

## Grażyna Praweńska-Skrzypek

Institute of Public Affairs

of the Jagiellonian University

Cracow, Poland

grazyna.praweńska-skrzypek@uj.edu.pl

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5314-1910

# Academic Autonomy in the Contemporary University

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The purpose of this article is to show changes in the understanding of academic autonomy and the manifestations of its erosion, by appropriating this value to legitimise the increase in managerial autonomy, discrediting the value of community autonomy and increasingly restricting individual academic autonomy.

**Methodology:** The article is based on a critical analysis of the literature dealing with the reality of the functioning of autonomy in higher education institutions and materials related to the implementation of contemporary higher education reforms - mainly in Poland.

**Findings:** Changes in the perception of autonomy, threats to institutional and individual autonomy resulting from the uncritical subordination of transformations of higher education to the new public management concept as well as institutional isomorphism are presented.

**Value Added:** Attention has also been paid to ignoring the critical discourse on the consequences of too-one-sided transformation of higher education institutions, losing key values, whose carrier is community and individual autonomy – both academic teachers, for whom it is a necessary condition for the development of didactic and scientific creativity, as well as students who only in a situation of feeling are able to take responsibility for their own development.

**Recommendations:** Individual autonomy and participatory management, which determine creative activity and academic entrepreneurship, should be a particular concern for university managers. It is necessary to undertake research on the autonomy of students as members of the academic community.

**Key words:** academic autonomy, managerial autonomy, academic community, collegiality

**JEL codes:** I 23

## Introduction

Academic autonomy is now again becoming an important subject of research on higher education<sup>1</sup>. Much more often, however, this concept appears as a “figure of speech” or a certain – undefined and universally understood feature of university reality, which is most often referred to by two communities: reformers of higher education and organisations representing higher education institutions, and especially those associating rectors of universities and similar institutions of higher education. The reformers, in their campaigns prior to introducing changes, usually argue that reforms are associated with increased autonomy of higher education institutions. In various comments referring, for example, to the new law being prepared in Poland, called the “Constitution for science”, it is highlighted that the proposed changes “Lead

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1. The author uses a broad approach to academic autonomy, including both institutional (community and managerial) autonomy and broadly understood individual autonomy of the academic community members.

to an increase in the autonomy of the higher education institution – on the one hand, regulate their relations with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education based on legality as a supervision criterion, and on the other – to strengthen control over the higher school institution by changing the way the university is managed” (Antonowicz et al., 2006, p. 18). Such an opinion can be read as a sort of oxymoron because it is difficult not to notice the logical opposition of the situation of the simultaneous increase in the autonomy of the higher education institutions and imposing changes in the way they are managed.

It is totally clear that we cannot understand the autonomy of higher education institutions in such categories as the autonomy of organisations is defined on the basis of management sciences. As Prof. Z. Martyniak wrote “... Autonomy refers to the structure, principles, and methods of management as well as the directions of development that cannot be imposed by an external institution.” (Martyniak, 2002). In this synthetic definition referring to the management of an organisation achieving its specific goals, the most striking aspect is the lack of reference to the autonomy of the entities forming the organisation. In the case of a university as a knowledge organisation the identity of which is based on creative research and teaching, it is necessary to simultaneously focus attention on the autonomy of the institution and members of the academic community. Freedom in the process of research, teaching, and learning is a key factor in successfully achieving the goals of such an organisation. In the 2015 Higher Education Development Programme, academic freedom of research and institutional autonomy of the university were recognised as its fundamental and inalienable values (Szostak, 2015, p. 13).

Reading the viewpoints in the discussion on the scope of the higher education institution's autonomy shows that the most important seems to be the question of what should be covered by State regulation, and therefore subject to supervision in accordance with the criterion of legality, and what is the domain of the sole decision of a particular institution? This question should now be supplemented with a second one, related to the scope of subordinating higher education institutions to market regulations. Replacing

the postulate of subordinating universities to state regulations by submitting to market regulations is only an apparent increase in autonomy.

Talking about the autonomy of higher education institutions only in the context of universities as an organisation and their relationship with the administrative or market environment, however, shows a shallow reflection and a significant narrowing of the understanding of the academic autonomy concept. In Poland, this is the aftermath of the period of real socialism, when universities were the last bastion of largely limited institutional freedom within public organisations. The defence of this relative freedom was the overarching goal, and all phenomena and processes of self-organisation, self-realisation, and self-reflection – as the natural and fundamental features of the functioning of academic communities - seemed to be safe under the condition of the higher education institution's autonomy. This phenomenon is also noted by the authors cited above, who highlight that the autonomy of institutions and staff autonomy are considered as complementary pillars. Contemporary research shows, however, that at a university organised according to the new public management concept there has been a clear crack between institutional autonomy and individual autonomy.

Research on academic autonomy revived in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries also in other corners of the world. In highly developed countries, they were stimulated by a discussion about autonomy in the context of the higher education institution's economic accountability, as well as its social responsibility (Rybkowski, 2015). In countries such as Poland, emerging from authoritarian regimes, they were associated with the hope of accelerating the development of science and education and giving it a new quality (Dee, Henkin, & Hsin-Hwa Chen, 2000). In many developing countries, the discussion on academic autonomy has emerged in the context of virtual university reality (Thorens, 2006).

## Traditions of academic autonomy and the scope of understanding it

The first higher education institutions were modelled on self-governing, professional guild organisations, distinguished by specific relationships of masters and students (Sowa, 2009). From the beginning, they had also drawn institutional models from more experienced knowledge organisations – with different university models coexisting: a student university where professors were employed by students (University of Bologna), professor (University of Paris), and university colleges (Leja, 2013). The oldest universities were different than other schools primarily looking at their independence (especially from the Church). This independence was connected with the freedom of teaching and research in the process of implementing the mission of striving to search for the truth.

The study of higher education institution autonomy clearly shows its different understanding, as well as the stress on a different approach to autonomy in different periods of university development. Krzysztof Leja (2013), following the studies by J. Szczepański (1976, pp. 21–22), highlights that autonomy “can be understood as” independence from state authorities in university administration “(formal autonomy),” independence in proclaiming the results of own research and views “(substantive autonomy)” and “as the right to set criteria for assessing social phenomena from the position of superiority and selflessness, as the right to independently select members of a professor’s corporation (moral autonomy)” (Leja, 2013, p. 45). The above author, following the studies by J. Jabłecka (2007, after: Leja, 2013) also cites the notion of academic autonomy including substantive and moral autonomy. What is striking in these approaches is the lack of perspective on autonomy in the context of political and ideological impact on the university as an institution and on researchers, as well as the pressure of the business community on the limitation of freedom of research and education. Generally, what is striking in the research on academic autonomy is also the favouring of one

social group of the higher education institution - the academic staff, and the omission of students who are full members of the academic community. In recent years, research on the autonomy of the higher education institutions has been increasingly considered in the context of new public management in the context of accountability and responsibility of public organisations. R. Rybkowski, looking at the shortcomings of Polish solutions treating autonomy and accountability separately, writes: "Freedom of operation of higher education institutions is not absolute freedom and is subject to the assessment whether the higher education institution really serves the state and society, or just wastes public money" (Rybkowski, 2015, p. 97). In the context of the distinction in terms of the approaches to autonomy discussed above, it is worth noting that in the period of development of the liberal university a large range of academic freedoms had existed at the Humboldt university since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with limited autonomy at the institutional level (Leja, 2013). This model was transferred to Poland after the World War I, which was reflected in the freedom of scholars in conducting research, "in the absence of demand from the state for work useful for the country" (Leja, 2013, p. 46). The distancing of the state from conducting science and higher education policy was also visible. After World War II, the autonomy of the higher education institution was, until 1958 (and again in 1968), increasingly limited. It had only been possible to speak of greater independence since 1982, when the law stipulated that "universities are self-governing communities of academic teachers, students, and other school employees ... and are guided by the principles of freedom of science and art." (Leja, 2013, p. 46).

The landmark year for the development of academic autonomy was 1990, when the principle of academic freedom was particularly articulated in the new law. The next stages of reforms (2005, 2011, 2014) resulted in deepening the autonomy of the higher education institution as a public institution, while limiting at the same time the function of collective bodies and introducing external stakeholders (from the economic and social sector) to the advisory and supervision bodies of the higher school institutions. Changes in the last

period clearly indicate a qualitative difference in the meaning of autonomy compared to earlier periods of higher education institution development.

Academic autonomy is a constitutive feature of the university's identity as an organisation. The first authors of the definition of the identity of an organisation based on management sciences, S. Albert and D.A. Whetten (1985, after: M.J. Hatch, M. Schultz, 2010), associated it with the features of the organisation, which its members considered crucial for their organisation, the features that distinguish their organisation from others and were permanent and unchanging over time. Referring this definition to the higher education institution's identity, we can see that both the historical durability of autonomy as a university feature as well as the specificity of its character and vitality in the face of modern transformation, leaves no doubt as to the importance of higher education institution's autonomy for understanding its identity.

Academic autonomy is the freedom of the higher education institution as an institution guaranteeing the freedom of members of the academic community – above all academic teachers and students – as regards the scope of implemented organisational goals, mainly research and education. The higher education institution's identity is based on coupling the freedom of research and education of this community's members with the independence of the university's functioning as an institution. Meanwhile, many studies show that the autonomy of institutions and the autonomy of human resources not only have now separated, but even a negative relationship between the autonomy of institutions and the autonomy of staff is described even in many countries. Dee, J. R., Henkin, A. B., Hsin-Hwa Chen, when analysing contemporary transformations of higher education institutions, note that "As institutions, universities have greater autonomy, while their academic members are able to manage their professional life to a lesser degree" (Dee, Henkin, & Hsin-Hwa Chen, 2000, p. 203). These authors, based on the original research of 22 higher education institutions in Taiwan, found that the autonomy of institutions and staff autonomy are more closely linked at general universities and teacher training colleges than at technical

universities. They also documented the existence of a positive correlation between the level of staff autonomy and the existence of participatory decision-making processes and higher education institution innovation, as well as the frequency of initiatives undertaken by employees (Dee, Henkin, & Hsin-Hwa Chen, 2000, p. 215).

## Conditions and pressure limiting academic autonomy and the way it is perceived

From the beginning of their existence, higher education institutions had had specific relationships with the political environment. Both rulers and various social environments (mainly the middle class) associated with their formation and development specific expectations regarding social, economic, and political utility. King Władysław Jagiełło expected that the renewal of the Krakow Academy would, *inter alia*, “contribute to removing the deficiencies of the Kingdom of Poland, contribute to its equalisation with other states” (Baszkiewicz, 1997, p. 31). In contemporary times, however, the nature of these relations with the community is that of strong pressure: political – with a neoliberal, economic orientation and institutional isomorphism, which, combined with technological changes, have changed the understanding of the higher education institution’s identity, and thus the determinants of higher education institution’s autonomy.

Political pressure results from the fact that science, innovation, and higher education have become today one of the most important factors in building the competitive advantage of states and regions. Hence the expectations of measurable achievements, expressed as positions in scientific, educational, or innovation rankings. According to Mats Alvesson, higher education is now credited with the role of building national greatness; being a leading country in worldwide educational rankings is treated as evidence of global economic leadership (Alvesson, 2013). With the increasing pressure on higher education to position the country in global competition, the traditional role



of the higher education institution as a community conducive to intellectual development is losing its importance. As M. Alvesson rightly notes, Critical thinking, the ability to abstract reasoning and reflection, and the ability to communicate – are the traditional ideals of education, and these clearly go beyond improving their position for status related purposes in competition with others and at the expense of others” (2013, p. 93).

A postulate for greater autonomy of higher education institutions also accords with this narrative in which higher education institutions become a tool for positioning the economy. It appears today in the context of looking for ways to increase the reactivity of schools to changes occurring in the external environment. Their effect is the growing differentiation of the requirements for higher education institutions. JR. Dee, AB. Henkin & J. Hsih-Hwa Chen highlight that autonomous institutions are able to respond more flexibly and vividly to changes (2000, p. 203).

The imperialist ambitions of political authorities (striving to build their influence, emphasising the importance and position of the country) materialise in the regulatory sphere. According to M. Geppert & G. Hollinshead (2017), subjecting the higher education system to the requirements of economic and political systems restricts the autonomy of research and teaching. At the same time, it is expected that the position of national science (and also individual higher education institutions) will increase without increasing real investment, only by introducing the principles of free competition. An important role in the implementation of these principles is played by various intermediary organisations: research funding agencies, academic exchange agencies, and above all the evaluation system, which has become a tool for rationalising funding and strengthening competitiveness, rather than supporting units and institutions, and organisational learning – which in fact is what evaluation should be (Prawelska-Skrzypek, 2017).

Theoretically, these regulations build a culture of responsibility – both academics and institutions are responsible for the results. This rhetoric appears to be rational and convincing, but in fact it is imposing performance

indicators that are easy to measure and control, rather than those that reflect the value of actions. This approach has specific substantive consequences, e.g. stiffening the directions of research due to disregarding the emergent nature of research processes - especially in experimental sciences, and also enforces significant changes associated with managing higher education and individual higher education institutions. The thesis on the emergent development of science was already raised in 1951 by M. Polanyi (as cited by: Zmysłony, 2011, p. 156) as an argument against external / central planning in education. In his opinion, "there is no institution capable of predicting the direction in which science can develop further, except for its most trivial aspects". Michał Zawadzki speaks in a similar way, showing that the currently desirable and promoted model of the university as an organisation "in which the knowledge creation process is to be subordinated to the needs of an external customer, can lead to reducing its intervention and critical potential, necessary to initiate positive changes in the environment, including at market level" (Zawadzki, 2014, pp. 130–131).

The transformation of higher education institutions in the neoliberal spirit is progressing on a global scale. These changes have also included the Polish higher education system, which since the mid-1990s has become more and more similar to the system functioning in highly developed countries. Equating requirements for Polish scientists and scientific institutions on the part of public institutions financing higher education, with the requirements for scientists and institutions abroad undoubtedly stimulates a change in behaviour of both academics and higher education institutions. These requirements are a kind of pressure encapsulated by formal standards and procedures. Clarity and transparency of requirements, especially the relative stability of evaluation principles, on the one hand, makes it easier for Polish scientists and scientific institutions to appear in world science – visibility. On the other hand, however, it is a significant limitation of autonomy – which has specific consequences for the development of both academic education and science, and also radically changes the academic culture.

In the documents of the EUA (European University Association), as well as in numerous statements of the rectors of Polish higher education institutions (for example, on the occasion of the current work on the new regulation), attention is primarily drawn to the threats to institutional autonomy resulting from the range of administrative pressure. According to the EUA the autonomy of higher education institutions is “the ability of universities to decide on internal organisation and shaping the internal decision-making process” (European University Association, 2012). The Chairman of the General Council for Higher Education and Science, Prof. Jerzy Woźnicki in October 2017 saying that “From the point of view of autonomy, an academic institution must retain the right to appoint the institution’s authorities ..., create and liquidate the institution’s units, develop study plans and curricula, control costs incurred by the institution ... and human resources policy ...” (Konferencja Programowa NKN, 2017). These statements point to some self-limiting the scope of understanding the essence of the higher education institution’s autonomy, focusing care for academic freedom on matters of institutional autonomy, with a clear emphasis on nurturing independence in the sphere of management. Opinions that highlight the importance of cultivating community autonomy are rare, such as in the continuation of J. Woźnicki’s quotation above, when he also pointed out to the need to balance the position of single and collective bodies. He postulated strengthening the rector’s position but at the same time preserving the principles of self-governance of the academic community represented by the senate (Konferencja Programowa NKN, 2017).

## Individual autonomy

The uniqueness of the university as an organisation is based on two features associated with autonomy: individual autonomy as well as the academic community’s autonomy. Contemporary discussions on autonomy usually focus on management independence (within a legally prescribed framework)

and research and teaching independence (within a politically designated neoliberal doctrine). There is no discussion, however, regarding the freedom of the academic community, and especially the individual autonomy of its members, which can be implemented owing to the specificity of the social environment, the way of working and learning at higher education institutions. The complete lack of reflection on the essence and role of the autonomy of students as full members of the academic community is striking.

Ideological formulations regarding academic freedom of research speak of the autonomous choice of the way to come to the truth, express views, proclaim ideas, the right to research initiative, the choice of research methods, setting goals, tasks, and measures necessary for their implementation in the field of research and academic didactics, as well as assessment the scientific value of research (Szostak, 2015, p. 14). However, many authors point to contemporary threats, especially to individual autonomy, caused by external market pressure, which, according to M. Geppert & G. Hollinshead, leads to a crisis of universities' identity (2017). In this context, the authors evoke descriptions of situations when academic teachers are forced to behave in a specific way, justified by the desire to ensure the higher education institution's position in international rankings, the need to achieve the economic results required by the higher education institutions, or to protect their jobs (Geppert & Hollinshead, 2017).

The topic of threats to individual autonomy also appears in American-Chinese studies on the effects of increasing the autonomy of Chinese universities. The authors show beneficial changes related to the increase of the university's flexibility and responsibility, but at the same time they note that this institutional autonomy does not always flow down to the organisation's members. They prove that individual autonomy is limited not only by the government but also by the higher education institution's management (Dee, Henkin, & Hsin-Hwa Chen, 2000). In this context, the example of Great Britain is often cited, where the relationship between institutional and individual autonomy of the university system has been broken in the last

20 years. The decline in the autonomy of academic staff is accompanied by a real increase in the autonomy of universities as institutions (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri, & Arnal, 2008).

Individual autonomy is necessary for the implementation of the creative process. It is difficult to talk about it if research has to be focused on research priorities set to a large extent by politicians. In addition, J. Gläser (2016) draws attention to how competitive financing reduces the autonomy of researchers in relation to their scientific communities. The evaluation mechanisms adopted in them favour mainstream research and avoiding risk. As it can be seen, individual autonomy is systemically effectively downgraded – from various sides. On top of that, it is difficult to talk about the implementation of the creative process if a large part of individual working time is absorbed by writing grant applications and endless – and increasingly appropriating attention, encapsulated by sanctions for minor violations – bureaucratic procedures related to the implementation of research projects and teaching processes. So what that it is possible to build a team and implement a project autonomously, if higher education institutions – and thus employees – are assessed for the amount of money obtained for the implementation of projects, and not for the substantive value of the results achieved. A description of such practices, implemented at British higher education institutions and cited by M. Geppert and G. Holinshead, leading to the glorification of financial achievements while depreciating the substantive values should be a warning to all reformers of higher education. This assessment criterion is repeatedly criticised in publications, by using the example of the UK, the Netherlands, and the USA \_ i.e. countries with the longest experiences of neoliberal transformation of higher education institutions \_ as an expression of extreme economisation destroying the freedom of research, as well as contrary to the sense of scientific activity (Geppert & Hollinshead, 2017; Mucha, 2014).

Monika Kostera (2013, p. 13) draws attention to the erosion of academic freedoms that has been progressing for a long time, saying that “Many of them, such as employment security, internal promotion system, and degrees (above

doctor's degree) permanently acquired by the individual and not assigned to the position, in many western countries no longer exist or are limited".

It is worth returning today to read the texts of Michael Polanyi from the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, devoted, *inter alia*, to the defence of the autonomy of science, recently recalled by Iwo Zmyślony (2011). It is difficult, after the experience of real socialism, to disagree with Polanyi (as cited in: Zmyślony, 2011, p. 155), when he says that central planning in science imposing its goals and ways of achieving them "hinders its development and suppresses the autonomy of researchers". Perhaps, delighted with democracy, we would experience the shock of realising that from the point of view of a particular researcher there is no difference whether the restriction on his or her freedom in choosing the subject of research is due to the fact that the government of the Polish People's Republic decided to launch and finance research on a specific list of nodal problems, or that the research policy of the government of the Republic of Poland includes specific research priorities for the implementation of which research funding agencies set up by that government organise grant competitions. Both in one and the other situation, the choice of one's own research subject (which is a key attribute of academic freedom) is determined by the availability of funds specified in the process of external / central planning of science development. Similarly, to the previous censorship, today there is an evaluation system for scientific activities. If scientific institutions and researchers are evaluated for the positioning of the state, institutions, units, in various international rankings, national and within universities, it means that they will undertake such research and carry it out in such a way as to get the most points and citations. In this situation, there is no need to prohibit anything. Such a control system effectively weakens research sensitivity to problems and research approaches outside the sphere of interest of magazines with the highest Impact Factors. This makes the second attribute of the researcher's individual autonomy – "conducting research in a way independent of any external control", also difficult to implement today. According to Polanyi (as cited in: Zmyślony, 2011, p. 156):

“The only factor that stimulates efficiency is ensuring optimum conditions for independent work of units and clearing communication channels enabling mutual control and coordination”.

The value of student autonomy in the process of academic education and development is pointed out relatively rarely in the literature. K. Leja (2013, p. 37) recalls the opinion of K. Jaspers that “the task of the university is to seek the truth by the community of researchers and students”, which indirectly raises the issue of recognition of subjectivity not only of academic teachers but also students. The subjectivity of students is usually manifested through their participation in collegial bodies. In modern Polish universities, their share in the composition of faculty and senate councils is equal to 20%. The limitation of the scope of authority of the higher education institution’s collegiate bodies, which has been increasing since 2011, also means limiting the students’ influence on the decision-making processes taking place in them. The second area of student influence on the education process is related to the dissemination of student assessments of didactic activities and administrative support for the education process.

This form of student autonomy is, however, extensively criticised and it does not constitute an important value for the whole community or students. The evidence is very low attendance in research – often at a level not surpassing 10% of class participants, which excludes the possibility of relying on the results of student surveys in the process of assessing academic staff. There is definitely a lack of manifestation of activities demonstrating a real recognition of the subjectivity of students in the education process and their ability to take responsibility for their own development. What is dominating is solutions giving students the status of a client who pays and demands high quality of services received, pretending to focus education on satisfying the students’ needs (in the process of developing theoretical and practical competences – sought after on the labour market). In fact, these solutions incapacitate students. They feel relieved of the necessity of their own research, independent study, and taking responsibility for their own

development. The attitude of expecting that they will be taught by someone not only a resource of knowledge and skills, but also independent being and living is becoming dominant.

Last year, at the Faculty where I work, we started implementing Master's seminars preparing students to conduct research in accordance with the Action Research approach. Ten promoters for several months were preparing formally and substantively to change the way seminars were conducted. We got familiar with the experiences of colleagues from foreign universities. We read and discussed numerous studies in this field. Having made extensive consultations, we concluded dozens of agreements with organisations in which student research would be carried out as part of Master's theses. We launched additional seminar dates, as well as additional on-call times devoted to consultations related to research conducted by students. Full of enthusiasm, I started a new seminar and I was a little surprised by the fact that students did not show special enthusiasm for new opportunities to acquire competences enabling them to get to know the problems of the organisation and ways of solving them, and thus increasing their attractiveness on the labour market. They were most interested in the issue of the obligation to attend the seminar and the number of absences allowed. It turned out that almost all my new seminar attendees attended 2 or 3 fields of study at the same time, and most of them additionally work professionally. They implement these studies on a full-time basis, i.e., unlike their colleagues from many highly developed countries, they do not incur any costs related to the tuition fee. Extensive educational and professional activity, however, excludes the possibility of real involvement in personal intellectual development. Conducting research in action requires a great deal of independence and initiative on the part of the student in conducting research, which is very difficult for them, because so far in the process of education they had not been required to meet such requirements, rather they were given knowledge and attempts were made to develop selected skills. Students, as adults, are not required to formal learning after passing the final secondary school exams; in contrast to the



requirement of compulsory school attendance in Poland for young people under 18 years of age. They are undoubtedly autonomous in their decision to study. However, are they, in the light of the above (otherwise common) behaviours fully responsible for their development? Freedom means autonomy in the decision-making process, but also responsibility for self-made decisions. This is characteristic of academic teachers - who are responsible and accountable for the multi-faceted quality of the teaching activities implemented, research conducted (including contribution to the development of science) and for their own development. Students as full members of the academic community should have adequate autonomy expressed in specific rights and connected with assuming responsibility for the quality of their own development. The method of ensuring academic freedom in relation to students, however, prevents the coming into being of real student autonomy.

The situation of students' passivity is also noticed by M. Kostera when she writes that "Contemporary students do not resemble the rebellious and brave elite of the past. They are rather a tired mass of young people, confused and burdened with obligations which are beyond their capabilities, incompatible with their young age associated with development and search. They are often indebted for quite significant sums of money, threatened with unemployment, and expectations are directed towards them that they do not understand or that exceed their capabilities" (Kostera, 2013, p. 13).

## Institutional autonomy - community or managerial

The institutional autonomy of the university, defined by the scope of freedom in making decisions concerning it, is clearly distinguished from the autonomy of employees, and on top of that it is often strongly emphasised that it cannot be considered a synonym of collegiality (Santiago et al., 2008). It has a systemic character and its specificity is an important feature of the diversity of different higher education system models (Woźnicki, 2015). Santiago et al.

(2008) referring to the works of R. Berdahl (1990) and McDaniel (1996) point to its two dimensions. At the same time, they recognise that substantive autonomy (identified with collegial autonomy) concerns the institution's right to define academic and research policy, set work standards and principles, curricula, curriculum offers, human resources policy and award degrees, and procedural autonomy refers to the institution's right to define - in principle non-academic spheres such as budgeting, financial management, or non-academic staff (Santiago, et al., 2008).

Actually, the discussion on institutional autonomy has been appropriated by considering the scope of the higher education institution manager's powers (the role of the steering centre) and ways of limiting the impact of collegial bodies on decision-making processes. The research by Krzysztof Leja conducted in 2008 and 2009 shows that in Polish technical universities collegiate bodies still played an important role in decision-making processes. Most of the rectors surveyed believed that "an important task of collegial bodies is to reduce the likelihood of making wrong decisions. ... Rectors notice that the university's autonomy under the Act creates the possibility of strengthening the rector's authority in the university's statute, but only a few take advantage of this possibility." (Leja, 2013, p. 97, p. 102). However, in these studies there were also voices indicating the slackening of decision-making processes due to the need to find a consensus between the interests of various groups represented by collegiate bodies, as well as individual opinions about the need to strengthen the rector's power at the expense of limiting the power of collegial bodies.

Numerous Polish researchers, searching for ways to strengthen the position of Polish higher education and science, as well as fascinated by the concept of the entrepreneurial university are in favour of strengthening the rector's power as a manager. According to K. Leja (2013, p. 153), "The relatively weak power of the rector and strong collegiality make the stimulating activities of the university authorities difficult." The issue of strengthening managerial autonomy at the higher education institution, and in particular

the consequences of such a change in the higher education institution's system, which leads to high managerial autonomy, combined with a significant reduction or even liquidation of collegiate bodies, is worth considering, as there are more and more disturbing reports in this regard. M. Geppert & G. Hollinshead (2017), based on the example of Great Britain, not only show the above-mentioned situations of making academic assessments and decisions to extend employment dependent on the economic results of work (the amount of external funds obtained). First of all, they document the processes of destroying the academic community, the academic ethos, the erosion of trust, the destruction of deserved authority, the destruction of attitudes of mutual cooperation, solidarity, and the emerging attitudes of cunning and cynicism of academics (2017, p. 145). In their opinion, stimulated competitiveness leads to far-reaching individualism, fragmentation of interests, and weakening of intra-academic cooperation (2017, p. 146).

One of the effects of demolishing the academic community at the expense of increasing managerial autonomy is the introduction of radically modified rules of remuneration. As written by M. Geppert & G. Hollinshead in 2016 in British higher education, characterised by an unusually high level of internationalisation and impressive financial results, the average remuneration of vice-chancellors (according to UCU statistics in 2016 – 260,000 pounds, as cited in: Geppert & Hollinshead 2017, p. 138) was 6 times higher than the average academic salary (excluding Professor's). The average salary of the academics in the period from 2009 to 2016 dropped by 14.5% at the same time. In the opinion of the cited authors there is a progressing marginalisation of academic teachers, destruction of authorities, domination of relationships by positions taken in rankings, polarisation of the community, giving special meaning to often unreliable results of student / customer surveys (Geppert & Hollinshead 2017, p. 138-139).

These phenomena are progressing. The consequences of the appropriation of community autonomy by managerial autonomy, which in many cases is transformed into autocratic, technocratic governments, are demon-

strated by mass protests that shocked British universities at the end of 2017. An example is the University of Bath, which has achieved some of the best financial results among British higher education institutions in recent years. An example is that of Prof. Dame Glynis Breakwell, Vice-Chancellor of this university, earning over 450 thousand pounds a year, not only raised protests at this university and demands of her departure. It was also negatively assessed by the financial supervision institution, and – paradoxically – it became a spur for a revival of solidarity within the community (BBC News, 2017a; BBC News, 2017b). Students joined the protests alongside with the employees. There are more and more demands directed against unjustified increases in the salaries of the managerial staff, combined with an increase in fees for education and radical cost cuts (including, inter alia, funds for the salaries of academic teachers). In these discussions, as can be seen in the cited texts from the press, the gigantic salaries of managers are defended only by members of university governing bodies.

Of course, the effects of appropriating the understanding of institutional autonomy to managerial autonomy cannot be reduced only to the above undoubtedly outrageous financial issues and the emergence of a strong opposition between the managerial staff and academic teachers and other members of the community. The subordination of rules within the university's activity to market principles is much more dangerous. These phenomena, combined with competitive funding of research and the uncertainty of employing numerous project employees, lead to the collapse of voluntary cooperation and mutual learning within the academic community. The bureaucratic systems do not perceive these features as organisational values at all.

Łukasz Sułkowski interprets these changes at the cultural level, showing the tension that arises "between formalism, politics, and precision of the culture of control and openness, autonomy and freedom of the culture of trust", while highlighting that "The culture of trust is based on the authority of the professors, while the culture of control makes management authority the source of authority and centrally created regulations" (Sułkowski, 2016, p. 29).

Referring to the changes currently being introduced in Poland to the higher education institution system, one can appeal for the use of experience and research results on changes in the higher education institution system in countries that introduced similar changes over a dozen or several dozen years ago. When making decisions expanding the scope of managerial autonomy, it should be remembered that its increase does not equal the increase in community autonomy, which in the draft of the new law was clearly limited by the introduction of a new unit (The Board of Trustees) as an element in the management structure. The introduction of the Board of Trustees, equipped with important competences, with the dominant participation of external stakeholders, is a manifestation of institutional isomorphism. It is doubtful whether the introduction of one new element in the structure of the organisation will be sufficient to change the way it functions. The introduction of the Board of Trustees is an expression of thinking about the higher education institution and the process of changing organisations in terms of the traditional system approach, when there was a strong belief in the organic nature of systems and the possibility of introducing changes in them through strong stimuli coming from the community. Meanwhile, as N. Luhmann argues, in the light of the concept of the organisation as an autopoiesis, social systems self-produce through communication processes.

Autopoietic processes rely on regular reproduction of meanings by identifying changes that are consistent with the organisation's identity or not. In Luhmann's opinion, social systems of meaning are also autonomous (Luhmann, 1984; *Social Systems*, 1995). The convincing results of Marta Lenartowicz's study show that the university is autopoiesis and behaves like autopoietic systems. External stimuli cause only superficial and temporary changes in them. Real change must be generated from within, it must be caused by a shift within the system's identity (Lenartowicz, 2013). This identity is based on the creative freedom of individuals and voluntary collaboration in conditions that foster critical discourse and reflection. Meanwhile, the latest reform has largely reached for the solution of introducing external economic forces into the

internal structures of the university. The literature indicates that as a result of this type of changes, the university in Anglo-Saxon countries has lost its uniqueness – it is easier to replace it with a more efficiently organised and cheaper business – e.g. corporate academies. It has not been noticed that in many highly developed countries (e.g. in Scandinavia) there has been successful return to independent, collegial forms of management (Kostera, 2012).

## In defence of collegiality

The issue of the essence and significance of community autonomy has been supplanted from contemporary discourse on the improvement of higher education. It follows from the studies of K. Leja recalled above, carried out at Polish technical universities between 2008 and 2009 that collegiality was still their important feature, and the respect of this principle declared by the rectors surveyed went beyond statutory requirements. The change in legal regulations of 2011 and 2014 slightly reduced the scope of powers of the higher education institution's senate, and the changes currently discussed go much further in the pursuit of limiting collegiality. Similar trends could also be observed in other countries where, e.g. in Sweden in 2011, collegiate structures were replaced by managerial forms of management and control, which was accompanied by a change in the forms of appointing academic leaders (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). As a result, Swedish universities where the senate does not exist have also ceased to be obliged to maintain faculty councils. Moreover, rectors are currently appointed by the government, after being nominated by boards of trustees. Thus, the previous *primus inter pares* principle had ceased to apply when the rector was chosen by the academic community and enjoyed its trust, because a strong emphasis was placed on his scientific competence. At present, as the cited authors write, "leadership has become a career path and is no longer mainly seen as a temporary service to the academic community" (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016, p. 3).

It is worth returning here to the Polish research conducted by K. Leja and the interview with the former rector of the Warsaw University of Technology, who in the interview cited by the author said, *inter alia*, "After the last term of office, the rector returns to his/her faculty (to the community), which is an important deterrent too far-reaching arbitrariness when making decisions. ... The current legal authorization allows the rector to do something positive, but under the control of the community, which introduces significant restrictions. The danger of creating coterie or creating interest groups is limited" (Leja, 2013, p. 97). K. Sahlin & U. Eriksson-Zetterquist, as cited in: Hasley (1992, 2004) highlight that collegiality is based on mutual listening and communication with each other, and the basic requirement for the functioning of collegiality is trust, knowledge, and continuous dialogue based on cultivating a shared set standards regarding what constitutes good teaching, good knowledge, and the main goals of universities. According to Bennett (1998), they recognise that collegiality is based on a sense of professional community, which should be supported by active collegial activities, such as peer reviews and seminars, through which the community assumes responsibility for the development and quality of research and education (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016, p. 4).

Observing the contemporary reality of Swedish universities, the authors note the disregard for collegiality and a complete lack of support for its development. Reforms focus on supporting managerial competences, intensifying support from consultants, focusing courses for leaders on criticizing collegial forms of decision making, academic leadership, and collegiality rules. The authors show significant differences in the understanding university leadership, which in the collegial system takes place in close collaboration with those who are lead, while in the promoted management system based on new public management – it is a career path, and the leader must create a distance towards those whom he/she leads (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). They also contest opinions about the weakness of collegiate leadership, arguing that it has a strong leadership base. Moreover, they point

out that the strength of the collegiate system is the loyalty of individuals towards activities and the academic community, as well as openness to criticism, which is not desirable in the managerial system. Referring to the latest research, the authors show that minimising critical voices makes employees choose to be silent, the most gifted ones leave the university or choose “internal exile” or choose the attitudes of “dissociated cynicism” (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016, p. 9). It seems that the next phase of implementing the new school management system in Sweden may take forms known from British reality and described in the earlier part of this text. According to Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist (2016), basing higher education management on the concept of new public management leads to political control of the higher education institution using a mixture of bureaucratic and management principles, while the practice and knowledge of collegiality as well as the ambiguous concept of leadership disappear.

## Future, perspectives of academic autonomy

Strong economic and political pressure exerted on higher education today, widespread subordination to the principles of higher education policy management as well as individual higher education institutions, the concept of new public management, causes deep erosion of academic autonomy, strongly changes not only the principles of higher education institution management but also the reality of academic work. According to Ł. Sułkowski (2016), the autonomy of the university identified in the past with the autonomy of institutions and staff, has been significantly reduced in both aspects today, and in the future departure from university autonomy in favour of the corporate system will take place. Piece by piece, however, there are voices that the university’s independence – understood both as institutional autonomy and the preservation of academic freedom – is in the interest of the further development of our culture and civilisation. Academic freedom is indicated at the same time as a guarantor of the freedom of exploration, independent



of political, ideological or business pressure (Thorens, 2006).

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