

## СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ФИЛОСОФИЯ И ФИЛОСОФСКАЯ АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ

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### A LIBERAL VERSUS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY? HOW UNIVERSITIES COMMUNICATE THEIR VALUES<sup>2</sup>

*This study explores the extent to which universities declare their orientation to liberal and neoliberal values and how it reflects in the university's mission. The research analyses the values declared by universities in Lithuania and shows that institutes of higher education demonstrate a balance between liberal and neoliberal ideas. In the process of globalisation, universities have become homogeneous, which has alarming implications for higher education in Lithuania. Despite the existence of a third way, the danger is that liberal values will gradually disappear over time.*

*Keywords: higher education, university values, liberal values, neoliberal values, liberalism, neoliberalism.*

### Introduction

In recent decades, European universities have experienced rapid change and transformation. From being independent and non-aligned research institutions with their own distinctive purpose and values, they are now obliged to serve the political and economic agenda of the global market economy. This is a paradigm shift in their fundamental purpose, i.e. the acquisition of knowledge [1]. As so-called service providers operating within the market economy, and with mass accessibility of higher education in mind, universities and their programmes are beholden to their ultimate master, the consumer.

With studies now firmly aligned to the acquisition of practical skills, the liberal approach has been replaced by neoliberal ideas. Some traditional, conservative

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**Название статьи:** Университет либеральный или университет предпринимательский? Как университеты демонстрируют свои ценностные ориентации?

**Аннотация.** Рассматривается степень ориентации на либеральные и неолиберальные ценности, которую заявляют университеты Литвы, и ее влияние на цели университета. Анализируются ценности, заявленные литовскими университетами. Показано, что высшие учебные заведения демонстрируют баланс между либеральными и неолиберальными идеями. В процессе глобализации университеты стали гомогенными, что имеет тревожные последствия для высшего образования в Литве. Несмотря на существование третьего пути, опасность состоит в том, что со временем либеральные ценности могут постепенно исчезнуть.

**Ключевые слова:** высшее образование, университетские ценности, либеральные ценности, неолиберальные ценности, либерализм, неолиберализм.

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ideas still linger, such that the belief in a liberal education is not entirely dead; many academicians still hold that research-based knowledge is still profoundly beneficial to society [2]. Market and New Public Management (NPM) ideologies increasingly shape the universities' institutional environment, which is now a mix of social and political rhetoric and practices of varying complexity. This presents a serious challenge to the "traditional" configuration of academic and professional identities, values and culture [1]. Accordingly, the objectives of the university are dictated by economic and social demands, with the result that the university loses its authority, autonomy and neutrality *de facto* [3].

Such transformations have been shaping the policies [4], and the mission of many of today's universities [5], as well as the aim of studies [6]. It is therefore timely for us to identify whether universities explicitly declare either a liberal or neoliberal approach, or whether they are in search of a so-called "third way".

### **Problem to explore**

Arguably, neoliberalism has diminished the value of higher education, especially in the case of universities that have fallen under its influence. Neoliberalism implicates "all aspects of the 'education enterprise' – the institutional culture, education policies, the classroom, the curriculum and the very experience of being a student and a teacher ... [where] the value of education is to produce skilled employees for the labour market, enabling higher incomes and enhanced living standards for the individual and economic growth for all" [7].

Mark Olssen & Michael A. Peters (2005) describe the main differences between liberalism and neoliberalism thus: classical liberalism represents a negative conception of state power in that the individual was taken as an object to be freed from the interventions of the state, neoliberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state's role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation. In classical liberalism the individual is characterized as having an autonomous human nature and can practise freedom [8]. In neoliberalism the state seeks to create an individual that is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur. It follows that the classical, liberal attitude towards the university as a shrine of knowledge and science, and where the main mission relates to the creation of knowledge, cognition and public education, is in decline [2].

With this in mind, we might ask what expectations politicians and society set for universities, but also how do scholars and authorities of universities see the future of universities? At present, universities strive "to remain on both sides": that is, to be a modern competitive business unit yet, at the same time, to hold aloft the torch of the fundamental sciences.

Universities cannot be measured in terms of economic return for their graduates because the function of universities is to create and introduce innovations. Yet, with increasing access to university education [9], universities are obliged to attract large number of prospective students in accordance with their business model, which is highly problematic. In search of a middle path, the mission and vision of universities has become a "soft" or a "third way", which is merely an attempt to manoeuvre between opposing liberal and neoliberal ideologies.

Changes in the role of universities in the context of neoliberalism have been extensively analysed [10–13]. However, there is a paucity of research with a par-

ticular focus on how neoliberal ideas are reflected in the values declared in university policy and value statements and documents. Moreover, whose are the values declared in such documents? In which direction can we expect the values of universities to proceed and what are the consequences? Which values – liberal or neoliberal prevail in the declarations of universities? Moreover, is the “third way” represented in the values of universities?

### **Higher education in Europe and Lithuania**

European universities are under political pressure to be increasingly competitive in order to adapt to the global market economy. For the most part, the “European Higher Education Area” (the so-called Bologna Process) was introduced to achieve excellence and competitiveness in universities, but also preserve the ideals of liberal education [14]. Social and political forces were at work at Bologna, so that the higher education sector in Europe is now significantly influenced by two European-level policy developments. Firstly, as we have noted, the higher education reforms initiated by the Bologna Process, and, secondly, the research imperatives of the European Union’s Lisbon Strategy for jobs and growth. Whilst the aforementioned documents do not stipulate specific actions to be taken by member states, national higher education has been strongly influenced by an increasingly growing international pressure [15]. Lithuania joined the Bologna Process in 1999. Therefore, its national system of higher education is in line with other countries of the Bologna process.

In the case of Lithuania, the higher education system is binary in character and consists of two types of establishments, i.e. universities and colleges. As at 1 January 2018, 14 state and 4 private universities and 12 state and 7 private colleges were operating in the Republic of Lithuania. In the case of this article, the focus is exclusively on universities. Lithuanian universities fall into three categories as determined in the legislation and these comprise: classical universities (2) which happen to be the oldest universities in Lithuania and which provide study programmes in all subject areas; comprehensive into universities (7) which offer studies in several areas; and thirdly, specialised universities (5) that focus on the arts, music, sports, military or agricultural sciences and others [16]. In the Plan for Optimisation of Network of State Universities (2017) the private universities do not fall under this typology.

### **Methodology**

This paper analyses the values declared by the universities in the Republic of Lithuania and identifies the trend of their ideological disposition as evidenced in their publicly accessible strategic documents. The analysis was conducted from May to June 2018. The values of 18 universities were selected and analysed, although it should be noted that just two state and two private institutions openly declare their values on their official websites.

The research was conducted applying the methodology of Qualitative Content Analysis [17]. The universities were coded from U1 to U18 according to type: classical universities (U1, U2); comprehensive universities (U3, U4, U5, U6, U7, U8, U9); specialised universities (U10, U11, U12, U13, U14), private universities (U15, U16, U17, U18). Having identified the liberal and neoliberal values indicated by scholars and declared *by universities in their publicly accessible documents*,

we made our selection criteria based on the category definition. Data obtained was then provisionally aligned under these categories. We then applied a feedback loop which further refined the categories, following which we assigned data to the main categories and checked for reliability. There were, however, limitations of the research, i.e. we did not conduct a comparative analysis of university values and research was limited to the analysis of values within the general Lithuanian education system.

Analysis of the data followed under two general categories and the values expressed: those universities reflective of liberal ideas, those that considered their values to be more aligned with neoliberalism. We also validated sub-categories presented in the text.

## The results of research

The analysis in this research differentiated liberal from neoliberal values in Lithuanian universities. The analysis of values reflecting liberal ideas identified six sub-categories, i.e. openness, autonomy and academic freedom, academic ethics, democracy, development of students' character and identity. The most visible concern regarding the nurturing of such values best finds expression in the oldest classical (U1, U2) universities in Lithuania. For example: "...values rely on the principles of culture fostered by European universities such as academic freedom, diversity of opinions, openness to ideas <...> combining autonomy with accountability to the state and responsibility to society" (U1).

Regardless of their type, the majority of universities (U1, U2, U3, U4, U6, U7, U8, U9, U10, U11, U12, U13, U14, U15, U17, U18) declare at least several values that represent liberal ideas. No values reflecting liberal ideas were identified in the documents of two universities. The sub-category of openness comprises the largest group of values (U1, U2, U3, U6, U7, U8, U9, U10, U13, U17, U18). This indicates a two-way process: firstly, universities are "open" to society regarding their own ideas or activities; secondly, universities are also open to the pressure imposed on them by society and declare, for example, "*openness to changes in social and economic development*" (U17). One university claims that this value is relevant even at the global level, for example: "*openness – <...> the community is open to positive initiatives both at the national level and on a global scale*" (U3).

The second largest sub-category unites the values determining academic freedom and autonomy. Autonomy (U1, U6, U11, U17) and academic freedom (U1, U2, U6, U8) are significant to six universities. One of them (U1) expands the understanding of this concept adding "*combining autonomy with accountability to the state and responsibility to society.*"

The sub-category of democracy declared by universities is closely linked with academic freedom. The community members of several universities (U1, U7, U8, U11, U18) appreciate the diversity of cultures, traditions, personalities or opinions and foster the value of tolerance "*Tolerance: respect for different culture, diverse opinions, attitudes and beliefs*" (U11).

The sub-category of academic ethics also unites the values declared by several universities (U1, U2, U4, U7, U6, U11, U13). Some higher education institutions refer to it just as "academic ethics" (U1) or "academic honesty" (U4), other provide a broader definition and associate this value with "*high culture, professional ethics*" (U13), "*honest competition of higher education schools and students*" (U6).

It should be noted that university narratives pay particular attention to the student as the main participant in higher education, and to the development of their character, declaring this as a value (U2, U4, U6, U7, U10, U11, U13, U15, U18). In some documents this value is formulated as “exceptional attention to student’s development and education” (U7), in others it is linked to “creativity” (U2, U4, U10, U11) or to broad *artes liberales* education (U18). It is also understood that “students’ personal interest” (U6) is becoming a value as well.

Seven Lithuanian universities (U4, U7, U10, U11, U12, U13, U14) emphasise identity, although this has special significance for all of the specialised universities (U10–U14). Identity is perceived as “*responsibility grounded on origin and culture, commitment to protection and development of own unique features in the multicultural environment*” as well as civic spirit, nationality, serving own state and patriotism.

The analysis of the values *reflecting neoliberal ideas* resulted in distinguishing six sub-categories: responsibility to society, innovation, international relations, quality assurance, professional activities and continuous improvement.

University values that reflect neoliberal ideas appear to be equally important to almost all the universities in Lithuania (U1, U2, U4, U6, U7, U8, U9, U10, U11, U12, U13, U14, U15, U16, U17), although such values are absent only in U3, U5, U18. Here, we must point out that only neoliberal ideas prevail among the values of one private university (U16).

The sub-category, responsibility to society, represents the largest group of values, and this may be explained by the key principles of the European Higher Education Area. In the European context, the European Commission has published a relevant documents that emphasise the role universities must play in order to contribute to the knowledge society and economy in Europe [9]. Some universities in this research expressed it in a somewhat abstract manner (“responsibility” (U2, U8, U10, U13); “*responsibility to society*” (U1, U6)), whereas others define it as responsibility for positive changes in society (U9) or commitment to development of social responsibility of academic community members (U6); even “global responsibility” (U7) is mentioned. One of the private universities (U16) provides a much broader explanation of this relation: “*Communication of a socially responsible organisation is transparent, decisions are ethical and they serve the progress of society.*”

*Innovation* is represented by a larger group of values (U1, U13, U16, U17, U14) that demonstrates the aim of universities to contribute to progressive decisions made by society through research and studies, for example, “striving for progress and efficiency of research and studies” (U17); “*Comprehensive promotion of new ideas, initiatives, professionalism and leadership*” (U14). It is interesting to note that entrepreneurship is mentioned by only one university: (U16) “***entrepreneurship–idea, initiative and implementation***” presupposes a direct link with the idea of neoliberalism.

The mission of universities is declared even at international level: universities are open, global, declare internationalisation as a value only expressing it in different ways: some state that “*partnership and integration into the international higher education area*” (U13, U17) is perceived as a value; others declare “*encouragement of active dialogue with national and foreign partners (clients)*” (U14); there are universities, which see “*international exchange, improvement of quality of arts, research and studies under conditions of globalisation*” (U11) as a value.

The sub-category of *quality assurance* is presented as an obvious expression of mass higher education, yet none of the classical universities presents quality assurance as a value. However, it is emphasised by the universities of the other three types (i.e., comprehensive (U6), specialised (U14) and private (U15) universities).

The sub-category of quality assurance resembles the sub-category of *professionalism*. Three universities (U4, U10, U11) link it with “professionalism” in activities, whereas the private university (U16) declares this value as “*expertise–creative professionalism*.” One of the specialised universities (U12) provides a broad explanation of the value of professionalism linking it with the competence of the student: “*Professionalism includes knowledge and skills that an officer will use for the sake of Motherland. This also embraces his/her erudition, culture, university education <...>*.”

The sixth sub-category refers to continuous improvement, which represents “improvement of university activities as a never ending process” (U13); initiative (U4) or dynamism, for example, “Dynamism means to ensure timely and appropriate response to changes in external and internal environment” (U15), ambition to strive for continuous learning and improvement (U6, U8, U11, U13, U17).

## Conclusion

This research explores and analyses the values declared by universities in Lithuania and leads us to conclude that institutes of higher education exhibit a balance between liberal and neoliberal ideas. Whereas in certain universities the ideas of one or the other side might be dominant, there is not a single university in Lithuania that can be said to hold exclusively liberal or neoliberal ideas and values. The data points out that the third way exists. On the one hand it seems there is no contradiction. The contradiction between the dimension of liberalism and the idea of university education seems to have gone missing in the discourse. although no contradiction exists [18]. The university as institution can function as a body with its own structure and processes, and this can be referred to as its “generative mechanisms” [19]. Being an institution, the university maintains its own managerial and marketing system, which, of course, is a basic requirement of the market economy. On the other hand, the university as idea must retain fundamental those values upheld by almost all universities in their missions and which find a place in their internal documents. The abovementioned systems do not contradict each other and, therefore, we might conclude that a “third” way also exists.

Despite some of our universities having chosen the “third way”, and declaring their values publicly, this poses some risks. The criteria for assessment which appears in the context of competition, leaves the impression that all universities are the same because they aim at the same goals. In the process of globalisation, universities have become identical, which has some alarming implications for higher education in Lithuania. Small countries appear to experience the reality of homogeneity, which represents a threat, although on a broader scale the orientation of universities towards international market forces is perhaps even more alarming; the reality is one the destruction of the identity of universities. Determined to gain peer acknowledgement in the international area, the prospect of small countries having small, specialised universities rows ever more remote. In their attempt to differentiate themselves, the smaller universities are deprived of their specifics so that any

attempt to fulfil all of the requirements (quality assurance institutions, rankings institutions, KPI's of universities strategy, etc) become superficial. As Stephen J. Ball (2012) states, the danger is that we become “*malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled, essentially depthless*” [20. P. 31].

The values of universities reflect needs of government and society and, thus, determine their trend of development. Possessing neoliberal views means keeping pace with contemporary epoch. Remaining loyal to their liberalist ideals and preserving ideals of academic freedom and knowledge as values in themselves, members of the university community attempts to counteract the drift of their university towards neoliberalism. The balance of both ideologies present in the values of university point to a “third way”. However, the more scholars compete with each other on an individual basis and at faculty and university level, the greater the loss of academic independence. The personal benefit derived from the commercialisation of science is now being perceived by scholars who are increasingly engaged in collaborative projects. A significant part of research has become less independent and is increasingly considered be a private good that has a price in the market [1]. Despite the existence of a third way, the danger is that liberal values will gradually disappear over time. Thus, choosing the “third way” universities contributes to the development of the scenario, which is unfavourable to supporters of liberalist views. According to Paul Sutton, the creation of this new organizational actor takes place when academics come to want what is wanted from them [21].

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