

THE UNIVERSITY: A SPECIAL WORLD OF FREEDOM*

Abstracts

The University as a Historical Form and Tradition

A text on the historical form of the university and the modern need for change. The search is provoked for the unused capacity of tradition through interpretation of the historical elements of the university. An exploration which continues to challenge the matrices of the dependability of universities on other institutions, and of the enforcement of certain historical elements of university communication at the expense of the oblivion of others. A text which seeks to introduce innovative elements to the university – innovative elements which have had their historical form but have been erased by various ideologies.

“An auditorium with a cathedra finds its superior version in the church auditorium with its pulpit to which it would be difficult to speak from below, and its inferior version in the classroom with a podium for the teacher. It is clear that the modern needs of secondary education, too, will require at a point that the podium is removed, that the shape of the desks is changed, and that they are placed freely in the room. Perhaps this will help overcome an obsolete form of detachment of the teacher from the students. The renovation of the aims and contents of education should be assisted by an innovation of the forms of organization of the teaching-and-learning communication. Therefore, we will not be able to update university education without thinking of such a sustainable and behavior-orienting element of the form of university communication as the teaching *ex cathedra*.”

On New Bulgarian University

A text about the need for a new university in Bulgaria which would educate more than clerks alone. The state university is discussed, with its advantages, but also with its rigidity, as well as the private university the way it should be – with quality facilities and rich in resources, which further determines the number of students wishing to study there. The author depicts the image of the private university of the future.

“If the existing university is a state-owned one, offering, together with the unavoidable dependence on the state, free education to its students, let, then, there be another one, a private one, made on a joint-stock basis, which takes its resources from different sources but mostly from the students themselves. Let these students have it upon themselves to find a bank or another sponsor who, by providing them with funding, will make them dependant in the best possible meaning of the word. In this situation, when the responsibility passes to the student and to a specific community, the first to feel relieved will be the parents. Therefore, the private university will in fact prove more humane than the state one. It spares the parental effort, and urges the students to be more active. Active in any respect: both as learners and as individuals demanding from those who teach them.”

* The University: A special world of Freedom. Bogdan Bogdanov. Sofia. NBU. 2006.

A view on the history of university education in terms of higher education in the humanities in Bulgaria

The text discusses an array of problems related to the changes in higher education during the transition to civil society and market economy.

The historical development of the university is examined: the European university of the 18th and 19th c., its earlier version of the 11th and 12th c., the higher schools of the Late Antiquity and Byzantium, back to Pythagoras' school of philosophy established in the 6th c. BC and already having the features of a university. On this basis, the author traces the elements inherited by the present-day university, the transformations they have undergone, and the changes needed today.

“The fact that the university appeared above all as a special type of community is revealed by its very name. ‘Universitas’ means ‘community’. This is how we today give expression to a notion that was formed later in time: the range of programs, faculties, and departments. It would be useful, however, to remember the original meaning of the word. Deriving from the idea of a corporation of citizens or of practitioners of the same craft, the medieval meaning evolved from the idea of the university as a community, a system of corporations mostly of students and professors. Medieval universities developed diverse forms of corporativity. In some cases, the management of the corporation was in the hands of the students, and the Rector was a student.”

The University: past and present

Explorations of the university in view of the past and of practice, and introduction of the everyday notion of university. Education is explored not as knowledge but as a public value, and so are the benefits and harms resulting from such an interpretation. Lecturing, in particular, is shown as a harmful tradition, as a monologue of the knowledgeable professor, from where all problems of education in general arise. The idea is set forth of changing the university and introducing diversity.

“Lecturing – the monologue of the knowledgeable professor – has not always been the key instrument of university communication. During the Middle Ages, disputes were a much more common form of training, and if today our attention is drawn to their transformed version which we'd rather call a conference, we should be aware of the similarity between the two gestures. It is expressed in the equal disposition of all participants, the avoidance of the cathedra, and the blurring of the line between the more knowledgeable and the less knowledgeable ones. It is here that the paradox of the historical form of the university resides. In a certain way, the manners of the medieval university are closer to our present-day needs. Consciously or not, today we follow the track of the egalitarianism, the diversity, and the working chaos of the early Middle Ages.”

The University: Ideology and Reality

A text on Pepka Boyadjieva's book “Dimensions of the University Idea”, whose Part One comprises texts dating back to the early 19th century and the important age of the foundation of the Berlin University – speeches, excerpts from treatises, and plans for reforms by Schelling, Fichte, Schleyermacher and Humboldt, while Part Two presents mostly the German tradition – Jaspers, Gadamer and Habermas, but also Ortega y Gasset and an excerpt from a book by Parsons and Platt. The structure of the volume is analyzed as well as its contributions to the Bulgarian university environment.

“A wonderful implication offered by the present anthology: the university is the focal point of functions which can also be found elsewhere, individually and in various combinations. The power of the university, as Jaspers claims insightfully, resides in the fact that it constructs the image of human universality versus the separateness of individual existence within a society. If this

statement, however, is at the core of the university idea, as something general enough, then it can obviously be implemented by other institutions as well, for example, religious complexes and rites. As Ortega y Gasset puts it aptly, and other authors in the volume also imply, the university has no idea of its own, nor has it some kind of essence to be traced back to the Middle Ages or to the Early Modern Times. What it has is a set of lasting issues which give evidence of a single thing: that from the onset of the 19th century till the present, no changes have taken place at a certain level of living. But at other levels such changes have occurred and should be taken into account.”

The Open Society as a problem of the individual

The open society not just as an ideology but as a project. A text on existence in Bulgaria through the endless matrix of the open/close metaphor. The open and the close pass through the theories of Soros, Popper, and Bergson. The author depicts the open society as an opportunity, too, for the individual to get rid of his clear belonging and his simple biography which is always told in the same old way.

“Because the open/close metaphor is a pretty powerful one, and one that makes us face an eternal structure which seems extremely stable. This structure is also understood in historical terms. Once there were closed societies, or there was a closed society close to us. There is a transition between them. The last few years, however, showed that this transition is not an easy one. There is a reason to think that it is not only a real thing but also an ideal expressed through two comparable notions that mirror each other, and thus make each other more understandable. The big advantage of the open/close is that it carries a lasting image of human existence – our ‘inside’ which we leave over and over again to go into an ‘outside’. In Bulgaria, we are in a kind of ‘inside’; in Europe, we’ll be in a kind of ‘outside’, although Europe, at present, is a kind of extreme ‘inside’ which resists its own opening.”

Higher Education and the Discipline of Identification

The university/individual relation is discussed, the similarities between school and family, the historical development of the university model, and the introduction of secondary-school elements to the state university. As a counterpoint to the closed, hierarchical and orderly university, the model of the liberal university is explored which originates from the corporate structure of some medieval universities, which was later adopted by the English college of the Oxford and Cambridge type, and is best established in the USA. An emphasis is placed on the form of the American university as capable of creating new professions and contributing to social development.

“Undoubtedly, what I am following is an utopian discourse. It is utopian, however, not only due to my desire for renovation of the old university, but also because every institutional philosophy is utopian compared to the rigid reality. Just like the form of American society, and its ideology, which are both utopian compared to American reality. The question is in the relation between the utopia of form and the evasive reality. This relation may very well take the expression of a simple mismatch. However, if reduced to projects, utopia may also participate in reality as it happens.”

Classical Education in Bulgaria

A text on the form and ideals of classical education, on the studying of the history and culture of ancient Hellenes and Romans, on the Latin and Old Greek languages. The study explores the reasons for the penetration of Greek and Roman culture into the Bulgarian territory, provides historical data on the existing relations, presents the individuals who contributed to the development of classical education, discusses the impact of the Greek school over the Bulgarian

school, the role of Greek schools in the Bulgarian national revival, and university and secondary classical education nowadays.

“Although it was not the only initiator, the Department of Classical Philology actively took part in the foundation of the National Secondary School of Ancient Languages and Cultures in Sofia. Its opening in October 1977 marked the beginning of the modern stage in secondary classical education in Bulgaria. If the past invites comparison, then the advantages of the present should include the improved public motivation behind classical education in this school, and its closer relatedness to contemporaneity and Bulgarian national culture. What I mean here is both the focus on Old Bulgarian language and culture, and the connectedness of all subjects in the curriculum to Bulgarian culture and history. Having learned the lesson of the past, we gave up the formal aspect of old classical education, and preserved mostly its humanitarian potential. Thus, the opening of the National Secondary School of Ancient Languages and Cultures corrected the extremity of the educational reform after the 9th of September 1994. Now the school has its followers in the face of the Secondary School of Humanities in Varna and the Aprilov Secondary School in Gabrovo.

Long as the history of classical education in Bulgaria may be, the future does not depend passively on it. The past is just a mainstay – it provides patterns and arguments. The future depends on our capacity to analyze, on the confidence we have in the cause we serve, and last but not least, on our hard work.”

Sustainable Development and Strategic Planning. The experience of New Bulgarian University.

On the confusion between the institution of the Sofia University and New Bulgarian University, between closed state education and private education aspiring to be open. A text about the changes in New Bulgarian University, about the new type of training and about the nature of the university’s philosophy.

“To achieve sustainable development in a university institution, the following prerequisites should be present: 1. the university should operate as an active system meaning that it should be organized in such a way that the interests of its individual units are in working opposition to the interest of the entire institution; 2. the university should have a strategy subject to ongoing clarification and specification, in view of the changing reality and of the interests of the individual units; 3. the university should set targets and plan their fulfillment in quantitative terms; 4. the university should maintain and develop certain standards; 5. the university should be capable of self-evaluation and of evaluating the environment it operates in; 6. the university should operate in cooperative association with other institutions.”

NBU’s Vision and Its Importance for the University’s Programs of Study

The text examines the role of New Bulgarian University’s strategic plan and of the setting of specific goals to the university community. The relation is traced between the university’s goals and its mission. The model of study at the university is discussed, the programs of study, the attitude toward students, and the goal of encouraging the development of educated individuals, with an individuality allowing them to be unproblematically involved in various ‘we-’environments, that is, capable of various types of transition.

“Generally, we at NBU – and each one of us in a different way - are faced with a big contradiction. On the one hand, we have to educate quality professionals, we need programs guaranteeing graduation within a certain period of time, and graduation which, in one way or another, will face the individual with a professional area that will require certain maturity of him. On the other, we are very stubborn when it comes to the fact that the process of study trains not

just professionals but also individuals of certain qualities who can either make progress in their specific career, or change it for another one because today's mobility and adaptability require them to do so. Therefore we insist on qualities like independence, ability to cooperate, to participate in projects, readiness to change, readiness for research and adoption of new attitudes, ability to work together for the fulfillment of a shared goal."

We cannot be just an alternative to education in Bulgaria

A speech by Prof. Bogdan Bogdanov, Chair of the Board of Trustees of New Bulgarian University, delivered at the official ceremony for the university's 10th anniversary. An account of the strong and hard times in the life of the university, about working communities, about the promotion of the university's public image, about the building-up of an alternative university and its specific tasks.

"We have not yet achieved the required degree of aliveness in our internal community, the required critical attitude of students toward that which is offered to them. What is important, however, is that throughout these 10 years – from 1990 to the present – we succeeded in creating an entire university form. A lot remains to be done inside it, but the main points are already there. What we are doing is not complete; it goes on and will go on. It will depend on those who partake in it. The more an institutional form is capable of attracting the energy of those who are involved in it, the more viable it is. I am a skeptic by nature: I often give myself to a certain degree of pessimism, I claim that this pessimism is constructive and insist on its constructiveness, but indeed, there are things that can be done in a purely optimistic way, because optimism is often more wrongful than constructive pessimism is."

An Understanding of Culture

A text for the opening of the university seminar "Science: understood and made" which, in New Bulgarian University, is aimed at encouraging the development of the Artes Liberales type of education. Attention is paid to scholarly discourse, considered as both work and culture; the relation is examined between language and world in connection with speech and reality; cultures are discussed and their expansion into entire worlds, as well as religion and science as ways of wholification.

"As far as they are languages, cultures in this universe are sets of things, words, ideas, and views. As far as they are discourses, they are mechanisms for wholification. This is why big cultures unfailingly develop the important mechanism for connecting a given world with a whole world. Religions are the usual symbolic system of this type of wholification. But the latter is also accomplished in the discourse of sciences. Of course, there are sciences which do not operate with an idea of a whole world. Following philosophy, the humanities usually practice in their discourses the transition from a given world to a whole world, and present not only certain matter but are also interested in accommodating it in some kind of whole world. This is why they fail to appear scientific enough. Because their work resembles the everyday wholification which every human being does. To this end, some read novels, other poems, yet others listen to Mozart, or look for a guru, say a shrink, to do this for them, or stick with a group."