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## **COLLEGIALITY VERSUS MANAGERIALISM. MANAGEMENT OF POLISH PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM UNDER REFORM**

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## **KOLEGIALNOŚĆ *VERSUS* MENEDŻERYZM. ZARZĄDZANIE UCZELNIĄ PUBLICZNĄ W REFORMOWANYM SYSTEMIE SZKOLNICTWA WYŻSZEGO W POLSCE**

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**Summary:** The reform of the Polish higher education system introduces an alternative model of university management, referring to the idea of managerialism. The strong academic leaders, limiting the role of academic collegiate bodies, and the involvement of external stakeholders in university management are the pillars of the new model. The article attempts to assess the changes in the structures of university authorities introduced in Polish universities as a result of the reform. The study was conducted based on an analysis of the statutes of 18 public universities. The obtained results indicate two regularities. Firstly, the new solutions place the university system closer to a model based on managerial logic. Secondly, the changes in university authority structures are not accompanied by the professionalization of management processes. Universities that maintained traditional academic authority structures before the reform made more extensive use of business management methods.

**Keywords:** public universities, collegiality, managerialism, reform of the higher education system.

**Streszczenie:** Reformy systemu szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce kryjące się pod nazwą Ustawa 2.0 wprowadzają alternatywny model zarządzania uczelniami, odwołujący się do idei menedżeryzmu. Filary nowej wizji uniwersytetu to silne przywództwo liderów akademickich, ograniczenie roli akademickich organów kolegialnych, zaangażowanie zewnętrznych interesariuszy w zarządzanie uczelnią. W artykule podjęto próbę oceny zmian struktur władz uczelni wprowadzanych w polskich uniwersytetach w wyniku reformy z roku 2018. Badanie przeprowadzono na podstawie analizy statutów 18 uniwersytetów publicznych. Otrzymane wyniki wskazują na występowanie dwóch prawidłowości. Po pierwsze, nowe rozwiązania

sytuują ustrój uczelni bliżej modelu zgodnego z logiką menedżerską. Po drugie, zmianom struktur władzy uniwersytetów nie towarzyszy profesjonalizacja procesów zarządzania. Uniwersytety utrzymujące przed reformą tradycyjne akademickie struktury władzy w szerszym zakresie wykorzystywały biznesowe metody zarządzania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uczelnie publiczne, kolegiałność, menedżeryzm, reforma systemu szkolnictwa wyższego.

## 1. Introduction

One of the most important and most frequently appearing threads in discussions about the directions of reforms of higher education systems is the postulate of introducing radical changes in university management systems that will correspond to the model of “corporate rationality”. Processes of this type are especially notable in European universities. They fit into the broad context of public sector managerial reforms inspired by the ideas of New Public Management, as well as globalization processes. The result of these processes is the evolution of the model of how academic institutions function, from the traditional one symbolized by ‘Humboldt University’, to the model termed ‘corporate university’. The latter term means “an institution that is characterized by processes, decisional criteria, expectations, organizational culture, and operating practices that are taken from, and have their origins in, the modern business corporation” (Steck, 2003, p. 74).

The reforms of the Polish higher educational system under the name of Constitution for Science (or Act 2.0), fit into the processes of change taking place in the European Higher Education Area. The solutions that introduce an alternative model of university management, referring to the idea of managerialism, are an important element of these processes. Strong leadership by academic leaders, limiting the role of academic collegiate bodies, and involving external stakeholders in university management are the pillars of the university’s new vision.

This article aims to assess the newly adopted system’s solutions in accordance with the statutes of public universities in Poland which locates the dean and faculty councils within the structures of university governance. Act 2.0 transferred this type of solutions to the level of statutory regulations and not legislative regulations. This raises a key question about how universities fill this specific legislative gap by adapting their internal regulations set out in their statutes. The study was conducted based on an analysis of the statutes of 18 public universities. The competences assigned to these two bodies were analyzed under the regulations in force until 2018, and the new ones that were introduced in 2019 by the amended Act on Higher Education and Science (Act 2.0). The article uses the research methods of critical literature analysis and the analysis of source materials to assess these changes.

## 2. Managerialism in the academy

The reforms in higher education systems lead to changes in the institutional structures of academic governance. They introduce a new paradigm in the field of university management. The strong leadership of academic leaders replaces the authority model characterized by academic self-government, meaning collegiality of decisions made by independent scientists. The decision-making process takes place in hierarchical authority structures, providing leaders with effective powers to make and enforce decisions. People who are not authorities in academic matters but who are professionals in such non-academic areas of institutional management as strategic management, finance, accounting, planning, and asset management are starting to play an important role in university management bodies. The role of traditional collegiate academic bodies is taken over by university councils, whose legal structure resembles supervisory boards or board of directors in private corporations. Supervisory, consultative or advisory tasks become the prerogative of external stakeholders' representatives – business, central or local government officials, and the local community.

The key element of reforming higher education systems is the demand to change the organization and the professionalization of university management structures (Maassen, Gornitzka, and Fumasoli 2017, p. 244). This can be expressed in the following words: “European universities have to become more like private enterprises operating in competitive markets, or rather, more like how markets and private enterprises are portrayed in economic and managerial text-books” (Maassen and Olsen, 2007, p. 13). According to M. Kwiek (2013, p. 250), “institutional adaptations force changes (...) in management methods and the system of higher education”. The foundation of the vision of the “corporate university” model is the transfer of hierarchical power structures and managerial management practices to the institutional academic environment.

The institutional solutions defining the system by which universities are managed and supervised are the first pillar of the idea of a corporate university. These solutions create the academic governance or university system. This term should be understood as “an integrated set of formal and informal institutions that jointly determine the institutional logic that determines the decision-making systems and management of universities, the principles of allocation of power and authority within the university, relations between the autonomy of universities and the influence of the state on the shaping of scientific and educational policy, as well as interactions between universities and the external environment” (Urbanek, 2019, p. 6). These are the processes, structures and institutions that decide about the division of power and its enforcement within the university, which determine the demarcation line between ‘corporate university’ and the traditional vision of the academic institution termed ‘Humboldt University’. Managerialism, which is the core of this first institution, and the collegiality that characterizes a traditional university lie at opposite ends of the

same continuum. According to some Australian researchers: “Managerialism and collegiality are negatively correlated. Managerialism is underscored by hierarchy, collegiality by lack of hierarchy; managerialism writes off failure, collegiality learns from failure; managerialism codifies behaviour, collegiality accepts behaviour” (Sawyer, Johnson, and Holub, 2009, p. 12). According to R. Middlehurst (2004, p. 272), the university’s “strengthened steering core” is the essence of managerialism. Introducing managerial ideas into the world of academia requires the “recalibration” (de Boer and File, 2011, p. 159) of university power structures, which consists in shifting the management burden to the level of the university’s central authorities. This leads to a redefinition of tasks, responsibilities, interrelationships, rules for the appointment and composition of management and supervisory bodies, as well as creating new authority bodies.

The second pillar means that universities should be treated as peculiar “enterprises” managed using business logic. This applies to both strategic and operational decisions. They should be supported by management methods and tools used in commercial entities. The need to implement managerial business practices is justified by the fact that the management of each organization, regardless of the specifics of its operations, faces the same decision-making dilemmas, meaning defining the principles of the optimal allocation of the limited human, financial and material resources that are at the disposal of both the corporation and the university in such a way as to achieve the highest degree of implementing the goals and tasks facing the organization. Examples of such tools that refer to business logic include strategic management, financial planning, operational budgeting, responsibility accounting, cost and performance accounting, brand management and others. Due to the widespread use of these types of business practices, the attitudes and values absent in a traditional university are being introduced to the hermetic world of the academy. This means that leaders, researchers, and academics are aware of the fact that the effects of their decisions can go beyond the strictly academic dimensions related to the quality of educational processes and scientific productivity. These decisions also have a financial dimension because they generate revenues, but much more often costs. Therefore they lead to the creation of an economic surplus, which can be treated as complementary to the traditional academic parameter used to assess the achievements of universities, organizational units and research teams.

The combination of these two aspects makes up the institutional transformation of the university, which is referred to as ‘hard managerialism’. This means a radical reform and transformation of the higher education system by introducing university management systems that will fully correspond to the ‘corporate rationality’ model (Trow, 1994, p. 11). There is also an alternative path of change that refers to the idea of ‘soft managerialism’. It also emphasizes the need for actions to improve the efficiency of university management. At the same time, however, it is postulated that traditional academic norms and values are maintained (de Boer, Denters, and

Goedegebuure, 1998, pp. 161-162). This refers to the idea of ‘Shared Governance’ (Birnbaum, 2004; Shattock, 2002). In the context of academic governance, preserving elements of academic self-governance and a collegial decision-making model is of key importance to reform activities. The next section of the article attempts to assess the changes introduced in Polish public university management systems from the perspective of these two paths of transformation.

### **3. Authority structures in universities under reform – research results**

Before the reform of 2018, the academic governance of Polish universities in the area of the position of deans and faculty councils within the university’s power structures was shaped by statutory regulations. The Act on Higher Education contained unequivocal provisions indicating the mandatory nature of two bodies in the university system – the dean and the faculty council (Ustawa z dnia 27 lipca 2005, art. 60, par. 1, 6). The dean was a single-person body of the university, faculty councils were collegial bodies with decision-making powers, referring not only to strictly academic issues but also related to faculty management processes (Ustawa z dnia 27 lipca 2005, art. 68 par. 1). Universities could independently decide on the management competencies of the dean and faculty councils.

After the reform, all solutions constituting the analyzed areas of power are the result of autonomous decisions taken by the university senates. In the amended Act on Higher Education and Science, the dean is not a single-person body of the university, but a managerial function not mentioned by name. At the faculty level, the decision-making and advisory collective body, i.e. the faculty council, ceases to be an obligatory body for all universities. Its introduction to the university’s power structures becomes the prerogative of the university itself. In this way, the scope of university’s institutional autonomy is increased by “shifting a wider range of matters to the level of statutory regulation, and thus granting the possibility to choose the right arrangements for a given school” (Izdebski, 2017, p. 49). At the same time, this raises the question of how universities fill this specific legislative gap by adapting their internal regulations as set out in their statutes.

The empirical part of the article presents the results of research conducted on a sample of 18 Polish public universities. The provisions of the university statutes before the introduction of Act 2.0 were analyzed, as well as the versions of statutes adopted by the senates in 2019, which took into account the new systemic solutions introduced by the amended Act on higher education and science. Three aspects of the academic order were assessed: the role of the collegiate academic body (faculty council) and the management competencies of that body and the dean of the faculty. Tables 1 to 3 present the research results.

**Table 1.** Role of the academic collegiate body (number of public universities)

Role of the academic collegiate body	Old act	New act
Decision-making and opinion-making body	18	4
Advisory and opinion-making body	0	14

Source: authors' compilation based on public universities statutes.

The most important change that occurred in power structures at faculty level is the shift of the role played by the faculty councils, from a collegiate decision-making body to an advisory and opinion-making body. This arrangement was introduced in 14 the examined universities. Only in four universities did the faculty council perform similar functions as before the reform. This change is usually accompanied by a change of the body's name to dean's council, professors' convention, didactic or scientific council, dean's college, or faculty college. Such a change in the position of a faculty collegiate body fits perfectly into the idea of managerialism. A similar 'calibration' occurs at university level. Act 2.0 introduced a new authority body, the university council. The mandate of the Senate was thus changed by giving this body an opinion-making and advisory character, not a decision-making one, excluding scientific and didactic matters.

Table 2 shows the responsibilities of the faculty council before and after the reform.

**Table 2.** Responsibilities of the academic collegiate body (number of public universities)

Responsibilities of the academic collegiate body	Old act	New act
Adoption of the faculty strategy	10 (16)	2
Approval of the report on the implementation of the faculty strategy	1	1
Adoption of the faculty financial plan	11	2
Approval of the report on the implementation of the faculty financial plan	3	1
Approval of the dean's report	11	2
Assessment of the dean's activities	11	3

Source: authors' compilation based on public universities statutes.

Before the reform, faculty councils in ten universities were responsible for adopting faculty strategy. This type of competence was the operationalization of the statutory prerogative, according to which: "the competence of the basic organizational unit council includes in particular: 1) determining the unit's general course of action..." (Ustawa z dnia 27 lipca 2005, no. 164, item 1365). Assuming that the statutory provision "determining the unit's general course of action" is identical to the adoption of the faculty strategy, the number of universities that adopted this type of system solution was sixteen. It is symptomatic that this statutory task of the faculty council was not accompanied by another competence related to the adoption of the dean's report on the implementation of the strategy. Such a provision was included

in the statute of only one university. This may indicate the superficial nature of strategic management at the level of basic units. The key to success in these procedures is not the formulation of the strategy itself, but the implementation of effective tools to monitor the degree of achieving the objectives and tasks contained in the strategy. The faculty council should play a leading role in these processes.

A similar conclusion can be made regarding the second managerial competence of the faculty council, i.e. the adoption of a material and financial plan. This type of prerogative is included in the statutes of eleven universities, while the adoption of the report on the implementation of the plan is found only in three statutes. The effectiveness of financial planning procedures in a situation where no effective tools for controlling the implementation of plans have been introduced is questionable.

The last two competences of the faculty councils are interrelated, but in many statutes they were included as separate. These are the approval of the dean's report and the assessment of the dean<sup>1</sup>. These tasks were included in the statutes of eleven universities. Assuming that approval of the faculty dean's report is synonymous with its positive assessment, faculty councils had this kind of prerogative at thirteen universities.

As a consequence of the introduction of Act 2.0, the role of faculty councils as decision-making bodies was substantially reduced. The most important managerial competencies of the council, the adoption of the strategy and the material and financial plan, were included in the statutes of only two universities.

**Table 3.** Responsibilities of the dean (number of public universities)

Responsibilities of the dean	Old act	New act
Preparation of faculty strategy	16	12
Preparation of the faculty financial plan	6	4
Administration of financial resources	13	9
Asset management	5	3
Staffing policy	10	13

Source: authors' compilation based on public universities statutes.

Slightly smaller changes occurred in the scope of the dean's responsibility. Before the reform, the dean's most important and most frequent decision-making prerogative was the preparation of the faculty strategy (16 universities) and the management of financial resources (13). This first task resulted directly from the statutory provisions: "the competences of the head of the basic organizational unit of the university include in particular the development of the unit's development strategy in line with the university's development strategy" (Ustawa z dnia 27 lipca 2005, art. 70, point 1). Although in 13 statutes there was a provision about the deans'

<sup>1</sup> The provision "periodic assessment of the didactic and scientific activity of the faculty" has been interpreted as an assessment of the dean's activities.

disposal of funds, only in six universities did deans prepare a material and financial plan for the faculty. This indirectly indicates the dominant financial management model at Polish universities. This was characterized by centralization of decisions related to the allocation of financial resources at rector's level. An important competence of the dean was to conduct staffing policy at the faculty (10). In practice, this first area of decision-making powers meant submitting applications to the rector regarding the employment and remuneration of faculty employees.

Changes in the university system introduced by the amended act also translate into a different definition of the deans' scope of responsibility. Above all, reducing the competences of deans is evident. Only the tasks included in the statutes were taken into account in the study. Several statutes contain the provision: "performing other tasks defined by the rector". The rank of 'statutory' competences contained in the statutes that have to go through the academic legislative path is higher than the rank of tasks defined solely by the rector. In five universities, deans do not have statutory rights that relate to strictly managerial decisions<sup>2</sup>. At other universities, the dean's most common competence is to conduct staffing policy at the faculty (13) and prepare the faculty strategy (12). At nine universities, deans are responsible for the financial management of the faculty. At the same time, only four universities prepare the faculty's financial plan, which, like before the reform, means that this earlier prerogative does not translate into the decentralization of financial management at the university. Deans are only managers of funds allocated at central level.

The obtained results indicate the occurrence of two regularities. First of all, taking into account the first pillar of the 'corporate university' model, i.e. university power structures, the solutions introduced in 2019 by public universities in Poland place the university system closer to a model in line with managerial logic. This is demonstrated by the substantial reduction of the academic collegiate body's role at faculty level. Only four universities have maintained the traditional decision-making prerogatives of the faculty council, also reducing deans' decision-making powers. These types of phenomena correspond to the vision of a university, which is managed by strong academic leaders, a rector at university level and also the dean. On the one hand, deans' management decisions have been stripped down, but on the other they do not have to undergo verification as part of academic collegiate procedures. This means strengthening the position of deans in their units but also weakening this position in relation to the rector.

Such changes in the power structures of universities are not accompanied by the professionalization of management processes. Before the reform, the university system was within the traditional model of "academic representative democracy" (Olsen, 2007, p. 32), whose essence lay in the broad powers of academic collegiate bodies. Therefore, one can point to the occurrence of a specific paradox. The universities that maintained traditional academic authority structures made

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<sup>2</sup> Universities in which the dean's competences were not mentioned were also included in this group.

more extensive use of business management methods such as strategic management and financial planning. Research has shown that the implementation of such tools does not necessarily mean the introduction of hierarchical, corporate power structures. They can also be effective when management processes are characterized by the autonomy of internal units and the collegiality of the decision-making processes.

In this context, it can be stated that the management model of the reformed university does not fully fit into the idea of the so-called 'hard managerialism' or 'corporate rationality'. The essential component of such a vision of the university, which is the implementation of business management methods, is missing. This is particularly important to such complex organizations as public universities, which are characterized by the structural complexity of the processes implemented there (Kivistö and Hölttä, 2008, p. 334). This consists in 'horizontal', 'vertical' and 'spatial' differentiation of universities resulting from the presence of separate organizational units, each of which carries out its tasks, extensive hierarchical organizational structures and dispersed location of activity (Kivistö, 2007, p. 60). These types of organizations are especially predestined to implement managerial management methods, especially strategic management.

The effectiveness of decisions made by a strong academic leader is conditioned not only by 'voting power', but also by 'vote quality'. This applies especially to long-term management processes. The growing dynamics of changes in the economic, demographic, social and political environment means that a university's success is determined by the right strategic choices and consistency in their implementation. This requires the ability to translate the organization's vision into strategic and operational goals, and then implementing effective methods to monitor the results achieved. Academic collegiate bodies, the senate at the university level and the faculty council at a basic unit level should play a key role in these processes. At the same time, whether these bodies effectively perform such tasks is conditioned by adopting the path of transformation referring to the idea of 'soft managerialism'.

## 4. Conclusions

One of the most important changes in the reforms of the Polish higher education system, referred to as Act 2.0, is the redefinition of the role played by the university's governing bodies. This leads, on the one hand, to strengthening the position of the university's rector, and, on the other hand, to reducing the role played by academic collegiate bodies. At the same time, the principle of institutional autonomy has been maintained, which means that universities can independently shape selected elements of their system, including especially those that are associated with the principles of the functioning of basic units, i.e. faculties.

The results of research conducted on a sample of 18 public universities indicate the existence of two regularities. Firstly, taking into account the first pillar of the 'corporate university' model, i.e. university power structures, the solutions introduced

in 2019 by senates of Polish public universities place the university system closer to the model in line with managerial logic. A departure takes place from the traditional decision-making and opinion-making functions performed by faculty councils, in favour of advisory and opinion-making functions. At the same time, changes in university power structures are not accompanied by the professionalization of management processes. Paradoxically, universities that maintained traditional academic authority structures before the reform made more extensive use of business management methods such as strategic management and financial planning. In this context, it can be stated that the management model of the reformed university does not fully fit into the idea of the so-called ‘hard managerialism’ or ‘corporate rationality’.

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