Agnieszka Anielska

Higher Education and Non-Traditional Students

Strategies of Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Adult Education on the Example of Postgraduate Studies

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The dynamics of the labour market and new career models have meant that *lifelong learning* has grown into a strategic challenge in the field of European education. Among the priorities of the European Higher Education Area is just lifelong education which means the necessity of implementation of *lifelong learning* objectives at the level of individual EU member countries' policies. Therefore the purpose of research constituting the core of this work was to verify whether various types of Polish universities are ready to put the ideas of *lifelong learning* into practice. This knowledge would make it possible to forecast higher education market's growth, and it might be used by officials shaping educational policy in their strategic and operational activities at the national level as well as by representatives of universities in their work on a daily basis.

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Proofreading:	GROY Translations
Editor:	Barbara Jędraszko
Layout:	Dorota Zajączkowska, Mariusz Skarbek, Dima Słupczyński, Grzegorz Dębowski
DTP:	Mariusz Skarbek
Printing:	Top Druk Łomża
Publisher:	Foundation for the Development of the Education System Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps National Agency Al. Jerozolimskie 142a, 02-305 Warsaw www.frse.org.pl | kontakt@frse.org.pl

ISBN: 978-83-66515-88-8
DOI: 10.47050/66515888

Citation: Anielska, A. (2022). *Higher Education and Non-Traditional Students. Strategies of Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Adult Education on the Example of Postgraduate Studies*. Warsaw: FRSE Publishing. doi.org/10.47050/66515888

Free copy. The publication is a translation from the Polish version.

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Introduction

Due to its extremely dynamic evolution, the Polish higher education sector has been constantly providing researchers with an abundant body of materials for analyses – not only in the field of sociology but also in pedagogy, economics and management sciences.

After the political breakthrough of 1989, there was a clear increase in the educational aspirations of Poles, and at the same time, public universities began to gradually lose the monopoly on higher education. The diversification of this sector and the introduction of paid educational services due to the emergence of the private sector – a brand new option in the Polish reality – forever changed the landscape of Poland's higher education.

The consequences of these changes were visible primarily within academia because the rapid and uncontrolled development of didactic activity at public and private universities exerted a far-reaching impact on the diversification of scientific and didactic work (Antonowicz, 2015a, 2015b).

Over time, the massification of higher education translated into changes in society's education structure, and together with the varying quality of educational services, also a decrease in the value of college degrees. The newly-awakened aspirations of young people gradually began to encounter resistance from the labour market, which became saturated with university graduates (Boni, Szafraniec, 2011).

With its numerous entities, including private ones, operating based on business rules, Poland's developing educational services market created a fertile ground for discussion on higher education management, strategic planning and personnel policy in university structures, as well as the marketing of educational services (see, e.g., Bugaj, 2016; Drapińska, 2011; Jabłecka, 2004; Koźmiński, 1999, 2009; Leja, 2013; Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2014).

The above phenomena represent only a portion of the many issues that attracted the attention of researchers. Various aspects of the endless reforms of Polish higher education have long been the subject of extensive public debate (see, e.g., Dziedziczak-Folin, 2017; Stankiewicz, 2018). The subject of education, including higher education, shows no signs of losing its significance anytime soon. Due to the rapidly changing reality and challenges of the modern world, education will remain the focal point of interest not only for scientists but also for decision-makers and higher education practitioners.

One of these challenges is undoubtedly the changes taking place in the educational path, as traditionally construed, and the increase in the importance of *lifelong learning*. One of its areas – adult education – aroused my particular interest.

The dynamics of the labour market and new professional career models, which assume working for many employers or performing various professions throughout one's life, make it difficult to expect that your education could end at the onset of your professional career. Due to the dynamic development of knowledge, it is necessary to constantly update your skills and acquire new ones. That is why *lifelong learning* became one of the strategic challenges of European education and a subject of debate not only in the scientific community but also in many supranational organisations operating in the field of culture and education. To this end, it was included in the Lisbon strategy (2000), which is considered one of the pillars of the European Union's (EU) economic development. The period of increased interest in *lifelong learning,* and consequently, of many activities aimed at its development and dissemination, began in the mid-1990s. The role of higher education in this process was also noticed: in 2009 *lifelong learning* was established as a priority of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which also meant the implementation of *lifelong learning* ideas at the level of individual country policies. Higher education institutions (HEIs) faced a significant challenge – determining the role and importance of adult education in the context of their current mission and strategy.

I had the opportunity to observe many of these changes, including the above-mentioned processes, from the perspective of selected public and private entities since I was professionally involved with the higher education sector for almost ten years. These first-hand experiences, accompanied by observation of selected trends in the educational market, became an inspiration to pose a question on the place and role of postgraduate education at Polish universities, and as such, to undertake the research that this dissertation is based on.

As part of the research, I intended to find out whether the student preferences pointing to the popularity of non-public (private) universities, as reflected by statistics (CSO, 2010–2019), were the result of thoughtful and deliberate actions taken by individual types of universities, as well as to learn how these strategies differed. I assumed that such knowledge would make it possible to forecast the market's development and possibly provide interested universities and college representatives with knowledge on both strategic and operational activities. First and foremost, I was interested in whether and to what extent individual types of universities see the potential in a group of people of non-traditional student age (working adults) and what strategies they adopt towards it – if and how they try to respond to its needs, as well as what their service range is and how they plan to expand it. Namely, to analyse whether and to what extent Polish universities are ready to put the idea of *lifelong learning* into practice and to determine any possible differences between them, and subsequently, to find

if one can outline the prospects for Poland's educational service sector based on these differences.

From the very onset of my work on this issue, I intended to reconstruct the actual strategies "in action" rather than formal declarations contained in strategic documents. That is why such documents were considered only as the starting point for further research covering members of authorities, employees and postgraduate students of selected universities. I assumed that organisation insiders, related to postgraduate studies in various ways, would constitute the best source of knowledge on the universities' priorities, operational rules and internal mechanisms in this area of academic activity. Referring to the Weberian tradition in social sciences, I wanted to observe higher education processes through the eyes of their participants.

The results of my empirical research are the core of this work. They are preceded by four concept and theoretical chapters. The purpose of the first two chapters is to introduce the reader to the subject, and on the one hand, to the latest history and the current structure of Polish higher education, and on the other, to present the development of scientific reflection and practical solutions in the field of *lifelong learning*, especially adult education. My interests, namely institutional strategies of universities' functioning within the current system, focused on adult (non-traditional) recipients[1], are located at the intersection of these two areas.

Therefore, Chapter I is devoted entirely to the transition that has been going on in the higher education sector since the early 1990s and which shaped today's picture of the sector. It presents the key actors, as well as the most important contemporary challenges and trends which provide important context for the issues discussed in this work. I focused mainly on the increase in social educational aspirations and the popularisation of higher education, as well as on demographic changes in Poland. These processes supported the transition in higher education structures, the development of the private sector and paid educational services, including part-time (extramural) and postgraduate studies. I chose this last area of the educational domain, which by definition involves adults, for further analysis to grasp the strategies of various higher education entities.

Postgraduate studies are one of many forms of adult education. Therefore, I start Chapter II by trying to define this concept and related concepts, as well as by presenting a scientific synthesis of reflections on these issues. Then I focus on "educational practice", presenting the history of adult education in Poland,

1 This category is defined in greater detail in another chapter.

introducing the statistics of adults' participation in various forms of education and showing the potential in this area. However, I focus mostly on the "life" aspect of the *lifelong learning* idea in national and supranational strategic documents. The focus was mainly on documents that concerned higher education. They are vital because they should translate into educational policy and the direction of the activities of educational institutions in Poland and Europe, and therefore, also contribute to the universities' adult education strategies, which are of interest to me.

Strategy as a concept has long been present in the area of management and already has numerous definitions. In the context of higher education, it became popular in the last decades of the 20th century along with the appearance of a new university model which was meant to be characterised by a new strategy--based management logic, i.e. systematic planning and accounting for activities. The approach used so far, one based on academic autonomy, was meant to be replaced by patterns transplanted from the commercial sector. In Chapter III, I present this process of changing the applicable academic institution model and its professionalisation, as well as the transition from administration to management in higher education, with the background being the reform of the entire public sector. The concept of *New Public Management* and the characteristics of Burton Clark's *Entrepreneurial University model*, to which I also refer in further parts of my work, are of key importance here. In this context, strategic management is of substantial importance – I also devote a lot of attention to this issue. I present varied approaches to the formulation and implementation of the strategy and its types, as well as strategic process structure, and contemporary challenges in this area. Further on, I refer to these issues in the empirical part.

Chapter IV is entirely devoted to the resource dependence theory which I chose as the theoretical framework for my final analysis of the collected empirical material. The resource dependence theory is one of the concepts that organisations consider in the context of their environment; they emphasise its role and focus on the relationships and interactions between organisations and their environment. In the case of research on the education system, including higher education, this context is perfectly justified. As shown by previous studies, e.g., by Dominik Antonowicz, Agnieszka Dziedziczak-Foltyn, Julita Jabłecka, Marek Kwiek, Krzysztof Leja and Helena Ostrowicka, the social environment has a major (even decisive) impact on the functioning of universities as they draw the necessary resources from it. In addition to the key assumptions of the selected concept, I also recall its previous applications in the field of explaining organisational behaviour in higher education – as an argument for its explanatory potential.

The empirical part comprises Chapters V and VI in which I present and analyse the collected material consisting of universities' strategic documents and individual in-depth interviews with university representatives. Due to the specificity of individual techniques used during the research, each part is slightly different and ends with a partial summary. Then, based on the conclusions of the research, I try to answer the research questions posed – the conclusions are presented collectively at the end of the work[2].

This paper is part of the research area devoted to the institutional activity of higher education entities in the face of the relocation of resources and develops this area further. I assumed that not only could my research results show a different approach of various types of universities to the problem of exploring the area of adult education, but that they could also be, to some extent, a diagnosis of the institutional readiness of various types of higher education institutions to implement the idea of *lifelong learning* in their activities.

Moreover, this work is interdisciplinary, just as higher education research is. It is embedded in social sciences and draws a lot from sociology, as well as management studies (to which it seems natural to refer, for example in the context of defining the concept of university strategy), and educational sciences.

The issues I had researched have not yet been analysed separately in Poland. My goal was to fill the gap in this regard, at least partially. I sincerely hope that the result of my research will be of interest not only to higher education researchers, but also to people at various levels of university administration who deal with adult learners in their daily work and make decisions on the development of the educational services they offer. The results of the presented research can be used in the debate on selected aspects of university management and the improvement of education quality. The conclusions of my research may also be useful for those who shape the policy concerning postgraduate education development, be it at the institutional (university) or systemic (legislator, ministry) level.

The publication is based on the doctoral dissertation prepared under the supervision of Dominik Antonowicz, PhD, Professor of the Nicolaus Copernicus University (Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika – UMK) in Toruń and defended in 2021 at the Institute of Sociology of the UMK. The dissertation was based on the research carried out as part of the project "Higher education and non-traditional students. Strategies of universities in the field of adult education on the example of postgraduate studies", financed by the National Science Centre – Narodowe Centrum Nauki (Grant No. 2016/23/N/HS6/00502).

2 For own research methodology, see the *Methodological note*.

1

Educational boom in two acts

1. Act one: demand

1.1. Increase in educational aspirations of Poles after the political breakthrough – belief in the value of education

Near the end of the People's Republic of Poland era, only 6.5% of the population held a university diploma[1] (CSO, 2003). According to researchers (see, e.g., Lis, Skuza, 2015), the reasons behind this included such things as Poland's uncompetitive economic system, guaranteed employment and the inability to translate the university graduates' level of education into high status and earnings (due to non-educational promotion paths), which effectively discouraged people from continuing education. Merely several years later, graduating from a university was already an obvious stage in the educational path for many young people and their parents. It turned out that education was of high value: *it translates into one's professional position which translates into income, and then into prestige*, which was related primarily to the process of marketisation of the economy (Borowicz, 2000, p. 22; cf. Białecki, Sikorska, 1998; Pawłowski, 2004; Wnuk-Lipińska, 1996, transl.). This shift also had a huge impact on the development of the higher education sector.

In the 1990s, there was a noticeable increase in the educational aspirations of Poles. According to Krzysztof Wasielewski (2012, p. 73, transl.), aspirations show *the preferences of individuals regarding certain values and goals they pursue*. Knowing them makes it possible to recognise life orientations and change them over time (Wasielewski, 2012).

The above change is recognised as one of the successes of the Polish transition (Misztal, 2000) – not only did it result in the dissemination of the belief in the value of education but it also brought activities that translated into a higher level of education in Polish society (see, e.g., Lis, Skuza, 2015).

According to Ireneusz Białecki, determining the level of educational aspirations requires reference to the *number* [of persons – A.A.] *who want to undertake education, to the determinants shaping educational decisions, environmental influences and stimulators of educational aspirations* (Białecki, Sikorska, 1998, p. 52, transl.). Therefore, the change in the scope of educational aspirations in the discussed period can be traced by referring to the data provided by regular public opinion polls on the value of education and preferred educational paths.

In 1970s Poland, there were many supporters of a short education path – fewer people leaned towards acquiring higher education than in the transformation

[1] Among persons aged 15 and up (1988 data).

period. At that time, 15% of respondents pointed to vocational education being a satisfactory education level for their daughters, with as many as 26% of respondents believing this to be the case for sons[2]. A total of 46% of parents expected higher education for their daughters and 35% for their sons. However, this was still noticeably more than the higher education enrolment rate (net), which was 13% at the time the Polish People's Republic fell. How can this discrepancy be explained? The declared educational aspirations were not consistent with the needs of the centrally managed economy to which virtually all levels of the education system were subordinated at that time. In the 1970s and 1980s, the educational fate of the young generation began to shape upon leaving primary school. As many as 50–60% of graduates enrolled in vocational universities, which would be the final portion of their educational path due to the lack of high school diplomas. The remaining graduates continued their education in secondary schools, with around half of them enrolling in secondary comprehensive schools. It was they who had the best chance of getting into college because university exams were based on the curricula of such schools. However, the possibilities of taking up further education were limited due to the restrictive university admission system[3]. Consequently, graduates of comprehensive secondary schools who failed to enrol in a university would find themselves at a dead end – without a specific profession, and consequently, with limited employment options. This was one of the deterrents to choosing comprehensive secondary schools. They were more popular in those circles where high aspirations were accompanied by great chances of success in their implementation (CBOS, 2009a; Gulczyńska, Jastrząb-Mrozicka, 1994).

In a 1993 Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) survey (2009a), as many as 76% of the respondents agreed with the statement that education is worthwhile (42% of whom chose the answer "definitely worthwhile"). The main reasons for this were high earnings in future work, the possibility of getting an interesting job and gaining economic independence (see also Gulczyńska, Jastrząb-Mrozicka, 1994). The respondents were also asked about the desired level of education for their children. Less than 5% of the respondents considered an education level below secondary to be acceptable; 24% deemed secondary education to be sufficient for daughters and 25% for sons, whereas aspirations regarding the completion of studies by children were revealed by 64% (for daughters) and 66% (for sons) of the

2 The reference to parents' preferences is justified due to their significant impact on children's educational choices (see, e.g., Kozłowski, Matczak, 2016).

3 Some persons who had completed secondary education or who stopped their studies decided to obtain higher education after the breakthrough of 1989, taking advantage of the new social conditions. This group, which is referred to as the *educational reserve*, had a significant share in the total number of students, especially in extramural studies (Pawłowski, 2004).

respondents. Compared to previous research in the 1990s, it was noticeable that the aspirations regarding the children's educational future were less differentiated when compared with the parents' education level. Therefore, it can be said that those aspirations started to become common across the entire social spectrum.

The first two decades of the transition process reinforced the belief in the value of education. By 2009, 91% of Poles believed that learning was worthwhile (15% more than in 1993), and as many as 68% declared that it was definitely worthwhile (26% more than in 1993). At the same time, many people noticed shortcomings in their education: 63% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their education level and 51% declared that they would strive for higher education if they were to start studying again. The primary motivation for acquiring education, as indicated by the respondents, did not change over the years. Such factors as high earnings, interesting professions and easier life, as well as independence, intellectual development and self-improvement, still prevailed in the statistics. Over several years (i.e. between 1993 and 2009), the parents' expectations regarding the educational future of their children consistently increased. As of 2009, as many as 86% of the respondents would like their daughter to acquire higher education and only slightly fewer, 84%, would like their son to get it (an increase by as much as 20%). The differences in educational aspirations of parents with different levels of education clearly decreased. In the 1990s, only slightly more than half of the parents with vocational education wanted their children to go to university; by 2009, it was more than 80%. Although the aspirations of parents with higher education also increased (albeit slightly since their education level was already high), the difference between the two groups decreased from over 30 percentage points to a dozen or so. The differences between the aspirations of parents from cities and rural areas of various sizes also decreased, following a similar pattern. The process of equalising aspirations has entered an advanced level (CBOS, 2009a)[4].

According to 2018 data (CSO, 2019), over 26% of the population (aged 13 and up) has higher education[5], with a clear difference between the women's education

4 It is worth mentioning that the post 1989 educational transition was largely beneficial to Polish women. Researchers agree on the assessment of their advancement. In the late 1980s, the percentage of women with higher education was lower than the percentage of men (5.9% vs. 7.9% in 1988). After the political transition, the situation reversed rapidly (by 2002, the proportions were 10.8% of women vs. 9.7% of men), and the following years saw these differences increase even further (CBOS, 2009a).

5 In the 2005–2015 period alone, the percentage of Poles with higher education increased from 14% to 24%. It was not without significance that this period (the introduction of the Bologna system) saw the rise in popularity of undergraduate education, reducing the time required to obtain a diploma from five to three years (CSO, 2019).

level (30.9% have higher education) and that of men (21.5% have higher education). Most Poles (four out of five) believe that education is of a mass nature[6]. However, despite the prevalence of this view, 86% of the respondents still consider it worthwhile (56% as definitely worthwhile). Although this percentage remains high, it should be noted that the belief in the value of higher education as of today is slightly lower than in the 2004–2009 period, when more than 90% of the respondents answered the question "Is education worthwhile?" in an affirmative manner (see Table 1). The parents' unwavering educational aspirations regarding the preferred educational path for their children can be considered as confirmation of the value of higher education. Most respondents would like their children to acquire higher education (84–85%, depending on the child's gender). These preferences have remained fairly stable for a decade and are also displayed by persons who have never graduated from university themselves (CBOS, 2017a, 2017b).

Although education has been one of the three most important factors influencing professional success for many years, the respondents are divided when it comes to the value that a diploma has in the labour market. Half of the respondents assess it as high and only a slightly smaller percentage (43%) considers it low. Doubts as to the value of the diploma are relatively more common among young people (aged 25–34) at the onset of their professional careers, as well as among people with higher education, specialists and management staff. Their previous experiences could have allowed them to reach a similar conclusion as the authors of the quoted report, i.e. that as of today, higher education is not so much worth it, but rather necessary. University diplomas, once popularised, ceased to be a confirmation of exceptional qualifications. In a situation where more and more people have a university degree and more and more employers expect it, it is no longer a guarantee of obtaining good employment but merely a necessary condition (CBOS, 2017a, p. 8, transl.). This conclusion is in line with another observation from the research: compared to others, the respondents who have higher education and earn the highest income per capita are significantly less likely to mention education among the most important success determinants. This proves that in the case of better-paid professions, having a diploma is not so much a guarantee of success but rather a barrier to entry, which is noticeable primarily to people who do not meet

6 Interestingly, the percentage of persons who agree with this statement is higher among those with a university degree (91%). On the other hand, the respondents of the "student" age (18–24) as well as pupils and students are slightly more likely than others to believe that higher education is elitist (CBOS, 2017a, 2017b).

the threshold conditions (CBOS, 2017b). By no means is this specific to Poland. Research conducted among university graduates in Europe shows that higher education has become a typical condition when applying for high-level jobs in the labour market (Antonowicz, Krawczyk-Radwan, Walczak, 2011, p. 97).

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF SELECTED RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION "IS EDUCATION WORTHWHILE?" IN THE 1993–2015 PERIOD[7], DATA IN %

	1993	2002	2004	2009	2013	2015
it is definitely worthwhile	42	66	76	68	49	56
it is worthwhile	76	91	93	91	82	86

Source: own study based on CBOS, 2017a, 2017b.

1.2. Demographic boom as one of the factors of the "Polish educational wonder"

Since 1990, Polish higher education was developing under the conditions of an evident demographic boom for 15 years. This, apart from the already discussed increase in educational aspirations, was the basis for the extremely dynamic growth of this sector. Between 1990 and 2005, the number of 19-year-olds systematically increased: from 536,000 at the starting point to 693,000 at the peak. Since the influence of the baby boom accumulates over time, presenting the dynamics of the size increase of the 19–24 age group, nominally assigned to the higher education stage, is a more reliable way to illustrate the increase in educational potential. In 1990, the number of this cohort was about 3,050,000; in 1997, it exceeded 3.5 million and proceeded to reach nearly 4 million (3,980,000, to be precise) at its peak (2004). This means that during the above period the number of potential students in the higher education sector increased by almost 30% (Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011).

Demographic processes combined with an increase in educational aspirations brought a significant increase in the number of students. This trend lasted until 2005/2006 (see Table 2) and is figuratively referred to as *educational explosion* or *educational wonder* in the subject literature (Pawłowski, 2004). When analysing the above data, one should bear in mind that the total number of students also included adults who usually took up part-time studies, often after an education gap, since they could not continue their education directly after secondary

7 The respondents' answers seem to reflect the higher education statistics. At a time when the belief in a high value of education was more common, the number of students was higher. The weakening of this view coincided with a decrease in the number of students (CBOS, 2013).

school graduation due to the limited number of university places before 1990 (Antonowicz, Borowicz, 2006; Pawłowski, 2004).

TABLE 2. INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN THE 1991–2005 PERIOD

	1991/ 1992	1993/ 1994	1995/ 1996	1997/ 1998	1999/ 2000	2001/ 2002	2003/ 2004	2005/ 2006
number of students	428,151	584,009	794,642	1,091,841	1,431,871	1,718,747	1,858,680	1,953,832

Source: own study based on Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011.

The increase in the number of students translated into changes in the enrolment ratio, which was 12.9% gross (9.8% net) at the time of the 1990 breakthrough. The highest level, i.e. 53.8% gross (40.8% net), was achieved in 2010/2011 and has been decreasing ever since, down to 46.2% gross (35.6% net) – see Table 3.

TABLE 3. CHANGES IN THE GROSS/NET ENROLMENT RATIO IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE 1990–2018 PERIOD, DATA IN %*

	1990/ 1991	1995/ 1996	2000/ 2001	2005/ 2006	2010/ 2011	2015/ 2016	2018/ 2019
gross	**12.9**	22.3	40.7	48.9	**53.8**	47.6	46.2
net	**9.8**	17.2	30.6	38	**40.8**	37.3	35.6

* CSO data is updated every five years. The table presents data for the academic years covering the duration of the study, including partial data from the beginning of the 2018/2019 academic year, also already available at the time of the study.

Source: own study based on CSO, 2010, 2016, 2019.

This "educational wonder" meant that in the years when the baby boom generation reached the university enrolment stage, the Polish higher education sector was second in size only to the German and British ones (IBE, 2011). However, this trend began to reverse. The decline in the number of students began in 2006/2007, in line with the forecasts that were used to create scenarios for higher education (see Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011; Pawłowski, 2004). Although its number of students (1.23 million – CSO 2019) allows it to rank high among the European Union countries, Poland currently falls behind Germany (3.09 million students per 83 million population[8]), the United Kingdom[9] (2.43 million students

8 Population and number of students according to Eurostat (2017b) and CSO (2019).

9 The list still includes the United Kingdom as an EU Member State.

per 68 million population), Spain (2.01 million per 47 million population) and France (2.53 million per 67 million population[10]) in this regard (Eurostat, 2017b; Kwiek, 2013).

2. Act two: supply

2.1. New legal realities and new actors in the educational market

The Act on Higher Education of 12 September 1990 initiated a process that completely remodelled the existing structure of the sector in several years, both in terms of quantity and quality. The changes, the scale of which was probably difficult to predict when the Act was being introduced, were not limited to the already existing universities. This was because the Act introduced a group of new actors to the higher education market: non-state higher education institutions[11]. Over time, they were to become a mainstay of Poland's educational system[12].

The new Act reorganised the principles of operation of over a hundred state universities that existed at the time[13]. As a result, they gained wide autonomy, at the cost of a significant reduction in the competencies of the minister responsible for higher education (at the time it was the Minister of National Education). Universities were guaranteed freedom of research and teaching. The area of internal regulations, ranging from adopting the statutes to creating and liquidating study courses to establishing student recruitment rules to creating curricula, as well as the entire personnel policy, became the responsibility of (collective or one-person) university bodies. The powers of the government

10 In the case of these two countries, it is worth noting that the total number of students also includes participants in the short-cycle education programmes at the 5th level of the European Qualifications Framework (which practically do not exist in Poland), constituting its significant part (in Spain 393,000 out of 2.01 million; in France 501,000 out of 2.53 million).

11 During the People's Republic of Poland era, state-owned universities were virtually the only higher education institutions operating in Poland. The exceptions were theological universities, seminaries and the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) – (Dziedziczak-Foltyn, 2009), but due to the specific nature of most of them, only the Catholic University of Lublin could be deemed the sole "public" non-state university at that time.

12 While forecasting the progress of the de-privatisation of higher education, Marek Kwiek (2015) suggests that the rapid and unprecedented explosion of non-public education in Poland will end with an equally violent implosion in this part of the sector over the next decade. It remains to be seen whether this is indeed the case.

13 In the academic year 1990/1991, there were 112 of them, seven of which were universities run by the Catholic Church. New regulations did not apply to them, with an exception of the Catholic University of Lublin (Dziedziczak-Foltyn, 2009; Act of 12 September 1990, Art. 1).

administration were limited to the supervision of universities and the allocation of state funding according to the adopted algorithm (Act of 12 September 1990, Arts. 2, 11, 24, 31–34, 48, 49, 86, see also, e.g., IBE, 2011; Pawłowski, 2004).

The Act's provision that enabled the establishment of non-state universities was revolutionary from the point of view of the impact that it had on the higher education sector in the years following its introduction. To establish such a university, one needed a permit from the Minister of National Education, which would be issued after consulting the General Council of Higher Education[14], at the request of the founder (Act of 12 September 1990, Art. 15). The founder's application submitted to the Minister had to contain basic data (name, registered office, etc.) and information about the amount of funding allocated to the establishment of the university/college, the method of its further financing, research and teaching staff, didactic base and the planned scope and directions of activity. The applicant also had to submit a draft university statute (Ordinance of the Minister of National Education of 2 February 1991; see also Geryk, 2007). The ministerial permit – issued if the application was approved – defined the general direction of the university's activity and the minimum value of funding that should be allocated to its establishment, while decisions regarding the internal organisation of the university (statutes, election of the rector) were made by its founder (Act of 12 September 1990, Arts. 15–16). The permit was issued in the form of an administrative decision, and after receiving it, the founder was required to submit a notarial deed with a declaration of establishing a private university (founding act). Then, after submitting the statute and the founding act, the university was entered into the register of non-public universities and acquired legal personality at that moment, which meant the beginning of its actual activity (Geryk, 2007).

In terms of the tasks imposed on the university, the legislator did not differentiate universities based on their founding status. The tasks were the same for all universities/colleges. In the field of didactics, they included *educating students in a given branch of knowledge and preparing them to perform specific professions,* as well as *educating persons who hold professional titles and perform practical professions to supplement their general and specialist knowledge* (Act of 12 September 1990, Art. 3, transl.).

To achieve the educational goals defined in the Act, universities could carry out uniform master's degree programmes, vocational higher education studies,

14 General Council of Higher Education was an elected representative body cooperating with the minister responsible for higher education. It defined such things as conditions for conducting studies, curricula and staff requirements (Act of 12 September 1990, Arts. 35, 42).

supplementary master's degree programmes, doctoral studies, post-graduate studies and special courses. The studies could be conducted in three modes: full--time, part-time and extramural, with the full-time mode being the basic one[15]. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the Act gave universities the right to charge fees for classes. However, this solution did not apply to full-time studies conducted at state universities – universities were to receive guaranteed subsidies for teaching activities to cover their operating costs (Act of 12 September 1990, Arts. 4, 23, 24).

Thus, the Act introduced paid educational services into the Polish higher education framework and initiated the process of privatisation of higher education, both in the state and non-state sectors (Kwiek, 2009). The course of this process can be seen either as *external* privatisation, *which means an increase in the number of private higher education institutions and the number of students in this sector* or *internal* privatisation, which is *associated with an increase in the number of students paying for studies and a nominal and/or proportional growth in the income from tuition fees in public higher education* (Kwiek, 2015, pp. 126–127, transl.). The boom in extramural studies (see Table 4) covers both of these dimensions. It would not be possible without the considerable densification of the non-public school network (which mainly offers this form of education) and the entrepreneurial attitude of public universities which started offering extramural studies to gain an extra source of income. The changes brought a significant change in the structure of students. In the academic year 1990/1991, students of extramural studies (offered only by state universities at that time) accounted for 23% of the total number of students, whereas in the mid-1990s, their market share increased to almost 40%, exceeding 50% as early as 1999/2000, and then keeping stable at this level for the entire decade, until 2010/2011 (MNiSW, 2013).

TABLE 4. INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF EXTRAMURAL STUDENTS AND THEIR MARKET SHARE IN THE 1990–2007 PERIOD

	1990/ 1991	1992/ 1993	1994/ 1995	1996/ 1997	1998/ 1999	2000/ 2001	2002/ 2003	2004/ 2005	2006/ 2007
number	91,000	134,000	239,000	387,000	594,000	847,000	979,000	980,000	972,000
market share	23%	28%	36%	44%	49%	55%	56%	52%	50%

Source: own study based on MNiSW, 2013.

15 Unless the university statute provided otherwise (Act of 12 September 1990).

2.2. (Uncontrolled) development of the non-public higher education sector, its role and internal diversification

The first non-public university (Prywatna Szkoła Administracji i Biznesu – Private School of Business and Administration in Warsaw, which was entered into the register under number 1) was established by the Minister's decision of 29 June 1991. In the academic year 1991/1992, about 400 students enrolled in it[16]. The further unprecedented market development dynamics are best illustrated using figures. Within the first five years of passing the Act of 1990 being, 72 non-state universities were established in Poland, and in just a decade, their number increased to 195, with another 200 applications awaiting the Minister's decision as of the year 2000. At that time, around 400,000 out of 1.4 million students attended non-state universities (as a reminder, Poland's total number of students in 1991 was slightly more than 400,000). In the first years after the Act's introduction, non-state universities were established mainly in large cities, such as Warsaw, Poznań and Łódź, where access to qualified academic staff was easy. Later, they also began to appear in smaller towns, often without academic traditions, e.g., in Nowy Sącz, Płock, Pułtusk, Bielsko-Biała, Olecko and many more. Over time, at least one university was established in almost every city with more than 50,000 inhabitants (Kruszewski, 2000; Pawłowski, 2004).

Considering the scale of this phenomenon, it should be assumed that while they had some common features (e.g., the portfolio of the most popular fields of study), the newly established universities were diverse in many respects. Krzysztof Pawłowski, the founder of WSB-NLU (Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu – National Louis University) in Nowy Sącz, one of Poland's first private universities, proposed that the motives of their creators should be used as the key division axis of non-public universities. Based on this, he distinguished several groups of universities. The first included those established to carry out a specific mission (as part of supporting the educational policy of the state, with an important role in the implementation of individual and group aspirations as well), most often by representatives of the academia. The other was the so-called "cooperative" universities created for economic reasons by "cooperatives" of professors and based on economic prosperity. These entities were treated by their founders, often people from outside the higher education environment, as pure business. They were established based on the observation of the market and its development

[16] The university, now the Warsaw Medical University (Warszawska Uczelnia Medyczna), functions to this day (previously as the Private College of Social, Computer and Medical Sciences – Prywatna Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Społecznych, Komputerowych i Medycznych).

potential. According to Krzysztof Pawłowski, the main difference between the two types of schools was the university's financial management strategy. In the case of "cooperative" universities, revenues from tuition fees were consumed on an ongoing basis by lecturers (in the form of remuneration for conducting classes); in contrast, mission-based universities invested some of the funds earned into the development of the didactic base, research teams, as well as improving student service, thus implementing a strategy focused on long-term goals (Pawłowski, 2004). Andrzej Koźmiński, the founder of one of the best Polish non-public universities, Kozminski University (Akademia Leona Koźmińskiego), described the nature of such universities as follows: *Our university is a combination of two things, a hybrid. On the one hand, we are a university with a mission, i.e. we have a sense of mission towards the emerging Polish middle class and what is happening in Central and Eastern Europe, where, it seems, we are a leading university in the field of management. We are trying to match the best in the world in this respect. But at the same time, we must remember about the business side of the entire undertaking, because no one gives us any money for anything. We have to earn it* (Koźmiński, 2017, transl.).

The outstanding educational hunger and market absorption, strengthened by demographic processes, created in the 1990s a space for the implementation of many ideas which, at that time, were deemed bold. The history of WSB-NLU is a perfect example of a spectacular success of a seemingly crazy idea (followed by a no less spectacular downfall). The founder's vision was meant to create the best elite business university in Poland. This would be hardly surprising, if not for the fact that this idea was supposed to materialise in Nowy Sącz, an "educational outback" with a population of 80,000. The "American myth" (of a foreign partner and its standards) was skilfully used for this purpose, as was the *priority and uniqueness bonus* (Pawłowski, 2004, p. 204, transl.). Just a few years after the university's establishment, young (and rather wealthy) people from all over Poland came to study in Nowy Sącz[17] and graduating from that school became somewhat of a snobbery.

The foreign university-like curriculum, extensive foreign language learning programme, as well as an organisational culture based on American patterns (student-centred orientation), where *the student is the partner and target of the work of all staff members* (Pawłowski, 2004, p. 211. transl.), combined with the new business model of university management[18] and the enormous ambitions and

17 Two-thirds of the students were children of company owners or company managers, a well as representatives of liberal professions (Pawłowski, 2004).

18 For example, the university published its annual financial statements (Pawłowski, 2004).

bold vision of the creators, determined the specificity of WSB-NLU[19]. Its founder, originating from the Business Centre Club circles, used an extensive network of contacts in the economic environment to build trust in the university. This soon translated not only into the high employability of WSB-NLU graduates – commonly called "Pawłowski's people" – but also the interest of company bosses in the educational offer addressed to employees at various levels. The university also consciously and effectively used its graduates (who quickly became recognisable in the labour market) in the process of building its brand. At the same time, it helped its youngest alumni to start their careers, including by sending a list of the best graduates to friendly companies across Poland every year (Pawłowski, 2004; Filas, Olejnik, 2001). In the 90s, the activities of this university, inspired by American models, could be considered truly innovative.

The university's success would not be possible without taking care of education quality. WSB-NLU repeatedly topped the rankings of non-public universities ("Wprost", "Polityka") and successfully competed with recognised state universities, staying ahead of such universities as the Warsaw School of Economics – Szkoła Główna Handlowa (SGH). Over time, the university created its own research and teaching team consisting of recognised lecturers, using complete and modern teaching facilities, as well as having an efficient administration (with much fewer employees compared to public universities, who nonetheless offered a much higher standard of service; Pawłowski, 2004). The university was one of the few exceptions as the private sector was characterised by a clear didactic orientation and dependence on the state sector due to the lack of its own academic staff. To ensure staff availability, non-state universities were often established in cities that were academic centres, offering university employees a financially attractive opportunity to work a second job (Antonowicz, 2015a, 2015b).

The extraordinary sympathy of the media was instrumental in the building of WSB-NLU's image. In 2001, "Wprost" included the following statement in a text about the representatives of a "global elite": *most* [...] *come from only a few universities: mainly from WSB-NLU in Nowy Sącz, Kozminski University in Warsaw, Warsaw School of Economics and Warsaw University of Technology Business School. Representatives of this generation do not seek work – it is work that seeks them* (Filas, Olejnik, 2001, transl.).

Many of Poland's recognisable non-public universities date back to the 1990s, including Lazarski University (Uczelnia Łazarskiego) founded in 1993

19 While these advantages are commonplace today and many universities regard them as a distinguishing (albeit questionable) feature, this was an innovative approach in the early 1990s.

as the Private University of Commerce (Prywatna Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa), Kozminski University (Akademia Leona Koźmińskiego) founded in 1993 as the University of Entrepreneurship and Management (Wyższa Szkoła Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania), The Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology – Polsko-Japońska Akademia Technik Komputerowych (1994), the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Uniwersytet Humanistycznospołeczny SWPS; 1996) and Collegium Civitas (1997) under the patronage of the Polish Academy of Sciences. All the above-mentioned universities are seated in Warsaw (although they have established branches elsewhere). However, some have also managed to succeed outside the capital. In the late 1990s, the largest non-public university, attended by over 18,000 students, was the Baltic Academy of Humanities (Bałtycka Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna) in Koszalin (operating until 2011) while the second largest was the University of Humanities (Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna) in Pułtusk, today operating as an academy, constituting a branch of the Vistula Academy of Finance and Business (Akademia Finansów i Biznesu Vistula), with 12,500 students (Kruszewski, 2000).

Zbigniew Kruszewski[20] described the functions that non-state universities performed in the higher education system. Firstly, the expansion of the network of educational establishments made it possible to educate more people – not only because there were more places available at the faculties, but also because universities began to appear in "educational outback" locations, making it easier for their residents to access education. Non-state universities expanded into areas that have never had any state universities. Secondly, the development of extramural studies (this mode has been dominant at non-public universities from the start) increased the availability of studies for people of various age categories, including adults, working people who either dropped out of the education system or had no possibility of studying at all in their youth (the so-called educational reserve)[21]. On the other hand, the implementation of bachelor's degree programmes (initially, non-state universities only offered bachelor-level studies; this has remained the main form of higher education in some of them), made it possible to obtain higher education in a shorter time, and also contributed to the dissemination and increase in recognition of bachelor diplomas on the labour market. Zbigniew Kruszewski also drew attention to the benefits of the immediate surroundings of the university.

20 Another founder of a private university: co-founder and then rector of the Paweł Włodkowic University College (Szkoła Wyższa im. Pawła Włodkowica) in Płock.

21 The same function was performed by part-time/extramural studies developed at public universities.

Leaving for your studies often proves to be a "one-way ticket" to large academic centres, which irrevocably links your life plans with your new place of residence. By enabling people to study in or near their hometowns, universities were meant to prevent "brain drain", whereas the denser network of the ("denser sieve") was meant to provide a chance to discover and develop more talents. Kruszewski also pointed to the great cultural potential of universities – not only in the sense of building the scientific community (in which few excelled since most universities focused on teaching) but also in animating and enriching cultural life in cities. One cannot overlook the economic impact of universities, including non-public ones, on the local labour market either. Each university is usually a large employer that creates jobs in research departments, as well as many administrative positions. Moreover, upon undertaking education, students become not only customers of the university itself but also of many retail and service outlets, as well as the local housing market. In this way, the local university also indirectly generates new jobs. From the perspective of Poland's entire higher education sector, non-state universities brought a new quality to the market, that is, action based on competitive principles. Among their strengths was the fact that, as a rule, they were characterised by greater flexibility and faster response to the needs of the labour market. This seemed to be of significant importance to applicants and students choosing how to prepare for future employment. The specificity (and significant advantage) of private universities was also the fact that they used both modern teaching methods and state-of-the-art forms of administration and communication with students. A private university student assumed the role of a customer, and this forced a more subjective and partnership-based standard of relations between employees (also academic staff) and students, which had not hitherto existed in the Polish market (Kruszewski, 2000; see also Pawłowski, 2004)[22].

2.3. State higher vocational education

It is worth mentioning here that in the second half of the 1990s, in the period of dynamic development of non-state education, the sector gained a new group of actors: publicly funded State Higher Vocational Schools (Państwowe Wyższe

[22] This sub-chapter focused primarily on the representatives of the non-public sector. The authors of many of the publications quoted here are founders and organisers of the first non-state universities (I am fully aware that not all of them belong to the scientific elite). I believe that their experience, as well as a broader reflection on the development of the higher education sector and deficits of state education, constitute a valuable perspective that helps to better understand the boom in the higher education market, as well as the specificity of the functioning of non-state universities and their role in the higher education sector.

Szkoły Zawodowe – PWSZ)[23]. Pursuant to the Act on Higher Vocational Schools of 1997, a total of 36 such institutions were established (the last one in 2009), 34 of which continue to operate to this day[24] – data from the POLON Integrated System of Information on Science and Higher Education (Zintegrowany System Informacji o Nauce i Szkolnictwie Wyższym) as of 10 August 2020.

The motives that encouraged the decision-makers to establish a new type of university were similar to those which contributed to the development of various forms of vocational education (non-university higher education) across Europe in the 1960s. This was not a coincidence since the process of massification of education that occurred in 1990s Poland had also taken place in many European countries, albeit 30 years earlier. In this reality, there were several arguments for the creation of a new type of university. First, this meant tangible savings from the state budget standpoint. Existing universities were unable to meet the drastically increased demand for higher education (without compromising its quality) and creating new academic institutions from scratch would be very costly. Due to the lack of need to finance research, vocational universities were a cheaper alternative to standard ones. They were meant to respond to signals from the labour market, i.e. the demand for middle-level personnel. Secondly, from the social perspective, the new type of institution contributed to the equalisation of access to higher education. Thus, apart from traditional universities, the United Kingdom saw the emergence of polytechnics, France – *instituts universitaires de technologie*, Norway – regional university colleges (*Høgskolen*) and Germany – higher vocational schools (*Fachhochschulen*) and dual studies (*Berufsakademie*) – (Kyvik, 2004; Seeber, 2016; Teichler, 2008; Wójcicka, 2002b; see also Rybkowski, Kędzierski, 2017).

The idea of diversifying the Polish higher education sector appeared in the first years of the transition and was not a bottom-up one. Its main originator was Jerzy Gąsiorowski, Director of the Department of Science and Higher Education of the Ministry of National Education (MEN) and the draft of the aforementioned

23 Two notes must be made here. Firstly, "new" in this case means those created after the political transition. Before 1989, there were several types of higher education institutions with a non-academic profile (pedagogical institutes, state pedagogical universities, teacher training schools and part-time engineering schools), the aim of which was to prepare candidates for the profession in practice (Kowalska, 2013). Secondly, non-state higher vocational universities could also be established under the 1997 Act.

24 The State Higher Vocational School (PWSZ) in Sandomierz was absorbed by the Jan Kochanowski University (Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego) in Kielce in 2016, whereas the State University of Applied Sciences (PWSZ) in Sulechów has been a branch faculty of the University of Zielona Góra (Uniwersytet Zielonogórski) since 2017.

Act was prepared under his supervision[25]. The Act on Higher Vocational Schools was developed at a time when the non-state sector was still of marginal importance (only 7% of students attended private universities). Therefore, the burden of quantitative development in higher education rested on state-owned universities, which were approaching the limits of their capacity, both in terms of staff and premises. At the same time, access to studies did not become easier since the available places were largely reserved for paying extramural students (Kowalska, 2013).

Several main reasons pointed to the need to establish vocational universities and to enable more people to study. The first argument raised was the facilitation of access to higher education for young people from rural areas[26] (less affluent and less likely to study in large cities) by bringing universities closer to their place of residence (previously, this niche was mostly filled by private universities; see, e.g, Wasielewski, 2015). Another reason – was the demographic forecasts, which indicated that the baby boom generation was approaching the student age. Attention was also paid to the potential of vocational universities to maintain a high level of enrolment ratio (in the context of Poland's accession to the European Union, which was already forecasted at the time) and to the staffing needs on the market generated mainly by the development of the Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) sector, changes in public administration, enterprise transition and emergence of entities with foreign capital. During the work on the Act, the economic motivation was also very clear. It was assumed that vocational universities would make it possible to reduce the costs of increasing the enrolment ratio by as much as 20% per year, although, understandably, this argument was not as prominent in the public debate as the social aspects. Therefore, the plans to create a new group of schools combined several assumptions of the educational policy in force at the time: *an attempt to reconcile the stabilisation (which actually means reduction) of the amount of expenditure on higher education, a steady increase in the higher education enrolment ratio, and maintaining academic standards in terms of education and research quality* (Wójcicka, 2002b, p. 35, transl.).

Despite disputes, the Act on Higher Vocational Schools was finally passed on 26 June 1997[27]. The General Council of Higher Education responded negatively

25 This does not mean that it was not supported at the level of local initiatives. The model structure of the university was developed in Tarnów before the act entered into force. The first State Higher Vocational School (PWSZ) was established there, and many cities benefited from its experience in the following years (Gądek, 2017).

26 In the early 1990s, the percentage of people with higher education was several times lower in rural areas compared to urban areas. Increasing unemployment was the stimulus that motivated the young generation to obtain education (Kowalska, 2013).

27 Although the Act's provisions could also be used to create non-state higher education institutions, they were created mainly for the sake of state vocational higher education institutions (due to the above circumstances).

to the first draft of the Act (and was not alone in that), pointing to the need for new legal provisions comprehensively regulating the area of higher education, which should incorporate new types of institutions. The academic community was also gravely concerned that the limited state funding would become even more dispersed, further deteriorating the already poor financial condition of academic universities. Although concealed by other arguments, this reluctance could have also been due to the existing universities' concerns about losing some market share (Kowalska, 2013; see Gądek, 2017, transl.).

Among the obligatory tasks of newly established universities, the primary one indicated in the act was *to educate students in vocational fields and/or specialisations and to prepare them for their profession, training to supplement specialist knowledge and professional skills, and educating for retraining in a given professional specialisation* (Act of 26 June 1997, Art. 3, transl.). Universities could implement those tasks by conducting higher professional studies, postgraduate studies and courses. Although the Act gave vocational universities the right to conduct research (with no guarantee of public subsidies allocated), research activity was not among their responsibilities. Therefore, two issues are noticeable here. Firstly, highlighting the didactic tasks as the basic area of the university's activity, and secondly, departing from the traditional Humboldt model of the university, which assumes the inseparability of scientific research and academic teaching (these obligations coexisted in the Act on Higher Education in force at the time)[28]. The Act also assumed that education in vocational universities would be different. Such universities were to be closely related to the local labour market and educate students according to its needs. Vocational studies (a new category introduced in the Act) were to be professional in more than name only. The six-semester courses were to emphasise primarily skills and not knowledge. A 15-week internship was also compulsory for students. Another difference was that education was to be carried out based on specialities (interdisciplinary by definition) not faculties, although this did not exclude the possibility of continuing education by State Higher Vocational Schools' (PWSZ) graduates at academic universities. Due to these assumptions, different rules would also apply in terms of hiring the teaching staff for new universities[29]. They were to become a place for staff

28 While State Higher Vocational Schools (PWSZ) were established as "different, but equal" universities, the phenomenon of the so-called academic drift (Gellert, 1993), i.e. interest in the implementation of scientific research and striving to approximate the status of universities, and as a result, blurring the differences between the two types of universities, was soon spotted (Wójcicka, 2002b).

29 It was assumed that State Higher Vocational Schools (PWSZ) would only provide teaching positions (professor, lecturer, assistant), while the requirements for their occupation were lower than at academic universities (Act of 26 June 1997).

with academic qualifications, as well as local market specialists with extensive practical experience. Yet another distinguishing feature of State Higher Vocational Schools (PWSZ) was the assumption that they would work closely with their local environments and that external stakeholders would be involved in determining their further development. A new collegial body (other than the senate) called the council was to be established for this purpose, comprising representatives of local authorities, employers and social organisations. The council would be granted consultative and advisory powers (including the ability to influence the educational offer). The provision on working with the local environment *in disseminating knowledge, as well as cultural, social and economic development of the home region*, emphasised the universities' local character (see Table 5). Their ties with the environment were further emphasised by the fact that they were created at the request of local communities, which often used their resources for the benefit of newly established universities – e.g., local government authorities donating real estate to the university. The last assumption that should be mentioned here is the location of the universities. It was assumed that they would be created in places where no universities have existed so far. Indeed, vocational universities have in many cases become compensation for some cities (e.g., Włocławek, Piła and Konin) which lost the status of voivodeship capitals under the 1999 administrative reform. The establishment of universities was meant to prevent their further provincialisation and social and cultural marginalisation (Act of 26 June 1997; Gądek, 2017; Kowalska, 2013). Considering the insignificant number of State Higher Vocational Schools' (PWSZ) students, who never constituted more than a few per cent of the total number of students (the 2013 estimate is around 5%; Rybkowski, Kędzierski, 2017), this segment has played a rather marginal role in the educational system.

TABLE 5. COMPARISON OF THE SPECIFICITY AND PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION OF UNIVERSITIES ESTABLISHED UNDER THE ACTS OF 12 SEPTEMBER 1990 AND 26 JUNE 1997

HEIs operating under the Act of 12 September 1990	Universities operating under the Act of 26 June 1997
Obligatory tasks	
Teaching activity: education in the field of higher vocational studies, uniform master's and supplementary master's studies, as well as postgraduate and doctoral studies, studies and special courses	Teaching activity: education in professional fields and specialities at higher vocational studies, postgraduate studies and courses
Scientific activity: conducting scientific research, educating and developing scientific staff	Scientific activity: none (conducting research as an optional activity)

Didactic specifics	
Vocational and general studies: four, six or ten semesters, with emphasis on knowledge	Only vocational studies: six semesters (including a 15-week apprenticeship), with emphasis on skills
Teaching staff	
Exclusively academic teachers	People with academic qualifications, specialists with practical experience gained outside the university
Model of cooperation with the local environment	
Not defined at the legislative level	Close cooperation: establishing schools at the request of local communities and with the participation of their resources, inclusion of external stakeholders in strategic decision-making processes, orientation towards the local labour market and education in terms of its needs
Collegial bodies	
Senate (representatives of the academic community) Faculty councils (as above)	Senate (representatives of the academic community) Council (representatives of local authorities and employers with consultative and advisory powers)

Source: own study based on the Act on Higher Education of 12 September 1990 and the Act on Higher Vocational Schools of 26 June 1997.

2.4. Fat years, lean years

2.4.1. Challenges of the prosperity era

When analysing European higher education systems, Martin Trow (1974) distinguished three model stages of their development: he denoted systems that cover up to 15% of people from a given year as elite, and those whose participation in education exceeds 15% as mass systems (massification); he assumed a level of 50% of the participation of the given year group in university education as the threshold for higher education popularisation. In Poland, the expansion of higher education took place (with considerable support from the state and public opinion) faster than anywhere else in Europe (see Kowalska, 2013; Pawłowski, 2004). The massification threshold was crossed in 1995 and the threshold for popularisation in 2007. However, Marek Kwiek notes that this process was *sudden* and *uncoordinated*; Poland was *completely unprepared* [for it] *institutionally, financially, in terms of personnel and conceptually* (Kwiek, 2015, p. 109, transl.). After a dozen or so years, the undesirable effects of this uncontrolled "explosion" became apparent.

The first decade after the Act's introduction can be described as the golden age of the entire sector. In the record-breaking academic year 2009/2010, there

were as many as 330 private universities in Poland[30], which were educating a third of Polish students (Kruszewski, 2000; CSO, 2010)[31]. As I have already mentioned, there was a dynamic development of paid forms of education at both public and private universities, and consequently, Polish universities saw a diversification of students in terms of the mode of study. The conditions in question, which brought about Poland's "educational wonder", meant that as little as ten years ago (2008/2009) the country was second only to Germany and the United Kingdom in terms of the size of the higher education sector (IBE, 2011). However, the favourable demographic trend began to reverse, and so did the current makeshift order, created spontaneously and on a bottom-up basis, with little state interference. Though initially slow, the decline in the number of students started in the 2006/2007 academic year, in line with earlier forecasts. The consequences of this process are discussed later in the paper, as the sector was already facing several other serious challenges, which merit some attention.

The first of these challenges was transnational and related to the drive to create the European Higher Education Area. In 1999, the ministers of 29 European countries, including Poland, signed the *Bologna Declaration*, starting the process of profound changes in higher education. The declaration contained the following appeal: *Attention should be paid to the need to increase the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the attractiveness of its culture to other countries. We must ensure that the European higher education system becomes as attractive to the whole world as our unique cultural and scientific traditions* (Bologna Declaration, 1999, transl.).

The Bologna Process was meant to lead to the harmonisation of national education systems at the higher level and thus create favourable conditions for the mobility of academic staff and students, better adaptation of the education system to the needs of the labour market and increased employability of graduates. From a global perspective, these changes were also designed to increase the quality and competitiveness of the European higher education system. The tools that were to be used to achieve these goals included the adoption of a system of clear titles and professional degrees, the implementation at national levels of a system based on two education cycles (first- and second-cycle studies), the introduction of the ECTS credit system, as well as broadly understood cooperation to ensure education quality. The joint efforts were supposed to result in the creation of a coherent education system called the European Higher Education Area

30 At the same time, there were 131 public universities (CSO, 2010).

31 By comparison, there are 232 of them today (data from the POLON Integrated System of Information on Science and Higher Education, as of 10 August 2020).

(Antonowicz, 2015). The goals set out in the *Bologna Declaration* were part of a broader programme formulated in the Lisbon strategy adopted a year later (2000) by the leaders of the EU countries. One of its foundations was the knowledge-based economy (Lisbon strategy, 2000).

To implement these obligations, Poland had to introduce statutory changes. This process reflected the growing importance of international agendas for national higher education systems. Dominik Antonowicz (2016, p. 133, transl.) noted the following: *the internationalisation of higher education in Europe is not only an increase in the international mobility of students and researchers but also a significant impact of supranational ideas, initiatives and institutions on the shaping of higher education policy, including the functioning of universities.* In 2005, an act was passed (the Act on Higher Education of 27 July 2005) which adjusted the Polish higher education system to match the European scheme. It introduced changes on several levels. The structure of the studies was modified – from now on, they would be based on two cycles of education (first- and second-cycle studies). ECTS credits were introduced to curricula, which were to enable the comparability of diplomas of Polish graduates with those held by graduates in other countries, and thus, recognition of education obtained at Polish universities in the European labour market (Act of 27 July 2005). Although the introduction of these changes was necessary due to the commitments made, the new solutions became the subject of a heated debate with many scepticalopinions voiced (see, e.g., Dietl, Sapijaszka, 2006). The act was claimed to be merely a response to the most pressing problems reported by the higher education sector community; its usefulness was also questioned due to the lack of a far-reaching vision (Dziedziczak-Foltyn, 2017).

Aside from adjusting the national system to European solutions, the statutory changes were akin to an order (the Act combined the regulations contained in the two previous acts, i.e. the Act on Higher Education of 1990 and the Act on Higher Vocational Schools of 1997), although they were quite important from the perspective of the non-public sector. A new system of universities was introduced: they were divided into academic (with doctoral qualifications in at least one field) and vocational. The act also had a symbolic meaning, as it introduced a common framework for all universities, regardless of their status upon establishment, entailing a kind of institutional "equality" – a change that was long-awaited by non-public universities[32]. *The non-public sector has become such a large and important segment of the higher education system, so internally diversified, that it required the new*

[32] At the nomenclature level, the new act replaced the division into state and non-state universities with the division into public and non-public universities. This nomenclature is used in the further part of this paper.

legal framework. In this way, non-public universities became part of the higher education system – symbolically and legally alike (Antonowicz, 2015, p. 280, transl.).

The changes introduced coincided with the intensification of the debate on the increasingly visible dysfunctions of the higher education system. Their roots were traced back to the liberalisation and marketisation of higher education and the lack of state interference and control (a no-policy approach) in the sector, especially when it came to paid studies (Antonowicz, 2017). Examples of dysfunctions that undermined trust in the entire higher education sector were discussed more and more widely (see, e.g., Stankiewicz, 2018).

Among the most prominent and important (and in the opinion of some researchers, the most important, see Kwiek 2015) issues was multiple employment. The very dynamic quantitative development of the non-public sector was not accompanied by an increase in the number of academic teachers (or an increase in expenditure on science, including staff remuneration, which is equally important in this context). While the number of students increased fivefold and several hundred new universities appeared across Poland, the number of academic teachers increased by as little as 60%, resulting in a major disproportion (IBE, 2011). The data on the primary workplaces of academic teachers left no illusions – private universities practically did not (and still do not) have their own academic staff. As a result, the "borrowing" of full-time employees from public universities took place on a very large scale. Many lecturers took the opportunity to take up employment in the private sector, *trying to maintain the middle-class standard of living at a time when university wages were far behind those of other specialists* (Kwiek, 2015, p. 182, transl.). This phenomenon, known as "parasitism" for a good reason, quickly gave rise to a strong conflict between the public and non-public segments of the sector[33]. This conflict entered a decisive phase when the education market visibly began to shrink. At that time, the "cold war for resources" began in earnest[34] – and this term should be construed as relating not only to potential students but also to academic lecturers (Pawłowski, 2004; Antonowicz, 2015; Kwiek, 2015). The problem of multiple employment was all the more worrying as the authorities had no tools to monitor it effectively (a lecturer's work outside their home university was often based on a civil law contract), and as such, the data that can be referenced here are only estimates. About every third academic teacher at that time combined work at a public

33 A draft law containing a provision requiring single employment appeared as early as 1999, but it encountered strong opposition from non-public universities (Antonowicz, 2015).

34 Before 2000, competition from non-public universities was disregarded by state schools due to the large number of applicants sufficient to saturate both sectors. Later, however, there were some actions blocking the development of private universities, giving rise to disputes over the employment of public university professors, among other things.

university with private sector employment. It is also worth paying attention to the varied scale of the problem in specific employee groups, depending on their place in the academic hierarchy. As many as 35% of assistant professors and 65% of professors were employed outside their home universities (Kwiek, 2015; Antonowicz, 2015; IBE, 2011). The report prepared by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Fulton et al., 2007) expressly formulated the assessment and consequences of the described phenomenon:

> *Employment of public employees* [...] *by the private sector is in fact a significant covert subsidy, which should be properly named. Such a subsidy is the real cost of the primary employer. Lecturers with multiple positions will find it more difficult to fulfil their obligations towards students at their primary employer's. They will also certainly have less time to conduct research, for which they are also paid, and which is necessary to keep their knowledge up-to-date and thus be an effective lecturer.* [...] *We suspect that also in the institutions of the primary employers there is a more hidden form of working on several jobs. The increase in the number of students* [...] *also made it possible to remunerate employees teaching at such* [extramural – A.A.] *studies with overtime pay* [...] *and while it is a valuable way of increasing employees' income, it carries the same risks of distracting workers from their core responsibilities, especially in the field of research*
>
> (Fulton et al., 2007, p. 66).

The above diagnosis raises two important issues. The first is the impact of multiple employment on research activities and its relationship with the uncontrolled development of the paid studies area (in this case, only concerning public universities), which should also be considered in the context of the "side effects" of the higher education sector's spontaneous expansion. The second is the low salaries in the public sector which – combined with the financially attractive prospect of paid teaching in the private sector and the de-institutionalisation of traditional academic standards (i.e. the legitimacy of "extra after hours"), including at the institutional level – brought a decline in interest in scientific research and marginalisation of scientific research in many fields (Kwiek, 2012). Research began to be treated as an *individual hobby: harmless and marginalised by multi-tenure and extensive teaching delivered in both sectors* (Kwiek, 2015, p. 182). Scientific and research activity declined especially in those fields that saw a massive expansion at the level of education, i.e. humanities, social sciences, economics and finance. As a consequence, some Polish scientists were excluded

from the international circulation of research knowledge for a long time (Kwiek, 2012, 2015; IBE, 2011, for more on the "split" of Polish science into the "global" and "local" branches, see Antonowicz, 2015b).

Over time, as a result of more than a decade of virtually uncontrolled expansion of paid studies, the reflection of the academic community also focused on issues related to controlling education quality (especially in extramural studies), as well as the structure of education courses. Furthermore, universities began to offer courses that cost relatively little money[35], e.g., pedagogical studies, humanities, social and economic faculties, including e.g., management and marketing – Poland's most popular field of study for several seasons[36], raising admission limits along the way. As a result, by 2008, education was dominated by four areas accounting for almost 60% of all students. A total of 23% of students studied administration and economics, 14% – social studies, 12% – pedagogy and 9% – humanities[37]. In the case of extramural studies, attention was paid to the optimisation of education (e.g., reducing the number of class hours and having direct contact with the teacher during classes while working in small groups) and its negative impact on the quality of the teaching process. The first attempts to regulate these issues were of a grassroots nature. Such initiatives included the establishment of the University Accreditation Committee (1998), which was meant to conduct accreditation activities, thus emphasising education quality. This was the teaching community's attempt to overcome the state's helplessness in supervising the educational services sector (Antonowicz, 2015; IBE, 2011). Noble as it was, the attempt was doomed to failure for two reasons. Firstly, due to the profitability of educational services, and secondly, due to the weakening of academic standards and tacit consent to the low quality of education.

2.4.2. Decade of reforms

In 2007, Barbara Kudrycka from the non-public sector (a former rector of the Białystok School of Public Administration) was appointed Minister of Science

35 In the case of non-public universities, the offer was also significantly influenced by the availability of academic staff and their readiness and willingness to take up additional employment. This has been confirmed by research showing that *the main motive for establishing non-public universities was the market analysis of the demand and the availability of academic staff* (Antonowicz, 2015, p. 235).

36 By comparison, only four private universities in Poland offer a cost-intensive medical course: Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University (Akademia im. Andrzeja Frycza Modrzewskiego w Krakowie; since 2016), Lazarski University in Warsaw (since 2017), University of Technology (Wyższa Szkoła Techniczna) in Katowice (since 2018) and Maria Skłodowska-Curie Medical University (Uczelnia Medyczna im. Marii Skłodowskiej-Curie) in Warsaw (since 2020). Depending on the university, the tuition fee for studies in this field is approximately PLN 264,000–390,000 for Polish-language studies.

37 Today, these percentages are 18%, 10%, 7%, 5%, respectively (language courses).

and Higher Education. Her term of office (2007–2013) was marked by a shift towards active government policy and neoliberal reforms in the higher education sector. The starting point was the deepening crisis and loud criticism of the sector by both external and internal stakeholders, including due to the issues discussed above (see, e.g., Antonowicz, 2015). The sector's key problems were diagnosed and described in two extensive reports commissioned by the Polish government to the World Bank (2004) and OECD (Fulton et al., 2007).

The reports highlighted several problems. Firstly, the sector's underfunding (as reflected by both employee wages and expenditure per student) and financing rules favour the preservation of the existing system instead of encouraging quality improvements on the scientific and organisational levels. Secondly, the report states the following:

> *Management practices in certain tertiary education institutions are underdeveloped, and reflect a lack of understanding of the importance of setting objectives, assigning priorities, creating incentives planning processes, and analyzing outputs against the targets set. Higher echelon management posts such as Rectors, Vice-Rectors and Faculty Deans are rotated according to academic seniority or group interests rather than by managerial skills or experience. The managers are elected for a rather brief period (three or four years) with a right to be re-elected once, which is not conducive to the accumulation of relevant skill and experience.* [...] *University senates and faculty boards, which is where many important decisions are taken, sometimes lack both experience and guidance on managerial and financial issues*
>
> (World Bank, 2004, p. 27).

Strategic management and reforms at the central level were further hampered by the substantial autonomy of universities and their units.

It was also indicated that Polish universities are conservative (both in terms of teaching methods and curricula) and lack the involvement of external partners (e.g., employers, local governments) in the education process. In conjunction with a clear inward-looking orientation, education was focused on the use of internal resources instead of meeting the needs of external stakeholders, which eventually impacted the future employment opportunities of graduates (the lack of interest in monitoring the subsequent careers of graduates only served to confirm this). The conclusion was as follows: *In Poland, the combination of academic traditions with an autonomous legal and financial framework encourages a relatively inward looking and independent academic culture. Most HEIs tend to concentrate on academically oriented*

education and basic research without much reference either to the labor market or to the business and innovation environment (World Bank, 2004, p. 32). According to the authors of the report, the effectiveness of the system was also affected by the fragmentation and lack of real diversification of the system (including the so-called *academic drift*[38]), inequalities in access to education (admission to good universities and free studies depending on socio-economic status) and lack of support for *lifelong learning* (World Bank, 2004; Fulton et al., 2007).

In early 2008, a ministerial team set out to develop assumptions for sectoral changes. Its work resulted in two packages of reforms: *We Build on Knowledge. Science reform for the development of Poland* (2008) and *Partnership for knowledge. Higher education reform in Poland* (2009). Soon after, along with the amendment to the 2011 Act on Higher Education came very significant changes, both in terms of the status of an academic teacher and the education process. From then on, research workers would have to be regularly assessed (based on bibliometric indicators and students' opinions) and have a set time frame in which they would have to obtain their habilitation, among other things. Most importantly, however, the amendment was a clear step towards reducing multiple employment since it introduced the obligation to obtain the rector's consent to hold an additional job (Act of 18 March 2011).

The state also intensified its activity in the field of recruitment policy. In response to the harsh criticism of the unfavourable structure of education and its inconsistency with the needs of the labour market, a programme of commissioned fields of study, financed under the Operational Programme Human Capital, was introduced in 2008[39]. The programme was meant to increase the number of specialists in the labour market by offering additional financial support for universities, including scholarship funding, which was significant from the perspective of the development of the Polish economy. It applied to graduates of science, technology, mathematics and natural sciences who, as of 2005/2006, accounted for as little as 16.4% of all graduates (NIK, 2015)[40]. The process of massification of higher education took place largely because of the increase in the number of students in the humanities and social sciences, which disturbed the balance between this education profile and science and

38 The term *academic drift* refers to a situation where relatively young, less selective higher education institutions focused on vocational education duplicate the mission and practices attributed to classical universities (Fulton et al., 2007, p. 47).

39 See Ordinance of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 2 July 2008 on the appointment and operation of the Committee for the evaluation of education offers under the systemic project "Commissioning education in technical, mathematical and natural sciences fields of study – a pilot" (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2008).

40 For the assessment of the effectiveness of the actions taken, see Study of Human Capital, 2014; NIK, 2015.

engineering studies. The programme of commissioned fields of study was designed to contribute to the gradual balancing of the demand for various fields of study (Antonowicz, 2015; Jelonek, 2020).

The stimulus for the programme's creation was the criticism levelled at the education process in Polish universities, especially in terms of its structural (non) adjustment to the needs of the labour market – too many social and humanities faculties and too few science and technology graduates, with the latter accounting for about 16% of all graduates at the beginning of the programme implementation process (2008). The programme aimed to increase this percentage to 22% with a simultaneous reduction in the number of dropouts in the above fields of study. It was meant to provide an impulse to change the candidates' preferences, and consequently, to provide them with the competencies sought in the labour market. A total of 11 fields and education specialisations vital to the economy were selected, including computer science, mathematics, environmental protection, mechanics and machine building, and construction (Jelonek, 2020).

The programme included several components to encourage and facilitate learning in these fields of study. Programmes for remedial classes for first-year students were introduced, as were additional education elements in the form of internships and apprenticeships and attractive scholarship programmes (70% of the programme funding was allocated to the latter). In the 2008–2016 period, 85 universities from all over Poland took part in the programme, which was accompanied by promotional activities targeted at potential candidates (Jelonek, 2020).

Yet another goal of many of the promotional initiatives undertaken was reducing the disproportion between male and female graduates in these fields of study. Examples include the cyclical campaign *Girls as Engineers!* (since 2006) and the subsequent *Girls go Science!*, as well as *IT for SHE* (FEP, 2018)[41]. An enrolment limit for full-time studies at state universities was also introduced, which was designed to avoid surplus education, among other things. The programme of commissioned fields of study was evaluated both by private entities commissioned by the ministry itself, as well as by the Supreme Audit Office (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli – NIK) and independent experts (Jelonek, Szklarczyk, 2013; Jelonek, 2020). The assessment of the programme's effects is ambiguous. For example, a comparison of the number of students in the second year of studies, both in the conditions of co-financing and under-financing of a given field of study, prompted Magdalena Jelonek (2020) to claim that the only ones who enrolled in the relevant science faculties were those

41 The effectiveness of the actions is as follows: in 2007/2008, women accounted for 30.7% of the total number of students at technical universities. By 2017/2018, there was as many as 37% of them (*Women at technical universities..., 2018*).

who planned to study there anyway. The increase in enrolment for commissioned courses took place at the expense of recruitment levels in related courses that were not covered by the programme (without subsidies and scholarships for students). As a result, the overall volume of science students did not increase significantly. Moreover, in the case of commissioned specialisations, the percentage of drop-outs was particularly high. Experts also questioned the range of the fields of study chosen for co-financing due to doubts as to whether it adequately reflected market demand, and pointed out that additional funding was being invested under the programme to promote fields of study that would most likely continue growing anyway given the rising interest among candidates (Jelonek, 2020).

The year 2014 saw the launch of a nationwide Polish Graduate Tracking System (ELA)[42], in which the criterion for measuring the quality of education was its market value, i.e. the level of graduates' earnings. The system is based on data collected by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) and begins to use the latter's administrative resources once the graduate has obtained their diploma. Aggregated data, including such indicators as the amount of remuneration, the number of employers, the time of looking for a job, the duration of unemployment and the scale of self-employment, are then used to determine the graduate's labour market situation. Students graduating in 2014 were the first to be monitored by the system.

Thanks to the data sourced via the national monitoring conducted by the minister, universities will obtain reliable knowledge about their graduates' careers in the labour market. These data will allow them to better adjust the structure of their educational offer to the needs of the labour market by, for example, increasing recruitment for the fields of study where graduates achieve the best results in the labour market, phasing out fields of study whose graduates do not find work or opening new fields of study, said Barbara Kudrycka, the then Minister of Science and Higher Education, to justify the system's creation (Kudrycka, 2013, transl.).

Although the system is not perfect – it does not cover civil law contracts and contracts concluded outside Poland, nor does it contain information on whether the graduates' work is compatible with their fields of study – the unprecedented scale of data collection (the system generally covers over 95% of all students graduating each year) made it possible to examine the didactic offer of Polish universities and identify the fields of study in which graduates largely experience unemployment, as well as those that allow graduates to receive high earnings upon employment or significantly increase them afterwards.

42 See ela.nauka.gov.pl.

> *Relative unemployment rate and relative earnings rate* [calculated in the ELA tracking system for each graduate – A.A.] *synthetically characterise the fate of graduates since the profile and mode of study or the profession performed after graduation, regardless of the field of study, indicate both the level of preparation of these people to work in the labour market and their market valuation by employers*
>
> (Rocki, 2021, transl.).

In 2010, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education commissioned an external consortium[43], selected through a tender, to prepare a development strategy for the sector (E&Y – IbnGR, 2010). A sectoral strategy was developed independently and coordinated by the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (KRASP, 2009).

However, the reforms constituted only one aspect of the ongoing changes. At the same time (starting from 2006/2007), a reversal of the demographic trend was observed. In a decade (2005/2006–2015/2016), the total number of students decreased by 28%, with non-public universities experiencing a 47% decrease in this regard. The consequences of demographic processes were clearly not distributed evenly. They have had a much more significant impact on the private sector. In the 2017/2018 academic year, the total number of students accounted for 66% of that in the peak year 2005/2006. In contrast, the 2017/2018 number of students at non-public universities was less than half of that recorded in the record-breaking year 2008/2009 (49% and compared to 2005/2006 – 52%) – see Table 6.

TABLE 6. DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN THE 2005–2018 PERIOD

	2005/ 2006	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2011/ 2012	2013/ 2014	2015/ 2016	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019
number of students	**1,953,832**	1,927,762	1,900,014	1,764,060	1,549,877	1,405,133	1,291,870	1,230,254
including non-public HEIs	620,800	**659,396**	633,077	518,196	398,562	329,934	322,035	328,453

Source: own study based on CSO, 2006–2019.

The decline in the student population is due to the decreasing number of persons enrolling in the first year of studies. In the case of non-public universities, a much greater decline, including in this category, was visible until 2017.

43 Notably, this marked the first time that an analysis of the higher education sector was commissioned to an external entity.

The number of students who enrolled in the first year of studies at public universities in the 2015/2016 academic year accounted for 87% of their number ten years prior, while in the case of non-public universities it was only 41% (see Table 7). In 2017, an interesting phenomenon could be observed in the non--public sector. Contrary to the prevailing trend at the time, several thousand more people started learning at these universities compared to the previous year. This was likely the result of new regulations introduced by the Ministry of Science, which entered into force on 1 January 2017. The introduction of the Student Staff Ratio (SSR) based on the number of students per one academic teacher to the university funding algorithm has made it unprofitable for public universities to admit large numbers of students. If the ratio exceeds 13, the ministerial grant per student is reduced. That is why many universities have reduced the number of places available for students (by as much as 30% in some cases), thus giving space to non-public universities. By accepting candidates rejected in the public universities' recruitment procedures[44], they have become an unexpected beneficiary of the ministerial changes (see Mirowska-Łoskot, 2017).

TABLE 7. NEWLY ADMITTED 1ST-YEAR STUDENTS AT PUBLIC AND NON-PUBLIC HEIS

	2005/ 2006	2010/ 2011	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020
1st-year students (public HEIs)	312,459	314,645	265,103	258,730	241,602	227,917	233,436
1st-year students (non-public HEIs)	192,600	132,309	76,243	76,782	87,765	88,483	90,076

Source: own study based on CSO, 2006–2019.

2.5. Contemporary image of higher education

Over time, given the deepening problems faced by the sector, the discussion on the situation of higher education and science and the need for further fundamental changes gained momentum and went beyond the framework of the educational environment. Recent years have seen the frequent publishing of articles criticising the condition of higher education and science and pointing to the need for systemic changes (for more on the public debate on higher education reforms, see Dziedziczak-Foltyn, 2017), not only in academic media – see, e.g., the Academic Forum (Forum Akademickie) and the Citizens of Academia movement

44 Experts pay attention to the quality-promoting nature of the new regulations. Due to lower admission limits, universities were forced to increase selectivity in the process of recruiting candidates.

(ruch Obywatele Nauki) – but also in high-circulation nationwide press, such as "Gazeta Prawna", "Rzeczpospolita", "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Polityka".

In 2015, the Committee of Scientific Policy (Komitek Polityki Naukowej – KPN) carried out a SWOT analysis (*strengths*, *weaknesses*, *opportunities*, *threats*) of Poland's science and higher education system[45]. The Committee mentioned the following among its strengths: modern infrastructure, valuable (though limited) solutions in the area of organisation and management and the potential for their implementation, opportunities for the development of education in practical fields of study, as well as the introduction of system solutions for monitoring the future careers of graduates, which may prove helpful in planning further HEI development. Attention was also paid to the employers' increasing awareness of the need to cooperate with universities, as well as the persistently high level of educational aspirations of Polish society, and the tendency to invest in education[46]. Unfortunately, the list of the system's weaknesses is much longer, with several sub-categories distinguished in the above document. In the area of management, these weaknesses include overregulation and low system flexibility accompanied by overburdening research workers with administrative and office work; weak management system (including the use of "firefighting" instead of strategic planning); underestimating activities in the field of popularising science (the evaluation system seems to deliberately overlook this area of employee activity); as well as the lack of cooperation with the economic environment both in education and knowledge transfer. In terms of didactics, attention was drawn to the low quality of education (due to poor candidate selection practices, lack of competencies among lecturers and general neglect of the field of teaching), lack of concern for equipping graduates with the competencies needed in the labour market, the dominant role of academic studies and shortcomings in the field of vocational studies, as well as a mismatched education structure in the context of the changing needs of the market. It was also indicated that first-cycle studies are not considered too prestigious in Poland, resulting in the massification of second-cycle studies with a simultaneous low level of graduate competencies (compared to other countries). The authors were also critical of the HEI funding system, arguing that the current

45 Here, I only discuss issues related to higher education (although they are a minority). For more on science policy, please see the source document (KPN, 2016). Its authors emphasise that the analysis applies to the entire sector, so it can be considered in the context of various types of institutions operating in the Polish educational market. A more detailed description of the SWOT analysis can be found in Chapter III.

46 I believe that these two items should be included among opportunities, but they are cited in the original category chosen by the authors.

funding algorithm does not motivate HEIs to improve the quality of studies and that there is no formal possibility of financing education at the best non-public HEIs through public funding, among other things. They also pointed to the low activity of universities/HEIs in the area of adult education. Astonishingly, the authors of the analysis included only one (*sic!*) item regarding education among the opportunities: *the fast development of the international sector of modern business and IT services in Poland, creating numerous new jobs for university graduates* (KPN, 2016, p. 5, transl.). In contrast, they diagnosed numerous potential threats. Firstly, they indicated that focusing on accountability for scientific and research activities may result in further marginalisation of education and affect its quality (the already marginalised area of science popularisation may suffer as well). Secondly, demographic changes may result in an outflow of students from smaller towns (with smaller universities) towards a dozen or so of the largest academic centres, which would bring even more profound differences in access to high-quality education. Thirdly, the low attractiveness of working at a university along with the existing entry barriers faced by young academics may affect staff quality, and consequently, also the quality of education. The combination of these weaknesses may bring a decline in the value of university diplomas and undermine the authority of higher education institutions. Due to the inclusion of non-public HEIs in the analysis, the risk related to dynamic market changes (demography, candidate preferences) was also indicated since such changes directly affect the financial liquidity of these entities (KPN, 2016).

Despite its non-exhaustive character, the above diagnosis points to many important and pertinent problems faced by the academic community, as well as key challenges, which are not limited to the long-discussed consequences of the demographic decline, but also concern such things as the growing role of HEIs in the social inclusion of immigrants due to the growing multiculturalism.

The problems and expectations of Poland's educational environment were meant to be addressed by the far-reaching changes announced by Jarosław Gowin upon his appointment as Minister of Science in 2015:

> *The common belief of the academic community is that the higher education and science sector needs a new law. As far as this is possible, I want this law to be created as part of a dialogue between the Ministry and the academic community and an internal debate in the community of Polish scientists. I would like to avoid a situation in which new regulations are created hastily, are partial and incoherent, and as a result, bring chaos into the universities instead of helping*
>
> (Gowin, 2015, transl.).

In line with this announcement, the final wording of the Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science also known as the Constitution for Science (Konstytucja dla Nauki) or Law 2.0 (Ustawa 2.0), which entered into force on 1 October 2018, is the result of more than two years of multi--stage community consultations conducted by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Antonowicz, Kulczycki, Budzanowska, 2020). Afterwards, an academic community competition was launched[47] to prepare the draft assumptions for the act; it was announced in February 2016. Fifteen expert teams took part in it, with the best three[48] receiving grants of PLN 300,000 to develop the assumptions. Competitive proposals were to become the starting point for further, wide-ranging consultations in the scientific community. This involved such activities as organising several programme conferences in various academic centres across Poland. Selected issues were discussed during their course (e.g., HEI models, financing, management, internationalisation, staffing issues), which were to be covered by the new legal regulations. September 2017 saw the Minister of Science present the draft Constitution for Science during the National Science Congress, which was a kind of summary of the work to date[49]. In the following months, the draft was subject to further consultations and many amendments, and after passing the legislative process, was ultimately signed by the President of the Republic of Poland in July 2018. It is worth noting that the whole process was of great interest to the public and appeared not only in academic media (e.g., the Academic Forum, news feeds of the Citizens of Academia movement) but also in high-circulation press (e.g., "Dziennik Gazeta Prawna", "Rzeczpospolita", "Gazeta Wyborcza", "Polityka" and "Newsweek").

The Law reflects the functioning division into public (i.e. established by state bodies) and non-public higher education institutions (established by natural or legal persons other than a local government or state unit). In principle, the requirements for establishing non-public higher education institutions did

47 See www.konstytucjadlanauki.gov.pl.

48 Winners of the competition were: the team of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań headed by Prof. Marek Kwiek, the team of the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities supervised by Prof. Hubert Izdebski and the Allerhand Institute team led by Arkadiusz Radwan, PhD.

49 Another quality-promoting activity that followed the Constitution for Science was "The Excellence Initiative – Research University" competition, which aimed to select the best Polish universities and support their potential by increasing the ministerial subsidy by 10% to support staff development, research activities and international cooperation (*Announcement of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 26 March 2019...*, 2019).

not change significantly. The previous division into academic and vocational higher education institutions was also retained, with the law redefining both types of these entities. An academic higher education institution is a higher education institution that *conducts scientific activity and has scientific category A+, A or B+ in at least 1 scientific or artistic discipline*. Academic higher education institutions conduct first- and second-cycle studies as well as uniform master's degree studies; they may also educate doctoral students. A vocational higher education institution *provides an education that takes into account the needs of the socio-economic environment and does not fulfil the condition referred to in Article 14 Sec. 1* (i.e. it is not an academic higher education institution). Vocational HEIs educate students only as part of practical studies. They conduct first-cycle studies and may also run second-cycle studies, uniform master's degree studies, as well as specialist education courses.

The basic tasks of higher education institutions (regardless of their founding status), as defined in the Law, included providing education as part of studies, postgraduate studies or other forms of education, as well as conducting a scientific activity, providing research services and transferring knowledge and technology to the economy. At the same time, as in the previous legislation, scientific and research activities were not included among the basic tasks of vocational higher education institutions.

The system of conducting studies and their profile have not changed. Higher education institutions can still conduct first-cycle studies, second-cycle studies and uniform master's degree studies, as well as general academic or practical studies. In the case of the general academic profile, more than half of the ECTS credits are assigned to classes related to the academic activity conducted at the HEI, and at least 75% of classes must be conducted by academic teachers employed there. In the case of practical studies, more than half of the ECTS credits are assigned to classes focused on practical skills while the number of classes conducted by academic teachers employed at the university is lower and amounts to 50%, enabling broader cooperation with outside specialists. Moreover, the curricula of practical profiles provide for longer work placements of at least six months (first-cycle studies and uniform master's degree studies) or three months (second-cycle studies). Vocational HEIs may conduct dual studies in cooperation with the employer.

Studies may be conducted as either full-time or extramural (at a public HEI, the number of part-time students cannot exceed the number of full-time students). Full-time first-cycle studies last at least six semesters (engineering studies at least seven), second-cycle studies from three to five semesters, and uniform master's degree studies from nine to twelve semesters. The legislator

assumed that extramural studies may last longer than the corresponding full-time studies (Act of 20 July 2018).

TABLE 8. MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TYPES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) SPECIFIED IN THE ACT OF 20 JULY 2018

Academic university	Vocational HEI
Conducts scientific activity and holds the A+, A or B+ scientific category in at least one scientific/artistic discipline	Conducting scientific activity is not one of its basic tasks
Offers first- and second-cycle studies and uniform master's studies, including dual studies	Conducts first-cycle studies, may conduct second-cycle studies, uniform master's studies and specialist education courses, including dual studies (the education takes into account the needs of the socio-economic environment)
Provides general academic or practical studies	Provides education only as part of practical studies (at least 50% of classes carried out by academic teachers, wider cooperation with specialists from outside the university, longer work placements: six months in first-cycle studies, three months in second-cycle studies)
Entitled to educate doctoral students	Not entitled to educate doctoral students

Source: own study based on the Act of 20 July 2018.

3. Challenges for the sector – will the worst-case scenario come true?

The early 21st century already saw attempts to answer the question of how demography would affect higher education (Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011; Pawłowski, 2004)[50]. The forecasts at the time indicated that by 2020, the number of 19-year-olds (study candidates) would be lower by almost half compared to the 2002 peak figures. The most likely approach would be to keep the number of students attending free full-time studies at a constant level (the first rational selection of candidates, facilitated by easing the selection criteria). This would make it possible to distribute the costs of the demographic decline among the other segments of the education market, especially non-public universities. The universities conducting

50 Symptoms pointing to the collapse of the "booming" demographic trend appeared as early as 2006, when the first decrease in the number of students enrolled in paid forms of studies was recorded (Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011).

full-time studies would be the ones most severely affected by the changes. *The report clearly shows that the paid forms of education, especially non-public universities whose activities are fully financed by tuition fees, will be hit the hardest by the demographic decline. It is clear that public universities compensate for the falling income from part-time studies by increasing the number of full-time places* (Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011, p. 18, transl.; see Table 9). The demographic decline was supposed to overlap with migration processes, which were expected to bring varying consequences for specific regions, depending on their attractiveness and ability to attract students from other parts of the country (due to the educational services offered and labour market prospects). *Negative demographic trends may lead to the further massing of students in the main academic centres of the country, with the simultaneous progressive marginalisation of its already weak peripheral centres*, stressed the authors of the report (Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011, p. 16). They also drew attention to the natural and pro-quality nature of the progressive selection of HEIs, stressing that *in the long term, it may bring enormous benefits to students and their parents because only strong, stable and reliable universities will remain on the market* (Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011, p. 18, transl.).

TABLE 9. NUMBER OF FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME STUDENTS AT PUBLIC AND NON-PUBLIC HEIs

	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2018/2019 to 2011/2012
public full-time	876,744	886,420	860,230	851,189	838,651	813,596	764,379	713,601	81%
public	369,120	331,057	291,085	259,019	236,548	220,565	205,456	188,200	51%
non-public full-time	88,519	83,715	79,525	78,313	80,301	82,129	88,594	95,658	108%
non-public	429,677	375,735	319,037	280,865	249,633	232,532	233,441	232,795	54%

Source: own study based on CSO, 2007–2019.

Based on the population forecast prepared by CSO (2014), it is difficult to be optimistic about the sector's future[51]. The expected changes in the population structure indicate that by 2050 the number of people aged 19–24 will constitute only 58% of the corresponding age group in 2013. In absolute numbers, it will

[51] In the 2017/2018 academic year, 1,292 million persons studied in Poland, 25% of whom were non-public university students. A total of 66% of all students studied in the full-time mode and 34% studied in the part-time mode. Extramural students constituted the vast majority (72%) at non-public universities, whereas full-time students dominated the public universities (79%; USwG, 2018).

be about 900,000 people, i.e. tens of thousands fewer than the 2017 number of students attending public higher education alone. While the years 2026–2029 are expected to bring a certain increase in this age group, it will be a short-lived improvement (it is the aftermath of a reform lowering the school starting age). The decline in the number of students of the standard student age will be more severe in cities, where the size of this group will decrease by 46% compared to 2013 (compared to 38% in rural areas). This means a dramatic reduction in the number of Polish students, even if the current high enrolment rate is maintained. Moreover, it is simply impossible not to notice the imminent changes in the short term. Within a decade (2015–2025), the number of students will decrease by 24%. This means that higher education institutions with an extensive offer (both in terms of the number of places and the number of fields of study) will not have a chance to find a sufficient number of candidates. Public higher education institutions offering free full-time studies, especially those located in the largest academic centres, will be in an advantageous position. In contrast, there will simply be no space left in the market for many non-public higher education institutions. In Poland, the last decade alone saw the disappearance of every fifth non-public HEI (330 of them operated in the 2009/2010 academic year; today, there are 232 left)[52] while the share of non-public HEI students in the total number of students fell from 33% to 27%. Further liquidations are inevitable (CSO, 2014; Kwiek, 2015; Moroń, 2016; Szczygielski, 2016).

In the case of the private sector, mergers may prove to be salvation and an alternative to liquidation[53]. Łukasz Sułkowski forecasts that the consolidation activity will intensify in the coming years due to this sector's dispersion, irrational education network and structure, and increasing competition (the effect of the demographic decline and market saturation). For several years now, the largest

52 Data from the POLON Integrated System of Information on Science and Higher Education, as of 10 August 2020.

53 Recent years have shown that mergers are not exclusive to non-public entities. Among the examples of the so-called "rescue mergers" is the incorporation of two state-owned vocational universities into the structures of universities: the State Higher Vocational School (PWSZ) in Sandomierz incorporated into Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce (Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego), and the State Higher Vocational School (PWSZ) in Sulechów into the University of Zielona Góra (Uniwersytet Zielonogórski). However, in the case of public universities, mergers are usually strategic and purpose-based, e.g., aiming to create a strong research centre with international potential – e.g., the 1993 incorporation of the Medical Academy (Akademia Medyczna) into the Jagiellonian University (Uniwersytet Jagielloński), or an institution with the status of a university – e.g., the 1999 establishment of the University of Warmia and Mazury (Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski) in Olsztyn. The State Higher Vocational School (PWSZ) in Gorzów, which absorbed a private IT vocational university in 2009, is an interesting case. So far, this is the only instance of consolidation of public and private universities in the Polish market (Sułkowski, 2017).

market participants (e.g., WSB group[54], Vistula group) have been taking over other smaller HEIs (in the last 10 years, there have been more than 80 mergers in the non-public sector, with up to four in the public sector). Mergers of non-–public higher education institutions are of a business nature[55] and are mainly aimed at strengthening the market position (increasing the scale and range of activities), improving financial results, optimising costs, and sometimes also increasing the status of the given academy or university. Overall, however, the consolidation processes will be a quality-improving transition for the higher education sector. They will lead to the elimination of inefficient universities, including the majority of non-public units (some forecasts indicate that only about 10% of them may eventually remain on the market). A more concentrated structure of the sector, better quality of education, organisational changes aimed at increasing efficiency (cost rationalisation, management improvement), as well as the strengthening of the top universities, are just some of the benefits that are expected to appear as a result of the forecast changes. It is worth mentioning that studies of mergers carried out in the public sector also indicate the benefits of the consolidation process (see Pinheiro, Geschwind, and Aarrevaara, 2016). Properly conducted mergers bring positive effects in the form of scientifically stronger universities, better offers for students and more efficient administration (Kwiek, 2015; Sułkowski, 2017; see also Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011).

54 List of acquisitions: Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Finansów in Wrocław (2012), Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomiczno-Turystyczna in Szczecin (2012), Wielkopolska Wyższa Szkoła Turystyki i Zarządzania in Poznań (2013), Wyższa Szkoła Prawa i Dyplomacji in Gdynia (2013), Wyższa Szkoła Techniczno-Przyrodnicza in Poznań (2014).

55 Nonetheless, at the declaration level, the initiators of mergers may point to such motives as the desire to strengthen the scientific position, increase recognition or improve education quality.

2

Adult education within the higher education sector

1. Adults in the process of education and education in the course of life – conceptual maze

Adulthood is a prolonged period in human life, subject to conventional internal periodisation, which includes several stages of development. According to Erik Erikson's classic theory (1963), these are early adulthood (21–34), middle adulthood (35–65) and older adulthood (after 65). Based on the criterion of the main occupation and the attitude towards this occupation, Włodzimierz Szewczuk (1961) divided adulthood into four stages: stabilisation of a life plan, progressive expansion with an *opus magnum* at its peak, regressive expansion and declining stage. He did not set age limits for individual stages, considering them an individual matter, dependent on many factors. In contrast, Elżbieta Dubas proposed a slightly more extensive division by arranging the successive stages of an adult's life into the following cycle: the fore-threshold of adulthood (up to 25), early adulthood (25–40), middle adulthood (up to 65), late adulthood (up to 80), old adulthood (over 80) – (Aleksander, 2001b; Dubas, 2009). Since professional development constitutes an integral part of human development, similar attempts at periodisation have also been made in this sphere of life. Tadeusz Aleksander (2001b) distinguished five phases in human professional development: pre-vocational education, vocational training at school, qualified work, gradual withdrawal from work and resignation from active professional life, i.e. the time of old age proper. Even without an in-depth characterisation of these periods, it seems obvious that people's educational needs at different life stages vary, as do the individual stages of human development. What they have in common is the constant need for education, which is typical not only for the period of one's professional activity but for life as a whole.

In recent decades, the issue of *lifelong learning* (including adult education, which is of particular interest to me) has been the focus of increasing attention of both scientists and national and international policymakers (see, e.g., Aleksander, 2015a; Grotowska-Leder, 2014; Malewski, 2002). This is due to at least two reasons. Firstly, no school today can prepare you for your entire career path. Acquiring a certain level of education is not the culmination of learning but merely the beginning of a continuous knowledge acquisition process. This applies to persons with different levels of education since due to the unprecedented pace of information growth and the rapid "ageing" of knowledge, each employee needs to deepen or expand their knowledge during the period of their professional activity. The second issue is related to the changes taking place in the labour market. New career types appear because the traditional, linear characteristics do not correspond to the dynamics of

the outside-world changes. Due to the shortening life expectancy of "organisations", the employees' working lives will be longer than their average lifespan. Thus, there are no more guarantees of prolonged employment "for life", or rather "until retirement", which was the norm for the previous generations. No longer will professional development, take place within a single structure, also as a result of individual decisions. Horizontal careers or competency development taking place outside a single, specific organisation will be more common. Changes will become a permanent feature of professional biographies. It is difficult to imagine how one could function in such a reality without various forms of education continuing throughout human life (Bohdziewicz, 2008; Kosmala, 2009; Piekarska, 2006).

In the scientific sense, the idea of lifelong education was developed in the early 20th century. The year 1929 saw the release of *Lifelong Education*, a book by Basil Yeaxlee who is considered one of the pioneers of modern *lifelong learning/continuous education*. The idea has been evolving ever since. The second half of the 20th century (the 1960s and 1970s) brought increased interest in *lifelong learning*, and at the time, scientific reflection on this issue was developed with the support of UNESCO (Grotowska-Leder, 2014; Malewski, 2002).

The institutionalisation of Polish andragogical research, thanks to the activities of educational societies, took place after Poland regained its independence. The year 1913 saw the release of the first Polish textbook on the topic, titled, *Educational work. Its tasks, methods and organisation*. The Warsaw-based Free Polish University (Wolna Wszechnica Polska), a pioneering institution in higher education for adults, and its Pedagogical Faculty played a major role in the development of andragogical research during the interwar period. In 1922, Helena Radlińska started her first lectures on out-of-school education there. Soon after, the College of Social and Educational Work (Studium Pracy Społeczno-Oświatowej) was established at the University; it was a research and development centre focused on educational work with adults and teaching educational workers (Stopińska-Pająk, 2010, 2019).

Adult education (the concept of *andragogy* was introduced by Helena Radlińska in 1947, though it did not replace the existing terms) was of interest to educators from the early days of the discipline's development, and to a lesser extent, to sociologists and psychologists. Shortly after World War II, the Department of Adult Education Theory was established at the University of Warsaw, and the Adult Pedagogy Group was set up within the Polish Academy of Sciences. The year 1957 saw the publishing of the first issue of "Oświata Dorosłych" (Adult Education System), a periodical addressed to theoreticians and practitioners of adult education (the last issue was published in 1990). Further textbooks were published in the 1960s and 1970s: *Wychowanie dorosłych. Zagadnienia andragogiki* (Adult Education. The issues of

andragogy; Kazimierz Wojciechowski, 1966), *Wprowadzenie do andragogiki: zarys teorii oświaty i wychowania dorosłych* (Introduction to andragogy: an outline of the theory of education and upbringing of adults; Lucjan Turos, 1972). At that time, a group of young researchers, including Tadeusz Aleksander, Olga Czerniawska, Józef Kargul, Mieczysław Marczuk, Józef Półturzycki (Kargul, 2018) decided to take up andragogy. After 1989, new cyclical publications appeared as a forum for exchanging andragogy-related thoughts, first "Edukacja Dorosłych" (Adult Education; 1990), then "Rocznik Andragogiczny" (Andragogical Annual; 1994) and "Edukacja Ustawiczna Dorosłych" (Continuous Adult Education; 1993) – (Sapia-Drewniak, 2014; Solarczyk-Szwerc, 2015). The topics they cover include such things as the, theory and methodology of andragogy, adult education in the context of the labour market, vocational training, e-learning and information technologies in education, as well as the issues of adult education in Poland and worldwide. The authors dealing with the subject also publish articles in other periodicals devoted to education, such as "Edukacja" or "E-mentor". Researchers investigating this issue are typically associated with institutes of andragogy, adult education, and continuous education (*lifelong learning*) departments. The first Andragogical Congress took place in 2009 (Bednarczyk, 2018; Gogolin, Szymik, 2018; Kargul, 2018).

As noted by such scholars as Jolanta Grotowska-Leder, the concept of *kształcenie ustawiczne,* the Polish equivalent of the term *lifelong learning*, is now construed in various ways, and therefore, it is difficult to define it unequivocally. Both the Polish subject literature and legal regulations use this term interchangeably with *permanent education* (*edukacja permanentna*). Both refer to the implementation of *lifelong learning* (*learning throughout life*; Grotowska-Leder, 2014). However, as noted by Józef Półturzycki, it still happens that *lifelong learning* is mistakenly equated with adult education even though the former concept has a broader meaning and *covers the entire school system as well as parallel education, adult education and upbringing in the environment*, and as such, expands beyond the limits of adulthood, encompassing the entire period of human life (Półturzycki, 2004). A similar view is taken by Tadeusz Aleksander, who treats adult education (continuous education) as an element of *lifelong learning* – the, continuation of education started in youth. According to him, adult education begins where the stage of school education (or, more precisely, "youth school") ends and continues until old age. The importance of this issue increases in the context of life expectancy in highly developed countries. The school education stage is significantly shorter than education at later stages of life. Moreover, it is not just the duration of education/training that gets longer – its intensity increases as well. Therefore, the idea of *lifelong learning* leaves behind the traditional division of human life into the learning (in youth) and employment (in adult life) periods in favour of their integration (Aleksander, 2015a).

The definition contained in the 2011 Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (EU Council, 2011) may serve as an interpretation guideline. It states the following:

> Lifelong learning *covers learning from pre-school age to postretirement. Adult learning is a vital component of the lifelong-learning continuum, covering the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities, general and vocational, undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training*
>
> (EU Council, 2011, p. 3).

Formal, non-formal and informal education – the terms dividing adult educational activities by their nature – are specified below based on documents of the European Union institutions and bodies.

Formal learning – *learning that is generally provided in an education or training institution for structured learning purposes, with a specific timeframe, and with learning support for learners, which is intended for the learner and generally leads to certification.*

Non-formal learning (formerly informal learning)[1] – *education not provided by an educational or training institution and generally not leading to certification, but of a planned nature, serving structured purposes and, taking place within specific timeframes, providing support for learners and having the intended character from the learner's point of view.*

Finally, **informal learning** (formerly incidental learning) is *learning resulting from everyday activities/tasks at work, at home or during leisure, i.e. one that is not implemented in an organised or systematic way, is, generally not intended from the perspective of the learner, and usually does not lead to certification* (FRSE, 2010, pp. 334–335, transl.).

The term *adult learning/education* (*uczenie się dorosłych*), which appears in the above-mentioned Resolution of the European Council (EU Council), is not present in Polish legal documents, as opposed to. the term *lifelong learning/continuous learning* (*kształcenie ustawiczne*). In the Education Law of 14 December 2016 (Act of 14 December 2016), the latter was defined as *in-school education for adults, as well as acquiring and supplementing knowledge, skills and professional qualifications*

[1] While the issue of *lifelong learning* (and its components) has long been at the centre of attention of the EU institutions, they have so far failed to remedy the terminological chaos in this area. On the contrary, it seems that they themselves contribute to it in some way, as evidenced by the definitions cited here.

in non-school forms by persons who have already fulfilled their schooling obligation. The Act of 20 April 2004 on employment promotion and labour market institutions contains the same definition, in this case, concerning the unemployed, job seekers, employees and employers. The scope of meaning of both terms differs, as indicated by the authors of *The Perspective of Lifelong Learning* [*Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie*] (KPRM, 2013a), signed by the Council of Ministers (see Table 10).

TABLE 10. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN *LIFELONG LEARNING* IN POLAND AND ADULT EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

***Lifelong learning* as defined in Poland**	**Adult education promoted in the EU**[2]
Concerns persons who:	
■ have fulfilled their schooling obligation and are still learning in continuing and practical education institutions or, in training and professional development centres; ■ attend adult schools	■ have completed education which entitles them to enter the labour market (initial), regardless of how long it was, i.e. including higher education
Focused on:	
■ younger persons, often up to 24[3], ■ attending education system institutions	■ persons between 25 and at least 65, ■ learning in various forms and places

Source: KPRM, 2013a, p. 18.

The Polish Strategy for the Development of Lifelong Learning until 2010 (adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2003) referred to the UNESCO definition (1973), which construes *lifelong learning* as a *complex of educational processes: formal, informal and incidental, which, regardless of the content, level and methods enable supplementing education in school and out-of-school forms, thanks to which adults develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their professional qualifications or acquire a new profession, or change their attitudes* (MENiS, 2003, transl.).

2 In the European Commission Communication referred to by the authors of the document, adult learning is defined as: *all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training, however far this process may have gone (e.g., including tertiary education)* – (European Commission, 2006). This definition is consistent with the previously mentioned definition in the 2011 Resolution of the Council of the European Union (EU Council, 2011).

3 The statutory limit of adulthood in the Polish education system has been set at the age of 18 (adults can start education in adult schools after the age of 18; this age is also the upper limit for the implementation of compulsory education, which includes the completion of primary school). Construed in this way, the formal threshold of adulthood is lower than that set in the EU guidelines, which do not define it by age but rather by the time of completing the last initial stage of education.

The "non-traditional student" category, as used in the title and throughout this paper, refers to education at various stages of adulthood. Although present in the literature on the subject (as a group separate from that of "traditional students"), this category is not clearly and coherently defined in literature or Polish documents, even though the number of people belonging to it has been systematically growing for years due to the popularisation of higher education. Thus, as noted by Monika Gromadzka (2017), it can be considered an "absent" category. At the institutional level, students of all ages are also treated equally. Within Polish universities and the Polish education system, there is no distinction between "traditional" and "non-traditional" students. However, in some countries, students are not treated as a homogeneous group by definition. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has proposed an interesting set of criteria covering, not only age but also factors such as financial independence, having dependents or employment of at least 35 hours per week (Gromadzka, 2017).

In this paper, the term "non-traditional students", is construed to mean persons above 24 years of age who are starting or continuing education in various types of studies (higher or postgraduate). This understanding of the above category and the establishment of the lower age threshold at 24 is motivated by the fact that this age range is taken into account when defining adult education in other EU countries (see Table 10), as well as in research on this issue (see, e.g., Adult Education Survey, Labour Force Survey, Adult Learning Statistics Eurostat). A similar criterion is also used by Statistics Poland, formerly Central Statistical Office (CSO), to determine the enrolment rate at a higher (net) level. The age group assigned to higher education is considered to be persons aged 19–24.

Since only the age criterion is used, the category of non-traditional students can be treated as synonymous with the "mature students" category that exists in some countries.

The subject of my interest in the empirical part of this work is only a selected group of non-traditional students and a certain part of the extensive portfolio of various forms of adult education that are available on the educational market today. It is no accident that I chose to focus on postgraduate studies. Since the number of people with higher education in Poland is systematically growing, it can be assumed that the area of education addressed to them will continue to develop dynamically, especially since the Polish statistics of adult participation in various forms of education differ significantly from the European average (which is discussed later in this paper). Although having a large share of the population with higher education is a relatively new phenomenon in Polish society, it does not mean that adult education should also be treated as such.

2. Adult education in Poland – the past and present[4]

In Poland's recent history, adult education has taken varying forms and scopes. Depending on the political system, it has responded to the current needs of the national economy and state policy (in the interwar period and the People's Republic of Poland era) or the demand generated directly by groups of potential education system participants (since the time of the political transition to this today). It has offered education "tailored to the times" that has continued to develop on various levels, and in many areas, depending on the current structure of education of the population. Selected examples that appear on the subsequent pages are quoted to illustrate the processes of changes that have occurred over the last century.

2.1. Interwar period

After Poland regained its independence in 1918, the needs in the field of adult education were at the centre of attention for the authorities. First, the level of education in Polish society dropped significantly during the partitions. This was further complicated by the significant differences in this respect that existed between individual regions of the country, which was a consequence of different educational policies of the partitioning authorities. Second, the post--war reconstruction of the country required the urgent involvement of qualified personnel in virtually all industries (Błędowski, Nowakowska, 2010).

In 1918, the Department of Out-of-School Education was established at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education. In the first years of its operation, the priority was to eliminate illiteracy since the 1921 census indicated that 33% of persons aged 10 and up could neither read nor write (Stańczyk, 2016). Primary school teachers were employed to work with adults in part-time classes, funded by the state budget[5]. The first school for adults was established in Warsaw in 1920. The students attended it for three years, during which they completed a shortened seven-grade elementary school curriculum. After passing a committee exam, the school's graduates had the opportunity to apply for a common school leaving certificate. From 1927, when schools for adults became public schools, certificates were issued without additional examinations. In addition to the classic school model, there were

4 Although this phenomenon had also occurred in Poland earlier in history, the subsequent discussion is limited to the last century (1918–2018) due to the limitations of this paper. For more on the subject, please see studies by such scholars as Jan Hellwig and Józef Półturzycki.

5 Pursuant to the decree of the Chief of State of 7 February 1919, school-age children were subject to compulsory education. However, this was never fully implemented (Hellwig, 1986).

also other teaching systems (including the system of "educational fours")[6]. Although the draft law on the elimination of illiteracy, which introduced the obligation of primary education for adults, was ready as early as 1927, the only group that compulsory primary education applied to in the early years of the Second Polish Republic were any illiterate Polish Army soldiers (Kargul, 2009; Sutyła, 1982).

Also available at the time were the Folk High Schools/Adult Education Centres (Uniwersytety Ludowe), which were addressed to people of lower status or without education. Operating primarily in rural areas, they organised lectures, readings and discussions. However, the dissemination of knowledge and vocational preparation were not the main, and certainly not the only, tasks set for these institutions by their founders. The preparation of "culturally neglected" listeners to actively participate in socio-cultural life at the local community and national level was no less important. The honourable senior of Polish social pedagogy, Helena Radlińska, issued the following appeal:

> *You cannot leave people awakened by the school to an intellectual coma; today, when all adults build a new life for the next generations, one cannot stop at teaching children* [...] *it is required that instructors of agriculture, horticulture, etc., organisers of reading rooms, choirs, theatres, and self-education associations should walk across Poland side by side*
>
> (Jamrożek, 2016, pp. 195–196, transl.).

The activities of community centres for adults were also part of this trend. They made it possible not only to gain knowledge, but also to develop interests. Local communities centred their activities around community centres, an approach that, quickly gained popularity. The network of community centres covered the entire country and was available to various social circles (Stopińska-Pająk, 2015).

Among the institutions conducting adult education activities at the time were also the Central Office of Courses for Adults (Centralne Biuro Kursów dla Dorosłych) and the Correspondence Public University (Powszechny Uniwersytet Korespondencyjny – PUK). What gave rise to the first one was the organisation of courses for the illiterate, over time, its activities took the form of part-time schools for adults, the curriculum of which was similar to that of common schools. In contrast, the Correspondence Public University developed a distance learning system and was the first institution in Poland to do so on such a scale. Its services

6 This system assumed learning in small groups, in which one person who could write and read would teach three others as part of social activity.

were available to anyone and were addressed primarily to people from small towns who had difficulties accessing stationary education institutions for adults. The students periodically received by mail the subsequent volumes of their selected course and sets of tasks to be performed once they have read the material. The students then had to send back their work, which was later forwarded to teachers for proofreading. Among those encouraged by the organisers to participate in the courses were professional groups subject to qualification exams (teachers), as well as individuals for whom education determined their future professional promotion (officials) or was an element of professional retraining (soldiers preparing for the civil service), although the offer also included courses from the 2nd grade of common school ("for non-orthographic writers and those unfamiliar with grammar"). The university enabled one to go through the programme of a selected subject or a course covering the entire common school or secondary school curriculum, as well as a teacher's course. The courses were aimed at preparing students to pass the relevant exams and obtain state diplomas. Up to 2,000 people a year used this form of education (Stopińska-Pająk, 2015; Tabor, 2010; PUK, 1930/1931; Półturzycki, 2001).

In the interwar period, vocational education was provided by craft and industrial institutes that began to emerge in the second half of the 1920s. Apart from vocational training and upskilling[7] for young people and adults, they also offered career counselling (directing young people to appropriate professions and informing them about market needs), conducted publishing activities and promoted reading. Interestingly, the so-called didactic trips (today we would call them "study visits"), which gave their participants a chance to learn the tools of the trade while working at an enterprise, were a common teaching method (Aleksander, 2001a).

During the interwar period, education was also available to adults with higher education. The Society for Educational Courses (Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych), operating in Warsaw during the partitions, was transformed into the Free Polish University (Wolna Wszechnica Polska). Its four faculties (mathematics and natural sciences, humanities, political and social sciences, and pedagogy) were open to people of various ages, who sometimes did not have any documents confirming the completion of earlier stages of education. Although the Free Polish University's students were required to pay tuition fees, candidates from various social circles had access to education due to their relatively low cost and discounts for less affluent

7 The course offer was very wide. Some of them concerned traditional crafts, contributing to the preservation of vanishing professions. Others, such as machine operation or electrical engineering, were related to the then technical "novelties" and promotion of new professions in which an increase in employment was expected (Aleksander, 2001a).

students (as many as 2/3 of the students were working people attending part-time courses). In 1929, the diplomas issued by the Free Polish University were equated with standard university diplomas. The Free Polish University's structures also included Collegium Publicum, which held "Sunday lectures" (today, we would probably call them a science-promoting activity). Thanks to its College of Social and Educational Work (Studium Pracy Społeczno-Oświatowej), the Free Polish University was also known as a centre that educated future organisers of cultural and educational activities, including those for adults. It was there that the scientific community of Polish andragogy emerged in the interwar period. The late 1920s saw the establishment of the Pedagogical Institute was established in Katowice – an institution for educating professionally active teachers. It also served as a centre for popularising didactic knowledge and holding general lectures on various topics (Stopińska-Pająk, 2005, 2015). Starting from 1926, Polish Radio (Polskie Radio) was also used for educational activities. At that time, broadcasts of French lessons began, followed by English lessons a year later. In the following years, readings for teachers were included in the radio programme, whereas the year 1928 saw the first broadcast of a repetition compendium for high school graduates (Hellwig, 2001).

The outbreak of World War II, followed by years of military operations and occupation resulted in the suspension of open educational activities in Poland. Nonetheless, secret schooling structures were quickly established to cover all levels of education, ranging from common, to vocational and general secondary education to higher education. Importantly, efforts were made to have these structures operate according to the existing rules so that the level of education, and consequently the graduates' knowledge level, would not differ from the pre-war standards. The organisation of teaching was hindered by the numerous arrests of teachers of all types of schools, which forced some of the academic staff to work in secret secondary schools (Draus, Terlecki, 1984).

For obvious reasons, university education necessitated working in small groups and could involve a relatively few students. It was also limited to large cities. The Stefan Batory University in Vilnius (Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego w Wilnie) was the first to continue its educational activities in secret after Poland's defeat in September 1939. The preserved reports from that period state the following: *the professors kept in touch with former students throughout the occupation, as long as the latter could learn, providing them with guidance and teaching aids and accepting the exam applications submitted* (Zasztowt, 1993, p. 75, transl.). Other universities soon began to operate in hiding as well, including the University of Warsaw (Uniwersytet Warszawski), the University of Poznań (Uniwersytet Poznański) under the name of the University of the Western Territories (Uniwersytet Ziem Zachodnich), Free Polish University (Wolna Wszechnica Polska), Warsaw School

of Economics (Szkoła Główna Handlowa), Warsaw University of Life Sciences (Szkoła Główna Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego) and the Warsaw Polytechnics (Politechnika Warszawska)[8]; in Kraków, it was the Jagiellonian University (Uniwersytet Jagielloński), the Academy of Fine Arts (Akademia Sztuk Pięknych), the Żeleński Music Institute (Instytut Muzyczny im. Władysława Żeleńskiego) and its affiliated Music School (Szkoła Muzyczna) – (Chrobaczyński, 1993; Krasuski, 1969). However, as noted by Józef Krasuski, *secret schooling at the higher level of education did not start as spontaneously as secondary education. The first attempts were often resented by some of the professors who did not really believe in the effectiveness of such an undertaking* (Krasuski, 1969, p. 233, transl.).

To some extent, secret informal schooling was carried out even in concentration camps. For example, the testimonies of Stuthoff camp prisoners refer to, education organised by Polish female teachers who taught, mathematics and Polish literature (Drywa, 2017).

2.2. Polish People's Republic

The fight against illiteracy and educational neglect remained a major challenge after World War II. At that time, the state became actively involved in the organisation of adult education. The authorities of the Polish People's Republic, under the Act on the Elimination of Illiteracy[9] (1949), introduced compulsory primary education for people between 14 and 50, along with administrative penalties for avoiding it. More than 600,000 people took part in compulsory education in just three years. The year 1956 saw the launch of a training programme for adults up to 40 without primary education, which had over 2 million participants (Act of 7 April 1949; Budnik 2013; Kargul 2009). Due to significant losses in teaching staff (a loss of nearly 30% compared to 1939), it was necessary to quickly educate a new generation of teachers that would be able to handle the extensive educational campaign that lay ahead of Poland. To that end, dedicated two-year pedagogical secondary schools were established; additional training opportunities for people with secondary education were provided as well (Kowtun, 1985).

For the first dozen or so years after World War II, adult education mainly played a compensatory role. Its overriding goal was to combat illiteracy and enable graduation – be it from common or secondary school – for people who

8 The scale of the secret schooling covering the oldest age groups is well illustrated by the fact that Warsaw's universities educated as many as 9,000 students in the 1939–1945 period (Krasuski, 1969).

9 According to some estimates (Kargul, 2009), there were as many as 4–6 million illiterates in post-war Poland; however, the lower figure of this range seems to be more accurate.

were deprived of this possibility due to the war[10]. Yet another crucial step on the way to increasing the level of education in Polish society was the 1961 law on common and compulsory eighth-grade primary school (Act of 15 July 1961). The act led to a significant expansion of the school network, including schools for working people. By the late 1960s, the latter had as many as 650,000 students (Kargul, 2009).

The turning point for the development of vocational education was the Law on Apprenticeship and Initial Work Experience of 2 July 1958 (Act of 2 July 1958). Following its adoption, dozens and then hundreds of workplace-affiliated schools for the youth and working people were established. In addition to training candidates for the given profession, they also offered the possibility of professional development of employees (Kowtun, 1985).

The subsequent years saw the popularisation of secondary education in primary schools. Describing the achievements of schools for working adults, Józef Kowtun cited the following data on the number of graduates in the mid-1980s: they educated over 4.5 million Poles in total, of which nearly 2.5 million in primary schools, 600,000 in general secondary schools and 1.5 million in vocational secondary schools. As many as 1.7 million people were covered by professional training annually (Kowtun, 1985).

Apart from the formal state-coordinated education system[11], independent organisations established in the interwar period were successfully operating in the first years after World War II (for example, the folk university network was reactivated). However, at the end of the 1940s, education became centralised and many independent units were liquidated (including the aforementioned universities, as well as many scientific societies). They were replaced by the Society for Common Science (Towarzystwo Wiedzy Powszechnej), which was subordinated to the central authorities, and far from politically neutral. The period of ideologically engaged education lasted more or less until the mid-1950s; at that point, independent educational associations began to reappear along with folk universities and self-education clubs (Kargul, 2009).

The 1960s and 1970s saw, further development of vocational training. At that time, individual ministries introduced legal regulations regarding the minimum education level for a wide range of jobs, and as a consequence, many employees of state-owned enterprises were directed back to schools. This resulted in the

10 The scale of educational activities for adults is illustrated by exemplary data from 1960: 223,000 adults studied in primary schools at that time, 62,000 in secondary schools, and a further 124,000 in vocational universities (Kowtun, 1985).

11 Organised forms of learning, both in educational and non-formal institutions, were used by the state for political agitation in favour of the new system.

dynamic development of extramural education at various levels, as the obligation to train included also employees with secondary (part-time studies)[12] and higher education (postgraduate programmes/studies, courses and, seminars). Although this was not expressed directly, the reason behind this was that the authorities wanted to raise the enrolment rates, which were very unfavourable compared to Europe (Kargul, 2009; Półturzycki, 1989).

While discussing adult education in the Polish People's Republic era, one should also mention educational programmes broadcast on television. As television was becoming increasingly widespread, it became feasible to use it in knowledge-promoting activities. For its time, the educational offer of Polish television was highly innovative. In this respect, the Television University of Technology (Politechnika Telewizyjna; broadcast in the 1966–1971 period) and the Television Agricultural Technical School (Telewizyjne Technikum Rolnicze; on air from 1973 to 1990) deserve particular attention. The former's curriculum included lectures in mathematics and physics, initially for first-year university students, as well as those attending part-time courses for working people, and preparatory courses focused on the knowledge required of candidates applying to HEIs. Its popularity is evidenced by the fact that it had as many as, 30,000 registered listeners in the first year of its operation (see UNESCO, 1973). The second programme (intended mainly for secondary school students) included not only typical agricultural subjects (e.g., agricultural mechanisation or animal husbandry/breeding), but also general education subjects – Polish language, history, mathematics, and physics. This programme also received significant interest (13,500 people in the first year) and was recognised by UNESCO experts as the most interesting form of didactic television, apart from the open university in England (Kusztelak, 2009).

The late 1980s brought a kind of crisis for adult schools. Within a decade, the number of students dropped by 60%, and many institutions were closed. It is difficult to justify this by claiming that society's educational needs had already been met, as these were still visible in the 1988 census results: 3.5 million Poles above 15 had never finished primary school; 11 million had only ever completed primary education; 4.6 million people had only acquired vocational education; a total of 5 million people had completed secondary and post-secondary education; as little as 1.2 million people had received higher education. Educational shortages

[12] In 1973, working students (mainly from peasant and worker communities) constituted as much as 39% of the total number of students. In 1988, almost half of the students were 30 or older. By the end of the 1980s, 350,000 persons had obtained higher education in part-time studies (Półturzycki, 1989).

were also revealed by the 1983 "personnel census": 35% of those employed in the economy had only primary education, 24% had vocational education, 28% had secondary and post-secondary education and, 9% had higher education (Półturzycki, 1989).

2.3. *Lifelong learning* today – Harvard for everyone?

As of today, many types of institutions – public and non-public alike – are involved in adult education. The state budget funding is used to finance primary schools, junior high schools, vocational and secondary schools, as well as universities, whose services can be used by interested adults. Many cities have continuing education centres which consolidate the educational services offered to adults within a single institution (primary school, junior high school, high school for adults)[13], as well as practical training centres, which are more oriented towards vocational education (e.g., vocational and qualification courses)[14]. Universities increasingly often offer both postgraduate studies and first-cycle studies for people of non-traditional student age (the so-called 30+ or 40+ Studies), They enable the implementation of free studies in a full-time system based on a schedule tailored to the needs of the working adults[15]. It is worth emphasising that employers and trade union organisations have a guaranteed influence on decisions regarding public education policy, at least in theory (OECD, 2005).

Apart from public sector institutions, there are also numerous non-public entities operating in the Polish educational market; this includes training centres, associations, foundations, companies and enterprises. Since there is no single act that organises and regulates this market, they operate based on various regulations. Schools are bound by the Act on the Education System (Act of 7 September 1991), the Education Law (Act of 14 December 2016) and the Law on Higher Education and Science (of 20 July 2018). The activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are regulated by the Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work (Act of 24 April 2003). In turn, the legal basis for the operation of private training companies is the provisions on the freedom of economic activity (Act of 2 July 2004). According to these regulations, training services do not differ in formal terms from other (unregulated) services, and providing them does not require one to obtain a license or approval, nor does it necessitate meeting any other conditions (e.g., demonstrating personnel qualifications). The only (imperfect) market regulator is the market mechanisms (Nowicki, Wiśniewski, 2015).

13 To learn more, visit www.ckptorun.edu.pl/index.php/kursy-zawodowe.

14 See *ibidem* to learn more.

15 More at, e.g., uwm.edu.pl/socjologia/?page_id=43, www.historia.umk.pl/studia/plany-zajec.

As a result, we are dealing with a very large fragmentation and diversification of the educational services market, including in terms of quality. Although there is a register of training institutions, only entities that want to work with labour offices to train the unemployed and job seekers are required to register in it, with such registration being free of charge. In turn, among the members of the Polish Chamber of Training Companies (Polska Izba Firm Szkoleniowych)[16], the largest industry organisation of this type that has its own code of good practice and training services standard, are as few as 300 companies and organisations (Nowicki, Wiśniewski, 2015).

Additionally, with the popularisation of broadband Internet, the educational offer has expanded to an unprecedented size. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have emerged as well; they are *courses offered online, very often free of charge, which are open to an unlimited number of participants and available through a website* (Wach 2018, p. 212, transl.). Although their roots date back to the early 21st century, this learning formula seems to have originated in earlier forms of remote learning that utilised traditional mail correspondence or audio- and video recordings (Wach, 2018).

MOOCs are based on active and interactive learning and are not limited to broadcasting. The interaction of the trainer and the audience as well as the interaction of the listeners with each other are equally important (Wach, 2018). Some courses take place within a predetermined time frame (with a set start and end date), while others can be carried out at any convenient time, with the date not imposed by the organiser (Kaczmarek-Kacprzak, Lewicki, Muczyński, Szreniawa-Szajnert, 2015). One disadvantage of this form of education is the high dropout rate (only several per cent of new users complete such courses), which, however, is somewhat compensated by their massive scale. Due to the high availability and wide thematic scope (humanities, social sciences, science, engineering), MOOC platforms seem to be an excellent tool for people interested in supplementing their existing knowledge at every stage of life (Gaebel, 2013; Wach, 2018).

The largest MOOC platforms today include edX (created by Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012), FutureLearn (Open University, 2013), as well as Coursera and Udacity (commercial platforms launched in 2012) – (Gaebel, 2013)[17]. In Poland, this formula should still be considered fairly niche.

16 See www.pifs.org.pl.

17 Michael Gaebel (2013) suggests that the high popularity of this form of education in the United States (unheard of in other countries) may be related to the significant cost of education in the US. The development of this sector may therefore depend on the policies of individual countries in the field of financing higher education.

The first such initiatives were undertaken by private universities: the Polish Virtual University (Polski Uniwersytet Wirtualny), run since 2002 by the University of Humanities and Economics (Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna) in Łódź, and the Virtual University (Uniwersytet Wirtualny), launched in 2013 thanks to the cooperation of Kozminski University (Akademia Leona Koźmińskiego) and the Warsaw University of Information Technology (Warszawska Wyższa Szkoła Informatyki), an initiative of the Polish-Japanese School of Information Technology (Polsko-Japońska Szkoła Technik Komputerowych) in Warsaw[18] – (Wach, 2018). In 2017, a grant competition was announced to create a Polish MOOC platform that would be available to all Polish universities. The competition was won by the Young Science Foundation (Fundacja Młodej Nauki), which had indicated several years earlier that such a platform could extend and supplement the content of the curriculum implemented in educational centres (Kaczmarek-Kacprzak et al., 2015). The outcome was the launch of Poland's first MOOC platform – NAVOICA – in 2019[19].

However, regardless of those available on MOOC platforms, anyone with the right equipment can access a virtually endless range of courses offered by institutions from around the world, including the most prestigious ones. Both Harvard University and the University of Oxford offer a wide range of courses, including online management courses in accounting, programming, medicine and many, others[20]. Access to some of them is free of charge and requires only the appropriate equipment; others require users to invest as much as several thousand dollars. E-learning forms are also used by commercial entities, which disseminate them and thus encourage the use of the solutions they provide. Examples include the Google Internet Revolutions programme, i.e. a free, certified training on the basics of Internet marketing, intended for e-marketing beginners. Apart from general issues related to Google's online presence, the training includes the use of Google tools, including Google AdWords and Google Analytics[21].

Employers who organise training for their staff increasingly often play an active role in educating adults, and large companies opt for it much more often (Nowicki, Wiśniewski 2015). According to the authors of a report on the Study of Human Capital (Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego), the results of the Study's last edition indicate that we are now seeing more employers using internal rather

18 The activity of non-public universities may indicate the search for a new model of business activity in the area of MOOCs.

19 See www.navoica.pl (nine courses were available on the platform as of 14 April 2020).

20 See online-learning.harvard.edu, www.conted.ox.ac.uk.

21 See learndigital.withgoogle.com/internetowerewolucje/courses.

than external training (Kocur, Górniak, Prokopowicz, Szczucka, 2019, p. 58). Training supported by other activities sometimes makes up a more complex form of a development path within the enterprise. Such initiatives are related to the implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices, a significant part of which concerns employees – including labour rights – as well as, work safety, training and development. The annual report titled *Responsible Business in Poland. Good practices* lists some interesting examples of training and development programmes implemented by enterprises. Its latest editions presented such initiatives as Project Management Academy, Sales Managers Development Program, as well as Open University, and a knowledge sharing programme, which were being implemented by the most important entities from various industries. Interestingly, some companies also go outside with their educational activities, e.g., bank employees are involved in the financial education of children, and insurance companies in education on road safety. Employee volunteering carried out by people employed in a given organisation can also be treated as a form of non-formal education (FOB, 2018, 2019).

The unemployed and job seekers who want to undergo additional training receive additional support from labour offices. Apart from all the forms of education described above, they can also benefit from education financed by a special purpose fund – Labour Fund (Fundusz Pracy). Training sessions enabling people to obtain, supplement or improve the skills and qualifications needed to start, keep or find a job are organised by district labour offices. Such training sessions are held in groups consisting of unemployed persons with similar education and profession. It is also possible to obtain support for individual training if the given job seeker wants to undergo specific training and can provide valid reasons for it. In some cases, employment offices also finance post-graduate studies by reimbursing the costs of examinations enabling the acquisition of diplomas, specific qualifications or professional titles, or the costs of obtaining licenses necessary to practice the given profession. Interested persons can also apply for the so-called training loan to cover study costs. Individuals who wish to use any of the above forms of assistance must register with a competent employment office and meet certain conditions[22] (Kotowska, Podgrodzka, Baranowska, 2005).

The increasingly broader educational offer is also directed to people who have ended their professional activity. The most popular form of educational activities addressed to the elderly in Poland is universities of the third age (U3A).

[22] See www.zielonalinia.gov.pl.

Their services are most often available to pensioners or those above a certain age threshold (KPRM, 2013b). The first Polish university of the third age (under the name of the U3A Study) was established in Warsaw in 1975, but the greatest dynamics of creating new U3As were recorded in the years 2006–2010. This could have been influenced by several factors – an increase in the number of pensioners, gradual lifestyle changes in this age group, as well as systemic support (the Polish-American Freedom Foundation programme to support educational activities for people over 55, launched in 2005). Out of the 640 units operating today, most (56%) are run by associations or foundations, 22% by universities (with as many as two-thirds of U3As having entered into cooperation agreements with universities) and 17% by cultural centres. University students (of whom Poland has over 113,000) can participate in regular lectures, seminars (medical and health topics dominate; others include tourism, history, culture, psychology), language courses, as well as art, computer and sports classes. U3As also organise cultural events. While any interested individuals can attend U3A classes regardless of their education, U3A students are mostly people with secondary and higher education (51% and 38%, respectively) and with an "intellectual" professional background[23]. This is additionally overlapped by large territorial differentiation, e.g., there are only six such universities in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship while, the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship has 49 of them. However, it must be noted that half of U3As run their activities in cities with up to 50,000 residents which may compensate for the lack of other offers addressed to this group of recipients (CSO, 2015, 2019; Gołdys et al., 2012). The activities of U3As are in line with the objectives of the Government Programme for the Elderly Social Activity (KPRM, 2013b). One of the Programme's aims is to *increase the diversity and improve the quality of the educational offer for the elderly*, and on a more detailed level, to create a *special didactic offer and new forms of educational initiatives responding to the needs of the elderly; promoting new solutions to motivate the elderly to learn to stay active* (KPRM, 2013b, p. 9, transl.).

The educational offer addressed to the elderly is also expanded through the activities of NGOs since they also include education efforts. Organisations can obtain funds for these initiatives from such sources as the ministries responsible for labour and social policy, as well as science and higher education, and local governments. Among the many examples in this area is the project implemented by the Toruń-based Foundation Institute of Discourse and Dialogue (Instytut Dyskursu i Dialogu) in cooperation with academics from the Institute of Sociology

[23] The image of U3As as "elite" institutions is simultaneously a significant barrier for the group of potential interested parties (Gołdys et al., 2012).

at Nicolaus Copernicus University (Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika) in Toruń[24]. It aimed to provide the elderly with knowledge in the field of social sciences, journalism and media studies and skills (including digital competencies) useful for recognising manipulative techniques and dealing with them, both at the level of media messaging and everyday interpersonal relations.

3. Place of *lifelong learning* in educational policy at the international level

Today, continuing education, including adult education, is the subject of interest not only to the scientific community but also to many supranational organisations operating in the field of education and culture. The growing interest in this subject can be seen as indicative of a consistent increase in its importance. The examples of documents and tools used in education policy, as, presented on the subsequent pages, are used to illustrate this process. They make it possible to show the gradual "emancipation" of this issue in recent decades and to indicate important stages and actors of this process.

Although reflection on the essence and role of *lifelong learning* has been developing in andragogical circles since the 1940s, the period of increased interest, and, consequently many activities for the development and dissemination of *lifelong learning*, began in the mid-1990s. It was then that an international commission chaired by Jacques Delors prepared a report for UNESCO entitled *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996). The report stated that *it is no longer enough for one to accumulate a reserve of knowledge in one's early life, from which one could then draw indefinitely. Individuals should be able to use all the opportunities throughout their lives to update, deepen and enrich this basic knowledge and adapt to the changing world* (Delors, 1998). The principle of *lifelong learning* should, in the opinion of this commission, redefine the place of education in human life and in a way, paraphrasing one of the main messages of the report, rewrite its structure. The traditional division into study time and working time has ceased to be relevant because today's science intertwines the entire biography and many levels of human life (Delors, 1998). The scope and environment of learning are changing and expanding, going far beyond the traditional channels of school and family. This does not mean, however, that the role of school education is diminishing. School and non-school education (e.g., in the workplace or during free time)

24 For more about the project, see indid.pl/smart-senior.

should be treated as complementary. The report also paid attention to the role that universities have to play in the process of making the idea of *lifelong learning* a reality – the need to have lecture halls "open their doors" and create training opportunities for all interested parties at various stages of their lives (Delors, 1998; Półturzycki, 1999).

The same year saw, the European Commission publish a report titled *Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society*, also known as the *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995); moreover, the Commission proclaimed 1996 the European Year of Lifelong Learning. This was to promote the idea of *lifelong learning* and raise awareness of its importance, both in terms of personal development and civic activity. Assuming that it is the "learning society" that will determine the future competitiveness of the Old Continent against global competitors, the paper's authors argued that people should be encouraged to undertake continuous education, at the same time indicating the tools that can be used for this purpose. They also called for greater institutional flexibility in terms of the education process, as well as closer cooperation between schools and enterprises, seeing it as a path to graduates' success in the labour market. One of the current tasks for the member states was the development of *lifelong learning*, in which adult education was meant to play a key role. At that time, the OECD also joined the discussion on *lifelong learning* by, holding a meeting of education ministers and preparing yet another extensive report titled *Lifelong Learning for All* (Półturzycki, 1999).

In 2000, the European Council adopted a EU development plan known as the Lisbon strategy. This document also, focused on strengthening the competitiveness of the EU economy, emphasised the key role of education and indicated specific goals to be achieved in this area within the next decade[25]. These included creating modern, multifunctional educational centres, mobilising people of working age to learn (with the target rate of participation in education at a level of at least 12.5%) and increasing expenditure on human resources investments (Witek, 2008).

Established in 2007, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) can also be treated as a systemic tool facilitating the implementation of the *lifelong learning* idea in the European Union countries. It consists of eight levels of qualifications (described in terms of learning outcomes), which include qualifications obtained during education at various levels of the formal education system, as well as outside it. In principle, thanks to the introduction of a universal classification, this tool is meant to make it easier for employers to compare qualifications obtained

[25] This area was defined in the document as *education for living and working in a knowledge--based society* (Lisbon strategy, 2004, p. 1).

in different countries; for training participants, this means easier "transfer" of qualifications and their recognition outside the country in which they were acquired. In this context, it is particularly important that the framework also covers qualifications acquired by adults, thus contributing to the promotion of *lifelong learning*. The member states were obliged to implement the EQF at the national level by the end of 2010 (Witek, 2008).

The implementation of the many ambitious goals formulated in documents signed by the European Community member states would be impossible without financial support. For several years, special purpose funds have been allocated to the member states under many programmes to support the implementation of the idea of *lifelong learning*.

The European Social Fund (ESF) is a key source of funding for adult education activities aimed at meeting the labour market's needs. Established in 1957, the ESF has supported the activity of numerous labour market groups in various forms ever since (e.g., by helping employees of declining sectors to retrain, training staff for new branches of the economy and strengthening the position of women and older people in the labour market). Since its creation, it has also supported the implementation of the Lisbon strategy (ESF, 2007). The European Social Fund financed such things as, the Operational Programme Human Capital that was implemented in Poland in the 2007–2013 period (co-financing of EUR 10 billion), and in the 2014–2020 programming period, the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development (co-financing of EUR 4.4 billion). The programme's scale and scope in Poland (in the 2007–2013 period) are illustrated by the following figures: 356,000 enterprises and more than 1.6 million employees were covered by training support (the courses, training sessions and postgraduate studies in which beneficiaries could participate at minimal cost were particularly popular) and a further 378,000 low-skilled workers received support in upgrading their skills[26].

It is also worth mentioning the Lifelong Learning Programme (implemented with EU funding between 2007 and 2013, with a budget of almost EUR 7 billion), which aimed to increase the number of participants in (mainly informal) adult

[26] See www.efs.2007-2013.gov.pl. The European Social Fund contributed to the dynamic development of the training sector in Poland. Based on data from training companies and institutions, the authors of the Study of Human Capital (Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego) in 2015 determined that ESF funds accounted approximately 20% of the revenues of these entities, occupying a significant position in their budget. Unfortunately, the quantitative development did not always go hand in hand with the quality of the offer, which was indicated by the sector representatives themselves. In cases where the price criterion was decisive in the market, inferior but cheaper training won as a result of ruthless competition (Worek, Turek, Szczucka, 2015).

education and promote educational and professional mobility, among other things. The specific activities under the programme were addressed both to students and graduates of schools of various levels (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci) and adults (Grundtvig) – (Witek, 2008)[27]. These activities continued during the 2014–2020 funding period, though no longer in the form of separate programmes. They were formally incorporated into the Erasmus+ programme, with a total budget of almost EUR 15 billion.

4. *Lifelong learning* within the academic sector in Europe

Due to their mission, higher education institutions are crucial actors that cannot be ignored when analysing activities aimed at popularising both the idea and practice of *lifelong learning*. They have long been implementing bottom-up initiatives in this area. The year 1991 saw the establishment of the European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN)[28], Europe's largest association promoting *lifelong learning* at universities. Today, it has about 200 member universities from several countries. Its mission is not only to develop various forms of university-based *lifelong learning* and promote high standards in this area, but also to increase social awareness of *lifelong learning* and to influence the relevant policies (Maniak, 2015). The European University Association has not remained indifferent to the challenges of lifelong education either. In 2008, the affiliated universities adopted the *European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning*, in which they vowed to promote this idea and take action to facilitate its implementation in practice by citizens (EUA, 2008).

The evolution of the systemic approach to the issue of *lifelong learning* and its place in higher education can be traced by analysing the documents related to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The *Bologna Declaration* (1999) that, initiated this process emphasised the need to increase the competitiveness of the European higher education system. The signatory states have set themselves the goal of achieving greater comparability and compatibility of higher education systems (by adopting comparable titles and degrees, systems based on two main cycles of education, a credit system, promoting mobility and European cooperation and more). While the document did not emphasise

27 See more on www.llp.org.pl.

28 See www.eucen.eu.

the role of *lifelong learning*, it started the process of promoting *lifelong learning* as a separate goal in public policy (Bologna Declaration, 1999; cf. Jögi, Karu, and Krabi, 2015). Although a press release from Prague[29] published two years later (2001) mentioned that *lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area*, the ministers gathered at the cyclical conference did not devote much attention to this issue. They issued a rather general statement: *In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness* [...] *and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life* (Prague Communiqué, 2001, p. 3). The conclusion from the next ministerial conference (Berlin, 2003) contains a more explicit postulate concerning the necessity to *improve opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow the lifelong learning paths into and within higher education*. The document also emphasises the *important contribution of higher education in making lifelong learning a reality* and calls for universities to *enhance the possibilities for lifelong learning.* According to the document, the steps taken in this direction should constitute an integral part of their activities (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p. 6).

The focus on *lifelong learning* became one of the core issues of the EHEA as late as ten years after the start of the Bologna Process, that is, in 2008, when ministers included it among EHEA's priorities for the next decade. Emphasising the need to increase access to education, they highlighted the role of *lifelong learning* as one of the tools leading to the achievement of this goal, which should be an *integral part of education systems.* This was EHEA's first document to define the question of *lifelong learning*, at least to some extent, stating that [*lifelong learning* – A.A.] *consists in acquiring qualifications, broadening knowledge and comprehension, acquiring new skills and competencies or enriching individual development.* It also draws attention to the various forms of *lifelong learning*, pointing out that the latter *assumes qualification acquisition opportunities through flexible learning pathways, including part-time and work-based learning.* Referring to the *European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning* published a year earlier[30], the document emphasises that the *implementation of lifelong learning strategies requires a strong partnership between public authorities, academia, students, employers and employees* (Bologna Process, 2009, p. 3, transl.).

29 The European Higher Education Area is managed through regular meetings of ministers responsible for the area of higher education, which take place every two years. Each meeting ends with a communiqué which includes key conclusions and resolutions for the coming years.

30 The *European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning* (EUA, 2008) is a set of commitments by universities and governments to help develop *lifelong learning* strategies. It was developed as a result of consultations between the aforementioned entities.

The conclusions of the next conference of ministers responsible for higher education (Bucharest 2012) were drawn during an economic crisis. This is probably why the links between higher education and the labour market were emphasised so strongly. The ministers also stressed the need to cooperate with employers on designing educational programmes and pointed to lifelong as a vital tool supporting employees in adapting to the changing needs of the labour market. *We aim to enhance the employability and personal and professional development of graduates throughout their careers. We will achieve this by improving cooperation between employers, students and higher education institutions, especially in the development of study programmes that help increase the innovation, entrepreneurial and research potential of graduates*, states the conference communiqué. Further, it emphasises that *lifelong learning is one of the important factors in meeting the needs of a changing labour market, and higher education institutions play a central role in transferring knowledge and strengthening regional development, including by the continuous development of competences and reinforcement of knowledge alliances* (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012).

At the conference related to the further development of the EHEA, held in 2015 in Yerevan, the call for increasing access to education was reiterated (taking into account the growing diversity of the learners' educational needs, resulting, from demographic changes, among other things), as was that for systemic support for the idea of *lifelong learning*: *We undertake to widen participation in higher education and support institutions that provide relevant learning activities in appropriate contexts for different types of learners, including lifelong learning*, the communiqué reads. During the conference, a report on the social dimension and *lifelong learning* by the Bologna Follow-up Group was also adopted. The Group called for the adoption of a separate strategic document titled *Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area to 2020*. The aim was to support the EHEA countries in creating and developing effective solutions (internal plans, strategies) in the field of the *lifelong learning* policy. Attention was also drawn to the need to develop guidelines that would support the EHEA countries in the process of integrating the higher education system and *lifelong learning* by 2018 (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015).

At the ministerial conference in Paris (2018), the growing role of short training cycles was noticed, and, as a result, it was decided that they should be included in the adopted qualifications framework. In the context of the growing role of *lifelong learning*, attention was drawn to the need to apply innovative practices in teaching and learning (student-centred learning, open education, academic and work-based learning). *In addition to measures at national level, we will develop joint European initiatives to support and stimulate a wide range of innovative learning*

and teaching practices, building on existing good practice in our countries and beyond. This will encompass the further development and full implementation of student-centred learning and open education in the context of lifelong learning. Study programmes that provide diverse learning methods and flexible learning can foster social mobility and continuous professional development whilst enabling learners to access and complete higher education at any stage of their lives. The active participation of the higher education sector in this process was defined as a condition for its success: *We therefore commit to developing new and inclusive approaches for continuous enhancement of learning and teaching across the EHEA, and can succeed only if we do so in close collaboration with the European higher education community, in full respect of academic freedom and institutional autonomy*, the signatories indicated. Taking into account the advanced process of digitisation in the member states, the ministers also called for the development of digital education since the available opportunities made it possible to expand the educational offer for people at different stages of life (Paris Communiqué, 2018).

Though quite superficial, the above review of documents, illustrates how, in less than two decades, *lifelong learning* evolved from a marginal problem of little interest to the higher education sector to a key challenge facing not only public authorities but also the authorities of European HEIs. Because the higher education policy implemented by individual countries is largely subject to the guidelines established at the supranational level, it should be assumed that, national policies will have to consider this area of HEI activity increasingly often in the coming years. This is all the more certain as the 2009 benchmarks set by the European Council for adult participation in learning have still not been met (EU Council, 2009).

5. Polish strategic documents in the area of *lifelong learning*

The first Polish document entirely devoted to *lifelong learning* (after the start of the Bologna Process) was the *Strategy for the Development of Lifelong Learning until 2010* adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2003. Its main objective was *setting directions for the development of lifelong learning in the context of the idea of lifelong learning and building a knowledge-based society* (MENiS, 2003, p. 1, transl.) and a total of six priorities were defined in this respect: 1) increasing the availability and 2) improving the quality of *lifelong learning*; 3) cooperation and partnership of the public, private and social sectors in this area; 4) increasing investments in human resources through an appropriate system of incentives for employees and employers; 5) information and career counselling; 6) shaping attitudes conducive to learning by making people aware of the role and importance of *lifelong learning*.

The document contains references to previous national and European strategic documents, as well as information on the possibilities of financing the strategy (European Union funds). The authors also indicated specific tasks for public administration, educational institutions and social partners striving towards the common goal, i.e. *to enable the individual development of each citizen by popularising access to lifelong learning and increasing its quality, as well as to promote active attitudes improving his/her chances in the labour market* (MENiS, 2003, transl.)[31].

The need to develop the area of *lifelong learning* was also emphasised in the report *Poland 2030. Development Challenges*, prepared in 2009 by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland. One of the challenges it defined was *high professional activity and adaptability of labour resources*. Referring to the adaptive labour market model targeted for Poland, it also identified several of its key elements, including flexible forms and security of employment, spatial mobility, as well as the important role of a developed system of *lifelong learning* and readiness for *lifelong learning* (KPRM, 2009).

The year 2013 saw, the Council of Ministers adopt yet another strategic document, the *Perspective of Lifelong Learning* (KPRM, 2013a), which was the outcome of the work carried out by the Interministerial Team for Lifelong Learning[32]. It was drawn up directly due to the international commitments undertaken by Poland, and aimed to ensure the coherence of actions taken at the national level. The authors of this extensive document used the diagnosis of learning at subsequent stages of life and career as the starting point and then proceeded to indicate the most important challenges for this area based on trend forecasts. The key part of the document formulates the strategic goal: *Children and adolescents well prepared for lifelong learning and adults expanding and supplementing*

31 The report was strongly criticised by the scientific community. Although he drew attention to the importance of the document itself, Józef Półturzycki highlighted its numerous defects and shortcomings, including conceptual chaos, lack of references to both classical theoreticians and the latest international documents, superficiality, as well as outdated and limited approach to the issue. His blunt conclusion was as follows: *The adopted "Strategy" with excerpts from the "Recommendation on adult education" from Nairobi makes us look ridiculous in the eyes of specialists from Western knowledge centres. They will probably be surprised that in Poland we do not recognise the Delors Report, the White Book and other documents and studies known and valued in the West, where lifelong education is evolving favourably* (see Półturzycki, 2006, transl.).

32 The Interministerial Team for Lifelong Learning, including the National Qualifications Framework, was established by order of the Prime Minister of 17 February 2010. The Team was established as an auxiliary body of the Prime Minister. The Minister of National Education became its chairman while its members were the ministers of science and higher education, economy, labour and social policy, regional development and foreign affairs (they could be represented at Team meetings by their representatives holding the rank of secretary or undersecretary of state), as well as the head of the Prime Minister's office. Other persons could be appointed to the Team by the minister of national education or the minister of science and higher education.

their competencies and qualifications according to the challenges they face in their professional, social and personal life, which was then translated into operational objectives and lines of action. One of them is worth emphasising here, i.e. the *work environment and social engagement conducive to the promotion of adult education* and the guidelines that follow from it. These included the unification of adult learning activities undertaken by ministries, creating a system for confirming the effects of non-formal education (validation), supporting enterprises in the field of educating and training employees, implementing new organisational forms of training for adults, and promoting good practices. These assumptions were directly related to the area of adult education and the prospects for its further development. Notably, the document also contained information on the planned system of implementation and monitoring of the undertaken activities together with indicators, one of which concerned persons partaking in various forms of education[33].

The authors of the *Programme for the Development of Higher Education and Science* published in 2015 also drew attention to the issue of *lifelong learning*. They indicated that it was worth supporting the idea of *lifelong learning* at the systemic level (by implementing appropriate legal regulations or developing an incentive system) and ensuring that the university education system was adapted to the growing group of students (people of different ages, with different motivations and needs), including by extending and diversifying the educational offer in terms of the form, content and methods of education and offering the possibility of creating and implementing individual flexible learning paths (MNiSW, 2015). The challenges and goals in this regard had already been defined earlier, in the project *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education 2010–2020*, prepared by the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (KRASP). The first (*sic!*) of its strategic goals was the adaptation of the education system to the changing social needs. The implementation of this goal was considered necessary to promote lifelong education (with the support of the state through awareness campaigns, legal regulations, the development of organisational structures and a system of incentives for learners and employers) and adapt the system to a growing group of recipients, among other things (KRASP, 2009).

Despite the strategic assumptions made both at the level of the ministry and the national representation of rectors, the 2018 Act on Higher Education and Science (Act of 20 July 2018) contained no general references to *lifelong*

33 Persons aged 25–64 who participated in various forms of education during four weeks of the study; the indicator was consistent with the cyclical Labour Force Survey (LFS). The starting point specified in the document was 4.5%, whereas the 2020 target was at least 10%.

learning. The concept of *lifelong learning* (or related concepts) did not appear in the Constitution for Science at all, which. seems a rather significant development[34]. Only in defining HEI tasks does the Act refer to conducting postgraduate studies, as well as specialist[35] and other forms of education (Act of 20 July 2018, Art. 11, pts. 1, 2)[36], undoubtedly addressed to adults, and outlines the formal framework of such education (Act of 20 July 2018, Arts. 160–164). In the context of the aforementioned recommendations, which had appeared a few years earlier in strategic documents, also concerning the higher education sector, this seems somewhat unsatisfactory.

Summarising the processes described above, it can be assumed that the observed increase in the importance of *lifelong learning* at the national level was influenced by several fundamental factors, primarily political conditions. This applies particularly to the consequences of belonging to the EHEA and involvement in the Bologna Process. Demographic issues were also important (the demographic decline, which affected the Polish higher education sector after 2005, contributed to the depletion of the pool of people who wanted to fulfil their educational aspirations after 1990 through paid forms of education), as were the structural changes in the Polish economy and the shift towards a post-industrial mode.

6. (Non)learning Pole – participation in *lifelong learning* according to statistics

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, data[37] shows that in terms of the percentage of adults participating in various forms of education, Poland

34 As a reminder, this concept appears in two other Polish legal acts – in the Education Law and the Employment Promotion Act.

35 Only vocational HEIs are authorised to provide specialist education. Detailed characteristics (duration, curriculum framework, level of qualifications, awarded titles) of specialist education are set out in Art. 161 of the Act of 20 July 2018. This form is known as the so-called short-cycle education and referred to as the "missing link" between secondary (PQF level 4, Matriculation) and tertiary (PQF levels 6 and 7, Bachelor/Engineer, Master). Previously, Polish legal regulations did not allow HEIs to provide education and issue diplomas at PQF level 5.

36 The primary task of HEIs is also the education of doctoral students; however, it is treated as training research staff and thus, has a slightly different nature than generally available forms of adult education (Act of 20 July 2018, Art. 11, point 1).

37 The Eurostat data presented are based on two studies: the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Adult Education Survey (AES). Both concern population aged 25 to 64; in both cases, the respondents are asked about their participation in various forms of education (both formal and informal). The key difference is the period they refer to. In the case of LFS, it is the last four weeks, and in the case of AES, the 12 months preceding the study. For more, see ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics.

ranks at the end of European rankings (see Table 11). In studies of participation in various forms of education (concerning the last four weeks preceding the survey), the average for the European Union was 9.2% in 2012 and 10.9% in 2017, while in the case of Poland, these values were more than two times lower – 4.5 % (2012) and 4.0% (2017). In the longer-term survey (covering the previous 12 months), the EU average was 45%, with almost 43% of the respondents indicating participation in non-formal education, and almost 6% in formal education. Here, too, Poland's result was almost two times lower and amounted to 25.5%, out of which almost 23% of respondents pointed to non-formal education and more than 4% pointed to formal education (Eurostat, 2012, 2017b).

It is worth noting here that the year 2009 saw the European Council set benchmarks (European benchmarks) in its conclusions on the strategic framework for cooperation in education and training. The benchmarks were designed to be used to monitor progress and identify problems within individual processes, as well as be the basis for further policy-making in this area. One of the identified benchmarks was for adult participation in *lifelong learning*. It was assumed that, at minimum, an average of 15%[38] of adults should participate in it by 2020. However, the document annotated that the benchmarks *should not be seen as specific targets that each country must meet by 2020. Rather, member states are asked to consider national priorities and the evolving economic situation, and to what extent they can help to achieve these benchmarks collectively through national efforts.* Therefore, although the reference levels are more like recommendations, they can still constitute an important point of reference (EU Council, 2009).

TABLE 11. PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS AGED 25-64 IN VARIOUS FORMS OF EDUCATION (LAST 12 MONTHS AND LAST FOUR WEEKS PRECEDING THE SURVEY), SELECTED EU COUNTRIES, DATA IN %

	Czech Republic	Germany	Lithuania	**Poland**	Slovakia	Sweden	EU
2016 (12 months)	46.1	52	47.5	**25,5**	46.1	63.8	45.1
2017 (4 weeks)	9.8	8.4	5.9	**4,0**	3.4	30.4	10.9

Source: own study based on Eurostat, 2016; 2017a.

The educational passivity of Poles is also evidenced by the results of regular national surveys by Statistics Poland, i.e. Study of Human Capital (Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego), Social Diagnosis (Diagnoza Społeczna) and Adult Education

38 This is the percentage of the population aged 25-64, participating in education and training in the four weeks preceding the survey, in line with the Labour Force Survey approach.

(Kształcenie dorosłych GUS – Worek, Turek, Szczucka, 2015; Grabowska, Kotowska, Panek, 2015; UswG, 2018). The data from the Social Diagnosis and the Study of Human Capital illustrate that *lifelong learning* in Poland not only has a very small scope, but also that participation in it is characterised by a high selectivity based on age and level of education (these differences are also visible in the Eurostat data on other EU countries), as well as the place of residence, and professional activity. The authors of the reports also point to the greater educational activity of women.

The research results are unambiguous: the percentage of adults who access educational services (whether in school or out of school) drops sharply with age[39]. While in the group aged 25–29 it was 13.8% in 2015 (compared to 12.7% ten years earlier), this percentage amounted to 3.3% among people aged 30–39 (5.4% in 2005) and was as low as 1.5% in the group over 39 (1.2% in 2005). Substantial differences are also visible when we take into account the place of residence of the respondents. In cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, every fifth person aged 25–29 is educationally active; in rural areas, less than one in ten. In the groups aged 30–39 and over 39, the results are as follows: 7.3% of educationally active persons in large cities as compared to 1.6% in rural areas, 3.1% in cities and 0.8% in rural areas (it ought to be noted that clear differences in the educational activity of residents also prevail between cities of different sizes; see Table 12). One of the first reasons that come to mind as an explanation for the current state of affairs is educational offer availability, followed by the financial possibilities of residents of metropolitan areas of various sizes to cover the costs of using paid forms of education (Grabowska, Kotowska, Panek, 2015).

TABLE 12. PERCENTAGE OF PERSONS ACCESSING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES BY AGE GROUP (2015) AND BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE

	city over 500,000	city 200,000–500,000	city 100,000–200,000	city 20,000–100,000	city below 20,000	village	total
age 25–29	20.5	22.9	15.5	12.9	15.9	9.2	**13.8**
age 30–39	7.3%	6.8	3.7	2.7	1.8	1.6	**3.3**
age over 39	3.1	3.4	2.1	1.1	1.2	0.8	**1.5**

Source: own study based on Social Diagnosis, 2015.

39 The authors of Social Diagnosis (2015, p. 100) construe the concept of educational activity of adults as the *participation of people aged 18 and up in various forms of education*, however, due to the adopted classification by age, the analysis contained in the document concerns persons aged 20 and more.

Interestingly, in all age groups over 24, the highest educational activity was observed in the 2007–2009 period (Grabowska, Kotowska, Panek, 2015). It is hard to resist the impression that this was a consequence of the disbursement of EU funding under the European Social Fund. Beneficiaries of training and educational projects implemented by the ESF had a chance to take advantage of an extensive range of training sessions, courses and postgraduate studies, either with a minimal financial contribution or completely free of charge.

The co-authors of the Study of Human Capital (Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego, 2015) reported on the research results in a quite pessimistic way. *Although strategic documents attach increasing importance to lifelong learning and considerable resources are spent on the development of human capital, it is difficult to talk about the clear effects of these activities. The level of educational activity of adults has not increased significantly since 2001 and the patterns of this activity have not changed: mainly well-educated and professionally active persons continue to develop their competencies, while less educated and economically inactive people most often remain educationally passive* (Worek, Turek, and Szczucka, 2015, pp. 151–152, transl.).

7. Postgraduate studies in the Polish education system – statutory framework, scale and dynamics of development, main motivations of participants

The right to carry out postgraduate studies has been granted to HEIs, research institutes and institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The Act of 20 July 2018 provides eligible units with a general framework for their implementation[40]. According to the Act's provisions, studies must last no less

[40] It is worth mentioning that until 2016, HEIs were authorised to conduct postgraduate studies only in the field related to the courses of study. In the event that their curriculum exceeded this scope, the consent of the minister was required to conduct studies, which was issued after consulting the Central Council of Higher Education (Rada Główna Szkolnictwa Wyższego) – (Act of 25 July 2015, Art. 8). Pursuant to the amendment to the act (2016), this restriction was lifted and HEIs gained more freedom in determining the range of postgraduate studies they offer. *Postgraduate studies are studies addressed to adults who have already completed at least their first-cycle studies. In addition, these studies are basically 100 per cent paid.* [...] *Due to the fact that postgraduate students are a group of particularly demanding students, the creation of a new legal barrier, which is also fictitious, is an expression of an anti-freedom approach to people*, claimed Jarosław Gowin, the then Minister of Science and Education Higher, arguing in favour of introducing the new solutions ("Gazeta Prawna", 2016, transl.).

than two semesters and their, curriculum must enable students to obtain at least 30 ECTS credits and determine the learning outcomes for partial qualifications, taking into account the characteristics of the second degree of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) at levels 6, 7 or 8, whereas graduation should enable one to obtain partial qualifications[41] at PQF levels 6, 7 or 8. To become a student of postgraduate studies, an individual must have completed at least the first-cycle studies; after completing the postgraduate studies, he or she may receive a certificate issued by the entity conducting the studies (Act of 20 July 2018, Arts. 160, 162, 163).

The Polish Qualifications Framework levels referred to in the statutory definition are an element of the conceptual framework related to the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS). In Poland, this system plays an important role in the implementation of the *lifelong learning* development policy. The Polish Qualifications Framework is one of the two main tools of the system. It consists of eight separate levels of qualifications corresponding to the relevant levels of the European framework. The framework *includes the requirements for knowledge, skills and social competencies at different levels and organises the qualifications awarded in the education and higher education systems and outside them, making it easier to compare them with each other and to relate them to qualifications functioning in other European countries*[42]. In other words, PQF levels specified in diplomas and certifications are meant to enable the "translation" of qualifications obtained under one education system into a "universal language" understandable in the labour markets of other European Union countries. The second and equally important tool of the system is the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR), which is a set of qualifications (diplomas and certifications) with assigned PQF levels. According to the act, the qualifications obtained in the course of education, including higher education (e.g., matriculation certificate or bachelor's degree), are entered into the Register. The relevant ministers decide on whether the qualifications they regulate, i.e. those based on legislative acts[43], should also be included in it. On the other hand, market qualifications acquired outside

41 In Poland, the acquisition of full qualifications at levels 6, 7 and 8 is confirmed by: a diploma of completion of first-cycle studies, diploma of completion of second-cycle/uniform long-cycle studies, and a doctoral diploma, respectively.

42 Source: kwalifikacje.edu.pl as of 20 August 2020.

43 Source: kwalifikacje.edu.pl. For example, the minister of finance in the case of qualifications of a tax advisor or tax inspector; the minister of culture and national heritage in the case of qualifications of a museologist or librarian; minister of health in the case of qualifications in medical professions.

schools and universities (e.g., courses and training sessions) may be reported to the register by interested bodies, e.g., industry organisations or employers' associations. This option is meant to contribute to the organisation of the non-formal education area[44].

In this context, it is worth noting that the completion of postgraduate studies does not provide full qualifications. Thus, graduates of first-cycle studies who have completed post-graduate studies still only hold full qualifications at level 6 (confirmed by a diploma of first-cycle studies) and appropriate partial qualifications (confirmed by a certificate of completion of post-graduate studies). The same applies to graduates of second-cycle studies (PQF level 7) and third-cycle studies (PQF level 8). Poland has seen a very dynamic development of postgraduate studies over the last several years. The scale and popularity of this type of education are illustrated by the dynamic increase in the number of students: in 1990, there were 33,000 of them in Poland, and 20 years later – as many as 170,000. In the last ten years alone, the number of graduates of such studies exceeded 1.5 million, which corresponds to almost 10% of professionally active Poles (CSO, 2010–2019). The estimated value of revenues generated by the provision of such services is PLN 700–800 million per year[45].

As these high dynamics have halted (see Table 13)[46], it is notable that the costs of this process are borne mainly by public HEIs. The 2018 number of traditional students (which is used for comparison) at public HEIs accounted for 71% of their number in 2010, and in the case of non-public universities, their 2018 number was only 52% of that in 2010[47]. The situation is completely different in the case of postgraduate studies. In 2018, the number of students at public HEIs accounted for 51% of their 2010 number, whereas at non-public universities, this percentage was 120% (CSO, 2011–2019).

44 *Today, trainings and courses are like a jam jar without a label informing about the ingredients. The seller ensures that there is only fruit and sugar inside, no preservatives, and the buyer has to trust, because there is no complete information available* (quoted after: kwalifikacje.edu.pl).

45 Own calculations based on the current number of postgraduate students in 2020/2021 (CSO, 2021) and the average amount of tuition fees in the fields of study of the group that is of interest to me, i.e. economic, administrative and social faculties. For more on this subject – see below.

46 Number of post-graduate students has decreased in recent years in proportion to the decline in the number of traditional students (CSO, 2011–2018).

47 This group of HEIs is more acutely affected by demographic trends. Students give up paid forms of education, primarily for rational reasons (Antonowicz, Gorlewski, 2011).

TABLE 13. NUMBER OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS BY TYPE OF HEI IN THE 2010–2018 PERIOD

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2018 to 2010
HEIs (total)	165,078	162,049	144,041	130,433	120,833	127,517	131,461	131,825	131,433	**80%**
public HEIs	98,080	89,925	74,316	65,759	61,147	59,413	57,559	55,184	50,858	**51%**
non-public HEIs	66,988	72,484	69,725	64,474	59,686	68,104	73,902	76,641	80,575	**120%**
universities (total)	45,259	41,892	33,286	27,967	25,477	24,536	21,996	20,664	18,536	**41%**
other HEIs total	40,329	45,311	44,443	41,230	38,648	44,303	47,836	47,341	50,659	**126%**
other non-public HEIs	37,347	41,973	41,732	38,688	36,158	41,734	45,052	44,587	48,267	**129%**
public economic HEIs	15,048	13,389	11,754	10,421	9,308	9,883	10,261	9,954	9,925	**66%**
non-public economic HEIs	21,839	22,127	20,464	20,166	19,018	21 606	24,326	28,353	27,789	**127%**

Source: own study based on CSO, 2005–2021 (reports from the 2011–2019 period).

When analysing statistical data on the number of postgraduate students in recent years, some trends may suggest greater activity of non-public HEIs in this area. While more than 2/3 of students continued postgraduate studies at public HEIs in 2007, a decade later, the greater part of the postgraduate studies market (over 60%) belonged to non-public institutions. The number of students in university postgraduate studies has been systematically decreasing for several years – by 2018, it dropped below 19,000 (there were about 55,000 as of 2007). At the same time, HEIs classified by Statistics Poland as "other" (this group is dominated mainly by non-public ones) have seen an opposite change in their student numbers:, in 2018, they had nearly 51,000[48] students (compared to just over 20,000 in 2007). Thus, it is easy to notice that the number of postgraduate students attending universities decreased by half within a few years, yet in the category of "other" HEIs, this number almost doubled. Data on economic HEIs

[48] Over 48,000 of them are students of non-public HEIs.

are also interesting[49]. In this category – in the case of public HEIs – one can also notice a decrease in the number of students, and at the same time – in the case of non-public HEIs – the highest increase among all types of HEIs.

One may assume that due to the drastic drop in revenues resulting from the decrease in the number of students, the *lifelong learning* area seems to be particularly attractive to non-public entities, which are almost entirely financed by tuition fees. In just a decade, the number of students at non-public HEIs decreased from 624,000 (in the record-breaking academic year 2009/2010) to 328,000 (in the 2018/2019 academic year), and consequently, the revenues they generated decreased significantly, too[50]. This decline may result in an increase in the activity of non-public entities in this area and a gradual change in their focus and may also bolster the position of postgraduate studies in the educational offer.

Considering the growing interest in postgraduate studies in recent years, it is worth asking what motivates candidates to take up this form of education. Andragologists divide the motives for doing so into three groups, according to their nature: utilitarian, intellectual and social. Utilitarian motives are directly related to professional work and by far the most determinant in undertaking education as part of postgraduate study programmes, thus overshadowing intellectual and social motives (Aleksander, 2015b). Students who are guided by utilitarian motives point to several reasons for taking up their studies. Firstly, it is the gradual emergence of new content (knowledge) and professional skills expected by the labour market, which they had not encountered during their studies and the technological and organisational progress that, forces them to acquire such knowledge and skills. People who decide to pursue postgraduate studies want to perform their work in accordance with the current trends and the state of the art in their industry. This concern for the level of qualifications is undoubtedly related to labour market competitiveness and the expectations of employers who positively evaluate the employees' willingness to develop professionally and stay active in this regard. The prospects of getting a better job, being promoted (both in structural and financial terms), strengthening one's workplace position, as well as the possibility of improving one's current qualifications and thus, being able to perform a new profession or take up a different position, also serve to motivate

49 Economic HEIs have been distinguished due to the fact that they offer fields of studies with a broad economic, administrative and social profile (belonging to seven subgroups, according to the ISCED 2013 classification). Apart from pedagogical studies (30% of all students), they are the most popular (22% of all students). Unlike the former studies, they are focused on a much wider, more diverse group of recipients (USwG, 2018).

50 Total revenues from teaching at non-public universities fell from 2,782,353.4 (thousand) to 2,020,940.2 (thousand); if we take into account only the tuition fee income, this would be a decrease from 2,462,067.2 (thousand) to 1,673,600.7 (thousand) – (CSO, 2011; USwG, 2018).

people to opt for postgraduate studies. In some cases, your motivation to re-qualify results from plans related to changing your job (to rectify a choice that you had made earlier) or from concerns about keeping it (if you experience uncertainty as regards your job or the organisation's future). Among postgraduate students, some had opted for this form of education before graduating (first- or second--cycle) or did so immediately after graduation, hoping that another diploma would be an added advantage that would increase their chances in the labour market and improve their negotiating position[51] (Aleksander, 2015b; cf. Jarczewska-Gerc, 2013; Minkiewicz, 1999; Wach-Kąkolewicz, 2008).

[51] Some non-public HEIs offer ready-made "consolidating" proposals, e.g., second-cycle studies along with post-graduate studies. After two years of study, one obtains two diplomas simultaneously. Students who choose this study model must pay extra fees.

3

Entrepreneurial university – towards higher education institutions (HEIs) professional governance

1. Background of transitions – public sector reforms

The development of a new model functioning for universities – an entrepreneurial university – was part of a wider search for an effective model for managing public institutions. This process was motivated by increasing criticism of this sector and a decline in trust in it. The reforms that were initiated in Anglo--Saxon countries in the 1980s and eventually covered almost all countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), are referred to in the literature as *New Public Management* (NPM), i.e. the trend in new public management (see, e.g., Broucker, De Wit, 2015; Donina, Paleari, 2018; Pollitt, 2007; Supernat, 2004). This concept was first presented by Christopher Hood in a 1991 article published in the "Public Administration" (Greve, 2010; Hood, 1991).

Christopher Pollitt (2007) claims that *New Public Management* should be examined on two levels: on the one hand, as a general theory based on the assumption that the public sector can be improved by implementing values, ideas and patterns taken from the business world, and on the other – at a more operational level – as a set of specific practices from the private sector used to "fix" the public sector. He mentions the following examples of such practices: focusing on the results of activities (measuring results); shifting towards dispersed, small organisations with a flat structure instead of large, multi-functional entities; contracting public services; implementing market principles (including competitive mechanisms for granting financial resources); focusing on improving the quality of services resulting from granting citizens the status of organisation customers (Pollitt, 2007, p. 1). The underlying assumption of this reform trend, i.e. that the implementation of business practices would automatically bring an improvement in the efficiency of public organisations, was a consequence of recognising the organisational advantage of private sector entities (Broucker, De Wit, 2015).

Jerzy Supernat (2004) summarises the assumptions of the new model of administration based on *New Public Management* as follows:

- prioritising outcomes[1], with internal processes being secondary since too much focus on them reduces service quality;
- achieved results (verified based on measurable indicators) constitute the basis for the assessment of the organisation's activities;

[1] Such results are construed not only as the quality of the services rendered (outputs) but also as the actual changes occurring as their consequence, i.e. – the impact on the quality of life (outcomes) – (Supernat, 2004).

- using market mechanisms to achieve better results (e.g., outsourcing services to private entities if this is more advantageous from a financial standpoint; disaggregation and reorganisation of public entities so that they are akin to private companies competing with each other);
- cost optimisation, i.e. improving the quality of services while reducing their costs (the "more for less" principle);
- pro-consumer orientation – persons and entities using the services of public institutions should be treated as their customers (adopting the perspective of recognising and satisfying needs);
- controlling role of public administration – guaranteeing access to goods and services and not necessarily their independent provision (network model of service provision);
- deregulation, i.e. greater freedom for those managing the use of resources by units, assuming that competitive mechanisms and consumer expectations will be an efficient motivation for efficient actions;
- enabling employees (also at lower levels) to show initiative, which may translate into organisational results;
- changing the manager's role with inclusion in mind – sharing power, caring for the representation of various interests, excellence in terms of ethics and conduct;
- organisational culture with the characteristics of adhocracy – only slightly formalised, focused on solving problems, built on flexibility, innovation and entrepreneurship;
- remaining apolitical.

Reforms in line with *New Public Management* may take various forms, depending on the context, and be implemented at varying paces and intensities – NPM is not a universal, ready-made scenario but rather a set of rules aimed at creating cheaper, more effective and customer-oriented administration. These rules are implemented in such a way as to match the local conditions of the specific countries as best as possible (Broucker, De Wit, 2015).

Although the concept of *New Public Management* has gained great popularity and a large group of supporters, some have also mentioned its weaknesses in the public debate. The side effects of NPM reforms are also often highlighted. These include the fragmentation of the organisation and the associated risk of silo mentality, which emerges when autonomous, narrowly specialised units focus only on their goals, and the organisation lacks common standards and a culture of cooperation (see, e.g., Szewczyk, 2018). Among the negative effects of implementing NPM are also the weakening of the coordinating centre and the negative impact on the

organisation's staff. In accordance with these principles, the management risks excessive orientation of activities towards achieving specific, financial benefits in the short term. A weakness of this approach is also the limited (to Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries) scope of possible reform implementation (Broucker, De Wit, 2015). Jerzy Supernat (2004) also raises the argument that the overall criticism of the administration that gave rise to the NPM trend is unjustified. He draws attention to NPM's strengths, e.g., ensuring compliance with the law and procedural fairness, and indicates the potential risks of implementing NPM. One of the key aspects of this model – prioritising results over procedures and processes – carries the risk of taking shortcuts, which are seemingly promising from NPM's perspective. On the other hand, the use of tools and techniques from the commercial sector in administration may lead to the unavailability of services expected by the public if such services are deemed uneconomical and ineffective. What also seems justified is the concern that marginalising values other than "effectiveness" and "economy" may lead to actions contrary to the ideals of the public service. Holding the more independent administration representatives accountable would become a challenge as well. Focusing on the customer and not the citizen also seems problematic. Firstly, as regards the customer, the role of the customer's interests becomes dominant, and because of that, some groups of customers become more important than others when market conditions apply (Supernat, 2004).

The researchers emphasise that while the reform programmes themselves and the techniques for implementing them have been the subject of many studies, little has been written about their actual results. Though we have extensive knowledge of the implementation process, its effects remain largely unknown. Little is known about whether and to what extent *New Public Management* "works" and whether it actually translates into increased efficiency and reduced costs of the activities carried out (Broucker, De Wit, 2015). Similar doubts also arise in the context of the higher education sector. Simon Marginson commented on this issue as follows:

> *After two decades of these processes, higher education operates more like a business, and according to competitiveness principles, it is more productive in quantitative terms, and certainly more financially effective, although there is no evidence that it has improved its level of education or that the tempo of making breakthrough discoveries has increased*
>
> (Marginson, 2015, p. 15, transl.).

On the other hand, since we are talking about phenomena that are difficult to measure, one cannot rule out the positive impact of NPM practices.

It is worth noting that the described model has not been the only concept for reforms in the public sphere. Alternative proposals include, for example, network governance or neo-Weberianism (see, e.g., Donina and Paleari, 2018; Kopyciński, 2016; Radzik-Maruszak, 2016), which seem to be more suited to the countries of Continental Europe.

The first of these approaches is based on the involvement of stakeholders from various sectors in the decision-making process. In this case, this process is horizontal and is based on negotiations of autonomous but interacting actors. Apart from politicians, independent experts, representatives of commercial entities, social movements or groups of citizens can also participate in it, provided that the specific problem concerns them and that they have the competencies and resources to solve it. Due to the participatory nature of the process, this model blurs the traditional boundary between the rulers and the ruled, between politics and administration, and ultimately, between private and public. Supporters of network governance point to its benefits, which include: reducing the distance between politicians, administrators and citizens; the ability to better relate to decisions made and a sense of (co)responsibility for their effects; improved efficiency of the management process (at the very least, because the network's wide range translates into, the greater amount of information); an increased overall level of trust. They also pay attention to its usefulness in the event of problems arising from conflicts of interest (Radzik-Maruszak, 2016).

In contrast, neo-Weberianism refers to the achievements of Max Weber, supplementing them with selected aspects of both *New Public Management* and co-governance. This orientation highlights the role of the civil service and administrative structures in carrying out long-term tasks. Supporters of this concept agree on the need to modernise the administrative apparatus, but in their opinion, the means to this end should not be a simple implementation of tools from the business sector. They also point out that the far-reaching criticism of the entire public administration sector, which underlies NPM, refers only to some of the sector's portions while completely ignoring the advantages of the bureaucratic system, such as its continuity, reliability and uniform approach to citizens. They point to the need to preserve the beneficial features and values of bureaucracy in the traditional sense, and at the same time, to change the procedures and attitudes to make them more geared to the needs of citizens. They also argue that the search for a universal administrative structure that would be possible to implement regardless of the context is doomed to failure since administrative structures differ from country to country. In the neo--Weberian model, the reform process is individualised, focusing on the role of the state and Weberian values (the state as the main coordinator of problem-solving; representative democracy as a mechanism for legitimising power; the idea of public

service), although it draws both from the achievements of NPM and Governance[2] (shifting the focus from bureaucracy to the citizens' needs and from processes to results, although without using market mechanisms; professionalisation of public services thanks to the culture of service quality and legal changes; introduction of participatory mechanisms) – (Kopyciński, 2016)[3].

Like *New Public Management*, the above approaches also have their supporters and critics. The shortcomings of network governance include the length of the decision-making process and difficulties in coordinating activities, the difficulty in assigning traditionally construed responsibility to individual process participants (resulting in accountability issues) and the incompatibility of this approach with representative democracy. It may also be problematic to redefine the roles of the entities involved in the process: politicians – from decision-makers to coordinators; administration representatives – from bureaucrats to co-authors of changes; citizens – from voters to co-creators of policies and services who are also co--responsible for their implementation (Radzik-Maruszak, 2016). On the other hand, its critics claim that the neo-Weberian approach does not take into account other actors (apart from the state) or the dialogue between them in the change process. While it points to the need to consider the context, it does not give any indication of what elements should change in a particular country. It draws attention to both the importance of social norms and the need to legitimise power by society but fails to describe these issues in detail (Kopyciński, 2016).

2. Entrepreneurial university – origins and characteristics

Reforms initiated in the higher education sector in the last decades of the 20th century were motivated by similar factors as those in other areas of public administration.

2 The concept of public governance (the Polish language lacks an appropriate equivalent) refers not to the structures of power but to the performance of its tasks (i.e. processes, methods of operation) and their social effectiveness. In this approach, citizens are not treated as voters and consumers but as partners and co-decision makers. An important point of reference here is civil society construed as a network of societal organisations. The role of public authority consists in creating optimal conditions for this network for articulating interests and solving problems – it lies not in creating but rather in moderating the policy. The application of this approach is not limited to the public sphere. Commercial entities and non-governmental organisations can also operate based on governance principles (Izdebski, 2007).

3 Some researchers who examined the failure in the implementation of *New Public Management* reforms in Central and Eastern European countries attributed this failure to the absence of an efficiently functioning administration (Randma-Liiv, 2008).

Public sector entities, including universities, began to be perceived primarily as organisational actors undertaking and responsible for intentional activities. Their problems were considered and solutions to them were sought from this standpoint (Krücken, Meier, 2006).

The higher education sector's excess bureaucracy was criticised, as was its management system (collegial, based on the influence of interest groups, outdated) and universities were perceived as ineffective entities. As early as the 1970s, several theoretical categories appeared to emphasise the specificity of the functioning and management system in universities. Michael Cohen and James March (1972) proposed the term *organised anarchy* while pointing out that the key problem affecting these "organised anarchies" was the instability resulting from the overlapping of multiple hierarchies and their internal competition. Cohen and March also used the *garbage can* metaphor to define the model of the decision-making process characteristic of universities. They noticed that in the case of universities, the individual elements of the decision-making process (i.e. problems, solutions, participants and circumstances) are independent of each other and "mix" in a disorderly manner that does not, necessarily create a rational logical sequence. Hence the association with a garbage can that gets filled with waste in a completely random order (Cohen, March, Olsen, 1972). On the other hand, the typology proposed by Karl Weick (1976) states the university is a loosely coupled organisation whose individual components, although related in some way, retain their individuality. Due to this, internal relations in the organisation are characterised by impermanence and some degree of underspecification. Decision-making processes are decentralised, and due to loose connections between elements, changes in one area of operation do not affect others. All this definitely hampers efficient management at the level of the entire organisation (Weick, 1976).

In their reports published at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, international organisations (World Bank, UNESCO) also pointed to the inequality of educational opportunities despite the significant quantitative expansion of higher education, as well as excessive convergence of institutions and curricula, low standards of education and research, lack of innovation, and declining expenditure on education (per student). It was recommended to diversify both the sources of financing for universities (including the participation of students in covering the costs of education) and the educational offer (including the development of the private sector and, better adaptation to the labour market's needs), as well as to strive to ensure the quality of the education process and research activities. There was also a need to legitimise educational entities and public expenditure in this area by introducing

the principles of accountability and responsibility of universities towards their local environments (Jabłecka, 1996; Leja, 2013).

The changes initiated by the states, in line with *New Public Management* principles, concerned the organisation of the educational services market, as well as the system of university accountability, financial and budgetary issues and management methods within individual entities (Donina, Paleari, 2018). The changes were aimed at transforming public organisations into quasi-entrepreneurial companies and included such things as *managerial ways of exercising power and leadership*, *goal-oriented production*, *performance measurement*, *work quality management*, *cost sharing*, *consumer orientation and periodic self-evaluation of individuals*. Under the new model, universities were meant to be *indirectly controlled by a mix of incentives to compete, contracts, planning, performance measurement and auditing* (Marginson, 2015, p. 14, transl.). The introduction of *New Public Management* in higher education gave rise to the spread of, the so-called audit culture. The audit was initially construed as a form of control of the organisation's operations in terms of finances (budget) and the applicable legal framework. Over time, it began to be used to monitor many other areas of organisations' activity, e.g., the quality of the services provided. Setting accountability as the overriding principle of management was intended to achieve transparency and efficiency; however, it inadvertently brought along new models of relationships, habits and practices (Shore, 2008). Apart from defining goals, improving structures and professionalising management, quality assurance procedures (in the case of higher education, these include, such things as evaluation and accreditation) are one of the four principles of organisational actorhood (Krücken, Meier, 2006).

These processes were motivated by the reduction of public expenditure on higher education as well as the liberalisation and privatisation of the sector (Broucker, De Wit, 2015). It should be noted here that some researchers (see, e.g., Marginson, 2015) question this direction of reforms in higher education, arguing that market mechanisms cannot cover the entire sector but only its selected fragments, such as educating foreign students or selected forms of vocational education. In their opinion, it is utopism to believe that the higher education sector could be organised along the lines of other sectors of the economy. Marginson notes the following: *Authentic market reform in higher education is constrained by limitations inherent in the essence of this sector (public goods, competition for status) and political factors related to these limitations* (Marginson, 2015, p. 11, transl.).

The implementation of the governance model in higher education, based on *New Public Management* principles has met with strong criticism from the beginning until today. Many representatives of academia are opposed to its

marketisation, i.e. the introduction of market solutions/mechanisms to the public sector, pointing to its harmful consequences (Musialik, Musialik, 2013).

Critics refer, to such issues as the lack of empirical evidence that privatisation and adaptation of market mechanisms in the public sector lead to improved efficiency. In their opinion, the advocates of *New Public Management* ignore or downplay the weaknesses and threats of market mechanisms, e.g., the introduction of competition principles to the public sector. They also highlight the key differences in the way the private and public sectors perceive "customers". Treating these sectors as equal would have far-reaching non-economic implications. It would bring a significant change to the social order – community members would be replaced by consumers, with the role of public authorities being reduced to that of providers of goods and services instead of care takers of the public good (Musialik, Musialik, 2013, p. 301).

Another threat to academic institutions is the reorientation of the operating strategy resulting from the change in the way the key areas of the higher education activity, i.e. education and research, are perceived. Under the new rules, they would no longer be a common good but rather a commodity subject to the laws of supply and demand (Jessop, 2018). Paid education and commercial research are a straightforward path to curtailing academic freedom in the name of profits gained from research and educational services.

Entrepreneurship, or in other words, academic capitalism, manifests itself, through such things as the diversification of the university's sources of income. Relations between academic institutions and business entities are tightening. If the university is construed as an entity providing broadly understood "services" in the market, students become consumers with the applicable rights and expectations assigned to this role. This creates significant tension and a conflict of interest, pitting the quality of teaching against customer expectations.

Some quasi-market mechanisms are also visible at the research level. *Universities engaged in intensive research have their departments and individual scientists act largely as "prestige maximisers"* (Melguizo, Strober, 2007, p. 634), constantly striving to raise their status. While companies are "profit maximisers", universities seek prestige mainly at the intersection of monetary and prestige economies. Scientists modify their behaviour accordingly, for example, by changing their publication patterns, to obtain research grants (Kwiek, 2021). Prestige is a competitive good, based on relative and not absolute measures – it is a zero-sum game in which *what the winners win, the losers lose* (Hirsch, 1976, p. 52).

Notwithstanding the above criticism, there is no doubt that the reorientation of state policy at the end of the 20th century gave rise to a new university model,

the entrepreneurial university (Clark, 1998), and later also the adaptive university (Sporn, 1999).

The term "entrepreneurship" first appeared in the scientific literature over two hundred years ago and has been defined in many ways since then (Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2014). It is construed as an organisation's orientation that consists in looking for opportunities in the business environment and their skilful use to build one's success (Jabłecka, 2004; Leja, 2013).

This term began to be used with respect to higher education in the 1980s (Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2014). At that time, Burton Clark began his research which involved analysing several European universities. He was interested in universities where significant reforms had been successfully carried out in the recent past. Clark's goal was to identify the set of organisational attributes that had contributed to this success and to determine the characteristics of an entrepreneurial university[4]. The author searched for the reasons why the institutions' reform processes were successful, assuming that due to the collective nature of the changes, they could only have succeeded with the involvement of the entire structure. He believed that without it, neither top-down changes nor isolated reform initiatives would bring the expected results (Clark, 1998; Leja, 2013). Wojciech Popławski (2014, p. 39, transl.) puts it as follows: *entrepreneurial orientation manifests itself at virtually every level and area of the organisation's functioning, from leadership and the creation of an organisation strategy, to management at the middle management level to the promotion of entrepreneurial attitudes among individual company employees. It affects both personalised aspects of the organisation's functioning, such as the organisational structure and tools for controlling or measuring effectiveness, and informal areas, such as the value system, culture and internal relations between employees.*

Based on the case studies mentioned above, Clark (1998) identified five key features of an entrepreneurial university:

4 Notably, Clark's paper was not the first to include the term *entrepreneurial university*, nor was it the first attempt to characterise this model. By that point, these issues had already been undertaken by: Henry Etzkovitz (1983), who defined an entrepreneurial university as an institution looking for opportunities to diversify sources of income in various relationships with business entities and various forms of commercialisation of knowledge; James Chrisman, Timothy Hynes and Shelby Frazer (1995) who described a university that stimulates entrepreneurship among students and employees; David Dill (1995) who emphasized the role of the formalised process of knowledge transfer/commercialisation and organisational units established to achieve this goal. Clark's concept differed from the previous ones in that it was more complex, and its characterisation of an entrepreneurial university covered many areas of university functioning and was not limited to the area of commercialisation of knowledge (Chrisman, Hynes, Frazer, 1985; Dill, 1995; Etzkovitz, 1983; OECD, 2012).

- strengthened control centre (i.e. university authorities) construed as an element and guarantor of an efficient management system, enabling a flexible response to changes (opportunities) in the environment;
- expanded activity of peripheral units, aimed at maintaining relations with the environment (oriented towards cooperation with the economy, including commercialisation of knowledge, with graduates and other stakeholder groups);
- diversified sources of income and openness to acquiring new (non-public) funding and skills in this area, giving universities greater autonomy;
- stimulating the academic centres and respecting traditional values;
- integrated entrepreneurial culture (Leja, 2013; Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2014).

Further research on Clark's model led to the development of a list of good practices influencing the development of university entrepreneurship, which included:

- high-quality human resources management, which is construed not only as hiring good employees, but also as taking care of their development and providing them with the working conditions that will enable the best results;
- instilling an entrepreneurial attitude (including seeking innovation and openness to changes) within the entire structure of the organisation, both among academic staff and administrative personnel;
- flat organisational structure that simplifies information flow and speeds up the decision-making process;
- having a mission and strategy that constitute a benchmark for the organisation's activities;
- monitoring the market (the environment in general) to seek (and forecast) opportunities and ways of utilising them;
- development of interdisciplinary research and inter-unit cooperation within the university (Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2014).

Table 14 summarises the key differences between the liberal (traditional) university model and the entrepreneurial university model.

TABLE 14. LIBERAL (TRADITIONAL) AND ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY MODEL – COMPARISON

	Liberal/traditional university	Entrepreneurial university
Control/decision centre	■ strong position of the state ■ university as a collection of scholars and collegial bodies dominating over one-man bodies ■ strong substantive autonomy and weak formal autonomy	■ university's autonomy ■ collegial bodies serve as advisors and not decision-makers ■ balanced cooperation between academic and administrative university staff
Mission	seeking the truth; acquiring and disseminating knowledge; educating the elite; serving universal values	conducting research and educational activities in accordance with the needs of the socio-economic environment
Tradition/ Innovativeness	strong traditions; attachment to conventional solutions	openness to innovation in all areas; creative environmental impact
Culture and values	scientific values: communalism, universalism, selflessness, organised scepticism	entrepreneurial culture and scientific values: ownership, locality, research usefulness, scientists serving as experts
Activity	research (almost exclusively basic), education (comprehensive and elite)	scientific research (basic and applied, implementations); (mass) training of specialist staff in cooperation with the environment
Character of education	■ education focused on the transfer of theoretical knowledge ■ independent study; broadening horizons; individual master – student relationship	the university provides not only knowledge but also practical skills, as well as training specialists in narrow fields, and adapting education to the needs of the labour market
Governance model	collegial model; decisive role of academic staff	managerial model; separation of professional management and academic self-government
Organisational structure	■ rigid structure; discipline-based division; the basic unit is the faculty ■ key position of professors–-department heads	■ flexible structure; shifting away from discipline-based division; interdisciplinary units ■ key position of research and teaching teams
Relations with the environment	limited – mainly with state authorities which, determine the scope and form of university operation through legal regulations	significant degree of independence from the state – extensive relations with public and commercial entities, as well as with university graduates (often based on organisational units established for this purpose)
Internationalisation	internationalisation based on scientific contacts	intense pursuit of internationalisation; extensive international contacts

Source: own study based on Leja, 2013, pp. 73–74; Olearnik, Pluta-Olearnik, 2016, p. 67.

In its report titled *A Guiding Framework for Entrepreneurial Universities* (2012), OECD presented a proprietary model of an entrepreneurial university, meant

to serve as, a guideline for contemporary universities, while also referring to previous publications. Wojciech Popławski noted that **strategy** [highlighted by – A.A.] *implemented through leadership at every organisational level and appropriate policy in individual areas of university functioning becomes a special expression of the nature of decisions made at universities in the OECD model* (Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2014, p. 29, transl.). Table 15 presents the features of this model, broken down into seven areas.

TABLE 15. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY MODEL ACCORDING TO ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Area	Detailed characteristics
Leadership and management	The important role of strategic management and, entrepreneurship, visible at various levels of the university's strategy – from vision to goals and indicators; broad involvement in the implementation of the strategy at all levels of the organisation; high autonomy of individuals; reduced bureaucracy
Organisational culture, people, motivation	Diversified financing and reduced dependence on public subsidies; sustainable and long-term strategy of development financing based on entrepreneurship; creating conditions and motivating employees and students alike to cooperate and undertake entrepreneurial activities; concern for staff development; openness to non-academic staff in recruitment processes (as a source of knowledge and skills valuable for the organisation)
Development of entrepreneurial attitudes in the education process	Appropriate organisational structures at the university level; using various educational methods; supporting entrepreneurial behaviour, e.g., through additional activities; including entrepreneurship in the learning outcomes; extensive cooperation with external stakeholders and their involvement in the education process; integration of research and education
Supporting entrepreneurial initiatives	Raising awareness of the importance of developing entrepreneurial attitudes among employees and students; providing support at an individual level; shaping attitudes and creating conditions for the implementation of entrepreneurial initiatives; providing organisational support in the form of incubators
Relations with the environment and knowledge transfer	Involvement in cooperation with and knowledge transfer between public and private sector entities; building a network of relations with stakeholders; working closely with entities operating in the field of knowledge transfer and popularisation; creating opportunities for employees and students to work with the business sector; research and education placed in the context of the local environment and its needs
Internationalisation	Internationalisation viewed as a strategic goal; supporting staff and student mobility; replenishing staff resources with foreign employees; developing international programmes; internationalising the education process; active international cooperation at the unit level
Strategy monitoring	Measuring the effects of conducted activities and using them to revise the strategy; measuring the scale of employee involvement in strategy implementation; verifying the effects of education and knowledge transfer; monitoring and evaluating support systems in the field of knowledge commercialisation

Source: own study based on OECD, 2012.

3. Origins and specificity of strategic management in higher education

The new university model was meant to be characterised by a new management logic based on strategy. The introduction of a performance-based financing system and related government expectations for systematic planning and accountability for activities have, in a way, forced this kind of change. The effectiveness of the traditional approach based on academic autonomy and the administrative process has been questioned. The functioning in the new conditions was supposed to be facilitated by commercial sector models (Fumasoli, Lepori, 2011; Hinton, 2012; Martin, 1992). The commercial sector saw the emergence of, the strategic management concept as early as the 1950s and enjoyed its greatest rise in popularity in the 1960s and 1970s when the commercial sector became *obsessed with strategic management* (Lerner, 1999, p. 5). The first attempts to implement this idea in higher education in the United States and Western Europe took place in the 1980s (Martin, 1992; Hinton, 2012). The year 1983 saw the release of George Keller's *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in American Higher Education*, which marked the symbolic opening of a new chapter in higher education institution management (Keller, 1983)[5].

Even before 1990, universities in the United Kingdom were obliged to develop strategies which were taken into account by funding institutions when allocating subsidies. In the 1990s, the authorities of Norway, Germany, France and the Netherlands imposed a similar obligation on their universities. Further, educational institutions sometimes voluntarily undertook to implement strategic management within their structures even if they were not covered by top-down regulations in this regard (Martin, 1992). However, for several reasons, the initial attempts to introduce the new university management formula and draw up strategic documents were not always successful. Strategies sometimes took the form of a set of short-term solutions aimed only at eliminating current problems. They focused too much on describing organisation issues rather than taking action. They were treated instrumentally, for example, to showcase the resources,

5 Notably, long-term planning was by no means alien to the academic structures at the time, however, it was usually limited to the economic dimension and aimed at providing the university with sustainable financing (Hinton, 2012). The identification of their missions and the focusing of their activities around it is something that universities had already been doing before – American universities began to define and make their mission statements public as early as the 1930s. This process, however, was not as comprehensive as that of strategic planning (Scott, 2006).

mission and vision of the given organisation. Thus, documents created as a result of misunderstanding the strategic planning idea were eventually shelved, discouraging those involved in the process of their preparation (Hinton, 2012).

Nonetheless, the strategic management model became popular over time, and specialised administrative units responsible for this process appeared at universities (primarily American ones). It is worth noting that this happened due to strong pressure from the external environment. Strategic management has proven itself to be the right tool to respond to the increasing demand for accountability in the higher education sector, whether in terms of quality of education, research excellence or resource efficiency. As early as the 1990s, financing institutions, but also accreditation commissions eagerly referred to university strategy, considering it to be the expected and binding standard (Hinton, 2012; Martin, 1992). Today, most universities, including the leading ones, communicate their organisational strategy openly (e.g., on their websites; see, e.g., University of Cambridge, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, University of Oxford)[6]. Polish public HEIs also have a statutory obligation to do so.

The very concept of strategy, which functions in the field of management, has been defined in many ways. Krzysztof Obłój (2009, p. 3) points out that this discipline has recently suffered from a *cacophony of terms, models and concepts*. However, while academic definitions are constantly changing as new theories emerge, their core remains the same. In this regard, Obłój comments as follows:

> *We can argue about specific words and phrases but we know what strategy was yesterday, what it is today and what it may be tomorrow. Strategy is a coherent concept of action based on several key and complementary choices, the general aim of which is to seize opportunities, build a competitive advantage and achieve above-average results*
>
> (Obłój, 2009, p. 3, transl.).

Alfred Chandler's (1962) definition of strategic planning in the higher education sector is often referred to as *setting long-term goals and tasks, organising and adopting a course of action, and allocating resources needed to achieve these goals* (Jabłecka, 2004, p. 38, transl.). In recent years, attempts to define strategy based on higher education research were made by such scholars as Tatiana Fumasoli

6 See www.governance.cam.ac.uk/Pages/University-strategies.aspx, ourvision.stanford.edu/, www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Strategic%20Plan%202018-23.pdf, community.harvard.edu/reports, web.mit.edu/globalstrategy.

and Benedetto Lepori (2011, p. 4), who described it as a *pattern of decisions and actions subordinated to the achievement of goals important for the organisation, while these decisions and actions constitute a coherent sequence spread over time and covering important areas of the university's activity*. This pattern must be recognised and shared by members of the organisation as a *form of collective striving to achieve goals*, however, its rationalisation does not have to precede decision-making and actions and, may occur during or even after them, when they can be examined in a broader perspective (Fumasoli, Lepori, 2011).

In the case of universities, one can distinguish several approaches to formulating and implementing strategy. John Taylor and Adrian Miroiu (2002) propose two: a reactive (conservative) approach based on passive adaptation to the requirements of the environment, as well as an entrepreneurial approach, where the strategy focuses on the strengths of the organisation and on actively changing the environment (Miroiu, Taylor, 2002). Justyna Bugaj (2016) proposed a similar, though slightly expanded division, describing reactive, adaptive and proactive strategies. The first one is characterised by the fact that the activities of HEI authorities are limited only to reacting to changes in the environment. Management is more operational than strategic, does not involve long-term planning, and is focused on maintaining a competitive position. The second approach requires that the management reacts to changes in the environment in such a way as to make the most of the emerging opportunities – making decisions and introducing changes facilitates efficient management. In this case, the strategy is aimed at maintaining or improving the competitive position. Finally, the proactive strategy, which is typical of leaders, is oriented toward the future and expressed through such things as, working with the environment. It allows HEIs to better address the needs of their environments, both in terms of education and research. Strategic management represents a high level, with the HEI being focused on continuous improvement with the active participation of employees (Bugaj, 2016).

In the context of contemporary challenges, Krzysztof Leja (2013) draws attention to the key differences between traditional planning established on previously developed documents and based on the present state of the art, and strategic planning that is evolutionary and future-oriented. The former applies only to organisations operating in a stable and predictable environment, where a strategy can be implemented according to the plan. This model is not advisable in highly dynamic environments. The faster the surrounding reality changes, the greater the flexibility of the strategy itself should be.

Leja suggests arranging the various possible variants of strategic processes within the continuum proposed by Henry Mintzberg. At one end of it there is a planned (intended) strategy, independent of environmental influences, and at

the other, its spontaneous (emergent) form, largely dependent on the external environment. Table 16 lists all strategy types along with their brief descriptions.

TABLE 16. CONTINUUM OF STRATEGY TYPES

Strategy type	Main assumptions
Planned	A pre-planned strategy that, assumes the environment's stability. The management's intentions are drawn up in the form of a plan that can be verified. The plan is not expected to be modified.
Entrepreneurial	A strategy included in the vision of the organisation's leader and under their control. While pre-planned, it allows for adjustments.
Ideological	A pre-planned strategy that is a consequence of the organisation's vision (team or individual). The organisation acts proactively in relation to the environment.
Umbrella	No strict management control. Partly pre-planned and partly created *ad hoc* as necessary. It assumes variability of the environment. Emergent, but in a deliberate manner.
Process--oriented	Leadership controls the processes but leaves the method of their implementation to the organisation members. It assumes variability of the environment and a lack of control over it. Partly pre-planned and partly ad hoc.
Loose	Leadership may or may not establish a vision. Actors are loosely related to the organisation. An organisation's strategy consists of loosely related strategies of its elements (people). This strategy is spontaneous and. assumes variability of the environment.
Consensus	A rather spontaneous strategy. Actors focus on the problems they agree on and solve them through negotiations. Convergence is the result of individual actions.
Imposed by the environment	Signals from the environment determine the direction of the strategy or restrict the available choices. This strategy is spontaneous, but acquires the features of a pre-planned one if the organisation undergoes internationalisation.

Source: Leja, 2013, p. 221.

Strategic management is a field that is constantly evolving. The search for new models of strategies that could increase the chances of success for organisations continues. One of the more interesting and noteworthy concepts that fit in with this aim is the *blue ocean strategy* created by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne (2004). They questioned the current paradigm according to which the strategic goal is to gain a market advantage over competitors. According to these authors, the economy consists of two sub-worlds. One of them (referred to as the *red ocean*) is the existing industries and markets – a market space for which boundaries and rules of operation have already been defined and adopted. It is a world ruled by competition principles. Here, individual entities compete with each other for the largest possible market share, and in this case, it is a zero-sum game. Where one actor profits, another one suffers a loss. Thus, the more players in the market, the fiercer the competition and the more uncertain the prospects of success. The second

sub-world (called the *blue ocean*), is an unrecognised market space – a *terra incognita*, untouched by competition, and governed by its own rules. This is a territory in which regulations have yet to emerge and demand has yet to be created, which means that there is no need to fight for it against others. Competition is not the benchmark here because it simply does not exist. Kim and Mauborgne point out that a new space for action can be found not only by creating completely new markets, but also by discovering undeveloped niches in the existing ones. This strategy motivates organisations to constantly develop and look for new market opportunities – after the inevitable appearance of competition, the *blue ocean* starts to change its colour, which prompts explorers to continue searching for what has yet to be discovered. Thus, the *blue* and *red oceans* exist and will always exist side by side. Although this type of strategy is often associated with technological innovations, it does not necessarily have to apply in this context. The case studies analysed by Kim and Mauborgne (2004) show that the application of this strategy is possible in a wide variety of sectors, from manufacturing to culture.

Given the current challenges, researchers increasingly emphasise the potential of a new type of strategic thinking from the perspective of higher education management (see, e.g., Bragança, 2016; Dennis and Lynch, 2015; Scott, 2012). They point to such promising areas (*blue oceans*) as the market of working people (including the so-called drop-outs, i.e. students who abandoned education at some point in their lives), short-term forms of education for foreigners or distance learning with the application of new technologies. It is also significant that the representatives of the university managerial staff point to the weaknesses of the classical (dominant) model of strategic thinking (Dennis, Lynch, 2015).

Arizona State University (ASU) is an interesting, practical example of this strategy's implementation, which allowed it to generate and explore a new market. Working with the global Starbucks company, the university has started offering education to Starbucks employees. Students can choose as many as 80 programmes, with tuition paid by the employer. The Starbucks College Achievement Plan, as one can learn from ASU's website[7], is a *unique joint venture that opens up an opportunity for all Starbucks employees to get a degree* [a bachelor's degree – A.A.] *thanks to the online study formula*. The proposal seems to be a win--win solution for all parties involved. Access to higher education is limited, and its high costs often make it necessary for young people to take up additional employment. However, working makes it considerably more difficult to continue one's education, which ultimately often results in students dropping out and

7 See edplus.asu.edu/what-we-do/starbucks-college-achievement-plan.

lowering their educational aspirations. Thanks to the programme, young people have the opportunity to continue their education, and the university regains students who would probably (at least in part) have to give up their studies. A company that invests in the education of its employees builds their loyalty and commitment as well as its positive image.

Nonetheless, Shay Scott (2012) points out, that acting in line with the *blue ocean* strategy is not always the optimal solution, and it will never fully liberate the organisation from the influence of competition and market forces. Therefore, he suggests situating the activities of the organisation within a certain continuum, limited by the classic type of strategic thinking (characteristic of the *red ocean*) on the one hand and by the above *blue ocean* model on the other.

The concepts of strategy and strategic planning in the context of higher education have been causing controversy from their very emergence (this is still the case today). Some researchers (see, for example, Musselin, 2007) question their usefulness due to the specificity of universities. Others (see Fumasoli, Lepori, 2011; Hinton, 2012; Jabłecka, 2004; Leja, 2013; Lerner, 1999; Wójcicka, 1996; Zeller, 2011) point to the need to consider the impact of this specificity on the implementation of the strategy and the management process in general. This seems to be necessary for the success of the process. The above concerns such issues as:

- indirect influence of state and supra-state authorities on the formulation and implementation of the strategy;
- complexity of the organisation's customers, which includes (increasingly diverse) students, academics and administrators who make up the academic community;
- university heterogeneity, large autonomy of individuals and decentralisation of the structure, which translates into ambiguous, often self-contradictory goals within the organisation and may generate conflicts of interest;
- collegial and dispersed (*garbage can*) model of decision-making where many often random – people participate in the process;
- strong attachment to academic traditions and values;
- conservatism, inertia, difficulty in introducing changes;
- incomplete affiliation to the organisation, i.e. the academic staff is strongly tied to the faculty (unit) but its ties to, the university as a workplace are much weaker;
- independent paths of professional development and individual ways of working within the organisation;
- different disciplinary cultures;
- managerial functions limited by terms of office;

- different time horizon adopted in the strategy (while in business it is two or three years, this period will usually be longer in the case of universities, amounting to at least five years)[8].

Therefore, the researchers suggest that the model used should be participatory while process coordination should be based on building a consensus around common goals. The system of values that underpins the activity of universities, the timelessness of which translates into the conservative nature of these institutions, also needs to be taken into account. Due to the internal differentiation of universities, i.e. the units that they comprise, the process should be based on respect for their separateness resulting from the specificity of fields and/or disciplines. In these circumstances, while involving academic community representatives in the centrally coordinated process would be a major challenge, the authorities should still strive to ensure their participation. The involvement of top management in the process is no less important. Moreover, the strategic process should aim to balance the autonomous tendencies of individual units and create a kind of alliance for the realisation of common goals. Units should support the goals of the university as a whole through their actions, but at the same time, they should be able to independently choose the goals they deem most important, as well as their own path to achieve them. This approach increases both the level of the employee's identification with the goals and their involvement. Lastly, although the key areas of university activity are education and research, extending the existing system of incentives to also include activities that go beyond these areas but are nevertheless related to the implementation of strategic objectives is justified to strengthen the involvement in the strategic process (Hinton, 2012; Lerner, 1999). Due to the complexity of the universities' mission (education, research, labour market, candidates, graduates), Julita Jabłecka also suggests that universities should implement numerous separate, partial strategies. The general institutional strategy should serve to integrate the partial strategies and the latter should support the implementation of the former (Jabłecka, 2004).

Paweł Zeller (2011) points out that the development and effective implementation of a strategy is impossible without taking into account the macrosocial and macroeconomic context of a university. This context consists of several elements:

8 The cases analysed further in this paper show that Polish HEIs most often choose a perspective of 8–10 years (see Piotrowska-Piątek, 2015).

- prevalence and professionalisation of higher-level education (i.e. orientation towards the transfer of practical knowledge, corresponding to the needs of the labour market);
- deregulation and diversification of higher education, including the market's availability to non-state actors, as well as new profiles, forms and modes of education;
- optimisation of public spending and striving to achieve specific results, giving universities a conditional autonomy (evaluation state);
- development of the *lifelong learning* concept and the role of education in building a knowledge-based economy, and thus the need to develop and adapt the services offered to several education cycles at various stages of human life;
- internationalisation of educational services (increased mobility, international competition and supply) as well as harmonisation and unification of education systems under transnational programmes.

4. Overall structure of the strategic process

Justyna Bugaj (2016) suggests that work on the strategy should start with establishing a schedule, budget (expressed not only in monetary units, but also in units of time determining the dimension of employee involvement), and appointing a team responsible for building and implementing the strategy. The team should be headed by a person of high authority (in the rank of rector/vice-rector) and ought to include representatives of all independent university units, as well as persons with appropriate operational knowledge and experience in building strategies (e.g., external experts). It is also reasonable to appoint a consultative and control body to oversee the process of creating and implementing the strategy and provide support for the team (Bugaj, 2016)[9].

Depending on the selection of team members, the above-mentioned author characterises three paths to building a strategy: external, internal and mixed. Their characteristics are presented below (Table 17).

9 The approach discussed on the subsequent pages is closer to the top-down model of strategy development, although, as the cited author points out, the bottom-up model may apply as well. The starting point for the first one is to define general goals for the entire structure, and only then to define specific goals for individual units. The initiative is in the hands of people holding the highest management positions (rectors, deans). The second model represents an opposite approach. In this case, the process begins at the level of individuals, and the goals they agree upon are extrapolated to the entire university (Bugaj, 2016).

TABLE 17. STRATEGY BUILDING PATHS

	External path	Internal path	Mixed path
Characteristic	preparation of the strategy by another (external) organisation or by independent experts from outside the university	preparation of the strategy by appointed university employees	preparation of the strategy in cooperation with university employees and external experts
Advantages	professionalism, innovation and originality of the strategy	relatively low cost, greater likelihood of identification with the strategy within the university	moderate cost, broad view of the organisation and spectrum of proposed activities
Disadvantages	high costs, lack of identification and acceptance of the proposed strategy within the university	long duration of the process, conservatism of the proposed solutions	problem with reaching a consensus, conflicts of interest, length of the process

Source: own study based on Bugaj 2016.

According to Karen E. Hinton (2012), the optimal composition of the steering committee is 10–12 people recruited from the university's key stakeholder groups[10] (including faculty authorities) under the leadership of the top representative of the authorities who represents a holistic view of the university. Apart from the permanent members of the committee, the author also recommends the involvement, of representatives of the academic staff and students, serving as supporting members. Thanks to them, information related to the process of creating and implementing strategies will more easily reach the groups they represent. Considering that communication is of key importance in the strategic process, this is an unquestionable, and by no means the only, benefit of such a solution (Hinton, 2012).

Some tools enable a very wide range of stakeholders to be indirectly involved in the strategic process. These include websites, moderated forums and discussion groups with representatives of various interest groups. In this case, the process participants must receive feedback on how the collected information was

[10] R. Edward Freeman is considered to be the founder of the stakeholder theory. The model of company management that he proposed assumed taking into account a wider range of stakeholders than the traditional one (i.e. shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers). Freeman pointed to the need to actively manage relations with all interest groups that are in any way related to the activities of the organisation, taking into account their needs and expectations (Freeman, 2001). This theory is widely used in business practice, e.g., in the area of corporate social responsibility (see, e.g., Wójcik-Karpacz, 2018), as well as in the public sector.

used to develop the strategic document. This serves not only as an expression of respect, but also supports process transparency. The use of various available forms of communication at further stages to inform about the progress in the implementation of the strategy will be a clear signal that the strategy itself is not just for show (Hinton, 2012).

According to Andrzej Koźmiński (1999), the involvement of the academic community in the process of creating the strategy is crucial, and not only because of the lessons learned during its preparation. The attitudes developed in the course of creating the strategy are of great importance from the perspective of its implementation, as they increase the probability of success. In addition, persons representing different points of view within one institution can inspire many activities (thanks to a good knowledge of procedures or customer groups). Koźmiński emphasises that the process of creating a strategy is as important (if not more important) as its outcome in the form of a written document. He warns that the top-down structure of the mission and strategy, followed by its mechanical cascading downwards, carries a risk of failure (Koźmiński, 1999).

Once established, the team can start creating the strategy. Although the exact course of such processes depends on the context of a specific organisation, all of them consist of several key stages. Further on, I present the framework structure of the strategic process based on resources by Karen E. Hinton (2012) and Alexandra Lerner (1999).

The starting point for creating a strategy is **to define the vision and mission of HEI**. Their fundamental importance for the next steps in the process is that they are the most important points of reference for themselves. Mission and vision are closely related. The first one contains a representation of the present state, the second one contains a desired future state. The developed strategic plan serves as a kind of link between them and aims to bridge the gap between the two.

The **mission** explains the meaning of the organisation ("Why are we here?") To that end, it should answer two key questions: "For what purpose was the organisation established?" and "Where are its activities directed?". The key goals set out in the mission make it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken. Sometimes organisations also decide to state their values, which are believed to have a significant impact on the implementation of the mission. As noted by Myroslava Hladchenko (2013), the decision to independently showcase the framework of one's activities by presenting a mission statement strengthens the organisation's autonomy on the one hand, and on the other, it constitutes the basis for its accountability for the implementation of the declared goals by the environment in which it operates.

The **vision** contains intentions regarding the organisation's future within the adopted time horizon. Thus, it reflects the nature of the organisation's future (desired) strategic position. It defines a common image of the future for all organisation members and is designed to guarantee that, everyone will proceed in the same direction at the strategy implementation stage. Since there is no strictly determined way of presenting visions, one may encounter visions referring both to the future and the present.

The next step in strategic planning is **environmental analysis**. It covers both the internal environment (resources) of the organisation and its external environment, including competition, trends, market challenges, etc. Its purpose is to gather the information that will then be used as the basis for future planning and decision-making. One may use various methods to carry out an environmental analysis. The **SWOT analysis** has been the most popular method for many years[11] (due to the wide application of this tool, it will be characterised a bit more extensively). At this stage, it is also possible to apply such things as the **PEST analysis**, which is focused on the macro-environment[12], or **Porter's five forces model** aimed at assessing the attractiveness of the sector, including the analysis of buyers, suppliers and competition within the sector and possible substitution.

The fundamentals of the SWOT analysis, initially for the needs of the business sector, were developed at the Stanford Research Institute in the 1960s (Kettunen, 2010). Its universal nature made it possible to adapt it also outside the business environment. This method has been used for many years, including in higher education, whether at the level of the analysis of individual institutions (see, e.g., Askarkyzy et al., 2016; Dyson, 2002), their selected areas (see, e.g., Sinclair, Croom, 2017) or the entire sector (see, e.g., Aneja, 2010; Cevher, Yüksel, 2015; Dawidziuk, 2011; Puciarelli, Kaplan, 2016). The authors of the strategy for the development of higher education in Poland have often referred to it, too (see, e.g., E&Y – IbnGR, 2010; KRASP, 2009).

SWOT is a tool that enables the simultaneous diagnosis of the organisation's condition (i.e. recognition of its internal resources) and the characteristics of the external environment. Its task is *to provide decision-makers with information based on which they can set goals and develop ways to achieve them* (Dawidziuk, 2011, p. 32). The results of the analysis, comprehensively

[11] The name comes from the first letters of the areas included in the analysis, i.e. *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats*.

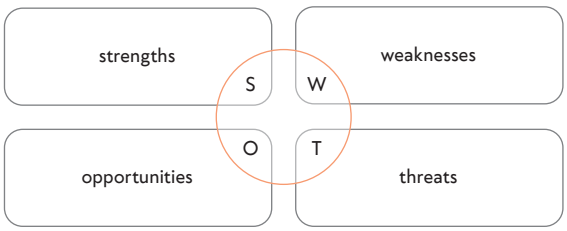
[12] Analysis for the study of the macro-environment, taking into account four groups of external factors: *political, economical, social* and *technological*.

presenting the organisation's situation and taking into account the context of its environment, are the basis for making strategic decisions. The SWOT analysis is therefore the starting point for strategic planning, and its results are used to develop and implement the strategy (Dawidziuk, 2011; Lerner, 1999; Phadermrod, Crowder, and Wills, 2019).

The SWOT analysis consists in identifying four groups of factors that determine an organisation's activities: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, that facilitate or hinder the achievement of the organisation's goals and can be controlled by the organisation itself. In contrast, opportunities and threats are external factors that enable or prevent an organisation from implementing its strategy and are beyond its control (Lerner, 1999; Phadermrod, Crowder, and Wills, 2019).

The SWOT analysis is used to select a strategy that will lead to the greatest possible synergy between the organisation's resources and the external conditions, i.e.,a strategy focused on minimising threats and skilful use of opportunities based on the diagnosed strengths and weaknesses of the organisation (Dawidziuk, 2011; Lerner, 1999). The results of the analysis are usually presented in the form of a matrix (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. SWOT MATRIX



Source: Lerner, 1999.

While SWOT is the starting point for the strategic process, its role does not end there as constant monitoring of the environment is necessary due to the high dynamics of changes. Regular SWOT analyses make it possible to verify strategic assumptions and adjust them to changing conditions. This allows organisations to take advantage of emerging opportunities and react to new threats (Kettunen, 2010).

Many appreciate the SWOT model for its simplicity, and although, as already mentioned, it is not the only tool used in the decision-making process, there is no doubt that it is still among the most frequently used ones (Kettunen, 2010; Phadermrod, Crowder, and Wills, 2019). Its timeless nature, however,

does not exclude the possibility of enriching it with elements taken from more modern concepts, e.g., resource planning or competency-based planning. Due to their strong emphasis on internal factors, both of these approaches should be used to supplement one of the components of the SWOT analysis rather than as a substitute for the analysis itself. The advantage of SWOT is its multidimensionality which makes it always up-to-date (Dyson, 2002).

Julie Sinclair and Patty Croom (2017) justify the usefulness of the discussed tool, and the need to use it to strengthen the action plan by pointing to the fact that creating a strategic plan is a *process on the border of science and art: it must be based on reliable data on both inside and outside of the organisation but requires a creative translation of these data into the priorities and goals of the organisation* (Sinclair, Croom, 2017, p. 38).

As already mentioned, the SWOT analysis covers two levels – internal (where the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation are identified) and external (where opportunities and threats are identified). In the case of a university, the following areas of activity are subject to internal analysis:

- education (e.g., assessed based on the qualifications and accreditation held and the SSR index; this area is directly related to human resources and university infrastructure);
- scientific research, including R&D (the evaluation criterion may be, e.g., the evaluation of scientific activity in disciplines);
- human resources (not only in quantitative but also qualitative terms: degrees and titles, development prospects, internationalisation);
- university infrastructure (teaching buildings, their standard and equipment, computer equipment and networks, library resources, sports facilities and others);
- finances;
- communication (internal and external, including marketing);
- management area (including management staff competencies and process organisation) – (Dawidziuk, 2011; Dyson, 2002; Hladchenko, 2015).

The analysis of the environment should consist of two complementary perspectives: micro, taking into account the immediate environment, and macro, taking into account the indirect environment. This component should comprise the following items:

- social environment (target groups and their educational preferences and aspirations; changing life patterns, e.g., extending the educational process and promoting *lifelong learning*);

- demography (age and education structure; demographic trends, including life expectancy);
- economic situation at the national and international level (which affects the amount of the budget subsidies; market absorption, which is determined by the purchasing power of individual customers);
- development of technology and economy (changing demand for specialists, as well as changes in the teaching process);
- legal regulations (applicable legal acts and changes in this regard; level of market regulation);
- market environment (market dynamics, competitors, products, technologies) – (Dawidziuk, 2011; Dyson, 2002; Hladchenko, 2015).

Although the SWOT analysis model is still valued and remains in common use, some perceive it as outdated and its simplicity – indicated as an advantage – is also a source of criticism. In terms of assessing this model, its users raise several questions. The first is that the process takes into account the subjective opinions of its participants. The second is their non-representativeness – the fact that the analysis often does not take into account the point of view of customers is often pointed to as a weakness. It is also noticeable that decision-makers participating in the analysis process tend to overestimate the favourable phenomena in the environment[13] (the real evaluation is replaced by the so-called wishful thinking) while underestimating the existing risks. Third, the issues analysed in the process are not always measurable and not subject to prioritisation. In addition, the apparent ease of use of the tool may result in superficiality and imprecision of the analysis. If too few factors are taken into account (or conversely, too many of them) and, are not ranked properly, the conclusions drawn may be incorrect, and as such, may lead to inappropriate actions (Dawidziuk, 2011; Phadermrod, Crowder, Wills, 2019)[14].

Due to these imperfections, there have been proposals to supplement the SWOT tools with supporting processes, e.g., *Web-Based Strategy Dialogue*

13 The real opportunities include such things as, demographic processes and the extension of professional activity as generators of development for lifelong professional development; however, as of today, increased budget expenditures on higher education or prioritisation of this area on the political level are examples of wishful thinking.

14 It is worth noting one more thing, which is indicated by the analysis of generally available strategic documents regarding higher education in Poland. It turns out that the participants of the process (authors of documents) are not always able to correctly assign individual factors to the appropriate analysis category. This leads to such issues as categorising elements that should be deemed "opportunities" as "strengths" (Dawidziuk, 2011).

(Kettunen, 2010) or *Importance-Performance Analysis* (Phadermrod, Crowder, Wills, 2019).

The Web-Based Strategy Dialogue mechanism is based on several assumptions. Information taken into account in the strategic planning process should undergo a verification consisting of several stages, which enables the elimination of information that, for example, goes beyond the adopted time horizon or is based on individual observations. Further, different cognitive perspectives should be taken into account in the process, which could be made possible by including such parties as students, employees and external partners and, not only people directly involved in the strategic planning process. The expansion of the process to include different stakeholder groups and involve them in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, seeking opportunities, defining threats and planning development can take place in various ways. Among them are the previously mentioned working groups, strategic workshops and seminars. Although the introduction of such changes would expand the entire process, it would also enable increased involvement of all the aforementioned groups (especially employees) and thus make the process more likely to succeed (Kettunen, 2010).

Another form of improving the process of obtaining and evaluating information in SWOT analysis is Importance-Performance Analysis, a technique taken from customer satisfaction surveys. It is based on measures of two components: importance and performance, the first of which relates to the importance of a given area from the point of view of customers, and the other to the organisation's performance in that area. Importantly, each organisation examined using this technique is assessed by customers in relation to a market competitor. In the case of this technique, reservations may also emerge regarding such things as, the expansion of the process or the tendency for customers to overestimate the importance of individual factors. However, the potential benefits, i.e. supplementing the SWOT analysis with the perspective of the organisation's customers – a significant factor that the original model lacks – seem to justify its use (Phadermrod, Crowder, and Wills, 2019).

The SWOT analysis with the Importance-Performance Analysis component is carried out in several stages. The process begins with the selection of elements that will form the basis of the customer satisfaction survey with the services provided by the organisation. The research itself is carried out in two parts – part one involves assessing the analysed organisation, whereas part two consists in assessing its competitor. Apart from assessing individual elements, customers also determine the level of their overall satisfaction with the service. Afterwards, two variables are measured for each of the tested elements: its importance for

customers[15] and the results achieved by the organisation within this component[16]. Subsequently, based on the conducted research using the Importance--Performance Analysis, the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, as well as opportunities and threats, are identified and presented in the form of a SWOT matrix. The strengths include factors that have been identified as the strengths of both the analysed organisation and its competitor. The a nalysed organisation must aim to maintain the current level and high results. The weaknesses include areas in which both the organisation and its competitor have failed to achieve satisfactory results. Activities aimed at improving the components included here may lead to gaining a competitive advantage in the future. The category of opportunities includes elements that have been identified as strengths in the case of the analysed organisation and, as weaknesses in the case of its competitor, which indicates a competitive advantage in a specific field. In turn, areas that have been defined as weaknesses of the organisation in question are considered threats, and at the same time, the strengths of the competitor. They represent a recommendation to take immediate corrective actions to avoid potential losses or prevent their escalation (Phadermrod, Crowder, and Wills, 2019).

The environmental analysis constitutes the basis for the **gap analysis**, i.e. the identification and description of the differences between the current and the expected (recorded in the vision) state of the organisation. The distance that separates today's organisation from that defined in the vision is the benchmark for establishing a strategy aiming to bridge this distance. At this stage, it may be helpful to compare the processes and results achieved by the university with analogous processes of other entities that achieve better results on the market (searching for good practices – the so-called benchmarking). Importantly, this type of comparative analysis is not about simple imitation, but about identifying factors that translate into successful processes to creatively improve selected areas of your own organisation.

Strategy formulation begins with the **definition of strategic areas**, i.e. the way to implement the organisation's mission and ensure development in the direction determined at the vision level. Both the mission and the vision are the frameworks for all stages of the strategic process.

15 This variable can be measured on the basis of direct assessments of the respondents, it can also be defined on the basis of the relationship between the results obtained by the organisation in particular categories and the overall level of customer satisfaction. The cited authors used the second method (multiple regression) in their analysis, for the set of independent variables they assumed the results obtained by the organisation within individual categories subject to customer assessment, and the dependent variable – the general level of satisfaction.

16 This variable is determined based on the averaged answers provided by customers.

Universities determine their **strategic goals/objectives**[17], **action and implementation plans** as well as **tactics** as part of individual strategic areas. Strategic goals result directly from strategic areas and can be defined as "milestones" that the organisation aims to reach. There is a set of criteria that should meet well-formulated goals. According to the SMART concept widely used in planning, goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. In turn, the action plans, describe the process leading to the achievement of the goals and specify the necessary resources. In other words, the strategic objective answers the question of where (as an organisation) you intend to arrive, and the action plan determines how you wish to get there. The concept of tactics refers to specific actions taken on the way to achieve the goals, i.e. the **implementation of the strategic plan**, translating the plan into actions adequately to the current situation. While tactics are not always written, they constitute procedures necessary for efficient management, planning, budgeting and evaluation of activities.

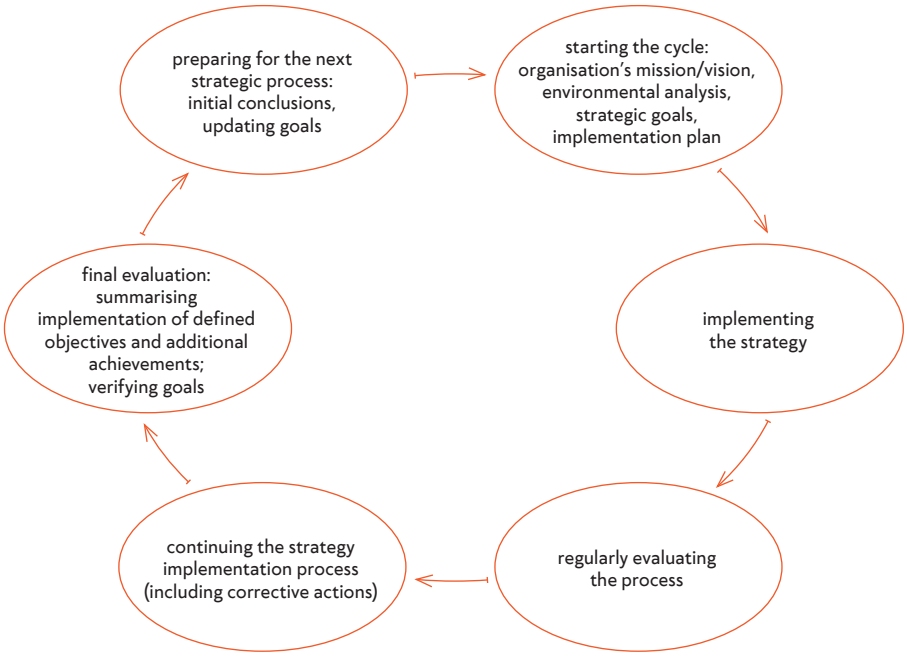
In the case of HEIs, implementation is a big challenge due to the specific way they are organised: they are. a network of independent units that function in silo-like structures and are often oriented towards their own short-term goals. Strategic decisions are implemented across all units – from the plan level for the entire organisation to the plan for individual units.

For the strategy implementation to run smoothly, it is necessary to support it with **periodic evaluation**. This includes an assessment of the implementation of indicators (a list of achieved and expected values), analysis of factors that could affect the course of activities and the achieved results, as well as the measurement of the impact of individual activities on long-term goals resulting from the organisation's vision and mission. Such a review may constitute the basis for decisions on possible modifications to the strategy.

The preparation of a summary of the entire strategic plan, with the latter usually designed to cover several years, is a starting point for a broader reflection. Apart from the achievements made under the plan, it is also worth considering those that were not planned at the start of the process. They testify to the flexibility of the organisation and its ability to take advantage of emerging opportunities. Evaluation is also the starting point for the next plan. This involves not only analysing the results attained, but also seeking ways to improve the processes.

[17] Karen E. Hinton (2012) draws attention to the slightly different connotations of the two terms, although they are sometimes used interchangeably in the context of strategy. Objective is more general in nature and sets the general course of action, while goal relates to more specific planned achievements.

FIGURE 2. DIAGRAM OF CREATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF A STRATEGIC PROCESS



Source: Hinton, 2012, p. 21.

Finally, it is worth adding that while developing an organisational strategy, its authors are often unable to predict and take into account all possible changes in the environment. The dynamics of the external environment sometimes force the creation of ad hoc strategies – actions that emerge in response to unforeseen changes and are not part of the baseline strategy (i.e. an **emergent strategy**, as per Mintzberg's continuum).

5. Strategic planning – a weakness of Polish universities (so far)

The 2011 amendment to the Law on Higher Education, required all universities to draw a development strategy, which was meant. to be adopted by a collegial body indicated in the statute, with the rector being responsible for its development and implementation. Moreover, the heads of basic organisational units were required to prepare development strategies for the respective units, which had to be

consistent with the development strategy of the university (Act of 18 March 2011, Art. 1, pts. 51, 53).

The available analyses show that as of the day preceding the imposition of the above statutory obligation, only every fourth public university (27%) had (or was in the process of creating) such a strategic document; 39% of them had a mission statement while 7% also had a vision (Jasiczak, Kochalski, Sapała, 2011). Researchers have also identified factors that may significantly reduce the effectiveness of the implementation of adopted documents. These factors include the ineffective cascading of the strategy (i.e. limiting to the central level or the level of basic units and not communicating it to employees), as well as inadequate adjustment of the organisational structure to the strategy implementation and monitoring processes (most universities did not make any organisational changes and a handful of them limited themselves to partly reorganising their existing structures). Few universities created a separate system for monitoring the strategic process. In most cases, monitoring was based on general reports and indicators from individual university units and not actual research focused on individual strategic priorities. Universities representatives indicated the following as the most challenging obstacles in the process: lack of an incentive system, negative attitudes – internal resistance to changes, lack of qualified personnel, financial and time constraints, as well as communication difficulties. The most common mistakes included: attributing responsibility to the wrong people, an ineffective strategy implementation support system, an ineffective communication system, difficulty in defining indicators and benchmarks for individual goals, insufficient management commitment and insufficient process control (Cyfert, Jasiszczak, Kochalski, 2011; Kochalski, Sapała, 2011).

It is worth recalling here that World Bank experts had presented an extensive diagnosis of the management-related weakness in the Polish higher education system several years earlier, they claimed that [it – A.A.] *is rather outdated and shows that there is no recognition of the importance of setting goals, selecting priorities, creating incentives or verifying the achievement of set goals* (World Bank, 2004, p. 29). They also drew attention to the insufficient competencies of persons performing managerial functions.

The top positions at universities (rectors, vice-rectors, deans) are held by people with the greatest scientific achievements or filled by members of interest groups, the report reads. Organisational experience and management skills are not taken into account. Candidates for the top positions are elected for relatively short terms (and may hold their positions for no longer than two terms),

> *which prevents them from acquiring appropriate experience and management skills [...]. HEI senates and faculty councils, which make most of the decisions, often have neither the experience nor the adequate preparation to deal with issues of management or financing*
>
> (World Bank, 2004, p. 29).

The authors of the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Poland until 2020* (2010) expressed a similar opinion. The weaknesses that they specified – not only at the university level but also at the level of the entire system – included the lack of strategic management and the corresponding organisational culture (i.e. goal operationalisation, financial controlling, etc.). They also pointed out that Polish universities are characterised by a non-transparent and inefficient management structure, which makes it difficult to evaluate their activities (E&Y – IbnGR, 2010).

Has the introduction of the statutory obligation contributed to changes in this respect and has it influenced the development of a strategic management culture? It seems that only to a very small extent, at least so far. *The current development of most HEIs, non-public and public alike, is very chaotic, and decisions of strategic importance, such as launching new fields of study, are made based on criteria that may turn out to be highly unfavourable for HEIs in the long term*, reads a 2012–2013 study (Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2016, p. 415, transl.).

Interviews with the managerial staff of Polish HEIs prove that the strategy-based approach is still not applied as an important element of management in these institutions (Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2014). Although the models for constructing strategies used by the specific universities may vary significantly (from compiling departmental strategies to university-wide debate to processes supervised by the unit's management, sometimes supported by external consulting companies, with the academic community playing a consultative role), many of them reproduce similar weaknesses. A strategy is often seen as a response to current problems (e.g., legal changes; top-down regulations, e.g., resulting from the National Qualifications Framework; the university's financial situation; demographic trends), and therefore focuses on short-term intentions and is an extrapolation of the current way the university operates. The university authorities do not treat a strategy as a real tool that may help manage the university, but rather as a smoke and mirrors solution forced by statutory pressure. They make their strategies highly generic, even universal, as evidenced by the fact that the authorities of various HEIs often declare the same strategic goals. Few formulate visions with real potential, and therefore, ones that are distinguishing. Another significant problem is the fact that universities do not

pay enough attention to the communication of the strategy (e.g., by limiting their activity in this area to publishing a document on the website) and to the monitoring of the progress of its implementation. Not only are employees unaware of the strategy, but they also do not know their responsibilities as part of it. This means that it is unknown who should implement the strategy and to what extent. Failure to communicate also translates into a lack of employee involvement, which poses a serious risk to achieving the goals of the strategy and effectively makes the strategy document inoperative. Even some executives treat it as such, seeing the development of a strategy as an unnecessary bureaucratic obligation, sometimes carried out for reasons aimed at achieving short-term benefits (e.g., the ability to apply for external funding). The low awareness at the top management level, as described above, carries the risk of bringing about a self-fulfilling prophecy. A document created and treated in this way does not fulfil its function, and from the perspective of the organisation's management, it often turns out to be useless. Furthermore, the development and implementation of a strategy require great organisational efficiency – something that, is not the strongest suit of HEIs, especially large academic public universities (Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2016, see also Popławski, Markowski, Forkiewicz, 2014).

Agnieszka Piotrowska-Piątek (2015), who conducted a review of all public strategic documents of Polish universities between 2013 and 2014[18], confirms many observations of the aforementioned researchers, somewhat undermining, the managerial value of the existing documents. She points out that the most frequently indicated factors that contributed to the development of the strategy, apart from the growing competitive pressure (95% of responses), included the announced changes in higher education (75%) and the expectations of external stakeholders (45%). This may confirm the adaptive nature of the documents in question. The very structure of a strategy, which illustrates the accuracy and depth of its planned implementation, had numerous shortcomings. Although almost all strategies define strategic goals (I would like to stress that not all do), their

[18] The sample included both public and private HEIs, including state-owned vocational universities. Interestingly, less than 60% of public academic HEIs, 53% of higher vocational universities and as few as 10% of non-public universities published their strategic documents on their websites in the period under study. The small percentage applicable to the non-public universities should not come as a surprise since such a strategic document would also inevitably disclose their business strategy that they would rather keep secret from their direct competitors. It is worth noting, however, that drawing conclusions on its basis (e.g., about the quality of strategic documents of non-public schools, which the author of the cited studies is trying to do) may involve a high risk of error due to the large diversification of the private sector in Poland. This may point to the following dependence: the higher the awareness at the university management level, the higher the quality and level of detail of the strategic document, with the simultaneous lack of transparency due to its business "value".

operationalisation can be found in more or less half (53%) of such documents, and the indicators of their implementation only in 41% of them. Not all HEIs defined a time horizon in their strategies. Many of those that did set it for 2020 – an obvious reference to the period of validity of the legal acts that obliged them to draw up a strategy (e.g., the higher education development strategy or EU framework programmes defining the end of the funding period) and proof of the formal, bureaucratic nature of documents created at the HEI level. *A strategy that only discusses intentions and does not specify them by defining action programmes, or the time horizon for their implementation, seems to be a declaration of intentions for the development of the HEI rather than a management tool*, the above author states (Piotrowska-Piątek, 2015, p. 114, transl.). Numerous weaknesses were also identified at the stage of the strategy development process itself. One of them was limited interest in the use of strategic analysis methods when creating a document, or more precisely, in the diagnosis of the HEI and its environment. SWOT, PEST or BSC analyses[19] were applied by roughly every other public HEI while preparing strategic documents, and only a few per cent of non-public HEIs used them. Another one was the lack of involvement of significant stakeholder groups in the work on the project, whether internal (students) or external (representatives of the socio-economic environment). This seems to be a significant oversight, especially in the context of the so-called *third mission* of universities (Piotrowska-Piątek, 2015).

Pursuant to the applicable regulations contained in the 2018 Act on Higher Education and Science, the rector of the university is responsible for the preparation of the draft strategy. The competencies of the HEI council include issuing opinions on strategic documents, whereas the relevant resolution on adopting the strategy is passed by the university senate. The same applies to the strategy implementation reports. They are prepared by the rector, reviewed by the HEI council and approved by the senate. Universities are obliged to make these documents available via the Public Information Bulletin (Act of 20 July 2018).

19 This is the so-called Balanced Scorecard (BSC) – a method of planning and managing a strategy based on balancing the benefits of three groups: shareholders, employees and customers.

4

Resource dependence theory – its creation, assumptions and review of applications in previous research on higher education

1. From the analysis of business processes to research on higher education – the origins and development of Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik's concept

Higher education management does not yet have such an extensive theoretical background as management in the commercial sector. Research on the functioning of higher education uses the achievements of classical disciplines in the field of social sciences, sociology, economics and management sciences. There is still room for the implementation of new concepts that may contribute to the development of research and a better understanding of the phenomena occurring in this area (Austin, Jones, 2015). Researchers indicate that the following theoretical concepts are vital from the higher education research standpoint (see, e.g., Austin, Jones, 2015; Davis, Cobb, 2010; Lipnicka, Verhoeven, 2014): institutional theory (DiMaggio, Powell, 1983), agency theory (Jensen, Meckling, 1976), stewardship theory (Davies, Schoorman, Donaldson, 1997), stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), population ecology (Hannan, Freeman, 1977) and resource dependence theory (Pfeffer, Salancik, 1978). In the course of further considerations, I use the explanatory potential of the last of the above items, whose origins lie in management sciences.

The resource dependence theory is one of the concepts that organisations consider in the context of their environment, emphasising its role and focusing on relations and interactions between them and the environment. As noted by Magdalena Lipnicka and Jef C. Verhoeven (2014), this context is absolutely justified in the case of research on higher education. Higher education and, the broader education system are closely related to and dependent on the social context. Their shape is the result of historical and cultural influences (Lipnicka, Verhoeven, 2014).

Gerald F. Davis and J. Adam Cobb (2010) consider the resource dependence theory to be the most comprehensive among all those enumerated above. At the same time, they draw attention to the impact that this theory has had – not only in management sciences (from where it originates) but also in sociology and public policy, e.g., in the field of education and health care. More and more researchers are starting to see the value of this tool in analysing and explaining the behaviour of entities in the higher education sector (see, e.g., Cantwell, 2015; Fowles, 2014; Jaquette, Curs, 2015; Jin, Horta, 2018; Kholmuminov, Kholmuminov, Wright, 2018; Lipnicka, Verhoeven, 2014). Their findings are addressed later

in this paper, while at the outset, I would like to briefly outline the genesis of this theoretical orientation.

The theory emerged at Stanford University, where Jeffrey Pfeffer began his scientific career, the. initial stage of which was devoted to the study of the relations of exchange and power inside and outside an organisation. His concept, later supplemented by Gerald R. Salancik, gave rise to a theory published in 1978 in the book *The External Control of Organizations. A Resource Dependence Perspective*. The authors posed questions about the sources and consequences of power in relations between organisations (*Where do power and dependence come from? How do those who run organisations use their power and manage dependencies?*). They were interested in various strategies of organisational behaviour aimed at minimising external influences and increasing their own autonomy. The authors' attention focused primarily on business organisations, hence many of the examples cited in the book relate to mergers and acquisitions, the functioning of supervisory boards or the links between the world of business and politics. The proposed theory served as the basis for many studies in these fields. Based on the resource dependence theory, other researchers analysed such things as, the composition of enterprise management boards (due to the types of resources provided to organisations by their members) and the impact of connections with representatives of the political environment on the financial results of companies (Davis, Cobb, 2010; Hillman, Withers, and Collins, 2009; Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003)[1].

Over time, the resource dependence theory has become one of the most influential concepts in organisation and management. The literature mentions several reasons for its popularity – with the first one being its empirical relevance. The theory explained business models and processes of that time well: extensive mergers, acquisitions, and clusters. Secondly, it noticed the role of power as a component explaining organisational behaviour – something, that was lacking in other approaches, which were oriented mainly towards rationality and efficiency. Moreover, the concept fits well with the social climate of the 1970s. Anyway, according to some researchers (Davis, Cobb, 2010), the shift toward the resource dependence theory, visible in the second decade of the 21st century, can be explained by socio-political conditions similar to those observed in the 1970s: a financial crisis, a growing dissatisfaction with governments and a rise of social activism, which once again brought power and dependency issues to the forefront. What also made the theory prominent was the very strong position

[1] In the context of the current situation of higher education in Poland, this avenue seems interesting and promising, e.g., in terms of analysing the composition of newly appointed university councils (pursuant to the Act of 20 July 2018).

of Stanford University, both in terms of education (a new business school model imitated by other universities and industry organisations, including recognised doctoral studies in the field of organisation and management) and its scientific research activities (*de facto* controlling leading scientific periodicals through publishers and reviewers) – (Davis, Cobb, 2010).

The resource dependence perspective gained importance in the field of higher education research as states, being the administrators of financial resources, began implementing a performance-based funding policy for public sector entities. This was related to the introduction and promotion of such things as the accountability principle in the higher education sector[2].

The cited theory outlines scenarios that illustrate how HEIs (like other organisations) adapt their management model to the needs of the external environment from which they draw various resources. It also indicates how resource providers can influence changes in the behaviour of their "subsidiaries", as well as how the universities themselves can influence their environment to improve their functioning conditions (Austin, Jones, 2015).

The possibilities offered by the resource dependence theory are used in the further part of this work to analyse the empirical material collected. I attempt to explain the differences and changes taking place in the management of HEIs in Poland using the theoretical framework proposed by Pfeffer and Salancik. At the outset, I present the key assumptions of this theory, as well as its current applications in selected works devoted to the activities of entities in the higher education sector in the countries of Europe, Asia, North America and Australia.

2. Organisations, environment, interdependencies – basic concepts and key assumptions of the resource dependence theory

The assumptions of the resource dependence theory were presented in 1978 in the book *The External Control of Organizations. A Resource Dependence Perspective* (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). Its authors assume that no organisation is self--sufficient. By necessity, all of them are involved in the process(es) of exchange with other entities around them. In this way, they acquire the resources necessary

[2] It was a consequence of adopting the assumptions of the *New Public Management* policy, the principles of which are discussed in Chapter III.

for their survival and further development. Complex networks of dependence and power are created between the participants of such processes. As a result, organisations remain dependent on the environment (or, in fact, on its resources) and are subject to its influence. On the other hand, organisations undertake various activities aimed at managing the existing interdependencies in accordance with their interests, i.e. directing them to increase their own autonomy. Due to the above-mentioned circumstances, according to the authors of the resource dependence theory, it is impossible to understand organisational behaviour without taking into account the context of the external environment in which a given organisation operates (Austin, Jones, 2015; Hillman, Withers, and Collins, 2009; Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003).

2.1. Resources as a source of power

The set of elements from which organisations can draw and in which relations of exchange can occur is very large and varied. The external resources obtained by an organisation include both intangible (e.g., work, knowledge) and tangible ones (e.g., goods, funding). The fact that these resources are beyond the control of the organisation creates, firstly, uncertainty about their future availability, and secondly, dependence on the provider of these resources. The degree of this dependence is proportional to the importance of resources and the degree of their availability to the organisation. From the point of view of an organisation, the most important resources are those without which the organisation cannot function and whose quantity in the environment is limited, effectively making them rare. Thus, from the organisation's standpoint, the more important the resources and the more limited their availability, the greater the influence on the organisation that can be exerted by their provider (and the more limited the organisation's autonomy). According to the theory in question, this is how the mechanism of power is shaped. Power is based on inherently asymmetric relations of exchange. It is based on having resources that are limited and desired by others (Austin, Jones, 2015; Davis, Cobb, 2010).

As part of their concept, Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) defined and described eight conditions that make it possible to gain control (power) over an organisation. First, you must have a certain pool of resources. These resources must be essential to the organisation's survival and operation. In addition, the organisation must not be able to source these resources from an alternative source (or its capacity in this respect has to be very limited) but must be free to plan and take action. On the other hand, the resource administrator cannot be limited in terms of their use and the right to allocate them. Nor can it be dependent on any resources controlled by the organisation it wants to be linked with in a subordination

relationship. It must make its preferences readable to the organisation. The last condition is the transparency of the activities of the organisation subjected to control (Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003).

Having power can manifest in two ways. Firstly, the administrator may limit the organisation's access to the resources it owns and which the organisation wants. Secondly, it can impose conditions on how certain resources can be used by the organisation (their consumer). For example, in line with the subject matter of this paper, there may be a relationship between the state, the administrator of budget funds allocated for education and public HEIs. Power can manifest itself in both ways within this relationship, either in the form of budget cuts or a set of regulations regarding the spending of subsidies, limiting the autonomy of HEIs in this scope (Austin, Jones, 2015).

In the context of the discussed issue, it should be noted that organisations differ in terms of their susceptibility to external influence. The greater the organisation's demand for resources from its environment, the greater this susceptibility becomes. Therefore, we are dealing with organisations with both low and high bargaining power, which differ in terms of the degree of sensitivity to external influence. If an organisation has low bargaining power, it also has limited possibilities for negotiating with the environment. As noted by Ewa Stańczyk-Hugiet (2017), *Such organisations are more passive* [...], *do not present their own position in an aggressive manner, and consequently, are more dependent not only on resources but also on powerful organisations in pursuing the assumed goals* (Stańczyk-Hugiet, 2017, p. 20, transl.).

2.2. Interdependence

Due to the complex nature of the network of relationships existing in the environment, it should be noted that individual actors may play different roles in different relationships. An organisation that needs a certain resource and is thus dependent on its owner can at the same time – whether in the same or another relationship – have the power resulting from the ownership of some other resources that are needed by other actors in its environment. In other words, if organisation A has the resources desired by organisation B, then organisation B may also have some resources relevant to organisation A, which then makes these organisations interdependent. Such a network of relationships and the related balance of power influence the decision-making processes and actions taken by organisations that are part of the system (Austin, Jones, 2015; Davis, Cobb, 2010).

It follows that any organisation should be viewed as two-dimensional – organisations try to minimise their own dependence by making other entities dependent on their resources. Therefore, they aim not only to acquire a pool

of resources that will minimise their dependence on others, but also to control a pool of resources that, will allow them to exercise power over others. The organisation's behaviour can therefore be understood as dependence management, and efficiency in this respect is of decisive importance for its survival and development (Stańczyk-Hugiet, 2017).

Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) point out that submitting to environmental influences, although justified by the achievement of short-term benefits (immediate access to the desired resources), is not always in the best interest of the organisation in the long term. Compliance with external pressure means limitation (or even loss) of autonomy and the possibility of self-determination. In extreme cases, even the very survival of the organisation may be threatened, as the willingness to conform to external expectations may prove problematic when various entities express conflicting expectations towards the organisation. At that point, the organisation must decide which expectations to meet or take action to eliminate the conflict of interest. It can do this by prioritising resources and the related expectations of their providers while balancing conflicting demands at the same time, meaning that the expectations of individual groups will not be met simultaneously. An organisation can also manipulate social control by only giving its stakeholders the illusion of meeting their expectations or even limit this control by restricting access to information channels. Another way of gaining some degree of control over the environment is participating in the process of formulating expectations. Such participation can take various forms, ranging from involvement in the formulation of policies and regulations regarding the environment of the organisation's functioning to the use of promotional tools and Public Relations that create beliefs about the products, services and the value provided to recipients by the organisation (Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003).

3. Review of active organisational strategies and behaviours in response to environmental pressure

The authors of the resource dependence theory perceive organisations as entities that rationally adapt to changing environmental conditions, which *are subject to constant reinterpretation as a result of interaction with the environment* (Stańczyk-Hugiet, 2017, p. 17, transl.). They must shape their behaviour in such a way as to increase the probability of obtaining resources. However, Pfeffer and Salancik are far from perceiving organisations solely in terms of passive, adaptive

actors forced to submit to external influences. They recognise that organisations can be active participants in the relationships prevailing in their environment. According to the above authors, organisations may undertake activities that at least partially aim to reduce external influences and limit existing dependencies and thus increase their autonomy. Moreover, they can do it in several ways and the resource dependence theory is largely devoted to explaining them. Pfeffer and Salancik proposed and described the potential strategies that organisations can apply in response to the interdependencies in which they are involved. Organisations use these strategies to manage this state of interdependence in their best interest. This assumption significantly complements the picture of the processes taking place in the environment. It makes us perceive them as the dynamically changing effects of both the organisations' adaptation mechanisms and their attempts to alter the existing order (Davis, Cobb, 2010; Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003; Stańczyk-Hugiet, 2017). The table below presents three main organisational strategies and examples of activities characteristic of each of them according to Michael S. Harris (2013).

TABLE 18. STRATEGIES OF ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOURS

Strategy of organisational behaviours	Exemplary actions
dependence reduction	■ supplier diversification ■ customer/consumer diversification
extended linkages	■ creating partnerships with other organisations ■ creating official policies that bind organisations
creating and managing a new environment	■ marketing ■ lobbying ■ coalitions ■ consortiums ■ acquisitions

Source: Harris, 2013.

The dependence reduction strategy consists in changing the goals and/or structure of the organisation in such a way that they are not dependent on one specific resource (e.g., market, raw material). An organisation's dependence on one critical source is replaced by dependence on a greater number of smaller sources and is the result of either finding alternative sources of resources or diversifying the organisation's activities. This reduces the risk associated with dependence on one resource and limits the uncertainty related to its availability, thus increasing the security of the organisation's operations. The organisation may also try to reduce the control of the resource administrator, including that of its

representatives in supervisory and advisory bodies, as well as in various forms of activity, which leads to their gradual socialisation within the structures of the organisation (Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003).

The above dependence reduction strategies can be successful when the organisation is within the sphere of influence of weaker interest groups. The authors of the theory assume that these strategies will prove less effective when facing strong interest groups and propose one of the two other adaptation strategies in such circumstances. The first one includes adaptation and internal changes in the organisation aimed at adapting to the environment (i.e. recognising needs and adapting products and/or services to them). The second is an attempt to change the organisation's environment rather than the organisation itself – in such a way that it best suits the existing potential of the organisation (i.e. creating new demand). These strategies can be implemented in many ways. Organisations can adapt to the environment by modifying their structure, management pattern, technology, product, as well as values and standards. The impact on the environment may take the form of diversification, absorption, activities aimed at changing the rules governing relations or lobbying to gain control over part of the environment (Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003).

Another way to increase the autonomy of the organisation is to develop extended linkages, which are vital not only because of the role they play in stabilising the environment, but also because they are a means for the organisation to ensure a favourable exchange of resources. The development of a network of relationships is associated with the improvement of access to alternative sources of resources, and their diversification reduces the organisation's dependence on its current (sole) administrator. In the higher education sector, this type of mechanism can be encountered in cases where the revenues from the existing, significant sources are decreasing (independently of the HEI) and the HEI itself tries to compensate for this loss by seeking alternative financing methods. When it comes to the resources necessary for the operation of the organisation, creating lasting relationships with key partners who can provide the organisation with those resources can prove an effective strategy. This strategy includes, for example, the appointment of opinion-forming and advisory bodies (councils) within HEI structures, which were introduced in Poland by a statutory obligation in 2018. Although their support is undoubtedly significant for HEI management, their role is not limited to broadly construed consulting (Antonowicz, 2018). The network of connections that HEIs establish with important external agencies thanks to the members of advisory bodies cannot be underestimated either as it. facilitates the negotiations with various entities in their environment and also helps to secure access to the desired resources (for information on HEI councils

and their role in the HEI management process, see Kretek, Dragšić, Kehm, 2013). Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) also mention the merger of organisations[3] as one of the dependence management strategies (cf. also Austin, Jones, 2015).

To become independent from previous influences, the organisation may also try to create a new, more favourable environment. In such cases, the organisation is the first (and initially the only) actor to gain control over such a new environment. In the higher education sector, this may mean such things as, negotiations with the government to reformulate the existing regulations on the one hand, and opening up to new, unexplored sectors of educational activity on the other (Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003; cf. also Austin, Jones, 2015).

One of the ways organisations can use to modify the environment (whether political or economic) in line with their interests is lobbying. Since economic activity is subject to increasingly stronger regulations, it is more and more common for organisations or their associations to try to adapt the environment to their expectations rather than to try to adapt their structures or operations to the environment. As such, while organisations are subject to environmental influences, so, too, is the environment affected by organisations. Thus, the dynamics of the environment also depend to some extent on the activities undertaken by the organisations themselves. Legal provisions or undertaken political actions (e.g., market regulations concerning entry barriers, restriction of competition or price determination) are sometimes the result of the influence of entities dependent on them, who protect their interests or fight for survival in this way (Pfeffer, Salancik, 2003).

4. Complementary theoretical approaches

Two approaches are most often indicated as the concepts that complement the resource dependence theory: institutional theory and population ecology (as well as the stakeholder theory or agency theory, though less frequently). Due to the different specificity of the organisation and the differences in organisational behaviour, the combined use of the above theoretical framework sometimes makes it possible to obtain more complete answers to the questions posed by researchers (Stańczyk-Hugiet, 2007; Hillman, Withers, Collins, 2009).

3 The aforementioned authors indicate several varieties of mergers. Vertical integration occurs when there is a mutual dependence of the organisation. Horizontal expansion takes place when a competitor is taken over, which not only reduces competition, but also increases the strength of the new entity due to the synergy effect. Diversification includes taking over an organisation operating in another area.

4.1. Institutional theory

The institutional theory, like the resource dependence theory, examines organisations in the context of their environment. Although both approaches consider the impact of external factors on the organisations' decision-making processes, they differ significantly in terms of the essence of this impact. The institutional theory emphasises how the environment imposes patterns of structures and activities on the organisations functioning within it through social norms, values and expectations[4]. In contrast, the resource dependence theory, which was discussed in detail earlier, assumes that the environment's impact on the organisation results from the fact that the environment provides the organisation with the resources the latter needs to survive,. and that it is this relationship that gives rise to the environment's control over the organisation and the organisation's susceptibility to external influences (Austin, Jones, 2015). The origins of both theories and the related publishing activity coincided and occurred in approximately the same period, i.e. the turn of the 1970s and 1980s (see, for example, Meyer, Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio, Powell, 1983).

Institutionalism assumes that the environment (which includes, values, standards and expectations, among other things) exerts pressure on organisations, forcing them to operate in the desired way. This impact is twofold. On the one hand, it is linked, to access to specific goods, and on the other, with socio-political expectations. In the first case, the organisation is rewarded for operational efficiency, whereas in the second, for adapting to external expectations (Austin, Jones, 2015).

While referring to the socio-political environment of organisations, Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, who are recognised as pioneers of the theory, try to explain what makes organisations so similar. They assume that the structures and practices within organisations reflect the rules, beliefs and conventions established in the environment and that organisations become similar to each other by adapting to the environment's expectations. The implementation of external rules and practices leads to organisations becoming more and more homogeneous. This mechanism, which is called institutional isomorphism, can emerge in several ways, sometimes simultaneously. The three main variations of this process are 1) coercive, 2) mimetic and 3) normative isomorphism. The first one refers to external expectations expressed in the form of laws or regulations that organisations which are dependent on lawmakers must comply with.

4 Its usefulness for researching management issues in the higher education sector is due to the fact that this concept raises the question of the organisational drive for legitimacy (a key survival factor for a university), among other things.

Coercive isomorphism is therefore based on compulsion or an obligation to comply with external regulations or standards. Mimetic isomorphism is a process in which an organisation voluntarily duplicates the structures and activities of other successful organisations (the so-called good practices), hoping that they will bring similar favourable results in its case. This mechanism applies particularly in conditions of environmental uncertainty. In turn, normative isomorphism is closely related to the process of professionalisation of work. It entails the promotion of values and practices regarding working conditions among representatives of particular professions. The factors contributing to the co-creation of this community of industry beliefs include the education system and methods of knowledge circulation (Austin, Jones, 2015; Lipnicka, Verhoeven, 2014; Marczewska 2016; Pawlak, Srokowski, 2014).

This approach constitutes a good complement to the resource dependence theory. Together, they cover a broad spectrum of organisational behaviours occurring in response to changes in the environment (both active and passive and based on, resistance and conformism alike) and answer related questions about who controls resources and who shapes institutional rules (Lipnicka, Verhoeven, 2014; Oliver, 1991).

4.2. Population ecology

Another approach worth mentioning here emerged in management sciences after the release of *The Population Ecology of Organizations* (1977) by Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman. Population ecology (or organisation ecology), which belongs to the group of organisational evolution theories, is still applied by researchers of organisations as one of the theoretical frameworks for analysing the relationship between organisations and the environment. Although the evolution mechanism is mainly associated with the theory of natural selection, the key principles it refers to (i.e. inheritance, differentiation and selection) have been adapted accordingly to also explain the phenomena occurring in the field of social sciences, e.g., economics (Stańczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, Piórkowska, 2016).

Population ecology tries to explain the evolution of organisations based on the assumption that the *environment is somewhat deterministic and its impact manifests through the selection process* (Stańczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, Piórkowska, 2016, p. 9). The environment selects organisations based on their features, which either make them well-suited to the environments they operate in or not. According to this theory, an organisation's success is fully dependent on its environment. Researchers using this approach focus not so much on individual organisations, but rather on their entire population. They assume that organisations operate and compete in certain areas (niches). Since the capacity of each such niche is not

infinite, there exists a certain limit – an optimal number of organisations that can function within its frameworks at the same time. As the number of organisations approaches this threshold, it becomes necessary to stabilise the population. This gives rise to the competition and selection of organisations. Their "mortality" temporarily increases and continues until their previous number (the niche-filling capacity) is restored. In this way, the *environment selects the optimal combination of organisations*, and the "mortality" of organisations and the emergence of new ones contribute to organisational changes in the population (Stańczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, Piórkowska, 2016, p. 9; Strużyna, 2011).

5. Application of the resource dependence theory in the research on higher education conducted to date

The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries saw dynamic changes occur in the higher education sector virtually all over the world. In their attempts to explain these processes, researchers used the explanatory potential of the resource dependence theory, among other things. Numerous interesting texts have been published in the last few years alone, with the selected ones presented below as examples of the empirical application of the theoretical approach in question.

The resource dependence theory is applied for such purposes as, the study of changes related to the progressive internationalisation of higher education. One of the researchers who used it in his work, eloquently titled *Are International Students Cash Cows?*, was Brendan Cantwell (2015). His considerations were inspired by a trend, indicating a gradual increase in the share of the education costs covered by students. This applies to the increasing tuition fees in countries that have a paid education system (e.g., the United Kingdom, USA) and the introduction of such fees in countries that used to have publicly-funded education (Australia). Cantwell notes that universities (especially in Anglo-Saxon countries) are characterised by an increasingly entrepreneurial orientation, which included seeking sources of income using market competition mechanisms. One such source is students who pay for their studies. In the face of cuts in public expenditure on education, this provides an attractive alternative, with the increased recruitment being treated as a kind of compensation, *a transaction with a high rate of return* (Cantwell, 2015, p. 515). Enhanced mobility has made foreign students a particularly attractive source of income – often there are no national regulations that would set the maximum tuition fee limits (foreigners have to pay for studies even in countries

where education is free for the local students). The United Kingdom and Australia are examples of countries where the export of educational services is developing dynamically. Local HEIs actively recruit students from abroad and do so on a large scale. This situation is a starting point for Cantwell to ask whether and to what extent public HEIs in the US increase their revenues by recruiting foreign students. In his analysis[5], he proved that in the case of some HEIs, greater recruitment of foreign students may be a source of additional income. Interestingly, this option is, however, limited to research and doctoral higher education institutions. It may also result from the fact that candidates are looking for well-known, recognisable and prestigious schools. Further, tuition revenues depend on economies of scale and such universities recruit large numbers of applicants. The conclusion is that not all institutions are beneficiaries of student mobility and not all of them receive additional income on this account. Moreover, Cantwell noticed that the strategies undertaken by universities, i.e. increasing the number of foreign students while maintaining the number of other students at a constant level, translate into a change in the student structure, which may have further implications for the functioning of the university (Cantwell, 2015).

Ozan Jaquette and Bradley R. Curs (2015) noted that, universities make efforts to compensate for the lost public funding in response to reductions in it. Although they do so in various ways, seeking alternative income sources in the form of research funding, private grants or investments, tuition income is what matters most. The above authors undertook to investigate whether US public universities, were increasing enrolment in response to a reduction in public subsidies[6]. However, they were interested only in a selected group of candidates – non-resident students – who were not subject to the state policy specifying upper limits on tuition fees. They assumed that increasing the recruitment of candidates from abroad and from other states would be an opportunity for universities to significantly increase their tuition revenues, as non-resident students' tuition fees are two or even three times higher than those for local students. Moreover, the authors in question adopted a hypothesis consistent with the resource dependence theory, which assumed that public universities would try to compensate for cuts in the public funding received by increasing the recruitment among the most "profitable" student groups. They also assumed that this strategy would be more effective in the case of research universities since they were very popular among non-resident candidates.

5 Covering data from the 2000–2009 period.

6 Research covered the 2002–2013 period.

The researchers confirmed both hypotheses[7]: the fact that the reduction in public subsidies is associated with an increase in enrolment in the group of candidates of interest to them and that the relationship is stronger in the case of research universities. They proved that reductions in public funding prompt public HEIs to undertake organisational activities similar to those prevailing at private HEIs, which focus on candidate groups that are attractive from the perspective of their purchasing power. At the same time, they showed that only the best universities have a chance to generate significant revenues in this way because only they have a scarce and highly demanded resource – prestige. Other universities with a much less prestigious, status were unable to generate significant revenues on this account. This issue is related to the relatively new phenomenon of interstate migration in search of better universities. The change in educational choices was first noticed in the 1970s and the quality of education and the reputation of universities have been consistently gaining importance in the eyes of candidates ever since (with the university's proximity to the student's place of residence becoming less relevant).

Summarising their research, Jaquette and Curs highlighted various risks arising from the reduction in public subsidies for education and from the strategies that universities are opting for in response to these changes. The privatisation of the sector means a shift towards commercial customers (revenues) instead of ensuring equal access to education (as the common good), known as mission drift. Access to education for foreign students is easier due to its profitability, while the share of students from disadvantaged groups, such as low-income families, is decreasing. The increasing migration brings further potential threats, including increasing differences between universities and, the so-called brain drain. Ozan Jaquette and Bradley R. Curs also point out that HEIs may treat the reduction in funding as a breach of the agreement between the state and the academic sector, which may result in HEIs failing to meet their obligations (Jaquette, Curs, 2015).

Researchers interested in the impact that the changes in HEI income structure have had on the activities implemented by HEIs have also used the resource dependence theory. For example, Jacob Fowles (2014) decided to examine the relationship between the structure of revenues and the policy and structure of expenditure of public HEIs[8]. The starting point for him was posing the question of whether the expenditure on education and related activities is linked to the

7 Notably, Michael J. Rizzo and Ronald G. Ehrenberg (2004) disagree with the claim that universities recruit candidates from outside their home state for economic reasons. They prove that qualitative criteria are of greater importance in this case.

8 His research also concerned US public universities.

amount of the tuition fee share in the university's total income. The context of his considerations was as follows: the aforementioned general trend of changes in the structure of university revenues observed by researchers; the gradually increasing dependence on tuition revenues (dependency on both the growing tuition fees and the increasing enrolment) with a simultaneous decrease in public subsidies; the assumption that the above issues can bring about serious but unintended consequences. The questions he poses are part of a broader debate on the impact of the market transformation process on higher education institutions.

Fowles analysed HEIs as organisations for which various stakeholder groups have certain expectations. Referring to the resource dependence theory, he explained how HEIs balance these expectations, taking into account the resources provided by individual groups. In line with the theory, he assumed that institutions would give higher priority to activities that address the expectations of providers of critical resources. Thus, the more HEIs rely on tuition fees as a source of income, the more they adjust to tuition fee payers, i.e. student preferences. He verified this hypothesis empirically based on the universities' financial information.

Based on the analysed data (covering over a decade of a university functioning, from 1998 to 2008), Fowles concluded that expenditure on teaching activities is quite responsive to changes in the revenue structure. This prompted him to ask some vital questions about the potential consequences that this dependence may have for the future of academic institutions. Since those who provide significant resources anticipate their expectations to be met in return – in line with the British adage "he who pays the piper calls the tune" – one must consider whether the dependence on the income generated by students may result in the universities becoming excessively concentrated on the didactic scope of their activities. Similar relationships of obligations and the related risk were also highlighted in the case of HEIs that increased their incomes by acquiring private donations or working (on applied research) with external commercial entities (Fowles, 2014).

A few years later, three researchers from Uzbekistan and the United Kingdom (Kholmuminov, Kholmuminov and Wright, 2018) put forward a research hypothesis similar to the one that Fowles had presented a few years earlier, except that they applied it to the Uzbek educational system. Their research proves that the resource dependence theory also applies to higher education systems other than those in Anglo-Saxon countries. The aforementioned authors wanted to verify the relationship between the share of tuition revenues in the overall structure of university revenues and the level of expenditure related to teaching activities. In Uzbekistan, like in many other countries, public spending on education is decreasing while the universities' dependence on tuition fees continues to increase.

The researchers assumed that if the importance of one revenue source increases, the share of expenses related to this source should increase, too. The university is expected to first address the needs of groups on whose resources it depends to a larger extent.

Despite the fundamental differences that undoubtedly separate the Anglo--Saxon higher education systems from those of the former Soviet bloc countries, the conclusions drawn by researchers independently dealing with these systems sound surprisingly similar. Shukrath Kholmuminov, Shayzak Kholmuminov and Robert Wright conclude their study by stating that the level of expenditure (or rather investments) on teaching is related to the share of tuition income in the overall income of the university. There is a statistically significant relationship between the share of tuition income in total income and teaching expenses. The greater the role of tuition fees in the university's budget, the greater the university's expenditure on education, which effectively favours one group of stakeholders (i.e. students paying for studies) and their expectations (Kholmuminov, Kholmuminov, Wright, 2018).

Referring to the above-mentioned studies, one may therefore conclude that universities exhibit similar organisational behaviour in response to similar conditions (reduction in public funding, increasing student participation in education costs) regardless of the country and continent.

5

Place of *lifelong learning* in the higher education institutions (HEIs) strategic documents

The research, results presented further in this paper, originate in the research project titled "Higher education and non-traditional students. Strategies of higher education institutions in the field of adult education on the example of postgraduate studies", financed by the National Science Centre – Narodowe Centrum Nauki (Grant No. 2016/23/N/HS6/00502). The research conducted under the project aimed to define and then verify the strategies adopted by different types of HEIs in the field of adult education[1].

I was inclined to address the issue by posing several questions I could not answer at length while searching through the existing reference literature. In the context of the increasing role of *lifelong learning*, including adult education, I was particularly interested in several issues:

1. How important is adult education in the strategies of particular types of higher education institutions? Do these strategies reveal significant diversity?
2. Do different types of HEIs adapt to non-traditional students – working adults (and if so, how)? Apart from declarations (at the institutional level), do HEIs undertake specific actions for the development of adult education, taking into account its specificity, as well as the needs and expectations of non-traditional student groups?
3. Are there any reasons for postgraduate education to be dominated by a selected group of HEIs (if so, what are the related factors)?

At the stage of research planning, I put forward several hypotheses based on the assumptions of the resource dependence theory defined in Chapter IV:

1. In terms of declarations (formal strategies, official documents and communications), different segments of educational institutions reveal a similar approach to adult education.
   In recent decades, both national and transnational strategic documents have indicated the increasing importance of *lifelong learning*. The analysis of this process, among other things, led me to assume that Polish HEIs would include in their strategies the direction of current changes and recommendations provided in overriding, political or environmental documents, regardless of the actions actually taken, and one of the elements of their strategies would include *lifelong education* and the development of educational services catered to adults. Firstly, this should be the case because of the increasing role of these issues, as reflected by the overriding

[1] For more on the research methodology applied, see the *Methodological note*.

documents concerning the activity of higher education institutions. The educational institutions should monitor these documents regularly to update the strategies they are formally obliged to develop by a competent ministry. Secondly, I assumed that reputation-related considerations that affect the decisions made by prospective students may prove an additional motivation for HEIs. HEIs that keep up with the current trends and market needs, and better adapt their service range to these trends and needs are perceived more favourably. The resource dependence theory emphasises the role of the environment and external influences applicable to each organisation. I assumed that HEI strategies would contain some elements of the above-mentioned influence and expectations of external stakeholders.

2. In terms of the strategies of activities implemented in practice, there are clear differences in the way the specific segments of educational market institutions define key stakeholder groups, and as such, individual segments approach the issue of adult education in different ways. This hypothesis derives from one of the key assumptions of the resource dependence theory providing that the most significant influence on the direction of organisation activities is exerted by the segment that provides most of the resources indispensable for the organisation's activities. Each entity, in this case, each HEI, identifies key resources and their providers and then prioritises the expectations accordingly. As a consequence, it adapts its management model and strategy to the expectations of the stakeholders whose resources affect its operation the most. Therefore, the strategies of non-public HEIs focus more on adult students (and students in general) because the fees that such HEIs receive for their teaching services enable them to function at all. Public higher education institutions, whose existence depends primarily on the state – the administrator of public funding disbursed as subsidies for education and science, focus mainly on fulfilling the objectives imposed by legal provisions, including both teaching and scientific activities. Notably, the latter is also a source of prestige – an "intangible currency", which has a high value in academic circles and translates into financial resources to some extent. As such, it is non-public HEIs that largely work for the development of adult education – both in quantitative and qualitative terms – by undertaking intensive marketing and sales activities to attract candidates on the one hand and by continuously improving their service range on the other (labour market monitoring and updating directions, adapting programmes and educational methods

to the needs and expectations of non-traditional student groups, service satisfaction surveys).

3. Due to different HEI strategies, market orientation underlying the activities of non-public entities, prioritising scientific autonomy established in the traditional university model with its limited links to the economy (curriculum-wise), as well as the specificity of adult education, the postgraduate studies are to a greater extent an area of non-public HEI activity, and therefore, this segment will most likely continue to be dominated by the non-public sector. This hypothesis was based on the assumption that different types of universities would adopt various trategies derived from the resource dependence theory. There is no indication that the previously indicated dependencies will change in the nearest future, so the current strategies are bound to remain in place. The strategies of non-public HEIs will focus more on the group of adult students since they will be able to continue operating thanks to the fees received for the teaching-related services, including postgraduate studies. In the case of public HEIs, whose activity mostly depends on the state as the administrator of public funding disbursed for science and education, adult education is unlikely to rise in importance if the current educational policy remains unchanged. The extent to which the existing differences between the activities of different types of HEIs will increase will depend, on such things as the objectives set for HEIs by the ministry, as well as on the situation in the market of paid studies, where non-public HEIs operate.

I verified the above hypotheses based on the analysis of collected material, using the previously mentioned categories and theoretical concepts regarding strategic planning, the characteristics of entrepreneurial university and resource dependence theory. The collected material is quite extensive. To make the analysis clearer, I opted for the following order.

First, I present an analysis of HEI strategic documents that I verified mainly in terms of the priorities assigned to the activity areas by individual HEIs, including any mentions of *lifelong learning* (goals and planned activities in this respect). This part makes it possible to verify the first hypothesis, proving that various segments of educational institutions apply a similar approach to the issue of adult education at the level of official declarations (formal strategies and documents).

In Chapter VI, I attempt to reconstruct the real strategies of diverse types of HEIs in the area of *lifelong learning*, i.e. the importance of this area and

the status of activities undertaken by individual universities, based on individual in-depth interviews (IDI) with HEI representatives. I describe the extent to which representatives of specific HEI groups perceive the potential of *lifelong learning*, whether (and how) different types of educational institutions adjust to the needs of non-traditional students, and what actions they take to expand their service range in the context of adult education, including its specificity and the needs and expectations of non-traditional student groups. This part of the analysis verifies the second assumption: that the real strategies implemented in practice by various segments of educational market institutions differ from each other, with non-public HEIs being focused primarily on adult learners. This results from the fact that HEIs – as entities engaged in relationships and dependent on external resources – determine the importance of individual groups of actors and the resources they provide in the context of their survival and further development. In the case of non-public HEIs, students are the key providers of financial resources since such HEIs operate thanks to funding obtained from tuition fees. Therefore, this group of actors, who are the providers of key resources, is of the highest priority to non-public HEIs and its needs affect the activities of such HEIs the most.

Finally, using research material and SWOT analysis of individual types of HEIs developed on its basis[2], I attempt to establish the potential consequences of actions taken by HEIs and the premises that may determine whether postgraduate education will become dominated by a selected group of institutions in the future.

In the summary, I present the conclusions in the context of the theoretical approach presented earlier, i.e. the resource dependence theory.

1. Strategies of non-public HEIs

The strategies of non-public universities feature, two significant aspects. The first refers to a very clear focus on the area of education (general, not only adult education) and the second to a customer-oriented approach (construed as striving to maintain high service quality and ensure customer satisfaction), reflected by the visions, mission statements and goals of the organisation, as well as the language used to formulate the above.

The mission statements of the HEIs analysed (e.g., *professional training of highly qualified staff as per the needs of the developing economy of the country and*

[2] The SWOT analysis of individual types of universities can be found in the *Annex*.

the uniting Europe[3]; *teaching the socially responsible professionals, staying competitive in the national and international labour market*[4]; *career development partners*[5]) highlight the utilitarian nature of education, perceived as a tool for success in the labour market. HEIs also emphasise the relationships with employers, thanks to which education is tailor-made for their expectations.

The strategies of non-public higher education institutions are student-oriented. As for the documents, the mission statement itself refers to the importance of student satisfaction in a broader sense. Adopting such a perspective determines the development of the range of educational services (*we are focused on the development of education profile, we strive for continuous development and improvement of our own activities*[6]), as well as the care for the quality and conditions of education, including the organisation and atmosphere of studying.

This declaration by the HEI proves that students are empowered and have a real impact on the educational process; they are, in a sense, its co-creators (*we are open to the opinions of students/learners, and we are constantly improving the services offered*[7]). The way the studies are organised is adjusted to student needs (*we want to teach in a way that makes it possible to combine work and studies, which numerous students opt for* [8]). Non-public higher education institutions perceive their mission as education focused on effects that are measurable for students and graduates, i.e. their strong labour market position. However, only a single university made a direct reference to *lifelong learning* and adult students in its mission statement (*we help to develop careers at various stages of professional life*[9]).

In defining their desired state of organisation in a long-term perspective, the visions of HEIs refer primarily to teaching and expanding the range of educational services. HEIs want to be perceived as places where *you can obtain attractive education which will facilitate finding the expected job*[10], places characterised by *the high quality of all aspects of the educational process*, *education of graduates that the labour market seeks, individualisation of education, including the aspirations and expectations of students in achieving professional competencies*[11]. The documents point to a market orientation of HEIs, which aim for a high

3 University of Health (Wyższa Szkoła Zdrowia) in Gdańsk.
4 University of Social Sciences (Społeczna Akademia Nauk) in Łódź.
5 Higher School of Banking (Wyższa Szkoła Bankowa) in Toruń.
6 Higher School of Banking in Toruń.
7 Higher School of Banking in Toruń.
8 Higher School of Banking in Toruń.
9 Higher School of Banking in Toruń.
10 University of Health in Gdańsk.
11 University of Social Sciences in Łódź.

and stable position in the rankings and wish to, strengthen or maintain their current market position, e.g., that of a regional leader. Again, only one HEI defines postgraduate studies as the area of its future market activity (*we want to become the regional leader in the area of postgraduate studies in terms of the number of students and the quality of studies*[12]).

It should be noted that the mission statements and visions of all non-public HEIs surveyed pointed to managing the organisation as one of the strategic areas of development (*as an organisation, we aim for continuous development and improvement of our own activities, and as employees, we are focused on development and innovation*[13]; *we want the university to be perceived as an efficiently managed, knowledge-based organisation*[14]; *the ideal situation by 2022: improving the efficiency of the school resource management and the stability of funding*[15]).

When formulating the strategic goals, the document's authors emphasise the increasing awareness and expectations of students. For this reason, they devote a great deal of attention to teaching and the objectives and tasks related thereto are combined with ensuring high-quality services for this group (e.g., *improving the system of assessing the quality of education*, *supporting the development and competencies of teachers, modernising the teaching infrastructure*[16]; *friendly academic environment*, *improving the quality of education and service range*, *making the education process practical*, *implementing a student-oriented policy through such things as an, individual approach, ensuring very good conditions for studying and working, increasing the organisation flexibility in the course of studies*[17]). The strategies of non-public HEIs, are also focused on the analysis of the needs and expectations of external stakeholders (labour market entities). Including them in the curriculum can be considered as a continuation of activities aimed at ensuring student satisfaction.

Regarding the analysed strategies of non-public HEIs, the strategy of Poland's only non-public university – SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities – stands out to some extent; its message is similar to the documents of public universities, which are discussed on the subsequent pages. The university's vision and mission statement (*we learn and change the world*; *through research and education in an inspiring environment, we support people*

12 Higher School of Banking in Toruń.
13 Higher School of Banking in Toruń.
14 University of Health in Gdańsk.
15 University of Social Sciences in Łódź.
16 University of Health in Gdańsk.
17 University of Social Sciences in Łódź.

in fulfilling their dreams and achieving individual and community goals) are more universal and do not refer to prioritising teaching or the utilitarian nature of education. The document's authors use the traditional academic values (truth, goodness, beauty) as its basis, supplementing them with several more, including *openness*, *courage* and *responsibility*.

The document defines and discusses the university's key objectives in four areas (education, science, relations and institutional development). It gives particular attention to the first one and the strategic goal in this *area involves focusing on the talents, needs, dreams and aspirations of students*. Therefore, at the more operational level, the strategy is similar to those that are characteristic of non--public higher education institutions, which are market-oriented and focused on customer satisfaction. Their operational goals include such things as *developing an ambitious, interdisciplinary and personalised educational service range*, including the *development of a service range enabling lifelong learning* and *adapting the educational paths to the needs and capabilities of students*, *supporting students in the education process and the process of entering the labour market*. In turn, the provisions on the universities' organisational development involve not only improving the management system, but also enabling the development of employees (including their managerial competencies), administrative service efficiency, reducing bureaucracy and investments in infrastructure. These elements can also be interpreted as oriented towards the needs of external customers.

Referring to the key assumption of the resource dependence theory and considering HEIs to be entities engaged in relations with the surrounding entities, it is necessary to determine the importance of individual actors for the survival and further development of non-public universities to address the subsequent question of how and why they adapt their management model to the environment in which they operate. To put it simply, it can be assumed that the three key actors (or actor groups) in the higher education institution environment include: a supervising and financing agenda (the relevant ministry), other higher education institutions (public and non-public) and students (with many potential internal divisions students of various degrees and modes of study, students of traditional and non-traditional age). Since non-public HEIs in Poland operate based on funding obtained from tuition fees paid by students, both this funding and its providers, have the highest priority from the strategic standpoint – without them, education units would be unable to survive in the market. Although these universities do obtain external funding (e.g., from the ESF) to partially finance the costs of education in selected fields of study, in line with the spirit of entrepreneurship, it applies only to a small fraction of their educational service range. In this context, it is unsurprising that the student-oriented

approach is the most important aspect of the strategic provisions of non-public universities. To convince candidates that the studies of their choice will prove a sound investment, such universities indicate the benefits that students can expect to gain after graduating. These may include such things as, acquiring practical skills, having access to comfortable infrastructure, a friendly environment or a flexible approach to students. Strategic documents of non-public HEIs make it clear that the activities they define apply to students, i.e. stakeholders who provide financial resources indispensable for the HEIs to continue operating. The expectations of this group are met through the model of services offered, as well as the management model.

Diversifying revenue sources is in the best interest of every HEI. Non-public HEIs have limited options in this regard, they can try to internally diversify a group of key actors who provide financial liquidity. Although one of the methods available may involve the development of postgraduate education, it seems that a more reliable and effective method would be to provide an educational service range with new fields of study available as part of the first- and second-cycle studies (longer time of students' involvement with the school) or to attract foreign students. This seems to explain the dynamic changes in the portfolio of the fields of study at non-public HEIs, as well as the increasingly visible activity regarding the recruitment of foreigners in recent years, especially from Eastern Europe (in 2012, foreign students accounted for 2.1% of all students at non-public HEIs; in 2015, there was 8.1% of them; in 2018, there was as many as 11.6% of them) – (OPI, 2019)

2. Strategies of public comprehensive universities

An analysis of university strategies gives a completely different picture since they go beyond outlining the mission, vision and strategic objectives. Their extensive introductions introduce the readers to the history, achievements and successes of the specific universities, which use strategies not only to present their aspirations, but also to emphasise their tradition and showcase their potential.

The language used by the document authors attracts attention. They refer to *ambitious development tasks*[18], *the intellectual potential of employees*[19], as well as

[18] Nicolaus Copernicus University (Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika) in Toruń.

[19] University of Łódź (Uniwersytet Łódzki).

plans to become *the leading scientific centre in the country*[20] and the *most important public institution in the region*, and *to ensure the university's rightful position among public universities*[21]. Universities strive for a high quality of scientific research, attractiveness for potential future students, stable economic position and well-developed cooperation with the environment.

One of the strategies defined it as an *interpretation of the ambitions of the academic community* and this definition seems to reflect the attitude and meaning of the analysed documents very accurately. It is difficult to avoid the impression that strategies of non-public higher education institutions seem to be outward-oriented and focused on meeting customer needs, whereas university strategies are inward-oriented, i.e. oriented towards their own environments. Universities contrast their aspirations with those of other universities, aiming firstly for a leading position among Polish universities and secondly for recognition abroad. Moreover, they refer to traditional university values, such as the pursuit of truth, solidarity, respect and trust within the academic community, and tolerance for dissimilarity in opinions. The authors of strategies emphasise their complementarity with the overriding documents of regional, nationwide and transnational scope.

The mission statements of universities are not defined as unambiguously as those of non-public higher education institutions. However, even in this case, it is evident that one of the areas is particularly important. Research activities come to the foreground, including the growth of scientific staff (*developing scientific excellence*[22], *freedom of seeking the truth and expressing opinions*[23], *providing a lasting contribution to the scientific knowledge of the world and solving its important contemporary issues*[24]). In turn, education is defined as a tool for the development of not only competencies but also student personality. It is construed not so much (and certainly not only) as preparing young people for their professional work, but as the shaping of conscious, responsible citizens. Such an approach to the role of the university refers to the traditional, culture-forming function of the academic community and its responsibility for shaping, and not only educating future generations, as well as to the impact of the university as an institution on developing the environment not only in the economic but also social context.

20 Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

21 University of Łódź.

22 University of Łódź.

23 Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

24 University of Gdańsk (Uniwersytet Gdański).

The visions of individual universities indicate very convergent aspirations of academic circles concentrated in different centres. They all strive for a "place on the podium" – being ranked among Poland's best universities, and at the same time, representing a sufficiently high level of research to actively participate in the European and global exchange of academic ideas. The authors of strategic documents can also see their importance in educating and shaping new generations of students, including foreign ones (*a breeding ground for the elites of scientific, social and economic life*[25]); therefore, universities intend to work towards the improvement of intellectual potential and development of their immediate environments in a broader sense. The vision of one university also included an item related to the university's internal operations. This proves the awareness of the need for changes in terms of managing and improving the conditions for education and scientific research (*an efficiently managed organisation with very good conditions for conducting scientific research and undertaking studies*[26]).

Even at a glance, one can see that the strategies of non-public HEIs, which are focused on the best interest of students, differ significantly from the academic strategies of public universities. The latter compete, for public subsidies and academic prestige instead of private funding.

The supervisory and financing institution plays a key role for HEIs and their environment, i.e. other HEIs and students, among the educational sector entities. The public "sponsor" of academic institutions, representing state interests, expects that entities regularly receiving funding should bring a return on the investment made, not only in the form of specific graduate turnout but also in terms of fulfilling their academic mission, i.e. significant research achievements. In such a situation, according to the resource dependence theory, the activities of universities should be oriented more towards meeting these expectations rather than those of students since, in this case, the latter do not have the decisive financial leverage that determines whether the university can continue to operate. This does not mean that the strategic documents omit the area of education; however, it is treated as one of the equivalent elements and students are not the main point of reference because they are not a key source of funding for the university.

In the university visions, we can find information that may refer to the area of *lifelong learning*, although this has not been formulated directly. The authors of the University of Łódź's strategy assume that the university will be *a prestigious*

25 University of Łódź.

26 Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

place of work, conducting scientific research and education at various levels of gaining knowledge. In turn, the authors of the University of Gdańsk's strategy claim that education at their university *will cover a wider range of faculties enriched with new valuable and utilitarian curriculum content provided using innovative teaching methods.*

The structure of individual documents, although slightly different, organises the goals set by universities and their planned activities within several areas in a comparable way. This includes specific strategies (research, education, internationalisation, infrastructure)[27] or several separate areas with strategic objectives (e.g., science, education, management)[28]. Two of these strategies first present the objectives and activities dedicated to the development of scientific research and focus primarily on them. In one case, the authors focus on education at the very beginning. The fragments of strategic documents devoted to this issue were of most interest to me and it is in those fragments that looked for issues related to various forms of *lifelong learning.*

As part of its detailed strategy regarding the educational service range and quality of education, the University of Łódź aims *to achieve the status of a university offering studies at the highest level thanks to its teaching excellence.* However, this strategy is clearly aimed at educating traditional students. The university intends to increase its popularity among prospective students (measured by the number of candidates who choose this university as their so-called first choice option) and to obtain a high State Accreditation Committee (Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna – PKA) rating for the fields of study it offers. Although the document's authors present a very wide spectrum of planned activities, ranging from those aimed to develop the university's brand and popularise its scientific achievements to, improving the graduate tracking system and working with the university's environment to supporting graduates in the labour market, the document does not refer to the development of various forms of adult education, even indirectly. The only activity that could be related to *lifelong learning* refers to the provision on *developing a wide range of distance learning services.*

Although the main emphasis of the university strategic documents is not on quantitative development but rather on the qualitative improvement of education and research, this does not mean that such documents contain no elements characteristic of entrepreneurial universities. One detailed strategy of such a university refers to postgraduate studies and speaks of *ensuring material conditions for the university's development*. It aims to ensure the university's

27 University of Łódź.

28 Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

long-term financial stability, and one of the criteria to that end includes diversifying the revenue structure. Postgraduate studies were included in the strategy exactly in this context. Further, one of the strategy's operational activities refers to the *development of an additional educational service range in the form of postgraduate studies, further training courses and other forms of training.* Therefore, this strategy evidently treats postgraduate studies instrumentally. Their value results from their usefulness as a revenue diversification tool and not from the role they play in *lifelong learning* in society. Similar elements can be found in the strategy of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, which defines three specified goals. Two of them refer to strengthening the university's position and increasing the internationalisation of studies. From the perspective of this effort, the most interesting fragment is the one referring to *reflecting in the educational service range, to a greater extent, the needs of the labour market and the expectations of the economic environment, local government institutions and organisations developing the social infrastructure of the region*. As an operational goal, this includes such things as, *the development of various forms of lifelong learning.* Although the target goal, as defined in the description, assumes mainly the development of first- and second-cycle studies (including the unique and interdisciplinary fields), the authors also point out that meeting the needs of employers requires continuous improvement from employees. Therefore, the university plans to meet the expectations of individuals who are interested in participating in various forms of continuing education, postgraduate studies, courses and training sessions.

In Gdańsk University's strategy, *world-class academic education* appears as the first objective. The document's authors focus on the development of the education system, including first- and second-cycle studies, as well as the development of new forms of education, such as *lifelong learning* or open university. They point to the need for good preparation of university graduates for their professional careers and declare that their service range will be regularly updated to reflect the expectations of candidates and labour market entities. Improvements in the level and quality of education are planned to be achieved thanks to the flexibility of the educational process and a shift away, from the traditional education framework and towards *parallel, permanent and commutative education.* The potential of various forms of adult education was also recognised in this context. Postgraduate studies and courses addressed to the working people ought to constitute a form of transferring the latest utilitarian knowledge to the economy, hereas the broadly construed contribution of universities to the development of their immediate social environments should comprise such forms of open education as the University of the Third Age and Open University.

3. Strategies of public vocational HEIs

Just like in the case of non-public HEIs, the mission statements of public vocational universities are clearly oriented towards education in a broader sense (*high-level youth education*[29], *modern education as per modern educational standards of qualified staff*[30]). It is worth indicating several issues here. Firstly, HEIs are focused on the local (or more broadly – regional) labour market and the employers' expectations regarding the desired education of potential employees (*education* in *the fields closely related to the economy of the region and the country*[31]). Secondly, the primary task of HEIs, defined in this way, is placed in a broader context and construed, for example, as supporting the *social, technological and cultural development* concerning external stakeholders, i.e. *all political, social and economic forces that have similar goals defined in their activities*[32]. In terms of their mission statements, such HEIs are externally-oriented towards various groups within their environments – from employers and other labour market entities to cooperating institutions to candidates and students – and verify their activities in the context of the needs of such groups. We should also emphasise the pragmatic orientation of education, revealed in the analysed documents. It is not so much a universal value per se, but it aims *to prepare for a professional start*[33]; it is provided as part of *specialities that offer a significant opportunity of getting a job or starting your own company*, and it also *develops possibilities for continuous education of all those interested in improving their professional qualifications*[34]. Therefore, it seems that the common denominator of vocational university strategies is that they all read as if these universities were established to meet the needs of their environment.

In their visions, vocational HEIs portray themselves as *modern*, though each defines this modernity in a slightly different way. On the one hand, they perceive modernity as a socio-cultural context, which is conducive to the development of pro-European attitudes and adequate preparation for future professional life[35]. On the other, they construe it as a process of keeping up with the needs of the changing labour market and preparing specialists with the right profile, high competencies and ability to adapt to the employer's

29 University of Applied Sciences (Akademia Nauk Stosowanych) in Elbląg.

30 State Academy of Applied Sciences (Państwowa Akademia Nauk Stosowanych) in Włocławek.

31 State Academy of Applied Sciences in Włocławek.

32 University of Applied Sciences in Elbląg.

33 University of Applied Sciences (Akademia Nauk Stosowanych) in Konin.

34 University of Applied Sciences in Elbląg.

35 University of Applied Sciences in Elbląg.

expectations[36]. In its document, the State Academy of Applied Sciences (formerly Public Vocational Higher Education Institution – PWSZ) in Włocławek, consistently portrays itself as an element of the regional socio-economic ecosystem, which is responsible for educating and preparing future employees according to the needs of the labour market. The school's vision states that *the Higher School diploma is reliable evidence of one's high professional competencies and the ability to flexibly respond to the employers' needs*[37], clearly suggesting that the school perceives the graduate diploma not so much as an abstract value, but as a proof of vocational preparation, which becomes important in the context of employers' recognition and student education and is a form of the school's contribution to developing the innovative economy in the region.

Further fragments of the analysed strategic documents of vocational universities reveal a strong education-oriented approach. Although they differ in terms of their structure, level of detail and content, they all focus primarily on education. It is in these fragments that I sought more information about the place of postgraduate education (and other forms of adult education) in the vocational HEI activity.

The strategic document of the the State Academy of Applied Sciences in Włocławek distinguishes four strategic areas[38], defining the strategic objectives, specific objectives and specific actions for their implementation. One of the strategic areas is *education*, which the document discusses first. This seems consistent with the higher school's mission and vision. Three strategic objectives were assigned to education; however, they are formulated using. quite general and difficult-to-verify expressions. Yet when it comes to specific objectives and related activities, the intentions are stated with much greater clarity (for example, when it comes to improving the quality of education, specific paths to achieve this goal are indicated, e.g., various forms of teacher improvement, class observation, development of innovative methods of conducting classes, etc.).

Several specific objectives contained in the aforementioned document can be analysed in the context of supporting the development of postgraduate studies and other forms of adult education, e.g., *continuous improvement of the quality of education by providing appropriate conditions for the new forms and improving the existing forms* or *aiming to ensure very good study conditions through the development of higher school technical facilities, modern teaching equipment and electronic equipment supporting the teaching process*. However, insight into the

36 State Academy of Applied Sciences in Włocławek.

37 State Academy of Applied Sciences in Włocławek.

38 State Academy of Applied Sciences in Włocławek.

activities planned indicates that they are oriented more towards increasing the comfort of studying for the dominant (traditional) groups of students rather than constituting an opportunity to expand the circle of addressees. Even the *development of e-learning, courses and training sessions* was determined as an inward-oriented initiative and not as a proposal for new groups of prospective students. Therefore, this strategy's objectives do not directly refer to adult education. However, it does not mean that this area has been omitted; it is included in the activities planned as part of two related objectives, i.e. *adapting the educational service range to the changing needs of the regional labour market* (this includes the *launch of new postgraduate studies organised, e.g., in cooperation with regional entrepreneurs)*, as well as *aiming to adapt the structure of education to the market's changing needs* (*continuing education – postgraduate studies, courses, training, e-learning*). It is worth indicating that the document also includes tasks that can be associated with the development of the adult education service range, including *working with regional employers to develop the study curricula*; *employing specialists to conduct separate classes* or increasing the practical aspect of the *fields of study* as per the needs of the labour market.

As part of the activities included in the strategy, the implementation of the objectives related to the improvement and development of the educational service range is also meant to be supported by a Career Centre tasked with *strengthening cooperation with the labour market institutions* and *setting up education specialisations as per the expectations of the local labour market.* Moreover, one of the activities in the strategic area *of research development and expert activities* includes establishing the organisational units involved in *expanding the higher school's service range, e.g., in the field of postgraduate studies and training.* In addition, the strategy provides for carrying out *a study of employers' needs regarding the employment projection*, which seems to be a natural source of information for these units.

The strategy of the University of Applied Sciences (formerly State Higher Vocational School – PWSZ) in Konin is an extensive document that is further complemented, by SWOT analysis and strategic cards for specific goals (defining measures, implementation times and persons responsible for each activity assigned to a given goal). In the case of this document, education – and more precisely, *increasing the attractiveness and effectiveness of education* – once again, comes to the foreground among the strategic goals[39]. It is related to five operational objectives

39 The next two include: *the development of cooperation with the socio-economic environment and the strengthening of scientific and human potential and the development of university infrastructure.*

defined in relation thereto, two of which refer to *lifelong learning*. It is directly related to a goal defined as *enriching and making the university educational service range more flexible, for graduates and seniors alike*, and indirectly also to managing the university *as a study-friendly place, open to the students' further cooperation with the university after graduation*. The implementation of objectives should be ensured by activities planned at several points in time, with. their verification being scheduled once a year.

As part of the second strategic objective (i.e., *the development of cooperation with the socio-economic environment*), at the level of operational objectives and the related activities, it is possible to indicate those that can contribute to enriching the above-mentioned educational service range, and those that point to close links between the education provided and the needs of the economic environment. One of the operational objectives refers directly to *monitoring the society and economy's educational needs,* whereas the activities planned include such things as an analysis of the environment's expectations towards the higher school, including an analysis of the needs reported by employers, a study of the needs of the labour market based on an analysis of job offers in a competent labour office, as well as an analysis aimed at adjusting the higher school's service range to the needs of the labour market based on the graduates' economic successes in the labour market (using data from the ELA electronic graduate tracking system).

It is worth indicating the issues related to the area of *lifelong learning* and non-traditional student groups, which appeared in the SWOT analysis included in the strategy of the the University of Applied Sciences in Konin. The school's strengths include a rich and diverse educational service range, including the University of the Third Age, networking with graduates and good relations with the socio-economic environment. The weaknesses of its current service range include the lack of loyalty programmes for its graduates, which proves that the higher school recognises the potential within the group of non-traditional students. This is confirmed by several opportunities for higher schools included in the analysis developed, i.e. increased employer pressure for employees to improve their qualifications through such means as, postgraduate studies, lack of competitive public higher schools in the vicinity and convenient access for extramural students from other towns. Interestingly, the authors simultaneously include the changing educational needs of labour market entities among the threats. A natural response to this dynamic labour market situation would be short forms of education, including training and postgraduate studies, thanks to which such treats could easily be turned into opportunities for higher schools.

The most detailed information on various forms of adult education can be found in the strategy of the University of Applied Sciences (formerly State Higher Vocational School – PWSZ) in Elbląg. Postgraduate studies (and separately, courses and training sessions) are described in dedicated parts of the document, which is not so much a strategy but rather an operational plan. Importantly, this plan contains 2007 data, which constituted the starting point (and at the same time, a reference point) for actions scheduled for the 2007–2011 and, 2011–2015 periods. One of the strategic goals in both periods analysed referred to obtaining EU funding to launch postgraduate studies. Plans to establish further fields of postgraduate studies and training courses were prepared and described with reference to specific higher school units. The document was further complemented with evaluation comments on the result of activities conducted and the potential of individual elements of the service range, and sometimes also updates containing elements of market analysis. The starting point of the recent strategic plan (for the 2014–2020 period) was a 2013 analysis (postgraduate studies), which constituted grounds for formulating plans for the continuation and launch of new fields of study and defining the conditions essential for their implementation.

The portion of the higher school's plan that was devoted to training indicated a wide range of services (e.g., language courses, courses for various professional groups), as well as the school's proactive activities in this area: identification of significant target groups (a wide range of training sessions addressed to public administration), current topics that may be of interest to potential participants (e.g., prevention of Internet addiction as one of the training topics at the Pedagogical Institute), as well as the development of e-learning platforms.

Due to their nature, the strategies of vocational universities, lie at the threshold of the interests of public sponsors and students – the two main, target groups of such universities. Since vocational universities must comply with the obligations imposed on them in the context of profiled higher education, their activities must be oriented towards the candidates' expectations and needs. Only through this approach can they ensure a sufficient volume of students, which will guarantee the appropriate amount of public funding needed for their activity. Activities that are carried out for students and are related to the development and attractiveness of the educational service range, also indirectly address the expectations of the public financing entity, which expects that the funding provided will make it possible to educate a group of students to work in the local market according to its needs. While their student-oriented approach makes, vocational universities similar to non-public HEIs, these dependencies are slightly more complex, and

an accurate response to the students' expectations is an indirect way to meet their obligations towards the public financing institution, enabling them to continue their operations.

4. Summary

The general conclusion that can be drawn after reading the strategic documents of the educational entities surveyed is that adult education is still treated quite marginally by the authorities of higher education institutions. This is common to all types of HEIs researched, even though it might seem (and that was my assumption) that there should be differences between the various types of HEIs in this area. Although its position in higher-level strategic documents is consistently increasing, *lifelong learning* is not included among the priorities in the current strategies of HEIs. It is more of an addition to the basic didactic activity, i.e. the first- and second-cycle studies. Therefore, it can be concluded that *lifelong learning* is included in the HEI strategies but as a form of complementary activity.

In addition, the strategic documents of individual types of HEIs differ significantly. Public universities, non-public universities and state vocational universities. are focused on entirely different things. The first ones are focused on fulfilling their research mission and providing education as an autotelic value because of their centuries-old tradition. In contrast, vocational universities (the dominant type of non-public HEIs in Poland)[40] are generally focused primarily on didactics and meeting student expectations. In their case, education is viewed from a utilitarian standpoint and the quality in this respect is determined by the success of graduates in the labour market. Therefore, in this case, they are treated more instrumentally.

This is particularly evident in the case of public comprehensive universities, few of which included the popularisation of *lifelong learning* in their mission. The strategic documents of such universities clearly indicate that they do not consider this field a priority.

Postgraduate studies, just as other forms of *lifelong learning*, are one of the sources of income for non-public universities. Considering the market orientation of non-public universities, this area is perceived as one of the types of educational services (although rather not vital) that HEIs intend to develop.

[40] On a national scale, there are only a few exceptions – one university with university status and several that can be described as aspiring to this status.

Education defined as a lifelong process can be found in the vision and mission of only one non-public higher education institution, even though a vision and mission should constitute a reference point for all activities undertaken. In developing its mission, this institution describes its role as follows: *we support the development of careers at different stages of professional life*. In the case of other HEIs, various forms of *lifelong learning* can be found in lower-tier documents (operational objectives, activities), although sometimes they are treated only as tools, e.g., as one of the forms of for-profit activity enabling the diversification of funding sources. Therefore, the analysed documents indicate that *lifelong learning* has not been treated as a priority (so far) and has been viewed not, as an idea that contributes to the reorientation of the educational process, but rather as a kind of a secondary educational "product" of fairly insignificant prestige and importance, compared to first- or second-cycle studies. This impression is reinforced by references to a university diploma as a kind of a ticket to a professional career. They offer a more traditional view of the educational process, portraying it as a certain stage to be completed before entering the labour market. Therefore, *lifelong learning* in a broader sense is notably absent from the strategies of HEIs and this seems to be the factor that determines the similarity between their strategies.

The findings based on the analysis of strategic documents reveal that regardless of the status of HEIs (public/non-public), their survival and activity are determined by students of the so-called traditional age. This is how the issue is presented today and it seems that this is also the way the authorities of the HEIs surveyed see the future. This is understandable because public HEIs receive state subsidies while non-public ones must generate the highest revenue possible (from the perspective of revenue generation, this is also a more stable student group since its members use the services of the higher education institution for longer). We should also indicate that the analysed strategy documents were prepared between 2012 and 2017, and most of them date back to 2012. Nonetheless, according to the analysis conducted in Chapter II, the area of *lifelong learning* had already gained a prominent place in the supranational and national strategic documents by that point. Perhaps too little time has passed for this idea to take hold in the academic environment and redefine the classic approach to teaching in a higher education institution. For this reason, it is certainly worth following whether and how this issue will be presented in the HEI strategic documents in the coming years.

6

"Strategies in action" – institutions of higher education and adult education

Tatiana Fumasoli and Benedetto Lepori (2011, p. 4) construe strategy as a certain *pattern of decisions and actions subordinated to the achievement of goals important for the organisation, where decisions and actions constitute a coherent sequence spread over time and cover important areas of the HEI's activity*. This pattern must be recognised and shared by members of the organisation as a *form of collective pursuit of goals*, however, by no means does the rationalisation of this pattern have to precede decision-making and action. It can happen during or even after them, at a time when they can be viewed from a broader perspective (Fumasoli, Lepori, 2011). The reconstruction of strategies construed in this way – "strategy in action" – was the actual objective of my research. The basis for such reconstruction was a series of interviews with HEI representatives (authorities, lecturers).

This chapter consists of three sub-chapters, each concerning one group of HEIs (non-public higher education institutions, public comprehensive universities, public vocational higher education institutions). By giving the floor to representatives of individual HEIs, I present the potential for the development of the *lifelong learning* service range from the perspective of various organisations, as well as the rules and procedures applicable in this area. In addition, I examine elements of the broadly construed organisational culture, which is vital for postgraduate students. On this basis, I point out the key differences between the organisational behaviour of various types of HEIs and attempt to justify them by referring to the previously mentioned resource dependence theory and the characteristics of an entrepreneurial university.

1. Non-public higher education institutions

1.1. Idea of *lifelong learning* as a chance to develop the educational service range

Representatives of non-public HEIs are careful observers who monitor changes in the environment and forecast development paths for their organisations accordingly. They are capable of identifying many changes that may affect the development of the adult education sector, whether in the labour market or in terms of social awareness concerning education at different life stages. They have noticed the transnational trend of the increasing popularity and importance of *lifelong learning*. They also draw attention to the growing awareness of adults as regards the role of education in their professional careers, as well as their willingness to supplement their knowledge and acquire new skills, which has rendered today's linear educational path obsolete. Moreover, they indicate

that education has ceased to be a finite cycle characteristic of young people and that it is increasingly fragmented since the decision to study does not always take place immediately after graduating from secondary school and taking up second--cycle studies is no longer a natural and immediate consequence of completing the first-cycle studies. Adults at different stages of their lives seek tailor-made educational services that take their current needs into account and will continue to do so. One of the respondents argued:

I believe that the adult education market is bigger and the growth potential of this market is even greater than that for the education of young people. This idea of lifelong learning and development is spreading very slowly yet very systematically in society. It seems to me that we are shifting away from the model of education that was valid 20 years ago: elementary school, secondary school, studies...

[R_42][1]

This search for operational development opportunities in the environment is characteristic of the entrepreneurial university model. The respondents noted an increase in the popularity of short forms of education, but also their competitiveness in comparison with the classic models of two- or three-year studies. They believe that this is due to the pursuit of a specific optimisation of the educational process. This approach is visible among adults, most often employed, who are focused on achieving effects (acquiring new skills or qualifications) in the shortest time possible. Considering the multitude of responsibilities, including professional and family ones, which working people must reconcile, the attractiveness of education construed in this way is understandable. Therefore, HEIs are trying to adapt their profile to the new type of educational path, gradually increasing the importance of the older group of candidates returning to the university and trying to adjust their service ranges to the needs of the group in question. As one of the respondents declares:

The model of education is changing and we have come to the conclusion that we would like to be an HEI that is perceived by students as part of their lifelong learning. A place they can come back to.

[R_43]

[1] For more information on the survey interviews, see the *Methodological note*.

The respondents' accounts indicate that the second highly pertinent factor, which affects not so much the general demand as specific fields of study, is employers' expectations and their demand for specific competencies that remain scarce in the labour market. It is these expectations that influence the decisions of the candidates apart from their interests – and the former likely outweighs the latter, too. Representatives of non-public HEIs emphasise that it is the market conditions that encourage employees to constantly improve their skills and lead them to search for appropriate educational services. Having the desired skills or qualifications allows you to negotiate your labour market position more effectively. Therefore, it is the preferences of employers and the trends emerging in business that largely determine the way candidates are sought, and, consequently, affect the HEI service ranges as well as the popularity and life cycles of specific fields of study.

Both the observed change in the approach to education and the pressure of expectations exerted by labour market participants make the respondents believe that various forms of *lifelong learning* are an area of increasing importance for the HEI sector. This is confirmed by the following statement:

> *I believe this market will grow and grow. And that it will actually allow most of the HEIs in Poland to support themselves. Most of the schools currently educating holders of undergraduate diplomas will have to adapt to provide* ad hoc *knowledge – that which is needed here and now.*
>
> [R_42]

Some directly admit that this area will be particularly important for the non-public sector, which focuses on didactics and is already (with few exceptions) mostly focused on part-time and non-traditional students.

Observations of non-public HEI representatives do not focus only on general trends influencing the growth potential of the adult education market. They also monitor direct competition, i.e. other universities and their educational service ranges, although not always in a systemic and formalised way. It is an important point of reference in defining own market position and in planning directions for further activities.

1.2. Profitability as a criterion for conducting activities

The use of economic profitability as the overriding criterion of operating is yet another element characteristic of entrepreneurial universities. The respondents' answers confirm that such a model is in force at non-public HEIs. The service ranges of non-public HEIs depend on the market, whereas the economic criterion

(apart from the possible profile of the university) is actually the only one that determines the maintenance, modification or liquidation of study programmes.

In fact, the only strategy for postgraduate education in our country is the economic strategy. It makes us withdraw programmes, change them. Even a lecturer, a practitioner who was valued by us, who had knowledge, had to change the curriculum because it stopped selling and students stopped enrolling. When he reconstructed the curriculum, they started signing up again. This seems good to me.

[R_42]

The development of the range of postgraduate studies, as the respondents say, is often an element of a well-thought-out strategy aimed at extending the period of use of the HEI's services or increasing the number of customers using the services at the same time. For example, one HEI that at some point only had the right to offer first-cycle studies started offering postgraduate studies in an attempt to retain people who wanted to continue their education after obtaining a bachelor's degree.

The primary purpose of establishing postgraduate studies was to retain our graduates. For many years, we only conducted first--cycle studies and we wanted to retain the students, but we did not have the right to deliver master's degree programmes. By creating fields of study that complemented and expanded their education, we wanted them to continue their studies at our university.

[R_36]

Expanding the available range of studies (including postgraduate studies) can also serve to increase the total volume of students and the tuition fees they generate – an option that can be, chosen from among other possibilities based on forecasts of economic indicators.

We knew that we would be unable to develop in this market through acquisitions or mergers, so we moved to the so-called organic development. The fact that today we have such a selection of postgraduate studies, but also of first- and second-cycle studies, is in a sense a consequence of the policy, the strategy that was devised some time ago.

[R_44]

Although most of the respondents could not (or did not want to) clearly indicate the share of postgraduate studies in the revenues of their HEIs[2], they agreed that it constitutes an important element of the budget. However, the cornerstone of higher education institutions is still first- and second-cycle studies, where education lasts three and two years, respectively (postgraduate students must re-enrol every year and their number is still not equal to that of first- and second-cycle students). For this reason, the profitability of conducting postgraduate studies does not match the undergraduate and graduate studies. This leads one to inquire as to why they are of interest to decision-makers of non-public HEIs. It seems that the forecasted growth of the market for postgraduate studies and other forms of adult education may constitute an opportunity for non-public HEIs to minimise the consequences of demographic trends (which are severe for this sector in financial terms). The noticeable decrease in the number of traditional students may be (albeit partially) compensated by the development of this area of education.

The attractiveness of postgraduate studies from the perspective of an HEI may also be determined by the ability to quickly expand the portfolio of services offered, thus bringing a quick "return on investment". This is due to the relatively simple procedure preceding their launch (with no need to obtain a ministerial permit). The high degree of autonomy of HEIs in this area, although beneficial in itself, translates into significant competitiveness in the postgraduate studies market. HEIs, virtually not subject to any external restrictions, can expand their educational offer almost indefinitely. The only barrier is the availability and competence of appropriate teaching staff as well as the speed of reacting to market needs and staying ahead of the competition's moves.

The respondents' accounts show that the process of introducing a new field of study into the HEI's range is always preceded by a precise cost calculation, which sets the boundary of the field's profitability, i.e. the minimum number of students that would make it feasible. If the number of people interested in taking up education is lower than the specified break-even point that guarantees covering the costs of classes and generating an appropriate profit for the HEI, the given study programme is not launched. This stage is as important as the substantive scope and curriculum of the studies.

[2] With one exception – one of the respondents, the coordinator of the postgraduate studies area, estimated that they accounted for approximately 25% of the department's revenues [R_43].

First, there is work to make this project [studies – A.A.] *as refined as possible, responding to the needs of both the labour market and the student. And then we pack it with a budget. We recalculate all financial expectations related to the lecturers, including the provision of accommodation. We divide it by 15 and, we can see how high the tuition fee should be. And this means that we have to gather 15 people to start such a programme.*

[R_43]

One way to increase the profitability of postgraduate studies is cost optimisation. The forms of optimisation used by non-public HEIs include outsourcing the creation of postgraduate studies. This practice consists in commissioning an external contractor to complete the preparation of a new field of study to introduce it to the school's range of studies. Such contractors are typically people with significant professional experience who work in the industry that the field of study concerns: HR studies are prepared by the owners of HR consulting companies, marketing studies are prepared by experienced marketing team managers, whereas OHS studies are created by owners of consulting companies. Among the key advantages that working with external contractors brings to universities is the minimisation of the initial contribution (mainly in the form of contracts with and payments for designated employees) and of the business risk associated with failure, i.e. failure to start the course. Both the workload and the aforementioned risk are transferred to the external partner who prepares the study programme (risk outsourcing). It is the contractor who invests the time and resources needed to develop the programme and recruits staff who must be let go should the interest in the studies prove insufficient. In turn, if the project is successful, the contractor shares the profit with the HEI that markets the studies under its brand.

Non-public HEIs are also characterised by innovation in developing the range of studies, openness to changes and a tendency to take risks. Only through daring actions can they stay ahead of the competition and thus conquer new areas of the education market – if only temporarily. More conservative strategies based on maintaining a relatively constant service range are untenable not only due to the market's competitiveness but also because of the dynamically changing needs of employers. Economic pressure and the desire to obtain the largest possible market share encourage HEIs to carefully monitor the market to find potential opportunities.

Therefore, apart from proven, classic faculties[3], non-public HEIs often offer new options. Their extensive cooperation with partners is probably not without significance here, as it naturally broadens the range of competencies needed to prepare and conduct highly specialised studies, and also facilitates tracking and quickly responding to new trends in individual industries. The shortened decision-making process is also vital here since it enables, non-public HEIs to maintain high operational flexibility, allowing them to quickly respond to emerging expectations. Some HEIs use advanced systemic solutions based on their own research and analysis teams. The results of the teams' work constitute the basis for decisions on how to develop the service range (although this more often applies to first- and second-cycle studies due to higher expenses related to their launch).

> *We follow the educational needs that are on the market, but we also try to create them. We propose fields of studies that are "daring". I try to follow trends in the labour market and talk to business people, not only to people involved in the broadly understood practice, to see what is missing. The world is changing very fast, some things are no longer relevant.*
>
> [R_43]

The respondents believe that these dynamic market strategies give the private sector HEIs an edge. Indeed, such an orientation in activities is seen as a necessary condition for the HEI's survival in the market. Flexibility is juxtaposed to tradition and conservatism, which are deemed to be hurdles in the development of new educational services that are characteristic of public HEIs.

1.3. Organisational culture – *the student comes first*

Another thing worth noting is having an organisational culture that values employee initiative, which is due to the vital role that such a culture plays in the dynamics of the development of non-public HEI services. It allows HEI authorities to reinforce and reward the entrepreneurial attitude, treating postgraduate studies as an area of additional income for lecturers and encouraging them to become involved in this area. As such, the win-win principle applies here. Postgraduate studies are a source of income for both the HEI and lecturers. Further, lecturers earn more for conducting postgraduate

3 For example, accounting, project management, HR and marketing.

classes compared to higher education courses. Financial motivation may thus be one of the most important (perhaps the most important?) incentives to develop a postgraduate study programme. At the same time, this type of approach builds a sense of shared responsibility for the services offered, both before (promotion and sales) and after the course is launched (quality of classes). This is how one of the lecturers describes it:

Sometime after I became an assistant professor, I found that my salary did not match what I could get in the market. I went to my boss and asked for a raise, and he says "look, I don't have the resources, but if you want to earn better, you can develop postgraduate studies". This is how employees are remunerated at our university. This rewards the initiative. Employees definitely treat these postgraduate studies as a way to earn more.

[R_42]

Non-public HEIs are also distinguished by their strong customer- and quality-oriented culture, characteristic of entrepreneurial universities. Attention to the high quality of services and concern for customer satisfaction take many complementary forms. During the studies, the student satisfaction level is systematically monitored. As part of regular surveys, students evaluate various aspects of the postgraduate studies, substantive (classes, lecturers) and organisational (efficiency of administrative units) alike. HEIs take their results very seriously. The requirements imposed on lecturers by university authorities are very high. Low ratings may result in a disciplinary interview, and in extreme cases, termination of the working relationship. HEIs make every effort to ensure that the staff meets the expectations of their students. As one of the postgraduate studies coordinators says:

Our lecturers are not divided into better and worse. Here, they are divided into very good and good, so sometimes when someone gets a grade, say 4.7 out of 5, and gets the worst score, it's not that he or she is the worst – he or she just didn't get the maximum score.

[R_36]

Openness to the needs of students and care for the high standard of both the studies and administrative services are dictated by the interests of the

university. The reasoning of university employees is as follows: the more satisfied the students are, the more likely they will be to recommend our university to other people. Therefore, it pays off to invest in the broadly understood quality of education, as this investment will pay for itself in the future with the next recruitment of students. Less funding will have to be allocated to marketing activities since customer opinions are extremely powerful in today's era of instant information flow. Non-public HEIs do not overlook this fact and apply the recommendation mechanism in a thoughtful way (the so-called word-of-mouth marketing), as one of the forms of support for the recruitment process. Its advantage is greater credibility than in the case of classic advertising messages.

> *There is huge competition in postgraduate or undergraduate studies; the service range must be extensive and the student must be satisfied. Because in fact, another student will come if the one who is currently studying graduates satisfied. He or she will then bring the most people to our postgraduate studies.*
>
> [R_34]

One of the key demands formulated by the students is ensuring that education stays practical. People who are active in the labour market want to obtain operational knowledge during their studies – knowledge that is based on real experience and mistakes made by others and not "book knowledge" that is inconsistent with real-world challenges. Studies organisers are aware of this and try to adapt their service range to candidate preferences.

> *People do not want to go* [to universities – A.A.] *where there are theorists, ones who have theoretical knowledge, even the greatest. Postgraduate studies need practical knowledge. People expect it. They want to hear about something that went wrong and what your response was when it did.*
>
> [R_48]

To meet these expectations, managers of postgraduate studies and managers of individual fields of study at non-public HEIs select their teaching staff very carefully. At the same time, they are not guided by the staff members' scientific achievements (academic lecturers are a definite minority) or excellent coaching skills. A key and indispensable attribute of a lecturer is many years of experience in a specific industry, which the practitioner can share with the students, drawing

on the history of his or her successes and failures. The lecturers themselves emphasise that this is a necessary condition for them to start working with students in postgraduate studies and to build their position.

> *For example, I teach about EU funds. The only reason I undertook it is that I have been doing it for 15 years. For 15 years, I have been a trainer in this field and a lecturer at various universities. I have also been writing* [EU funding – A.A.] *applications for 15 years. I implement them, I evaluate them, so I know what I am talking about.*
>
> [R_32]

To further emphasise the practical nature of the studies, HEIs work with companies and institutions that play the role of industry patrons of studies, strengthening the studies' prestige with an image of a brand recognisable in the market.

To actively work with adult, experienced listeners, one must establish a new relationship model. The standard form of academic classes and the corresponding relations between the lecturer and the students would not be applicable here. HEIs adapt the formula and method of conducting postgraduate studies to the practical nature of the studies and the expectations of the students themselves, with the latter hoping that learning will be conducted in an interesting and engaging way. To that end, lecturers step down "from the lecterns", organise classes focused on the activity of the participants and make them partners in the process of generating knowledge in a departure from the traditional academic roles and a one-sided knowledge transfer model. Lecturers' narratives show that during classes they deal with a community of practitioners (with varying degrees of experience) who exchange knowledge and, with the help of lecturers, solve specific problems and develop solutions to be used in their daily work.

Teaching staff members are aware of the high expectations of their students, not only as regards their knowledge and teaching skills but also their role, which expands beyond the traditional category of an academic lecturer. Although postgraduate studies are predominantly attended by relatively young people (more or less up to 35 years of age), these people have already gained some professional experience in the course of their careers, and as such, the lecturers agree that they must use the students' capital. Therefore, they try to meet student expectations, not only in terms of the scope and formula of providing knowledge, as mentioned earlier, but also in terms of the model of relations with class participants. In their statements, lecturers repeatedly – and independently of each other – provided their own definitions of a lecturer, describing him or her not so much as an

authority focused on transferring knowledge, but rather as a facilitator tasked with managing, collecting and systematising the knowledge already possessed by the participants.

> *They have knowledge. Maybe they don't have a name for it, maybe it is not structured, but in the field in which I teach, many people have experience. At times, I am not a tutor but a facilitator. The kind of person who extracts information and organises it in an intended way. Over time, I have become much more humble.*
>
> [R_48]

This approach translates into much more partnership-based relations between the teacher and the class participants (compared to traditional student groups). However, this does not mean that the lecturers "have it easy" – conversely, their task is more than merely providing knowledge.

The formula of studies based on partnership favours building relationships that go beyond traditional roles and lecture halls. Some lecturers attach great importance to building industry communities, thanks to which they not only maintain contact with graduates long after their graduation, but also enable them to further improve and exchange knowledge as part of an, informal network of experts.

> *Today, there are tools out there that let us keep in touch with everyone. We already have over two hundred graduates and we are able to keep in touch with them through Facebook. Once a year, we organise a so-called "general convention". The people who are currently studying also attend it. Everyone has the opportunity to mingle and exchange contacts and business cards.*
>
> [R_45]

Postgraduate students are perceived by lecturers as committed and determined to use the time devoted to learning as effectively as possible. They expect not so much reflection and discussion on subsequent topics, but rather practical knowledge in the form of specific instructions and proven tools which, once practised in class, can be immediately applied in their professional environment. On the one hand, such an attitude makes the lecturers' work easier, and on the other, it obliges them to prepare classes in line with student preferences. Lecturers realise that they have to approach the education process differently and choose adequate strategies.

When it comes to commitment, I have to say that it is much better to work with people who have already completed some education process during their studies. People come to study for the first time and they don't see it that clearly. In contrast, during postgraduate studies, they come for specific, practical tips and tools. They want to practice them in class. There is even certain resistance when they have to read something, process the content and then convey it. They are not interested in this. I can see that they feel like it's a bit of a waste of time for them.

[R_41]

The practical nature of learning and student expectations, as indicated above, also determine the formula and structure of the classes. Classic lectures, if they appear at all in postgraduate programmes, are hugely marginalised. Instead, such programmes are dominated by exercises that actively engage students and allow them, to acquire and practice specific skills. A representative of the authorities of one HEI gave the following account of the structure of this HEI's study programme:

Thirty percent of the hours are, in our understanding, treated as knowledge hours, the latest knowledge for the field of study. Here, we try to attract scientists who present knowledge that is not available in the first- or second-cycle studies. On the other hand, 70% of the classes are practical, that is, skills-related exercises carried out in-house or in external workshops.

[R_33]

Such a structure of studies enables the immediate application of knowledge, as it does not require self-processing, and is delivered in the form of ready-made "scripts" or in action. Student expectations are also a point of reference for the selected methods and forms of education. Not only should they be effective, but they must also be attractive to make learning fun.

People want to have fun in class. When there are games and some group exercises, it is easier to endure eight hours in class than when there are lectures that you have to listen to. [...] At the moment, many classes are workshops or, skill training sessions on communication, negotiations, interviews and assessment interviews. It is very popular.

[R_40]

Lecturers are also ready to show considerable flexibility in adapting the content to the experience of the group and its current needs. Thanks to this, students have the opportunity to co-decide about the course of education.

> *On one occasion* [the audience – A.A.] *was keen on learning about the assessment centre process. It is not so much related to these studies, but they wanted to. They felt unsatisfied when various recruitment and evaluation processes were discussed instead. So, we included it in their classes.*
>
> [R_41]

Empowering students and focusing on their needs applies not only to the proper education process but also to all logistical and organisational issues related to the implementation of studies: administrative services, didactic facilities, dates of classes and educational materials.

At non-public HEIs, postgraduate studies are supported by separate units, and as such, their employees devote time and attention only to administration, communication, financial issues and solving the current problems of specific student groups. This seems justified considering the high expectations of the recipients. It also enables a more individual relationship between students and those who administer the studies.

> *This is a little university within a university*[4]*. Since the candidate becomes a student, he or she is serviced exclusively by the postgraduate department throughout the entire teaching and financial process. We have our own system, the extranet, so they can see everything there. If there are several people in the department, then such a "supervisor" handles, let's say, 10 or 12 courses and supports a given group from start to finish.*
>
> [R_46]

Employees try to quickly respond to student feedback and needs which, as they declare, are quite extensive. Employees consider it a part of the quality of the educational service provided. The respondents also pointed to the importance

4 At one of the HEIs, the postgraduate studies department functions almost like a special purpose vehicle of the home university. It has a separate budget and shares the profit it earns with the home university.

of providing customers with excellent service and a broadly understood comfort of studying, that is, both modern teaching facilities and a customer-oriented education process. Hence, the significant attention to the high standard of service for the education process and the professional organisation of studies.

Some HEIs also handle student needs that are only indirectly related to postgraduate studies, creating an "umbrella" of extra services. For example, one HEI allows students to take advantage of childcare. It has a kindergarten on its premises, where one can take advantage of full-time care (regular kindergarten) or occasional care (during classes).

1.4. Summary – adult education as a form of income diversification for non-public HEIs

The key assumption of the resource dependence theory addresses the organisation's strong links with the environment and its dependence on the environment's resources. The resources that determine the organisation's survival to the greatest extent are the most important, whereas the most crucial stakeholder group is the providers of such resources. The interests of this group are treated as a priority, which means that the resources at its disposal constitute an effective tool of influence.

The reconstructed model of the functioning of non-public HEIs clearly fits this pattern. Since obtaining funding from private sources or, directly from students is a mandatory condition for their operation, HEIs apply a customer-oriented approach focused on the needs of the above-mentioned groups. The entire management model of the postgraduate education segment – from the practical nature of studies to tailor-made service – is a response to the expectations of direct recipients. HEIs make their decisions with these recipients in mind. Their services are developed (both educational and auxiliary) and their quality is constantly monitored with regard to the recipients. It is the interest of the candidates (demand orientation), and not such things as the needs of academic staff (supply orientation) that determines the educational service range. Should the interest of potential recipients prove insufficient, even faculties with excellent staff will be dissolved. New ones will be established instead to fill the existing market niches that have not yet been noticed by the competition.

Postgraduate students should not be perceived as passive participants of the education processes; many examples cited by the respondents prove that they are treated like co-creators of the didactic process, which is constantly being updated in line with their expectations, whether in terms of content, selection of lecturers, or even (quite marginal) organisational issues. This proves that students of non-public HEIs are very prominent stakeholders with a real impact on

the decision-making processes in HEIs. It seems that non-public HEIs have developed effective mechanisms (e.g., in the form of appropriate structures and elements of organisational culture), thanks to which the interests of students have been very well secured. Their customer-oriented attitude is manifested not only through their regular student satisfaction surveys but also through the fact that they adapt their programmes and methods to student expectations and promote a, non-traditional model of student-lecturer relations. This includes activities both directly and indirectly related to the implementation of the educational process, such as the organisation of custom administrative services for students or the provision of services that make it easier for students to reconcile their studies and family responsibilities.

The organisational behaviour of non-public universities also shows some characteristic strategies aimed at partial independence from the influence of specific stakeholder groups. They are manifested through such things as the gradual expansion and diversification of the recipient groups – universities that offer higher education didactic services establish postgraduate studies that allow them to retain their graduates for longer, and at the same time, gain a new source of income in the face of the expected decline in the number of traditional students. Non-public HEIs treat *lifelong learning* as a form of income diversification, and thus, a way to increase their financial stability by limiting dependence on one group of students. A thorough observation of the market, including transnational trends in education, the changing educational path model, as well as employer needs, are a starting point for HEIs when seeking new development opportunities. The ongoing changes are perceived as a generator of new opportunities, with little time available to respond to them. Substantial flexibility is visible not only in the constantly updated educational service range but also in the attitudes of employees who treat it as an obvious and necessary attribute of the market game. Another solution is to expand the current market by including new fields of study into the educational service range, including through mergers or consolidations. Such activities undertaken by HEIs temporarily increase their economic security.

The non-public HEI managerial model also, contains features characteristic of an entrepreneurial university. The first of these features is supporting and rewarding the initiative and active attitude of employees as well as incentive systems aimed at their involvement in the search for opportunities to develop the educational service range. Another is the orientation towards financial efficiency and cost optimisation, e.g., in the form of the previously discussed outsourcing of risk and resources that, some non-public HEIs opt for. By working with external entities, HEIs can develop their service ranges very dynamically with minimal

involvement of their own resources. These activities are consistent with and further reinforce the overarching objectives of HEIs.

In light of the resource dependence theory, the student-oriented attitude of non-public HEIs appears as an obvious consequence of the dependence of HEIs on thousands of small private sources of income which, due to their mass nature, make up the funding stream that allows HEIs to operate. Just as it is impossible to imagine the functioning of public HEIs without state subsidies, so, too, it would be impossible for non-public HEIs to operate without the private funding received from students in tuition fees, and it is their interests that non-public HEIs will prioritise. In the case of public universities, the situation is more complex, but here too, the resource dependence theory can be useful in explaining the existing mechanisms and models of operation.

2. Public comprehensive universities

2.1. *Lifelong learning's* potential to expand the range of the educational services offered

University employees are also aware of the fact that people who are active in the labour market today face the need to constantly broaden their knowledge and improve their skills, and often also to change their profession. For this reason, they seem to notice a certain development potential for HEIs in postgraduate studies while, pointing out that the general economic situation has a significant impact on the educational market at this level. One of the respondents presented the following forecast:

> *In the case of business-related studies, in my opinion, this potential will always exist. Sooner or later, people educated to be chemists or Polish language teachers – if they come into contact with business – will need to master at least the minimal competencies to run a business* [...]. *The demand will grow along with the business itself. If there is economic growth, the demand will grow, too, and when bad times come, we will probably feel it, too.*
>
> [R_23]

University staff provided some additional arguments for keeping postgraduate studies on offer. The first is the predicted consequences of demographic changes, which will result in a decrease in the number of students, and thus, also

in the teaching load. Should this happen, postgraduate studies may constitute one of the alternative forms of engagement for full-time university employees. A representative of the authorities of one unit summarised it as follows:

> *The demographic decline will continue. To keep this potential – namely: scientific, human and infrastructural – while complying with the applicable regulations and anticipated changes in the regulations that maintain the institution of the fixed teaching load [...] we ought to reckon with the fact that we must have some hours to find tasks for those employees.*
>
> [R_25]

Another respondent pointed out that compared to the basic forms of studies (first-, second-, third-cycle), the introduction and maintenance of postgraduate studies require much less work from HEIs, and the possibilities in this respect are almost unlimited, making it a relatively easy way to expand the didactic service range. At the same time, almost all respondents noted that postgraduate studies are not a priority area from the perspective of academic universities, nor will be in the future. It was difficult for them to avoid comparisons between the public and non-public sectors, which is understandable since many of them have extensive experience working with private entities. Comparing universities and non-public HEIs competing with them in the postgraduate studies market, the respondents had no doubts that the latter group is the leader due to a simple fact: their survival in the market depends on the income generated by students. The legitimacy of the university's existence is based on completely different premises, but this does not mean that the authorities of university units do not see the economic potential in developing postgraduate studies at all. They are viewed through the lens of university image improvements, among other things.

> *We favour postgraduate studies; it simply pays off for the department [...]. Thanks to this, employees earn better, the position of the department improves, and we also meet certain market needs. This pays off on all accounts.*
>
> [R_14]

However, it is not always the case that the awareness of the potential of postgraduate studies and a favourable attitude of university authorities result in their planning and taking specific actions. This is also due to the

dispersed power structure in universities and often contradictory interests. In the interviews, employees assessed the actual efforts of their home units to develop the postgraduate studies segment rather harshly. They pointed to the lack of a long-term approach and the use of strategies that could be described as reactive. The conservative character of such strategies manifests through such things as opting for passive adaptation to the occurring changes (e.g., regulations related to the performance of specific professions) instead of attempting to anticipate them or to forecast or create new demand, as is the case with non-public universities.

The random nature and limited scope of activities in this area may reflect a wider problem, which is the lack of a long-term action strategy and subordinating HEI activities to short-term goals designed to achieve short-term benefits, within one term of office of the HEI authorities.

The dean will tell you that he has some strategy. But in my opinion, this is not a strategy. It is reacting to changes in regulations. When they introduced the magic factor of 13 students[5], then all activities got subordinated to this. When the rules for classifying departments were introduced, what has our department, and not only ours, been doing over the past two years? It has been creating 25-point monographs. In my opinion, there is no long-term vision here.

[R_24]

It is worth emphasising at this point that even some representatives of university authorities openly admitted that postgraduate studies are a forgotten sphere lacking good development ideas.

At the moment, in my opinion, this is a wasteland. Totally. Coming back to the strategy... there are indeed no postgraduate studies there. That's the truth. [...] I think that your visit can give us an impulse to do so because one has to take a pause and actually look at what we are doing here. And we're not doing anything.

[R_20]

5 A Student Staff Ratio of 13:1.

This is not the only reason why the situation of universities and the opportunities for development in their postgraduate education structures do not look too promising compared to their non-public competitors. Market orientation, which is a condition for the survival and functioning of non-public universities, determines their organisation and mode of operation. It promotes greater flexibility of commercial entities and entails a more advanced degree of specialisation in terms of selected functions, including those related to sales and marketing, which I had mentioned earlier. These components are becoming clear competitive advantages in the market of postgraduate studies, as emphasised by university employees, who can see the shortcomings of their home universities in this area.

Although the interest in *lifelong learning* is noticeable both at the level of the authorities of individual educational units and university employees, it is not an effective stimulus to take active measures to develop the service range in this area. The strategy of universities is more conservative and inward-oriented. They do not see postgraduate studies as a response to the expectations of prospective students but rather as an opportunity to create conditions for lecturers to fulfil their teaching duties (which would be beneficial from the perspective of universities facing demographic decline). This approach undoubtedly results from different priorities and a clear focus on research activities. However, what draws attention here is the high awareness of university employees of the marginalisation of this area and many weaknesses – at the level of both strategic and organisational decisions – which effectively hinder (or even prevent) universities from competing with non-public HEIs in this area.

2.2. Development of the postgraduate studies service range – employees as "islands" of uncoordinated entrepreneurship

Updating the existing postgraduate studies service range and the emergence of new proposals usually depend on the initiative of employees of individual units. It is also they who are responsible for the substantive and organisational preparation of the study programmes, recruitment of participants and the launch and implementation of classes. It can therefore be concluded that even though the development of postgraduate studies is not of key importance to HEIs or their units, much depends on the individual ambitions and actions of individual academic teachers. They are special "islands of entrepreneurship" that work on market research and supplement the service range and it is around them that active centres are formed. It depends on the initiative of a specific employee whether and to what extent he or she will ask external experts to work with the university. Such situations do happen, but this is not always the case. Most often they are the aftermath of the non-university

professional activity of lecturers. The impulse to create postgraduate studies usually comes from younger employees. One of the university officials explained it as follows:

> *They do care. They do not earn as much as a professor, yet they are quite apt already; they have some contacts and are not yet burdened with any organisational responsibilities. And they have time. [...] Such an assistant professor in postgraduate studies has the only chance to show initiative: he may have an idea, he may organise people, he may talk to the rector's office and the financial department. This is a leadership role assumed by someone who does not yet have any leadership tasks within the university structure. As a result, I can see those who want and can do something.*
>
> [R_14]

Preparation and launch of postgraduate studies are preceded by many months of work of the initiator (who eventually becomes the manager in most cases). This includes such things as identifying market needs, developing a concept and a detailed study curriculum with relevant documentation and gathering the teaching staff. It is worth noting that the performance of the head of studies at either the stage of preparing the studies or their subsequent implementation is not usually linked to financial remuneration. However, this does not exclude cases where the head conducts classes in postgraduate studies and thus receives additional remuneration. Nonetheless, an active attitude is not appreciated adequately to the actual work input. While the units' authorities may give their employees a green light to take action, they usually fail to motivate their employees to do so.

Innovators do not always receive actual support from the university authorities. By no means does this apply only to receiving support when developing the curriculum, communicating with the market or ongoing administrative services (although here they are usually on their own in this regard), but also to the lack of flexibility in financial matters and rigid rules determining the profitability of starting and running a new field of study.

> *The university takes a 30% markup on income. And no one wants to touch that 30% to get the course started. The course only launches when there is enough cash for that 30%. And a very simple move would suffice – the university would not take 30% but rather 20%. [...] It is a question of whether to get nothing or get 20%. After all, it is worth reaching for that, too, as there may be another group coming later.*
>
> [R_13]

Such an approach results from the fact that even if the creator of a new market research course is highly involved in the creation of the study programme, the university's entire formal procedure and information and promotion activities (which are often carried out by the creators on their own), the potential participant turnout may eventually prove insufficient to cover the costs of this internal markup that must be transferred to the university's budget. A rigid approach to the criterion of profitability of studies and the lack of flexibility on the part of universities sabotage their employees' efforts. This is because university authorities treat postgraduate studies as individual "islands of entrepreneurship" as part of which individual employees implement their own ideas using the university's brand. In extreme cases, such structured financial regulations discourage persons interested in establishing postgraduate studies (both inside and outside universities) from working with public HEIs and encourage them to look for a partner in the non-public sector. Then, the intellectual capital and ideas of public university employees are taken over by non-public HEIs which can offer them proven organisational facilities and extensive marketing and sales support. If candidates are interested in the studies they offer, they benefit from student fee payments – but in the non--public domain.

In the case of universities, there is also a somewhat conservative stance when it comes to developing the range of postgraduate studies, which may also be a factor that discourages initiative in this area. A low propensity to take risks and join the market game to compete for customers means that universities willingly initiate postgraduate studies only when there is no substantial concern about this game's outcome, i.e. when there is a guarantee of finding enough candidates interested in taking up studies (e.g., studies for organised groups, studies in classic, proven fields). When coupled with a management model based on dispersed responsibility, the need for such a high level of certainty leads to demotivation and creates hurdles for the promoters of innovative concepts and trends on the one hand, and results in the loss of the university's chance to attract interested student groups on the other.

In the case of universities, the service range is less oriented towards the changing needs and new trends in the labour market and more focused on internal resources, i.e. the creation and implementation of studies are determined not so much (and certainly not only) by the market's needs, but by the resources (in this case, competencies) and areas of interest of staff for whom postgraduate studies are an extra source of income). One of the university lecturers, who has been working with non-public HEIs for many years, explains it as follows:

Here [at the university – A.A.] *it takes a long time to start studies. That is why we try to come up with good ideas good, namely promising candidates or success. However, for example at the Banking School, if we have a good idea, we do not think about the candidates but rather prepare a course.* [...] *If there are enough candidates, we start a given specialisation. If there aren't, we don't start it.*

[R_18]

According to the respondents, the aspects that distinguish non-public HEIs from public universities, i.e. the flexibility of operations, the propensity for risk--taking and shorter decision-making processes, determine the market advantage of the former. In this regard, many respondents also pointed to effective promotional activities and the attractiveness of the service range.

2.3. Organisational culture – the student (not always) comes first

The respondents' answers indicate that universities also make efforts to ensure that their study programmes meet the expectations of demanding student groups. It seems, however, that this policy only reaches as far as the decision--making power of the persons responsible for establishing postgraduate studies. In the areas where general university principles apply (e.g., administration and finances), the student does not always come first.

The perception of postgraduate students as viewed by university employees is similar to the previously outlined characteristics based on statements offered by employees of non-public HEIs. Such students are perceived not so much as the recipient of the content delivered during classes, but rather as the co-creators of this content. As such, lecturers often see themselves as facilitators rather than lecturers in the usual sense. Their task is to support participants in structuring knowledge, solving problems on their own and developing conclusions instead of being offered ready-made solutions. As one of them puts it:

I have [among my students – A.A.] *an owner of a large company, who created it in a garage and is now one of the biggest players in Poland. I have people who have been working in the budget sector for many years. I have people from corporations. And these people really know a lot. They do not need to be educated but rather need facilitation. I call it facilitation.*

And even at EY[6], we say "facilitators", not "trainers". Because we facilitate knowledge. The point is to manage this knowledge, to use their input, to share their experiences, their observations, their work and their problems. The facilitator is there to organise the knowledge that is "in the nation". All these people have it, you just have to bring it out.

[R_29]

Lecturers know that postgraduate students are a group with high expectations and that the "who pays the piper calls the tune" principle applies to them. This entails the need to continuously monitor the quality of classes, and if necessary, quickly modify their elements that raise doubts among students. These modifications may concern both organisational issues, such as hours of classes, and substantive issues related to the didactic content or specific persons conducting classes.

The study formula and teaching methods are planned with student preferences in mind. What works best is activities that require substantial participant involvement, and not those focused on passive reception of the content presented *ex cathedra*.

No lectures, God forbid! Seminars based on presenting certain content and discussing it. Various practical cases, i.e. case studies. Case studies, various exercises. And the projects.

[R_18]

Academic teachers who deliver classes realise that students devote a considerable part of their limited free time to studies. Therefore, they try to keep the students' attention while making sure that their classes are attractive and allow students to both gain knowledge and pleasantly spend their time. At the same time, they attach great importance to the applicative nature of the transferred knowledge. The teaching staff is selected based on the preferences and expectations of postgraduate students. Professional experience – not only academic experience – is of key importance. Its lack is even perceived as disqualifying by the students, as is the lack of a partnership attitude and recognition of the students' know-how and experience.

6 Ernst&Young is a global corporation specialising in business consulting; the respondent is an external collaborator of the HEI.

Although the strategic documents of comprehensive universities state that such universities are oriented more toward universal values than instrumental ones, their employees approach postgraduate studies in a rational manner. They recognise the fact that students and candidates view the value of postgraduate studies through the lens of their broadly understood usefulness in the labour market, i.e. the applicability of knowledge gained during the course and the probability that the studies will contribute to changes in professional development (promotion, raise, changing jobs or employers). Therefore, a fairly common practice when creating postgraduate studies, including for universities, is to work with external, commercial entities. This allows university employees to continuously update their knowledge on the needs of the labour market and can create curricula that meet the expectations of employers. Representatives of companies and industry organisations are also involved in conducting classes with students. Working with recognisable companies not only increases the prestige of the studies but sometimes also allows students to obtain specialist certifications.

Nonetheless, extensive cooperation with the business sector is by no means the norm – oftentimes, it takes place on someone's own initiative. Moreover, even studies conducted within one university (one faculty) may differ significantly in this respect. The concept of studies, including the scope of cooperation with the environment, always depends on the originator and coordinator of a specific field, as well as the internal policy of the faculty itself. In some cases, the cooperation covers both the preparation and the implementation of studies. In others, an unwritten strategy assumes a more hermetic (university) character of the studies. While it is formally possible to hire external experts, in reality, universities are rather reluctant to do so, favouring their employees instead (supply strategy). This may already be evident when creating the study programme: the programme may include subjects that are not too useful from the students' point of view but can be delivered by university employees.

Based on their experience gained while working at non-public HEIs, the respondents see the key difference between public and non-public institutions in this respect, thus pointing to the reason for the latter's market advantage.

> *At private HEIs, we primarily want to attract practitioners, provide practical knowledge, supported by scientific knowledge of course, and achieve substantial results in the area of increasing their* [students' – A.A.] *competencies. Private HEIs highlight practice, satisfaction* [of students – A.A.] *and build curricula tailored to the needs of given studies. Not to the staff we have, but to the needs. And they get great results.*
>
> [R_18]

The respondents also indicate that despite the evaluation surveys conducted, the impact of feedback on possible changes in the studies is limited. This applies especially to changes in the ranks of the teaching staff recruited from the unit conducting the studies. Such lecturers often continue to deliver classes even if the students are dissatisfied with their performance. The interest of the unit conducting the studies outweighs the interest of the students. One of the lecturers, an external collaborator working with a university, points to the weakness of this approach.

The institution of a university cannot be such that if someone has a degree, his or her position is "immutable". I saw both here, and in other institutions, lecturers who were simply rubbish, but they stuck. It's a dead end. What are we here for? We are here to educate people. And in order to teach people, you must be able to teach in the first place.

[R_29]

Also, the administrative facilities handling the studies are organised with the HEI capabilities in mind rather than in line with student needs. The work related to the handling of postgraduate studies is designed in such a way that it requires relatively low involvement on the part of employees and does not entail structural changes. None of the researched universities has a separate unit dedicated to managing postgraduate studies. The responsibility for conducting studies is dispersed, and therefore, it is difficult to develop service standards for students of various faculties that would be common to the entire university. This makes it challenging to indicate the person responsible for the proper delivery of the entire process.

When students start postgraduate studies, they get sort of a schedule from us. It says that they should contact Ms X for invoicing, along with her phone and e-mail. For other matters, they should contact Ms Y. For matters relating to lecturers, organisation of classes and materials, they should contact me.

[R_19]

The current state of affairs can be maintained at the expense of the students. Therefore, we are dealing with a situation that is not inherent to the market: it is not the entity offering the service that tries to adjust it to the recipients' needs – it is the recipients who have to adapt to the service providers' organisational

framework, even if it is not always the optimal solution for them. This approach manifests itself through such things as, the lack of flexibility of universities in terms of payment for studies or in the bureaucratic attitude of employees.

2.4. Summary

Two somewhat opposing trends are visible in the strategies of universities. On the one hand, representatives of universities are aware of the increasing role of adult education and external conditions that affect the change process in this area. Due to the external needs they observe, many university employees (who often simultaneously work at non-public HEIs) initiate activities aimed at meeting the expectations of external customers. Lecturers are aware of the specificity and requirements of this group of students, who are adults, which can also be treated as a good forecast of the success of their postgraduate studies. Lecturers care about the high quality of didactic work, the practical nature of learning, the selection of attractive methods and building relationships with students, to the extent that this is their responsibility. Due to the implementation of practices of non-public HEIs, to some extent (where it depends on the creators of the studies), the range of postgraduate studies at public universities is similar to that provided by private ones. In this case, this institutional isomorphism becomes mimetic – universities replicate, practically-oriented models of postgraduate education that are characteristic of non-public HEIs and such models contribute to their market success.

In contrast, bottom-up initiatives are uncoordinated and, more ad hoc than strategic. This is probably related to the strong orientation towards research activity, as reflected by the interviews (and strategic documents), to which other areas of the university's activity are subordinated. Achievements in this area are the key determinants of success for universities since, their level of scientific activity determines their status and impacts the funding they obtain – not only through state subsidies but also via grants from external institutions. Due to the scale of full-time education (free from the student's point of view, because it is paid for through public funding), revenues from tuition fees charged directly to part-time students by public HEIs are incomparably smaller than in the case of private HEIs. Thus, the balance of power and influence between public universities and their stakeholders is also different in this case. Although these HEIs are also inseparable from the environment in which they operate, the burden of financing academic institutions rests not with the direct recipients of educational services, but with the state, which allocates funding through the designated administrator (the respective ministry). For this reason, public HEIs assign a different rank to the legal obligations that, are imposed on them

by the state that finances research and teaching, pushing student expectations into the background. Public HEIs primarily focus on meeting their obligations towards the actor they perceive as the key one, and their management model is oriented primarily towards this goal.

The existing discrepancy between the strategies of HEIs of different types can be explained using the resource dependence theory, which points to the uneven strength of influence (resources provided). HEIs that depend directly on the income generated by students will favour the interests of students while HEIs funded by the state will primarily fulfil the obligations imposed by the state authorities. Although during the interviews it turned out that university representatives are also aware of the needs of adult students, the energy and resources of the organisation are invested primarily in the area of research and "basic" teaching activities, for which universities are held accountable.

For universities (as organisations), prestige is a key resource strongly associated with research and its international perception. Teaching activity seems to be somewhat less important as does postgraduate education. Hence, the main interested parties in this area are individual employees, and postgraduate studies are their initiative. People involved in developing the range of postgraduate studies often cannot count on support, and what is more, they encounter various internal administrative and organisational hurdles on many levels, among other things. This primarily concerns the low flexibility of universities in terms of procedures (e.g., financial), a long decision-making process, dispersion of responsibility (many people involved in the service delivery process), as well as putting the interests of employees over the preferences of potential candidates, as sometimes happens at the stage of determining the staffing for individual fields of study. The above obstacles may not only hinder competition with other entities in the postgraduate studies market, but also effectively sabotage the activities undertaken by university employees.

One should also pay attention to the conservatism of universities in terms of the range of postgraduate studies they offer. In this area, the dynamics of changes at public HEIs are much lower than in the case of non-public ones, which puts the former at risk of marginalisation compared to other entities in this highly competitive market.

While it is difficult to deny that university staff are both aware of, and take initiative in changing educational needs, activities undertaken at universities can be deemed "incomplete" or "piecemeal" entrepreneurship if no adequate institutional support is provided.

This gives the impression that when it comes to postgraduate studies, universities do not utilise their potential and voluntarily give the field to their

non-public competitors. For public HEIs, postgraduate studies are not a form of gaining strategic resources, but rather a means of generating additional income for individual employees. For this reason, lecturers largely seem at peace with the current state of affairs and, understand candidate preferences. They point out that the status of universities (tradition, prestige) is not as important to the prospective students as the practical nature and timeliness of the educational services, in which case non-public HEIs, due to their specificity, have an advantage over public ones and are much more active and effective in this regard.

3. Public vocational HEIs

3.1. *Lifelong learning's* potential to expand the range of the educational services offered

During interviews, representatives of public vocational HEIs – Public Vocational Higher Education Institutions (Publiczne Uczelnie Zawodowe; hereinafter referred to as PUZ)[7] unanimously admitted that the market for *lifelong learning*, including various types of postgraduate studies, has enormous potential. According to the forecast of one of the respondents, this area will soon gain significant importance and will involve various educational entities operating in the market to a much greater extent:

> *In our opinion, it is – it may be in the future – between 25% and 35% of the university's activity. Training courses, i.e. education outside the higher education system as part of courses and training, plus post-graduate studies as part of higher education.*
>
> [R_10]

This forecast is based on the observation of supranational trends in *lifelong learning*, as well as Poland's position compared to other European countries in terms of the educational activity of its inhabitants. Despite the high enrolment rate in higher education, Poland still significantly differs from the EU average in terms of the educational activity of adults, and in a negative sense at that. Just as Poland has managed to catch up with other European countries when

7 The name Public Vocational Higher Education Institutions (Publiczne Uczelnie Zawodowe – PUZ) appeared in the Act of 20 July 2018, and replaced the previously functioning name of the State Higher Vocational Schools (PWSZ), although most of these types of HEIs have retained their names in accordance with the old nomenclature to this day.

it comes to the percentage of people with higher education diplomas over two decades, so, too, it is expected that a similar process will take place in the case of participation in various forms of *lifelong learning*.

However, this is not the only argument raised by representatives of these types of HEI regarding the potential of *lifelong learning*. In justifying their claims, they also point to the broadly understood conditions of the labour market and the characteristics of the contemporary professional careers of the working inhabitants of their regions. The first group includes dynamically changing needs of employers related to the development of individual branches of the economy or amendments to legal regulations resulting in the need to bring new knowledge to organisations. The development of *lifelong learning* is also influenced by decisions made by employees themselves. Participation in postgraduate studies is motivated by the desire for changes (and sometimes their necessity) in the course of one's professional life: the desire for promotion, the search for more interesting, better-paid work and opportunities for development within the profession. One of the managers of postgraduate studies pointed to the perspective of professionally active people. In this context, one respondent noted that the great advantage of postgraduate studies is the quick acquisition of new qualifications or certificates, which makes them attractive to people interested in improving their qualifications.

> *Acquiring a higher education is a long process. It takes three years. The alternative is postgraduate studies, preferably those that give a certificate to perform a specific profession, or training courses that allow you to perform a specific activity.*
>
> [R_10]

Employees of vocational HEIs also point out that considering the still low level of professional mobility (especially in small towns where PUZs operate), acquiring new or expanding existing competencies and qualifications seems to be not the only but certainly an effective way to increase one's choice options in the local labour market. This is also where they see opportunities for the development of their HEI's service range addressed to professionals.

> *In our country, people are more attached to their place of residence than to work. [...] If we want to change something or are forced to look for another job, we often have to adjust our qualifications to what the local labour market offers.*
>
> [R_11]

Apart from the market needs indicated above, which create favourable conditions for the development of the *lifelong learning* services offered, the representatives of HEIs indicate one more motivation to undertake activities in this area. Postgraduate studies, courses and training sessions are a source of additional income for HEIs.

However, despite their perceived potential, virtually all interviewees agreed that postgraduate studies, like other forms of adult education, currently play a marginal role at their universities. One of the representatives of the authorities noted the following:

Our income from postgraduate studies and training courses is approximately 2% of revenues. One–two percent of our university's revenues. So you could say – relatively not much.

[R_10]

As in the case of academic universities, arguments about the key "meal tickets" were used as justification. While academic universities mainly referred to, research activity, vocational ones primarily pointed to didactic activity, or more precisely, full-time university education, since vocational universities are oriented towards it.

The adult customer is also very important to us, but he or she is not decisive for the university's functioning. The university would not be able to make a living on postgraduate studies. It makes a living due to the possibility of delivering full-time studies.

[R_2]

In recent years, the respondents have observed a decline in interest in postgraduate studies, which means that they see large limitations in terms of further development of various forms of adult education. The reasons for this are seen in the increase in educational services offered by other entities, as well as the strong competition in the market and its saturation – it must be noted that vocational HEIs operate in small towns where few jobs require specialist qualifications. Another issue that may be the cause of the decreasing number of students is the financial limitations of residents of smaller towns and less affluent regions, who cannot afford to cover the costs of studies due to relatively low earnings.

Postgraduate studies in finance and accounting attracted more interest when the employment office had funding for courses and training, i.e. people simply found a source of financing. The needs are huge. However, the satisfaction of these needs is conditioned by this financial barrier.

[R_12]

Interestingly, the HEI where this problem was diagnosed decided to meet the expectations of adults interested in supplementing their education and created full-time studies for working people. Due to the target group specifics, classes are held on weekdays, in the afternoon. The studies are full-time, and therefore, students do not pay tuition fees. The fields of study offered by the HEI as part of this formula include mechanics and machine construction, computer science and English philology. According to the respondents, they enjoy great interest not only among the town residents but also among other residents of the region. People from towns situated dozens of kilometres away commute to the HEI to access free studies. One of the respondents indicates that only the removal of the financial barrier revealed the true level of interest in the services offered by the HEI:

There is a lot of interest, and earlier, there were no applicants when we started part-time studies. It is clearly visible that it was only the financial barrier that prevented us from recruiting students. In my opinion, the potential is very large. It is only a matter of creating the conditions for it to be available to these people.

[R_12]

One may also wonder what influence the wide-ranging promotional activities of competing institutions, especially non-public ones, have on reducing the interest in the services of vocational HEIs. HEI employees pointed out that various forms of communication with potential recipients are not used in their HEIs on a large scale.

3.2. Range of postgraduate studies at public vocational HEIs

What inspired the expansion of the range of postgraduate studies offered is broadly understood monitoring of the environment, and in this case, the environment in question should be considered in three dimensions. It is about both the immediate market environment (other educational entities and their service ranges), the socio-economic environment (commercial and public entities, industry organisations in the context of their needs as labour market entities)

and the legal and institutional environment (changing legal regulations, including ones related to the performance of specific professions, etc.). These processes run in parallel and complement each other. Observing the market also consists in seeking new areas where attractive studies or training services can be offered.

> *Last year, changes were made – for the first time in years – to the Code of Administrative Procedure. Knowing that such changes in the law were being introduced, we prepared one-day training sessions. We sent information to local governments and offices because these changes affect them.* [...] *If we know that the next year will bring major changes in the field of personal data protection, that there will be new regulations and new requirements in this regard, then we offer such services.*
>
> [R_11]

The respondents' statements show that the creation of postgraduate studies in the case of PUZs is most often bottom-up. Individual units of universities have great autonomy in this respect and create new faculties independently of each other. Decisions are made at the level of departments, institutes or faculties. It is worth emphasizing that the entire process is often initiated by individual university employees interested in a specific subject, who are responsible for the initial market research and then for developing the study concept. A representative of the authorities of one of the universities justified this procedure as follows:

> *I think this is dictated by the fact that many people are very involved and work with the socio-economic environment. We have programme councils for every field of study, and stakeholders very often report that there is no specialisation or training, and there is room for training in a given field. And after such talks, the person who works in a given department takes the initiative.*
>
> [R_6]

The presented solution has both advantages and disadvantages. Certainly, the fact that the service range is prepared by the most competent persons who also, act on their own initiative translates into a high level of accountability and commitment, and as such, into the high quality of the services offered. On the other hand, such an organisation of the process carries the risk of only a fragmentary view of the HEI's potential (and its use), no exchange of know-how and no standardisation in the process of creating studies or their subsequent

implementation[8]. Integration of activities undertaken in this area would make it possible to take advantage of synergy benefits, e.g., the potential of the interdisciplinary services offered.

The mention of the close and often institutionalised contacts between university employees and the socio-economic environment (representatives of commercial and public entities, industry organisations) deserves attention in the above-mentioned statement. They constitute a reliable source of knowledge about the current needs of the local labour market (what kind of specialists the market needs) and the basis for planning further development of the services offered. Cooperating employers also provide substantive support in constructing new study programmes (not only postgraduate) in such a way that they respond to local needs to the greatest possible extent. They suggest the content that should be included in the curriculum to enable students to acquire the desired skills. Together with lecturers, they create the profile of a graduate of postgraduate studies. This cooperation sometimes takes a more advanced form, including entering the field of studies. The implementation of studies in consultation with the selected partners allows students to obtain additional qualifications or certifications.

3.3. Quality culture and customer orientation

Representatives of vocational HEIs are aware of the specificity, needs and expectations of adults returning to the university to continue their education by taking up postgraduate studies. They note that the key features of this group are professional experience and openness to exchange of experiences, as well as highly specific expectations, both in terms of learning outcomes and teaching staff. Postgraduate students expect tangible learning outcomes. For them (or at least for most of them) learning is not an end in itself, it is a means to achieve other goals, most frequently professional ones. This affects the process of creating course programmes, including the selection of the teaching staff and methods of working with students.

The learning process and the relationship with the lecturers are treated as a kind of exchange transaction. By investing their time and resources, in return, they expect the fulfilment of their expectations and subjective treatment, which the lecturers are aware of. Therefore, they also pay attention to the challenge posed by working with adult, professionally active learners, who are much more

8 Public vocational HEIs (PUZ) are relatively small units, hence the authorities may find it easier to manage them in a less formal manner, and the lack of standardisation of procedures is not as significant a problem as in the case of larger organisations.

demanding than traditional students. Since they already have professional experience, the relationship between the students and the lecturer eludes the traditional division of roles. It is both an opportunity and a challenge for lecturers.

> *In the case of first-cycle students, this is a strong distinction. There is the teacher and there is the student who "receives" this lesson and knowledge from the teacher.* [...] *However, when it comes to postgraduate studies, I always start with the fact that there is such a space, these classes, where we learn from each other.* [...] *We are partners because if we conduct these classes well, I will gain and learn something, and so will they.*
>
> [R_12]

Being aware of the needs of adult learners, the creators of postgraduate studies try to adapt their service ranges to them, at the levels of the programme, methods and organisation of the didactic process. People who create postgraduate studies are not indifferent to the professional and non-professional obligations of their potential students and try to organise their classes (days, hours) in such a way that it is most adapted to the lifestyle of working adults and leaves them space for private life.

Two vocational HEIs have established separate specialised units to meet the needs of postgraduate students. They deal with administrative services, from the recruitment process to graduation. The employees of these units are responsible for activities related to such things as issuing the necessary documents, logistics of sessions, planning classes, preparing materials for participants, managing information flow, as well as responding to current problems and needs reported by the postgraduate students.

Due to student preferences, great importance is attached to the practical dimension of education. This is easier in the case of vocational HEIs since, the practical education profile[9] is obligatory (from a legal standpoint) for all degrees and courses of study. Employees of vocational HEIs admit that the statutory provisions in force at their universities work in favour of strengthening contacts with local companies. When preparing or amending their curriculum, HEIs with a practical profile are required to obtain opinions in this regard from external stakeholders.

9 One in which more than half of the ECTS credits are assigned to classes developing practical skills (Act of 20 July 2018, Art. 64, pt. 2).

Respondents point to the practical nature of education as a necessary condition to make the candidates interested in the postgraduate studies offered by HEIs. Based on their statements, one may conclude that this practical nature consists of several components. Firstly, the extent to which studies will be assessed as practical is determined by the selection of the teaching staff. HEI authorities representatives noted the following:

> *We don't want to have lecturers who don't have practical experience. We are a practical school. And this practical experience is more important to us than scientific experience. We prefer to have a better practitioner with less research experience than a scientist with a title but no practical experience.*
>
> [R_10]

Persons acting as managers of postgraduate studies, who declare that their experience is a key criterion in the process of selecting lecturers, speak in a similar vein. At least half of the staff are people professionally active in the fields covered by the curriculum content.

> *Practitioners have priority, even if they have a master's degree. They have a lot more to offer, things people can find useful on the market. [...] For a subject related to procedural labour law, I was looking for a practitioner who had a law firm and ran labour law cases, representing both employees and employers.*
>
> [R_5]

Importantly, substantive preparation and professional experience are not everything. The respondents also pay attention to the soft skills necessary in working with adult learners, i.e. the ability to reach students and convey the message thanks to the knowledge of appropriate methods and techniques of working with a group, as well as an attitude based on openness, respect and partnership. Their lack may disqualify a lecturer in the eyes of the students and result in his or her dismissal – even if he or she has extensive subject knowledge. Indications of irregularities are collected during cyclical evaluation surveys or direct meetings with students.

The practical nature of the studies also means that they should be applicable in the sense of close connection with the needs of local economy entities, e.g., postgraduate students in the field of logistics ought to participate in classes based on know-how originating directly in business:

In the case of one of the subjects, half of the classes are conducted in a large warehouse. Therefore, even if we do not have something in place, we have outsourcing; we know what to get and where to get it. We really have nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to our staff and their knowledge.

[R_8]

The respondents believe that the best results, in terms of preparation for independent performance of specific tasks or working in a specific position are, achieved through various forms of learning by doing (e.g., case studies, games, simulations of real processes) rather than by the use of classic teaching methods. A representative of the authorities of one HEI directly indicates how the practical way of education that he and other lecturers use in classes translates into specific skills and the future of graduates in the labour market:

I am a legal advisor, a forever practitioner. [...] When I graduated from law school, I couldn't fill out a personal income tax form on my own, and I had 90 hours of tax law under my belt! Nowadays, I deliver a module on starting a business where every student has to set up a business, albeit virtually. Choose the appropriate legal form, issue invoices, book these invoices, settle accounts and write a co-financing application. Everything that a person in the labour market has to do on their own. And we have a lot of students who start their own businesses after these classes.

[R_10]

Universities regularly evaluate the classes offered to verify their quality and, if necessary, make adjustments in terms of staff, plan, organisational and communication issues. The evaluation most often takes the form of an annual or mid-year questionnaire; however, thanks to the relatively small-scale activities of public vocational HEIs, it is also possible to obtain feedback less formally with the involvement of lecturers through direct meetings and talks with study participants, e.g., during the days when the classes are scheduled.

3.4. Summary

Postgraduate education is important for public vocational HEIs as an element of building a position on the educational market and the image of HEIs as institutions focused on practical knowledge and shaping skills. Both the authorities and employees of HEIs observe changes happening in the environment

that influence the evolution of individual learning pathways and the growing role of *lifelong learning*. They indicate the great potential that is hidden in this segment of the educational services offered, and at the same time, the good preparation of HEIs to deliver adult education, including postgraduate studies. Nevertheless, they believe that HEIs do not and probably will not treat this area as a priority. Public vocational HEIs, like public comprehensive universities, operate thanks to public funding, the difference being that the former receive funding for research and teaching activities, whereas the latter only receive funding for, the education of students. Hence, in the case of vocational HEIs, the educational services offered to people interested in taking up higher education, i.e. full-time first- or second-cycle studies financed from the state budget, are of key importance. Other proposals like postgraduate studies, courses or training sessions, are complementary, and sometimes of a prestigious dimension, due to their relatively small share in the school revenues. For vocational HEIs, yet another factor that influences the marginalisation of postgraduate studies is the limited market absorption resulting from the specificity of the labour market and the limited purchasing power of inhabitants of smaller cities (e.g., Włocławek, Konin, Elbląg), where such educational units are usually located.

This fact likely makes it difficult to reconstruct a comprehensive and coherent policy in this area based on the interviews with the respondents. The development of the range of postgraduate studies offered depends on the initiative of individual employees, their understanding of the market and the diagnosis of needs made on this basis. In this case, one should not speak of "entrepreneurial universities" but rather of entrepreneurial lecturers, as in the case of comprehensive universities. It is they who are responsible for ensuring the quality of education. They are aware of the needs and expectations of adult learners and the challenges that organising didactic processes for this group entails. They make every effort to ensure that both the organisation and the curriculum are in line with the needs of the students. To that end, they use both formal and informal tools, e.g., interviews with study participants.

Vocational HEIs are an interesting case to be analysed. As public entities, they depend on state funding, but unlike universities, they receive it only in connection with their teaching activity due to specific obligations set out in the Act, and this area is the focus of their activity. Unlike non-public HEIs, which are also teaching-focused, they depend on students only indirectly because they do not finance their studies – the state does it for them – and in this case, it is the state that is the key stakeholder expecting universities to cater to its interests. However, due to their specificity (the practical nature of education) and embedding in extra-metropolitan communities, Vocational HEIs operate

at the intersection of interests of several groups – the state, labour market entities, as well as candidates and students. The state expects effective use of the funding allocated to education, employers want high-quality staff and students/candidates want to receive an education that will not only meet the needs of the local labour market but will also be affordable to the average inhabitant of the region.

Although the respondents indicate that they find first- and second-cycle students to be of key importance and that the opportunities to develop the range of postgraduate studies offered are insufficient due to the way the university's activities are financed, HEIs nonetheless try to diagnose the needs and remain open to adults/*lifelong learning*, albeit only within the frameworks of public funding. Thanks to an active attitude, people who have already passed the traditional student age but require further learning may also be invited to access educational services as part of services "commissioned" by the state.

Regardless of the limitations described, vocational HEIs have great potential in the field of adult education (although not necessarily in postgraduate studies), as shown by one of the surveyed units. Upon seeing a declining interest in part--time studies and determining its cause to be the inability of potential candidates to afford them, the HEI in question established free full-time studies in a special formula that makes it possible to hold classes in the afternoon. The enormous interest in these studies proves that the HEI properly recognised an existing market need. In this context, education at the 5th level of the NQF may be an opportunity for such HEIs in the future, especially since they were the only entities in the system to obtain rights to carry out such education under the 2018 Act on Higher Education and Science.

Conclusion: Higher education institutions' (HEIs) strategies in the field of adult education in light of the resource dependence theory

In the chapters on empirical research, I analysed the collected material, presenting successively: the place of *lifelong learning* in the HEI official strategic documents; the actual strategies of HEIs, reconstructed based on conversations with representatives and teachers of postgraduate studies; SWOT analysis and opinions of postgraduate students, which I treated as a forecast for the further market development in this segment of studies.

I was prompted to investigate the above issues by the growing importance of *lifelong learning*, including adult education, in strategic documents at the national and international levels, as detailed in Chapter II. The idea of comparing the approaches used by different types of HEIs resulted from observing a large diversity of the Polish higher education sector (presented in Chapter I) and from the analysis of statistics on the number of postgraduate students within various types of universities. These pointed to a clear advantage of the non-public sector in terms of candidate preferences. I was interested in the sources of that advantage, and as such, I planned research motivated by the desire to verify whether or not this is a result of well-thought-out strategies implemented by non-public HEIs.

It turned out that *lifelong learning*, including adult education, remains a marginal issue in formal university strategies and is not as important as one could expect when taking into account such things as the evolution of educational policy documents at the national and transnational levels. One of the reasons to which I attributed this state of affairs was the timing of compiling HEI documents (almost all strategic periods were about to end) – perhaps it was too early to implement elements that began to be highlighted at the transnational level during that period. Hence, reviewing strategies that will be developed in the coming years in terms of possible changes in this respect may prove an interesting option. Another issue worth paying attention to in this context, the possible generator of changes, is the fact that the 2018 Act on Higher Education and Science necessitated the establishment of university councils at higher education institutions. They are meant to serve as an institutional bridge between HEIs and the external environment, so perhaps the *lifelong learning* needs will be better articulated through them, leading to the implementation of the appropriate solutions by HEIs (Antonowicz, 2018).

I analysed the activities undertaken by HEIs in everyday educational practice through the lens of the characteristics of Burton Clark's entrepreneurial university. I attempted to interpret the decision-making processes, organisational solutions and, the attitudes and activities of teachers and authorities related to the development of postgraduate studies in terms of the idea of university entrepreneurship. In this case, in line with the hypothesis I adopted, non-public

HEIs turned out to be the most active. According to Justyna Bugaj's typology (2016), public vocational HEIs and universities are characterised by rather reactive strategies. Elements such as continuous market analysis to seek opportunities for further development of the services offered, operational flexibility, the propensity to risk characteristic of business entities, but also the use of outsourcing (resources and risk) and strong customer orientation adopted at the level of the entire organisation, translate into significant interest on the part of the candidates, and consequently, into the market success that is reflected by the statistics on the number of postgraduate students.

At this point, I would like to refer to the resource dependence theory mentioned earlier. As a reminder – the theory creates a base of scenarios that illustrate how HEIs adapt the management model to the needs of the external environment from which they draw their resources. It also shows how resource providers can influence the activities of their dependent entities. This theory was used by researchers of higher education for such purposes as, explaining the shift in university activities (e.g., increasing the recruitment of foreign students) in response to declining budget expenditure in this sector.

No organisation is self-sufficient, and this applies to universities as well. Therefore, to obtain the necessary resources (e.g., financial, on which I focus here), each organisation must engage in exchange processes with various entities and stakeholder groups. As a consequence of these processes, some of those groups may gain some degree of control over it. Therefore, it is necessary to have a specific pool of desired resources and be able to manage them. These resources must be essential from the HEI's point of view and significant for its survival and operation, and the possibilities of obtaining them from other sources must be severely limited. Resource administrators have the right to decide how these resources are to be used.

Public (irrespective of the type) and non-public HEIs differ substantially in terms of the most important sources of income. Financial resources of public HEIs are provided primarily by the state (subsidies for didactic and research activities). They guarantee the stability and functioning of public HEIs but also – at least nominally – their autonomy. In contrast, non-public HEIs, in principle, depend on fees paid by students. According to the resource dependence theory, the entities or groups that are the main source of key resources for an HEI get greater leverage in terms of influence – the activities of individual types of HEIs will be oriented towards meeting their needs and expectations. These differences were reflected (although to a smaller degree than I expected) in the *lifelong learning*-related strategies of interest to me and were otherwise indicated directly as the overall rationale of such strategies by a large group of respondents.

Stakeholder groups formulate varying expectations toward HEIs, which. balance these expectations, based on the resources provided by specific groups. According to the resource dependence theory, it should be assumed that organisations will prioritise activities that address the expectations of groups that provide more important resources; for example, the more dependent HEIs are on tuition fees as a source of income, the more they will be guided by the interests of the group that delivers them – namely, by student preferences. Both public and non-public HEIs are in some way limited by these entities and stakeholder groups thanks to which they function in the market. These groups literally or symbolically make individual HEIs "accountable", and as such, individual types of HEIs focus their activities on these groups.

For non-public HEIs, it is a broadly understood area of didactic activities financed by various groups of students, with first- and second-cycle studies clearly having a priority. They guarantee the stability of the HEI due to the duration of the service provision period and student ties with the HEI. For public HEIs, the priority shifts to research activities paid and accounted for by state authorities and agencies, which are also the main source of prestige for higher education entities. In this context, the needs and expectations of postgraduate students are naturally of a lower priority, and public universities are systematically organised in such a way as to support the primary (research) functions and motivate HEIs to mainly undertake research work while treating postgraduate studies as auxiliary initiatives of the academic staff. My analyses demonstrate that it is the employees themselves, i.e. the study organisers, who are the most interested in developing such studies.

The greatest competitive advantage of non-public HEIs is their much greater flexibility and organisational autonomy. Although they are dependent, like any commercial entity, on customer payments, they have virtually unlimited possibilities of overriding the sources of these payments by diversifying customer groups (this elimination of dependence on one, exclusive source of resources is one of the organisational strategies described in the resource dependence theory). In the case of public HEIs, such options are severely limited, as is the freedom of spending the public funding received., Thanks to a centralised management system and shorter decision-making processes, non-public HEIs adapt to the environment more swiftly and extensive cooperation with the economy sector provides them with much greater innovation in terms of the services offered, which generates demand for their services. Both these phenomena are inherent in another strategy called avoiding external influence.

Compared to non-public entities, public HEIs are moderately active in the postgraduate studies market, and their strategies can be described as reactive and

not very expansive. This area is not the subject of their strategic reflection and planning (surprisingly, many respondents questioned whether such a reflection exists at public HEIs at all – not just in this area), and the actions taken to develop the range of services offered are bottom-up and, not coordinated or systemically supported. One might get the impression that due to the barriers resulting from their complex structure, inflexibility and organisational barriers, universities seem to discourage employees from engaging in such (non-scientific) activity. In this respect, universities differ from PUZs, since the latter are more manageable due to their size and the lack of academic traditions, despite being public organisations subject to public financing principles.

While universities as organisations have a moderate interest in developing the range of postgraduate studies offered, this should not be confused with a lack of capacity to do so. University staff members often successfully establish postgraduate studies or participate in their implementation, often outside their home unit, at local non-public HEIs. Therefore, we are dealing here with a partial "outflow" of competencies from universities to the non-public sector and support for building an image, a brand of non-public universities.

The non-public sector eagerly takes advantage of this type of opportunity. The services offered by non-public HEIs are not only much more extensive, but also include many innovative proposals that address the changing needs of the market, and sometimes even anticipate them. This is possible thanks to the shorter decision paths and the extensive cooperation of non-public HEIs with external partners. As such, a significant part of the process of preparing the postgraduate studies takes place somewhat outside the HEI itself, allowing it to offer a ready--made product, the quality of which is guaranteed by its partner.

However, both the authorities and employees of non-public HEIs admit that while postgraduate studies, constitute an important part of the services offered by such HEIs and will still be developed, they are not treated on a par with the primary area of activity of non-public HEIs, namely, first- and second-cycle studies. Due to the much larger number of students taking up first- and second--cycle studies and the longer period of their association with the HEI (2–3 years), non-public HEIs are mainly focused on them since they guarantee the stability of their operations, whereas postgraduate studies are an important but, not primary area of their activity.

Non-public HEIs are the most entrepreneurial. This is not only due to the entrepreneurial, albeit individual, attitudes of employees, which can also be seen in public universities, but also thanks to a system of incentives and motivations designed for them, a customer-oriented quality culture, as well as advanced marketing, sales and evaluation mechanisms. These systemic solutions seem

to be the reason for a competitive advantage in the postgraduate studies market, measured by the number of students. On the other hand, loudly proclaimed advantages and promises can sometimes turn against non-public HEIs. By assuring applicants of the competitive quality of their services, non-public HEIs are getting into the "expectations trap", and as it turns out, over-inflated expectations are not so easy to meet.

Finally, some interesting observations about public vocational HEIs. These educational institutions appeared in the Polish higher education system under the name of "state higher vocational schools" in the second half of the 1990s[1] and 34 of them operate to this day[2]. By definition, these schools offer a practical educational profile that is closely related to the local labour market and has, curricula tailored to its needs. The 2018 Act on Higher Education and Science provides that, apart from first- and second-cycle studies, uniform master's studies and postgraduate studies, vocational HEIs may also provide specialist courses that enable obtaining a full qualification at PQF level 5 (Act of 20 July 2018). Importantly, the Act states that only vocational HEIs may carry out PQF level 5 education and this marked the first time that such a provision appeared in a binding act on higher education. Due to its specificity and connection with the area of *lifelong learning*, it is worth discussing it in more detail.

Specialised education is the so-called short-cycle education, which is defined as the "missing link" between secondary education (PQF level 4, matriculation) and tertiary (PQF levels 6 and 7, Bachelor, Engineer, Master). Until now, Polish legal regulations did not provide HEIs with the possibility of providing education and issuing diplomas at PQF level 5[3], although these programmes *respond to important educational needs, support the idea of lifelong learning and, are characterised by considerable diversity reflecting the needs of students, HEIs and their social environment* (Chmielecka, Kraśniewska, 2017, p. 99, transl.). Although qualifications corresponding to the 5th level of the European Qualifications Framework do not

1 We are talking about schools established after the political transition. Earlier, in the times of the Polish People's Republic, there were several types of higher education institutions with a non-academic profile (pedagogical institutes, state pedagogical higher schools, teacher training colleges and part-time engineering schools), the purpose of which was to prepare candidates for the profession in practice (Kowalska, 2013).

2 Data from the POLON Integrated System of Information on Science and Higher Education, as of 20 June 2020. The State Higher Vocational School (PWSZ) in Sandomierz was absorbed by the Jan Kochanowski University (Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego) in Kielce in 2016, the State Higher Vocational School (PWSZ) in Sulechów has been a non-local department of the University of Zielona Góra (Uniwersytet Zielonogórski) since 2017.

3 Qualification level 5, established by the Act, corresponds to the diplomas of teachers' colleges and colleges of social workers (Ziewiec-Skokowska et al., 2017).

exist in all European Union member states, it is possible to indicate countries where short-cycle education is very popular and well integrated with the higher education system. In Norway or the Netherlands, if you want to continue your education and obtain a bachelor's degree, the completed short-cycle programme is credited towards your studies (Chmielecka, Kraśniewska, 2016).

Short-cycle education is clearly focused on professional specialisation (leading to qualification with a vocational profile). The specificity of the studies – short cycles and high availability – allows persons at various stages of life and professional career to take advantage of them: young people graduating from secondary schools, university graduates in their twenties and senior secondary school and university graduates who want to supplement their qualifications or obtain new ones (Chmielecka, Trawińska-Konador, 2014).

For many people, short training cycles can translate into better chances of finding a job. The employment rate is lower in the case of persons who accomplished secondary education compared to the holders of university diplomas; therefore, further academic achievements may improve the labour market situation of such people. An unquestionable advantage is that education at PQF level 5 allows you to gain qualifications without the need to incur significant costs, and at the same time, to combine learning with work (Chmielecka, Kraśniewska 2016, 2017). Where there is a mismatch between employee competencies and the needs of the labour market, short-cycle studies can be a form of combating structural unemployment. The fact that the shortage diagnosed in the labour market (see e.g., Biernat et al., 2018; Górniak, 2015) is related to the occupational categories for which it is possible to introduce short training cycles is in favour of this type of education, allowing the interested parties to acquire specialised professional skills required in such shortage occupations[4] (Chmielecka, Kraśniewska, 2017).

Another advantage of this type of education is the ability to quickly address the needs of the labour market. Employers' needs evolve dynamically and the demand for qualifications changes. On the one hand, many professions that employees will perform in a dozen or so years do not yet exist. On the other hand, forecasts indicate that tens of thousands of jobs will disappear in Poland (as automation is progressing in the simplest jobs). In light of newly emerging professions, this will mean not so much the risk of unemployment but rather the need for employees to flexibly respond to changes and modifications or

4 In the 2010–2015 period, the employees of the following three occupational categories were in the highest demand: skilled workers (especially construction workers), operators and assemblers (especially drivers), specialists and middle-level personnel (doctors and nurses, economics specialists, IT specialists), as well as salesmen and service workers (especially hairdressers and cooks) – (Study of Human Capital, 2010–2015).

to increase their qualifications (for example, the demand for operating machines or automated production lines will increase). Importantly, a substantial part of the professions for which the demand will increase, require the development of competencies at levels lower than a bachelor's degree (Chmielecka, Matuszczak, 2015). It seems that in this case, education at PQF level 5 would meet the needs of employers who indicate poor preparation of university graduates to start work. In this case, the advantage of certified specialists would be a specific competence profile.

Over the last two decades, public vocational HEIs seem to have become a permanent part of the higher education system. Their strengths, which make up the potential in the area of vocational adult education, include primarily their close ties with labour market actors[5]. Thanks to their relatively small size and structures that are not excessively complex, they also enjoy shorter decision-making processes and potentially improved flexibility and responsiveness to the changing needs of the environment. With a structure of loosely coupled faculties, they are easier to manage compared to much larger universities.

As evidenced by one of the examples (afternoon studies for adults), these HEIs have no rigid barriers preventing them from introducing innovative forms of adult education. Moreover, the opinions of postgraduate students indicate that these institutions are quite well prepared to admit this student group – they do not differ at all from non-public schools which are most effective in recruiting postgraduate students. Considering the above, public vocational HEIs seem to have great potential in the area of adult education. In this regard, specialist education seems to be a particularly promising field considering its alignment with the professional profile of those HEIs, as well as their local character. In the age of demographic decline coupled with a dynamically changing labour market, skilful use of such opportunities may determine the continued existence of HEIs, and the future will show to what extent HEIs manage to capitalise on them.

5 The 1997 act already contained a provision on the council – a new collegiate body in the structures of newly established HEIs. Apart from representatives of local authorities, it was to be composed of representatives of employers, professional organisations and other institutions. The council was granted mainly opinion-making and advisory powers (Act of 26 June 1997).

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Methodological note

The study, the results of which I used in this work, is the outcome of a research project titled "Higher education and non-traditional students. University strategies in the field of adult education on the example of postgraduate studies", financed by the National Science Centre – Narodowe Centrum Nauki (Grant No. 2016/23/N/HS6/00502). The qualitative research planned as part of it was comparative. I decided to use complementary techniques, i.e. the analysis of the content of strategic documents, in-depth interviews[1] and the auditorium questionnaire (the data obtained with the use of the latter technique were only supplementary and a kind of verification of the previously collected material, and as such, were not presented and discussed separately in this paper). The combination of the above methods and techniques and the use of various groups of HEI stakeholders as a source of information made it possible to examine not only the official messaging of these institutions, as formulated in their strategic documents, but also its consistency with their activities and thus to make it possible to assess the real nature of the policy that HEIs pursue.

The analysis of the content of strategic documents was the starting point for further research. At this stage and based on this analysis, I wanted to determine what HEI strategies were focused on, what priorities and goals they set and, how significant (if at all) the group of adult (non-traditional) students and the range of educational services offered to them were in the official HEI documents.

In-depth interviews with representatives of university authorities responsible for the area of postgraduate education were primarily meant to define the declared place and role of adult education in university strategies (at the level of the entire organisation and its units). The analysis of the services offered by HEIs, study curricula, teaching methods and tools for assessing their outcomes, the roles of academic teachers and the selection of teaching staff, as well as openness to student needs (broadly understood as such things as organisational flexibility, innovative forms of education, incentive systems, flexibility, communication, relationship management), among other things, was meant to make it possible to determine the extent to which the forms of adult education provided are in line with good practices and correspond to the specificity of adult education.

In-depth interviews with lecturers were supposed to present not only the lecturers' experiences, but also how they define their role, competencies, the teaching methods and assessment tools applied, as well as the attitude and model of relations with the students. They were also meant to help assess whether

[1] In-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted in the 2016–2018 period.

and to what extent declarations at the institutional level translate into specific solutions that can be perceived as tools for implementing these strategies.

The study covered three types of higher education institutions: non-public HEIs, public comprehensive universities and public vocational HEIs[2]. It covered a total of eleven higher education institutions located in the following voivodeships: Kujawsko-Pomorskie (four universities), Pomorskie (four universities) and Łódzkie (three universities).

The sample selection process comprised several stages. The first was the selection of universities representing separate sectors of higher education (non-public HEIs, public comprehensive universities and public vocational HEIs).

I initially selected public and non-public HEIs (taking into account the funding criterion) and, planned to carry out research at six public and six private ones; however, the final sample included 11 entities. Further, I broke down public HEIs into academic and vocational universities. The next step was to choose the institutions to be surveyed. Based on Statistics Poland data on the number of postgraduate students in the last few years, I selected three voivodeships with a relatively large and stable number of them, which also did not lose students to the neighbouring voivodeships. These voivodeships were the Kujawsko--Pomorskie, Pomorskie and Łódzkie. The stable number of postgraduate students suggested that the situation in the selected markets had not seen rapid changes in the several years immediately preceding the study (e.g., mergers or liquidations), which could distort the image constructed based on the collected material.

I selected one public comprehensive university in each voivodeship, i.e. the Nicolaus Copernicus University (Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika) in Toruń, the University of Gdańsk (Uniwersytet Gdański) and the University of Łódź (Uniwersytet Łódzki), respectively. The selection of public vocational HEIs turned out to be slightly more problematic, as it turned out that not all of the selected voivodeships had such institutions that were implementing postgraduate studies in the area of my interest. Therefore, for the sample, I chose HEIs that were closest to the border of a given voivodeship and well communicated. Consequently, I included the University of Applied Sciences (formerly State Higher Vocational School – Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa) in Elbląg in the Warmińsko--Mazurskie Voivodeship, due to its location perfectly connected with the Pomorskie Voivodeship, the State Academy of Applied Sciences (formerly Public Vocational Higher Education Institution – Państwowa Uczelnia

[2] Formerly State Higher Vocational Schools (Państwowe Wyższe Szkoły Zawodowe – PWSZ), the new nomenclature was introduced in the Act of 20 July 2018 and, again, in the Act of 14 January 2022 since when they are Universities of Applied Sciences.

Zawodowa) in Włocławek in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship and the University of Applied Sciences (formerly State Higher Vocational School – Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa) in Konin (although it is located in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, it is equally well connected with the Łódzkie Voivodeship). As for the group of non-public HEIs, I chose the following entities for the sample: SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities – Faculty in Sopot (Uniwersytet Humanistycznospołeczny SWPS – Wydział Zamiejscowy w Sopocie), Gdańsk Management College (Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania w Gdańsku, known as the University of Health – Wyższa Szkoła Zdrowia, in Gdańsk, since 2019), Higher School of Banking (Wyższa Szkoła Bankowa) in Toruń, Kujawy and Pomorze University (Kujawsko-Pomorska Szkoła Wyższa) in Bydgoszcz and University of Social Sciences (Społeczna Akademia Nauk) in Łódź.

The key criterion that I took into account when selecting higher education institutions was the scope of postgraduate studies they offered. Two groups of fields of study that are most popular among students are pedagogical studies and studies in economic, administrative and social sciences (seven subgroups according to the ISCED classification). Due to their specificity, pedagogical studies have a narrow target group and are, mainly addressed to persons employed in the education system. The second group of the above courses is intended for a wider group of students, diversified in terms of education and profession. This means that when planning and implementing their activities, HEIs must take into account a wider range of needs and expectations of potential candidates. Unless the HEI selected for the sample was a single-faculty entity, a specific unit (department) implementing studies in the economic, administrative and social fields was selected for the research; in the case of institutions with separate structures responsible for postgraduate studies, offices designated to support such activity were surveyed as well. In the case of the University of Gdańsk, it was the Faculty of Management (Wydział Zarządzania), at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń – the Faculty of Economics and Management (Wydział Nauk Ekonomicznych i Zarządzania) and at the University of Łódź – the Faculty of Economics and Sociology (Wydział Ekonomiczno-Socjologiczny) and the Faculty of Management (Wydział Zarządzania) – I took into account two faculties since the services they offered partially overlapped. Public vocational HEIs selected for the sample included: the University of Applied Sciences in Elbląg – the Institute of Applied Informatics (Instytut Informatyki Stosowanej), the University of Applied Sciences in Konin – the Faculty of Economics and Technical Sciences and the Teaching Department (Wydział Nauk Ekonomicznych i Technicznych i Dział Dydaktyki), as well as the Institute of Social and Technical Sciences and the Centre for Postgraduate Studies (Instytut Nauk Społecznych

i Technicznych oraz Centrum Studiów Podyplomowych) of the State Academy of Applied Sciences in Włocławek. In the non-public HEI sector, I examined the: Faculty of Finance and Management and the Department of Postgraduate Studies (Wydział Finansów i Zarządzania oraz Dział Studiów Podyplomowych) of the Higher School of Banking in Toruń, the Faculty of Management and IT and the Promotion and Recruitment Office (Wydział Zarządzania i Informatyki oraz Biuro ds. Promocji i Rekrutacji) of the University of Health in Gdańsk, the Institute of Economics and the Centre for Postgraduate and Continuing Education (Instytut Nauk Ekonomicznych i Centrum Kształcenia Podyplomowego i Ustawicznego) of the Kujawy and Pomorze University in Bydgoszcz and the Faculty of Management and the Department of Postgraduate Studies (Wydział Zarządzania oraz Dział Studiów Podyplomowych) of the University of Social Sciences in Łódź.

This process was preceded by the HEI market research, with particular emphasis on the scope and continuity of the postgraduate education services offered by HEIs. This research was based primarily on the websites of the respective HEIs. This. approach allowed me to create an extensive list of higher education institutions along with up-to-date information on the educational services they offered.

The first stage of the research involved the analysis of strategic documents to verify how they approached *lifelong learning* and related issues, as well as how important *lifelong learning* and such other issues were, and what language was used to describe them. Not all entities agreed to disclose the full content of their documents, claiming that this was due to the nature of the said documents and the fact that they outlined their further activities and directions of development, the disclosure of which would be undesirable in the context of market competition. In two cases, strategy elements available on the HEI's website or excerpts of documents presented for inspection on-premises were analysed. Strategic documents covered a similar, time horizon, namely 2012–2022, though it was not always exactly the same.

The second stage of the research consisted of individual in-depth interviews with representatives of the university management and the faculty. A group of respondents comprising representatives of the authorities, lecturers and employees related to the area of postgraduate studies was selected at each HEI. First, representatives of the authorities of the units conducting postgraduate studies were invited to participate in the study, followed by the indicated administrative staff and teaching staff conducting studies in the subject area that was of interest to me (economic, administrative and legal faculties).

The research began in 2016 with the analysis of strategic documents. At the same time, I made efforts to obtain permission to conduct scheduled

interviews. I decided to carry out the interviews myself. I reasoned that the knowledge of the environment and the specificity of both non-public and public HEIs, as well as my experience in conducting qualitative interviews (including with demanding respondents), would prove useful in conducting the research process in an optimum manner. In total, I conducted 49 individual in--depth interviews (IDI) with representatives of university authorities (vice-rector, chancellor, vice-chancellor), faculties (deans, vice-deans), heads and lecturers of postgraduate studies. The interviews were held at the headquarters of universities in Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Elbląg, Konin, Łódź, Toruń, Włocławek and Sopot. There were nineteen respondents from non-public HEIs, eighteen from public comprehensive universities, and twelve from public vocational colleges.

I planned the study in such a way that the empirical material would constitute a reliable basis for further interpretations and conclusions. The material was obtained as part of two research stages carried out in various stakeholder groups and using various research techniques, which made it possible to verify the consistency of the declared policy and the activities implemented.

Annex

SWOT analysis: expansion prospects in the area of postgraduate education for different types of HEIs

The strategies of HEIs, reconstructed based on conversations with their representatives at the stage of formulating research conclusions, were supplemented with conclusions from the SWOT analysis prepared for three types of HEIs. The material presented in the enclosed tables helped indicate the premises that may enable selected HEIs to effectively expand and dominate the area of postgraduate education.

TABLE 1. SWOT ANALYSIS – NON-PUBLIC HEIs

Strengths	Weaknesses
■ flexibility, ability to quickly respond to market demand, e.g., thanks to the system of subcontractors; ■ high dynamics of development and a wide range of services offered; ■ innovative nature of the services offered (market and competition analysis as a development engine); ■ advanced and active (aggressive) marketing activities thanks to having the appropriate human resources within the organisation (chats, product newsletters, events for professionals); ■ status of an "expert" in the field of practical studies and recognition in local markets; ■ extensive cooperation with the business sector; ■ care for customer satisfaction, "student-centricity", which results in significant potential in the area of word-of-mouth marketing when multiplied by the number of recipients (recommendations are one of the important factors considered while selecting an HEI); ■ advanced and centrally coordinated class evaluation system; ■ centrally managed and administered area of postgraduate studies: a separate service unit with a single person being responsible for this area; ■ high standard of infrastructure; ■ didactic orientation with an emphasis on the practical nature of education (this does not apply to SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities)	■ lower prestige ■ market dependence and lower stability than in the case of public HEIs
Opportunities	**Threats**
■ lack of a coherent system for managing the postgraduate studies offered by public HEIs (fragmentation of the services offered, lack of cooperation between units); ■ lack of extensive ministerial regulations regarding postgraduate studies; ■ similar pricing applied by all entities in the market (regardless of the type of HEI); ■ dynamics and changing needs of the market; ■ numerous people with higher education are present in the market, including representatives of surplus occupations (potential for retraining); ■ motivating income goals; ■ competition in the market may prove an incentive for continuous development	■ decline in the number of candidates for postgraduate studies (demographic decline, market saturation); ■ development of internal employee training systems in companies; ■ strong market competition; ■ outflow of employees to public universities that are more prestigious and offer greater opportunities for scientific development; ■ academic drift

TABLE 2. SWOT ANALYSIS – PUBLIC COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITIES

Strengths	Weaknesses
■ prestige both among direct (candidates) and indirect (employers) recipients of services; ■ tradition, long history in the local environment; ■ stable, public source of financing; ■ extensive and varied human resources – the potential to create innovative, interdisciplinary courses; ■ high competencies of the teaching staff	■ lack of strategic planning at the HEI level (a characteristic feature of a loosely coupled organisation); ■ lack of coordination in the postgraduate education area, many independent policies and no cooperation between units, cannibalisation of the services offered in some extreme cases; ■ development of the services offered depends on the scope of interests and initiative of full-time employees; ■ mechanisms that demotivate employees: low flexibility, a long decision-making process, the bureaucratisation of activities, burdening study organisers with all administrative activities related to conducting the studies; ■ administrative weaknesses and difficulty in maintaining service standards: lack of specialised units for postgraduate studies, many different persons responsible for handling candidates and students; ■ lack of coordinated marketing communication with customers, rather passive attitude in attracting candidates; ■ employees strongly focused on scientific research due to the way the periodic evaluation criteria are constructed
Opportunities	**Threats**
■ statutory strategic planning obligation; ■ systemic changes (Act of 20 July 2018) may be an impulse for structural changes and the establishment of appropriate, extra-departmental units coordinating the area of postgraduate education (similar to interdisciplinary doctoral schools), which could also develop contacts with economic entities; ■ located in large metropolitan areas (many employers and many jobs for highly qualified staff, greater demand for services); ■ lack of extensive ministerial regulations regarding postgraduate studies; ■ dynamics and changing needs of the market; ■ numerous people with higher education are present in the market, including representatives of surplus occupations (potential for retraining)	■ Act of 20 July 2018 initiated the process of changes at universities and this adaptation to the new legal order in the coming years will be a priority for the authorities; ■ employees (and research units) are increasingly focused on scientific achievements at the expense of didactic activity due to the principles of parametric assessment; ■ very active and competitive attitude of non-public HEIs; ■ low priority of postgraduate studies compared to other sources of funding; ■ excessive focus on internal human resources; ■ declining numbers of candidates applying for postgraduate studies (demographic decline, market saturation); ■ development of internal employee training systems at companies

TABLE 3. SWOT ANALYSIS – PUBLIC VOCATIONAL HEIs

Strengths	Weaknesses
■ status of a public HEI, trust and prestige in the local market; ■ stable, public source of financing; ■ strong links with the local economic environment and real operational cooperation in the diagnosis of needs and shaping the offer of postgraduate studies; ■ full-time teachers combining professional (industry-related) and academic careers; ■ expert-practitioners from outside the HEI employed as lecturers; ■ shorter decision-making processes, greater flexibility and easier management due to the size of the HEI; ■ availability of studies for local recipients (no travel or accommodation expenditures, competitive cost)	■ limited range of the postgraduate studies offered – related to the areas in which the full-time employees specialise; ■ lack of a development strategy and systemic support for this area, the burden of developing courses rests on individual employees for whom it is an extra activity; ■ central coordination of the postgraduate studies area is not a standard – it is introduced once a certain critical threshold has been reached; ■ relatively low marketing activity related to the area of postgraduate studies
Opportunities	**Threats**
■ little competition in local markets; ■ good knowledge of the local labour market based on direct relations with its entities; ■ building the image of an HEI based on advantages (knowledge of employers' expectations, practical nature of learning, low costs, convenient studying); ■ exclusive possibility of offering qualifications at the National Qualification Framework level 5 – new opportunities for HEIs (Act of 20 July 2018); ■ lack of extensive ministerial regulations regarding postgraduate studies; ■ dynamics and changing needs of the market, numerous people with higher education in the market, including representatives of surplus occupations (potential for retraining)	■ lower prestige than universities; ■ low absorptive market (small and medium urban centres: limited demand for highly qualified employees, the unfavourable economic situation of residents, the outflow of potential candidates to larger cities); ■ academic drift and focus on developing scientific research, "neutralising" the professional nature of an HEI; ■ Act of 20 July 2018 initiated the process of changes at HEIs and this adaptation to the new legal order in the coming years will be a priority for the authorities; ■ low economic importance of commercial forms of education at the postgraduate level and low motivation for their development; ■ declining numbers of candidates applying for postgraduate studies (demographic decline, market saturation); ■ development of internal employee training systems at companies

Appendix

Appendix 1
Questionnaire for an in-depth interview with representatives of HEI authorities

Introduction

Introducing the moderator, outlining the purpose and context of the survey.
Informing the interlocutors that the research is being carried out as part of a project titled "Higher education and non-traditional students. Strategies of HEIs in the field of adult education on the example of postgraduate studies", financed by the National Science Centre, and will constitute the basis for the preparation of a doctoral dissertation at the Institute of Sociology of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

Confidentiality Information. Requesting permission to record the conversation.

I. Asking respondents to describe their professional characteristics, including:

Their place in the structure, the current path at the HEI, the scope of responsibility at the HEI or department, colleagues and institutions that the respondent works with in terms of the topic discussed (e.g., the central level of the HEI, the unit for postgraduate studies or *lifelong learning*, promotion office, etc.).

II. HEI's strategy

1. Does the HEI/department have a (written) strategy (mission statement or vision)?

2a. If so:

When and how was this document developed? Can you briefly outline the process of its development? Who was involved in its preparation? What time perspective does it refer to? Is it being updated? How often? What are the key assumptions of the document? Does the document refer to strategic documents at the European or national level (Charter of European Universities on Lifelong Learning, Strategy for the Development of Higher Education until 2030)? How, and what aspects do these references relate to?

2b. If not:

What influences strategic decisions made at the faculty? Who makes these decisions (are they made collegially or individually)? Do they relate to the objectives of strategic documents at the European or national level (Charter of European Universities on Lifelong Learning, Strategy for the Development of Higher Education until 2030)?

3. Is *lifelong learning* (especially adult education) included as a topic in the strategy? How important is it in the strategy?
4. What educational services does the HEI or department offer to adults? What were the dynamics of these services in the last five to ten years?
5. To what extent does the department conduct a separate/individual policy in this respect? To what extent does the "headquarters" or HEI influence the activities undertaken?
6. Does the HEI/department monitor the situation in the higher education institution/educational services market (with particular emphasis on adult education)? To what extent does this affect the unit's functioning? Is it an important point of reference? Why?
7. What student groups are perceived as key by the HEI or department and why? Have such groups been defined?
8. How does this affect the activities undertaken by the HEI (both in respect to long-term planning, e.g., concerning the services offered, and organisation or communication)?
9. Are postgraduate studies a significant source of income for the department/HEI?

III. Educational services offered to adults

1. What are the HEI's or department's objectives concerning adult education and what is the measure of their success?
2. How are the educational services offered to adults prepared? Who is involved in this process?
3. At what point has the HEI started offering postgraduate studies?
4. What forms of education does the HEI or department offer to adults apart from postgraduate studies?
5. How does the HEI or department try to address the needs of the defined recipient groups (in terms of the services offered, organisation and communication)? Are they researched in any way?
6. Are the so-called non-traditional students a group that differs from others and requires the establishment of different learning conditions?

IV. Implementing educational processes

1. Does the HEI or department assume that the formula of postgraduate classes differs from first- or second-cycle classes? If so, in what ways?
2. How are postgraduate study programmes prepared? Are representatives of the non-academic community (from outside the HEI or department)

involved in their creation? To what extent? How do they cooperate with the HEI or department in this respect?

3. Are methodologists involved in preparing the programmes? Are good practices/recommendations of experts in the field of adult education taken into consideration? Does the HEI introduce innovative forms of teaching? If so, what forms? Who initiates their introduction?
4. Does the HEI or department cooperate with non-academic or business entities? To what extent? What is this cooperation about? Is it permanent, recurring or incidental?
5. Are the classes with traditional and adult students run by the same people (using the same methods)? Do people who conduct classes with adult students train to improve their skills in terms of teaching adults?
6. How is the teaching staff selected for classes with postgraduate students? Who are the lecturers?
7. Is the level of postgraduate students' satisfaction with their studies analysed?
8. Are lecturers or classes evaluated using evaluation questionnaires?
9. Can students influence the course of the education process during their studies (e.g., concerning lecturers or class delivery)? Is there a defined process that allows students to submit their suggestions?
10. What is the operational nature of the services offered to adult students and the handling of such services? Is there a separate, dedicated unit, office or person that handles the students' issues and the education process during postgraduate studies?
11. What is the policy regarding contacts with alumni? Does the HEI strive to maintain such relations with a view to the alumni re-enrolling, for example, to take up postgraduate studies (are there any incentive systems)?
12. How are the learning outcomes verified during postgraduate studies?
13. What is communication with postgraduate students like?
14. Are the classes scheduled in a way that takes into account student needs and expectations?
15. What is your opinion on the development potential in the adult education segment?
16. What factor will determine institutional success in this area?

Summary and conclusion. Thanking the interlocutors for the interview.

Appendix 2
Questionnaire for an in-depth interview with postgraduate studies lecturers

Introduction

Introducing the moderator, outlining the purpose and context of the survey.
Informing the interlocutors that the research is being carried out as part of a project titled "Higher education and non-traditional students. Strategies of HEIs in the field of adult education on the example of postgraduate studies", financed by the National Science Centre, and will constitute the basis for the preparation of a doctoral dissertation at the Institute of Sociology of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

Confidentiality Information. Requesting permission to record the conversation.

I. Asking respondents to describe their professional characteristics, including:

Their place in the structure, the current path at the HEI, the scope of responsibility at the HEI or department, colleagues and institutions that the respondent works with in terms of the topic discussed (e.g., the central level of the HEI, the unit for postgraduate studies/*lifelong learning*, promotion office, etc.), experience in adult education (construed as education of postgraduate students).

II. University strategy

1. Are you familiar with the HEI or department strategy in the field of adult education? Regardless of this, do you think that the actions undertaken in this area constitute a coherent strategy?
2. Who influences the strategic decisions made at the department? Who makes these decisions (are they made collegially or individually)?
3. What educational services does the HEI/department offer to adults? What were the dynamics of these services in the last five to ten years?
4. To what extent does the department conduct a separate/individual policy in this respect? To what extent does the "headquarters" or HEI influence the activities undertaken?
5. Does the HEI/department monitor the situation in the HEI or educational service market (with particular emphasis on adult education)? To what extent does this affect the unit's functioning?

III. Educational services offered to adults

1. How is the range of adult education services created (by monitoring competition, trends, etc.)? Who (and what) influences it?
2. Are persons involved in creating postgraduate studies supported by HEI or department authorities? In what way? Are such efforts appreciated or rewarded in any way?
3. How are the curricula for postgraduate classes/studies prepared? Who is involved in this process? Are curricula consulted with non-academic entities or employers?
4. How is the teaching staff selected for classes with postgraduate students? Who are the lecturers?
5. Are the so-called non-traditional students a group that differs from other groups and requires the establishment of different learning conditions?
6. What does the cooperation with non-academic partners during classes or studies look like (both at the planning and implementation stage)?

IV. Implementation of education

1. How do you define your role in the context of adult education (lecturer, teacher)? Does this role differ from that in traditional studies?
2. What competencies are essential for adult learning?
3. How would you estimate your competencies in the previously indicated areas?
4. What methods of education do you use in adult education? Do they differ from those applied to traditional students?
5. What assessment tools do you use in adult education? Do they differ from those used with traditional students?
6. What is the model of teacher/adult student relations in your case? Does it differ from the one you apply to traditional students (and if so, how)?
7. How do you obtain feedback from postgraduate students?
8. Does your HEI conduct satisfaction surveys among the participants of postgraduate studies (in any form)?
9. Do good practices in adult education inspire you? Where does this inspiration come from?
10. Can students influence the course of their education process during their studies (e.g., concerning class delivery)? Is there a defined process or path that allows students to submit their suggestions?

11. In your opinion, to what extent is your HEI prepared for adult education in terms of substantive content and organisation? (*In the case of employees of various, public and non-public, entities – do they see clear differences between them?*).
12. What is your opinion on the development potential in the adult education segment? What determines institutional success in this area?
13. In your opinion, does your HEI offer attractive educational services to the non-traditional student segment? Why? What would you change?

Summary and conclusion. Thanking the interlocutors for the interview.

Summary

The dynamics of the labour market and new career models have meant that *lifelong learning* has grown into a strategic challenge in the field of European education. In 2000, it was included in the Lisbon strategy, which is considered one of the pillars of the European Union's economic development. The role of higher education in this process was also noticed as the year 2009 saw the establishment of total education as one of the priorities of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which also meant the implementation of *lifelong learning* at the level of individual EU countries' policies.

The subject of my interest and the purpose of research constituting the core of this work was to verify whether and to what extent various types of Polish universities are ready to put the ideas of *lifelong learning* into practice. In particular, I intended to find out whether the preferences of postgraduate students, which are visible in statistics and point to the popularity of non-public universities, are the result of thoughtful and purposeful activities undertaken by such universities and how the strategies of various types of these entities differ from each other. I assumed that this knowledge would make it possible to forecast market's growth, and that interested representatives of universities and persons shaping educational policy at the national level would find it useful from the perspective of both strategic and operational activities.

I intended to reconstruct actual strategies "in action", not just formal declarations stated in strategic documents. Therefore, the analysis of the strategies was only the starting point for further research. I proposed the *resource dependence theory* as the theoretical framework for analysing research results. It considers organisations in the context of their environment, emphasises their role and focuses on relations and interactions between the organisations and the environment.

KEYWORDS

- *lifelong learning*
- adult education
- postgraduate studies

Streszczenie

Dynamika rynku pracy oraz nowe modele kariery sprawiły, że edukacja całożyciowa (*lifelong learning*) znalazła się wśród strategicznych wyzwań w obszarze europejskiej edukacji. W 2000 roku została wpisana do strategii lizbońskiej, którą uznaje się za jeden z filarów rozwoju gospodarczego Unii Europejskiej. Rolę szkolnictwa wyższego w tym procesie również dostrzeżono, bowiem w 2009 roku kształcenie całożyciowe uwzględniono w priorytetach Europejskiego Obszaru Szkolnictwa Wyższego (EOSW), a to w konsekwencji oznaczało również implementację idei *lifelong learning* na poziomie polityk poszczególnych państw członkowskich UE.

Przedmiotem mojego zainteresowania i celem badań stanowiących oś tej pracy była weryfikacja, czy i w jakim stopniu różne typy polskich uczelni są gotowe na wcielanie idei *lifelong learning* w życie. Przede wszystkim chciałam dowiedzieć się, czy widoczne w statystykach preferencje słuchaczy studiów podyplomowych świadczące o popularności uczelni niepublicznych są efektem przemyślanych i zamierzonych działań podejmowanych przez uczelnie tego typu oraz w jakim zakresie różnią się strategie uczelni poszczególnych typów. Założyłam, że wiedza ta pozwoli na prognozowanie rozwoju rynku, a dla zainteresowanych przedstawicieli szkół wyższych i osób kształtujących politykę edukacyjną na poziomie krajowym okaże się przydatna z perspektywy działań zarówno strategicznych, jak i operacyjnych. Moim zamierzeniem od początku prac nad prezentowanym zagadnieniem było zrekonstruowanie rzeczywistych strategii „w działaniu", nie zaś tylko formalnych deklaracji zawartych w dokumentach strategicznych.Jako ramę teoretyczną analizy wyników badań zaproponowałam teorię zależności od zasobów (*resource dependence theory*). Rozpatruje ona organizacje w kontekście ich otoczenia, akcentuje jego rolę i koncentruje się na relacjach i interakcjach między organizacją i środowiskiem.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

- kształcenie całożyciowe
- edukacja dorosłych
- studia podyplomowe

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From the series of publications awarded in "Monografie" contest (edition 2021)

Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, E., Szczepaniak-Kozak, A. and Lankiewicz, H. (2022). *Doświadczenie pobytu w Polsce w narracjach zagranicznych studentów.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo FRSE. https://doi.org/10.47050/65591425

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This publication won an award in the "Monografie" publishing contest in 2021. The contest is aimed at researchers and scientists who deal with topics related to education in various disciplines of the social sciences and humanities. For 30 years, the Foundation for the Development of the Education System has supported academics in developing international cooperation and promoting the findings of state-of-the-art research on education in Poland. It has enabled scholars to reach wide audiences both in Poland and abroad. Further information can be found at:

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