

Happy Together? On Satisfaction in Czech Academia— A Response to Zábrodská et al.*

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At first glance it looks like tremendously positive news: Kateřina Zábrodská, Jiří Mudrák, Petr Květoň, Marek Blatný, Kateřina Machovcová, and Iva Šolcová in their recent article ‘Keeping Marketisation at Bay: The Quality of Academic Work-life at Czech Universities’ claim that the Czech academic environment is, to a large extent, being spared the effects of the multiple forces of neoliberal ideology and market-driven rationality [Zábrodská et al. 2016]. Drawing on a large-scale e-mail survey, the authors suggest that nearly 84% of Czech academics working at public universities are satisfied or very satisfied in their workplace and on the basis of this finding conclude that Czech higher education (HE) ‘keeps marketisation at bay’, especially when contrasted with academies in other nations. This is a fascinating argument and conclusion, which suggests that there is something exceptional about the Czech academic environment and culture that, precisely because of this uniqueness, calls for further inquiry and reflection. I approached two other scholars from different professional backgrounds and asked them to comment on the conceptual framing, relevance, methods, and findings of Zábrodská et al.’s study. My contribution here is followed by a short reflection by Johana Chylíková from the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Her text focuses solely on the methodological flaws of Zábrodská et al.’s study. Roger Dale from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Bristol then addresses two aspects of the study in a response: first, the dominant, but inward looking ‘HEism’ that seems to pervade much work on HE, and second, the relevance of the study for changing the conditions of academic knowledge production.

In my critical response to Zábrodská et al., apart from expanding on some important contextual factors, I will argue that assessing levels of individual satisfaction provides neither an indicative nor a substantive basis with which to confirm the presence or absence of market (or, broadly, neoliberal) ideology in the public sector and specifically in higher education and (publically funded) science. The assumption in Zábrodská et al.’s study—that the presence of marketisation generates dissatisfaction, and subsequently the absence of marketisation

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produces satisfied academics—is wholly arbitrary. This path of reasoning is perhaps hypothetically too pre-emptive, as it assumes that satisfaction *is* present in a particular configuration in which certain (market) attributes *do not* feature, even if such an assumption is not spelled out explicitly in the study.

The critique of the commercialisation of higher education

Max Weber, in a rather uncharacteristically Marxian tone, noted in his famous lecture-turned-essay ‘Science as a Vocation’,¹ how universities in mid-19th-century Germany and America resembled state capitalist enterprises. Consequently, according to Weber, academics were presented with precarious labour conditions and a ‘quasi-proletarian’ existence akin to the conditions of any other (factory) worker in early modernity’s Taylorist/Fordist capitalist system. To be sure, there is an interesting history of critical discussions of how the forces of capital shape modern knowledge (re)production and its institutions in (but not limited to) Anglophone countries. In this sense marketisation—even if introduced schematically [Zábrodská et al. 2016: 348] there is little engagement with this very central term in Zábrodská et al.’s study²—amounts to a *continuation* of a long existing trend with a specific and complex history (rather than a suddenly imposed set of principles) that critical social scientists have substantively been dealing with for quite some time [e.g. Veblen 1918; Weber 1946; Kerr 1963; Readings 1996; Slaughter and Leslie 1998; Holmwood 2011; Collini 2012; Wright and Shore 2017]. There is indeed evidence aplenty suggesting that quasi-corporate managerial governance and the logic of capital are penetrating ever more deeply into the very core of institutional arrangements and the value formation of intellectual and scholarly life. Such developments are often both loosely and directly contextualised by shifts in academic governance, auditing, the accounting and measuring of processes within academia, reconstitutions of knowledge production/priorities, and the changing (public) role of academia (i.e. the emphasis on the *economic* role of knowledge).

¹ Delivered in 1917 in Munich and published in English in Gerth and Mills [1946].

² It is not entirely clear what it is that is marketised in HE and science in Zábrodská et al.’s study. Marketisation in and of HE is a complex matter. It for instance assumes that knowledge or education is already a capitalist commodity that is exchangeable or tradeable on a market. Kauppinen’s commentary adds further nuance to the subject matter: ‘marketing and selling higher education products to transnationally mobile students is a different kind of process than selling research results through patents to some (transnational) corporations. While the former is aimed at multiple consumers, the aim of the latter is rather to generate external revenue by licensing the product to some particular corporation’ [2013: 14]. Furthermore, there are at least two other perspectives on the marketisation of/in HE. One is the marketisation of the institution (universities as private institutions, for-profit education, and the like) and the other is the marketisation of the profession of academic (‘REF-ability’ in the UK, the monetary worth of a scholar on the job market based on the ability to raise funds). To be sure, Czech HE and science are

Critiques of HE have not had much impact on the past and present configuration of scientific institutions and higher education policy. The limited, if not entirely lacking impact of critique echoes Thrift's [2005] and Boltanski and Chiapello's [2005] observations about contemporary 'knowing' capitalism and how it absorbs and 'repacks' any kind of critique into a (quasi-)commodity/service. There are proliferating accounts of the stress, eroding (mental) health, work overload, accelerating pace of academic life, frustration, de-professionalisation, and de-moralisation in contemporary academia but they have not had too much effect on the politics of labour conditions or on science and higher education policies in general. Rather we can see the emergence of manuals and courses on how to manage time and mitigate stress and how to even become a 'productivity ninja' [see Vostal 2013]. All such services indeed come with a monetary price tag. In this sense we may concur, however remotely, with Latour [2004] that critiques of the various '-isms' colonising academia and other social arenas have run out of steam and lost their performative power.

Leaving aside the points made by Thirft Boltanski and Chiapello, and Latour, it still comes as a surprise that this constantly expanding and important bulk of critical—and to some extent historical—literature on the transformation of higher education and scientific policy and governance is largely neglected in the study and at best referred to in *passim*. The only significant supporting reference point the authors set out from is a study by Shin and Jung [2014]. A single reference, however, provides rather weak ground for any serious attempt to set up a solid foundation for the authors' claim that Anglophone academia is fully marketised. This is not to say that their departure point is entirely invalid. It is simply poorly contextualised within the existing literature. This then gives rise to another set of issues.

The claim that these developments in Anglophone academia have had a negative impact on the academic workplace and on academic well-being has been

marketised, as universities charge foreign students fees. There is also a massive political push to turn 'ideas into invoices' and transfer and 'accelerate' knowledge into profitable commodities and services via patenting, licensing, and setting up various platforms, such as start-ups and 'innovation' initiatives. All this is enhanced by several important binding policy initiatives in R&I, such as the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS 3), adopted by the Czech Government in June 2016 under the imperative of *ex-ante* conditionality required for the disbursement of CZK 70 billion EU funds for R&I. In the Czech Republic, the RIS 3 is very commercially oriented and puts a strong emphasis on profit-generating innovation at the expense of social innovation. Another example is the emerging discourse around Industry/Society 4.0 and the associated framing policy document *Initiative Industry 4.0*, which, with small minor exceptions, is driven by an often one-dimensional business and economic outlook. The neoliberal 'spirit' of these policy initiatives will considerably co-shape the national R&I landscape. It is clearly possible to observe market-like behaviour in publically funded HE and science institutions and the inscription of market ideology in important framing policies.

made in various studies [e.g. Parker and Jary 1995; Barry et al. 2001]. The problem with this otherwise valuable literature is that it often treats academics as passive victims exposed to top-down forces. Important studies from the UK problematise and challenge this one-dimensional view, suggesting that academics lack agency and are mere victims of various kinds of institutional pressures [see, e.g., Bryson 2004]. Even if this logic might hold to an extent in certain cases where university management uncompromisingly adopts measures from the business sector and applies them across university infrastructures (as with the Key Performance Indicators in the UK), it certainly cannot be claimed as universally applicable. Returning to the Czech Republic, academics working in the Czech environment (the clear majority of them Czechs) are active and acting agents in the process of shaping of their culture, environment, and regulations. In other words, many features and policy arrangements emerge from *within* the academic community [see Linková and Stöckelová 2012; Stöckelová 2015]. However, this does not exclude the possibility that academics may be acting agents subjectified by the dominant ideology (see the discussion below) and thus actively reproducing systemic pathologies.

There can be no denying the rise in mental-health, psychological, and professional problems in academia, the increased personal distress,³ and the growing numbers of young scholars leaving academia.⁴ It has also been reported that many academics change institutions out of necessity or simply because other institutional cultures offer much more favourable and friendly conditions. Many scholars, particularly junior ones, report job insecurity and speak about the overall volatility of the academic job market irrespective of discipline. These are no doubt serious matters, yet it is likely that if many 'knowledge' professions—for example, creative industries jobs, self-employed artists, legal occupations, managers of various kinds—were examined in such a meticulous light as ours, the overall picture would arguably be comparable or perhaps even worse.

Satisfaction measured

The conclusions that Zábrodská et al. arrive at become rather complicated when we take into consideration a recent paper by Jaroslav Fiala [2017] published in *The Conversation*. While his piece admittedly cannot be compared to Zábrodská et al.'s in terms of the scope and extent of the empirics and genre, in it he comments on the working conditions, pay, workload, and overall levels of satisfaction in Czech

³ There have also been several cases of work pressure ending in tragic suicide (such as the widely discussed suicide of Professor Stefan Grim of Imperial College in 2014).

⁴ As recently noted by Nobel Laureate Peter Agre, who said that young scholars are losing faith, heart, and confidence in academia and may decide for easier ways to support their families (see <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/nobel-laureate-i-fear-young-will-lose-confidence-academia>).

academia in a radically different way. Fiala notes that academics, many times junior ones, must often participate in several research projects at various institutions at the same time, in his words ‘holding down several gigs at once’, in order to pay the bills and provide for their young families (the author of this text can confirm this). Surely, Fiala says, salaries differ widely depending on discipline and institution and ‘often have little correlation with experience or qualification’. Even if Fiala’s essay is not an empirical study, the points he makes indicate which direction a qualitative, more streamlined and circumscribed (e.g. focused on a discipline or an institution) inquiry might take—especially in contrast to the robust but highly problematic response rate (2229 questionnaires) that Zábrodská et al.’s study was based on (see also Chylíková’s comment). Another problem with Zábrodská et al.’s study is the very framing of the notion of satisfaction—or rather the *lack* of any such framing.

Human satisfaction is a complex, contradictory, and contested experience—much like the experiences of boredom or happiness. These are affective states of the human inner-most self that largely escape a strict de-contextualised and non-interpretativist bracketed grasp. Arguably then, there is no ‘objective’ way to determine human satisfaction unless it is instrumentally operationalised and treated via a grid of ‘hard-core’ positivism or it is converted into metric and/or measurable categories. Thus, one of the core problems here is whether or not an empirical measurement of satisfaction without positivist/scientistic framing is possible. In academia, job satisfaction it is a contextual experience dependent on multiple significant variables considered only tangentially in the study, such as discipline, academic position, career stage, career history, academic culture, habituated modes of behaviour. Also, one might, to put it very simplistically, feel satisfied in the morning and melancholic in the late afternoon; the same is true for days—the phenomenon of the ‘Sunday blues’ has been fascinatingly discussed by Zuzanek [2016], which could, by extension, affect satisfaction. And this is true not necessarily only for satisfaction in some fleeting, transient, perhaps romantic and even metaphysical sense, but also and *particularly* in the case of satisfaction with our jobs, in the case of the very conditions under which we work—especially if we acknowledge that academic vocation is not only a material/financial resource, it is also an important source of our identity(-formation) and sense of self-worth.

Examining recent attempts in organisational and industrial psychology and various branches of the neurosciences, Davies [2015: 16–27] and Goodstein [2017: 21–34] note that the measurement, classification, and indexing of different scales and intensities of happiness and boredom, respectively, are ultimately deemed to be unsuccessful. Davies critically reflects on the recent research results of a group of neuroscientists at Cornell University led by Junichi Chikazoe, which came up with the claim that it is possible to determine happiness in the sense of a physical occurrence in the human body by unlocking the very code ‘through which human brains deals with different pleasures and pains’ [Davies 2017: 17]. Goodstein critically unpacks industrial and organisational psychology’s attempts—refer-

ring primarily to a study by Stephen Vodanovich and colleagues—to administer, code, and statistically analyse the ‘results of questionnaire-based studies ... built around a variety of boredom assessment instruments, sometimes in combination with controlled laboratory experiments designed to manipulate subjective states ...’ [2017: 21]. The problem here is that ‘[r]esearchers [in this field] are ... far from agreeing on what they are studying’ even if they ‘approach and analyse boredom through a rhetoric of objectivity ...’ [Goodstein 2017: 22–23].

Both Davies and Goodstein, I think correctly, critique *any* attempt to ‘decode’ such heterogeneous modes of the innermost human experiences in such a positivist sense. Of course, Zábrodská et al. do not strive to penetrate the ‘innards’ of (job) satisfaction in a neuroscientific sense. However, their approach does seem to comply with the general socio-cultural tendency to quantify and measure human experiences (for a comprehensive critique of social quantification and the performative of metrification, see in particular O’Neil [2016] and Beer [2016], respectively) that are arguably very difficult to treat in such a manner. Zábrodská et al.’s approach to satisfaction, in other words, resembles the approach to happiness and boredom that Davies and Goodstein take issue with. Even more problematically perhaps, Zábrodská et al. assume that satisfaction and even job satisfaction is a self-explanatory category. It would be futile to subject it to neuroscientific inquiry, yet it is also insufficient to work with satisfaction as though it possessed a fixed and seemingly consensual meaning. Even if satisfaction *is* taken at face value, treated in a positivist manner, and bracketed as an experiential category vis-à-vis a set of variables, which is the methodological assumption of Zábrodská et al., its analysis, again, barely produces anything significant about the marketisation or commercialisation in and of the higher education system, or, for that matter, anything about the variants and ramifications of neoliberal ideology to which higher education systems are both subject to and the co-producers of.

Considering Zábrodská et al.’s findings, one might be tempted to ask the following, admittedly general and provocative set of questions: Do Czech academic institutions, overcrowded with satisfied academics, serve their purpose? It is arguably quite useless to create academic institutions full of happy academics if they are not fulfilling their broader socio-cultural, educational, critical, intellectual, and even economic role. I do not mean that academic institutions need necessarily conform to the prevailing metrics or to the criteria of the currently fetishised and methodologically problematic Shanghai or THE university rankings. These indicators provide limited evidence about the state of Czech science. I rather propose that the evaluation system needs to take into account *substantial* publications, fewer in number, but stronger in quality, i.e. published in respected high-quality venues; the quality of the PhD process and doctoral supervision needs to be seriously addressed; career possibilities need to be clearly articulated and advancement for aspiring scholars must be established; even the different levels of intertwining between the academic and body politic including wider intellectual engagement with mass media needs to be deepened. While there are

attempts to build channels and common platforms to articulate what needs, solutions, and evidence there are for tackling and understanding pressing (global) societal challenges (e.g. Strategie AV21/Strategy AV21), and progressive initiatives such as the Czech Association of Doctoral Students (ČAD) also exist, these attempts are (just) a reminder of the limited awareness there is of the critical role higher education and scientific work play in social progress and the reflection of such progress, both on the side of academics and relevant stakeholders.⁵ Also, many of ČAD's initiatives supplement what should be deeply embedded and established institutional rules of PhD supervision. How is it that, as a colleague told me, some PhD students had met their supervisors only *twice* over the duration of their doctoral study? For these reasons, if we take Zábrodská et al.'s findings at face value it is somewhat tempting to hypothesise that satisfied academics might also be *passive* academics with comfortable jobs. Of course, this is a rather speculative and variegated line of thought associated with the production and control of academic subjectivities in the Czech academic environment.

Shaping academic subjectivity

Crucially, the assumption that marketisation generates *unsatisfied* academics does not hold and cannot be assumed. There is no logical or consequential connection to indicate that marketisation should or could engulf *tout court* human feelings, be it satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's job. If this is the case, it would imply that the presence of fully-fledged marketisation would produce ubiquitous *dissatisfaction* in academia. This surely is not the case as in arguably the most marketised HE landscape, the UK, we would find a wide mix of reactions to its extensively marketised university sector that would include psychological distress, dissatisfaction, resignation, and cynicism, but also courageous resistance and the productive gaming of and with the system. On the other hand, there have since at least early Marx and the Frankfurt School and in the aftermath of French (post-)structuralist thinkers such as Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari been social scientists who have been discussing how subjectivities (e.g. mental representations of the world; behavioural, ethical, and socially embedded patterns of human interaction; structure of personal feelings; ways of reasoning; ethical judgements and framings; affects; sensibilities; fantasms) get co-shaped by the dominant ideological configuration. However, as many critics of post-structuralism note, human beings are reflexive agents capable of stepping-back and making sense of their immediate condition. It might still be useful to situate mar-

⁵ There are indeed exceptions and it is necessary to remind ourselves that scientific enterprise comprises other tasks than just the *policy* role and includes also professional, critical and public roles, as Burawoy [2004] demonstrates on the case of sociology and then extends to scientific endeavour as such [Burawoy 2011].

ketisation with its complex meaning-structure in a broader scope or possibly the historical motion of neoliberal ideology. As we know from many critical social theorists, neoliberal ideology has many covert and subtle manifestations in the daily life of those subjected to it, whether they be individuals, groups, or institutions [see Guattari 1995; Lazzarato 2014]. Moreover, as well as under the influence of the Washington Consensus, which set out to spread neoliberalism worldwide in the late 1980s [Harvey 2005], there is evidence that neoliberal thinking and market fundamentalism in the Czech Republic was already establishing itself in the early 1990s [Szelényi 2014; Fiala 2017] and academia was never excluded from this trajectory.

It is possible and again tempting to read the results of the study in the sense that the majority of the respondents to the authors' questionnaire were simply uncritical and complicit with the overall academic culture and evaluation system. It is possible that the standard habitus of satisfied academics involves relatively 'undemanding' work patterns. It is also possible to infer from Záborská et al.'s study that there are particular pathological attributes of Czech academic culture that account for the unquestioned imperatives and fixed 'normalised' expectations. Moreover, the present evaluation system—arguably one of the most important components of any academic environment—allows if does not actually induce 'inventive' gaming strategies that often leave academics satisfied in terms of their performance and scholarly rigor. Consequently, however, the quality of scholarship might lag behind international standards, especially if it is not exposed to international peers. Of course, this probably differs dramatically across disciplines; there are indeed academic fields that are 'ditches' in terms of productivity, but there is also, luckily, no solid consensus on what academic productivity should be and whether or not or even how it can be measured.

Finally, I think that the causal relationship between the level of individual satisfaction and the ideological configuration of the academic environment introduced by the authors itself does not have to be dealt with just quantitatively or quantitatively. It is barely possible to bracket and 'pack' such complex notions—let alone the relationship between them—into neat categories, figures, and numbers that can be measured and mechanically compared. I would venture to suggest that such matters need to be theorised first and then empirically assessed, and, moreover, that much work needs to be done in terms of theorising the very method of inquiry and analytical strategy to address the problem at hand. It remains an open question to me as to whether the majority of the satisfied or very satisfied Czech academics might simply have accepted and internalised the demonstrably flawed system of evaluating science [Good et al. 2015] and the pathologies of Czech academic culture. The vast majority of Czech academics therefore provide a good example of the process that various critical social theorists call the production of academic subjectivities, which in effect, often inadvertently, reproduce the status quo and embedded oddities.

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A Few Comments on the Methodological Aspects of Zábrodská et al.'s Study

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This text examines the methodological and analytical aspects of Zábrodská et al.'s quantitative study of Czech academics [Zábrodská et al. 2016]. First I comment on a questionable choice researchers made in their analysis. This is followed by a note of caution about the lack of weighting of the cases in the analysis and a criticism of the choice of population in the study.

The part of Zábrodská et al.'s article describing the analysis the authors used in their study immediately gives rise to certain doubts. Although researchers obtained a response rate of 23%, that is, they received completed questionnaires from 4517 academics out of the 20 000 academics they had addressed with the request to fill in the questionnaire, they used data from only 2229 respondents, which is 10% of the addressed sample. The authors write: 'To avoid problems stemming from missing values in the analysis, we used a sample of 2229 academics all of whom fully completed the questionnaire. The effective sample thus included 10% of the researched population, which is comparable to other studies using online surveys among academic faculty [e.g. Kolsaker 2008].' [Zábrodská et al. 2016]

(1) The type of the analysis that the authors use in their study (i.e. descriptive statistics and correlations) is very capable of dealing with missing item values. It is thus remarkable and curious that the researchers used only half of the data that they had available. Regarding the exclusion of a big portion of the research sample, the authors write in a footnote: 'We recognise that excluding questionnaires with incomplete items may seem unnecessarily restrictive for the purpose of descriptive statistics and correlations reported in this article. However, in our follow-up analyses related to the project we use more advanced statistical methods, such as SEM, in which such reduction is appropriate.' [ibid.: 356] Even if this were true and SEM methods could not process data with missing values (which is not true), it makes no sense to get rid of one-half of the data in a study that is based upon descriptive statistics and correlations. This kind of omission could have a radical impact on the results of the study, producing different finding than if all the available data were used.

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(2) The authors compare their methodology to that used by Kolsaker [2008], i.e. that their data sample consist of 10% of the researched population. This fact is by no means justification for the arbitrary exclusion of half of the available data.

Further in their article the authors provide information about the composition of their sample with respect to basic characteristics such as gender, academic rank, and academic discipline and compare their sample to the characteristics of academic population provided by the Czech Statistical Office. Although they find a considerable disproportion (for example) between *academics in social sciences and humanities* in their sample (42%) and in the population (28%), they do not weight their data. It is true that such a discrepancy between the sample and the population is so robust that weighting cases would be pointless. Nevertheless, the authors should have pointed out that inappropriateness for weighting was the reason why they did not adjust their unrepresentative data.

(3) My last comment regards the choice of studied population. The authors followed the methodological decision made by Shin and Jung's [2014] to include only academics that work at universities. Although following the approaches of foreign studies is a standard procedure in the social sciences, it is worth considering the specific features of the home country. In the Czech Republic both universities and the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS) conduct non-commercial academic research and train young researchers. The inclusion of academics from the CAS in the studied population would have been a reasonable choice that could have produced a more general picture of Czech academia, of which researchers in the CAS are certainly a part.

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Analysing HEism

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I would like first of all to thank the editors for giving me this opportunity to comment on this article, which I found interesting and informative. My comments will be organised in two brief sections. In this first section I will advance a brief commentary on the Záborská et al. [2016] article, as an example of what I will be referring to as 'HEism'. Its focus is the quality of academic life in the Czech Republic, with a particular emphasis on how 'the global drive to marketisation' has affected academic systems and the well-being of Czech academic staff, in terms especially of job satisfaction and stress, and their perceptions of their work environment. These are elicited by means of a survey of responses to various emanations of 'marketisation', and their implications for the quality of academic worklife, which has developed under these conditions.

I do not want to go deeply into the 'technical' elements of the paper (such as an analysis of responses), but wish to focus on the nature and consequences of the central distinction made—by Shin and Jay in work already carried out in other systems—between 'market-oriented' and 'professor-oriented' responses to changes in academic conditions and experiences. The paper seeks to compare their respective impacts on the well-being of academic staff. Just how the comparison was carried out is not clear, and this represents a significant missed opportunity to enlarge and differently embed the findings. Moreover, the range of differences between these two approaches, and the distinctions between them, and especially how they might be recognised and theorised, are not clearly articulated. They both represent clusters of possibilities, but the bases of their differences, in what ways they might be recognised and experienced, are not effectively and decisively spelled out. To reach the authors' laudable goals would, to my mind, have entailed a much deeper analysis and discussion of the two ideal types presented. In particular, the bases of the clusters are not fully spelled out, and there is little attempt to distinguish between, account for, and explain the differences in the ways that they are perceived, experienced, and valued. In essence, the experiences are not formulated in ways that could enable effective, and productive, forms of comparison. While there are references to particular issues, such as the introduction of metrics, changes in university environments, these seem to represent something of a turn towards what might be called the 'new normal', which

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the article does not really problematise (which is a serious issue throughout the piece), but tends to assume as 'to be expected in the circumstances'. The focus is on the effects of market-friendly policies on academic satisfaction, professional pressures, and market pressures, but a serious issue, for me, was how little we learned about how the individual responses reflected respondents' experiences, once the blanket categories of market, etc., had been touched upon. It is difficult to believe that there would be such a high level of agreement across this population, for instance in their ability to differentiate between market, professional, and academic pressures. The overall story is one of the resilience of Czech academia in the face of the massive changes they are confronted with (which is very interesting in itself, and might have been probed more deeply). What is especially interesting is how little it was necessary to modify, or add to, existing categories of understanding and reporting on these issues.

By way of wider—and I hope, constructive—critique, I will argue that the way that the issue is set out and addressed by the authors can be seen as an example of the ethnomethodologists' distinction between examining an issue from the viewpoint of taking it as a resource to be made use of, and making it a topic to be addressed in its own right. One pre-eminent example of a 'resource' approach is the use of statistical material and argument as a basis for drawing what are claimed to be valid conclusions about a particular issue, on which policies and practices may be based. Indeed, the best contemporary example of the difference between topic and resource is to be found in the area of education statistics; the key question is, are the statistics to be taken as 'explaining' (resource) or themselves 'to be explained' (topic). The pre-eminent current example is probably the use of statistics as an unproblematized resource in the OECD's PISA tests, whose results are accepted, analysed, and deployed as accurately representing the state of play in an especially significant area of activity, to the point where they are taken as a template for national education systems globally. There are at least two problems here: first, the assumption of comparability on the basis of a common metric (rather than activities) that is used to categorise the whole range of education systems, which are known to differ from each other in fundamental and significant ways, and second, that a method of comparability based on generalisation from data generated in very different circumstances can nevertheless be of enormous value in directing the work of national education systems. And, even more important, this enables, justifies, and embeds what might be taken as currently the dominant tool of education policy-making, competitive comparison between education systems.

The point of this digression for my argument is, I hope, clear; that the article under review adopts an approach much closer to a 'resource' than to a 'topic' based argument. In this respect, it follows a rather common approach within studies of higher education, one that I have characterised as 'HE-ism'. At its core, the use of this term is intended to reflect an approach to analysis of HE where practitioners' typical approach is to make HE research itself a resource, particu-

larly one which makes it possible to identify pressing problems (for particular groups) of HE institutions and personnel, and the means of addressing them. And this is at the expense of taking these issues as 'topic' in themselves, problematising them, and seeking to explain them—which is surely the main purpose of academic endeavour.

The main argument behind the 'isms' suffix is to suggest that they represent a significant form of the distortion and possible understandings of education—and many other—policies, through the limitations that they place on the scope and targets of investigation. Overall, the argument is that the study of education policy, and possibly HE policy in particular, does not make this a topic for analysis in itself, but continues to be analytically shaped by the tendency to see particular crucial objects of analyses as resources, whose main purpose and value is as a means of improving HE as an institution, universities as organisations, and the various kinds of activities that go on within them.

The basis of the way we understand and seek to use the term 'isms' comes from the coiner of the term 'methodological nationalism', Herminio Martins. He sees it as 'a general presumption (in sociological analysis) ... that, in the case he was addressing, the "total" or "inclusive" society, in effect the nation-state, be deemed to be the standard, optimal or even maximal "isolate" for social analysis' [Martins 1974: 276]. The idea of a 'general presumption' about the nature of the field captures the essence of what we mean by 'isms'.

They can be seen as 'pre-theoretical', too obvious in their (assumed unchanging and unchanged) form and importance to require explicit theorising or being addressed as objects of inquiry, to the point where they become 'ossified' in current analyses of education policy, which tend to retain the same methodological and theoretical assumptions in massively changed circumstances. It is this that we refer to as 'isms'—fixed, frozen, and taken for granted, representing and embodying significant forms of the distortion and possible understandings of education policies, through the restrictions they place on the scope and targets of investigation. Consequently, our aim is to expose the bases of the theoretical assumptions and consequent methodologies and methods, and the limits these place on our understanding of the nature and significance of the transformations at work in higher education.

'Isms', then, represent taken for granted, and unproblematised, assumptions about the nature and significance of key elements of social worlds. They can be seen in a sense as 'pre-theoretical', sufficiently obvious in their form and importance not to require explicit theorising or addressing as objects of inquiry.

It is useful to compare these methodological 'isms' with theoretical isms, which refer to 'families' of mutually linked concepts and propositions. They can, in principle, unlike methodological isms, be justified in their own terms, as a coherent set of concepts for understanding a part of the (social) world (but not only social—cf. Darwinism, Marxism, etc). There is also the danger that they may be 'caricatured' by opponents—for instance, through (deliberate) emphases on

some components rather than others, for instance, determinism in Marxism—and ‘dogmatised’, or made into doctrine, by unreflexive adherents.

The consequences of this have been very well put by Dominic Boyer [2010: 75]. Perhaps the worst injustice critical scholarship does to itself these days is to begin with categories like ‘capitalism’ and ‘neoliberalism’ which, however useful and necessary glosses they are for narrative purposes, are analytically dangerous in that they bestow an undeserved systematicity upon current trends and relations. Once invoked, such ‘isms’ also make it very difficult to imagine that the individual critic or even a network of critics can do much to intervene in, let alone disrupt, them.

More broadly, then, this is a rather different but equally relevant conception of isms from that I’ve tried to advance through the argument about HEism. First, it is ‘(pro)claimed’ by analysts to advance analytic tools based on the delineation of a category taken to be sufficiently coherent in its structure and composition to enable the concept to be used as a general, even generic, term. My aim in the case of HEism was to identify the tendency to base analyses on implicit or unrecognised sets of assumptions that require no discussion and hold almost a pretheoretical status. So, while ‘capitalism’ and ‘neoliberalism’ may ‘bestow an undeserved systematicity’ on their objects of study, this is different from ‘isms’ as used here, because (a) it is based on witting analysis, not implicit assumptions, so that (b) it is always available/open to/encourages further analysis—‘what do you mean by ... how do you understand?’, which is not the case with the ‘isms’, because they are themselves analytic terms, bestowed ‘metatheoretically’, to enable a rethinking of the tools for analysis of the objects

And this leads us to recognise that capitalism and neoliberalism have to do with methods of analysis rather than objects of analysis; they construct analytic categories rather than objects of analysis. Their problems can be overcome by refining the analysis rather than the object of the analysis.

By contrast, and more specifically, what we might refer to as Educationism reflects the tendency to regard “education” as a single category for purposes of analysis, with unproblematically accepted common objectives and a set of implicitly shared knowledges, practices, assumptions, and outcomes. This may result from the fact that education has been possibly the central project in modernising societies. Since the early 19th century, mass education has been a crucial element of the modern nation-state in the interests of collective progress and in the interests of equality and justice. Educational systems are almost invariably seen as rationalising social projects whose universal expansion necessarily brings improvement and emancipation, and the more education the better. This results in education being treated as fixed, absolute, ahistorical, and universal, when no distinctions are made between its use to describe purpose, process, practice, and outcomes. This ‘flattening’ of education and the reluctance to recognise that there are crucial relationships between different representations of education that are being occluded or disguised by the failure to distinguish between them makes it

important to identify and seek to go beyond Educationism. The point I am making is, I hope, clear. It is that Zábrodská et al.'s analysis tends to take a particular form of academic purpose and organisation as a norm, and consequently focuses on the nature and consequences of possible changes to that norm, rather than 'making' or problematising it.

The second section of my comments aims to provide an alternative basis for the assessment of the impact of recent changes in the governance of HE from that provided in the paper. I set out the basis of the argument in the first half of my comments, and here I want to elaborate on some of the rather more implicit points I made above. In essence, what I have hinted above is that assuming, and leaving unproblematic, the two main alternative explanations of the differences found in the responses to the investigation of academics' responses about their satisfaction, etc., that is, market-based and professors-based explanations of those responses, limits both the scope and the potential depth of the changes, and the conclusions made.

In particular, I want to briefly articulate a rather different set of bases on which to analyse their sample's responses. As I have noted above, one reason that HE is a useful field in which to elaborate these arguments is that it may be seen in some relevant respects as an extreme case, chiefly on the basis that the relationship between the occupational interests of the practitioners in the field, and of the academic study of the field, appears to overlap to a much larger degree than is usually the case. 'HEists' are more concerned with improving their immediate experience and the value to their institutions and the sector as a whole than problematising those issues more thoroughly.

The main methodological approach I will employ is what we may refer to as 'critical comparison' (which is not at all to be confused with 'competitive comparison' advanced by the OECD as a tool of educational governance). Rather, critical comparison involves the problematisation, via levels of abstraction of the categories applied to the framing and analysis of the responses, taking them as explananda rather than as explanans.

The means I will attempt, very briefly, to elaborate a comparative sociology and politics of knowledge production in and of the field of HE, which is where I suggest we will find a basis for a deeper understanding of responses to recent changes. The reason that HE represents a useful basis for this purpose is that it may be seen in some respects as an extreme case, chiefly, as noted above, that the relationship between the occupational interests of the practitioners in the field, and of the academic study of the field, appear to overlap to a much larger degree than is usually the case. By contrast, in the case of education more broadly, the distance between the fields of practitioners and of the analysts, of say, the sociology of education, are rather greater and more critical.

Such problematisation is based on the assumption that the nature of academic fields and the parameters and constructions of the kinds of knowledge they produce are framed at least as much by conditions 'external' to the field as

those internal to it. The essence and scope of the sociology and politics of knowledge production, then, is not confined to the (type) of knowledge produced, the theories and methodologies on which it draws, or the explicit processes on which it is based, but must include the wider 'conditions' under which these are themselves produced.

These 'wider conditions', or sets of 'selection principles', are based on what I will refer to as the project, location, and context within which the field operates, and which shape the directions and emphases that come to characterise it. Moreover, the ways that the selection principle works is through its framing of distinct—discursive, theoretical, methodological, etc.—'opportunity structures' which selectively contain, identify, and appropriate what were the most and least appropriate, or possible, paths for the field and its practitioners.

In the case of HE we find a significant twist, arising from the fact, again noted above, that, unusually, in HE the great majority of the knowledge producers are themselves largely inhabitants of and practitioners in the field into which they are enquiring. In making this point, I am not referring to the practice of 'insider research', involving academics researching elements of their own or their colleagues' practice, which is not uncommon in HE, so much as to the whole institution of HE, including projects where individual organisations' 'representativeness' of the field as a whole is the focus of study.

If we turn to look at how the 'selection principle' works in the case of HEism, we see that its conditions of knowledge production are shaped through the following:

- Context: rapidly changing, qualitatively and quantitatively; new demands, new roles, new expectations, new opportunities;
- Location: a shift to HE as specialism, but more likely to be found in new specialist 'centres', with an emphasis on expertise, with multiple challenges, forms, purposes, expectations, profiles, and audiences;
- Project: to defend and improve HE as it has traditionally been organised and experienced.

To put it in somewhat different terms, it is useful and interesting to compare the relationship between two different Bourdieusian 'fields', fields made up of topics such as work, religion, or HE, and the fields of research into those topics, such as sociology of religion as a field in its own right, with different membership; and it is the relationship between these two fields that makes up a major element and condition of knowledge production.

In the case of HE, research in and research on, are rarely considered as completely separate from each other, and they are usually recognised as to some extent mutually constitutive.

In terms of the selection principle that I have just outlined, the project of HE research can be seen as seeking to maintain, as far as possible, the 'myth' of the institution as traditionally conceived, within contexts of rapid change in, of and to, the sector, which may be represented as threats to that myth. And this can lead

to weak relations between HE and the main disciplines, with few papers on HE published in disciplinary journals.

I want now briefly to set out the nature and importance in this context of what I have been referring to as sets of 'Opportunity Structures'. In Colin Hay's words, these structures are

selective of strategy, in the sense that, given a specific context, only certain courses of action are likely to see actors realise their intentions. Social, political and economic contexts are densely structured and highly contoured. As such they present an unevenly distributed configuration of opportunity and constraint to actors. They are, in short, strategically selective, for whilst they may well facilitate the ability of resource- and knowledge-rich actors to further their strategic interests, they are equally likely to present significant obstacles to the realisation of the strategic intentions of those not similarly endowed'. [Hay 2002: 380–381]

It is important to note that opportunity structures are analytic categories, not empirical ones. Students of HE act within opportunity structures which legitimate, favour, and prioritise some forms of decision and action over others: they 'embody and exemplify what is to be regarded as 'sensible, realistic and legitimate' [Koopmans and Statham].

The specific argument here is that HEism is a response to and a product of the Political Opportunity Structures confronting the fields (of HE and research on HE) as a result of massification, instrumentalisation, etc. They include:

- much greater political interest in HE as a potentially powerful instrument of forms of desirable social change—economic, cultural, individual;
- the development of international cooperation and competition;
- the imposition of NPM-like forms of management of HE as a sector and organisation;
- changing institutional and individual reward structures;
- HEism in part a consequence of these changes;
- and propelling the study of HE in the direction of 'problem-solving theory', which, as Robert Cox famously put it, 'takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given framework for action. The general aim of problem-solving is to make these relationships and institutions work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble' [Cox 1981: 128–129].

In terms of the Methodological Opportunity Structures influencing HE researchers, a crucial—and relevant—distinction is that in the production of knowledge in social life, two contexts come together—the context of investigation, which consists of the social world of the investigator, and the context of explanation, made up of the social world of the actors who are the objects of the study [Reed 2008].

There are clear continuities here with the idea of ‘in and of’ the field of HE, and attempting to resolve this conundrum involves problematising both contexts. We might say that the context of investigation is framed by the politics of knowledge production in the area, but that it is ‘interpreted’ in the social world of the actors. So, the key issue becomes investigating the relationships between the two contexts.

The basic claim I want to make around the forms taken by and the relationships between these two contexts in the case of HE research is that, because of the specific characteristics of researchers’ relationship to the field, distinctions between these two elements become blurred, and that this represents one key element of what I have referred to as ‘HEism’.

The argument I have tried to advance in response to the paper’s authors is that the context of explanation is framed by the—political, cultural, and economic—interests they perceive—albeit somewhat unreflectively, as they note in the Conclusion—to be at stake, which also inform their roles as investigators. Their involvement in these social worlds thus has a double, and circular, character; they are ‘investigators’ of the same social world that turns their investigations into explanations.

The key questions then become: What are the particular, HE-specific, forms taken by these two contexts? How do the same groups simultaneously inhabit both contexts, and with what consequences for the ways that we may understand HE? How do the investigators perceive their social world and its relationship to the actors they study—where their own activities are their own objects of study?

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And these questions seem to me the crucial ones in respect of the forms of explanation I have attempted to set out in the second part and to justify in terms compatible with the ambitions and purposes of the authors’ project, if not with the limitations it sets itself.

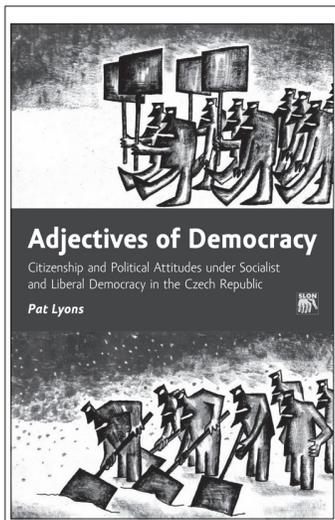
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Adjectives of Democracy

Citizenship and Political Attitudes under Socialist and Liberal Democracy in the Czech Republic



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