

Institutional change and adaptation strategies at Polish universities

Summary

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This work concerns the issue of the impact of institutional changes at universities in Poland on their cooperation with the socio-economic environment. These reforms are in line with global trends in the transformation of universities and the reference point of the research carried out are the changes that began in Poland in 2007 and which are often referred to as neoliberal reforms.

Among other things, due to this type of reforms, modern science is under pressure related to growing social expectations regarding its goals and forms of functioning. Significant changes are taking place in particular in the area of defining the so-called third mission of the university, which before concerned its culture-forming mission, but now is more often understood as a direct impact on society by responding to the expectations of the external stakeholders, stimulating economic growth and creating the so-called knowledge-based economy.

Contemporary external pressures on science are not similar to the old forms of limiting the autonomy of universities, e.g. by defining possible topics and acceptable views through censorship by the state or the church. The external pressure that is currently taking place does not use censorship, but various types of tools for controlling the university and influencing the directions of undertaken research, primarily through external determination of the financing mechanism, based on verification of results and evaluative management model.

A theory that is able to explain how the university and science are changing under the influence of neoliberal reforms in Poland, in particular in the context of strengthening relations with the social environment, is the theory of social and complex systems, which in the field of sociology developed mainly thanks to Niklas Luhmann. These theories take into account, in particular, the processes taking place today in universities, which, as D. Antonowicz argues, are becoming more and more complex due to the significant increase in the complexity of the environment in which they operate (Antonowicz 2015). This is related to the changes that began in the 60s of the twentieth century in Western Europe, which started in Polish in the 90s, after the fall of communism. Among these changes, it is necessary to emphasize above all the significant increase the scale of research activities and education at the higher level. With the massification of universities, their social significance increased, which paradoxically led to

greater subordination to state policy, which now significantly influence research programs and educational content.

As higher education researchers write, after World War II, universities in Europe are in a situation of permanent reform (Clark 1996). In this paper, using a systemic approach, an attempt was made to determine to what extent the changes taking place at Polish universities are a kind of natural adaptation to the changing external environment, and to what extent they are influenced by institutional reforms. Many current studies on changes in universities pay attention to their institutional or organizational dimension and conclusions about changes and their conditions are formulated in relation to them. In this work, using the concept of a complex system, the organizational dimension is one of the three elements of a complex system of science. In addition, the communication system of science (understood as a self-organizing system of knowledge creation), emergent to organizational processes and to people operating within the organization, whose autonomous decisions constitute the third level of a complex system, was taken into account. This approach allows us to better understand what processes take place within these three interrelated but not identical dimensions. In addition, in the adopted approach, an inseparable element of the analysis is the relationship of the system with the environment, in which attention will be paid to practices regarding joint production and mutual transfer of knowledge.

Among other things, based on the research carried out, it can be seen that the introduced changes can be considered in relation to three elements of complex system, because institutional change, understood as an external interference in the organizational dimension of the science system, may cause a number of reactions and unintended consequences at different levels. Structural changes in organizations are supposed to affect both the strategies of actors, but an often overlooked context in this research is the fact, that both the organization and the operating individuals function within a functional system (science), which has its own logic and rationality of self-organization, which is not always coherent with the goals of the implemented reforms.

Another issue is that the considered change is specific, as it does not concern only one system, but assumes an increase in the orientation of scientific activities for the needs of external systems, which Luhmann calls structural and functional couplings. A very popular subject of research is the impact of cooperation with science on the functioning of the economy, while the inverse relationship is rarely studied. The aim of this paper is to fill this gap by examining the response of the science system to reforms, the determinants of the effectiveness

of reforms in the context of increasing cooperation with the environment and the impact of such cooperation on knowledge creation practices and the development of science.

In this work author present the context of changes taking place in the Polish system of science and higher education including general diagnoses of contemporary world society and the trends on the scientific system reforms, mainly due to the expectations towards it formulated by the environment.

Next, local conditions will also be discussed, which to a large extent can be treated as "echoes" of changes taking place in the global system. In particular, attention will be paid to the ideological and institutional aspect of the changes taking place in Poland, which are often referred to as imitative modernization. Polish reforms will be presented in the context of changes taking place in the world, in particular with regard to the organizational model of the universities spreading in Western countries and increasingly spreads into countries such as Poland, located outside the core of the world system.

Based on theoretical analyses and empirical research, a proposal for a model approach to this process was formulated, showing the main problem of reform implementation. Author also present diagnosis regarding the impact of Polish reforms on the interaction of science between science and the socio-economic environment. The main thesis in this context is that the mere fact of increasing institutional pressure does not seem to be the main factor in increasing the scope of cooperation between science and the environment, although it should be pointed out that they are favorable. More important in this case are changes in environment , which consist in increasing interest in scientific knowledge. The problem during cooperation and the main barrier to its development in Poland is the nature of the knowledge created in cooperation, which is not always applicable in the field of science and from systemic point of view, this activities often not correspond with its goals and internal rationality.

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