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Thoughts on the higher education system in Poland

KEYWORDS

higher education,
degree system, studying
process Poland, Euro-
pean Union

ABSTRACT

This report is a part of the results of the international project entitled “Studium in Osteuropa: Ausgewählte Aspekte (Analysen, Befunde)” conducted in the years 2013-2015 under supervision of Prof. Wilfried Schubarth and Dr Andreas Seidl from the Potsdam University, Department of Education Science, and Prof. Karsten Speck from the University of Oldenburg, Germany. The project was conducted jointly by representatives of academic centres from Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland and Russia. Its general aim was a comparative analysis of the effects of implementation of Bologna Process directives into the higher education systems of the individual countries. The changes introduced into the higher education systems in the countries involved in the project were described and evaluated, discussed was in particular the problems of education of teachers at the university level.

The following text is the result of the contribution of the Polish group participating in the project. The report will be presented in two parts. The first part is focused on the macro-societal context of transformations in the higher education system in Poland. The implementation of selected aspects of Bologna Process directives is described and supplemented by empirical comments. The second part deals with selected aspects of university level education of teachers, followed by a polemic against the assumptions and execution of the target transformations of higher education system.

Changes – issues – evaluation¹

Part 1

The macrosocietal context of changes in the area of the higher education system

The year 1989 marks a specific threshold in the newest history of Poland, as this is the year that the first partially free elections were held in Poland for the first time since the Second World War. Thus achieved were the foundations for the free market economy and democratic development of the state (with the reforms aligned neo-liberally), which began to replace the old centrally controlled structures of a community 'behind the iron curtain' that were under enormous influence of the Soviet Union. In this same period of great national and economic changes that also reflected markedly on the area of education, one can also see the acceleration of cultural changes with which the acceleration of the macrosocietal transformation went hand in hand. In itself, it occurred mainly at the threshold to the 21st century, and belonged to a global context.

Pawlikowski (2006) in *Polskie uczelnie wobec wyzwań Procesu Bolońskiego* indicates three dimensions, in which the higher education system functions, and which at the same time describe very well its specifics, tied with the macrosocietal context of the times. Here he speaks of the following:

- The economy (education as a component of the service industry, and its specific components, because the preparation of resources for the job marked is secured by this area).
- Politics (the preparation of resources for the functioning of the state is guaranteed here).
- Knowledge (the scientific dimension of higher education in conjunction with the distribution of research results and their processing).

All these areas are closely tied to one another – and a response to the question about the priority role of one or the other dimension causes in the present society controversies anew. The character of the changes and the macroprocesses directly refer to the course of the debate on the higher education system. The outer envi-

¹ The present text shall also be published (as of July 2017) in: Małgorzata Grzywacz / Grażyna Miłkowska / Magdalena Piorunek / Lech Sałaciński Die Entwicklung des Hochschulwesens am Beispiel Polens (pp. 241-262) Potsdamer Beiträge zur Hochschulforschung | 3 Wilfried Schubarth | Sylvi Mauormeister | Andreas Seidel (ed.) **Studium nach Bologna** Befunde und Positionen Universitätsverlag Potsdam **Bibliographical information of the National Library of Germany** The National Library of Germany registers this publication in the German National Bibliography; detailed bibliographical data can be found on-line via <http://dnb.dnb.de/>. **Universitätsverlag Potsdam 2017** ISSN (print) 2192-1075 ISSN (on-line) 2192-1083

ronment directly influences higher education facilities. These properties include, among others, the changes in the area of work. They stem from the altered economy, and are reflected in the coincidence of various work histories and their models that could be observed for some decades now (conf. Guichard / Huteau 2005).

The professional job system, in which the profession determines the identity of an individual and the entire context of an employee, is a thing of the past. Such professions can now be seen on the job market to an ever smaller extent. At the same time, within the so-called Fordian system², the term 'profession' was replaced by employment, work, acquisition. All these activities tie the individual not to the character of the activity that they perform, but to the place where they perform it, which becomes the fixed point of collective work. In the highly technicised "network society" (Castells 2007) of the recent years, other, new abilities are demanded of employees, aimed primarily at interaction. The activity at the place of employment is understood as a function of one's profession that occurs within an organisation that is permanently ready to learn (Guichard / Huteau 2005). Changes also occur in the organisation of the work process, and with them there appear forms of participation in the job market that are new or that up to date weren't very popular, reflecting these changes: work time and place flexibility, as well as new modes of working: telework, part-time work, part-time employment, self-employment, etc. They now belong to the pool of the collective conscious. This is amended by a completely new spectrum of employment contracts and their short-term nature. Different is also the content of the executed activity. Certain professions quickly disappear, traditional professions are replaced by new, sometimes unnamed or unclassified examples of competences that often have niche character. In many cases they are related to a new lifestyle and new demands that the technological development had given rise to. In the labour system, full-time employment is eroding, to be sort of redefined by the implementation of a clear list of tasks and duties. These changes also influence the access to knowledge and the acquisition thereof (Castells 2009). The challenges of the job market permit the formation of dominance of professions with an intellectual foundation. The demand for professional employees is aligned with the ability to utilise modern technologies, whereby the IT character and potential of work steadily rise. These dynamics cause frequent changes of places, new jobs, new challenges. The individual feeling of comfort wanes, and with it also the individual's learned abilities to adapt and align. Thus, the market challenges become the catalyst for a more engaged attitude of man

² A form of organisation of work processes introduced by Henry Ford. At the production and assembly line, there emerged a form of work that can be subdivided into the most basic activities of workers even in case of complicated products.

with respect to the learning demands within the context of one's entire biography (*lifelong learning*).

Up until recently, the time foreseen for education ended in one's individual biography in the phase of late adolescence. This was followed by the phase of exploration and adaptation to the job market, full consolidation in one's professional role, then the establishment of the *status quo* and in the end a withdrawal from professional activities (the concept of D. Super – conf. Paszkowska-Rogacz 2003).

The time frames of the individual stages could be determined relatively precisely with a high degree of probability. This stability turned out to be a constant in the social reality of the period from the 1950s to the 1970s. In the centrally controlled reality of Poland until the end of the 1990s, the distribution of employment was one of the areas of influence of the state. This, there emerged almost fictitiously maintained full employment, often independent of the real competences of the employee and their education. A relatively secure guarantee of work also at times when the economy was doing well in consequence led to the execution of typical careers.

Presently, one's professional career is characterised by many transitions, coupled with transfers from the education market to the job market (conf. Rożnowski 2009), often with retreats into the area of the education market. In certain biographies one can see not infrequently stages of temporary unemployment, profession migrations or the necessity of multiple changes of employment – of the industry or of the form of employment. This gives rise to the phase of extended exploration within an individual's professional life. In some situations, the phase of consolidation may not even appear. Because of this, the time also shifts, meaning, one leaves the job market at a later point in life (not only due to the formal increase of the retirement age). Thus, education becomes an indispensable component in all stages of life, it permits flexible movement in a world of permanent changes, and permits many instances of requalification that have become a necessity on the dynamic job market. Continued education, life-long learning, may be successfully implemented with the support and engagement of higher education facilities. Symbolically, certain dichotomies may be indicated that characterise this transition process:

- the industrial society *versus* the post-industrial society
- the Fordian society *versus* the post-Fordian society
- the society of mass production *versus* the society of flexible production
- the production society *versus* the service society (conf. Pachociński 2004).

Globalisation of culture, politics and the economy is characterised by numerous antinomies (conf. e. g. Bauman 2000, Liberska (ed.) 2002, Sztompka 2005,

Wnuk-Lipiński 2004). Coupled with technical progress, at the same time it creates the possibility of real transnationalisation of one's career, so as to liberate it from specific territorial references. The characteristics of present-day culture require such a lifestyle that in general belongs both to indirect, as well as to direct factors of economic development: unlimited consumption that creates needs and evokes demand for frequently unknown goods. Thus, new dimensions of the job market are opened (Bauman 2005, Baudrillard 2006). We are dealing with a culture of superficiality, and the life in the hyper-reality of media and virtual worlds characteristic for it. The case is that *de facto*, media co-create the world. In reality, this scheme can be observed as really functioning on-line (often running in parallel). Even if globalisation creates new job markets, however, at the same time it contributes to the unification and reification of man, whereby man is often excluded from employment, shifted into social exclusion (conf. Bauman 2006).

Concerning the external context and the situation of higher education facilities, Pawlikowski (2006) indicates the following:

- demographic changes in Europe – the ageing of the European society influences in the short term the job market. There will be fewer active employees, the service sector for the needs of older people is expanding, the number of students will drop (some forecasters even speak of a double-digit percentage of a fall). This describes the necessity of reshaping higher education facilities to adapt their functioning to the needs of other, older people;
- globalisation processes that span both transnational migrations as well as those within one country (e. g. from rural areas to metropolises [change of the character of work], the IT revolution, through the acquisition of knowledge by remote courses, the development of services in the area of education as well that can easily be integrated into the autonomy of higher schools;
- geopolitical changes (less important role of Europe in politics and the world economy) and cultural changes (see above).

The changes already disclosed, occurring within the macro-societal context, are coupled in Poland with a series of dynamic transformations in the area of higher education, which began to develop particularly intensely in the last twenty-five years (Hejnicka-Bezwińska 2011)³. New higher education framework acts are passed. The first of these, dated 12 September 1990 (Pl. *Ustawa o szkolnictwie wyższym z 12 września 1990 roku*) created the basis for a “market economy-related reorientation” of the education sector, by way of which the state had to abandon

³ Certain authors speak of dynamic and chaotic development. From the point of view of reform theories, these can be described as a flawed change strategy.

its position of monopoly in the area of higher education facilities. This permitted the creation of so-called private higher schools that began to be formed almost uncontrollably. Paid studies had also established themselves at public (meaning – state-controlled) higher schools with studies fees paid within the scope of so-called extramural studies. Based on data contained in the report *Society towards knowledge – a report on the education system in Poland* (Pl. *Społeczeństwo w drodze do wiedzy. Raport o stanie edukacji* 2010), in comparison to other European countries and the United States, Poland has the highest ratio of private higher education facilities and students in this sector (as of November 2013, Poland has 467 higher education facilities, of which 326 are not public, with 1.5 million students (www.gov.pl/dane-statystyczne-o-szkolnictwie-wyzszym). An important effect of the changes in the wake of the higher education act was the education boom. Pupils who would in the year 1989 choose a professional after primary school, decided at that point to massively enrol in general education secondary schools, with the goal of achieving higher education. Young adults as well could compensate for old deficiencies, catching up on their education loopholes – the existing system of extramural studies was developed for them, so that they would be able to fuse work and studies.

For this reason, the school attendance quotas at the university level rose rapidly⁴. The aspirations of society in terms of learning were awakened, the extension of the period of education delayed the decision of the job market entry, thus directly contributing to the partial reduction of unemployment rates: *Should one analyse these changes that accompany the act of law of 1990 ex post, one could arrive at the conclusion that the increased school attendance at the third level of education allowed the state to solve many political and social problems without great investments* (Hejnicka -Bezwińska 2011: 16).

The long-term transformation process in the indicated sector is connected inseparably with the key event in the political and economic strategy, Poland's accession to the EU on 1 May 2004 (the treaty was signed on 16.04.2003.). This step described a dynamic process that was continued also following the formal accession. The motion for accession to the structures of the EU was filed by Poland in the year 1994. At that time, and immediately following the accession, activities were undertaken that enabled Poland's participation in the education changes happening on the European continent. In the year 2003 (14 March), the Polish act on academic ranks and titles, and ranks and titles in the area of art (Pl. *Ustawa o stopniach*

⁴ According to the data of the Polish Central Statistical Office from the years 1990/1991 – 2012/2013, the school attendance quota ranged from 9.8% to 40.2%. Since 2011, a slight reduction in this data can be seen. The student numbers have quadrupled.

naukowych i tytułe naukowym oraz stopniach i tytułe w zakresie sztuki) came into force. It describes the stages to be taken to the titles of Dr., Dr. habil. and Professor.

The subsequent higher education system framework act of 27 July 2005 (amended in the years 2006-2011) (Pl. *Ustawa o zmianie ustawy Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym, ustawy o stopniach naukowych i tytułe naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytułe w zakresie sztuki...* announced 18 March 2011, Polish Journal of Laws of 2011, no. 84, item 455) introduced in many areas of the higher education system and the scientific career a transition period of two years, in which full adaptation to the principles and basics stated in the Bologna Process was to take place. These were to be fully respected with the beginning of the academic year 2013/2014. The process of such dynamics and intensity naturally brought with itself a series of questions that directly refer to the strategies of changes in the higher education system, leading to debates as to the extent in which one in consequence may speak of a (de)-stabilisation of the higher education system. These changes, synthetically sketched out above, occurring within the Polish higher education system, correspond to the processes occurring in this area within the European Union (with reference to the treaty of Maastricht of 7 February 1992). The set objective formulated there should be closer cooperation among higher schools as well as their Europeanisation. This process is taking place in stages, and is documented by the following treaties:

- *Magna Charta Universitatum* (signed in Bologna in the year 1988). In it, the chancellors and higher school heads for the autonomy of institutions in the areas of research and learning, based on the foundation of freedom within these processes. The higher schools of Europe are the administrators of the traditions of the humanities of Europe. Research and learning should correspond to the interests of society and scientific progress.
- *Sorbonne Declaration* (1998), signed by the ministers of education of France, Germany and the UK, calling for harmonisation of the European higher education area.
- *Bologna Declaration* signed on 19 June 1999, in the presence of the 29 ministers of education (with representatives of Poland) (with other attached documents), aimed at establishing a common European Higher Education Area until the year 2010.

The individual main components of the so-called Bologna Process were:

- The creation of a **two- and three-level system of studies**
- The creation of a system of easily **understandable and comparable diplomas**

- The creation of a performance point system permitting the transfer of achievements (ECTS).
- Intensification of **mobility** of students and employees of European higher schools
- Cooperation in the area of **quality development** of higher schools.
- Support of the European dimension of higher schools. Creation of study courses and modules concerning European topics.
- Creation of structures for **life-long learning**, and support thereof.
- Improvement of **cooperation** between those studying and the higher school
- Support for a **European Higher Education Area** and its activity in the world.
- Interlocking of **cooperation** between the sectors of education, research and innovation, **synergy** within the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.
- Placing value on the **social dimension** of education: Creation of equal access to higher-school education and enabling graduation for all – irrespective of their socio-economic status, primarily by creating relevant financial support measures as well as professional and personal advice.
- Increasing the **employability** of graduates, e. g. their ability to find a job and to keep it, strengthening their mobility on the job market.
- Introduction of the **diploma supplement** issued to all high school graduates.
- Student-oriented education process (instead of the lecturer-oriented process).

The convergence aimed at between the areas is unified by the qualification framework. One of the main priorities of the countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is the introduction of these. The idea of the European Qualification Framework came to life in the year 2004, four years later published was the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council as the document “Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of April 23rd, 2008., on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning”. The recommendations concerning the EQF do not describe any specific qualifications or competences of individuals – the European standards should serve to raise the qualification frameworks in the relevant member states. Poland is obliged to develop and implement such a qualification framework by the communiqué of Bergen (2005, for the Higher Education Area) and the recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council (2008, for the entire education system). The **national qualification framework** for higher schools is

a method of description of education programmes that focus on the effects of education and to which the entire education process is subordinate. The word “qualification” itself is understood as a title, an education level, identical to a diploma, certificate or competence certificate. Each qualification achieved within a higher education system is characterised by the following:

- the education effects determined and estimated for the relevant programme,
- a specific level with the European and national qualification framework,
- an accumulation of accomplishment appropriate for the amount of work of the student, expressed in ECTS points.

The implementation of the Bologna Process in Poland

The development of the goals of the Bologna declaration as well as the implementation of the European Higher Education Area is coordinated by the Polish ministry of science and higher education, the most important activities are undertaken by the individual higher schools themselves (Kraśniewski 2006).

From the formal point of view, all recommendations and goals of the Bologna process will be implemented in Poland. Individual higher schools are at different stages of implementability of the system solutions. Presently, work is progressing on the recognition of competences achieved within the formal and informal education systems.

The strategy of changes of the last decade analysed ex post permits the conclusion that the second stage – in conjunction with Poland’s accession as an equal member state of the EU, and the introduction into the implementation of the Bologna Process – was subordinate to the creation of the European Higher Education Area, with the level of execution being high from formal perspectives (Hejnicka-Bezwińska 2011: 17).

In total, the following may be said of the introduction of the European Research Area:

1. The education structure was reformed – the following levels and forms of studies exist at present, per art. 2, section 2 of the Polish higher education framework act:

First-level studies – a form of education, to which candidates are admitted who hold a certificate of maturity. These studies conclude with a first-level qualification.

Second-level studies – into this form of education are admitted candidates who hold at least first-level qualification. It concludes with a second-level qualification.

Unified master's studies – into this form of education are admitted candidates with a certificate of maturity. It concludes with a second-level qualification.

Third-level studies – Doctor studies, governed by a relevant structural component of a higher school, a research institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, an international research institute called into existence by way of other acts of law. Accepted are candidates with a second-level qualification. These studies end with a third-level qualification.

Post-graduate studies – into this form of education are accepted candidates with first-level qualification. These studies are conducted at a higher school, a research institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a research institute or a medical centre for post-graduate studies, and are concluded with a post-graduate studies certificate.

Direct studies – a form of higher school studies, whereby at least 50% of the programme occurs in direct contact with the lecturer and other students.

Indirect studies (extramural studies) – a form of studies different than direct studies, determined by a resolution of the senate of the relevant higher school (conf. www.nauka.gov.pl/poziomy-i-forma-studiow).

First-level studies (bachelor studies) usually take three years, the second-level cycle takes two years, with a doctoral study taking four years (the 3+2+4 model). The unified five-year master's studies was maintained for a very limited number of courses. Due to relevant acts of law, this provision applies to the following courses: acting, medical technology and analysis, pharmaceuticals, medicine, dental medicine, art restoration and maintenance, law, canon law, psychology, television and film technology, photography and veterinary medicine. There also exist studies conducted in various forms: graphics, painting, film directing, sculpture, theology (for theology – candidates for priests study in a five-year cycle).

2. The diploma supplement was introduced – it serves as the basic tool of recognition of education within the European Economic Area, and was conceived as an attachment to the diploma. Its contents are made up of information indispensable for the determination of the level and character of the completed studies. This includes: the full designation of the diploma, the characteristics of the completed study programme, a register of individual achievements of the graduate, a general description of the higher education system in the country of the graduated studies), (**Suplement do dyplomu. Przewodnik: krok po kroku. – ekspercibolonscy.org.pl pdf**). The higher schools in Poland are obligated since 1 January 2005, to issue such documents (Regulation of the Polish ministry of national education of 23 July 2004.).

3. European performance points were introduced – as a sample of procedures enabling the recognition of performance at higher schools different than the alma mater of the student. The higher schools prepare, according to available templates, the descriptions of the relevant courses, whereby the relevant modules clearly indicate the performance of the student, precisely describing the direct courses, as well as the time of the preparation and processing of the material (direct studies and self-study), including the effort of testing.

4. Introduction of the National Qualification Framework.

An education system operating within the qualification framework is basically student-oriented. The planing and templates for courses at higher schools formally begin with the determination of the education results (what the students are to know, understand and be able to do after graduation), subsequently determined are material programme points and methods, with the goal of developing projected education effects (with relevant validation).

Within the National Qualification Framework System in Poland, the education effects were subdivided into three types:

- **Knowledge**
 - **Abilities** as well as
 - **Personal and social competences.**
 - Formally, the implementation of the education programmes began based on the NQF in the 2012/2013 academic year. The entire process was preceded by drafting of acts of law.
5. Introduction of programmes to improve the mobility of students and employees.

Mobility of students was assigned a bigger meaning, because it has a direct influence on the other partial areas of this sector. It leads to flexibility (the possibility of attending courses that are unavailable at one's own higher education facility). This also builds cultural competences and communication abilities in foreign languages. Horizontal mobility means studying abroad (at the same level). We are in turn dealing with vertical mobility if students want to conclude the subsequent level of their education at a different higher school than their original one. The most popular form of horizontal mobility (interest in this form of studies is rising steadily, it is however still far from becoming common) are the exchange programmes Erasmus, presently incorporated into the broader LLL (Lifelong Learning) programme. Within this framework, there exist further the programmes Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Manet, and others. Lifelong learning hinges on

the ideas of necessary rivalry and competition on the job market, where one very often deals with transitions in one's professional life.

Most activity within the European Economic Area serve the **employability** of potential higher school graduates – so that they could find their way on the job market. The guiding idea of adapting higher education to the requirements of the job market is part of the content of the majority of ministerial ordinances. It is difficult, however, to evaluate this in the long term, because not all competences gained at a higher school can be easily measured in the diachronic perspective so that they could easily be transposed into the possibility of employment or so that they would directly influence it. Basic statistical data is relentless – the majority of the unemployed in Poland are youths that also hold higher school diplomas⁵. It is thus necessary to rethink the specifics of the offer of higher education facilities. *The case concerns not only an adaptation to the job market – but rather a mission of higher schools and their role “to what extent do they bear responsibility for the expansion of competences required in specific professional roles, and to what extent their task is the teaching of general, also theoretical, competences?”*

6. Presently, measures are being introduced to strengthen the financial autonomy of higher schools.

Implementation of the Bologna Process – empirical contributions

The Introduction of the National Qualification Framework largely closed the process of restructuring that accompanied the Bologna Process. An evaluation of these issues and the implementation of these strategies is presented in the resume report *Benchmarking the introduction process for the National Qualification Framework at Polish higher schools*, by the foundation of the Polish chancellor conference from the year 2013 (*Benchmarking procesu wdrażania Krajowych Ram Kwalifikacji w polskich uczelniach*). Earlier effects of the programme were presented in a series of reports drawn up in the years 2007, 2008 and 2012 (conf. Woźnicki 2007, Woźnicki 208, Woźnicki 2012). We deal here only with the current report from the year 2013 which collects and describes the most important trends in this area.

⁵ Conf. detailed data and reflexions on the reasons for unemployment among young people in: *Młodzi w liczbach* pdf. – Annex no. 1 to the scheme *Youths on the job market* („Młodzi na rynku pracy”) as well as Szafranec 2011.

The analyses were conducted in the organisationally difficult period of implementation of measures at the individual higher education facilities. In the year 2012/2013, 46 higher education facilities, among them 327 so called organisational units (e. g. faculties, institutes) participated in this process, mostly from universities and technical universities. The diagnosis covers both higher schools as well as faculties. The topical focus of the analysis spanned, among others, the inspection of

- „...the methods of coordination in terms of the introduction of the NQF
- participation of representatives of various interest groups
- the level of centralisation and technical equipment during the introduction of the NQF as well as a general evaluation of the process by academia, including the problems and difficulties observed in the process”... (Kraśniewski / Próchnicka 2013: 19).

The obtained data characterises the contemporary trends spanning the introduction of the NQF with respect to higher schools and faculties. The tendency shines through that representatives of managing bodies of higher schools develop a markedly positive attitude towards the introduced measures. The case was very different among academic lecturers (Kraśniewski / Próchnicka 2013: 30-31). While the attitude of the leaders is positive (the categories of positive and rather positive total 79.2% of cases), only 45.6% of academic teachers expressed themselves positively. A clearly negative attitude was declared by two-and-a-half times more employees than members of managing bodies. The relevant caution of this group shines through also in the more numerous ambiguous answers. The author of the report suggests that the level of acceptance will rise with increasing awareness of the basics and processes (Kraśniewski / Próchnicka 2013: 31).

A series of difficulties and problems arose according to the report primarily due to difficulties in the interpretation of the acts of law and ordinances concerning the NQF and too short a time for the implementation of these provisions at higher schools (Kraśniewski / Próchnicka 2013: 36). This had led to an overload of the teaching force through organisational work.

“The opinions of the basic units (faculties) are characterised by general criticism of this process with respect to the concept of the NQF itself, to its legal and organisational assumptions (...). The replies clearly indicate that these changes are understood as a subordination and adaptation to the acts of law, much less as a deep and multi-layered change of education programmes and processes. All this additionally occurred under strong time pressure (Kraśniewski / Próchnicka; 2013, p. 36).

The report also sees also generally less favourable attitudes towards the changes within the higher schools, which occur against the backdrop of the adaptation to the social transformations taking place on the job market, which in turn are considered challenges. Many representatives of interest groups understand this process of the introduction of the qualification framework as a superficial, shallow and bureaucratic pseudo-measure that would not lead to any changes, not even mental changes. The question about the decidedly very complicated sources of these attitudes remains open. A different perspective can be seen in the evaluation of the academic reality accompanying the creation of the European Higher Education Area by the concerned group, at which these changes are aimed – the students. They will have to be able to measure up to the challenges that the changes at the higher schools are attempting to answer (conf. Piorunek / Werner 2011: 17-39, Piorunek / Werner 2013: 63-85)⁶, which, however, make no claim of completeness with respect to the entire student population.

The research was conducted with the aid of the diagnostic survey method (Babbie 2003, Rubacha 2008) on the basis of the proprietary questionnaire “Studying in the European Higher Education Area” developed for this purpose. The question catalogue spanned general questions:

- the practice of education (one of the goals of changes to be implemented – a subject-related inclusion of students in the education process and their influence on the shape of studies).
- the relation to the job market (one of the goals of changes to be implemented – an enlargement of the employability and preparation for the job market) in conjunction with the education and professional plans of those interviewed.
- the societal resonance of the mechanisms of ascent through education (evaluation of diplomas and certificates, higher school access, their prestige, etc.).

Within the context of the survey, the questionnaires of the coherence scale SOC-13 by Antonovsky were utilised (the abridged version of Antonovsky’s SOC-29). The group spanned 418 randomly selected students of the last two semesters of bachelor-level studies: political science, international relations, culture studies, paedagogy and sociology within the framework of **private higher schools** (paid higher schools).

⁶ From these publications stem also the generalised conclusions in the individual chapters that reflect certain trends, but which in no way should be understood as wholly representative due to the small sample size.

A general overview of these research results from the group of students of culture sciences (understood as humanities) at private higher schools permits one to sketch out certain tendencies that characterise the opinions, attitudes and plans of young people. The following forgoes a detailed analysis of statistical data, turning the focus to comments to the empirically verified results.

The students of culture science courses at a private higher school in most cases declared having taken up the studies as a result of the increasing challenges of the job market and a certain “trend of studying”. This can be traced to the awakened education aspirations of a society at a stage of cultural and scientific transformation. In addition, they are also generally satisfied with their studies. It does not have anything at all to do with the European Higher Education Area. These changes go almost unnoticed by the interviewees. The awareness of the dimension of these reforms is limited to the two-level cycle of their studies. A generally positive opinion of the studies only creates the space for paedagogical reflections if set together with the partial aspects of practical studying.

The dominant components of the evaluation include in the opinion of the students:

- the fact that the studies programme is overly theoretical, overstressed are general courses, in which contents often repeat and overlap. The volume of practical aspects is too limited.
- academic teachers have varied attitudes towards the students, prefer various forms of work, however, a liberal style of work led by young people, with the simultaneous utilisation of traditional, presentational practice, clearly stands out.
- the students usually do not know the study regulations.
- the self-assessment of active participation in the process of studies shows that approx. 30-40% of the interviewees evaluate it as low, a tenth of the interviewees confesses generally not wanting to participate in the studies in general. Obtaining a diploma is generally perceived as instrumental. The interviewed students (not forming a specific representative group) show no engagement in programmes supported by the European Higher Education Area of international student exchange, mobility is perceived for them to be an empty slogan. The work of the higher schools serving to promote student mobility is appreciated by a third of the students – according to the students, the reasons for stagnation in this area are not to be found on the part of the higher school, but in the inherent limitations and lack of interest in such a form of studies.
- the quality of studies at a private higher school does not basically differ from the quality at a public higher school, so that in view of the interview-

ees, one can speak of acceptance of competition on the job market. The state accordingly does not have at its disposal a monopoly of organising education any more.

Irrespective of the limited awareness of the students about the basics of the Bologna Process – this group specifically are the participants in this process (or rather: the recipients of the changes) – on the level of implementation in the context of higher education. Young people are critical with respect to many aspects of studying. One of the central basic provisions of this reform of higher education is quality assurance that is to be operationalised by diverse research questions. It is to be described by evaluation of the effects of education or by a presentation of the conditions of studying or the material aspects of the process of education (conf. Pawlikowski 2006). The presented research permits one to draw partial conclusions on the general analysis level, aimed at “describing the learning atmosphere” that shines through as being system-centred and teacher-centred. There can be no talk about a student-oriented reality. Many of those questioned spoke of the low level of partnership in the relation with academic teachers, they complained on the limitations imposed on student activity, on lacking support and interest in student projects and ideas. Would one also consider the excess of the presentational form of work (lectures) with extreme dosages of theory and knowledge that is not up to date, the opinions of the students do not show an optimistic image of subject-oriented studies in culture sciences. This is quite far from the stipulations of the European Higher Education Area. In view of the students, these fields neither prepare one to take on specific professional roles, nor do they prepare one to cope with the challenges of the job market (conf. Piorunek / Werner 2011, Piorunek / Werner 2013)⁷. In the opinion of that part of the students who want to broaden their knowledge, such studies prevent one from creating independently thinking active and creative individuals. The massive higher education ‘sucked such people into’ the higher education system, who have no interest in their personal development. One needs to conclude, however, that the attitudes and approaches of students are quite varied. There also exists a group that is strongly motivated to study, and which does not want any pseudo-education, but which has realistic and critical opinions with respect to its reality of studies. This group also shows development potential, the uncovering of which only occurs in the wake of the upsetting of the teacher-centred mode of studying.

The interviewees agree in their negative or ambiguous opinions on the “market-oriented” value of their studies. The low level of their employability and lack-

⁷ A different issue, not analysed in this text, refers to the correctness of such questions.

ing preparation for the challenges of the job market cannot be hidden. Despite the low evaluation, the students are generally happy with their studies. The question remains open, to what extent were the students aware of the specifics of the chosen course, whether they made their decision independently of the employability, and was their guiding idea of studying primarily influenced by the investment in socio-cultural competences. These competences are not directly related to a specific professional role, and this came to light only during the studies. This question forms a part of a broader societal debate on the subject of higher education: Studies as a way to the job market *versus* general preparation, an investment in oneself, about which the candidates autonomously decide. This dilemma evokes the question of the foundation of higher schools, the creation of study courses and the related priorities that stand in a direct *or* indirect relation to the job market (conf. Kupczyk 2005).

One has the feeling that critical (or realistic) evaluations of students with respect to the value of “market orientation” of their profession [are unrelated] to the will of not wanting to close their studies with the bachelor diploma, but that they are aligned with declarations to continue to the second level within the same field at a public or private higher school. Paradoxically, considerations are made that this course could perhaps improve their situation on the job market, with the master’s studies perhaps being of value to a potential employer. The ambivalence of opinions stresses also the situation that a fourth of the interviewees does not want to change their current job in relation to the studies. For this group, accordingly, the studies do not form a single and sufficient way to finding a job.

Among those interviewed that have some work experience (in most cases – students of extramural or indirect studies), they have found employment within the scope of a socially insured employment contract, preferring this form for the future as well. The dominant trend among the students of culture science is finding a job in the public sector, as much as possible by way of an employment contract. This is not a preferred trend on the job market, where flexibility is required, and where the private sector is dominant. Stressed should be the fact, however, that a third of the interviewees prefer self-employment. The interviewees profited from the boom following the transformation of the 1990s, and had no opinion of the access to higher education yet. The ambiguity of their attitudes is placed between the ideas of societal egalitarianism, expressed by general access to studies, without consideration for an individual’s intellectual competences, and the elite thinking, whereby access to higher education is limited and to which the best are privy.

The achieved results provide no unified image of students of culture science courses that are represented in the highest numbers at higher education facilities.

Their attitudes, opinions and plans often indicate a polarisation of attitudes and ambiguity of opinion. We can assume with great probability that in this they differ from their colleagues who have chosen a specific, traditionally profession-related field of studies.

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