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INTRODUCTORY

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There is general consensus that academic institutions (universities and colleges of all types) all over the globe have been undergoing unprecedented change in the last few decades. University reforms no longer seem to lead to reformed universities: they lead to new reforms, and this is clear across Europe. Almost nowhere in Europe have universities stayed similar to traditional versions of the modern academy, whether epitomized as "Humboldtian", "Napoleonic" or "Newmanian". From structure and design to ways of governance, academics' work conditions and socio-cultural mission, universities as we knew them are no longer the same. Universities as institutions are under powerful pressures to reform or to be reformed, just like state institutions. However, there is no broad consensus about the direction those changes are taking, and there are but few who would venture to predict where academic institutions are heading in today's restless world. We are in the midst of changes, and it is hard to see the endpoint in the reforms ongoing across the continent. Many theorists have followed the radical views proposed two decades ago by B. Readings (1996) who depicted these changes as "ruination"; they speak of "corruption" (Washburn, 2005) or a "lost soul" and an "assault" on higher education (Schrecker, 2010), which serves as a call for "resistance" (Bailey & Freedman, 2011). Some theorists have started to pose anew the fundamental question "what are universities for?" (Collini, 2012), while others are ready to remind us "what a college was, is, and should be" (Delbanco, 2012); still others have already replied that universities are "not for profit" (Nussbaum, 2010). But most have been trying to see this situation realistically as an opportunity for "reform" and "transformation", or even a chance for the "recovery of an idea" (Graham, 2008) or the "restoration" of the university (Barnett, 1990), and yet others have considered new ideas such as a "postmodern university" (Smith & Webster, 1997), or a "virtual university" (Robins & Webster, 2002), or an "ecological university" (Barnett, 2010), or even, finally, although much earlier, a "multiversity" (Kerr, 2001). European universities have been under powerful public scrutiny, especially since they have never in all their modern history received so much investment from both public and private sources. The academic profession is in the midst of the storm, and it has to be ready to adapt to the ever changing conditions. New approaches to university funding and university governance are appearing both across Europe and the world, and

it is no longer clear what universities are "for". Certainly, universities as institutions are responding to the new challenges (public sector downsizing, changing demographics, university mission overload, and so forth) as creatively as possible. But changing states and views about the state are leading to changing universities and views about the university (Kwiek, 2013).

The situation in the "academic sphere" is thus complex and demands an enormous amount of creative intelligence and cooperation on global and local levels. The determining factors have been identified many times, and they include globalization and, more recently, a global crisis, neoliberalism and academic capitalism, academic entrepreneurialism, public sector reforms and New Public Management, the marketization and commodification of higher education, and the shift towards more managerialism and bureaucratization. The consequences of these trends have also been identified, and they include a loss of academic autonomy and academic freedom, the changing nature of academic work, the transformation of the identity of academics. But perhaps the key questions are the following: what kind of an academic institution (university) do we want to preserve/design/project for today and tomorrow? Is it possible to implement transformative projects of this nature? Who decides the future of the university as an institution? Is it the internal or external stakeholders of the university, or the academics themselves or the state? Certainly, more public funding inevitably means more public scrutiny and, possibly, less power for academics. As a knowledge-economy means heavier reliance on university-produced knowledge, both more research funding and more public accountability can be expected in the future. There are already fewer places in Europe (for instance, Poland and Italy) where traditional "professorially-coordinated" university systems operate, and the role of both the state and the market is increasing.

The title of the present symposium, "contemporary academic culture", represents our intention to take another look at these complex issues and questions. The first collection of four papers focuses on the condition of the Western culture. The lead paper by R. Barnett puts these questions fundamentally: is there any chance of an academy holding its own type of culture and thus contributing to the overall culture in society today? The author (as always) attempts to find a hopeful way out of this "posthuman or even inhuman" situation when he claims that it should be a "culture of revelation". C. Iloh and W. G. Tierney attempt an understanding of contemporary college life using ethnographic research. By reviewing an abundance of data and literature, they show how revealing such research can be in identifying new phenomena such as "for-profit colleges" and "online education". In his paper S. Pihlström provides a briefer insight into another important part of academic work that likewise suffers from many challenges: academic publishing. The author focuses on interdisciplinarity and journal rankings by referring to recent experiences in the Finnish academic community.

There is no doubt that the current academic condition in postcommunist Central Europe is even more complex due to several additional factors, such as the cultural legacies of the former communist regimes, economic and social transitions, and intellectual havoc and moral uncertainties. The following papers in the symposium focus on these countries and their authors attempt to depict important aspects. One of the most crucial is the changing role of the state as the traditional "sponsor" of public higher education and sponsor of major

public sector services. In his paper M. Kwiek provides a concise overview of developments that have affected transitions in the area of higher education and the welfare state. He draws attention to a serious theoretical drawback: neither universities nor welfare state regimes in the region can be easily placed using existing typologies. Both sectors are still "works in progress", he claims. Another perspective, based on social experience of academic life in the former Czecho-Slovakia, is provided by B. Kosová in her paper discussing contemporary "dilemmas", mainly between "old" (traditional modern) and "new" (postmodern) approaches to university education reform. Her view reflects her long-term experience in academia (as dean and rector). In her paper M. Linková directly addresses the situation in the Czech Republic concerning academics and research assessment. She refers to these issues in Western countries and demonstrates the differences between the various research assessment systems introduced in former Eastern bloc countries under the prevailing neo-technocratic managerialism. M. Vohlídalová reflects on yet another new social academic experience in the Czech Republic—academic mobility—in generally positive but also negative terms, namely the negative impact on private and family life. Her views provide a specific gendered outlook on the issue. We hope that the papers in this issue will shine additional light on ongoing university transformations and reforms, from both a theoretical and empirical perspective. In particular, we wish to draw readers' attention to the changing higher education institutions and cultures in new postcommunist European countries—in the larger context of changing academic cultures.

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