ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the future of the academy as a center for creating new ideas and values as well as shaping competences necessary in society (Collins, Halverson 2018, Schwab 2016). The role of universities is therefore to equip students with the skills they need on the labor market, but also shape attitudes that will allow them to adapt to the constant changing reality and achieve their own goals in the volatile and uncertain era of digital disruption (Śledziewska, Włoch 2020, Arthur 2011). The new socio-economic reality, radically changed during the technological revolution, requires thorough consideration of the that academia plays today to maintain its moral and educational legitimacy. Therefore, the idea of the university of the future should base on five interrelated pillars, involving actors from various social backgrounds. These are: a reconstructed vision of the university, responsible and committed lecturers, empowered students, well-established relations with the socio-economic environment and a fully exploited potential of the digital environment. and only a skillful combination of these elements will allow the university to maintain a social and moral mandate to shape the dispositions and attitudes of the next generations.

Keywords: academy of the future, challenges, digital era, attitudes, competences.

1. THE REVOLUTION TAKES NO PRISONERS

It is not enough to say that the technological revolution has already affected virtually all areas of our life (Muehleisen 2018), starting from the digitization of the economy and the labor market (Śledziewska, Włoch 2021; Schwab 2016; Brynjolfsson, McAfee 2014), through changing the practices of spending free time, leisure and building relationships with others (Toews 2018, Boase, Wellman 2005; Katz and Rice 2002), to new sources and forms of care for the well-being of society, health and population safety (Lupton 2018, Gostin, Halabi, Wilson 2018). The technological revolution shook the world at its base, crushing existing structures and cognitive patterns and deconstructing shared meanings, while not proposing a single, comprehensive alternative vision of the new world - a world fit for the digital age (Van Dijck 2014). The search for a new narrative and a way of understanding reality is a challenge that requires not only appropriate competences and skills, but also attitudes that will allow - especially young people who are just starting their adult life - to find themselves in a rapidly transforming world, enter the labor market and face the challenges of life in the world of the future.

2. NEW REALITY DEMANDS A NEW ROLE OF THE ACADEMY

Universities and academies play one of the key roles in building a new, coherent vision of the reality of the 4.0 technological revolution (Collins, Halverson 2018, Schwab 2016), as well as in preparing society for the challenges of progressive digitization and datafication.

Although this is not the first paradigm shift in the history of society, this one is considered to be the most dynamic and unpredictable in its consequences (Śledziewska, Włoch 2020, Arthur 2011). The social responsibility of the academy and its role in shaping the discourse, but also in working towards the Sustainable Development Goals (McCowan 2019) mean that it is the adaptation skills of the university

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and its adaptability in the process of digital transformation that will determine the condition of the 21st century society.

Therefore, it is worth asking a few key questions: what place should the academy take in the diversified and diverse education system of the future? What will 4:0 education look like when it takes full advantage of the technological and infrastructural opportunities that the technological revolution brings? What role will lecturers and university staff play in the process of higher education? How to prepare teachers to meet the requirements of 21st century universities? And last but not least - how should students be educated (and shape attitudes) in order to give them a chance on the labor market and enable them to use their potential?

3. THE VISION OF THE ACADEMY OF THE FUTURE

The vision of the academy of the future is a vision of a new educational ecosystem, based on five strong pillars:

1. A reconstructed vision of the university as a significant place in the social arena, a place for shaping attitudes and competences, but also a hub for innovations and practices disseminated outside the scientific community. Jack Ma, the creator of the Alibaba platform, also a professional teacher, noted during the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2018 - “Education is a big challenge now. If we don’t change the way we teach, we will be in big trouble in 30 years from now. Because the way we teach, the things we teach our kids, are the things from the past 200 years” (Barnes 2018).

Main challenge: The revolution in the education system, initiated during the COVID19 pandemic, has thoroughly revised the power relations in the scientific community, introducing the non-human actors (including streaming platforms and new digital tools), which have become an integral part of into the interactive structure of teaching (Abriszewski 2007).

2. Responsible and committed lecturers who not only update their knowledge and teaching skills, but above all have a sense of co-creating a new educational order - based on project thinking, cooperation with non-university centers and a silo organization of learning, similar to the conditions on the labor market (Śledziewska, Włoch 2020, Czerniewicz 2018). Research on digital transformation clearly shows how the paradigm of "work" and "employment" is changing in the era of the technological revolution - professions and positions are replaced by bundles of competences implemented in a project environment, and the progressive platformization contributes to the dissemination of outsourcing and redefinition of professional relations (Krzywdzinski, Gerber, Evers 2018). This is also how the educational curriculum should change, towards shorter and more skills-oriented courses supported by certificates, giving students a sense of a measurable return on the effort they put into their education.

Main challenge: As McCowan emphasizes - it is crucial for universities to face the need to adapt the scope of the content and skills provided to the requirements of the modern labor market, because the high degree of "employability" of graduates will be one of the indicators of the effective transformation of the academy (McCowan 2017).

3. Empowered students, aware of the ongoing changes and the value of lifelong learning. As shown by WEF data - 75 million jobs are directly threatened by automation, but they will be replaced by over 130 new jobs, the names of which we do not even know to this day (WEF 2018). As a result, more than half of the employees active in the labor market today will have to significantly equip themselves with competences and qualifications to be able to continue to perform their work, and one in ten employees - completely change the sector (WEF 2018, Card, DiNardo 2002, Moav 2000).

Main challenge: The requirements for students entering the labor market are also changing, as - due to the popularization of the task economy
(Śledziewska, Włoch 2020) - will have to become causative entities, independently managing their professional career and continuity of employment. Well-established social competences and the ability to organize work time in a short period (which has already been proved by the COVID19 pandemic) will therefore become a passport to the stabilization of the lives of today's academics.

4. Well-established relations with the socio-economic environment, which are necessary for the development of the academy of the future, as not only a teaching center, but also a center for shaping scientific discourse and spreading social attitudes well-established by research virtues (the so-called third mission of the university). As Watkins writes - in the era of the diversification of actors and forms of education on the educational market - one of the main challenges facing universities of the future will be to face the growing competition from the business environment (EdTech companies and Big Tech), which has entered the arena of education by offering its own, well financed educational programs (Watkins 2016).

Main challenge: The real cooperation between the academy and business representatives seems to be of key importance in order to jointly prepare - using the potential and capabilities of each party - a new, empirically rooted educational offer, providing students with transferable and marketable skills, which will be verifiable results of their efforts put in the educational process. The strength of the universities of the future will also be networking and supra-regional cooperation within specialized hubs, harnessing the potential of transdisciplinary collaboration.

5. And finally - a digital environment that enables the implementation of a new vision of the academy of the future with the use of technological resources and infrastructure based on the latest know-how. Looking at the example of Poland - the COVID19 pandemic initiated a rapid technological revolution at universities, but - as research shows (including Bryła, Kołodziejczyk, Peter-Bombik 2021, Prokopowicz 2020) - changes were introduced overnight (in March 2020), without a thorough preparation of the basics and proper design of organizational processes. As a result, the digitization of Polish universities was carried out under the slogan of crisis education (Romaniuk M. W., Łukasiewicz-Wielba J. 2020) and brought only partial results - in most cases it was possible to continue education during the restrictions related to the COVID19 pandemic, but so-called permanent digital maturity and readiness to implement new digital technologies in the teaching process - has not been worked out yet.

Main challenge: A big challenge related to the development of new digital technologies is the personalization of the education process and datafication, recognized - by Shoshana Zuboff - as a new stage of "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff 2019). Universities need to realize the potential of analyzing large corpuses of data and prepare to be immersed in the data collection process.

4. TOWARDS THE “IDEAL TYPE”

Summing up, reflection on the future of the academy and its role in the new educational ecosystem, built in the post-covid social reality, seems to be crucial for designing educational institutions that will ensure the society constant development and security in the era of civilization calls. And although the answers to the questions posed in the abstract are not clear-cut - it is worth considering the vision of the academy of the future, according to the Weber’s “ideal type” - as a scientific construct and point of reference - that immersed in partnership relations with business actors, employing committed and socially responsible lecturers, and educating conscious and empowered students. And all this will only be possible thanks to the mature use of the latest digital technologies, which not only replace face-to-face education when it becomes impossible, but above all - develop the potential of individual students (personalization) and accelerate the multilevel development of international, networked science.
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