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On the vagueness of the frontier – centre dichotomy in selected universities

Traces of historical frontiers and centres still smoulder in the mists of time. Following in their footsteps is an expedition into places near and far, a journey to the frontiers of history that we (un)know. The road is long and time is short, so we must curb our enthusiasm to at least vaguely trace the fate of "frontier" and "centre". Davies (2010, p. 19) wrote that "in the beginning there was no Europe" and we can say that in the beginning there were no peripheries or centres either. Thought and words allow us to give and construct meaning. Let's ask the words (written down) about where the "frontier" originates. Thematically and vocabulary-wise, the concept of border has a rich family of words, among which we can only mention: border, borderland, cross-border, and these in turn have their derivatives, among which we can find: border, border area or periphery.

Considering this diversity, we decided that for the purposes of this paper we will restrict the expressions we use to – frontiers (synonymously called by us periphery) – and, contrary to appearances, (un)being in antagonistic relationship – centre, which we will also call middle (Niedźwiedzki, King, 1898, p. 263; Pieńkos, 1996, p. 73). In the Old Slavonic tradition signs on trees were carved to indicate individual boundaries; they were the best known and simplest form of boundary marking. Polish "ciosna" is a sign carved on a tree, Russian "frontier" had a similar meaning, but in addition (more broadly) "frontier" was understood as border area, border (Kiersnowski, 1960, p. 277)[1]. In the Dictionary of Warsaw, we also find other synonyms to the word frontier, they are: edge, shore, cutting, extreme. In (Niedźwiedzki, Król, 1909, p. 759).

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[1] The etymology of the word indicates a Russian root (Russian: Рубе́ж); border ((Linde, 1994, p. 157). Borrowing from Old Russian rubežъ meaning "nick, mark carved on wood; border, frontier; boundary strip;

In attempting to conceptualise the key concepts of "frontier" and "centre" for the present analysis, it is necessary to present two leading paradigms, which at the same time shape the way we think about the above categories. Historical connotations impose on us the idea of borders as relatively static places closely related to their geographical location. However, modernity does not allow any concepts to rest, demanding that they be reinterpreted or extended. Useful for our analysis is the distinction made by Babiński (1994). The first perspective sees the border phenomena as autonomous, distinctive, somehow internal and uncorrelated with what is happening in the centre. The second perspective sees the borderlands as parts of larger whole (centres). Therefore, the causes of phenomena occurring at the frontiers are to be looked for "beyond them". This is a concept that takes into account not only interactivity, but also dependency. Indeed, a constitutive condition for the existence of a "centre" is the existence of what can be called a "frontier" but this is a two-way dependency. The first perspective (hereafter: PD – dichotomy perspective) emphasises a clear frontier-centre dichotomy, the second perspective emphasises a lack of clear separation and fluid borders (hereafter: PPG – fluid borders perspective).

The existence of spaces considered peripheral to centres is characterised by a certain constancy, but the history of the world as we know it is characterised by variability. History shows how peripheral areas have been absorbed by centres, how centres have moved into or emerged from the periphery. It is a long history of their birth and death (Szul, 2011, pp. 188–189). The history of the Jagiellonian University and the University of Szczecin is a story played out in the dimension of long and short duration. If we want to present the history of the Jagiellonian University even briefly, we would have to wade through centuries, whereas the history of Szczecin University, from this point of view, lasts only a moment, as it is only a few decades long.

Although Szczecin has a long history, as historians rightly point out, "In recent centuries the winds of history have blown extremely intensively here, often radically changing their direction" (Puchalski, Włodarczyk, 2010, p. 3). Higher education in the Szczecin area emerged (almost) literally from oblivion. After 1945, not only the restoration of material resources, but also an unimaginable shortage of people, especially those who could be called intellectuals, became a huge problem. It was not until October 1946 that there was a glimmer of hope, when the first academic lecture was delivered. It took almost forty more years for the efforts and desires of the people of Szczecin to materialise. The year 1985 resulted in the establishment of a scientific centre, the University of Szczecin[2] (Lesiński, 1998, pp. 443–449). The traditions to which

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obstacle". Since the XVI century rubežъ was formally understood as a border, border area, border district (Boryś, 2010, p. 525).

[2] The basis for the establishment of the US was the former WSP (1973–1985), which in turn emerged from the previous branch of the UAM or WSN (1968–1973).

the University of Szczecin draws its spirit go all the way back to the 16ᵗʰ century and the heritage that was offered to it along with the entire history of Western Pomerania (US Strategy, 2019, p. 3).

The reasons why the Jagiellonian University has been recognised as a central university are down to both tradition dating back to the fourteenth century (the first Polish university and one of the first in Central and Eastern Europe), its location and the size of the metropolitan area in which it operates, and purely scientific and didactic reasons – i.e., it is recognised as one of the best in the field in Poland and, thanks to the quality of its research and teaching, has a relatively large impact not only on the immediate social and economic and academic environment, but also on other universities, for which it is often one of the benchmarks.

As examples potentially demonstrating the emergence of this dichotomy in both the PD and PPG versions for higher education institutions, we have taken two universities – Szczecin University (which, among others, we have called a borderline university because of its borderline location) and Jagiellonian University (considered a central university). The purpose of the analysis presented here is to see which point of view corresponds to the actual state of affairs regarding the above-mentioned exemplary universities. We have compared the development strategies of these universities and extracted the guiding ideas (postulates) contained in them (strategies) in order to determine, on this basis, whether the possible existence of differences justifies the statement of explicit differences (as in PD) or their absence (as in PPG). Based on a comparative analysis of the documents: Jagiellonian University Mission (until 2030) and Jagiellonian University Statute (from 2019), as well as in the Development Strategy of Szczecin University for 2019–2028, we identified seven postulates – peculiar ideas that define the directions of the university development in the field of student learning.

The term idea (Gr. idea, "form", "epresentation" [Podsiad, 2001, p. 357]) is usually associated with its Platonic understanding, in which eidos was used to refer to "...that external form, that metaphysical structure or essence of a thing, which has a purely intelligible nature" (Reale, 2005, p. 89). The idea, then, is a kind of metaphysically understood form (com. Reale, 2005), representing a kind of being comprehended only by reason, the future "...in the full sense of being in and through itself" (Reale, 2005, p. 95). However, we do not give this idea such a – philosophical – meaning. In our article we adopt the modern understanding of the idea, according to which it is "the guiding thought that determines the purpose and direction of action, scientific or artistic creation, etc.[3]" In view of the above, the ideas we have already mentioned that give direction to universities in terms of student learning include:
– the idea of the unity of education and research,

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[3] Idea, PWN, download from: http://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/idea.html.

– the idea of developing a tolerant, critical and self-critical attitude,
– the idea of independence of education from ideology,
– the idea of interdisciplinarity in education, including the development of new educational models and programmes,
– the idea of opening up education to the social environment,
– the idea of "education for world citizenship", openness to cultural diversity,
– the idea of teaching pro-environmental attitudes.

Below are the entries corresponding to each category in the documents of the universities indicated.

Table 1. The idea of the unity of education and research

University of Szczecin	Jagiellonian University
– The main mission of the University of Szczecin is the unity of science and education	– The basic principle of education at the university is the unity of learning and teaching, realised through the creative development of scientific thought and the demonstration of the results of research carried out – Creation of a training proposal based on the results of the research and analysip

Source: own study.

The concept of combining the ideas of doing science and teaching students lies at the heart of university education. It emerged from the German university model, in which its functioning is based on the implementation of three principles: the unity of knowledge, the unity of professors and students, the unity of research and education (Pritchard, 1990, p. 40; Hejwosz, 2008, p. 42). The main task of the university is to implement the principle of the unity of research and education. According to this principle, conducting research (by professors and students) should be the best form of education (Pritchard, 1990, p. 47; Hejwosz, 2008, p. 42). For both compared universities this idea is a fundamental principle.

Table 2. The idea of developing a tolerant, critical and self-critical attitude

University of Szczecin	Jagiellonian University
– The University of Szczecin carries out independent scientific, didactic and culture-forming activities, observing the principles of humanism, democracy and tolerance, and disseminating the values of the cultural heritage of a unifying Europe and the traditions of its native people – The university community cares about access to knowledge for the widest and most diverse age groups, including people with disabilities and those at risk of exclusion (the social mission is to access and disseminate knowledge). – Working together for the common good in a spirit of tolerance and respect for human rightp	– The idea of developing a tolerant, critical and self-critical attitude

Source: own study.

The university's origins point to its transnational character. The three universities – Padua, Bologna and Göttingen – were centres that brought together all those who wanted to seek truth. This deeply rooted tradition has been able to survive because the university upholds what is valuable, good and worthy, that is, what is at its core. This is how the university became a repository of the spirit of tolerance (Malewski, 2000, pp. 24–25). It seems as if the ideas that follow are derived from the concept of the Humboldtian University. After all, the idea of attitudinal formation: critical and self-critical becomes a consequence of practising "free science". The ability to think logically and reason rationally, to see the existence of multiple perspectives on the "reality" available to us, is impossible without a (self)critical eye.

Table 3. The idea of independence of education from ideology

University of Szczecin	Jagiellonian University
– The University of Szczecin has independent scientific, educational and cultural activities – The main mission of the University of Szczecin is to conduct independent research and teaching at a high level, while preserving the autonomy of the university and the freedom to conduct research and choose educational content	– Strengthening the role of the university as a research and teaching space that remains independent of ideological, political and economic pressurep

Source: own study.

"Ideology [fr. idéologie, gr. idéa 'form', 'figure', 'representation', 'concept'; lógos 'word', 'science'], a concept found in philosophy, social and political sciences that

defines sets of views used to interpret and transform the world at large".[4] In colloquial language, "ideology" may be defined as ideas that are not strictly scientific theories, i.e., ideas containing a set of assertions that are not subject to a process of verification (com. verification in the natural sciences). In some ways the opposite of ideology is 'science' (Gr. episteme; Lat. scientia), which can mean (in a functional sense) "...an organised cognitive process leading to the construction of theory, i.e. science in a material sense" (Podsiad, 2001, p. 550).

> In a material sense: a set of theories which are already ready in a certain way, although still hypothetical, regarding a certain area of reality and which meet the methodological conditions regarding accuracy of concepts, validity of assertions, etc. (Podsiad, 2001, p. 551).

Science is thus in clear opposition to ideology. In this way, science protects us from ideological manipulation. The idea of the independence of education from ideology derives from the need to dissociate what we call ideology (lies) from what can be considered scientific truth. Ideology enslaves minds by limiting their field of vision because it is the only one, correct and undeniable. Scientific claims are subject to constant verification, which can be done by anyone with the appropriate research skills.

Table 4. The idea of interdisciplinarity in education, including the development of new educational models and programmes

University of Szczecin	Jagiellonian University
– Conducting research at the highest level, including interdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research, with a significant contribution to broadening current knowledge horizonp – Creating educational programmes and new teaching models oriented towards interdisciplinarity and integration with research using best practices, teaching innovations and research resultp – Changing the nature of the first degree programme to a more general one; reducing the number of first degree coursep – As a university of the future, the scientific activities of the University of Szczecin are geared towards conducting top-quality interdisciplinary and innovative research, taking into account the needs arising from the strategy of the city and the region	– Increasing the number of interdisciplinary courses in general university classes and curricula, including the discipline of "sustainable development"

Source: own study.

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4   PWN, https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/ideologia;3913853.html.

Interdisciplinarity in a broad sense means undertaking research from the positions of different scientific disciplines. In contemporary discussions on the organisation of scientific disciplines, there is an increasing demand to break with the traditional division into scientific disciplines (McCulloch, 2002). This is justified, among other things, by the fact of the complexity and multifaceted nature of the problems of some research problems, which, in order to be complementary, should be studied from different – not limited by scientific disciplines – perspectives. An example of this is cognitive science, which undertakes research on the mind from the perspective of psychology, philosophy, computer science or neurobiology. Both the universities of Szczecin and Jagiellonian University recognise this need, and in both cases interdisciplinarity is postulated both at the level of didactics and, what is related to this, scientific research. In this respect, support can be envisaged for the creation of new or superstructures that could be responsible for such research and its didactic implications.

Table 5. The idea of opening up education to the social environment

University of Szczecin	Jagiellonian University
– The University of Szczecin, creatively working in partnership with its surroundings, prepares students for active citizenship, to perform important social, political and economic rolep. Graduates are characterised by the ability to understand the surrounding world, accepting its complexity and social diversity, and cooperating for the common good in the spirit of tolerance and respect for human rightp. They are distinguished by their professionalism, initiative and entrepreneurship, and responsibility for the fate of the region, homeland and the world	– Collaborate with the Kraków and Małopolska local government in the development of the city and the region, providing research and expert support and participating in the solution of local problemp – Expand the offer of internships and apprenticeships in cooperation with employerp – Conduct surveys of employers, students, doctoral students and graduates (including tracking career paths), analyses of the apprenticeship and vacancy database and use the data to inform the development of educational provision – Organise meetings with employers to improve educational programmes and develop new courses of study

Source: own study.

This idea is mainly an attempt to respond to the need for elite education and research that responds to locally determined needs. Within this idea, cooperation with the local government and economic environment, i.e., with employers, is also advocated, in this way the universities take part of the responsibility for being able to contribute to solving the actual problems and increasing prosperity in the environment in which they themselves operate. In the case of both universities, in spite of the

differences due to historical and geographical specificities, this idea functions as an important postulate.

Table 6. The idea of "education for world citizenship", openness to cultural diversity

University of Szczecin	Jagiellonian University
– The location of the university poses a challenge to the academic community, which should be distinguished by a unique understanding of the spirit of tolerance and a desire to learn about other cultures, religions, ideas and customp – An important role in establishing fruitful academic and cultural contacts between Poland and Germany, the countries of the Baltic Sea region and other countries in Europe and the world	– Developing modern and innovative models of education for international students that are based on rational debate and argument analysis, and that use and promote openness to cultural diversity – Support for education programmes in English and other foreign languagep – Preparation of joint education programmes with prestigious foreign centres at undergraduate and graduate level – Development of forms of international mobility enabling the greatest possible participation of UJ students, doctoral students and staff in international exchanges, including active participation in the Erasmus+ programme

Source: own study.

Educating citizens of the world is understood here to mean educating people who are able to find their way in changing circumstances, also beyond the borders of their own country, as well as people who are open-minded and tolerant of otherness in terms of, among other things, worldview beliefs. It is to be implemented, inter alia, through programmes supporting mobility and the development of international co-operation, including in the field of scientific research. It is worth emphasising at this point that the Jagiellonian University's strategy also includes a proposal for a didactic tool supporting openness, namely – the postulate of teaching critical thinking skills (here under the name of rational debate and analysis of arguments). This is a way out of the need to appreciate the importance of cooperation, mutual understanding and respect as a condition for success in the implementation of both local and global tasks (including scientific tasks).

Table 7. The idea of teaching pro-environmental attitudes

University of Szczecin	Jagiellonian University
– Responsibility for the fate of the region, the homeland and the world	– Undertake research and expert work related to climate and environmental protection – Educational activities in the field of climate protection

Source: own study.

A distinctive feature of the Jagiellonian University is the didactic and scientific demand for climate protection. It is a response to the negative climate changes occurring and predicted by researchers for humanity. This response boils down to a rational involvement in the plan to reduce these changes by supporting scientific and educational activities in this area.

A comparison of the two strategies proves the existence of many convergences at the level of the categories identified, and therefore postulates, determining the directions of university development in terms of student education. It is noteworthy that in the case of both central and peripheral universities, the need for interdisciplinarity in education, the unity of education and research, as well as the openness of education to the social environment was clearly indicated. In both cases, the need to "educate citizens of the world" was also emphasised, manifested in openness to cultural diversity and the shaping of a tolerant, critical and self-critical attitude. In view of the above, it is difficult not to get the impression that the Development Strategies of the universities indicated in the article contain very similar postulates, at the same time being carriers of a similar vision of the university.

It seems, therefore, that it does not matter much whether we are – in this particular case – dealing with a central or a peripheral university, as both present a comparable vision of university development. This brief analysis of the selected documents indicates that despite the differences at the level of specific solutions and partly at the level of development ideas themselves, it is difficult to conclude that there is a clear border-centre dichotomy (PD) in the case of both analysed universities. A closer model to describe this relationship seems to be the model of fluid boundaries (PPG). Clear differences can possibly be seen in the level of implementation of the ideas mentioned (however, this was not the subject of analysis in this article). It is not difficult to imagine a situation where, due to differences in the level of funding of universities, the degree of implementation of the postulates may be clearly different.

The prevailing view today is that the university should serve something – "be for something". This postulate of "serving something concrete", something quantifiable and yielding quite tangible results (expressed, for example, in the form of practically understandable educational outcomes), is the consequence, unfortunately, of the

"successful" attempt to fit the university into the structures of a market society. The result is a radical change in its functioning, which means the loss of its original character and, ultimately, the complete destruction of the institution, which is the only example of the Humboldtian idea of the university. However, when reading the development strategies of both universities, one cannot help but feel that our and others' fears that these ideas are under threat are unfounded. Indeed, the spirit of the Humboldtian vision of the university resonates vividly in these documents. However, the reality around us robs us of our illusions. The spirit of Humboldt is dying, and dying before our eyes (see: Kwiek, 2010; Readings, 2007; Rutkowiak, 2010).

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Summary

The analyses presented in this article concern the issue of the relationship between the centre and the periphery in terms of the functioning of universities in Poland. The problem is addressed here on the basis of a comparative analysis of the documents of two universities (Jagiellonian University and Szczecin University), which express the strategy and mission of their development for the next several years. In the course of the research, the types of developmental postulates that each of these universities formulates (e.g., concerning interdisciplinarity, education of attitudes of respect for otherness, openness to the socio-economic environment) were identified and compared. The conclusions reveal a lack of significant differences between the mentioned universities in terms of the analysed postulates, which supports the thesis that there is no clear centre – periphery dichotomy in the case of universities. It should be noted that the analyses only covered the strategies and missions formulated by the two universities and that they did not address the level of implementation of the postulates they formulated.