

**Ružica Jurčević**

# Quo Vadis Academia? Student Attitudes Regarding Croatia University Missions

**Abstract:** This paper presents the results of a study conducted with the aim of examining student attitudes regarding the missions of university in Croatia. The assumption of the research was that student views of university missions are closer to the neoliberal perspective rather than the humanistic one, which would be reflected in the pragmatic ranking of university missions and uncritical acceptance of academic capitalism in four determinants: commodification, performativity, commercialisation and managerialism. The study included a sample of 2136 undergraduate and graduate students at seven public universities in Croatia. The results show students are closer to the neoliberal perspective in thinking about university missions and roles. The results also show there is a statistically significant difference in student attitudes in relation to university affiliation and the field of science.

**Keywords:** Academic Capitalism; Higher Education; Neoliberalism; Students; University

UDC: 378

Scientific article

## Introduction

Widespread recognition that higher education is a major driver of economic development has resulted in structural institutional changes and widening the roles of university, mostly aimed at addressing growing societal and economic challenges. Many authors (e.g. Readings 1995; Tuunainen 2005; Popp Berman 2012; Loi 2015; Cooper 2017; Rubens 2017; Van der Walt 2017; Jurić 2018; etc.) have argued that expanding university roles and missions to meet socio-economic needs and market demands has resulted in transforming university from a relatively autonomous institution into a hybrid organisation which gives priority to generating and disseminating useful knowledge and practical research. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) use the term »academic capitalism« to describe this paradigm shift in higher education, arguing that it turns universities into companies competing for profit, which, consequently, leads to diminishing traditional (humanistic) understanding of university as a place of emancipation, liberalisation and personal growth, as advocated for by prominent thinkers such as Kant, Fichte, Schleiermacher, Humboldt, Newman and Jaspers. A review of the literature on neoliberal ideology, academic capitalism and higher education (Hurt 2012; Popp Berman 2012; McGettigan 2013; Peters 2013; Münch 2014; Jessop 2018) indicates four overlapping processes as key determinants of this process: commercialisation, commodification, performativity and managerialism. Commercialisation and commodification are defined as processes in which education is understood as a service which can be traded, sold and bought and whose product (knowledge) is primarily aimed at solving economic problems. Performativity and managerialism refer to activities by which universities try to be more competitive in global rankings and the adoption of market-like styles of operation characteristic of the private sector.

Although there is an extensive body of literature which highlights the negative consequences of academic capitalism on university (e.g. Gibbs 2009; Karran 2009; Trani and Holsworth 2010; Salthmarsh 2011; Hurt 2012; McGettigan 2013; Lynch 2013; Giroux 2014), less is known about what the main actors of higher education – university teachers and students – think about university roles and missions in the changing environment. Several researchers have investigated the attitudes of

teachers regarding this theme. For example, Reiners (2014) examined the attitudes of German and British university teachers about changes in higher education in relation to the humanistic and market models of university governance. The results showed that teachers, although generally inclined towards humanistic ideas and values, believe the university should adapt to the needs of the market. For Reiners, this was clear evidence of neoliberal influence on higher education and university. Teichler et al. (2013) conducted a survey from 2004 to 2012 with more than 25,000 university teachers in 19 countries. The results showed that contemporary trends significantly influenced the work of teachers. According to the researchers, the biggest issues in higher education are increased expectations from universities, the growth of entrepreneurial activities and the takeover of business approaches to governing the institutions.

McNay (2007) conducted a study with 300 university teachers in the UK with the goal of examining their personal and professional values as well as their views on classical (traditional) values in higher education, including: commitment to truth, mastery of scientific thinking, professional responsibility, freedom of opinion, respect for different opinions and attitudes, personality development and contribution to society. The results indicated that university teachers support classical humanistic values and that they are concerned about the growing interdependence of higher education and industry. The teachers believed that the university has lost its role as a social critic and that the integrity of science has been lost through the commercialisation and marketisation of knowledge, causing a gap between the expectations of teachers and their actual role. The research also revealed a change in the teacher–student relationship, driven by neoliberal ideas. The teachers emphasised that the focus on competitiveness has changed the teacher–student relationship because students no longer perceive the university as a place of personal emancipation but only as an institution which provides them the knowledge they need for the labour market. Moreover, teachers recognised students as the most important actors in higher education and held that, together, they should nurture the ideas and values of the institution to which they belong so that they were not further alienated from each other.

These results are consistent with theoretical discussions about the influence of market ideology on students (Tavares and Cardoso 2013; Woodall et al. 2014; Nixon et al. 2016). For example, analysing changes in higher education in Croatia, Žunec (2010) emphasised how students are encouraged to develop competencies which are market-competitive as a consequence of the subordination of universities to the market. Similarly, Raimondi (2012) stated that the university no longer shapes students as critically aware citizens but only as competitive and self-interested individuals who adopt and use only that knowledge which will ensure their competitiveness in the labour market. This view is shared by Giroux (2014, p. 140), who argues the university is becoming a »hyper-militarized institution« driven by a dystopian mission to produce robots, technocrats and trained workers rather than critically aware citizens. Tomlinson (2016) and Budd (2017) indicated that, although students tend to behave as consumers, they also demonstrate a substantial degree of responsibility and motivation to study which derives not solely from

extrinsic factors (such as a good salary or social reputation) but also from internal needs and desires. By contrast, Jabbar et al. (2017) argued that students, because of the introduction of tuition fees, perceive university education as a transactional process during which they expect a full service, including obtaining a degree. Similarly, Bunce et al. (2017) and Paricio (2017) argued that high tuition fees elevate students' consumer ethos and influence academic achievement.

However, the theoretical implications regarding the impact of neoliberal ideologies and academic capitalism on students are not supported by sufficient empirical research. Therefore, this study was conducted with the goal of investigating student perspectives on the university and its roles and missions. Students are substantial actors in the learning community, and their views and attitudes are among the most important factors of quality assurance in higher education.

## Research purpose

Based on theoretical discussions on the impact of academic capitalism on students, the purpose of this study was to examine student attitudes regarding the missions of the university. The research was based on the assumption that student views of university missions are closer to the neoliberal perspective than the humanistic one. To confirm or reject this assumption, two research questions were formulated:

- Q1 What are the most important missions of the university from student perspectives?
- Q2 Has academic capitalism influenced student views of the university, and, if so, to what extent?

In addition to these questions, this research also examined whether there is a difference between student attitudes about university missions regarding university affiliation and the field of study. As for university affiliation, it was expected that differences in student attitudes are present between the universities since the seven differ by curricula, study programmes and number of students. As for the field of study, the assumption was that students in the natural sciences and engineering would be closer to the neoliberal perspective when perceiving university missions than students in the social sciences and humanities. This assumption emerges from the view that social sciences and the humanities are more focused on understanding the meaning, purpose and goals of historical and social phenomena rather than discovering the truth of the natural world (as in natural sciences and engineering) and thus more concerned with the individual and social relations, which would be reflected in university teaching and teacher–student relationships. Based on these assumptions, two hypotheses were formulated:

- H1 There are statistically significant differences in student attitudes regarding university missions in relation to university affiliation.
- H2 There are statistically significant differences in student attitudes regarding university in relation to the field of study.

## Methodology

### *Sample and data collection*

The research was conducted in the academic year 2019/2020 and included a sample of 2136 undergraduate and graduate students at seven public universities in Croatia (Table 1), in nine scientific fields defined by the Regulation on scientific and artistic areas, fields and branches (Official Gazette 118/2009) (Table 2). Of the total number of respondents, 2035 or 95.3% attended university study programmes and 101 or 4.7% attended professional study programmes.

University	Respondents (N)	Respondents (%)
University of Dubrovnik	109	5,1
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek	344	16,1
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula	9	0,4
University of Rijeka	245	11,5
University of Split	115	5,4
University of Zadar	167	7,8
University of Zagreb	1147	53,7
Total	2136	100,0

Table 1: List of universities included in the research and the number of respondents (N, %)

Most of the respondents were first-year students (N = 586; 26.6%), followed by second-year (N = 527; 24.7%) and then third (N = 460; 21.5%). Fifth-year students were least represented (N = 263; 12.3%), while 14.9% (N = 318) were fourth-year students. In terms of distribution by gender, 42.4% (N = 906) were male and 57.6% (N = 1230) were female.

Field of study	Respondents (N)	Respondents (%)
Natural sciences	119	5.6
Engineering	944	44.2
Biomedicine	156	7.3
Biotechnology	108	5.1
Social sciences	351	16.4
Humanities	377	17.6
Arts	28	1.3
Interdisciplinary fields of science	47	2.2
Interdisciplinary fields of art	6	0.3
Total	2136	100

Table 2: Number of respondents by field of study (N, %)

## Instrument

The survey used in the research included 10 questions divided into three parts. The first part of the survey included questions about gender, university affiliation, type of study programme, field of study and year of study (independent variables). The second part of the survey examined student attitudes about the most important missions of the university, which corresponded to research question Q1. The questions in this part of the survey were taken and modified from the instrument used in research on youth in Croatia (Ilišin and Spajić-Vrkaš 2017). The respondents were asked to rank seven proposed missions of the university (advancing science, strengthening the national economy, ensuring the well-being of the family, preparing for the labour market, developing a free and independent individual, ensuring the well-being of the society, and ensuring the well-being of the world as a whole) from the most to least important mission.

The third part of the survey, which was designed for this study, examined whether academic capitalism has an impact on student views of the university. This part, which corresponded to research question Q2, contained 18 statements about university missions which correlate with four determinants of academic capitalism: commodification, performativity, commercialisation and managerialism. As a counterbalance for these statements, this part included four statements which correspond to the social mission of the university. The survey ended with a closed-ended control question ( »no«, »yes« or »I don't know/I didn't think about it«) about whether the university should prepare students to work for the benefit of the local community and society as a whole.

Analysis of the instrument with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability confirmed the measurement scale had a satisfactory level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.718$ ).

## Research design and data analysis

The survey was conducted online from February to May 2020. To ensure maximal anonymity of the respondents, students were not contacted directly. The survey link was sent to all faculties and departments, which either published it on their official websites or sent it to students via email. The responses were analysed using SPSS 23 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Out of a total of 2984 completed questionnaires, 2136 were filled completely, while 848 were partially filled and therefore were excluded from the analysis.

Results from questions which included ranking and grading were reduced to three categories. In the question about ranking university missions, the first and second ranks were grouped into the category »most important mission of the university«; the lower two ranks were merged into the category »somewhat important mission«; while the two lowest ranks were grouped into the category »less important mission«. The statements about the university missions in relation to academic capitalism, which were originally arranged on a 5-point Likert-type scale, were reduced to three categories. The quantifiers »strongly disagree« and »disagree«

were merged into the category »(strongly) disagree«, and the quantifiers »agree« and »strongly agree« to the category »(strongly) agree«. The category »neither disagree nor agree« stayed neutral.

The following statistical procedures were used for data analysis: descriptive analysis (frequencies, mean and standard deviation), one-way ANOVA with Levine's test for homogeneity of variances and the Games–Howell post-hoc test (significance level  $p < 0.05$ ). With ANOVA, we examined the statistically significant differences between respondents according to university affiliation and field of study. In relation to the latter, the respondents were grouped into three categories: natural sciences, biotechnology and biomedicine (»NS-BIO«), engineering (»ENG«) or social sciences and humanities (»SS-H«). Due to the small number of respondents, arts and interdisciplinary fields of science and art were excluded from statistical analysis, which means ANOVA was used on 2055 students (Table 3).

Field of study	Respondents (N)	Respondents (%)
Natural sciences, biotechnology and biomedicine (NS-BIO)	383	19%
Engineering (ENG)	944	46%
Social sciences and humanities (SS-H)	728	35%
Total	2055	100%

Table 3: Number of respondents by grouped fields of study (N, %)

## Results

### *Most important missions of the university*

For approximately three-fifths of all students, the most important missions of the university were the development of a free and independent individual, the preparation of the individual for the labour market and the advancement of science (Chart 1). On the other hand, missions related to ensuring the well-being of the world as a whole and strengthening the national economy were considered the least important by approximately the same number of respondents. About half had a similar attitude regarding the university mission in ensuring the well-being of the family.

When we compare the ranks of university missions among universities, we see that students of the University of Split expressed different attitudes than students from other universities. While the vast majority of students from other universities believed preparing the individual for the labour market was an extremely important mission of the university, for more than three-quarters of students from the University of Split considered this mission less (47%) or somewhat (30%) important. For Split students, the most important mission of the university was to ensure the well-being of society. However, at the same time, the university's contribution to the well-being of the world and the national economy was much less important to them.

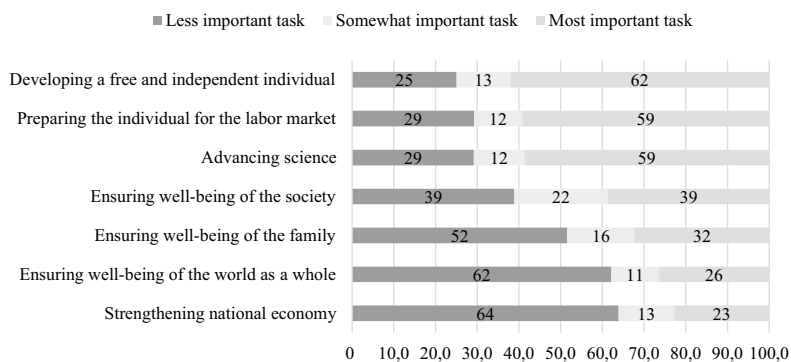


Chart 1: Student's ranking of proposed university missions (%)

*Influence of academic capitalism on student views of the university*

In an attempt to answer whether academic capitalism influenced student views of the university, students were asked to assess the level of agreement with 18 statements on a 5-point Likert scale (later reduced to three categories). These statements correlate with four determinants of academic capitalism: commodification, performativity, commercialisation and managerialism (Table 4). When it comes to commodification, nine out of ten students held that education should be seen as a long-term profitable investment and that study programmes should ensure the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills which are market-competitive. Half of them did not think every student who pays for their studies should be provided with a diploma, but 30% saw this as an institutional obligation. More than two-fifths did not approve of the abolition of study programmes which are not economically viable, and approximately the same number did not have an opinion on this. When asked if natural sciences and engineering are more necessary for the world today than social sciences and humanities, students' answers differ. Two-fifths of them give priority to natural sciences and engineering and the same number to social sciences and humanities. When we compare the answers according to the field of study, the results are expected: 60% of students in natural sciences and engineering agree these fields are more important, while 69% in social sciences and humanities think their fields are more important.

In the performativity category, nearly four-fifths of students claimed they study to secure a better position in the labour market. Furthermore, more than two-thirds believed university should focus on the development of entrepreneurial competencies of students and teachers and become more competitive in order to achieve a better position in global university rankings. At the same time, almost half (47%) were not inclined to a university which encourages a competitive relationship among students. Similarly, 86% thought the work of university teachers should be examined and evaluated more often, while only 45% agreed with more frequent evaluation of student progress.

When it comes to commercialisation and managerialism, the largest number of students (77%) believed university should primarily encourage applied research and establish stronger ties with industry (63%). Yet, they are not quite certain whether the quality would improve if university was organised like a business. Furthermore, 41% agreed university should be equally influenced by the private and public sector, while almost the same percentage (43%) was unsure. However, students do not think university should be privatised. It is interesting to note that more than half (54%) agreed that external supervision of university should be increased. In addition, almost all students believed university administrative services should be more efficient, which may indicate insufficient quality, efficiency and/or flexibility for these.

Statements	(Strongly disagree)	Neither disagree nor agree	(Strongly agree)	M	SD
<b>COMMERCIALIZATION</b>					
Education should be seen as a long-term, profitable investment.	80 (4%)	132 (6%)	1924 (90%)	4.57	0.79
Study programmes should ensure the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills which are market-competitive.	70 (3%)	157 (7%)	1909 (89%)	4.39	0.77
Natural sciences and engineering are more necessary for the world today than social sciences and humanities.	852 (40%)	460 (22%)	824 (40%)	2.99	1.39
Every student who pays for their studies should be provided with a diploma.	1108 (52%)	382 (18%)	646 (30%)	2.63	1.46
Those study programmes which are not economically viable should be abolished.	907 (42%)	641 (30%)	588 (28%)	2.80	1.28
<b>PERFORMATIVITY</b>					
The work of university teachers should be checked and evaluated more frequently.	58 (3%)	250 (12%)	1828 (86%)	4.40	0.81
I study to ensure a better position in the labour market.	356 (17%)	163 (8%)	1617 (76%)	3.92	1.13
Each university should make efforts to ensure a better position in global university rankings.	263 (12%)	424 (20%)	1449 (68%)	3.83	1.13
The university should focus on the development of entrepreneurial competencies of students and teachers.	229 (11%)	462 (22%)	1445 (68%)	3.80	1.00
Student progress should be checked and evaluated more frequently.	567 (27%)	599 (28%)	970 (45%)	3.27	1.13
The university should encourage students to compete with each other.	999 (47%)	438 (21%)	699 (33%)	2.77	1.24
<b>COMMERCIALIZATION</b>					
The university should primarily encourage applied research.	209 (10%)	280 (13%)	1647 (77%)	3.97	0.94
University should establish closer ties with industry.	295 (14%)	506 (24%)	1335 (63%)	3.72	1.02
University should be equally influenced by the public and private sector.	358 (17%)	912 (43%)	866 (41%)	3.29	1.00

MANAGERIALISM					
The administrative service of the university should be more efficient.	61 (3%)	214 (10%)	1861 (87%)	4.37	0.80
External supervision of the university should be increased.	256 (12%)	738 (35%)	1142 (53%)	3.65	1.03
The quality of teaching would improve if the university was organised like a business.	657 (31%)	1035 (48%)	444 (21%)	2.87	0.98
The university should be privatised.	1630 (76%)	412 (19%)	94 (4%)	1.71	0.95

Table 4: Student attitudes regarding the university missions, operationalised through four determinants of academic capitalism (N; %; M; SD)

Finally, student attitudes about the university missions were examined through several statements from a humanistic perspective, operationalised through the university social mission. As seen in Chart 2, the vast majority of students (88%) believed university should be free from political pressure and control, as well as that study programmes should be focused on acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to an individual in everyday life (81%). On a positive note, more than three-fifths of students claimed university should primarily remain a place of individual emancipation and more than half (53%) that it should primarily focus on the well-being of the community rather than the economy.

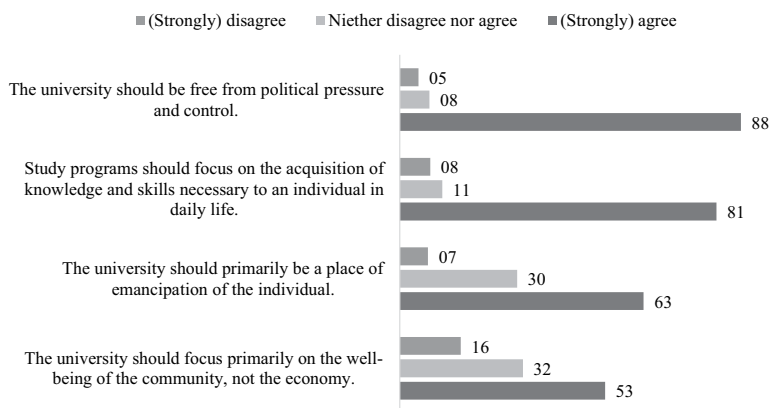


Chart 2: Student attitudes about the university missions, operationalised through university social mission (%)

### Differences in attitudes in relation to university affiliation

To determine the differences among student attitudes in relation to university affiliation, a one-way ANOVA was performed with Levine’s test for homogeneity of variances and the Games–Howell post-hoc test at the level of  $p < 0.05$ . Since only nine students from Juraj Dobrila University in Pula participated in the research, they were left out of the analysis. The analysis confirmed a statistically significant

difference between universities for 14 of 22 statements about university tasks (Table 5).

Statements	Differences between universities*	F-ratio (p < 0.05)
Study programmes should ensure the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills which are market-competitive.	ZG > DU; ZD	7.426
Education should be seen as a long-term, profitable investment.	ZD > ZG	2.476
Every student who pays for their studies should be provided with a diploma.	DU; ZD; OS > ZG ZD > RI	11.127
Those study programmes which are not economically viable should be abolished.	OS > DU	3.130
Natural sciences and engineering are more necessary for the world today than social sciences and humanities.	ZG > OS; DU; ZD RI; ST > ZD	17.159
I study to ensure a better position in the labour market.	OS > ZG; RI; ST ZG; ZD > ST	6.160
The work of university teachers should be checked and evaluated more frequently.	ST; ZG > OS	2.739
The university should encourage students to compete with each other.	ST > OS; ZD	2.689
Student progress should be checked and evaluated more frequently.	ST > OS; ZG	3.113
The university should focus primarily on the well-being of the community, not the economy.	DU; ST; OS; ZD; RI > ZG	14.164
The university should be equally influenced by the public and private sector.	RI > ZG	2.245
The university should primarily be a place of emancipation of the individual.	ST > ZG; RI	2.240
Study programmes should focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to an individual in daily life.	DU; ZD; OS > ZG	6.431
The university should be free from political pressure and control.	DU > OS; ST; ZG	3.511

\* DU = University of Dubrovnik; RI = University of Rijeka; ST = University of Split; OS = Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek; ZD = University of Zadar; ZG = University of Zagreb

Table 5: Differences in student attitudes about university missions in relation to university affiliation

Compared to students from the Dubrovnik and Zadar universities, students from the University of Zagreb were more inclined to argue that study programmes should ensure the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills which are market-competitive. At the same time, they were less inclined to argue that a university should focus primarily on the well-being of the community rather than the economy. These results may indicate the neoliberal orientation of students at the University of Zagreb when thinking about the university missions. This is supported by the fact that they were more inclined to claim natural sciences and engineering are more necessary for the world today than social sciences and humanities compared with students from the Osijek, Dubrovnik and Zadar universities. However, these

data should be taken with caution because the majority of the respondents from the University of Zagreb were engineering students (682 compared to 103 from Osijek, 14 from Dubrovnik and 3 from Zadar).

Furthermore, students from the universities of Zagreb and Split believed the work of university teachers should be checked and evaluated more often than did students from the University of Osijek. Students from the University of Split were more inclined to claim that student progress should be checked and evaluated more often. They were also statistically more inclined than their colleagues from Zagreb and Rijeka to claim university should primarily be a place of individual emancipation. This result, like the one above, could also depend on the number of students in a particular field of study. To verify this, another ANOVA was performed to explore whether there were differences among student attitudes in relation to the field of study.

### *Differences in attitudes in relation to the field of study*

The ANOVA in relation to the three study fields (natural sciences, biotechnology and biomedicine (NS-BIO), engineering (ENG) and social sciences and humanities (SS-H)) confirmed statistically significant differences among students for seven statements (Table 6). The post-hoc test showed engineering students, compared to students in the NS-BIO field, were more inclined to claim study programmes should ensure the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills which are market-competitive, as well as that those study programmes which are not economically viable should be abolished and that every university should make efforts to ensure a better position in global university rankings.

Statements	Differences between study fields	F-ratio (p < 0.05)
Study programmes should ensure the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills which are market-competitive.	ENG > NS-BIO	71.361
Education should be seen as a long-term, profitable investment.	SS-H > ENG	9.044
Those study programmes which are not economically viable should be abolished.	ENG > NS-BIO	23.178
Student progress should be checked and evaluated more frequently.	ENG > SS-H	6.232
Each university should make efforts to ensure a better position in global university rankings.	ENG > NS-BIO	4.539
The university should primarily be a place of emancipation of the individual.	SS-H > NS-BIO	66.987
The university should be free from political pressure and control.	NS-BIO > SS-H	13.928

Table 6: Differences in student attitudes about university missions in relation to the field of study

Furthermore, students in the ENG field, compared to those in SS-H, believed student progress should be checked and evaluated more often. On the other hand, more than ENG students, SS-H students believed education should be seen as a long-term, profitable investment and that university should primarily be a place of individual emancipation, in relation to NS-BIO students. It is also interesting to note that NS-BIO students were statistically significantly more likely to argue that university should be free from political pressure and control, compared with SS-H students.

## Discussion

The results for the most important missions of university suggest students are more inclined to recognise university as a place which should focus more on the well-being of the individual than on the community. Although they do not neglect the importance of university in advancing science, which is one of its historical mission, developing a free and independent individual and preparing them for the labour market remain the most valuable mission. Favouring the individual emancipatory perspective together with the perspective of individual market »usability« results in neglect of the social mission of university and thus its role in resolving contemporary social challenges, which could be interpreted as a result of the direct influence of neoliberal policies in higher education.

Such a perspective is not in line with recent efforts to make university more responsive to societal needs. For example, recent European strategic documents emphasise the social responsibility of university and its anticipatory role. Thus, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a renewed EU agenda for higher education (2017) it clearly states university should not be isolated from the community but should be an inclusive and open institution focused on the well-being of society. Moreover, it is emphasised that a university should profile itself as a »civic university« which would integrate local, regional and social issues into curricula. The latest European Commission report, Community Engagement in Higher Education: Trends, Practices and Policies (Farnell 2020), places a clear emphasis on the wider social contribution of university and the need to engage in community processes due to growing societal challenges around the world. The report explicitly addresses the importance of involving students in addressing these challenges by strengthening student organisations and encouraging extracurricular activities and volunteering in the community, which would help students become aware of the importance of their professional role in society and take responsibility for transforming the world in which they live.

The need for social engagement is also highlighted in the latest strategic documents for Croatian public universities. Despite the visible orientation in the neoliberal direction, the idea of university as an institution which plays an important role in the development of society has been retained in these documents.

For example, the University of Zagreb envisions its development in accordance with all three main missions (teaching, research and service to society) in its strategic document *Strategija studija i studiranja Sveučilišta u Zagrebu* (2014). In this document, a special emphasis is placed on university's serving society and addressing the challenges of the community. In the University of Osijek's Strategy (2011, p. 15), university is defined as a socially responsible institution which primarily serves society and whose purpose is to »develop a wide range of student competencies« which will contribute to the »development of a democratic society«. Finally, the University of Split (2015, pp. 3, 4) sees itself as a university »for society and in society« which »advocates and promotes the highest moral, ethical, social and economic principles and standards in the public good«.

The perceptions of the surveyed students regarding the importance of university's social mission is not only inconsistent with strategic documents but also with their answers to the question for whether university should prepare them to work for the benefit of the local community and society as a whole, to which 78.5% gave an affirmative answer. Such inconsistency points to at least two significant conclusions. First, students are not sufficiently aware of the complexity of university roles and missions beyond the production of certain scientific knowledge and its dissemination through the teaching process. Second, although they favour a university which is socially oriented, for them this mission is secondary when placed in relation to the missions of personal and professional development. Their self-orientation, in terms of the dominant link between higher education and the emancipation of the individual, is devoid of social context. It seems that they reduce university education to a learning process through which they are trained to be, on the one hand, independent from external demands and pressures, whatever their nature, and, on the other hand, competitive in the labour market. Everything outside this university mission, including activities for the benefit of the community, students do not see as an important institutional obligation, which is not surprising given that in the Croatian higher education system social engagement has not yet become an integral part of studying. If this is the case, it remains unclear what the development of a free and independent individual means to students as the most important mission of university – if they do not link it to the emancipation of a socially engaged individual. In addition, it is unclear how university will ensure such emancipation if it continues directing its development towards formal criteria without linking them to social welfare criteria. Their lack of awareness of the link between university activities and the needs of the world, and, in particular, the separation of university functions from the advancement of the national economy, supports the conclusion that students tend to reduce modern university missions to formal teaching and learning.

These results are comparable with the results of a survey conducted with students at the University of Zagreb in 2019, which found a gap between the declarative and real attitude of students about the importance of the university in society (Jurčević 2019). The research showed that most students believed university should nurture socially desirable values, such as ensuring global peace and sustainable development, eliminating inequalities or developing human resources;

however, only a small number of them actively participated in activities which directly promoted such values. More than three-fifths of the students (63%) never volunteered in the local community, and half had never been involved in public debates important to the well-being of society. Based on this, it was concluded that student's view of the university as an institution that should work for the benefit of society does not exceed the declarative level, as they were not aware that they should be involved in this process. (ibid.). Similar conclusions were reached by Ikeda et al. (2009) and Kandiko and Mawer (2013) in their research. They concluded that students understand the importance of higher education for the well-being of society but perceive it primarily as an instrument by which they can achieve short-term goals and material well-being, which confirms them as active participants in the neoliberal transformation of university today.

Furthermore, the results show that academic capitalism is a very influential factor in shaping student views on university. The results confirm the assumption that Croatian students are closer to the neoliberal perspective than to the humanistic one, since there is a high percentage of agreement with statements regarding key determinants of academic capitalism. Students see education as a long-term, profitable investment which will provide them with a better position in the labour market. They agree study programmes should deliver specialised and market-competitive knowledge and skills, as well as entrepreneurial competencies. This indicates a commodified view of university education; that is, they see education as a service which will help them improve their personal prosperity and advantage in the labour market. This is also indicated by the fact that 30% of them claimed every student who pays for their study should be provided with a diploma. In addition, they largely believe university should encourage applied research, deeper connections with industry and international competitiveness, which confirms their neoliberal orientation. However, they still believe higher education should remain a public good and that it is not necessary to privatise university or change the way it operates. On the contrary, they agree that university should retain its autonomy and be free from external pressures, as well as that it should be possible to acquire general knowledge and skills. In addition, they believe university has the mission of emancipating the individual and solving community problems.

Finally, the results of the survey show differences in student attitudes in relation to university affiliation and the field of study, as expected. The results suggest that students in the University of Zagreb and those in engineering are more neoliberal-oriented than students in other universities and study fields in Croatia; however, a more detailed examination of these differences is needed. These results could be a starting point for further research on this topic. This research could focus on examining the attitudes of university teachers on this topic, since they can also be a very influential factor in shaping student views on higher education and university.

## Conclusion

Over the past few decades, the university as institution has faced a number of challenges which required its transformation. They are usually associated with the promotion of new economic and political paradigms, within which knowledge became a strategic resource and irreplaceable factor of economic prosperity. By gaining positional power in the economic and political structure, universities started establishing closer ties with industry and focused more on the production of pragmatic knowledge and market-relevant research, moving away from its humanistic roots. The dispute between growing external demands for university active involvement in addressing the challenges of local and global communities and attempts to maintain existing forms of work and action caused immense pressure on universities. In addition, the inability to establish a balance between science whose primary goal is the well-being of the individual and science which is focused on particular interests has further deepened the crisis in education, which raises questions about the true role and mission of university and the direction it should develop towards in the future.

That is why, in the framework of this paper, we examined the attitudes of students, as one of the most important actors in higher education, about the university missions in Croatia. The main purpose of this research was to expand knowledge about the role and missions of the modern university in relation to historical ideas about university as a place of humanistic emancipation of the individual. The results of the research suggest a need for deeper examination of students' views on higher education and their own role within the academic community, particularly their perceptions of the role of education in their personal development. More attention should be paid to involving students in the community through extracurricular activities (volunteering, research in praxis), to raise awareness of their role in society, but also to take responsibility for community development in order to prevent the development of human capital in which *modus essendi* and *operandi* reduce down to efficiency, competitiveness and entrepreneurship, rather than to the well-being of humanity.

Although the results of the research indicate the possibility of generalised conclusions, the limitations of the study should be considered. They primarily relate to the use of a simple random sample and low representation of respondents from certain universities. Greater representation would provide a more complete picture of the attitudes of university students in Croatia. Other limitations are the subjective assessment of the respondents and the possible influence of the social desirability of responses. Furthermore, there is a lack of previous research on student attitudes towards higher education and university globally and nationally, which could help in comparing the results and drawing new conclusions. However, the obtained results are suitable for indicative conclusions and can serve as a guideline for future research on this topic.

## References

- Budd, R. (2017). Undergraduate Orientations towards Higher Education in Germany and England: Problematizing the Notion of »Student as Customer«. *Higher Education*, 73, issue 1, pp. 23–37.
- Bunce, L., Baird, A. and Jones, S. (2017). The Student-As-Consumer approach in Higher Education and its Effects on Academic Performance. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42, issue 11, pp. 1958–1978.
- Cooper, D. (2017). Concepts of »Applied and Public Sociology«: Arguments for a Bigger Theoretical Picture around the Idea of a »University Third Mission«. *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 11, issue 2, pp. 141–158.
- Farnell, T. (2020). *Community Engagement in Higher Education: Trends, Practices and Policies - NESET Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Gibbs, P. (2009). Adopting Consumer Time: Potential Issues for Higher Education. *London Review of Education*, 7, issue 2, pp. 113–124.
- Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism War on Higher Education*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Hurt, E. (2012). The Marketization of Higher Education. *College Literature*, 39, issue 2, pp. 121–132.
- Ikeda, A. A., Veludo-de-Oliveira, T. M. and Campomar, M. C. (2009). *Business Students' Perspective on Customer in Education*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267556598\\_Business\\_Students'\\_Perspective\\_on\\_Customer\\_in\\_Education/](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267556598_Business_Students'_Perspective_on_Customer_in_Education/) (Accessed on 19. 9. 2018)
- Ilišin, V. and Spajić-Vrkaš, V. (2017). *Generacija osujećenih. Mladi u Hrvatskoj na početku 21. stoljeća*. Zagreb: Institut za društvena istraživanja.
- Jabbar, A., Analoui, B., Kong, K. and Mirza, M. (2017). Consumerization in UK Higher Education Business Schools: Higher Fees, Greater Stress and Debatable Outcomes. *Higher Education*, 76, pp. 85–100.
- Jessop, B. (2018). On Academic Capitalism. *Critical Policy Studies*, 12, issue 1, pp. 104–109.
- Jurčević, R. (2019). *Suvremeno sveučilište između humanističkih ideala i tržišnih interesa* (Doctoral dissertation). Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu.
- Jurić, H. (2018). *Iskušenja humanzima*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo.
- Kandiko, C. B. and Mawer, M. (2013). *Student Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education*. London: King's Learning Institute.
- Karran, T. (2009). Academic Freedom: in Justification of a Universal Ideal. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34, issue 3, pp. 263–283.
- European Commission. (2017). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0247&from=EN> (Accessed on 23. 4. 2019)
- Loi, M. (2015). The Third Mission of Universities: An Investigation of the Espoused Values. *Science and Public Policy*, 42, issue 6, pp. 855–870.

- Lynch, K. (2013). New Managerialism, Neoliberalism and Ranking. *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, 13, issue 5, pp. 1–13.
- McGettigan, A. (2013). *The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher Education*. London: Pluto Press.
- McNay, I. (2007). Values, Principles and Integrity: Academic and Professional Standards in Higher Education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 19, issue 3, pp. 1–20.
- Münch, R. (2014). *Academic Capitalism: Universities in the Global Struggle for Excellence*. New York: Routledge.
- Nixon, E., Scullion, R. and Hearn, R. (2016). Her Majesty the Student: Marketised Higher Education and the Narcissistic (dis)satisfactions of the Student-consumer. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43, issue 9, pp. 927–943.
- Paricio, J. (2017). Students as Customers: A Paradigm Shift in Higher Education. *Debats. Journal on Culture, Power and Society*, 131, issue 3, pp. 137–149.
- Peters, M. (2013). Managerialism and the Neoliberal University: Prospects for new Forms of »Open Management« in Higher Education. *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, 5, issue 1, pp. 11–26.
- Popp Berman, E. (2012). *Creating the Market University. How Academic Science became an Economic Engine*. United Kingdom: Princeton University Press.
- Raimondi, L. (2012). Neoliberalism and the Role of the University. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 21, pp. 39–50.
- Readings, B. (1996). *The University in Ruins*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Reiners, A. (2014). *Humboldt versus Neoliberalism: University Academics' Perception of Higher Education Changes in Germany and England*. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Humboldt-versus-Neoliberalism-%3A-University-of-in-Reiners/8a55857ec72d6f3344099722a6afa5a3bd3e121b> (Accessed on 6. 10. 2021).
- Rubens, A. (2017). Universities' Third Mission and the Entrepreneurial University and the Challenges They Bring to Higher Education Institutions. *Journal of Enterprising Communities*, 11, issue 3, pp. 354–372.
- Salthmarsh, S. (2011). Economic Subjectivities in Higher Education: Self, Policy and Practice in the Knowledge Economy. *Cultural Studies Review*, 17, issue 2, pp. 115–139.
- Slaughter, S. and Leslie, L. (1997). *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku. (2011). *Strategija Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku 2011.–2020*. Retrieved from [http://www.unios.hr/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/SJJS\\_Strategija\\_Sveucilista\\_izmjene\\_i\\_dopune.pdf](http://www.unios.hr/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/SJJS_Strategija_Sveucilista_izmjene_i_dopune.pdf) (Accessed on 10. 10. 2021).
- Strategija Sveučilišta u Splitu 2015-2020*. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.szst.unist.hr/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/STRATEGIJAunist-1.pdf> (Accessed on 4.10. 2021).
- Strategija studija i studiranja Sveučilišta u Zagrebu (2014.–2025.)*. (2014). Retrieved from [http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/O\\_Sveucilistu/Dokumenti\\_javnost/Dokumenti/Strateski\\_dokumenti/Izvjescja/Strategija\\_studija\\_i\\_studiranja.pdf](http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/O_Sveucilistu/Dokumenti_javnost/Dokumenti/Strateski_dokumenti/Izvjescja/Strategija_studija_i_studiranja.pdf) (Accessed on 11. 3. 2020)
- Tavares, O. and Cardoso, S. (2013). Enrolment Choices in Portuguese Higher Education: Do Students behave as Rational Consumers? *Higher Education*, 66, issue 3, pp. 297–309.

- Teichler, U., Akira, A. and Cummings, W. K. (2013). *The Changing Academic Profession: Major Findings of a Comparative Survey*. New York, London: Springer.
- Tomlinson, M. (2016). The impact of Market-Driven Higher Education on Student-University Relations: Investing, Consuming and Competing. *Higher Education Policy*, 29, issue 2, pp. 149–166.
- Trani, E. and Holsworth, R. (2010). *The Indispensable University: Higher Education, Economic Development and the Knowledge Economy*. Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Tuunainen, J. (2005). Hybrid Practices? Contributions to the Debate on the Mutation of Science and University. *Higher Education*, 50, issue 2, pp. 275–298.
- Van der Walt, J. L. (2017). Some Recent Responses to Neoliberalism and its Views on Education. *Theological Studies*, 73, issue 3, pp. 1–8.
- Woodall, T., Hiller, A. and Resnick, S. (2014). Making Sense of Higher Education: Students as Consumers and the Value of the University Experience. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39, issue 1, pp. 48–67.
- Žunec, O. (2010). Sveučilište i cjelina događanja. In: D. Barbarić (ed). *Čemu obrazovanje: Razmatranja o budućnosti sveučilišta*. Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, pp. 67–84.

Ružica JURČEVIĆ (Univerza v Zagrebu, Fakulteta za humanistiko in družbene vede, Hrvaška)

#### QUO VADIS ACADEMIA? RAZISKAVA STALIŠČ ŠTUDENTOV O NALOGAH UNIVERZ NA HRVAŠKEM

**Povzetek:** V prispevku so predstavljeni rezultati raziskave, ki je bila izvedena z namenom preučevanja stališč študentov o nalogah univerz na Hrvaškem. Predpostavka raziskave je, da so pogledi študentov na univerzitetne naloge bliže neoliberalni perspektivi kot pa humanistični, kar se odraža v pragmatičnem razvrščanju univerzitetnih nalog in nekritičnem sprejemanju akademskega kapitalizma v vseh štirih oziroma večini determinantah: komodifikaciji, performativnosti, komercializaciji in managerizmu. Raziskava je vključevala vzorec 2136 dodiplomskih in podiplomskih študentov na sedmih javnih univerzah na Hrvaškem. Rezultati raziskave kažejo, da so študentje bližje neoliberalni perspektivi pri razmišljanju o nalogah in vlogah univerze. Rezultati tudi kažejo, da obstaja statistično pomembna razlika v stališčih študentov v zvezi z univerzitetno pripadnostjo in znanstvenim področjem.

**Ključne besede:** akademski kapitalizem; študentje; univerza; neoliberalizem, višja izobrazba

**E-naslov:** rjurcevi@ffzg.hr