The Status Quo, Imponderables of Change, and Evaluation: Between Higher Education Policy and Academic Discourse

Dominik Chomik & Helena Ostrowicka

Abstract: In this article, we discuss various issues regarding the contemporary reform of science and higher education in Poland, which are constructed and sustained by academics in media discourse. In the performed analyses we refer to the critical and post-Foucauldian studies on the discursive aspects of change in higher education. We propose that the connections between discursive factors, events and social changes be crystallized in the processes of their media *problematization*. In the space of public discourse and in the forms of the problematization of the reform of higher education, we sought the knowledge, concepts and classification rules that set the discursive framework of the change experienced by the academic community. The research has shown that this framework goes beyond the polarization of positions, that is, beyond the criticism or affirmation of neoliberal reforms. On the basis of the performed analyses we reconstructed three types of internally diversified and non-dichotomic discourses: the *status quo* discourse, the discourse of the imponderables of change, and the discourse of reform evaluation. Taking Poland as a case study, the article includes a discourse analysis formed at the national level in respect of the key objectives laid down at the European level.

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1. Introduction

Reforming academic research and higher education in many European countries, including Poland after 1990, is a process of permanent change related to the creation of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. The direction of this change is the subject of numerous public debates and disputes in which, in addition to journalists, publicists and politicians, the academic community participates with varying intensity. In the analyses of the public debate so far researchers have focused mainly on the polarization of positions, i.e., criticism or affirmation of neoliberal reforms (DZIEDZICZAK-FOLTYN, 2017; KWIEK, 2011, 2013; MAASSEN & OLSEN, 2007), the research presented in this text shows the complex and non-dichotomic ways of presenting

and interpreting university reform. The discussed analyses refer to critical studies on the discursive aspects of changes in higher education (FAIRCLOUGH & WODAK, 2008; SOUSA & MAGALHÃES, 2013; WODAK & FAIRCLOUGH, 2010). In the most general terms, the discursive perspective assumes the existence of a connection between discourse (and changes within it) and social change. The theoretical description of these relations and their empirical identification each time poses a research challenge (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, 2007; KRZYŻANOWSKI, 2016; KRZYŻANOWSKI & WODAK, 2009). In this article, we assume that 1. each stage of implementation of the policy towards higher education from the macro level is accompanied by a series of discursive processes at the micro level (FAIRCLOUGH & WODAK, 2008), and 2. the relations between discursive factors, events and social change become "visible," and therefore identifiable among others, in the processes of *problematization* (BACCHI, 2009, 2015; BACCHI & GOODWIN, 2016; LOWE, 2001). [1]

In this article we attempt to answer the question of how contemporary changes in the academic research and higher education sector are presented and interpreted by scientists in the public debate in Poland—i.e., in the theoretical perspective we have adopted, we ask about the ways of problematizing contemporary university reform by the academic community. On this basis, we examine the connection between the policy on higher education and academic discourse. Taking Poland as a case study, we include a discourse analysis at the national level in respect of the key objectives laid down at the European level. [2]

In this empirical analysis, we intended to crystallize problematization in a specific social, economic and political context. To this end, the statements of academics about the reform published in the press in 2011–2014—i.e., in the period of intensified debate related to the amendment of the Law on Higher Education in Poland—became the object of our interest. Owing to new, neoliberal legal regulations, in the analyzed period the system of academic research and higher education became the subject of an animated public debate in which, inter alia, representatives of the academic world engaged. The way the academics spoke about the reform revealed a deeper structure of discourses of change (self-) management. For in order for the transformation to be objectified, the individuals subject to reform must attempt to problematize it. When it is expressed in words, the reform is subjected to the procedures of control and distribution characteristic for discourse; when it is uttered, it is subjected to discursive positioning, thereby participating in the establishment of hegemonic order. This order is much more complex and internally polyvalent, and far from explicitly affirming or criticizing the direction of neoliberal reforms. [3]

We present the various problematizations of the reform of science and higher education in Poland that have been constructed and maintained in media discourse. The analyses fall into the now extensive post-structural trend of studying objects of discourse as products of practices of governing (BACCHI, 2015; BACCHI & GOODWIN, 2016; FOUCAULT, 1992). In this perspective, problematizations of the reform are the means of presenting, interpreting and constructing it as a "problem." Thus, the term "problem" does not evoke a

pejorative connotation. It is also not a "difficult situation" or a disproportion between conditions, needs and possibilities. Rather, it is a synonym for a "question" demanding an answer, or an "issue" that becomes the object of discourse (BACCHI, 2009; ROSE, 1999). Along with a discursive expression, especially in its post-structural version, researchers of higher education become more sensitive to the construction of academic reality and draw attention to the language in which the social order and the truth about Academia are produced (OSTROWICKA &SPYCHALSKA-STASIAK, 2017). [4]

In Section 2, we present the theoretical and methodological assumptions of this research. We describe the context and criteria of the selection of empirical materials. In Section 3, we show the main outcomes, i.e., the results of the analysis of the forms of problematization of the reform of higher education in Poland and the three types of discourses reconstructed on its basis: the *status quo* discourse, the discourse of the imponderables of change and the discourse of reform evaluation. [5]

2. Assumptions and Methodology

Problematization is a form of raising and explaining selected issues as *exactly these and not others*. We share the belief that "problems" are not fixed or easily identifiable, but are a form of changeable structures. In the literature, these mechanisms are described and explained from two different perspectives: interpretive (emphasizing the agency of subjects) and post-structural (anti-foundational) (BACCHI, 2015). In accordance with the post-structural perspective that is closer to us, we avoid searching for sources of problematization in the intentional and causative actions of individuals. We direct our attention towards the numerous and complex relations in which "issues" become products of the practices of governing. To crystallize the process of constructing "problems," the context of reforming and the government regulations that create the conditions for the occurrence of a particular type of expression are important. According to FOUCAULT (1992), academic research and higher education are "objects of thought": they are a being that is given as a question to think about , and the research task is to investigate how these "objects" emerge in discursive practices as "problems." [6]

From the Foucauldian perspective, governance is possible thanks to the established styles (forms) of problematization, which encourage taking action (BACCHI, 2015) or refusing to take it. As a result, the identification of models of governance, referred to as *governmentality* (FOUCAULT, 2008), becomes an outcome of the analysis of problematizations. The idea of governmentality has brought about numerous discursive studies into the area of widely understood higher education (ANGERMULLER, 2013; BALL, 2015; DAVIES & BANSEL 2010; POWER, 1997). Linking discourse analysis with the concept of governmentality (HAIDAR, 2007; VAN DYK & ANGERMÜLLER 2010) makes it possible to crystallize the relationship between educational and scientific policy and academics experiencing the reforms of higher education in Poland. This is because problematizations show how changes are discursively presented in

terms of "issues" that are given for reflection and may lead to their stabilization, rejection or modification. By *discourse* we mean a collection of statements that is characterized by a certain regularity within concepts, the object, subjects, and modality (FOUCAULT, 1972, 1988). In the space of public discourse and in the forms of problematization of higher education reform we searched for knowledge, concepts, classification rules and the attitude of academics to their own work, which set the discursive framework of the change experienced by the academic community. The academic problematizations of the reform are not "innocent" constructs but, by launching sets of concepts, classifications and divisions in response to the policy adopted at the level of the government, they become woven into discursive processes of objectivization. It is the concepts and rules of classification and division that appear in the discourse (FOUCAULT, 1972) that we have made basic analytical categories[1]. What is worth emphasizing, in the perspective we have adopted, is that it is not the intentions and differences between the authors of the texts that are subject to analysis, but what is expressed in the collection of statements in the body of the texts that make up our discourse archive[2]. [7]

The procedure of creating the archive consisted of two phases: external and internal (FLICK, 2007). The stage of the external selection of texts was purposeful, taking into account three criteria: time, the author, and the subject of the statement[3]. We started with the collection of publications in which academics speak about the contemporary reform of academic research and higher education in Poland. As a result, at this stage of the selection we gathered the main body of the press texts published in the years 2011-2014 in the seven most opinion-forming (most frequently cited) Polish press titles: three dailies, i.e., *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, Gazeta Wyborcza*, and *Rzeczpospolita*, and four weekly magazines with largely editorial content i.e., *Polityka, Newsweek Polska, Wprost*, and *W sieci*, which thematically refer to the reform of academic research and higher education in Poland, and their authors are academics. Ultimately, the first stage of selection generated 125 texts. [8]

The second stage, i.e., the internal selection of empirical materials, was of a theoretical nature and was based on an initial analysis performed taking into account three criteria. First, we decided that in reconstructing the voice of the academic community we would limit ourselves to whole articles and features by academics, and we would omit the quotations of their statements in the texts of journalists. We decided, however, that the body should also be supplemented with a group of interviews, despite the relatively large role of the journalistic factor

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1   In the analysis, we used the ATLAS.ti software, especially at the data coding stage.

2   Since we are not interested in specific authors, but in the fragments of the texts, we have abandoned publishing their full names in the cited fragments of the empirical materials. The initials in brackets provided after the quote refer to the analogically marked position on the source list enclosed at the end (see the Appendix).

3   The adopted criteria resulted from the assumptions of the research project entitled "Governmentality of the University—the Discourse Image of Contemporary Higher Education Reform in Poland" (a grant from the National Science Center in Poland), in which we are interested in official and public discourse.

in them. Some important voices of representatives of the community appear only in this mixed press genre. [9]

Second, we chose press releases whose authors speak on behalf of the academic community. This allowed us to avoid texts in which the researchers, because of their institutional (and financial) involvement in the implementation of the reform (e.g., concept creation, supervision, advocacy, counseling, distribution of funds, etc.), represent the policy of the reformer (visible, among others, in the statements of the minister and the prime minister), or they are entrepreneurs who had an episode of academic work in their previous career. [10]

And finally, thirdly, the selected texts were to express the issue of the then reform of higher education in Poland in a "problematic" way. Taking this criterion into account, we followed the guideline formulated by Carol BACCHI regarding the study of problematization: "To study problematizations it is useful to open them up for analysis by 'reading off' (or identifying) the implied 'problem'" (2009, p.XI). The use of theoretical criteria for the selection of sources, i.e., based on the concept of problematization (BACCHI, 2015; FOUCAULT, 1992), meant that "the sample becomes, by definition, representative of the phenomenon of interest" (PATTON, 1990, p.177). [11]

Thanks to this, we obtained a set of developed, in-depth analyses of the situation of higher education, whose authorship and meaning represent the voice of the community to the greatest possible extent[4], and are subordinated to the editors' program lines to the smallest. As a result of the multi-stage selection, a database of 59 texts was created (15 texts from 2011, 16 from 2012, 8 from 2013, and 20 from 2014). The body of the texts was subjected to a main analysis conducted from the perspective of dominant concepts and patterns differentiating the statements, i.e., patterns of classifying, linking and differentiating phenomena, behaviors, objects, etc. (FOUCAULT,1972; OSTROWICKA, 2015) appearing in academic discourse in connection with the reform of higher education. [12]

The analyzed discourse is of an expert nature, resulting from the authors' special competences, expressed in texts and confirmed in the biographical notes placed at the beginning or at the end[5]. In addition, it is also a look from within the reformed world. The reform (and the *status quo*) thus becomes also an experience reported by the subject, which additionally substantiates the expression of opinions, and sometimes justifies the manifestation of emotions. [13]

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4   The dominant group of authors, numbering 57 people, are independent researchers. Their academic titles include most often the abbreviation "prof.," and less often "dr hab." (In the Polish media, the distinction between the so-called university professors and holders of the academic title of professor, which is awarded by the president, is seldom used). The other 10 authors are assistant professors. Some texts have several authors, hence the difference between the total number of authors and the number of texts.

5   Polidisciplinarity and inconsistencies in the ways of presenting by individual authors make it impossible to provide the strict statistics of the authors' specialties. Out of those whose academic profiles were provided, the most numerous group were philosophers (16 texts of their authorship or co-authorship), sociologists (9) and historians (9).

The analysis of the concepts and classification patterns, according to which the academics' discourse about the reform crystallized, made it possible for us to answer questions about what is problematized in the area of contemporary changes in higher education, and how the reform became a problem. [14]

3. The Results of the Analysis

As a result of the analysis of academics' press statements, we reconstructed three dominant forms of problematization of the reform:

1. *status quo* discourse,
2. discourse of the imponderables of change,
3. discourse of reform evaluation. [15]

In the first form of problematization, the reform is a response to the *status quo* problem in the system of academic research and higher education. Criticism of reality is, therefore, the starting point and justification for the repair project. The statements generated in the *status quo* discourse refer to the conditions and possibilities of improving the situation in the academic research and higher education sector. [16]

The second form of problematization expresses changes in terms of elusive phenomena (i.e., myths, beliefs, mentality, and others). It is a (re)construction of the problem of the reform by reference to the imponderables of change. It is those that become the subject of discussion and criticism when the reform becomes a response to incorrect or incomplete premises derived from the problematization of the *status quo*. [17]

In the third case, the reform is already an element of the reality experienced by academics. Their statements take the form of *post factum* evaluation, because the problem of the reform is the process and effects of its implementation. In the discourse of evaluation, two issues become visible first and foremost, i.e., the relationship between the assumptions of the reform and its course and effects, and the problem of reality after the reform. [18]

The three distinguished models of problematization are based on different concepts, classification and division rules, and the construction of the reformed subject of Academia. The categories characteristic of the distinguished types of discourse emerged in the analyzed material in an inductive and emergent manner. [19]

Below we discuss the discourses of the *status quo*, the imponderables of change and reform evaluation. We also emphasize their internal differentiation. Because the space intended for the presentation of the results is limited, according to FLICK's (2007) recommendations, we quote only the statements that are the most meaningful and best illustrate our conclusions. [20]

3.1 *Status quo* discourse

The context, starting point and justification of the reform are included in the *status quo*, i.e., in its elements and internal links, as well as in the reformist interpretations of these rules. The project of changes is a response to the intricacies of this world, an attempt to solve the dilemmas of academic reality, its transformation, and its adaptation to new expectations, tasks, and priorities. [21]

In our understanding, the *status quo* is not a situation changing over time; it is not a state subject to evolution, but (according to its general meaning and application) it is a static construct. Therefore, the reconstruction and evaluation of the *status quo* is the starting point for the reform project. This sets a specific time horizon in which the criticism of reality reaches its critical mass and leads to a conclusion: it is time for change. But the discourse around the reform is governed by other laws in this regard. [22]

The discourse *status quo* is not a being that appears at the beginning, when creating, reporting or discussing the concept of change. It is true that it constitutes a significant notion of discourse at its initial stage (which is, to a limited extent, visible in the dates of the examples cited in this chapter). However, it also becomes a point of reference, i.e., it is referred to as the *status quo ante* within the evaluation of an undertaking already completed. [23]

This creates a research problem: how to distinguish the elements of the *status quo* from the changed, corrected, and petrified reality after the reform? The role of the time criterion must be assumed here by the criterion of opposition. The most appropriate and closest to the nature of the *status quo* will, therefore, be to define it as an antithesis of the reform. It is from this juxtaposition that its individual features emerge, becoming a material for the problematization of the reform project. [24]

In view of the dynamism of the reform, the *status quo* embedded in itself is defenseless. Regardless of how much authenticity or propaganda there is in the project of change, the very slogan of the reform carries in itself a force in view of which the defense of the *status quo* may find only short-lived, fragile answers. It is significant that in the studied set of texts there are absolutely no positive evaluations of the reality that shaped the academics and in which they functioned most often throughout their entire professional lives. This particular issue is beyond our interest. However, it explains why opposing the *status quo* and the reform cannot become central to the encapsulation of the issues of discourse around the reform. If the praise of the *status quo* is not "the done thing," the possibilities of its use to criticize the reform are limited. [25]

This means that there is a rhetorical margin of interpretation, i.e., the distance of academics from the *status quo* manifested as cautiously expressed, toned down criticism, just like the praise of the reform, may be implementing a specific conversational strategy: fulfill the principle of cooperation (AWDIEV, 2005, p.132) or serve to win an opponent over to one's other arguments:

> "By saying this, I am not saying that we are perfect; on the contrary"[6] (PM).
>
> "I agree with this—it is very serious structural reform. I have my reservations about the fact that ..." (ZM).
>
> (...) the reform of higher education, which I personally support and even admire. It is a pity that in its assumptions ... " (ZM). [26]

There is an instance that the defense of the *status quo* can make reference to. It is the context from which it grew—the past. The staticity of the present day, regardless of its actual disabilities and dysfunctions, can be surrounded with the symbolism of noble faithfulness to the past. To make this possible, the past must take the form of a myth:

> "For many academic people, the Humboldtian idea of a university is something of a paradise lost, a mystified vision of the good old times, when students were real students, and professors were real professors" (ST). [27]

Recalling tradition is not only an argument in the discussion about education worth considering at the rhetorical level. The self-reflection from within cited above shows that tradition may be sometimes a kind of filter through which one looks at the reformed reality. A change seen in this way blurs the contours of this utopian land, destroys the truth of the "good old days" (ST) and introduces uncertainty. [28]

However, protecting the *status quo* with the myth of the past is not an effective recipe protecting the *universitas* from the logic of reforming, and not only because it would prefer to erase part of its own heritage (e.g., the "epoch of 'Camouflage'" [GA][7]). Most importantly, recalling the past does not eliminate the difficult to ignore dysfunctions of today. Tradition is not a safe screen behind which the deficiencies and pathologies of the status quo can effectively be hidden. [29]

In dynamic discourse, however, the sins of the *status quo* can be attributed to the reform. In the period under consideration, it is favored by the dynamics and changeability of reality, which creates a field of interpretational freedom:

> "Submissiveness, meekness, and *no questions asked* are in great demand. Decorations for courage—sapere aude!—so valuable in the days of Kant—are kept today crammed into drawers. Since my existence depends on the next evaluation, why the heck should I put myself at risk?" (NP) [30]

The *status quo* is populated, and the distinctiveness of its evaluation is based on the vices of people living in this world. It is inhabited by "ones of us" (KS12), "mediocrities" (GG), "weaklings" (JA), "semi-intelligentsia" (HJ14) and "multitudes of nonentities" (NA). The weakness and atrophy of the *status quo* community are underlined by the names of the state in which these individuals exist, such as

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6   Translations from Polish press texts are ours.

7   A reference to "Camouflage" (in Polish *Barwy ochronne*), a film by Krzysztof ZANUSSI, depicting a critical image of the Polish academic community of the 1970s.

"hanging around" (ŻM), "sweet doing nothing" (GG) or "not giving a hoot for the expense of the taxpayer's toil" (HJ12). [31]

Lethargic stagnation and passivity do not close the description of functioning within the *status quo*. "Moonlighting" (MK) is equally important. As part of a coherent picture of the *status quo,* this substitute of work (low-quality work) is most often done on an undemanding sinecure, where "you can earn some extra money and not toil at it" (OW). It is less often a slave job on the side motivated by elementary material needs: "they lecture, or rather, moonlight doing a second and third job. (...) They must earn some extra money" (MK). [32]

The personalized and specified *status quo* has its age and title. This is a group of older academics, professors immersed in the distant land of the past, disregarding the imperatives of today. "Closed in the ivory tower, they write more books that even their students do not read!" (PA) [33]

Alienation and ignorance of the new does not mean inertia towards the forces that can affect the existing order. This negative collective hero (rarely presented from the perspective of the individual) is, as in the tabloid, contrasted with another group. These are the so-called "young and talented," challenging existing relations. However, the internal order of the *status quo* is based on "gerontocracy" (OW), as part of which professors "block the academic career of young, talented people" (WP) and perpetrate the "exploitation of doctoral students" (JD). [34]

The described world functions in its unchangeable shape thanks to unwritten rules ordering interpersonal relations. These are bluntly presented as "elite relations" (GG), "negative selection system" (ŻM) or "reproduction of mediocrity" (GG). [35]

The stability of the above rules is based on the principle that should be considered the most important for the *status quo*. It is exclusiveness. The university's invariability is possible thanks to the isolation of its world from external stimuli. [36]

The exclusiveness of the *status quo* assumes a geographical dimension. In this case, it means locality, pejoratively valued as a backwater or province: "Polish social sciences and humanities are, in their general picture, provincial, and rarely are their representatives present on international forums" (GG). At the same time, this valuation is certainly not subjective; it is based on rational premises, for example taken from the natural sciences: "as a biologist I know that diversity is usually better than inbreeding, which is why staff mobility is a rule in the world of science outside of Poland" (ŻM). [37]

The described exclusiveness builds the distinctiveness of the juxtaposition of both orders: the world of external patterns and the "Polish academic uncompetitive backwater" (KS13). That is why their detailed features are arranged in contrasting pairs, such as, for example, "the Western system of measuring the value of

publications" (KS13) and the "Polish one, giving points to publications in 'Scientific Papers of Pcim Dolny'[8]" (KS13). [38]

Exclusiveness as the most important attribute of the *status quo* is the basis of its collision with the reform project. For it is this property of the world that gives the chance to formulate a clear and simple plan of repair, consisting in breaking the status quo and opening the university. The power of the amendment to the higher education act lies precisely in that it "introduces a number of changes favoring the openness of Polish universities to the world" (AD). [39]

The overcoming of mental, legal and economic barriers, therefore, seems to be an effective way to deal with the problems of higher education. The flow of ideas should take place both ways. First of all, it should consist in the "supply of fresh blood" (KS13), and thus letting in ideas and external models, because "the students coming to us will probably be less uncritical, less willing to turn a blind eye to mediocrity" (AD). Secondly, it means going out into the world, because "only the mobility of academics gives a chance to break out of the local stagnation" (AD). [40]

At the psychological and sociological levels, exclusiveness manifests itself in the (individual and community) resistance of those who want things "to remain the same" (OW). This reaction against the "new breath" (GA) of the reform is motivated by the fear of losing privileges: "The reform will, for example, help to discipline academics. This, certainly, stirs resistance, because academics live comfortable lives, like all professional groups that can use the state" (OW). [41]

The attitude of resistance to the reform is hyperbolized in discourse. It becomes total. "Even quite simple and obvious solutions encounter the resistance of the community" (ŻM), although above all it is visible in the face of these changes that are supposed to disrupt the *status quo* by removing the university's isolation, such as "the resistance accompanying the employment of foreign academics in Poland" (ŻM). It is also active resistance, even when it is associated with low productivity, as in the case of "'scholars with persistently modest achievements" (GG). In this case, idleness is not an expression of laziness or passivity, but a demonstration of obstinate opposition. [42]

If the *status quo* logic excludes a consensus on the reform, its success does not depend on the efficiency of associative communication, but on the reformers' energy and their efficiency in implementing the project. Hence, the correct parameter of the reform in the context of resistance is not its direction ("the reform goes in this direction" [OW]), but intensity. In this respect, criticism of the *status quo* leads to raising the issue of sufficiency/radicalism of systemic corrective incentives: "The new law touches on this issue gently, encouraging the mobility of the academic staff, but it does not make it compulsory" (ŻM). [43]

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8 *Pcimie Dolne*, or more often *Pcim Dolny*, are the colloquial and jocular names of a small
   Podunk town, isolated from the world.

The link between the radicalism of the techniques governing the implementation and acceptance of the reform and its success takes the form of a dilemma, because "quality and the responsibility of the community may not be decreed" (OW), and "even the best regulations can be neutralized by people" (ŻM). This observation leads to two different reactions, both logical. [44]

The first one takes the form of a conclusion expressing the evaluation of the effectiveness of the reform in a nuanced, though positive way: "System changes in academic research and higher education could go further, but even these neutralized versions of laws enforce a change in thinking" (ŻM). Although the impact of the reform has been softened and "waiting for its results will take a long time" (ŻM), the rules of the game have already been irrevocably changed. Thus, it is not the direct remodeling of the world to match a specific intended ideal that is an actual success, but the violation of the *status quo*. The breaking of its internal balance makes it susceptible to external stimuli and creates a field of further evolution in the desired direction. [45]

The second reaction links too small radicalism of reforms not with the logic of the *status quo,* but with the inadequacy of the adopted solutions (also seen as apparent or inappropriate). In this case, it takes the form of an appeal for action: "Let's band together! Let's demolish anachronistic universities since paper is unimportant, because in practice it is skills that count anyway. Let's invent new universities. May is approaching, just as in 1968. I sound the alarm for universities!" (PA) [46]

Importantly, in this case the impulse for a real change comes from within the system, it is to be the effect of university self-reflection on the *status quo*, and at the same time to demonstrate the strength of the academic community and its ability to repair itself. This, certainly, does not preclude the search for a special individual, a reformer: "We need a new Hugo Kołłątaj[9] today, who would take measures against the lethargic Polish university. We need a much deeper reform" (HJ14). [47]

The *status quo* and the reform are not always revealed as antagonistic concepts. In order to describe the situation in higher education, we can use a different perspective as part of which, for example, the reform is an (only weakly marked) element, a logical creation of a dysfunctional system (KM, KR). The struggles of the reform and the *status quo* are then an apparent or insignificant phenomenon. [48]

In addition, a destructive reform can also be a desirable phenomenon, provided that it is treated as an element of the system of two antagonistic negative values:

> "I am of the opinion that the old-style university is dead and that it does not make sense to galvanize its corpse. On the contrary. We have to help it depart this world, and the Bologna process and the latest reform of higher education can be of great help in this" (NP). [49]

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9   Polish politician and writer of the Enlightenment, one of the creators of the Constitution on May 3 1791.

If the *status quo* logic is permanently assigned to this world, then a recovery program neither exists nor can it exist. The only solution is to annihilate the university. Thanks to the destructive element of the reform, a new one can be created on the ruins of the present world. [50]

3.2 The discourse of the imponderables of change

The *status quo* presented in the previous section is functionally a kind of fertilizer; it is from its unpleasant ingredients that the reform-demand draws its vital forces, the energy and elegance of the idea. Thus, the project of the change that has grown on the subsoil of the *status quo* is strong thanks to its roots, binding its individual components with the logic of common origin. [51]

However, another perspective is also characteristic of a subject immersed in the reality of the *status quo*. According to it, the reform is a creation coming from the outside and shaped by forces that derive their motivations just from the outside. Their influence on the *universitas* must be unclear and suspicious in this approach and, therefore, deserving special interest[10]. The central problem of the discourse of the imponderables shaped in this way is the idea (ideas) of the reform understood as its vague basis. Such discourse is of a regulatory nature, and its structure is determined by two different patterns differentiating the statements about the imponderables of change: a scheme for the *demystification of the reform* and a scheme for its *demythologization.* The first one generates statements expressing the conviction that the truth about the causes and objectives of the reform is hidden by its authors. In this case, the discourse leads to the revealing of the concealed basis of the reform. The second scheme differentiating the discussed discourse refers to the statement about the reform as an intrinsically wrong project. The presentation of its basis in this case takes the form of demythologization of the assumptions of the reform: the reconstruction of the deep, unconscious errors of its creators, and of the myths whose falsehood the reformer does not see. [52]

Although different, both of the above-mentioned schemes forming the discourse of imponderables are interwoven and lead to partially convergent effects. The demystification and demythologization of the reform's basis allow us to point out mistakes and proposals for their correction, or to expose and disparage the reform and, eventually, to undermine its sense. [53]

The discursive emergence of imponderables has its source in empirical knowledge. The direct experience of change and the perception of its announcement allow us to identify individual features of the project. It is on this basis that the deep motivations and beliefs of the authors of the reform are induced. This can be seen, for example, in the way of revealing one of the basic, features of the reform in the discourse, which is its permanence (persistence,

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10 Therefore, perhaps, the sources of the discourse around the imponderables of the reform should be sought not only in the personal experience of academics, whom the reform affects directly, but also simply in the skepticism of scientific cognition, protecting in this case against the uncritical acceptance of a politician's declarations (OSTROWICKA & SPYCHALSKA-STASIAK, 2017).

chronicity). Two groups of interpretations explaining why "the system is constantly changing" can be seen in the discourse being "studied" (KI). [54]

One of them is based on the various motivations of the authors of the change, resulting from their alleged internal beliefs, for example, that a natural attribute of power is the readiness to change (improve) imperfect reality. The implementation of this task is facilitated by the fact that "the reform means any change introduced by the political system" (MK). The change legitimizes the ruler and gives meaning to their existence (especially if they had written the announcement of modernization on the banner leading to the electoral victory). [55]

But in this situation, the political project of modernization can be primarily propaganda. The operation of such a "pompous revolution" (NA) is then based primarily on "clichés" (MK). *Reform is an empty slogan* hiding the other, real intentions of the rulers. [56]

The permanent transformation of reality, for which the slogans of the reform, change, renewal, or repair are created, legitimizes the authority not only in the face of external forces. The reformers' action can serve to realize their internal need for fulfillment, realized in isolation from the needs of the world and the mechanisms of its operation. The intellectual project of the reform is for the authority an act of such internal fulfillment, based on ideas-fetishes (e.g., "the fetish of the so-called Philadelphia list"[11] [GA]). For an uninitiated observer, these actions are taken for "incomprehensible (...) reasons" (CO) and are called "the triumph of irrationalism" (KM). In fact, their effect is irrelevant because the reality being transformed is only a tool, and reforming is, for the authority, an end in itself. [57]

In addition to the above explanations of the permanence of the reform, indicating as its source the various hidden motivations of its author, there is also a second interpretation. Reform is a chronic process because the underlying ideas form an imperfect (erroneous, incoherent) construct. These "constant changes" (KI) are, therefore, a substitute for a real reform that the system (here the government) is not capable of. "The chaos caused by 'continuous reforms' is embedded in the logic of this interpretation" (BA). Permanent amendments are supposed to conceal (and they actually expose) the weakness of the repair project and the indolence of its author. [58]

Chaos is not only a property of the changed world, but also of the reform itself. Its elements and transformational stimuli generate forces with different, distant vectors. "The chaotic actions of the ministry do not allow the evaluation of the result of this aggregation in advance" (PM). The consequences of the reform are simply unpredictable. The inability to simulate the effects (even using scientific methods) undermines the existence of an overarching idea, or the main idea, which the individual modifications implement. [59]

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11 Philadelphia list is the common Polish name of the list of journals and scientific series indexed in bibliographic databases created by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) in Philadelphia. Full name: Thomson Scientific Master Journal List.

In this way, the problem of the consistency of the reform project, e.g., defined by the concept of strategy, is uncovered:

> "this law reveals an absolute lack of strategy, lack of vision, (...) lack of linking the budget subsidy with pro-quality results" (ND).

> "such a strategy was not developed by the ministry responsible for state policy in the area of higher education. So what are our strategies to relate to (...)?" (PM) [60]

A lack of strategy in this case means that the activity of the authority should not be associated with any coherent repair project. It does not implement a coherent plan; the plan is only a loose collection of many independent solutions introduced "in a not very systematic way" (JD). [61]

What was supposed to be an emanation of the reformer's activity becomes a space for the reconstruction of the truth. It does not act as a shield to protect against the criticism of the basis of the reform either, because from the multi-colored tangles of actions and declarations one can read what they veil—an ideological void:

> "there is no clear vision, idea, or even educational project" (KR);

> "creating a system that provided the development perspective for a few (...) does not seem to be an element of a proper and coherent scientific policy, but rather suggests a complete lack of it" (BA);

> "no defined policy" (BA). [62]

The key word is *lack*. Conceptual nothingness means that the reformer's actions are not only ineffective, but also dangerous, because the people who are subjected to them are bombarded with uncoordinated stimuli in a completely random and unpredictable way. [63]

The concepts quoted above, such as *strategy*, *vision*, *idea*, *project* or *policy,* refer to the whole ideological basis of the reform. Meanwhile, its incoherence is also manifested in close-up. The individual elements of the project compiled in this way cease to form a loose, chaotic collection with unclear interactions. What takes place is a struggle—a canceling out and a neutralization of individual tendencies, such as "the fight for points and the struggle for students (which) are not complementary at all, but rather contradictory" (KM). [64]

In contrast to the broad view of the background of the reform, this narrow view provides much more room for concretization. The close perspective is also a personal perspective, showing that "employees are primarily assessed for their academic activity, i.e., conferences, publications, research projects, while material conditions are created only for didactic work" (CO). [65]

The discourse clearly shows how systemic contradictions affect the functioning of the individual. We can also see that academics are aware of the absurdities hidden in the requirements imposed on them, in conflicting legal, organizational,

and financial pressures. Academics also understand the misery of their own condition, which requires the constant making of choices as in a Greek tragedy, when, for example, a given "law is ignored as a result of pressure from another law" (GA). [66]

The statements that individual changes are introduced in a completely random way appear when the reform is seen in the broad perspective as a whole. A close-up is not conducive to such radical assessments. At that time, detailed imponderables such as the various motivations of the authors of the reform and the meanders of their thinking emerge. [67]

The basic problem visible in a narrow frame is *the irrationality of the reformer's premises*. A great role is played by faith and magical thinking, for example, "faith in the magical motivational power of grants" (LA). This approach simplifies the relationship between the stimulus and the effect. In the reformist assumptions, this relationship is direct, i.e., a specific impact is realized automatically. Hence the regulatory tendencies, i.e., "the belief that raising the level of academic research and higher education can be decreed" (ST). [68]

Corrective actions are derived from silhouette perception, in which individual elements of reality are melted. "Blind faith" (JD) also results from the agnosia of the background, i.e., a given problem is seen in an isolated way and the influence of the environment is ignored. [69]

A premise accepted "in faith" is often referred to as a *belief*. Such a judgment (as opposed to a theorem) is not subject to objectivization. It is permanently assigned to the subject believing in this belief (e.g., "the lawmakers are convinced that" [PL]). [70]

Where does the place of beliefs and convictions result from then? Why are they so important in the sphere of imponderables? This is explained by their closest context:

>   "the most widespread cliché is the belief that" (MK);
>
>   "there is a widespread opinion that" (MK);
>
>   "the belief that ... has been disseminated for some time" (DM);
>
>   "the conviction about ... appears more and more often" (DM). [71]

They are clichés, cluttering the public debate and obstructing the sober judgment of the situation. Just like *images*. Seeing reality "in accordance with the general image" (TJ) gives primacy to fantasy. An imagined thing becomes possible. It is enough to include it in the description of the world, as it is done by "most of today's (...) wise men thinking about the successive reforms of our education (who) imagine" (KA) these or other things before they are publicly considered axioms. [72]

However, imagination produces not only pictures. As group imagination, it also becomes a space for the circulation of ideas. The creations of imagination are seen as charming by the public, who accept its suggestive clichés. In this way, "our imagination is populated by masses of frustrated, deceived graduates of *bad* fields of study, which are opposed by a handful of 'good' ones. Attempts are made to convince us that universities 'produce too many' graduates in the humanities" (TJ). [73]

When rational premises give way to faith, beliefs based on the opinion of the majority, or the dubious value of authorities and images, stereotypes appear. For an academic, the "stereotype of a 'non-innovative' loser academic, clinging to the job and fearing change, is the most painful" (BA).[12] [74]

In addition to indicating the general properties of the broadly understood basis of change, the discourse around imponderables also brings to the surface the hierarchy of individual reform concepts. Based, for example, on the fact that certain slogans are more strongly promoted or more often stressed, it indicates which ideas and beliefs should be considered as crucial. [75]

In the previous chapter, we pointed to the dependencies surrounding the discursive *status quo* and the reform. The coexistence of both these values is based on their opposition: what is most important for the *status quo* is negated and reversed as part of the reform. According to this principle, with regard to the constitutive feature of the *status quo* indicated at the time, which is its exclusiveness, the reform creates an antithesis, i.e., the demand for opening. This property is concretized in the discourse as a reformist tendency to take over the external patterns of organization of academic research and higher education. [76]

The problematization of the underlying ground of this tendency allows us to trace the detailed implementation of the general critical threads outlined earlier. Taking over external standards becomes a sign of various conceptual defects of the project of the reform, e.g., its inconsistency. Juxtaposing external standards with the parochial *status quo* turns out to be a productive figure, replacing the overall reformist concept. The conviction that what is foreign is better than what is native becomes a substitute for a real strategy (justifying the consistency and complementarity of individual changes). [77]

Such reforming is mechanical. External solutions are "transferred as spare parts" (MK). It exposes the reformer's non-rational premises, their "relishing 'foreignness' in an uncritical and unjustified way" (ŁM). Novelty "is accepted on the knees" (MK) not because of its real value and adequacy to Polish conditions, but because it "came to Poland from the outside" (MK). It is a myth of the West, a conviction of its superiority over native realities and ideas. "In this reform (...) there is something that is unstoppable, and there is no way to deal with it: it is a surge (...) of post-colonial mentality" (MK). [78]

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12 It leads to solutions that will be discussed in the next section.

"The minister let herself be seduced by the trend of 'westernization' of Polish
science" (ŁM) because it is difficult to resist fashionable ideas. A consequence of
thoughtlessly relishing the attraction of foreign standards is the contradictions
mentioned above. They appear as a result of combining regulations coming from
different systems:

> "A special feature of the Polish neoliberal model is a peculiar combination of
> marketization and bureaucratization. In classical terms, theoretically developed by
> Max Weber, these were opposite tendencies" (WA).
>
> "The introduced changes, however, combine in a disastrous way the worst features
> of the Anglo-Saxon and continental systems" (CO). [79]

The imponderables of components of the reform allow the extraction of features
invisible in an overall view. This is also the case with regard to the openness to
foreign standards, enriching the presented earlier critical threads of the lack of
systematicity and contradictions of assumptions with an additional component,
i.e., the fragmentary nature of actions. Invoking the West, "with a mythical
America as an example" (PA), does not necessarily mean an overall
implementation of foreign ideas, but their tendentious selectivity. A feature that
deviates from the Western model is the financing of academic research and
higher education, remaining at a similar, native level:

> "the modernization of Polish science equates to the transfer of organizational models
> (not financial ones, alas!) from the West" (MK);
>
> "let us begin with adapting working conditions to European standards; then we will be
> able to demand from researchers 'European' results, such as publications in *Nature*
> and *Science*" (WI). [80]

This arouses the suspicion that the myth of the West is needed only as a
propaganda concealment of the hidden intentions of the reformer ("Native
reformers of science invoke western standards ... interpreting them in an
extremely biased way, which discloses [...] the deliberate misleading of public
opinion to promote their own ideas" [WA]). [81]

3.3 The discourse of the reform evaluation

The view from the inside of the transformed reality identifies two sources of
modernization determinants: the first one is the *status quo*, the second is
imponderables. The first one is the problematization of a reality that requires
reform, the second is genetically related to the figure of the reformer; it includes
their views and motivations leading to change. [82]

In this way, the genesis of changes is revealed, i.e., the properties and needs of
the world that condition the appearance of the project in its specific shape. In a
perspective thus outlined, the reform is an external product, alien to the individual
subjected to it. It is from this that academics can derive the conditions of their

own existence and build a rational framework for their attitudes towards the reform, i.e., acceptance, opposition, passivity, ambivalence, etc. [83]

But the project materializes itself in the form of concrete actions. It affects the university in a real way, i.e., it transforms it with a certain dynamics and in a certain way. These transformations (processes) and their effects show the reform in a different perspective, in which concepts such as effectiveness, accuracy or efficiency of actions and means come to the fore. The reform is subject to evaluation. [84]

However, this is a special evaluation, other than for example in the practice of management. Although these threads develop and mature with the crystallization of the reform and the emergence of the silhouettes of the new reality, their presence does not only serve the regulatory purposes of the project in the process of its implementation (e.g., as an element of public intervention).[13] A key role is played here by the perspective of the evaluator-academic, critical of the reform as an imposed, foreign and harmful (or at least suspicious) creation. As a result of this, cognitive goals are pursued with regard to (as well as from the point of view of) the "reformed" individual and constitute the basis for the adaptive and defensive attitudes adopted by it. [85]

And it is the perspective of the academic, and not the systemic needs that determines the dynamics of emergence of the thus understood evaluation. The presence of the discourse of evaluation is, therefore, a result of the statements of academics, showing their experience of the impact of the reform on reality. This is more specifically related to 1. the perception of the world before the reform, 2. the knowledge of its components and goals, and 3. the identification and evaluation of its effects.[14] [86]

This approach is, therefore, more complex than the problematizations discussed above, which narrow down the question of the reform to the *status quo* or imponderables. In evaluation, what is directly available and close (current and experienced) collides with what can be derived from the basis of the reform (its aims and the needs of the world). There is a confrontation of various elements defined as a problem, need, goal, idea, pattern/standard, declaration, theory, assumption, tool, prediction, effect, practice and others, combined in different configurations. [87]

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13 Certainly, the intention behind some of the statements quoted in this text was to correct the reform (which was, actually, willingly used by the authority, stressing its respect for these voices and openness to the opinions of the community). Some voices (more often *en masse* than individually) also affected the shape of specific solutions and the procedure of their implementation. However, the issue of the actual impact of the academic community on the shape of the reform of Polish higher education is beyond the scope of our interest.

14 Evaluation is also the product of a series of more detailed parameters, taking into account, e.g., the dynamics of changes (the pace, partial, transitory and final effects) and the role of the academic in the reform (participatory, passive).

The strength of the created combination is based on clearly defined and verifiable components, for example when *the state after the reform* can be confronted with the *goals* declared by its author, and *tools* to solve a given problem:

> "The minister of higher education boasts that one of the pillars of the reform of academic research and higher education is the *system of competitions for positions*. Among others, it was to encourage academics to be more mobile, i.e., to look for a job in different centers, and open the possibility of *employing specialists from abroad*. (...) Competitions are, in fact, not attractive even on the domestic market, which is why *'nothing has changed*" (PM). [88]

The goals, tasks and functions of individual tools, as above, can be referred to in the form of reformist declarations. The modal constructions containing them, with the Polish verb "mieć" ("*to be to* [do something]"), e.g., "were to be an antidote" [pol. "miały być antidotum", KS14], "is to facilitate commercialization" [pol. "ma ułatwić komercjalizację", PL]), become a distinct element of the effectiveness of reforms, i.e., the goals included in them are compared with their implementation or expert forecast. They are combined freely, i.e., wide-ranging innovations with one effect. ("To what extent have all these systemic changes contributed to the increase in the competitiveness of our higher education in the international arena?" [WO]), or one tool with a general situation ("Will the system of grants solve the problems of Polish science?" [GE]). [89]

The evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of given solutions is not built on hard data. This is evidenced by the continuation of the above-cited examples. We can see in it that the discourse of academics emphasizes its own role of authority: its subjectivity ("Let's be honest—we have not seen any major successes in this area so far" [WO]) and skepticism ("I doubt it" [GE]). [90]

The problem of dependencies between declarations and implementations shows not only the lack of effects, but also the counter-effectiveness of reforms, which are a "step back" (PL), "even do harm" (KS14) and "cause more and more degradation of Polish academic circles" (WA). [91]

In the simplest way, this counter-effectiveness manifests itself primarily as a contrast between the effect and the intended goal. In this case, a given solution "is a way to destroy Polish academic research, and not to make it more innovative" (CO)[15]. [92]

In evaluation, the goal may be put aside. The effect is then combined with the *status quo* problems. Undesirable effects of the reform are not a new quality in this case. "The amendment confirms" (PL) and perpetuates the negative phenomena that have long been a problem of higher education. The already functioning "archaic system (is) legally sanctioned" (KS14). [93]

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15 This opposition usually comprises larger text structures.

The ineffectiveness of the reform draws attention to the component that should link the planned intentions and effects. It is about widely understood mechanisms (also referred to as tools, practices and strategies for their application). This link is missing, which means that the reform is dead:

> "The main drawback of the new laws is that they do not provide for any mechanisms that would guarantee the decent financing of academic research and education" (ST).

> "There are also no mechanisms enforcing the care for the quality of education and internal modernization at universities" (ND).

> "There are still no formal solutions on a national scale that would make small plagiarisms no longer pay" (JD). [94]

Without the mechanisms "causing" (JD), "forcing" (ND) or "guaranteeing" (ST) the implementation of the set goals, the reformist assumptions are suspended in a vacuum. Their codifications "can be thrown into the waste paper basket because they do not work" (KS14). [95]

The problem of the coherence and complementarity of a reform undertaking is naturally related to the issue of hierarchization of its components. In detail, the effective splendor of the lofty ideas that fill declarations and official documents fades:

> "The idea is not a very bad one, but its Polish implementation is good for nothing" (JD).

> "The idea makes sense in theory but, unfortunately, it leads to problems" (JD).

> "As part of the systemic order adopted in this way, there can be no room for the autonomy of academic communities and the legally guaranteed (in theory!) autonomy of the university" (WA). [96]

In this way, the details of the reform as a modernization process, the problem of its complementarity and internal order, as well as the purposefulness and adequacy of its individual components are revealed. In this respect, evaluation is functionally system-orientated, i.e., it uncovers its shortcomings and can potentially serve to control and regulate the project during its implementation and after it. [97]

But attention does not have to be focused on the reform process itself. The way of introducing the project and the nuances that are revealed then tell a lot about the reformer himself: his competences, views and intentions. This combines evaluation with the search for imponderables. Firstly, its findings are the starting point for reconstructing the reformer's hidden motivations and views. Secondly, oriented in such a way, evaluation reconstructs the goals of the discourse described in the previous chapter, using hard evidence, i.e., the effects. [98]

Thus, an implemented reform tells a lot about its author. The author's attitude discloses, among other things, gaps in the project. The "sin of omission" (WO) is the conscious choice of a reformer who gives up difficult activities that require

special skills, but also energy and courage. Instead of effort, he chooses idleness, which also manifests itself in the sloppiness of actions. As a result, we can see "what legacy of negligence and omissions those currently in power will leave to their successors" (NA). All the more so that the conditions of "access to enormous EU funds" (WO) conducive to reforms will not happen again. [99]

Gaps resulting from negligence or laziness are part of the "scheme of phoney action" (NA). The "flagship slogan of the ministry (...) was followed by no real actions" (ND) because it is not about education, but about something else: "the crowd must be given circuses" (NA). [100]

Not all evaluation findings prove that the reform does not work. The evaluation of the project focused on the academic leads to other findings. In addition to the modernization system and the reformer, this is the third element concentrating evaluation threads. The discourse of the academic elite, acting in the role of authority with expert competence to evaluate the project, in a natural way also presents the viewpoint of the "reformed" object. It is not only about the (already mentioned) perspective of evaluating the whole undertaking, but about the threads concerning the change of tasks and prerogatives of the academics.[16] [101]

As part of the problematization focused on the scientist-academic, the same reform (which in the already presented evaluation perspectives was shown as a failed, provisional, phoney creation) is becoming a logically coherent and complete undertaking, effectively implementing the set goals. In this case, the effects do not undermine the reformer's high-flown announcements, but *reveal their true meaning*. The slogans of breaking with the *status quo* and calling for the modernization of higher education cease to be empty slogans; they become a smokescreen that conceals the author's actual intentions. [102]

There are two areas in which the reform affects the academic. The first one is derived from the general conviction that in this whole undertaking "it is all about money and not about the academic level of the university, lectures and graduates" (NA). The project of changes is essentially motivated by savings, or is simply a cheap counterfeit of the reform (a *low-cost* program organized by and, most importantly, for the poor). [103]

"Dusty laboratories with (...) slovens negating material needs are concretizations of the model of reformed science" (PŁ12). They implement the principles of optimization, primarily based on the dogma of productivity; the lecturer's work is treated as "unloading coal from wagons" (NA). However, since "academics, despite appearances, also happen to be human beings" (BA), the "beggar's salaries" paid to them (PŁ13) result in the "progressive despair and discouragement" (PŁ12) of the community. [104]

How is it possible that the academic community allows the introduction of reforms, although these "do not provide for any mechanisms that would

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16 Another issue is the fact that they become crucial or symptomatic for the evaluation of the whole undertaking.

guarantee the decent financing of academic research and higher education"
(ST)[17]? The changes are the result of "forced consent" (PŁ13), which means that
the community is not capable of effective, non-verbal protest ("academics will not
go out to the streets with picks in their hands" [WJ][18]). [105]

The susceptibility of academics to the solutions unfavorable to them binds these
issues with the question of freedom and autonomy of the academic community.
However, this relationship is not limited to explaining the success of changes that
harm the interests of academics. For enslavement is (next to financial savings)
another effect of the reform, manifesting itself as part of the evaluation focused
on the academic. They can be seen both in the social scale ("the Polish variant
means, in fact, depriving the academic community of all and any autonomy"
[WA]) and the individual one ("members of the university community lose their
subjectivity" [SP]). [106]

The experience of enslavement is the result of the control practices of officials.
Among the tools for the "incapacitation of academics and handing power over to
officials" (JD), parameterization comes to the fore. [107]

"The bureaucratic Matrix, in which unmeasurable values do not matter" (KI),
requiring the academics to subordinate their own conviction about the meaning
and value of undertaken actions to the evaluation performed "according to a
rigorous point-awarding system, set arbitrarily in the interest of officials" (WA), is
treated as oppressive and enslaving. This conviction is based on the premise that
immeasurable values, subject only to descriptive expert assessment, yet
unverifiable by means of functioning algorithms using quantitative methods, to a
large extent constitute the quality and efficiency of an academic's work. Hence
the sharp contrast between the academic's activities promoted by
parameterization and their real activities: valuable and sensible ("academics
begin to be judged not by what they have done, but by 'scoring' points for
publications" [WJ]). [108]

Another trend visible in evaluation that is part of the enslaving control activities is
the multiplication of reporting obligations. Their practical sense seems dubious,
not just because the postulate of quality assurance itself is suspicious (in other
words: "of exercising control over me [as a result of distrust]" [MJ]). Since "in
every dean's office and institute there are growing (...) heaps of protocols,
reports, statements, balances, study plans" (MJ), the faith in the sense of these
documents is lost. A sober judgment of this production makes us undermine the
basic sense of such "restrictions" (PK). Producing these "tons of absurd papers"
(HJ14), one undoubtedly arrives at the conclusion that: "nobody reads them
anyway" (SP), "no one will benefit from them" (HJ14). [109]

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17 In the years 2013-2015, the salaries of academic teachers in Poland increased in total by 30%
    on average.

18 An allusion to the protests of Polish miners. Demonstrations of mine trade unions sometimes
    took on a violent course. After the battle with the police, which took place on July 26, 2005 in
    front of the Sejm, the government did not proceed with raising the current age of retirement for
    mining professions.

The reporting dysfunction of these activities and the fact that they take up more and more time ("continuous audit, continuous detailed reports" [SP]), however, make one look for some sense in these new ministerial requirements. According to the most important interpretation, the ministry thus "manifests" (MJ) and "makes an impression" (SP). In essence, it does not verify quality, it only sends the supervisor's signals that it is watching all the time and "assessing academics" (MK). [110]

Since the tools of this reporting—the documents—serve to manifest the order and the relations of power, their ostentatious primitivism, "formal schematicism behind which there is a shallow content" (ŁM), is a signal of the prerogatives of this authority. The wording of the forms, which "is an insult to intelligence" (ŁM), in fact, does not show what the place of this intelligence is in the reformed reality. It is replaced by "the ability to write adequately developed applications, to match stereotypes" (MK). [111]

4. Summary

The public dispute over the shape of the university, embedded in the discussion on the mission and position of academics and the criteria for assessing their work, has been going on in Poland with varying intensity since 2008 (CHOMIK, 2018; DZIEDZICZAK-FOLTYN, 2017; OSTROWICKA & SPYCHALSKA-STASIAK, 2017; OSTROWICKA & STANKIEWICZ, 2018; STANKIEWICZ, 2018; ZIMNIAK-HAŁAJKO, 2013). According to many researchers in the area of science and higher education, the concept of academic autonomy based on trust has now been replaced by the idea of social accountability and a culture of evaluation (ANTONOWICZ, 2015; OLSSEN, 2016; SHORE & WRIGHT, 2015a, 2015b; SLAUGHTER & LESLIE, 1997), and in the assessment of the work and achievements of academics scientometrics has replaced expert evaluation. [112]

The purpose of the study presented in this article was to find ways to problematize the reform of academic research and higher education by the academic community experiencing the changes. The broader theoretical background, within which we embedded the research problem, was provided by the concept of governmentality related to the post-structural approach in discourse studies. The perspective of governmentality is related to the departure from the traditional concept of power understood in terms of the privilege of the rulers, whom the attribute of "holding" power differentiates from those who are subject to power. The concept of power in FOUCAULT's approach directs our interests towards the dispersed, multifaceted and non-centralized *relations of power*. From this perspective, the statements of academics analyzed by us show the relationship between the state policy and the governed subject. An additional and important context here is the domain of public discourse. Academic commenting, when implemented in the media space, results in an increase in public interest and this, in turn, triggers the reaction of decision-makers and may lead to further changes in the law (ANDERSON, 2007). [113]

In conclusion, we would like to reflect on the results using two questions. First, what does the reform mean for the academics subject to new legal regulations? Second, how are relations of power manifested in the discursive construction of the reform? [114]

In the first type of discourse identified by us, the main material for the problematization of the reform project is the *status quo* seen as the antithesis of the reform. Rationality (sense and justification) of the reform as a problem of the *status quo*, or more precisely, a problem originating from the *status quo*, emerges from the opposing rhetoric: the status quo *versus* the change. The reform is, therefore, above all a logical consequence of the shortcomings and dissatisfaction with the traditional identity of the university. Power becomes palpable in the tension between the narrations of the far-from-perfect reality and the vision of its inevitable and desired change. The reform as a postulate draws its energy and power thanks to being rooted in the *status quo.* [115]

Another perspective in which the reform is a creation coming from the outside, foreign, unclear and suspicious, is also characteristic of a discourse immersed in realities. The discourse shaped in this way enters the sphere of imponderables: it has a regulatory character, it demystifies the weak, elusive ground of the reform and uncovers its myths. If we look at the studied phenomenon through the prism of power relations, these two forms of problematization of the reform (the *status quo* and imponderables) will show us effective "Governing by Values" (TALLACCHINI, 2009). [116]

In turn, the discourse of reform evaluation is of a more complex nature. Within it, what is currently experienced by academics collides with what can be derived from the basis of the change, its goals and the needs of the world. The reform is problematized here both as an unfinished, permanent process and as a state, an effect of intentional, but also unintended, interventions. The relationships on the *goal-tool-effect* line tell much about the authors of the reform. However, an evaluation based on the results is not as unequivocal since the effectiveness of the reform is described, among others, in terms of effective control and restriction of autonomy. [117]

Within such outlined forms of problematization, the reform is an external and foreign creation to an individual subjected to it. Assuming, according to FOUCAULT's (1992) idea, that governance is possible thanks to established forms of thinking about objects, the exogenous character of the reform allows the creation of a rational framework for reaction to changes, i.e., their acceptance, opposition, resistance, passivity or indifference to them. This location "in relation to" the reform, characteristic of academic discourse, becomes the answer to the "outside voice," a discursive solution to the problem of reforming the university. [118]

The problematizations of the reform constructed in the press discourse in the years 2011-2014 show academics' interest in speaking out on matters that concern them. It seems that in the subsequent years (i.e., 2015-2018), this already signaled a need for a public debate about the university, and the direction

of its change has been "intercepted" and partially utilized in the conditions of ministerial control in the process of preparing another wave of reforms in Poland called the Constitution for Science. The Ministry of Science and Higher Education organized ten conferences of the National Science Congress, which, in the intention of the Minister, were to create a space for social dialogue and consultation. However, the scope, content and effects of these debates constitute issues for further research. [119]

Finally, let us add that the interpretations of regularity presented in this text, on which the discursive multitude of beings, such as judgments, ideas and postulates, is called to life, should be treated as a partially open concept, and therefore requiring verification. In this context, combining the change with the idea of the global flow of standards, which can be seen in such tendencies as the co-occurrence of the postulate of continuous improvement and opening to the world, e.g., using external higher education standards as a (most often positive) benchmark for evaluating the situation on a micro scale, and designing directions of change, undoubtedly weighs in its favor. The constitutionality of these tendencies in the analyzed material allows us to treat the order of the discourse based on the ideas of the status quo, imponderables and evaluation as permanent and repetitive in debates on the reforming of academic research and higher education. [120]

Acknowledgment

Appendix: List of Cited Empirical Materials

(AD) Antonowicz, Dominik (2011). Czy Kopernik zrobiłby dziś w Polsce karierę? [Would Copernicus make a career in Poland today?]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 2, 21.

(BA) Bal, Wojciech, Kurowska, Ewa & Wagner, Izabela (2013). Sieroca dola doktoranta [A PhD student's orphan's lot]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 28, 7.

(CO) Collective open letter (2014). Humanistyka niezbędna dla debat [The humanities necessary for debates]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 18, 7.

(DM) Dziemianowicz, Mirosława (2012). Oszukani? Do czego potrzebne jest wyższe wykształcenie? [Deceived? What is higher education necessary for?]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 4, n.p.

(GE) Górecka, Ewa (2011). System grantów działa źle [The system of grants works badly]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 8, 24.

(GG) Gorzelak, Grzegorz (2012). Reprodukcja miernoty [Reproduction of mediocrity]. *Polityka*, September 5, 36-38.

(GA) Grobler, Adam (2014). Polemika o filozofii na uczelniach. Co ma piernik do reformy [A polemic about philosophy at universities. What's that got to do with the reform]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 23, 8.

(HJ12) Hartman, Jan (2012). Nie ma darmowych studiów [There are no studies free of charge]. *Newsweek*, January 19, 3-5.

(HJ14) Hartman, Jan (2014). Powstań, uniwersytecie! [Revolt, university!]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 16, 31.

(JA) Jajszczyk, Andrzej (2012). Kto się cieszy, a kto martwi? [Who is happy and who is worried?]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 8, 19.

(JD) Jemielniak, Dariusz (2014). Grzeszna reforma [The sinful reform]. *Polityka*, January 8, 64-65.

(KS12) Karpiński, Stanisław (2012). Przyczyny niskiego poziomu polskiej nauki według prof. Stanisława Karpińskiego [The reasons for the low level of Polish science according to prof. Stanisław Karpiński]. Interview conducted by Jolanta Ojczyk. *Rzeczpospolita*, December 10, n.p.

(KS13) Karpiński, Stanisław (2013). Zaścianek ocenia zaścianek [The backwater evaluates the backwater]. Interview conducted by Beata Lisowska. *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, September 27, 10-11.

(KS14) Karpiński, Stanisław (2014). Polska nauka na emeryturze [Polish science in retirement]. *Rzeczpospolita*, August 22, 13.

(KA) Kokowski, Andrzej (2012). Studiować? Czy aplikować wiedzę? [To study? Or to apply knowledge?]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 25, 3.

(KM) Kowalska, Małgorzata (2014). Myślenie, zbędne hobby [Thinking, an unnecessary hobby]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 29, 35.

(KR) Król, Marcin (2013). Szkolnictwo wyższe jest dostosowane do miernot [Higher education is adapted to mediocrities]. *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, September 10, 4.

(KI) Krzemiński, Ireneusz (2014). Jak popsuli nam naukę [How they spoilt our science]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 17, 17.

 (ŁM) Łagosz, Marek (2014). Innowacja – nowa królowa Polski [Innovation—the new queen of Poland]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 25, 23.

(LA) Leszczyński, Adam (2012). Ile jest wart akademik? [How much is an academic worth?]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 6, 22-23.

(MJ) Majcherek, Janusz (2014). Przyczynek do dyskusji o braku zaufania [A contribution to the discussion about distrust]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 5, 7.

(MK) Modzelewski, Karol (2011). Nauka nie jest od zarabiania. A humanistyka – już na pewno [Science is not for earning money. Nor are the humanities—for sure]. Interview conducted by Adam Leszczyński. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 15, 19.

(NA) Nalaskowski, Aleksander (2011). Nauka w stylu pop [Pop style science]. *Rzeczpospolit*a, February 8, 12.

(ND) Nałęcz, Daria (2011). Przetrwają także najgorsi [The worst will also survive].
Interview conducted by Paweł Rusak. *Wprost*, March 13, 8.

(NP) Nowak, Piotr (2012). Hodowanie troglodytów [Breeding troglodytes].
Rzeczpospolita, July 28, 2.

(OW) Osiatyński, Wiktor (2011). Profesor od 9 do 17 [Professor from 9 to 5].
Interview conducted by Adam Leszczyński. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 12, 28.

(PL) Pacholski, Leszek (2014). Na polskich uczelniach się tylko bywa [Polish
universities are attended only occasionally]. Interview conducted by Katarzyna
Wójcik. *Rzeczpospolita*, October 1, 7.

(PM) Pałys, Marcin (2013). Uniwersytet nie fabryka [University, not a factory].
Interview conducted by Edwin Bendyk. *Polityka*, June 12, 62-63.

(PK) Pawłowski, Krzysztof (2011). Minister może nas zniszczyć [The minister can
destroy us]. *Wprost*, March 13, 5.

(PA) Pezda, Aleksandra (2012). Alarm dla uczelni: gorąca debata o fabrykach
bezrobotnych [Alarm for the universities: A heated debate about the factories of
the unemployed]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 2, 3.[19]

(PŁ12)(31) Płaźnik, Adam (2012). List otwarty znad grobu [An open letter from
above the grave]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 27, 14.

(PŁ13) Płaźnik, Adam (2013). Od mieszania się nie poprawi [Stirring will not bring
about improvement]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 7, 13.

(ST) Szkudlarek, Tomasz (2011). Mądrość 2.0 [Wisdom 2.0]. Interview conducted
by Miłada Jędrysik. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 15, 16-17.

(SP) Sztompka, Piotr (2014). Zakład przerobu studentów [Student processing
facility]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 24, 16-17.

(TJ) Trzcionkowski, Lech (2013). Niektórzy studenci nie powinni ukończyć
gimnazjum. Odchodzę [Some students should not graduate from junior high
school. I quit]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 20, n.p.

(WI) Wagner, Izabela (2011). Szare komórki nie wystarczą [Grey matter is not
enough]. *Rzeczpospolita*, January 28, 16.

(WA) Walicki, Andrzej (2013). Nieświęty sojusz biurokracji z rynkiem [The unholy
alliance of bureaucracy with the market]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 1, 22-23.

(WP) Węgleński, Piotr (2011). Czy można przerobić trabanta na mercedesa?
[Can you convert a Trabant into a Mercedes?]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 26,
15.

(WJ) Woleński, Jan (2014). Uczeni na Sejm z kilofami nie pójdą [Academics will
not charge at the Sejm with pickaxes]. Interview conducted by Agnieszka Kublik.
Gazeta Wyborcza, July 5, 14.

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19 As an exception, this text is written by a journalist. However, it contains extensive fragments of
    the well-known lecture by professor Ewa NAWROCKA delivered on April 18, 2012 at the
    University of Gdańsk as part of the conference "Rage and Outrage. Images of the Revolt in
    Contemporary Culture."

(WO) Woźnicki, Jerzy (2014). Ostatnie 15 lat polskiej nauki: główne osiągnięcia i grzechy [The last 15 years of Polish science: main achievements and sins]. *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, May 21, 10.

(ZM) Zdanowski, Mirosław (2011). Reforma nie może dyskryminować [The reform must not discriminate]. *Rzeczpospolita*, December 23, 10.

(ŻM) Żylicz, Maciej (2011). Ruszmy z posad bryłę nauki [Let's move the sphere of science]. In interview conducted by Edwin Bendyk. *Polityka*, May 4, 58-59.

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Authors

Dominik CHOMIK is assistant professor in the Department of Theory, History and Media Language at the University of Gdansk. He is a linguist. He is currently researching tabloids, the media image of the Catholic Church, ways of reporting mourning in the media, and analysis of the press discourse on higher education reform in Poland (research project funded by National Science Centre in Poland).

Contact:

Dominik Chomik

Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Journalism
University of Gdańsk
Ul. Bażyńskiego 4
80-309 Gdańsk, Poland

E-mail: dominik.chomik@ug.edu.pl
URL:
https://ug.edu.pl/pracownik/545/dominik_chomik

Helena OSTROWICKA is associate professor in the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology and Chair of Research Methodology and Discourse Studies at Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Poland. Her research interests focus on general and critical pedagogy, in particular on Foucauldian discourse analysis and the reception of Foucault's ideas in social research. She is the principal investigator of the research project on Governmentality of University—A Discursive Image of Contemporary Higher Education Reform in Poland, funded by National Science Centre in Poland.

Contact:

Helena Ostrowicka

Institute of Pedagogy
Kazimierz Wielki University
Ul. Chodkiewicza 30
85-064 Bydgoszcz, Poland

E-mail: hostrowicka@ukw.edu.pl
URL:
https://www.ukw.edu.pl/pracownicy/strona/helena_ostrowicka/

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