

On the verge of liberal arts education: the case of MISH in Poland

Daniel Kontowski

PhD student in Department of Education Studies and Liberal Arts at University of Winchester and a research project leader at the University of Warsaw

Contact: daniel@kontowski.com

Bio: Daniel Kontowski is a PhD student in Department of Education Studies and Liberal Arts at University of Winchester and a research project leader at the University of Warsaw. He is currently conducting a comparative study of aims, principles and values of first generation leaders of eight European liberal education initiatives launched during last three decades. Daniel graduated from Polish liberal education programs (MISH UW and KAL UW), and studied the idea of liberal education in Dutch university colleges, Russian liberal arts colleges and selected institutions in the U.S (2012-16). Daniel was a Visiting Scholar at Boston College Center for International Higher Education and at Wagner College. His research interests include public mission of higher education, governance and internationalization. More information can be accessed at www.kontowski.com

Suggested citation: Kontowski, D. (2016). On the verge of liberal arts education: the case of MISH in Poland. *Working Papers in Higher Education Studies*, 2(1), 58-94.

The article is available online at: <http://www.wphes-journal.eu/>

On the verge of liberal arts education: the case of MISH in Poland

Daniel Kontowski

The following article analyses MISH college, a liberal education program at the University of Warsaw (UW). The article is based on a critique of existing research on the issue, and proposes an inductive approach to defining liberal education. Reconstructing the coherent idea behind MISH contributes to both understanding of European liberal education and related methodological debate.

In 1993 MISH offered a small group of selected candidates an opportunity to develop cross-disciplinary, individual curricula and work with an academic tutor. The model spread to 9 Polish research universities, as well as 6 other institutions in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Despite subsequent creation of a separate degree-granting program in Kolegium Artes Liberales UW in 2008, MISH continues to operate as a self-identifying liberal education program.

The Author claims that in the case of MISH, the aim (active, engaged and trusting academic community) and principles (critical thinking, communal thinking, and operational independence) are related to values (opposition, republicanism, autonomy). Organization of MISH complicates its classification, while its idea bears marks of a unique “variation on the theme” of liberal education in Europe. The article advocates for greater emphasis on diverse ideas of liberal education in the pluralist European higher education landscape.

Key words: liberal arts education, liberal education, interdisciplinary education, Polish higher education, Eastern Europe

Introduction

The paper analyses a little-known institution that embodied a very peculiar idea and practice of liberal education. MISH (Międzywydziałowe Indywidualne Studia Humanistyczne, or Inter-Faculty Individual Studies in the Humanities at the University of Warsaw, hereafter MISH UW) shows how the idea of liberal education (rather than organization or curriculum) might be the most important lens through which we might observe the development of liberal education outside the United States. This working paper is an attempt to create the inductive definition of liberal education, one grounded

in the institution rather than imposed externally. It is hoped that a description and interpretation of MISH would draw more attention to internal diversity of the liberal education “movement” in Europe.

The first section provides a general picture of the liberal education movement in higher education and introduces the basic facts, significance, and guiding questions with regards to MISH UW. The second heading discusses existing literature on European liberal education (ELE) and its relevance for the study of MISH UW. Third section consists of original analysis of the idea of liberal education present in curriculum, definition(s) and aims, principles and values of MISH UW. After discussing the specific features of the program as a liberal education program in part four, the conclusion suggests the benefits of adopting the proposed alternative view for further comparative studies on other liberal education institutions outside the U.S.

The big picture: Liberal Education and the Polish case

Despite its long history and extensive practice, there is no theoretical nor operational agreement as to what liberal (arts/arts and sciences) education is about. Ancient Athens of the Golden Age (Mulcahy, 2008; Nussbaum, 2008; Rothblatt, 2003; Rudolph, 1990) is often identified as its birthplace. Three separate and dialoguing tradition of liberal education were initiated by Plato (according to W. Jeager), Isocrates (E. Curtius) and Aristotle (J.H. Newman) (Kimball, 2010, pp. 1–8). The concept of liberal arts (*artes liberales*) was a basis for a roughly common undergraduate curriculum of the medieval university (Clark & Jain, 2013, pp. 30–81), but its practice had since diversified. Oxbridge tutorial model, Humboldtian Bildung and especially American liberal arts colleges have all shown some similarities and inspirations, by the tradition of liberal education. The latter, with bucolic campuses and broad undergraduate curricula, became the most popular proxy of the idea in the 20th century (Koblik & Graubard, 2000). But even in the U.S., the term “liberal education” was indeed used generously, as various practices, realizing diverse principles and aims, have been labelled as “liberal (arts) education”, to the detriment of conceptual coherence, which led Thomas F. Green to conclude: „There is no such thing as the American theory of liberal education” (1976, p. 36).

While in the U.S., liberal education has for three decades been besieged by culture wars, privatization agenda, and the push towards employable, preferably STEM, its promoters

attempted to reframe the somehow elitist ideal in terms of “inclusive excellence”, by focusing on transdisciplinary skills that deem such education more marketable, civically minded and empowering students as critical thinkers (LEAP National Leadership Council, 2007, p. 18; Project on Liberal Education and the Sciences, 1990, p. xi). The ideal of liberal arts, as curriculum, or small college, as institutional setting, as exclusive places for true liberal education have been long abandoned, which allowed for strategic alliances nationally and inspired similar developments in other regions.

The end of Cold War, globalization and diversification of higher education systems worldwide led to a historically unprecedented rise in the number of liberal education programs outside the U.S., independently developed and referring to the same, although fuzzy, idea of the liberal education.

An exploratory study by Godwin (2013) states that liberal education initiatives in higher education can now be found on six continents, in 58 countries, with the biggest growth taking place in Asia (Jung, Nishimura, & Sasao, 2016) and Europe (van der Wende, 2011) which I would call the last European Liberal Education (hereafter ELE). However, regional and national differences on shaping educational practice associated with liberal education has not been very well understood, or even acknowledged. While the developments in liberal education received attention in Netherlands and in the UK, Eastern European liberal education remained more of a terra incognita.

MISH – the first Polish liberal education initiative

In 1992 a selective, interdisciplinary program was launched in mathematics and natural sciences. MISH, operating on similar premises, followed in 1993; only couple of years later it self-identified as an endeavour in liberal education¹. It was offered by the biggest Polish public research university (UW). While legal and institutional details are not the main scope of this study, the confusion in the literature of the subject requires setting the record straight.

MISH can be best described as quasi-honours, cross-disciplinary, elective study path made up of courses offered across the university selected by a student with the help of academic tutor. It has historically been offered to a selected group of best candidates, and importantly, has been labelled by its leaders as a form of liberal education. Despite being

called a “college”, it has never been a residential institution nor has it independently offered a full curriculum, and it remained purely non-vocational. Classes offered by the university that MISH students could attend to obtain a joint (magister) degree were entirely in Polish. MISH had limited organizational footprint, with no faculty, own curriculum, or limited oversight over tutors. It might well be said to be a product of the culture of trust and freedom, internalized by academics and admitted students, to the end of utilizing the best of educational opportunities offered by the university.

The success of the enrolment procedure, the innovative spirit of Polish universities during this time of limited bureaucratic control, and the general enthusiasm for a small-scale, elite path of education allowing students to break through departmental walls guided by an academic tutor – was critical for the success of the program. In the early 1990s, it was assumed that those individual, interdepartmental study paths were just “prototype solutions” (Axer, 2010, p. 9) that, if proven successful, would pave the way to original reorganization of the whole university into a less departmental and more collegiate structure. An exercise in what was possible at a time using existing resources, was a break away from what faculty described as mass, departmentalized, monodisciplinary, tunnel-like education dominating higher education in the communist timesⁱⁱ.

Significance

MISH – or one/two-area, multidisciplinary studies constructed from courses already offered by a research university – became the Polish model for liberal education. It is surrounded by few related and similarly called initiatives that serve related purposes, which raises its importance but also generate confusion to most outsiders.

“Academia Artes Liberales,” a project started in 1996, helped create MISH studies at 8 other major Polish universities. There are ca. 1500 students studying in MISH formula in Poland, with other institutions having smaller student bodies, and sometimes different organizational and curricular arrangements. Despite a growth in private higher education, two attempts to create MISH at Polish private universities failed. Since 1996 what became International School for the Humanities (MSH) popularized MISH internationally, and similar structures were established in the regionⁱⁱⁱ.

MISH was largely dependent on existing faculties, and the support of rectors. It grew from a laboratory to more mainstream educational option. The attention and private grants originally attracted by MISH paved the way for Kolegium Artes Liberales (hereafter KAL, also at the University of Warsaw), which opened in 2008. The innovative spirit of MISH was somehow overshadowed by the ambitious and a more extensive vision of liberal education of the new institution. Both for KAL, and almost all ELEs, MISH remains “the older brother”.

Despite national and international role of MISH, descriptive and analytical studies were limited and unsystematic. Eva Kowalski (2012), a Canadian scholar, portrayed developments of liberal education in Poland primarily as part of the post-Soviet space. Kowalski undertook a difficult task and falsely merged MISH with KAL, a fair mistake that nevertheless obscured the quality of conclusions. Comparative studies of ELEs (van der Wende 2011, Godwin 2013) paid little attention to Poland, and if they did, they struggle with organizational details of MISH and tend to focus on KAL instead. Another article (Krajewska & Kowalczyk-Walędziak 2014) focus discusses MISH as example of academic tutoring. Most extensive information can be gathered from works authored by Jerzy Axer (founder of MISH) which serve both descriptive and rhetorical purposes. Despite being a primary source, they have never been subject to a scholarly analysis.

Research question

The elusiveness of MISH can be best seen in terms of self-description. Without a framework or definition of liberal education (especially outside the U.S.), it is hard to classify MISH as such (or not). Unlike many liberal education programs, MISH does not have a general education protocol, but it provides tools for creation of interdisciplinary curricula. It is not offering its own courses or even diplomas, yet unlike most European, and especially American programs, it charges no tuition and remains accessible only based on merit. MISH has only begun to label itself as a liberal education program in circa 1997, and did it mostly for international audience.

I would argue that educational ideal is the best basis for meaningful comparison of ELEs. The potential of such approach would be demonstrated on the example of MISH. This study is guided by a set of questions that are motivated by external interest in MISH as a

case study. How does MISH define itself as liberal arts program, especially given its complex organization? Does it follow what was suggested in existing studies of ELE?

The basic question driving this research is: what idea of liberal education is embodied in MISH? More specifically, how does MISH define itself as a liberal arts program, given its complex organization? Does it follow deductive studies of ELE? What are the elements of this idea of education – its aims, principles, and values – and are they coherent with each other? What does the example of MISH tell us about the benefits of more inductive approach to study of ELE?

MISH vs. main approaches to liberal education

Existing work on ELEs focus on the macro reasons for its development. In the following section I analyse the most relevant literature. While most works focus on the (assumed) unity of purpose and organizational differences among ELEs, MISH does not easily fit the dominating model – as a program that arose from a very complex, context-sensitive idea and operates with somewhat opaque structure.

Theoretical accounts

Existing body of theoretical work presents liberal education as a complex, if not contradictory, tradition. In his milestone work on the idea of liberal education, Bruce A. Kimball (1995) employs a pragmatic approach, that has the potential to embrace this diversity. For Kimball the meaning of a concept is its use over time, so there might be almost as many ideas of liberal education, as many historical examples of philosophers, scholars or institutions speaking of “liberal education”. Self-definition is certainly the most promising way for exploratory studies of ELE – especially without a coherent and understood tradition of institutionalised liberal education in Europe – but at the same time it raises more questions of what is hidden behind the label.

There is considerable diversity in the history of the concept. Where Kimball proposes two major traditions (philosophical and rhetorical), Nigel Tubbs (2015) eruditely reinterprets them in terms of freedom and discipline. Sheldon Rothblatt identified six elements specific for an education that was called liberal (character formation, leadership, breadth of studies, critical thinking, general education and personality development) (Rothblatt, 2003). Currently, some scholars still hold on to a vision the liberal education is in

opposition to a vocation – following the tradition of Aristotle and Seneca the Younger (1988), while others frame it as “practical”, because it addresses general skills that are critical for a rapidly shifting economy (Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy, 2005; Hersh, 1997; see also: Kontowski, 2016c).

Numerous works contain proposals of modern understanding of liberal education (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012; Axer, 1997; Becker, 2014; Eliot, 1909; Newman, 1893; Strauss, 1995). Those are often too general to be operationalized, and/or had normative rather than descriptive character. More recent approaches (Bass, 2014; Harward, 2012) created an elaborate theory that includes four dimensions of liberal education: epistemic, eudemonic, civic, and holistic. These could serve as a diagnostic and improving tool for existing liberal education initiatives, yet they do not define liberal education per se, given that any education might well be said to ideally have all those ideals.

One might come to a somewhat bitter conclusion that any initiative that is primarily non-vocational, interdisciplinary and judged favourably by the speaker (Ferrall, 2011; Glyer & Weeks, 1998) can easily be called liberal education. Liberal education discourse clearly lacks critical approach (Godwin, 2015) and the concept of liberal education requires “faith, not proof” (Bird, 1975, p. 8).

MISH was described (mostly by American authors) and self-described (by its leaders) as liberal education program. Since there is no widely accepted definition or concept of contemporary liberal education, we might conclude that theoretically speaking 1) there is no reason why MISH cannot be called liberal education, and 2) such labelling tells us very little about MISH itself.

Comparative and descriptive accounts

The rise of liberal education programs across the globe has been also noted by higher education scholars, who focused on “what” and “why” questions.

The first systematic study of ELEs was authored by Marijk van der Wende (2011). The starting point is a list of 29 ELEs (which includes KAL but not MISH), followed by discussion on the reasons for emergence of liberal arts in Europe. Wende describes a

happy convergence between the Bologna Process, diversification suggestions from supranational organizations (e.g. OECD) and the (resulting) rise of ELEs. The growth should be credited to the demand for broader (interdisciplinary) and more selective (elite) undergraduate curricula. It should be mentioned that there are no stated criteria for creating this list, and the article is based on very general desk research.

To what extent we can seriously assume that interdisciplinarity and elitism were two (and only) drivers behind all 29 ELEs? General, cross-country explanations do not tell us very much with regards to such marginal phenomena as ELE. To give an example, unlike the Netherlands that operated on open admission, in Poland all higher education programs at public universities were fairly selective – MISH attracted a small subset of the most academically able candidates looking for more educational freedom. 10-15 years after the creation of MISH did Poland introduced Bachelor degrees (and more as organizational “window dressing” in response to external pressure (Oliver, 1991)), while it happened almost concurrently in the Netherlands.

Van der Wende’s account shows some strengths in interpreting Dutch liberal education (and its unparalleled growth), but cannot offer much in terms of principles, aims or values associated with ELEs by its leaders, teachers or students and parents. And since her list is very diverse organizationally (public and private, independent and externally controlled, accredited in the US and not), one might wonder how those qualities translate into educational philosophy. Similarly, to some earlier works, van der Wende assumes such fundamental unity (Abrahám, 2012; Becker, 2015; Gillespie, 2001; Tymowski, 1998) rather than search for evidence.

Kara Godwin compiled Global Liberal Education Inventory (GLEI) in order to catalogue and classify institutions of liberal education outside the US. She proposed to overcome a methodological impasse associated with authoritative lists by proposing a pragmatic (self-identification as liberal education program) or material criterion for inclusion. The latter fulfilment can be summarised as having (based on (Godwin, 2013, pp. 48–52)):

- 1) interdisciplinary curriculum;
- 2) with a general education protocol; and
- 3) at least two out of those three items:
 - a) transferrable skills,

- b) civic/ethics/global competence,
- c) student-centeredness/holistic development.

MISH appears on GLEI as a non-degree granting program (Godwin, 2013, pp. 315–16) hosted by a public university^{iv}.

Godwin proposes a twofold explanation for the rise of ELE. In Western Europe, ELES stemmed from a need for a curriculum reform; in Eastern Europe, ELES were the result from shifts in political power; both regions were also directly influenced by the Bologna Process. Godwin concludes with identifying three types of rationales for the rise of ELES: global macro (knowledge economy, international competition, massification, Bologna); national macro (eg. Dearing Report), and micro rationales (institutions, programs, courses and individuals).

The power of Bologna to force university leaders to create a distinct undergraduate curricular philosophy might be doubted; indeed, many faculty sought to participate in liberal education initiatives as a way to contradict the principles of such reform, especially the driving concern to make universities contribute to the knowledge economy. The EU and OECD can be facilitators of elitist and general curricula, but they have little leverage to generate policy change in higher education given university autonomy and limited incentives. Furthermore, Bologna did not influence higher education policy seriously before 2000, and Europe has already had 34 ELES by then. It would be unprecedented for universities to anticipate change rather than react to what already became pressing reality.

With regards to MISH and other liberal education initiatives in the region, it might also portraying universities during communist times as certainly lacking responsibility, democracy and freedom might be too simplistic. Even though Eastern European countries experienced political and economic transformation in the 1990s, guided by those very values in the 1990s, the push to restore those values in higher education systems seems surprisingly limited. If we had to assume that liberal education represents the best institutional arrangement to promote those very values, we would have to conclude from the lack of serious organizational and curricular transformations in public higher education that relevant stakeholders had apparently very different priorities.

Godwin should be credited for the sincere attempt to discern between the conditions of establishing ELEs in Eastern and Western Europe, which might be the first step towards acknowledging the diversity among ELEs. Her diachronic comparative perspective allows to follow the changing trends in ownership, religious affiliation, language of instruction, and international and national affiliation and accreditation of newly established programs. However, her account also overplays global macro rationales that have not been efficient drivers of policy change in higher education in Poland. Godwin admits that the micro rationales are not her priority - and those are specifically important in case of MISH as a local, low-cost, low-profile innovation. National or institutional motivations and conditions resulting in the development of MISH, as well as personal vision of liberal education, are undetectable in such a study.

The remaining body of work on ELEs is either very minor (Adriaansens, 2014; Dahrendorf, 2000; Harward, 2007; Norgaard, 2014), focuses on a single country (Adriaansens, 2014; Ivanova & Sokolov, 2015), a single institution (those are works typically written by their deans) (Adriaansens, n.d.; Becker, Kortunov, & Fedchin, 2012; Detweiler & Axer, 2012a; Kowalski, 2012; Norgaard & Hajnal, 2014; Oomen, 2016; Servant, Frens, & Schmidt, n.d.; van der Wende & Reumer, 2010; van der Wende, 2013; Wilczek, 2013), or are journalistic pieces (Holdsworth, 2000; Redden, 2009, 2013; Stroop, 2014; Woodard, 2002). Those relevant for Poland have to be briefly mentioned.

Regional accounts on liberal education in Eastern Europe

In the late 1990s, scholars first noted the existence of an ELE in Poland. Andrzej W. Tymowski (1998) was among the first to use the label for two institutions in Poland and Russia, which he believes subscribe to an idea of education for education's sake. This brief account rightly captures the non-commercial spirit behind the idea of education at MISH, contrary to dominating trends of then rapid privatisation of Polish higher education.

Susan Gillespie (2001) analysed international liberal education and mentioned Smolny College in Russia and Central-European "Invisible Colleges" as promoters of multidisciplinary liberal education curricula that experiment with new pedagogical styles (small classes, dialogue, critical thinking (Gillespie, 2001, p. 79)). Gillespie notes the

diversity of motivations behind the liberal education worldwide, but does not address it systematically. Jonathan Becker (her colleague at Bard College, NY) continues her line of inquiry, adding that in post-Soviet space liberal education was the embrace of an ideological antidote to Marxism-Leninism, curricular rigidity, teacher-centred pedagogies and expulsion of the arts (Becker, 2015, p. 34). The differences between political realities in Poland and Soviet Russia limit the scope in which this can be directly referred to MISH^v.

Patti McGill Peterson extends the analysis of challenges to the liberal arts curriculum to various developing countries globally, and with regards to post-Soviet countries she denounces “extreme aversion to liberal education, instead emphasizing departmentalization, segmentation, overspecialization, and the separation of teaching from research” of the previous system; as well as donor policies in the new realities (Peterson, 2012a, pp. 12–13) that support only vocational, marketable lines of study. She employed an inclusive definition of liberal education (promoted by AAC&U), and applied it flexibly to Poland and Russia. Peterson then moves to call those liberal education experiments enormously effective (Peterson, 2012b, p. 235) – without showing criteria of success or conducting an evaluative study. Peterson is mainly interested in the limitations for further development of ELEs. Peterson is right pointing out that new realities of democratizing country were not all roses and unicorns for liberal educators. But again, one cannot understand on such basis what MISH stands for in terms of education.

The development of liberal education in Eastern Europe was financially supported by various foundations (for example OSF HESP programme, Christian A. Johnson Endeavour Foundation, Gagarin Trust), and loosely coincided with the shifting organization of European higher education through the Bologna Process. While the first of those developments have never been systematically acknowledged, the latter was overemphasized by higher education studies scholars that proposed explanation for this unprecedented development. Eastern Europe, including Poland, has its own specifics that can be seen in late and superficial adoption of the Bologna Process, but was also targeted by those external agendas, also in liberal education. It would be fascinating to more closely to see the difficult interplay of the two.

*

Philosophical, comparative and regional works on liberal education do not lend each other well to promote our understanding of MISH. While they provide a very general description of organization and some of the motivations behind MISH, they do not address more fundamental motivations to introduce liberal education in the first place, and how to understand it. We should specifically avoid a deductive bias, or assuming that some general idea of liberal education in Europe, often drawn from Dutch and Russian institutions, would automatically apply to MISH.

One reason that hard to tell what is exactly common for ELEs in different countries is that “the tent housing the enterprise has become a very big one” (Peterson, 2012a, p. 8), as it is. The opacity of MISH requires careful reconstruction. The following account follows the need for “deeper investigation of liberal education programs”, focusing on more organic accounts, case studies and analysis of motivation – one of the postulates identified by Godwin (2013, p. 304)

Inductive approach: MISH and its idea of liberal education

This section contains a delimited case study of MISH UW as a liberal education program (Stake, 1995, p. 3), in which organizational, definitional and ideological dimensions are analysed, contributing to a better understanding of diversity within ELEs. Primary sources consulted include the articles by major figures in history of MISH UW, as well as program descriptions, to keep the study focused on institutions rather than individuals. In some cases, institutional data and interviews have been used to validate the information. This study highlights the idea of liberal education behind MISH and its reflection in curriculum, with occasional references to the Polish context. It cannot be treated as an evaluative study^{vi}, and does not focus on direct comparisons with other liberal education institutions.

Organization and the Curriculum

MISH started as a cooperation of six faculties covering humanities and social sciences. With time, it grew to include fifteen faculties. Deans of those faculties are members of the MISH board, which also includes MISH administrators, student representatives and rector’s appointees. The board is responsible for curricular and organizational issues.

Studying at MISH was deemed prestigious among faculty and some high school teachers^{vii}. The first cohort consisted of only 40 students (recruited from the whole country), who entered a five-year program leading to a “magister” title, equivalent to an five year MA-equivalent degree. Recruitment consisted of two stages: first the results of matriculation exams, and then an interview with a panel of scholars, determining the capability and motivation of undertaking interdisciplinary studies. In the early years of MISH, almost all places have been claimed by laureates of high school knowledge contests.

With the growth of the program and general massification in Polish higher education, this number went up to 120 in 2013, and since 2015 – down to its current 100. The estimated total number of MISH UW graduates is 500 to 600, some 2/3 received two degrees. No data from alumni surveys have been published, and only basic information are collected during enrolment phase.

In financial terms, MISH does not charge tuition, and its revenue is comprised of a direct subvention from the government, calculated per enrolled student. Almost all classes taken by MISH students at UW are taught in Polish.

The basic idea behind MISH was to:

“create within a university a small, modern unit – mini-Oxford or mini-Harvard if you like – in which every student would be allowed to overcome departmental obstacles, pursuing his dream curriculum under the supervision of a personal tutor” (Wróblewski, 2015, p. 76).

A MISH student chooses their academic tutor during the first month of studies, typically from a department the student wishes to graduate. Tutors are responsible for accepting the semester plan of studies, i.e. the choice of courses from eligible departments, and its match with students’ interests and study regulations. The tutor reads, comments and grades the end-of-year papers as well as theses. Since 2014, tutorials may count into working time of faculty.

Understanding MISH curriculum may prove a little more difficult. A “dream curriculum” means that a student should not be restricted by the university regulations, but should attend all classes matching their interest offered by cooperating departments. With some exceptions, this was and is the guiding rule. In addition, perhaps more importantly, a student is supposed to complete at least one MA diploma within five years from inception of the studies. After the implementation of the Bologna Process, this has been changed to a 3+2 formula accordingly, with both levels operating independently. At MISH (and this is true almost exclusively for MISH UW) a student remains in administrative custody of MISH for the entire length of her or his studies, as well as for scholarship and financial aid purposes.

However, it is the academic faculties that are solely responsible for conferring the degrees. In the initial phase, this cooperation was founded with some degree of trust in the tutors and MISH and, therefore, the minimal requirements for the degree were rather limited^{viii}. Today, degree requirements for MISH students grew considerably, but are still lower than those for “regular” students. The adoption of the Bologna at Polish universities technically resulted in doubling the requirements of the previous curriculum (therefore providing more faculty positions), which until 2011 had been regulated by the government, not the universities. The National Qualifications Framework, massification and conservative interest of the faculties are all responsible for a growing number of prescribed courses, and less time for individual study.

Apart from the main degree, a MISH student may pursue a second/supplementary course of study. The requirements are the same, effectively almost doubling the amount of work students need to invest in their studies. At each level, a student is permitted to extend their studies for another year to write a second thesis and attend some classes.

MISH has also a small list of common requirements: a two-semester course on semiotics, and legally required courses in physical education and instructional safety. Additionally, a distribution requirement, called “three methodologies”, set up a minimum number of courses taken in at least three departments during the first three years of study. Mini core curriculum (one elective course from “MISH Module” offer), with interdisciplinary courses was offered for all interdisciplinary students during the 2000s. These days courses offered by KAL play a similar role.

Complex requirements that developed to restrain student choice gradually became a more important part of the student-tutor relationship. With over 45 undergraduate degrees, each with separate requirements, the successful assemblage of a study plan becomes a complex task to complete and assess. MISH students often encounter scheduling conflicts, and academic advising has proven difficult for over 300 MISH tutors.

Definition: how does MISH define liberal education?

MISH follows the initial intention of providing the best high school students with an opportunity to gain a solid general education, a strong dedication to student choice and relevant, scientific ways of thinking (Wróblewski, 2010, pp. 12–13). In this respect, it follows the student-approach to higher education, which informed liberal education movement during the last few decades.

The principal belief in the interconnectedness of all knowledge that lay behind the formulation of MISH informed the attempts to create a limited opportunity to work outside departmentalization. Although MISH did not reach the level of independently run co-taught classes or summer schools, it nevertheless created an important precedence. The elective principle across degree granting programs helped introduce elective courses within it.

The concept of liberal education was not part of Polish educational history, and its vocabulary was not widely adopted even by MISH^{ix}. There are three possible reasons for this: lack of adequate knowledge about colleges of liberal arts and sciences^x, an interest in more conservative sources of inspiration or an anti-colonial sentiment. It was only in 1997 that Jerzy Axer first used the term “liberal education” to depict what he hoped to establish at MISH – and only for the international audience. According to Axer, MISH was originally based on intuition (Axer, 1998, p. 113) rather than on the American tradition of liberal education. Outside the Anglo-Saxon world, abstaining from using the name might also be a result of practical difficulties.

But even without the name, MISH in its own way tried to implement liberal education principles. In its curriculum, it opted to emphasize student choice. In the initial phases it insisted that students select courses from three different disciplines from humanities or the social sciences, leaving it up to the student and tutor to make specific decisions – as

well as accepting the responsibility connected to this greater freedom. In terms of pedagogy, although MISH did not offer its own courses, its students were attending seminars early on, which later found its way to becoming pedagogically required by internal regulation; regular meetings with a tutor were supposed to further engage the student, creating master-apprentice pairs. Finally, students were supposed to develop intellectually, rather than gaining skills needed in the rapidly evolving Polish economy of the time. Thus, the aim of the education offered by MISH was from the onset not purely economic. Rather than aiming to create informed citizens, or flexible workers, the guiding idea was that of interdisciplinary research through general education^{xi}. This had to do with the perceived high quality and extensiveness of the secondary school curriculum, high selectivity of admissions and the perception that many MISH students would ultimately stay in the academia.

Poland has a long university tradition that is mainly academic, without organised ways of making its operations relevant to the broader society. Individuals – recently members of intelligentsia – not institutions, have civic responsibilities. Polish higher education was for a long time elitist, devoted to expanding research and paying little attention to students. The purpose of liberal education, on the other hand, is typically linked with democracy, rather than the traditional leadership of aristocrats or clergymen. At the crossroads, MISH was part of the movement for a better university, which was ultimately to create a transformed society (e.g. one comprising of more responsible and active citizens). However, beyond academic content/courses in support of this aim, it included no further tools for achieving this purpose.

Axer's vision behind the creation of MISH UW did not end at the organization of studies for the excellent students and calling it liberal education. At the heart of MISH was the need to reconstruct the connection between the scientific community – which MISH was supposed to be a good example of – and the needs of a society after the democratic transformation.

Idea: aims, principles and values

I would like to analyse this complex idea through the lens of aims, principles and values, as presented in articles and mission statements and with regards to the context of Polish higher education post democratic transformation.

Polish higher education was state-organized or state-controlled during the communist period. The official ideology of the system promoted integration of university programmes with the needs of industry. The dominant model was a large research university, divided in departments run by a collective management of faculty members devoted to research and teaching, with 5-year degree programs in specific disciplines, resulting in a M.A. or M.Sc. (Edquist, Fulton, Hackl, Santiago, & El-Khawas, 2007). As a “degenerated form of Humboldtian university”, it did not offer full academic freedom (Detweiler & Axer, 2012a, p. 243), although ideological pressure was weak, especially after the “Solidarity” movement. Faculty wages didn’t equal their high social prestige; academic mobility was practically non-existent (Yudkevich, Altbach, & Rumbley, 2015). Publishing in Western journals was practically impossible. University curricula were set by the ministry for all universities, which were charged with providing education to a marginal portion of the population.

The democratic transformation of 1989 legalised private universities, which were created to cope with a skyrocketing demand for higher education. Those new institutions never achieved status or research visibility comparable to public institutions, and are now challenged by weak demography (Kwiek, 2002, 2016b; Musial, 1983; Siwinska, 2011). Bureaucratic control from the ministry weakened, but the model of higher education itself was not contested at a large scale: it remained strictly departmental, with some academic and some vocational professional study programmes (Kowalski, 2012). Even joining the EU and acquiring subsequent access to the European Higher Education Area did not substantially affect university governance and internationalization. Polish universities have by and large inefficient systems of collegiate management, an insufficient amount of valuable research, internationally unattractive study programs, an almost non-existent mobility of faculty (if exceptions exist, they are international and generally one-way) and disciplinary/departmental boundaries (Kwiek, 2016a; The World Bank & European Investment Bank, 2004, pp. 26–28; Wilczek, 2013, p. 211). MISH was an alternative only to the last of those ^{xii}.

With that in mind, MISH was a response to perceived shortcomings and an alternative proposal.

“The Interdepartmental Individual Studies in the Humanities have been established for gifted students who are willing to assume co-responsibility of realizing their own, individual programme, created by them with the cooperation of the tutor (...). The structure of MISH could be treated as a certain proposal leading to reforms especially towards overcoming a system in which the student is restricted in deciding about the selection of his trend of education. MISH experiences can serve as an example of contacts between various humanities departments (...) to better employ the qualifications of the staff and to offer the students a chance for a more all-sided education. MISH is already regarded as such a model, as is testified by attempts at copying its concept in other schools of higher learning” – MISH 2000 leaflet, as quoted in (Gillespie, 2001, p. 82).

Although MISH was a curricular innovation, dedicated to the most academically able students, it was based on a vision of the university that did not exist in Poland. Technically, it was a mode of study, but strategically, it was also a different organizational model for the university^{xiii}.

This proposal was a variation on the theme of liberal education, which in the case of MISH UW took the shape of a tri-dimensional aim of an active, engaged and trusting academic community that the best students were invited to join in amidst the new realities of a democratic Poland. Those three dimensions were reflected in three modes of thought – critical thinking, communal thinking, and operational independence – or in terms of values: opposition, republicanism, autonomy.

The oppositional status of MISH is the first face of Polish liberal education. In recurring situations, its creation exists as fierce opposition to some “system”: the government, free-market and university organization. MISH was supposed to treat them suspiciously and act as a Trojan Horse (Axer, 2015), an institution that will challenge the system of bureaucratic oppression, especially given its classical roots and Axer’s background (he was an elected dean during the 1980-81 “Solidarity” period)^{xiv}. But it was also supposed to challenge the commodification narrative which sees education as merely a way to harness greater income (market incentives, often referred to as “the city”). The first impulse of this opposition was against the university as it appeared in the early 1990s. Specialization and disregard of “unity of knowledge” forced students to “choose their

“cage” for five years^{xv}. “Setting up new, model, “genuine” humanities studies” (Detweiler & Axer, 2012b, p. 243), was a response to the situation in which universities ceased to teach properly – and need now to be opposed from the inside. Poland has a long tradition of grassroots education, deemed illegal during periods of non-sovereignty^{xvi}, and Axer saw his educational project as an extension of those trust-based learning circles that were vehicles of critical thinking in times when political action was suppressed^{xvii}.

Republicanism of such education starts with overcoming the lack of engagement:

“Liberal education is the ideal training in qualities which became obsolete in the communist society: readiness to take risks and to accept responsibility of one’s own choice. Liberal education is for those who are willing to take chances” (Axer, 1997, p. 118). Axer’ concern lies in framing education as a common good, and therefore linking the development of a responsible, risk-taking, engaged and idealistic student with advancing the good of the *res publica*. This is an idea that comes down to the Enlightenment-like concern for preparation of future elites – this dubious term recurs, although never in its economic understanding. The university devoted to liberal learning is capable of providing “what money can’t buy”; better citizens. MISH operates on a principle that “elite” is not bad, that every society needs an elite, and that a true elite starts with a true education. As this elite would not be detached from the society, its critical thinking abilities and cultural capital would inform new Polish civil society^{xviii}.

As a side note, this open republicanism was not to be beneficial in Poland only. A symposium on liberal education in Eastern Europe convened by Axer and Nicholas Farnham in 2000 attracted representatives of 39 regional institutions and American scholars. Under the “*Artes Liberales*” movement, attending representatives of Russian, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Belarussian institutions declared that:

“We must prepare the next generation to live and to assume leadership roles in a globalised world, where it is essential that citizens be tolerant of other traditions and respectful of local differences. Challenging students to “become thoughtful human beings and responsible citizens” should take place within a framework of

better teaching, professional workshops and student exchange programmes” – as quoted in (Holdsworth, 2000).

Axer believes that everybody is “*anima naturaliter liberalis*”, because European cultures are built on the fundament of *artes liberales*. Therefore, the mirror of classical tradition is the best way to achieve liberal education^{xix}, in a dialogic relation between a student and a tutor in their free time, or “*quoniam amicitiae mentionem fecisti et sumus otiosi*” (Cic. *Amic.* 16). At a 1997 conference on liberal education in New York, Axer uses another classical trope to speak about his vision of liberal education:

“We have left the smouldering ruins of Troy behind us, and our task resembles the mission of Aeneas, who was to revive it in another form and time. The meaning of such a mission can be formulated in the language of the classical tradition, and words which seem to be just commonplaces when heard and spoken in the squabbles and hubbub of daily life, regain their sense and authority thanks to the recollections of their original contexts. If we wish to prepare society for becoming truly civic, and make citizens ready for participation in community instead of being outside observers, we must restore the conceptual apparatus, which endows meaning to the notion of *Res Publica*” ((Axer, 1998, p. 115), later also quoted in (Bellah, 2006, p. 471; Katz, 1997, p. 3)).

To achieve this aim, the university ought to be shaped so that it would allow for its operational independence – or multi-level autonomy, based on trust. A social contract of a sort is needed to provide public institutions with autonomy without retracting public funding. Polish liberal educators stress the tradition of university autonomy (religiously referring to a famous Polish philosopher, Kazimierz Twardowski speech from 1932) as a necessary requirement for a valuable education to be delivered in small-scale, excellence-based academic units, alongside the massified higher education system^{xx}. MISH operates on the “return to the origins” rationale, which promotes individual choice and shifts responsibility for educational effects from centrally designed curricula and external quality assurance schemes to tutorial pairs that are as varied as students and faculty members can be. This is supposed to be a single, autonomous, model unit of knowledge production and dissemination, and therefore a vehicle for liberal education. Although classical studies hold a special place as a non-marketable, arcane area of knowledge, the

benefits of university autonomy can be enjoyed across disciplines. Axer believes that universities have a special role in developing civil society, because of qualities of the academic community.

In case of MISH UW, oppositional, republican and autonomous dimension are interrelated:

“The idea of universities free from any government political pressure, concentrated mainly on their mission to liberate individuals from the totalitarian system’s legacy, encouraging them to be active and responsible and to reveal instead of conceal their desires and needs. Our aim was to break free of imposed restraints in favour of restraints intentionally chosen and accepted by teachers and students in their desire to renew the university community protected by its autonomy from future claims by authorities” (Detweiler & Axer, 2012a, p. 243).

Liberal education is not a task for a single unit, but would preferably be implemented by the university as a whole – and all true universities. This would have consequences in missions, curricula, learning outcomes and values in higher education.

The university is capable to improve society by preparing students for the future. However, it must be granted substantial and procedural autonomy, for practical reasons. Academic skills are useful to that end, and reviving *universitas* – a common body of students and professors – is the best way to transmit academic spirit and capabilities to the broader society. When left to their own devices and guaranteed means to realize their own aims, universities will create a future elite that everyone will benefit from. It is hoped that this will restore trust to the civil society in a post-communist country by training students in a trust-based environment.

When it comes to curriculum, accenting breadth of education is combined with an in-depth learning. The distribution requirements are set, but ways of its realization still depend on student choices.

As to the values promoted by this education, the first is by no means freedom of choice of courses. MISH serves only the best students, although it may be claimed that all

academia can benefit from the more democratic presence of the brightest minds – if they are drawn by interesting courses, there are no structural obstacles to prohibit them joining the class. Not particular departments, but university as a joint community should be working for the public good.

Discussion: MISH as borderline liberal education program

MISH started with a simple “tweak” to the system – to open courses across the university for the best students, regardless of their “home” department. However, it would be unfair to reduce MISH to a mechanical improvement. Understanding its unparalleled success requires accounting for both low entrance cost for the universities, the success of MISH UW, the personal leadership of Axer and the coherence of the idea of liberal education that lies at the heart of the project. This coherent idea, even if not officially admitted by MISH, is central to understanding the influence of Axer’s “intuitional” educational philosophy.

There are differences between MISH and some more independent, “full” liberal education programs across Europe. Despite using a name of a “college”, MISH students do not share a common college experience as is the case in Dutch residential university colleges offering liberal arts degrees, and many others. Contrary to the European mainstream, MISH uses Polish instead of English as language of instruction. Most importantly, it describes itself as offering individual, interdisciplinary studies rather than as offering a liberal (arts) education, as in Smolny College in Petersburg.

MISH is an individual mode of study, in a serious sense of the word. Students, with the help of a tutor, find a compromise between what is required by the academic faculty and what they wish to study. MISH students may become better citizens, more insightful academics, more interesting or conscious people, etc. – but no one, including MISH – can be held responsible for achieving those aims.

The operational dependence of MISH may be intentional. Students – as citizens in a free market economy – should be held responsible for their choices all the way through university, not merely at the beginning. At the same time, the belief in university autonomy and in the quality of the academic community suggest that “the good is out

there”, and all that is left to do is to remove the obstacles that deny access to those who want to pursue it.

MISH is also subject to a paradox between a far-reaching ideology and small scale action. One example is the idea of interdisciplinary studies that in the case of MISH is realized through multidisciplinary curriculum; liberal education, as it is understood by Axer, can help achieve wider societal aims, not purely improve higher education systems. At the same time, Axer’s institutions lurk in the shadow of educational landscape, without exposing themselves to a wider audience; they remain operationally and financially dependent on the big research university, and do not aim to attract a large volume of applicants – only those that fit institutional profile. Without large scale promotion, the knowledge of the program becomes a characteristic of the ideal candidate.

MISH is a fascinating collage of an Oxbridge tutorial model, American idea of elective curriculum, Humboldtian belief in a research community and the anti-oppression tradition of Polish education. Until 2008, instead of creating a parallel, top-league general curriculum, this model remained a structural advancement using existing resources. The ideas of opposition, republicanism and autonomy were pursued within existing universities, without substantial cost, and based on mutual trust between faculty members and students. Over time, this model was “mainstreamed”: instead of being a “prototype” or “laboratory” for a large-scale change in higher education, it became an accepted solution for some academically able students to make their education a little bit better. Resurging bureaucratization of Polish academia which started in 2007 limited the space of uncertainty in which MISH operated for a long time.

Although this grounded the model in a higher education system, it also challenged the assumption that the aims of opposition, republicanism and autonomy can effectively be pursued within MISH. This marks a time when a new vehicle for liberal education was much needed: it was embodied in KAL, a new project of Jerzy Axer’s circle, building on the success of MISH, but aiming for an independent liberal arts curriculum.

Conclusion

Without attempting an evaluative study, it might be concluded that at least at the theoretical level MISH could be understood as a coherent variation on a theme of liberal

education. The aims – active, engaged and trusting academic community as a potential core for a democratic society, are to be achieved by principles of critical thinking, communal thinking and operational independence, and based on values, such as opposition, republicanism and autonomy. Framing MISH as such is an original contribution, and does not necessarily reflect either past or current views held by leaders of the program. Far from presenting this model as a guideline for other institutions, the intention of the paper was to describe, analyse and understand an educational innovation in its context. Its relation to the idea of liberal education is not weaker, but also not stronger, than of others ELEs.

Because of the deep organizational diversity across ten institutions that currently run at least one of the multidisciplinary studies, this analysis applies only to MISH UW. While the national spread is notable (also for discussion of diversity in liberal education provision), MISH at UW achieved the most autonomy, the biggest scale and international recognition, and was also the only directly referring to the idea of liberal education. Individual interdisciplinary studies in mathematics and natural sciences are even “thinner”, both in administrative and theoretical side – and did not self-describe as liberal education.

The proposed model of analysis, one that focuses on the idea of liberal education, might be of special interest to scholars working on ELE in the future, mostly given its ability to acknowledge and deal with diversity. While Kara Godwin proposed the first steps to catalogue basic organizational and curricular diversity among ELEs (and there is a clear way forward from her studies), the mission diversity with ELE might have appeared a little bit taboo, since the whole “movement” is rather marginal and has only recently gained more attention. But this diversity is real. If the only thing ELEs have in common is the idea of liberal education, analysing it too closely might reduce the common ground to just a discursive one – associated with a common name. But this is a risk worth taking, both for ethical, and political reasons.

Pluralism of ELEs might be considered a weakness, but it would also serve as evidence that the tradition of liberal education is alive outside of the US and has not been mechanically transplanted from one institution and higher education system to another. Indeed, it is lack of diversity that should have surprised us, given the strong national

traditions of higher education systems and often major separate problems in each of them. Focusing more on the idea of liberal education would also be a necessity in serious comparative studies of liberal education in different cultures, for example recently in Asia. There is no longer a consensus on what liberal education looks like, there are no guidelines to establish and deliver it, and there is no clear and accepted distinction between liberal and non-liberal education. Facing this diversity might reveal not only differences, but also surprising commonalities between different programs. With a skyrocketing population of students undergoing liberal education outside the US, we are entering a phase in which serious scholarship might be of better service to liberal education than ritual pats on the back saying that “we all want the same thing”. We probably don’t, and that is even better.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer that provided very valuable feedback to an earlier draft. Suggestions from Sarah Stockdale, Aleksandra M. Swatek and David undoubtedly improved the article in many respects. I am also indebted to Jerzy Axer, founder of MISH UW that I can proudly call my alma mater, and Marta Bucholc, my tutor and supervisor of a Diamond Grant research project. All remaining mistakes are, of course, only my own.

Financing and conflicts of interest

The work was financially supported by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education from the funds for the studies in the years 2012-2016 as a part of “Diamond Grant” programme, statutory research project no. DI2011 019541. The article might not represent the official views of MISH UW.

ⁱ The history of MISH is complicated. Although its founder, classicist prof. Jerzy Axer, proposed MISH to the UW rector Andrzej K. Wróblewski in a 1992 one-page letter, and subsequently received approval from the university senate, the inception of the institution is rooted in the democratic transformation of 1989. In that year, Wróblewski assumed office; a trained physicist with a strong track record of international research and visiting positions in the US, he wanted to establish a general undergraduate studies

program for all UW students with subsequent specialization in different faculties. This liberal education idea was not well received, so in a second attempt – with a special Advisory Committee – he proposed a reorganization that would merge faculties into 4-5 Schools that would admit students studying in different areas (Wróblewski, 2015, p. 75). Met with an opposition of many senators afraid of the radical character of the changes and unpredictable effects of its implementation, Wróblewski then settled down to propose an individual, interdepartmental path of studies in the mathematics and natural sciences which was approved under the name of MISMaP college in late 1991 and admitted its first students in October 1992.

- ii Organizationally similar programs include „general social sciences and „general humanities” at Utrecht University (established in the 1980s) or individual study paths at the University of Vienna, probably among some others. Also Kings College London operates on similar principle, with an addition of core curriculum just for liberal arts students.
- iii Of the programs in Lvov, Kiev, Human, Minsk, Hrodna and Rostov-on-Don, with only the latter to survive the attendant political pressures (Sucharski, 2013). More info (in Russian) on www.migo.sfedu.ru
- iv KAL, “Akademia Artes Liberales”, East-Central School of Humanities and Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies, are also part of GLEI, with KAL as the only degree granting program. This description is largely correct. Within Europe, Godwin identified 52 degree-granting and 5 special programs, four of the latter associated to Axer – an interesting suggestion for organisational and curricular diversity of ELE and the role of Polish liberal education.
- v While silos structure (and departmental and disciplinary rigidity) hold true in both cases (Altbach & Kontowski, 2015), ideological intrusions were much weaker post 1956, and the position of a teacher was less dominant (although there naturally were exceptions).
- vi Interested readers may want to consult (Kontowski, 2016a).
- vii Until 2007 between 5 to 10 candidates applied per one open spot. After this period, the numbers went down, and are currently stated as between 3 and 4l applicants. This is largely to changes in leadership, shifting priorities of students, more MISH programs being opened at other universities, very limited promotion and growing bureaucratization of the program. A more detailed evaluation of operation of MISH is provided in (Kontowski, 2016a, 2016b).

- viii Some faculties, for example history, did not require MISH students to attend lectures (or even low-level seminars) if they did not want to, guided by the idea of individual study and personal acquaintance with students. A student may have completed their studies by passing few exams and attending a two-year seminar and subsequently submitting their thesis, which was supposed (by MISH) to be interdisciplinary and academically outstanding.
- ix Modern, non-curricular and non-institutional approaches to define liberal education would allow to claim a status without using a name. < this sentence is incoherent. Would allow [what] to claim a status? What does it mean to ‘claim a status without using a name? It is unclear how this endnote is relevant to the information it is linked/relevant to in the main part of the paper. See for example:
“At its best, liberal education enables students to develop critical thinking skills and disciplinary competence and to distinguish categories of information, acknowledge ambiguity, and eschew easy certainty. It encourages students to be both reasonable and passionate—to link learning with action—and, in that respect, to champion the cultivation of the civic and the responsibilities of citizenship and leadership. Liberal education does respect contrarian ideas and challenge the status quo. And if expectations are held high and students are truly valued, the consequences of liberal education are deeply relevant to students’ lives” (Harvard, 2012, p. 15).
- x While typical US liberal arts college is small, private, residential, independent and expensive, MISH, is small, public, non-residential, dependent and free. The main difference, of course, is that you can graduate from liberal arts college (if you can afford it), but you cannot graduate from MISH – which is “just” an honours program
- xi To some extent, the liberal research ideal was in conflict with the more market-oriented motivations of some students. Until 2002, the Faculty of Law was not an option for MISH students. Reasons for this had to do both with the reluctance of the faculty (who were concerned about finances, student preparation and control over the student body) as well as the dedication of MISH administration to a spirit of free inquiry and broad development of students rather than a very specialized, professionally oriented education. This tension was resolved in 2002 with the Law faculty starting cooperation with MISH and limiting the number of admitted students; the law curriculum has traditionally been very extensive, but nevertheless almost ¼-MISH students have pursued this subject each year since then.

- xii To some extent, its postulates have been implemented, with granting universities right to decide about the shape of their curricula in 2011, or giving each student a small amount of credits to be used outside of their department. But at the same time, other factors – including granting the legal status to inter-area studies (like MISH) limited traditional flexibility of the formula.
- xiii In its current form, the description on MISH website merely states other institutions, and focus on the “education of a contemporary humanist”, motivational elements of such study form and “increasing the ability of graduates to adapt to the changing labour market (Kolegium MISH, n.d.).
- xiv “This conviction that education consists in raising people to be faithful to the past for the benefit of a distant future, in constant opposition to existing governments trying to destroy remembrance of the past in order to control the present, was very much alive at the university where I was educated” (Detweiler & Axer, 2012a, p. 242).
- xv “For “teachers’ vital interest is to enclose students in the narrowest cage possible” (Axer, 1997, p. 118), due to strong independence of departments and rules of their financing.
- xvi In dire times for the humanities, Axer claim that to “stay and sabotage the system, each person in their own sphere, reviving the old Polish ability to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds” is not an option in a democratic society (Axer, 2011, p. 27).
- xvii In dire times for the humanities, Axer claim that to “stay and sabotage the system, each person in their own sphere, reviving the old Polish ability to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds” is not an option in a democratic society (Axer, 2011, p. 27).
- xviii On the potential elite character of MISH, cf. “An elite university that I have in mind is especially useful for shaping society and civic attitudes not because it teaches proficiency in some particular profession, but because it prepares for the society some group of people I would – in lack of better term – call “educated”, that is trained in formulating ideas and aims as well as critical analysis of thinking (theirs or other people). And only in this sense it is an “elite”. The main addressee is and will not be immediately economy, private capital would not be a significant donor, scientific output would not take form of patents, but creating cultural-symbolic capital and its application to creating civil society (Axer, 2013, p. 172). And also: “Although it was not the aim of creating MISH, I can’t see why we should hide it; its alumni and alumnae are an elite of a kind, even though this knowledge should boost their awareness of their duties to the society. We often forget our duties to the society that

stem from the privilege of good education we have received” (Wilczek & Jędral, 2012, p. 107)

^{xix} “Remember, Axer's argument is radical. It is not just that some version of a liberal arts program can cultivate those attitudes of citizenship which are the purpose usually ascribed to a liberal arts education, but specifically training in the classics -- something you may well initially regard as too narrow (and possibly even disciplinary) to be "integrative" and "liberal."” (Katz, 1997, p. 2).

^{xx} “Autonomy practiced in conditions of mass instruction disavow itself unless academic milieu cannot use it to warrant a place for elite research and elite education” (Axer, 2013, p. 170).

References

Abrahám, S. (2012). Europe is now ready to import what it once had exported. In H. Tak & B. Oomen (Eds.), *De disciplines voorbij: De colleges van Hans Adriaansens* (pp. 77–84). Middelburg: De Drukkery. Retrieved from <http://www.ucr.nl/about-ucr/history-UCR/Documents/1.html>

Adriaansens, H. P. M. (n.d.). Roosevelt Academy as a Liberal Arts & Sciences College Philosophy and implementation.

Adriaansens, H. P. M. (2014). *The Dutch Mix: the international university college*. St. Petersburg.

Altbach, P. G., & Kontowski, D. (2015, November 8). Rankings, Mergers, Development - Philip Altbach in conversation with Daniel Kontowski (part 4). *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/world-view/rankings-mergers-development>

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2012). What is a 21st Century Liberal Education? *What Is a 21st Century Liberal Education?* Retrieved from http://www.aacu.org/leap/What_is_liberal_education.cfm

Axer, J. (1997). What is liberal education? Can it support both freedom and equality? Is it for everybody? *Kritika a Kontext*, 4, 116–118.

Axer, J. (1998). How the Classical Tradition Can Serve to Promote Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century. The East-Central Europe Case Example. *Kritika a Kontext*, 1, 113–116.

Axer, J. (2010). Autonomia uniwersytetu i innowacyjność. *Nauka*, 2, 7–10.

Axer, J. (2011). From the humanist Respublica Litteraria to the Collegium Artes Liberales. In M. O'Connor & P. Wilczek (Eds.), *Collegium / College / Kolegium. Kolegium i wspólnota akademicka w tradycji amerykańskiej i europejskiej* (pp. 22–27). Boston - Warszawa: Sub Lupa.

Axer, J. (2013). Aktualność/nieaktualność tradycyjnych ideałów uniwersyteckich w Polsce anno Domini 2013. In J. Woźnicki (Ed.), *Misja i służebność uniwersytetu w XXI wieku* (pp. 169–178). Warszawa: Instytut Społeczeństwa Wiedzy, Fundacja Rektorów Polskich.

Axer, J. (2015). Kiedy wreszcie Troja zostanie zdobyta? - doniesienia z MISH-owego frontu. In S. Biliński (Ed.), *Szkolnictwo Wyższe w obliczu zmian* (Debaty PAU., pp. 83–85). Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności.

Bass, R. (2014). The Next Whole Thing in Higher Education. *Peer Review*, 16(1), 35. Retrieved from <http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/2014/winter/reality-check>

Becker, J. (2014). *What a Liberal Arts Education is... and is Not* (2003/2014). Smolny College. Retrieved from <http://artesliberales.spbu.ru/about-en/liberal>

Becker, J. (2015). Liberal Arts and Sciences Education: Responding to the Challenges of the XXIst Century. *Voprosy Obrazovaniya / Educational Studies* (Moscow), 4, 33–61. doi:10.17323/1814

Becker, J., Kortunov, A., & Fedchin, P. (2012). Russia: Against the Tide, Liberal Arts Establishes a Foothold in Post-Soviet Russia. In P. M. Peterson (Ed.), *Confronting Challenges to the Liberal Arts Curriculum: Perspectives of Developing and Transitional Countries* (pp. 159–183). New York and Oxon: Routledge.

Bellah, R. N. (2006). On being Catholic and American. In S. M. Tipton (Ed.), *The Robert Bellah reader* (pp. 457–473). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bird, C. (1975). *The case against college*. New York: McKay.

Brint, S., Riddle, M., Turk-Bicakci, L., & Levy, C. S. (2005). From the Liberal to the Practical Arts in American Colleges and Universities: Organizational Analysis and Curricular Change. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76, 151–180.

Clark, K., & Jain, R. S. (2013). *The liberal arts tradition: a philosophy of Christian classical education*. Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press.

Dahrendorf, R. (2000). *Universities After Communism. The Hannah Arendt Prize and the Reform of Higher Education in East Central Europe*. Hamburg: Edition Körber-Stiftung.

Detweiler, R. A., & Axer, J. (2012a). International Perspectives on Liberal Education: An Assessment in Two Parts. In D. W. Harward (Ed.), *Transforming Undergraduate Education. Theory that Compels and Practices that Succeed* (pp. 225–252). Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Detweiler, R. A., & Axer, J. (2012b). International Perspectives on Liberal Education: An Assessment in Two Parts. *Transforming Undergraduate Education. Theory That Compels and Practices That Succeed*, 225–252.

Edquist, C., Fulton, O., Hackl, E., Santiago, P., & El-Khawas, E. (2007). *OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education: Poland 2007*. OECD Publishing. doi:10.1787/9789264039131-en

Eliot, C. W. (1909). What is liberal education? In *Educational Reform. Essays and Addresses* (pp. 87–122). New York: The Century Co.

Ferrall, V. E. J. (2011). *Liberal Arts at the Brink*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press.

Gillespie, S. (2001). Opening Minds: The International Liberal Education Movement. *World Policy Journal*, Winter, 79–89.

Glyer, D., & Weeks, D. L. (1998). The Liberal Arts in Higher Education: Challenging Assumptions, Exploring Possibilities. *The Liberal Arts in Higher Education: Challenging Assumptions, Exploring Possibilities*. Retrieved from <http://capitadiscovery.co.uk/winchester-ac/items/eds/eric/ED427646>

Godwin, K. A. (2013). *The Global Emergence of Liberal Education: A Comparative and Exploratory Study*. Boston College.

Godwin, K. A. (2015). The Counter Narrative: Critical Analysis of Liberal Education in Global Context. *New Global Studies*, 9(3), 223–244. doi:10.1515/ngs-2015-0033

Green, T. F. (1976). Liberalism and liberal education : the good life and the making of the good man. In *Liberalism and liberal education: Western perspectives* (Columbia U.). New York: Columbia University.

Harward, D. W. (2007). Why the Effort to Establish Liberal Education in East--Central Europe Might Prove Interesting for American Educators. In J. Kieniewicz (Ed.), *Autonomia uniwersytetu. jej przyjaciele i wrogowie* (pp. 123–136). Warszawa: Fundacja Instytut “Artes Liberales.”

Harward, D. W. (2012). The Theoretical Arguments and Themes. In D. W. Harward (Ed.), *Transforming Undergraduate Education: Theory that Compels and Practices that Succeed* (pp. 3–33). Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Hersh, R. H. (1997). The Liberal Arts College: The Most Practical and Professional Education for the Twenty-first Century. *Liberal Education*. Retrieved from <http://capitadiscovery.co.uk/winchester-ac/items/eds/eric/EJ552312>

Holdsworth, N. (2000). Warsaw conclave backs liberal arts. *Times Higher Education Supplement*. Retrieved from <http://capitadiscovery.co.uk/winchester-ac/items/eds/eue/507733220>

Ivanova, Y., & Sokolov, P. (2015). Prospects for Liberal Arts Education Development in Russian Universities. Overview of Proceedings of the Liberal Education in Russia and the World Conference. *Voprosy Obrazovaniya/ Educational Studies*. Moscow, 4(4), 72–91. doi:10.17323/1814-9545-2015-4-72-91

Jung, I., Nishimura, M., & Sasao, T. (2016). Liberal arts education and colleges in East Asia: possibilities and challenges in the global age. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1179358>

Katz, S. N. (1997). *Can Liberal Education Cope?* (30 October 1997). Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved from <https://www.princeton.edu/~snkatz/papers/aglsp.html>

Kimball, B. A. (1995). *Orators & Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*. (R. Orrill, Ed.). New York: College Entrance Examination Board.

Kimball, B. A. (2010). *The Liberal Arts Tradition. A Documentary History*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth: University Press of America.

Koblik, S., & Graubard, S. R. (2000). Foreword. In S. Koblik & S. R. Graubard (Eds.), *Distinctively American. The Residential Liberal Arts Colleges* (pp. XV–XVI). New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Kolegium MISH. (n.d.). *Kolegium Międzyobszarowych Indywidualnych Studiów Humanistycznych i Społecznych*. Retrieved February 7, 2016, from <http://www.mish.uw.edu.pl/ogolne>

Kontowski, D. (2016a). Co niszczy studia międzyobszarowe w Polsce? Fałszywe wyjaśnienia i poczucie wyższości. In P. Bogalecki & R. Koziółek (Eds.), *Wiedza niezdiscyplinowana - meandry międzyobszarowości*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego (in print).

Kontowski, D. (2016b). Recession in Polish liberal arts? Shifting priorities of students at the MISH, University of Warsaw and their consequences for the institution. In J. Fazlagić (Ed.), *Images of Intellectual Capital. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing* (in print).

Kontowski, D. (2016c). The paradox of “practical liberal arts”: Lessons from Wagner College case for liberal (arts) education in Eastern Europe. *Voprosy Obrazovaniya/Educational Studies. Moscow*, 3, 80-109. Doi 10.17323/1814-9545-2016-3-80. Retrieved from <https://vo.hse.ru/2016--3/191152255.html>.

Kowalski, E. (2012). Poland: The place of liberal education in post-Soviet higher education. In P. M. Peterson (Ed.), *Confronting Challenges to the Liberal Arts Curriculum: Perspectives of Developing and Transitional Countries* (pp. 122–150). New York and Oxon: Routledge.

Krajewska, A., & Kowalczyk-Waledziak, M. (2014). „Possibilities and Limitations of the Application of Academic Tutoring in Poland”, *Higher Education Studies*, 4(3), 9–18. doi: 10.5539/hes.v4n3p9.

Kwiek, M. (2002). Reforming Polish Higher Education in the New Millennium. *International Higher Education*, Winter 200(Issue 26), 5–6. Retrieved from <http://www.herdata.org/in-focus/higher-education-in-croatia-introduction/6>

Kwiek, M. (2016a). Constructing Universities as Organizations : University Reforms in Poland in the Light of Institutional Theory. In E. Samier (Ed.), *Educational Administration and Leadership*. New York: Routledge.

Kwiek, M. (2016b). From Privatization (of the Expansion Era) to De-privatization (of the Contraction Era): A National Counter-Trend in a Global Context. In S. Slaughter & J. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Higher Education, Stratification, and Workforce Development*.

Competitive Advantage in Europe, the US, and Canada (Higher Edu., pp. 311–329). Springer International. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-21512-9_16

LEAP National Leadership Council. (2007). *College Learning for the New Global Century*. A report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Mulcahy, D. G. (2008). Newman's Theory of a Liberal Education: A Reassessment and its Implications. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 42(2), 219–231. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9752.2008.00624.x

Musial, J. (1983). Polish Semielite Private Higher Education Institutions. *International Higher Education*, 56(Summer 2009), 14–15.

Newman, J. H. (1893). *The Idea of a University, Defined and Illustrated* (new edition). London: Longmans, Green & Co.

Norgaard, T. (2014). *MISH, ECLA and CLAS Comparative Notes on the Organization of Liberal Education in Europe*. Warsaw.

Norgaard, T., & Hajnal, P. (2014). Value Studies and Democratic Citizenship. In J. N. Reich (Ed.), *Civic Engagement, Civic Development, and Higher Education. New Perspectives on Transformational Learning* (pp. 41–46). Washington, DC: Bringing Theory to Practice.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2008). *W trosce o człowieczeństwo. Klasyczna obrona reformy kształcenia ogólnego*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej.

Oliver, C. (1991). Strategic Responses to Institutional Processes. *The Academy of Management Review*, 16(1), 145–179. doi:10.2307/258610

Oomen, B. (2016). Orchestrating encounters: teaching law at a Liberal Arts and Sciences College in the Netherlands. In B. van Klink & B. de Vries (Eds.), *Academic Learning in Law: Theoretical Positions, Teaching Experiments and Learning Experiences*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Peterson, P. M. (2012a). A Global Framework. Liberal Education in the Undergraduate Curriculum. In P. M. Peterson (Ed.), *Confronting Challenges to the Liberal Arts Curriculum: Perspectives of Developing and Transitional Countries* (pp. 1–23). New York and Oxon: Routledge.

-
- Peterson, P. M. (2012b). Comparative observations. Problems and prospects. In P. M. Peterson (Ed.), *Confronting Challenges to the Liberal Arts Curriculum: Perspectives of Developing and Transitional Countries* (pp. 226–236). New York and Oxon: Routledge.
- Project on Liberal Education and the Sciences. (1990). *The liberal art of science: Agenda for Action*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.aaas.org/programs/education/about_ehr/pubs/the_liberal_art_of_science.pdf
- Redden, E. (2009). The Liberal Arts, Abroad. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/print/news/2009/02/16/liberalarts>
- Redden, E. (2013, February 8). Liberal Arts Go Dutch. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/02/08/netherlands-growth-liberal-arts-colleges-has-influenced-higher-ed-sector-whole>
- Rothblatt, S. (2003). *The Living Arts: Comparative and Historical Reflections on Liberal Education*. Washington, D. C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Rudolph, F. (1990). *The American College and University. A History*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press.
- Seneca, L. A. (1988). *Epistle LXXXVIII: On Liberal and Vocational Studies*. *Seneca's Chosen Epistles in John's Ahrens Translation*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips. Retrieved from [http://vault.hanover.edu/~ahrens/texts/Seneca Epistle LXXXVIII On Liberal and Vocational Studies.pdf](http://vault.hanover.edu/~ahrens/texts/Seneca%20Epistle%20LXXXVIII%20On%20Liberal%20and%20Vocational%20Studies.pdf)
- Servant, V. F. C., Frens, M. A., & Schmidt, H. G. (n.d.). Problem Based Learning in the Liberal Arts and Science Context : Striking a Balance Between Academic Excellence and Freedom of Inquiry. *The Journal of Problem Based Learning in Higher Education*. doi:10.5278/ojs.jpblhe.v3i1.1202
- Siwinska, B. (2011, November 13). Tired pioneers in Eastern and Central Europe. *University World News*. Retrieved from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20111111215313914>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books?id=sIMOAQAAMAAJ>
- Strauss, L. (1995). What is Liberal Education. In *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Stroop, C. A. (2014, November 6). Can the liberal arts model thrive in Russia? *Russia Beyond the Headlines*. Retrieved from http://rbth.com/opinion/2014/11/06/can_the_liberal_arts_model_thrive_in_russia_41199.html

Sucharski, R. (2013). OBTA UW - wschodnie oblicze. In K. Marciniak (Ed.), *Antyk i My w Ośrodku badań nad Tradycją Antyczną* (pp. 63–82). Warszawa: Wydział “Artes Liberales” UW. Retrieved from http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/Antyk_i_my.pdf

The World Bank, & European Investment Bank. (2004). *Tertiary Education in Poland*. Warszawa. Retrieved from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTECAREGTOPEducation/Resources/PolandTertiaryEducation.pdf>

Tubbs, N. (2015) *Philosophy and modern liberal arts education: freedom is to learn*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tymowski, A. W. (1998). *New Trends In East European Higher Education*. EES Noon Discussion on November 17, 1998. Retrieved November 22, 2015, from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/170-new-trends-east-european-higher-education>

van der Wende, M. C. (2011). The Emergence of Liberal Arts and Sciences Education in Europe: A Comparative Perspective. *Higher Education Policy*, 24, 233 – 253.

van der Wende, M. C. (2013). An Excellence Initiative in Liberal Arts and Science Education: The Case of Amsterdam University College. In Q. Wang, Y. Cheng, & N. C. Liu (Eds.), *Building World-Class Universities. Different Approaches to a Common Goal* (pp. 89–102). Shanghai: Sense Publishers.

van der Wende, M. C., & Reumer, C. (2010). *Excellence and Diversity: The Emergence of Selective Admission Policies in Dutch Higher Education - A Case Study on Amsterdam University College* (No. 10).

Wilczek, P. (2013). Building partnerships between universities and communities to strengthen university autonomy and democratic citizenship: the Artes Liberales movement at the University of Warsaw. In B. Sjur, H. Ira, & H. V. Land (Eds.), *Reimagining Democratic Societies: a new era of personal and social responsibility* (pp. 211–217). Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Wilczek, P., & Jędrał, P. (2012, April). Wykształcenie ma wyzwalać. Z Piotrem Wilczkiem rozmawia Paweł Jędrał. *Rzeczy Wspólne*, 100–110.

Woodard, C. (2002, April 26). Once-Communist Countries Make Way for the Liberal Arts - Global - The Chronicle of Higher Education. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, pp. A45–A46. Washington, D. C. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Once-Communist-Countries-Make/4995/>

Wróblewski, A. K. (2010). Wizja uniwersytetu przyszłości. *Nauka*, 2, 11–17.

Wróblewski, A. K. (2015). MISMaP - Koń trojański w systemie szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce. In S. Biliński (Ed.), *Szkolnictwo Wyższe w obliczu zmian* (Debaty PAU., pp. 75–82). Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności.

Yudkevich, M., Altbach, P. G., & Rumbley, L. E. (Eds.). (2015). *Academic Inbreeding and Mobility in Higher Education* (Palgrave.). Palgrave Macmillan UK. doi:10.1057/9781137461254