

**THE IMPORTANCE OF UNIVERSITIES
FOR SOCIETY AND ECONOMY
THE EXPERIENCE OF RESEARCHERS
FROM THE VISEGRÁD GROUP**

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNIVERSITIES FOR SOCIETY AND ECONOMY THE EXPERIENCE OF RESEARCHERS FROM THE VISEGRÁD GROUP

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Foreword

The functioning of universities is affected by numerous factors, exogenous and endogenous, which reflect changeability of the environment, and the emergence of new types of economy and society based on knowledge. Among the developmental factors, the most frequently pointed out are human resources, talent, creativity, innovativeness, along with technology and its creative application in many areas of socio-economic life. Knowledge, as one of the resources and capabilities of using it, increasingly decides about an individual's place in the social hierarchy, and in the case of enterprises and countries – about their competitive position.

The long-standing term 'university' comes from Latin, meaning 'entirety, the universe, teachers and students in general'. An important stage in the development of universities was the emergence of the Humboldt model, based on five principles: the unity of knowledge and science, unity of research and education, unity of professors and students, academic freedom and autonomy, unity of national spirit (Sułkowski, 2016, pp. 14-17). In reference to the concept of Karl Jaspers, it is worth indicating that the task of a University is

science, and scientific research and education as the revelation of truth serve to form intellectual life. The realisation of these tasks is linked with communication between intelligent people, between researchers, between students and teachers, between students themselves, and finally, depending on intellectual conditions, communication of all with everyone (Jaspers, 2017, p. 71).

Nowadays, universities operate within ever more complex networks of relations created with other universities, worlds of business and culture, and also with the authorities of towns, communes and regions. The paradigms in didactics are changing, and there is also a drive towards increasing the scope of practical implementation of knowledge generated by the world of science.

It must be noted that universities should be both evolving under the influence of socio-economic processes and transformation, and affect desired changes in the environment. There is a growing need for the shift of society towards more sustainable life styles and models of consumption in order to limit negative changes triggered by the climate crisis. This requires significant changes in production and consumption trends, building the culture of responsibility, as well as including in the individual stages of the value chain the environmental and social issues. In this

context a question can be asked about the role of universities, and the relevance of research they conduct for the construction of sustainable societies and economies.

An attempt to answer this question was made by 28 authors representing 12 universities from the Visegrád Group. Addressing the problems discussed in this monograph from the perspective of the experience of researchers from Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary, corresponds with the important direction in the development of science, namely its internationalisation.

The monograph consists of three parts. The first concerns the functioning of universities and directions in the development of education, as well as the scientific research conducted in the context of the sustainability crisis, and the need to expand the scope of implementation of the sustainable development concept. The considerations included in the second part of the monograph regard academic teaching and areas of research emerging in the context of the ongoing technological progress, particularly visible in the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI), and the need to develop digital competencies. The third part presents the results of research undertaken in view of finding research gaps resulting from changes in the geopolitical and social conditions produced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study by Bogusława Drelich-Skulska, Magdalena Sobocińska and Małgorzata Domiter, opening the monograph, discusses the role of universities in shaping responsible society and expanding the scope of the implementation of sustainable development by entrepreneurs and consumers alike. The authors, starting their study from considering the evolution of the functions and tasks realised by universities, pointed out that modern universities have many opportunities for their participation in the realisation of sustainable development objectives and in stimulating entrepreneurs and consumers to behaviour following the model of the moderation economy. This is linked to the acceptance of the assumptions of sustainable development in many areas connected with university's functioning, including scientific research, commercialisation of its results, concepts and educational programmes, and also management of a university. The presented issues were illustrated by the example of Wrocław University of Economics and Business (WUEB), which applies a strategic approach to shaping the culture of responsibility.

Particular attention was dedicated in the monograph to the need of addressing ecology-related issues in educating future managers. Emília Huttmanová, Jana Chovancová and Radoslav Mikča emphasised the fact that implementing deep structural changes in the economy, including the aspect of the protection of the natural environment, requires understanding and support on the part of society. In this context, universities have an important role to play, as they co-create an environment conducive to studying the ongoing changes (climatic, social, demographic, etc.) and their dynamics and effects. The study showed that higher education has the potential to form competencies of graduates, including green competencies, in order that

they become drivers of societal progress. The authors presented the relevant activity conducted by the Faculty of Management and Business of the University of Prešov in Slovakia.

Another study, by Piotr Gryszel and Sabina Zaremba-Warnke, considered the role of the Academic Coordination Centre for the Euroregion Nysa (ACC) in the implementation of the objectives of sustainable development. This paper presented the unique initiative of the higher education institutions, which is the association of universities from Poland, Czechia and Germany operating in the Euroregion Nysa starting from 1992, and described selected activities of the ACC contributing to the realisation of the assumptions of sustainable development, and in particular the transborder projects dedicated to this issue, the ACC Forum and the annual Conference of Young ACC Scholars.

Agnieszka Piekara addressed the important research problem of food waste, and described the current level of food waste in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia, and the reasons behind this phenomenon. The study revealed in what way food waste obstructs the realisation of sustainable development goals, and indicated the need for preparing and implementing a strategy of food waste minimisation, as well as the promotion of more sustainable systems of nutrition. The author also drew attention to the fact that prevention of food waste at each stage of the food chain requires cooperation between public administration (at EU and individual country levels) and the non-governmental organisations.

Eva Kostikov, Dawid Szramowski and Martina Švecová revealed the key role of recycling centres in the implementation of a circular economy. This paper has the character of a comparative case study in which the authors analysed the operations of recycling centres in Czechia and Poland, which extend the life cycle of products *via* repairs, renovation and redistribution. They make up a part of sustainable waste management and of circular economy. The authors' analyses indicate that such centres contribute to waste reduction, education of society and job creation. Both countries, despite their differences in the approach and community engagement, developed their unique models of activity, which can provide inspiration to others.

The first part of the monograph concludes with a study in which Łukasz Jurek addressed the issue of sustainable development of the welfare state from the perspective of social fraud. These problems have not been frequently examined, and there is a real need for closing the existing research gap. The author stressed that the term 'social fraud' covers a wide range of pathological behaviour regarding the social welfare system related to both petty and serious crime. This subject matter is even more relevant due to the fact that serious crime always results in the greatest losses, however being fairly rare, while petty crime, although in single cases causes only small damage, yet its very scale means that it can significantly reduce the effectiveness and hamper the functioning of the social benefits system. The role of the researchers into

this subject matter was to uncover reliable information which could provide the basis for establishing directions of the activities aimed at reducing the abuse of the social welfare system.

The studies presented in the second part of the monograph deal with forming digital competences and conducting scientific research in the era of technological progress and dynamic development of artificial intelligence (AI). Anna Mempel-Śnieżyk and Petr Hlaváček presented the results of their research focused on the evaluation of progress in the implementation of e-government in EU countries, and on the analysis of its linkages with the objectives of sustainable development. The use of such tools as e-government development index (EGDI), and sustainable development goals (SDGs), allowed to examine dependencies between the progress in e-government and the achieved goals of sustainable development. The study showed geographical differentiation within Europe, as well as the differences between the north-western countries and the south-eastern ones. The authors stressed that identification of these differences is crucial for the understanding of factors leading to disparities, and enables to formulate recommendations aimed at sustainable development of society both on a local and global scale.

The subject matter of the next two chapters of the monograph is connected with the development of AI, finding ever wider usage in numerous areas of socio-economic life. Petr Svoboda and Ladislava Knihová conducted an in-depth review of how artificial intelligence and the need for new competencies impact the shape of university education. The analyses conducted by the authors suggest the need to create new competencies among teachers, which will allow them to apply AI in teaching students and in their own academic research. This is connected with the necessity of preparing a purposeful and sustainable strategy of implementing AI in education, in order to include human approach and create valuable relations between students and teachers. This should translate into providing students with indispensable skills necessary for their development and professional career in an increasingly digital world.

The authors of the next chapter, Andrea Tomášková and Ladislava Knihová, showed the significance of innovation and AI in the evolution of family enterprises and emphasised the great importance of cooperation between family-run companies and universities, which should continuously develop their educational programmes. The study also pointed out that the key to success of family businesses is maintaining their values, traditions and following sustainable development.

The studies presented in the third part of the monograph provide a reply to the changes in the geopolitical and social conditions, including those resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Eva Ardielli, Robert Kovács, Marta Maciejasz and David Slavata conducted the analysis of the affordability of housing in the countries of the Visegrád Group which experienced economic transformation within the last 30 years, and this

applied also to the housing market – from the one regulated by the state to a self-regulating one. This meant that housing has become a marketable commodity whose affordability is determined mainly by the individual household's credit-worthiness. At the same time the authors indicated the differentiation existing not only between the selected countries but also between their regions, and that the state and the local communes play an important role in establishing the availability of housing and modification of the conditions in the local housing market.

The monograph also addressed the problems related to the consolidation package regarding the public finance sector in Czechia, whose introduction was linked with implementing changes in expenditure and revenue sections of the budget in order to stabilise public finances and reduce the public debt deficit. Otakar Schlossberger and Andrea Tomášková emphasised that these means impact the public sector, enterprises and households, both on an international and regional scale. The authors also pointed out the importance of universities as key educational institutions and a factor in the country's economic growth and in raising its competitiveness.

The considerations included in the papers comprising the third part of the monograph are also oriented at the matters linked with strengthening the transborder cooperation between Poland and Czechia. Katarzyna Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska and Roman Śmiateński showed that transborder cooperation constitutes an important factor in the regional development and integration within the EU. In the case of these two countries, their cooperation is being realised and extended *via* the Euroregions. One should note that starting from 1991, six Euroregions were created, along with two European Groups for Territorial Cooperation. This institutionalisation of the transborder cooperation contributed to achieving and maintaining the high level of mutual Polish-Czech relations. The authors presented the opportunities and challenges of transborder cooperation between Poland and Czechia in the context of the Euroregions, concentrating on the key initiatives, best practices, and also indicating the areas for improvement.

In their study, Daria E. Jaremen, Izabela Michalska-Dudek and Pavlína Pellešová based on the results of their empirical research, identified the changes within the process of decision-making of the organised tourism events, regarding three different periods: prior to, during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The identification of these changes allowed the authors, as well as the practitioners, for a better understanding of the evolution in consumer behaviour, and for the latter also adjusting their business strategies to the changing market environment. It should be stressed that the study has both a cognitive and applied character, significant from the viewpoint of the development of functions realised by universities.

We would like to thank all the authors for preparing such interesting and valuable studies. The research results presented in the monograph and the conclusions they provide, indicate the crucial role of universities in shaping the socio-economic

changes in response to modern challenges and to the need to implement the principles of the sustainable development concept. We hope that the considerations and analyses presented in the monograph will prove both valuable and inspiring for the variety of entities in the university environment, interested in the inclusion of ecological and societal issues in the formulated strategies and conducted activities. Bearing in mind the notable volatility of the environment, and dynamic development of new technologies, accompanied by the emergence of new research contexts, as well as the necessity to monitor progress while building the economy of moderation, we would also like to point to the need for the further exploration of these problems. We cordially invite international research teams to present the results of their research in future scientific publications of the prestigious Publishing House of this University.

Bogusława Drelich-Skulska, Magdalena Sobocińska, Andrea Tomášková

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PART 1

Universities and Scientific Research in View of Sustainable Development

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Eva Ardielli, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Public Economics of the Technical University of Ostrava. In 2008, she completed her Master's in European Integration at the Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Ostrava. In 2015 she concluded her doctoral programme of Public Economics and Administration with the title PhD. During her studies, she attended internships in Germany, Italy and Poland (Technical University of Dresden, University of Cologne, University of Insubria and University of Katowice). In 2012, she completed her specialisation in real estate valuation at the Institute of Property Valuation of the Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Ostrava. Currently, she is involved in teaching, research activities and projects in the area of public economics.

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