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## NATIONAL REFORMS AND THEIR EUROPEAN CONTEXTS: ON INSTITUTIONAL AND INSTRUMENTAL VISIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY APPLIED TO THE POLISH CASE

### Introduction

I had been studying various aspects of Polish higher education reforms for several years before I encountered Peter Maassen and Johan P. Olsens *University Dynamics and European Integration* (2007). As a collection of chapters on different visions of the institution of the university - referred both to the past and, especially, to the future - it had a tremendous effect on my thinking about what is behind higher education reforms. About that time, there appeared an opportunity to fund a research project on Polish and Norwegian reforms, NORPOL (2009-2011). I had an honor and pleasure to co-run it with Peter. The two years of collaboration and joint conferences in the two countries were very fruitful, especially in the context of understanding the growing conflict over where Polish higher education should go; and what the preferred shape of reforms should be. Our joint project coincided with the period of heated debates about the co-called Kudrycka reforms, changing basic rules of the academic game in Poland - in both governance and funding - in 2009-2011 (Kwiek 2015b). Both teams studied Polish and Norwegian reforms in a wider European context in detail, and our co-edited book was published in 2012 (Kwiek and Maassen 2012).

I am referring here to the mind-opening Maassen and Olsens book because it has formed my approach to what Peter with Ase Gornitzka, Johan P. Olsen and Bjorn Stensaker termed the “search for a new pact” (Gornitzka *et al.* 2007) - and which I was able to refer to the complicated Polish case of universities under powerful reform pressures. The conceptual framework developed in the Maassen and Olsens book was fascinatingly useful for thinking about Poland. The book provided both an overview of the four visions of the university and, especially, detailed commentaries on each of them, leading to a jointly produced, daring research agenda.

### The relevance of ideal-type of university models

Specifically, the book led me to studying the applicability of the two following models to the realities of Polish universities: the university as “a rule-governed community of scholars” (related to Robert Birnbaums “collegial” model and Ian McNays “collegium”); and the university as an “instrument for shifting national

political agendas”, developed in detail by Peter and Ase (Maassen and Gornitzka 2007, 81-98).

The university in the first model has its own constitutive, normative, and organizational principles; it shows a shared commitment to scholarship and learning, basic research, and the search for the truth; it is supposed to benefit society as a whole and not specific “stakeholders”; truth is an end in itself, and the higher education system evolves through internal, organic processes (rather than external design) (Olsen 2007,30-31; see also two classical statements on the university as a “community of scholars”: John D. Milletts *The Academic Community. An Essay on Organization*, 1962, 66-105; and Paul Goodmans *The Community of Scholars*, 1962, 84-106). In the second model of the university - as an “instrument for shifting national political agendas” - the university is viewed as “a rational tool for implementing the purposes and policies of democratically elected leaders” (Olsen 2007, 31).

The organizing principle of the latter vision as defined by Peter and Ase is “hierarchy and command” and in this vision there are two core functions of the university: the training of employees for the growing professional bureaucracy and the production of knowledge in areas that provide the basis for the states wealth and welfare. Its underlying assumption is that “the state is best positioned to represent the public interest” (and to set up national agendas and identify national priorities) and its underlying question is “who gets what, when and how” (Maassen and Gornitzka 2007, 83). Universities main tasks are thus the contribution of the knowledge of direct relevance to the state and the provision of competent civil servants and workers. The organizational autonomy of universities is low, and individual academic freedom stays at a relatively high level. In this vision, outputs rule, rather than inputs, as in previous decades. The university’s relationship with the state and society at large is “redefined and reorganized” and the current transformations involve “more than the marginal adjustments to changing circumstances” (Maassen and Stensaker 2011, 766). Universities and the economy are brought together closer than ever before, and there is growing policy emphasis on the economic role of higher education. There is intense tension between economic and social perspectives in viewing the institution of the university (Gornitzka and Maassen 2000, 219). And, in more general terms, there is intense tension between its institutional vision and various forms of its instrumental visions, including the one in which it is merely an “instrument for national political agendas”.

While studying the Maassen and Olsen book, my research question was to what extent Polish universities could manifest the characteristics of the above two models. I linked the two visions presented above to selected variables from a large-scale European dataset on the changing academic profession in 11 countries (the combined CAP and EUROAC datasets) to see how the Polish system could be located among other European systems in the process of deep Europeanization (see Maassen and Musselin 2009). The initial hypothesis was that Poland should be a “community of scholars” type of system to a higher degree than most European systems. In particular, I assumed that the current dynamics of changes was as follows: the collegial model is powerful today but it may be slowly eroding in the face of ongoing structural reforms.

The first model was found exceptionally powerful among Polish academics, and the second model was powerfully promoted in Poland by the international community of experts appealing to such umbrella terms as the “knowledge-driven economy”; this model was also strongly promoted by the policy-making community in a recent wave of higher education reforms in Poland, heavily influenced by the OECD report on Poland, swiftly translated into Polish (see Fulton *et al.* 2007). This was actually *the* model for the policymaking community in the recent reform period.

The initial assumptions were that there might be strong incommensurability between the values shared by two communities (the Polish academic community and the Polish policymaking community). Polish academics turned out to be strongly embedded in the first model of university organization (“a rule-governed community of scholars”) and the Polish policy-making community turned out to be heavily involved in implementing the second model of university organization (“an instrument for national political agendas”), so carefully defined by Peter and Ase. The general rejection of the direction of ongoing reforms by large segments of Polish academia may be a reflection of a fundamental incommensurability regarding the guiding principles believed to drive Polish universities. The above rejection may be the result of a clash between two university models carefully defined in the 2007 book. These initial assumptions were confirmed by the detailed empirical analyses (see Kwiek 2015a). The emergent conflict between the vision of the university shared by the academic community (the value-based, autonomy-driven “community of scholars” model) and the vision shared by the policy-making community (instrumental, externally-driven) is a conflict about what can be termed “basic values” (Bowen and Schuster 1986, 53): those which are “derived from long academic tradition and tend to be conveyed from one generation to the next”.

### Final reflections

Before I have read the Maassen and Olsen book (2007), I was trying to present the ongoing conflicts between the reformers and the reformees in Polish higher education in various conceptual frameworks. But the split between “institutional” and “instrumental” visions of the university in general, and between its “collegial” and “national agendas” visions in particular, turned out to be especially useful. This conceptual framework developed over the years in various forms (from the opposition between universities as “social institutions” and as “industrial branches” in Gornitzka and Maassen 2000 to “institutional” and “instrumental” models presented in Maassen and Olsen 2007) proved to be operationalizable and measurable, using the data on academic attitudes and behaviors across Europe. I owe the successful combination of theoretical insights and primary data analysis to Peter, and especially his sustained emphasis on the usefulness of the 2007 book. He was right in suggesting the book to us, both Polish and Norwegian teams in the NORPOL project. The book - and especially its concluding chapter about the search for a new “foundational pact” and changing relationship between the university, state and society - has been a continuing source of inspiration for me.

Still, the book opens numerous roads to be further explored. I am happy that I had a privilege to be working with Peter, and that I was able to test empirically the theoretical frameworks he developed so successfully. Peter, thank you!

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