

BETWEEN MODEL AND REALITY*

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The articles, studies, and speeches collected in this volume and focused on the issues of education and the university, have been delivered on various occasions after 1989. They are the proof of a certain type of attitude in the years of transition, but also of the prevailing ideas accompanying the emergence of New Bulgarian University.

The year 1991, when the official existence began of several private universities in Bulgaria, now belongs to the past. Today, the Bulgarian society enjoys a considerable number of well-estimated public and private universities. The bad thing about them is that they rely mostly on media image and approval by the state, and not so much on their networking capacity and the related opportunities. The good side of their significant achievements, however, is there, too. Regardless of the usual depressive and inferiority-implying tone of self-evaluation and public evaluation, they are already part of a working system, even without being conscious of it.

Over the past decade, New Bulgarian University has been the initiator of quite a few of these achievements. It gave rise to a number of initiatives that are nowadays reality in the system of higher education in Bulgaria. However, this is not the thing to be emphasized here. This should rather be NBU's principal achievement, that is, the working unity of old and new embedded in its organization, and the operating university community developed on this basis.

Therefore, the main assumption of this volume is that successful transformation calls for a certain type of winding non-radical conformity between old and new. Yes, but the tone of my own articles and studies is quite radical. Hence, the unavoidable consequence that this book falls into the category of radical publications on higher education over the past decade. So it can easily be qualified as dealing with something that belongs to the past, as far as the already expanding higher education in Bulgaria now requires not general conclusions but a discursive probing into the actual university experience, both foreign and Bulgarian.

This is not an easy thing to do. It is not less difficult for me, either. No matter how specialized my stance and reasoning are, I still depend on my personal experience, and above all, on my three types of experience as classical philologist, researcher in the field of historical anthropology, and theoretician of the open society. These three types of experience are the fundament of the model of a liberal university institution presented in this volume.

Of course, there is one more ingredient: my experience at NBU. It is the one that gives rise to the great difficulty of the mismatch between model and reality. NBU is indeed a locus of internal freedom for a large number of individuals communicating and achieving their goals while struggling with the restrictions imposed by the whole, and it is indeed a small model of a society made of communities. Very often, though, these communities have different images of the whole, which argue, and even fight with it.

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

That's why, to put it pessimistically, it could be claimed that the liberal university model represents an ideal unattainability.

And this is where NBU's true achievement resides - in the rigid pessimist stance, and in the firm belief that the model is reducible to submodels, which in turn are reducible to implementable projects. The same can also be put otherwise, by saying that the whole, which NBU is, is a virtual frame, and what is more realistic is the multitude of small communities harmonizing their wills with each other. And there is one more thing, the most real one: the individual faculty members and students who are also outside the small communities, and even more outside the university's whole.

The same formula can also be applied to the understanding of any society. This is my reason to claim that New Bulgarian University is a small society of higher capability and achievement, which understands that it can never be fully independent and concerned about its achievements becoming the achievements of other Bulgarian universities, of the whole society, and now even of the larger society of the European Union.

As far as the voicing of such a thought is permissible, NBU is already mature enough to realize that it depends on its changeable self, but is also open to one whole or another that involves it, of which it knows that this whole needs NBU's self. These are, I believe, the appropriate words to introduce the texts collected in this volume, and to mark accordingly the 15th anniversary of New Bulgarian University.