

# The Culture of Trust in the Context of Changing Global Academic Scenario

*Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak*

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## ABSTRACT

*“Contemporary social, economic and political contexts of higher education raise new challenges in the realm of education and research. On the one hand, we have to put great importance to the preservation of tradition and dignity of the academics and on the other hand, the processes of globalization and internationalization and development of new interdisciplinary fields of knowledge necessitate the search for new forms of functioning of the Academy. Traditional academic culture, of which the culture of trust is a significant element, encounters multi-dimensional changes. In this paper, the focus is on a very narrow example of a culture of trust in the changing academic culture, namely, the one element of interpersonal relationships in academy, that is, the trust in interactions in the process of assessment. Exams of mass-nature in higher education cause a lot of new problems. In this context, the results of research conducted in Polish academic milieu are presented. The objects of analysis are students’ opinions about the proposal of one of the students’ self-governments for monitoring the examination by third parties or using video cameras. Analysis of the collected empirical material indicates the scale of the immersion of the students in the culture of mistrust and suspicion. This can be seen as a sign of change in academia culture”.*

## Introduction

Academic education is an expression of the representation of the university and its functions in the social transformation. Debates on the directions of the changes which emerged in academic circles as well as in the press, reveal the

intensity of the challenges and tasks facing the academics in higher education. More than eight hundred years tradition on the one hand carries a lot of benefits, on the other hand it is a huge commitment to preserve it. This is of particular importance in the case of universality and dynamics of changes in direct and indirect social and material milieu of universities. Also participants and organizers of social processes in high school are changing. These changes are exponential in nature.

Along with changes in the multidimensional context of the functioning of the university, the uptake of specific phenomena of the contemporary, especially the open access to information and, on one side, megatrends such as consumerism and post industrialism, on the other - micro trends, universities are facing new tasks and new forms and methods of their implementation . It is not easy, especially in the case of a deep rooted mindset of both - participants of academic education and bureaucratic decision-makers - contrasting ideas of higher education and its functions.

Changes in the sphere of social order is accompanied by changes in the assumptions and operations of the university, which from the scientific and cultural institution transforms into a company and even in an “industrial” or “enterprising university”. Traditional values of the university are being replaced or displaced by new rules of the market game. This applies both to research that is treated as a tool in the struggle for supremacy in the world and the source position in the rankings, as well as to education and specializations, which are enforced by the labor market and eligibility requirements formulated by the various ministries and professional associations. Education and research are becoming a kind of “production”. The test results are “commodity”. Research conducted in the university is the manifestation of “the provision of research services”. Same is the case with “educational services”: materials-students, are fashioned into finished products (able to perform defined professional roles) are formatted like nails, and specifications “of technical production” (competencies) come from the Government and from future (or rather potential) employers. The proof of the quality of the product is a diploma that it becomes *Auto telic Value*. This in turn, generates the expectation and obligation of “servitude” of higher education to the individual and social aspirations, among which come credentials’ aspirations, in which a diploma is just one of subjects of consumption. This is accompanied by developing a culture of conformity, and sometimes even servility (usually political) stand in sharp contrast to the traditional role of the university as a source of social and intellectual criticism. States boast of high enrollment rates at the academic level, and universities compete for students (as the resource of materials which become subjected to “processed in a useful product”).

## The Academic Culture

Over 800 years of existence of European universities is reflected in a specific culture, rules, values and beliefs shared by members of the academic community:- Teachers and Students. This type of conceived academic culture leads to emergence of several subsystems, including: culture of organization, culture of research and culture of education. They are integrated, which means that a change in one of them causes a change in the other. However, education reformers often focus on only one of these cultures, which create a lot of confusion and even harm the functioning of the entire system.

Like any other culture, the academic culture is dynamic. It is involved in processes occurring in the environment. This means that the academic culture changing with the development of science also changes with the change in the social, economical and political order in which universities operate. A characteristic feature of the academic culture is search for truth. And just search for the truth, understood as a process of divergent thinking and critically testing hypothesis is one of the key elements of the mission of the university from the time of its inception. It was present in the medieval universities, as well as those that were created by the Humboldt's idea, and by the nineteenth century concept of Cardinal JH Newman.

Traditional academic culture creates the possibility of putting the key questions to public debate, reading a variety of texts, meeting with people of different cultures and learns from the dialogue. Contemporary culture of the university is, however, the culture of the questions in the world which calls for practical answers as soon as possible. On simple unquestionable answers waiting both politicians and impatient consumers autonomy is a form of defense that culture from flattering of simple tastes and expectations, giving critical responses to questions coming from the contemporary world.

Threats to freedom of university system are coming today from many sides. Important among them are the initiatives and decisions of introduction of free market mechanisms in academic culture. These initiatives are presented as arguments for needs to modernize higher education. As an effect the university has become similar to the company ruled by laws of corporations and aimed at financial benefits. "Profit or loss and efficiency criteria become the main means of evaluation, promotion factors". Along with changes in the sphere of economic and social order, changes occur in the conditions and operations of the university, which transforms scientific and culture institution and into a firm and even, as they write *Rui Santiago, Teresa Carvalho* and *Rosario Relva* in the "industrial university". Education academic and scientific research becomes a kind of "production". The test results are "commodity". Research and education conducted in university becoming of "research services" and "educational services".

Such commercialization of academic education and research not only transforms the organizational culture of the university, but also the goals and core mission. Above all, however, interferes with interpersonal relationships that were traditionally based on trust.

In debates on contemporary academic culture one seeks answers to questions about the concept of the university in the postindustrial era, especially when in university, the education and research are becoming a kind of “production”. A worrying consequence is the transformation of the university: “In the quasi-enterprise where knowledge is produced, but it is done in a way pragmatic and instrumented in a simplest way. It produces a quasi-educated people. All this is done using the university as a mask. This neoliberal culture has changed the quality of the university, which still seemingly works and operates in the same institution and in the name of the same goals that the institution has traditionally pursued. The problem is that in spite the university has become something else, but still operates under the same banner.”

In these conditions, the academic education is transformed in a particular way. It is perceived as object, the functions of which are assigned by the legislative and administrative decisions. They imprint their mark on the academic everyday life. Not all changes are elements of a process of improvement. They in fact include both that support the personal development, as well as that which are threats. Every change has its specific “*Janus faced*.” It carries both a chance for personal development of the participants and social communities at the local, European and global, but also risks escalation of threats and difficulties of development, the growing rivalry and deepening of social and economical stratification.

An important subject of debate is also seeking answers to questions about the concept of university education in the world of mobility and open, public information, which requires special skill levels and ethical disposal in obtaining and confirming the acquired competence. Against this background are formulated questions about the specifics of the experience of students: what are their subjective experiences or what are their expressions of individual and collective inertia. Inherent in academic culture is students’ activism. It occurs in at least of two forms, namely: commitment to the fulfillment of mission of the university or protest. Both forms of students’ activism leave their own mark on the stability and change in academic culture. Involvement in the implementation of the mission of the university promotes the development of potential of collective as well as personal competences and multiplication of intellectual capital and cultural heritage. The involvement of students in protest leads to radical changes, including the emergence of new fields of study and research, which inter alia include gender studies, ethnic studies and the broader -culture studies but

most of all to change the character of educational interactions, interpersonal relations in the process of teaching and learning as well as research.

Commercialization as a mark of contemporary academic culture, combined with an increase in educational aspirations and hopes of changing the individual and collective lives may result in an increased rate of enrollment in higher education. In Poland, we are talking about the “miracle of education.” It is expressed in the radical growth of academic enrollment rates: gross and net. This is illustrated by the data presented in Figure 1. So, dramatic increase in the number of students, with a slight increase in the number of teachers carries a lot of risks to confidence in the quality of education and the quality of academic diplomas. Then, it raises a doubt to contemporary academic culture.

### **Culture of Trust**

Every culture is built around a configuration of complementary ideas, values, attitudes, meanings, symbols and behaviors. The shaping of the culture requires energy and time. These treatments are processual, and their effect is often uncertain, vulnerable to all sorts of confounding factors. This also applies to a culture of trust. The ideas, values and symbols constituting this type of culture are subject to change, which can strengthen or weaken both individual and social trust. Great increase of numbers of students draws attention to the academic culture based on cooperation and development of its participants, which in the context of learning and gaining experience is consistent with the traditional values of the academy. The culture of trust plays a very important role in this context.

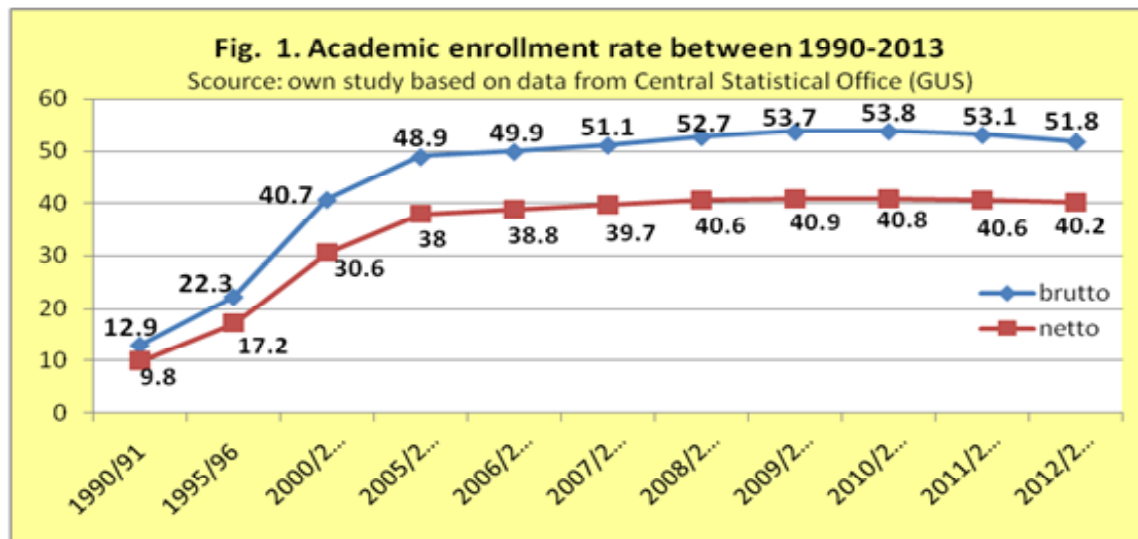
For the purpose of my analysis the researcher has defined the culture of trust as a socially produced system of values, principles and norms of coexistence respected in a selected social circle, determining the character of the interaction of the person with other elements of his direct and indirect social and material environment. The elements of this system are people, norms and the content of social behavior. Culture of trust is not something abstracted from the whole culture, including academic culture. Quite the contrary, it is vitally connected with it. The trust in the context of education can be seen in three aspects: a) trust to education, b) trust in education and c) education to trust. Each of these aspects contains many elements and each of these elements is the subject of critical reflection.

The first aspect (a): trust in education includes phenomena such as trust to educational institutions, trust to the effects of education, such as subjective competence of graduates, the value of diplomas, etc. The trust in education (aspect b) can be seen as the trust to the content of education, standards applicable in education, as well as trust to people as participants of educational interactions.

The third subject of critical reflection and exploration of practical solutions is the education to trust (aspect c). Trust, as a personal disposition and social binder is the aim as well as medium of education.

The first objective is to focus on the trust in educational institutions especially in the context of mass-nature of higher education.

Data in *Fig. 1* shows the rapid growth of NER and GER.



\*brutto: GER

\*netto: NER

It means that in the academic year 2012/13 was 1 678 900. Last quarter-century has been a special period in the Polish academic education. The effect of this kind of “miracle” is a mass nature of academic education with all of its consequences - both positive and negative. Mass nature of access to academic education is beneficial in terms of both personal and social perspective. Solid education of the broad masses of people is the foundation of prosperity and welfare. It is a factor of experiencing individual and collective subjectivity.

In the academic year 2013/14 441 schools, operated in Poland including:

- a. Government universities, academy and colleges - 115 (with 1 153 550 students and almost 85 000 academic teachers, it means 84.4% of all teachers in higher education alone)

Universities – 19, Technical universities – 18, Medical universities – 9, Agriculture universities – 6, Economical universities – 5, Pedagogical universities and academies – 5, Academies of physical education – 6, Maritime academies – 2, Theological universities – 2, Universities running

by Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Interior – 7. Gov. Professional Colleges – 36

- b. Private institutions of HE – 326 (with 459450 students and 15726 academic teachers)

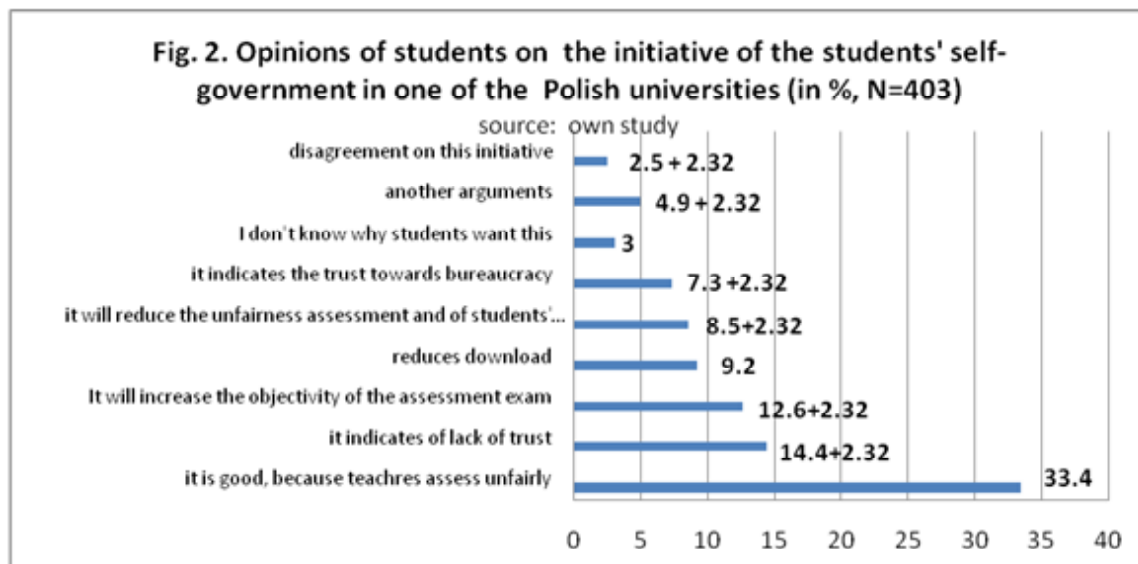
This phenomenon raises ambivalence. On the one hand, the growth rate in academic enrolment is a welfare factor for both, the individual and the society, but on the other hand, it creates new problems. The researcher has mentioned this issue in the context of writing of Abhijit Bora, who analyzed the Gross Enrolment Ratio in India in the context of the role of ICT in education. Now, the researcher would like to point positive and negative consequences of high GER. Positive: for individuals and for society advance specialised knowledge and skills, higher salary and better employment prospects, higher standards of life.

The trouble is, however, that the mass nature of higher education is also accompanied by phenomena such as saturated classrooms, difficulties in the access to library resources, and above all, the increase in the anonymity of participants in educational interactions resulting from the reduction of opportunities for direct interactions in various stages of educational process. As a result, education is not always solid, which reduces trust in the effects of academic education. Inflation of academic title increases not because of its universality, but due to an opinion about the way of its achieving, since university recruitment procedures arouse critical comments. Access to studies is easier not only because of the resignation from entrance exams, but also because of growth in HE institutions across the country.

Mass academic education could change the trust in society. Such big number of students could be seen as the agent for this. However, the anonymity of participants in the educational process results in a situation in which students do not know or even recognize each other. In the lecture hall with 200 or more people, it is difficult to take a close look to others who are in the same room, not to mention to get to know them. Lecture hall takes on the attributes of a public space in which strangers meet. This is the one of the main obstacles in experiences of value of trust and creating the culture of trust in mass-nature of Higher Education. It makes a lot not only in lectures and seminars, but also in exams. It causes a lot of new problems, both for educational institution and for individuals– teachers and students. Examination in higher education institution is one of the elements of the educational process. It is one of the types of educational interaction and one among of indicators of academic culture. Experiencing mutual trust of participants in this interaction is an important factor in shaping the culture of trust in higher education, which thanks to its mass nature has a chance to spread throughout the culture of trust in society.

In this context, the interesting are opinions on the introduction of supervisory tools to assessment procedures.

At one of the Polish universities students' self-government asked the Rector for monitoring by an independent observer or by recording on camera all consultations and exams. It was written in national newspapers as well as on Internet. The researcher was curious to know the reason of such initiative, but mostly how students of other universities could explain this. The researcher discussed this issue with my students and then the investigator surveyed a group of university students (N=403). The results of the survey are shown in the Figure 2.



“If we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures”. Examination and assessment play a special role in the social and moral development. Massive nature of academic education causes a lot of changes in traditional exams. The experience gained in the process of examinations and passing individual tasks are subject to generalization to other situations in which assessment is carried out by others (especially of the higher status), while presenting one's own achievements in order to achieve highly valuable benefits, etc. Data on the Figure 2 shows the spectrum of experiences and feeling of students. Fact, that only 25% are disagree with such initiative makes ones think about social interactions during assessment of students' activity. Acceptance of monitoring of such interactions by external observers arouses many ethical dilemmas, and thoughts of perpetuating of distrust and suspicion in social relations.



### Concluding Remarks

This Polish context of analysis of culture of trust in the perspective of the academic culture is only one from the many. I would like to point out one effect of massive nature of higher education, and how it affects culture of trust in educational interactions. The traditional academic culture expresses itself in the community of teachers and learners. Educational interactions are based on mutual trust and respect of people's subjectivity. Changes in the academic culture which affect teachers-students relations, such as limitations of direct interactions or even lack of them cause decrease in culture of trust. Commercialization and "industrialization" of higher education plays the same role in university culture. Students are clients, customers with their requirements and demands. It affects the interactions that have an impact on the personality of students, which contribute to their moral, spiritual and social as well as intellectual development far beyond the institutional training programs and formal curricula.

Another feature of contemporary academic culture similar to that of culture of corporation is competitiveness and rivalry. This is the main obstacle in the development of a culture of trust in academic interactions. Together with the inflation of diplomas by a massive nature of the academic education, these phenomena are currently most often shown as inhibitors of culture of trust at universities.

Creation of culture of trust in the new culture of academy requires identifying all, or at least as much as possible, specific features of contemporary university. This university which exists in the global context is facing a lot crisis, both common as well as its own. These crises have their sources in the people, rules as well as content of knowledge. It means one should analyze the culture of teaching/learning, research as well as management of the university, thoroughly.

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