning here, as 'perpetually responsive' and therefore best adapted to compete for scarce resources and the most 'progressive', because, in the neoliberal state, self-reliance and accumulation of private wealth are equated with 'good' citizenship (Plant 2010). As pointed out by Olssen, the rise of 'manipulatable man' does not mean that 'the conception of the self-interested subject is replaced or done away with':

in an age of universal welfare the perceived possibilities of slothful indolence create necessities for new forms of vigilance, surveillance, performance appraisal and of forms of control generally. In this new model, the state has taken it upon itself to keep all up to the mark. (2003, 199-200)

In keeping all 'up to the mark' the neoliberal state allows academics to exercise freedom of choice, within the confines of the public sphere redefined as the marketplace.

The 'corporate' university as the (inevitable) future?

The increasing neoliberalisation of the public sphere has been concurrent with the rise of the 'corporate' university, which has spread from the US to Britain and other countries (Harris 2012; Barnett 2013; Rolfe 2013). The central goals of the American-style corporation of enhancing corporate profit and shareholder value are predicated on competition, market expansion, advertising and customer satisfaction, which are achieved through employee compliance, corporate loyalty and consistently delivered top performance (Illouz 2007). In this account, the corporatisation of higher education is characterised by 'the entry of the university into marketplace relationships and by the use of market strategies in university decision making' (Steck 2003, 75). Accordingly, the corporate university privileges commercial values and practices over the traditional values of the academy. The emergence of the corporate university in the 1990s, in the wake of increasing globalisation, accentuates the pursuit of 'excellence' (Readings 1996; Rolfe 2013). 'Excellent teaching' is enforced through quality assurance regimes which render academics accountable for student performance outcomes and 'student-consumer' satisfaction (Molesworth et al. 2011). The economic survival of the corporate university depends on student numbers and this has contributed to the massification of HE (Naidoo 2011; Alvesson 2013). Under the pressure to deliver 'excellence' to increasing numbers of students and to demonstrate corporate loyalty, academics need to be 'perpetually responsive'. Ironically, however, 'excellence' is an empty signifier, a 'unit of measurement rather than something to be measured' (Rolfe 2013, 9). Because

'excellence' posits a continually shifting ideal, without being assigned a clear content, it may be used for controlling academics and making them 'manipulatable'. According to Rolfe (2013, 76), the adoption of corporate structures and governance engenders the disappearance of the traditional academic 'all-rounder' and the fragmentation of the academic community into 'researchers who do not teach, teachers who do not research; and administrators who do neither'. Through charging constantly increasing tuition fees, the corporate university becomes an elite institution and a 'site of capital accumulation, a place for creating or enhancing the profit-making capacity of individuals, businesses, or the country itself' (Carroll 2004, 181).

The ways in which corporatisation has entered Polish higher education is illustrated by the rise of institutions which mimic the corporate ethos, values and modes of governance, such as a post 1989, private *Koźmiński University* in Warsaw. According to its website information, the university was formed in 1993 as *Leon Koźmiński Academy of Entrepreneurship and Management* (Koźmiński University 2016).

Although its provision is limited to Management, Finance and Accounting, Administration, Law, and Sociology degrees, the institution has recently been granted a university status. Its governing body consists of the President (Professor Koźmiński), Board of Trustees and International Corporate Advisory Board. The latter comprises international consultants, CEOs and industry experts with a remit of providing consultancy to the Trustees Board on university strategy and adapting degrees on offer to the requirements of the market. Unlike public universities, which have roots in tradition and scholarship, this 'new' institution has achieved its status of 'excellence' through an entrepreneurial brand, international rankings, affiliations and business partners, graduate employability statistics, student internship opportunities, as well as a huge campus, state of the art facilities and prestigious activities (including golf). The

Koźmiński brand has been ostensibly supported by ‘18 years of presence in the market’ as a guarantee of ‘our professionalism, knowledge of the market and highest quality of services’ (Koźmiński University 2016). The entrepreneurial ethos of its President rests on a definition of entrepreneurship as ‘*creating something from nothing* and undertaking the risk in order to achieve extraordinary benefits’ (Koźmiński 2014, 336). His experience of working in the USA has affirmed professor Koźmiński’s belief that the competitive advantage of American higher education stems from its ruthless ‘publish or perish’ ethos, as opposed to the ‘social, friendly and soft’ ethos of European HEIs (Koźmiński 2010). Neoliberal values permeating statements by the education ministers discussed above (Kudrycka 2008; Kolarska-Bobińska 2015) suggest that even the established Polish universities are expected to mimic the corporate language and ethos, in the spirit of ‘corporate academics’ such as professor Koźmiński.

The changes instigated by the rise of the corporate university are so far reaching that, for some commentators, they mark a 'twilight' for the traditional Humboldtian university (Kwiek 2000; Antonowicz 2005). As a ‘protected space’, the Humboldtian university was insulated from the influence of the state and was, therefore, well positioned to challenge its power. Unlike a privately-owned university, a corporatised public university opens its resources to private and commercial interests, at the taxpayer’s expense. Perhaps the greatest problem with the teleological narratives of corporate (and Gosplan) approaches to modernisation of higher education has been the promotion of economically useful knowledge in the sense of '*Wissenschaft*' to the detriment of the arts, humanities and social sciences ('*Geistwissenschaften*'). This is because, as noted by Kołakowski (1989, 2-4), technological progress as the ultimate aim of knowledge-as-*Wissenschaft* is unable to satisfy our need for a purpose and desire to inhabit a world made permanent through some enduring human values. This desire

stems from an assumption that a metaphysically coherent and 'purposeful order of the world cannot be deduced from what may validly be regarded as the experimental material of scientific thought' (1989, 2). Consequently, Kołakowski argues, humans will always need knowledge-as-*Geistwissenschaft*, not only to address the essential need to make their empirical realities meaningful, but also to understand themselves, to connect to their roots in tradition and seek a *telos* that goes beyond purely economic ends.

Thinking about this in the early 1970s, at the height of the Gosplan era, Kołakowski (1971) emphasised that all systems are subject to 'historical obsolescence' when they act as a 'brake' on progress towards the realisation of this essential need. On this account, the utilitarian goals of the 'modern' model of the corporate university may make it obsolete from the outset. Alternative principles which could provide different directions for modernisation provide the focus for the conclusion of this article.

Rethinking 'modernisation'

As a result of internal dynamics and external influences on a society that has left its communist past, some of the reforms implemented in Polish higher education reanimate the Soviet era via highly regulative management techniques, audit and performativity. This is partly because of the similarities between the Gosplan and neoliberal approaches to organising modes of (knowledge) production, some of which also chime with the regulatory systems and quality assurance protocols of the Bologna Process. As a result of these dynamics, the Polish education 'miracle' (Jabłeczka 2007) has turned out to be problematic. The unprecedented growth of the Polish HE 'market' post 1989 resulted in an 'overproduction' of graduates, lowering of the quality of education offered at some institutions and splitting the academic community along the public-private divide. State regulation followed (Law on Higher Education 2005; Higher Education Act 2011), in

parallel with moves towards greater integration within the European Higher Education Area. The key outcome of these reforms is a highly stratified HE system (Kwiek 2014) which, after twenty-seven years of 'modernisation', is still struggling to 'catch up' with Western Europe and the USA.

The 'Polish problems' discussed in this article may be viewed as specific manifestations of the more general ways of thinking about the 'modern' university that underpin higher education reforms in other countries. The idea of 'modernisation' brings with it an aspiration to progress, but also a danger of a narrow view of progress based on negating tradition to replace the 'old' with the 'new'. Like 'excellence', terms such as 'modern' and 'entrepreneurial' may be used as empty signifiers to denote units of measurement 'rather than something to be measured' (Rolfe 2013, 9). A term becomes an empty signifier when it fails to refer to anything tangible, 'real', as illustrated by Koźmiński's (2014, 336) idea of entrepreneurship defined as '*creating something from nothing... in order to achieve extraordinary benefits*'. The use of 'modern' as an empty signifier is illustrated by the way in which the two opposing ideologies of Gosplan and neoliberalism have taken up the idea of 'modernisation' and assigned it contradictory meanings.

On the analysis presented in this article, the current wave of the 'modernisation' of Polish HE sets continually expanding goals of greater efficiency, higher position in university rankings, more detailed information and data systems, in short, more of the same kind of 'excellence'. As Barnett (2013, 1) might say, this is a 'hopelessly impoverished' version of modernisation, which appears to simply maintain the status quo. For modernisation to be progressive in the sense of opening up different possibilities, the university would need to nurture 'an essentially new historical Subject' (Marcuse 2002, 256). Neither the 'productive worker-committed party member' nor the

'manipulatable man', but someone willing to think, imagine and connect to others outside the calculative logics of performativity and competition. On Kołakowski's analysis, this would be someone engaged in a social movement that resists 'historically obsolescent' systems:

The emergence of a movement... depends to a large extent - though not entirely - on the belief of the public in the very possibility of such a movement. Given that the character of a society depends in part on the image that it has of itself, potentialities in the sphere of social transformations cannot lie in the objective facts alone, without relation to the awareness which people have of such possibilities. (Kołakowski 1971, 18)

A source of inspiration for what later became the Polish *Solidarity* movement (Kubik 1994), these words emphasise that despite 'objective facts' it is always possible to imagine an alternative. Post 1989, Poland gained freedom to reconnect to European educational ideals to modernise its universities. Ironically, however, European ideals also changed and the negative impact of the most recent modernisation of Polish higher education suggests that tackling knowledge 'like a business' may constrain the university within an instrumentalist pursuit of the grand, albeit empty, ideal of 'excellence'. However, the Polish history recounted in this article also indicates that there is always an alternative. An alternative to the corporate university which could respond to the current socio-political and economic challenges in genuinely modern ways, may be in the hands of those who assert their freedom to think, imagine and, if need be, challenge and resist the temptation to be in the race to the top. Creating opportunities for thinking, imagining and acting in solidarity with others, would, therefore, need to be a core mission of the 'modern' university.

Notes

1. The departure from Kudrycka's (2008) reference to 'science' made in the title of our article is deliberate in seeking to reflect a broader remit of the Polish 'Ministry of Science and Higher Education' (*Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego*, MNiSW) signalled by the use of the Polish word 'knowledge' (*nauka*) rather than 'science'. The Polish word '*nauka*' in the name of the 'Ministry of Knowledge' (MNiSW), encompasses knowledge in the more inclusive sense referring to both the natural sciences and the humanities.
2. According to Dakowska (2014), the transformations of the Polish HE system were similar to those in other Soviet Bloc countries, particularly in aiming to give higher education more autonomy and, in tune with neoliberal narratives promoted by organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank, pursuing competitiveness in the international HE market. Dakowska also points to a lack of more detailed investigation of how reforms developed at the international and European levels have been designed and implemented in Eastern Europe.
3. The assertion that 'there is no alternative' underpinned Margaret Thatcher's politics of no alternatives (McLean 2001) and was used to push through controversial public policies on the grounds of economic viability. The ensuing neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state in Britain has been characterised by the focus on economic priorities (Hall 2011).

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