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The needs and expectations of students in higher education: a new view on the management of educational institutions

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Introduction

A few events that I experienced as an academic teacher became the inspiration to write this article. As a consequence, I will focus on two events, which I believe are inseparable from each other. First of all, the higher education system is currently in the reform phase. Secondly, its important part, if not the most important are the students. They – in the course of didactic classes, but also before and after studies completion – remain and ask some questions and arise problems. It would not be surprising if these problems concerned substantive content discussed in class. However, they go beyond these and concern many dimensions of their daily lives. These events cause my reflection on the role of the university about the needs and expectations of students as beneficiaries of this educational institution. I assume that if a student articulates his/her needs, and they are often very personal, it means that a student expects the needs to be included in the space of the university. The question arises: do the managers of an educational institution at the higher level realize the expectations of their recipients? Do they take into account the students' needs and how do they organize the offer of support in many dimensions of students' existence?

Needs and expectations of students

Whether today's higher education system responds to the needs and expectations of students is difficult to answer unequivocally, especially since there are no such studies at the national level. The activities of individual universities may indicate that they carry out, in fact, analyses concerning, among others, the selection factors of both the university and the field of study, the students' expectations towards the education process and attempt to monitor the further life of graduates.

There raises the question: are the assumptions of the Bologna strategy coming down to achieving properly the intended goals implemented by universities? Alternatively, maybe the focus was too much on the graduates' preparation for the labor market and neglected other dimensions such as:

- development and maintenance of a broad base of advanced knowledge (for the knowledge society),
- preparation for being an active citizen in a mature democracy,
- personal development of learners¹.

Focusing mainly on the dimension of student preparation for the labor market, the university implements its utilitarian mission. Meanwhile, its main goal should be to create conditions for developing the talents and skills of each student, thus discovering, stimulating and strengthening of his/her development potential. Education conducted in a higher education institution should, therefore, take the face of "an investment good" and not just "a consumer good"².

Focusing on the fields of education with the prospect of only entering the labor market is a missed perspective. The fact that the task of the university should be to ensure the comprehensive development of the student/graduate provide research conducted by J. Konieczna-Sałamatin among graduates who said that

[...] students generally do not choose a field of study [...] regarding future employment, they also rarely admit to being subject to environmental pressure in this matter (e.g. parents or teachers). They are most willing to talk about their interests or passions³.

Therefore, a university is a multidimensional educational space. It is the space in which we learn to be ourselves now and in the future, the possibilities

¹ Deklaracja Bolońska. Szkolnictwo wyższe w Europie. Wspólna Deklaracja Europejskich Ministrów Edukacji, zebranych w Bolonii w dniu 19 czerwca 1999. http://ekspercibolonscy.org.pl/ekspercibolonscy.org.pl/sites/ekspercibolonscy.org.pl/files/1999_PL_Bologna_Declaration.pdf [date of access: 19.05.2017].

² Cf. E. Potulicka, *Uniwersytet na wolnym rynku*, [in:] E. Potulicka, J. Rutkowiak, *Neoliberalne uwikłania edukacji*, Kraków 2012, pp. 281–297.

³ Following: A. Wroczyńska, *Oczekiwania współczesnych studentów wobec uczelni wyższych – prezentacja wyników prowadzonych badań*, *Studia BAS* Nr 3(35) 2013, s. 249–272 http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/wydbas.nsf/0/88A01F525FBD1451C1257BDC002A2C0A/%24File/Studia_BAS_35i-12.pdf [date of access: 18.05.2017].

between being and becoming in both the material part of the environment and in the mental space “[...] The educational space, just like the physical one, is not only given, but it is still given to us, not only discovered but still discovered by us”⁴.

Higher education understood in this way requires its managers to adopt long-term activities that are compatible with the needs of internal (students) and external (local environment) stakeholders.

Meanwhile, the weakness of Polish universities to promote the development of the student's potential is the underdeveloped model of cooperation with the socio-economic environment. This fact is confirmed by the results of research from the Report “Diagnosis of the needs of universities, students, and graduates in the field of building lasting relations between the university and the student – a graduate based on mutual exchange of knowledge and experience”⁵. We can read in it:

Current relations of Polish universities with their surroundings are shallow and usually limited to declarative forms. The main barrier preventing the existence of valuable university-graduate relationships is the lack of a developed model of cooperation in this area. The reasons include the traditional vertical organizational culture of the university; omitting the role of a graduate in the life of the university; educating students bypassing the need to learn throughout life⁶.

Diagnosis of students’ needs and expectations

Striving to raise the culture of quality of higher education, managers of educational units should pay attention not only to formal and legal guidelines in the organization of the university but also to listen to the voices of the direct beneficiaries they serve, that is students. They, as I emphasize in this article, are the most valuable assets of a university. Students’ needs and expectations are a determinant for constructing appropriate conditions for their comprehensive, multi-dimensional development in the course of life. As long as we do not hear these voices and we do not take into account the organization of places in the university space, “the student will be for the university”, not “the university for the student”.

Striving to improve the management system prevailing in higher education, I attempt to construct a cognitive diagnosis regarding the needs and expectations of students in many dimensions of life and the system of educational and socio-

⁴ M. Piasecka, *Od redakcji: Między porządkiem a chaosem*, “Podstawy Edukacji” 2015, 8: *Między porządkiem a chaosem*, p. 10.

⁵ „Diagnoza potrzeb uczelni, studentów i absolwentów w zakresie budowania trwałych relacji uczelnia – student – absolwent opartych na wzajemnej wymianie wiedzy i doświadczenia” w ramach projektu innowacyjnego „Model kształcenia przez całe życie w oparciu o trwałą relację z uczelnią: ideAGORA- absolwenci kapitałem uczelni” Programu Operacyjnego Kapitał Ludzki, Warszawa 2013. http://www.ideagora.mazovia.edu.pl/sites/ideagora/files/pages/672/raport_z_badan_poglebionych_cm_31.05.2013.pdf [date of access: 19.05.2017].

⁶ Ibidem.

cultural services that the system can offer and provide for them. From this perspective, it seems interesting to me not only to show the places of official (institutional) student support but the systematic arrangement of these places in the university space about the student's expectations and his/her independent functioning in the society and the labor market.

My diagnosis aims to examine the needs and expectations of students towards development and support their overall development potential and to raise the culture of quality of higher education (including educational, social and socio-cultural services).

For the research formulated in this way, I formulated the main problem:

Does the system of providing educational (education and upbringing), social and socio-cultural services functioning in the university space meet the needs and expectations of students towards development and support of their overall development potential and raising the culture quality of higher education?

To achieve the diagnostic goal, I distinguish the scopes of services provided by the university to students and the dimensions of their expectations and needs.

- 1) The scope of services provided to students (educational, assistance, socio-cultural, etc.) within the legal framework (external and internal acts).
- 2) The scope of student's expectations and his/her needs:
 - in the field of education (educational services – education programs/preparation for the profession (practices, internships, additional courses, consultations, participation in conferences, etc.),
 - in the field of assistance and support offered by the university (assistance services – cash benefits (scholarships, grants, concessions, subsidies, etc.), non-monetary: career guidance, psychological support, support for people with disabilities, legal counseling, etc.),
 - in the field of participation in the social and cultural life of the university/and further environment (scientific circles, development of interests, participation, and organization of cultural/sports events in the university and outside, volunteering, etc.),
 - in the field of student's functioning at the university (rights, duties, availability of services, information about them, accessibility and participation in university bodies, self-government, sense of influence and agency (learning democracy),
 - students' expectations in the field of service management in the university (student management in an individualized approach).

From the opinions of the students gathered as part of preliminary pilot studies conducted by me, it appears that the universities have dispersed, unorganized procedures and tools for providing student services that are possible within the social and legal order of the university, which do not take into account the individuality of the student. For example, students need: places conducive to direct interpersonal contacts; organization of meetings integrating students – the need

for direct contacts; support (institutional and personal)/one person who will help to solve social students' problems but also of the closest family members (alcoholism, gambling, diseases, etc.), availability of crèches, kindergartens not far from the university, cooperation with potential employers, etc. These are just a few cases that signal us that a student is a person who, when coming to a university, comes not only "for something", but also "with something". With motivation, enthusiasm, dreams, and problems, which he/she hopes to solve with the support offered by the universities – that someone will help them solve this here.

It is, therefore, necessary to redefine: the social role of higher education⁷, by not only verifying and modifying the didactic offer (education programs) but referring to the changing expectations on the one hand from the graduate entering the broader social world, including primarily the labor market, and on the other hand to the institution to prepare/create conditions for overall development throughout life.

The emerging new, innovative didactic-developmental formulas of the tutor or mentor type, apart from the usual role of the guardian of the year, give rise to competence anxiety among lecturers and students as well as organizational disorder⁸. Existing organizational units, which functioning scope includes support and help for the student, operate according to their own rules, strictly defined tasks, and competences, without creating a comprehensive (holistic) support system for students' potential.

This situation often causes organizational chaos experienced mainly by students. If one wants to create a culture of quality at a university, one should treat the academic community, and in particular students, as the most valuable assets, because they are part of the organization on the one hand, and on the other one they are beneficiaries of services that should respond to their needs and expectations in the broader social and economic context of the country.

Summary

Case Management as a proposal to manage educational institutions

In the range of my research, there is a Case Management (CM) method understood as a method of student's case management in the direction of supporting its overall development potential in the space of the university and enabling to achieve a "high" quality of culture of higher education⁹.

⁷ M. Ławicka, *Społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni wyższej w Polsce*, "ZN WSH Zarządzanie" 2016 (3), pp. 217–220.

⁸ M. Mirowska, *Porównanie pojęć mentor, tutor, case manager w kontekście teorii i praktyki*, „Вісник післядипломної освіти: Збірник наукових праць”, 3(32), 2017, p. 61–70.

⁹ M. Mirowska, *Case management (zarządzanie przypadkiem) jako technologia przyszłości w szkole wyższej*, „Педагогічні науки: теорія, історія, інноваційні технології : наук. Журнал”, 6 (70), 2017, p. 108–116.

So far, the Case Management method has been successful in Germany in the existing system of educating employees of social services in contact with an unemployed person. The basic idea of CM consists of two levels: the first is the diagnosis of the recipient of the service, his/her needs, capabilities, individual and environmental limitations, and the second one which is the effect of the first one – the development of the help service by a Case Manager together with the recipient, to support his/her potential. This plan includes providing the customer with the right service at the right time. The Case Manager is always responsible for organizing these activities, with the help of an assisted person and with his/her consent¹⁰.

In my opinion, managing educational institutions in the scientific-didactic and administrative dimensions within which it is possible to provide pro-student services using the Case Management method gives the prospect of raising the culture of higher education quality, which aims to individualize the educational process. Adaptation of the educational offer by the university to the largest possible extent to the individual recipient (student), rather than “matching the recipient” (student) to the unified educational model (unfortunately ignoring the education dimension) is possible by using Case Management and it is a part of achieving the strategic objectives in the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education 2010–2020 – environmental project¹¹.

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¹⁰ See A. Smrokowska-Reichmann, *Zarządzanie przypadkiem – Case Management (CM) w pracy socjalnej* [in:] *Nowe kierunki i tendencje w organizacji i zarządzaniu pomocą społeczną*, ed. A. Skowrońska, Warszawa 2013; T. Kaźmierczak, M. Rymśza, *Case management jako formuła koordynacji usług społecznych i innych działań służb publicznych – przypadek aktywizacji zawodowej i społecznej osób niepełnosprawnych*, [in:] *Profesjonalna praca socjalna. Nowy paradygmat czy niedokończone zadanie?*, ed. K. Piątek, K. Szymańska-Zybertowicz, Toruń 2011; M. Mirowska, *Case management (zarządzanie przypadkiem) jako społeczno-inwestycyjny element systemu usług społecznych*, Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A.S. Makarenko. Педагогічні науки: теорія, історія, інноваційні технології 5(59) 2016; pp. 442–448.

¹¹ Strategia rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego 2010–2020 – projekt środowiskowy <http://arch.krasp.org.pl/pl/strategia/strategia> [date of access: 2.05.2018].

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Summary

A student is the main beneficiary of the educational service provided by a university. The university, being an educational institution, is subject to formal and legal provisions that define its functioning. Legislator's provisions regulate the main requirements that higher education institutions must meet, and their clarification is constituted by internal legal acts established in the university

depending on its type, strategy or development policy as well as the subject and object resources of the university in close and further surroundings. Taking into account the student's needs and expectations is a very important issue, decisive for the quality of the university's work in the utilitarian and investment dimensions. The long-term policy of creating conditions conducive to the development of the student's potential in many dimensions of his/her existence (satisfying developmental needs) may bring results for raising the culture of quality of higher education. The existing system of services provided by the university is unclear, disordered and, above all, does not have the characteristics of an individualized approach to the student. The fragmentation of services causes organizational chaos and disorientation of the recipient. Case Management may be an alternative to the system that functions in the way described above. The idea consists of two stages: the diagnosis of the student's needs and expectations and an individualized plan of help in achieving the goals of education by satisfying the needs in multidimensional development lasting the whole life.