

Introduction

The book, which the Reader receives, comes from the publishing series *Pedagogy of Higher Education*. The tradition of research, scientific conferences and publications in the field of higher education pedagogy at the University of Szczecin is very rich and quite distant in time, as it dates back to the penultimate decade of the 20th century. They have been presented many times (Król, Magiera, 2015, pp. 213–217; Murawska, Wiażewicz-Wójtowicz, 2020, pp. 7–8¹), so there is no need to repeat them here. Suffice it to say that despite the constant changes concerning the practice of science and education in higher education institutions, the concern for the university, and hence the need for research, discussion and publication in this field, remains a constant for the academic teaching community.

The functioning of universities and their history are linked to the history of culture and the development of civilisation. The establishment of *Alma Mater* in the central centres of a country, in capital cities, and in economically and culturally developed areas is a common phenomenon, which ensures the maintenance of the dynamism of science and potential of the entire region. The situation is different in the border regions. The establishment of universities at the borders was of strategic importance. From a historical point of view, it is important to pay attention to the factors that conditioned the formation of scientific centres that were remote from the centre, but closely involved in the development processes of the border regions. This is in line with contemporary expectations that the university should develop and strengthen its relationship with its environment, playing a culturally relevant role. This is called its third mission, which is no less important than research and education.

For these reasons, the title category of this volume is the category of frontiers. While a geographical understanding of it may be imposed, as the category is analysed, it opens up new possibilities of understanding, in addition to the literal, also metaphorical. One can speak of educational, social, cultural, economic and other frontiers.

¹ <https://wnup.edu.pl/psw/pl/>.

As borderlands are recognised, new varieties, understandings and meanings emerge. Maria Dąbrowska-Partyka, talking about the frontiers and their place in literature, stated that one can be on the frontiers, one can defend them, less often live on them, but one cannot live there (2004, p. 27). The situation of the universities on the frontiers is therefore interesting. Have they settled, “there” and “are they doing well”? Or vice versa? Is their situation related to uncertainty, situationalism, un-rootedness?

A frontier is associated with a border. It connects and disconnects something at the same time. It is in between. If we agree with Tadeusz Ślawek, “between” is precisely the space of the university, its nature.

(...) in the university we teach ourselves and others to say: “no, this is not it”, “not this solution”, “neither this nor that”, this is where the essence of our work lies, which is in the space “between” – between one issue and another (...), between the individual and society, between man and the world. (...) “Between” of the university is a reflection on the place of a person and, at the same time, the joy of being together (Ślawek, 2021, pp. 11–12).

The authors of the various chapters encourage Readers to engage in this reflection.

The subtitle of the volume emphasises contextuality. People and their institutions, including the university, function in many contexts. One could even speak of contextual entanglement. This entanglement, so to speak, forces a broad, multifaceted analysis. Only this approach allows us to recognise problems, to understand phenomena. The breadth of the research problem, the diversity of ideological and methodological orientations and the diversity of the functioning of universities on the border made the task faced by the team of researchers from different academic centres in Poland and Europe a challenging one. The book, handed over to the Reader, does not pretend to be an exhaustive treatment of the title question. Indeed, in today’s university, answers to questions become coherent versions of the question (Ślawek, 2021, p. 11). The themes of the various parts of the volume are diverse and can serve as a starting point for further pedagogical, historical, historical-pedagogical, cultural, sociological and other studies. The individual texts can be seen as a kind of monographic treatment of a particular issue, representing a voice in the scientific discussion, demonstrating the multifaceted and diverse nature of the issues under study.

The book is aimed at different communities (not only academia) for whom the university is not just an “ordinary” institution, for some a place of work, for others a place of study, for others a generator of costs, but an environment of cooperation, integration, creating a culture of living together and working together to care for the people and the world in which they live. The recipients of the book can therefore be people on whom the functioning of the university depends: decision-makers at regional level, officials, people who are close to the problems of the regions and universities as their key institutions. Reading the texts included in the publication can

deepen the understanding of the significance of the university, show the complexity of the phenomena and processes inherent in its functioning, and make the reader discover new frontiers.

The volume is divided into four parts. The first part, entitled “Borderlands and Frontiers”, comprises four texts whose authors search for the meanings embedded in the category of the title. Flavia Stara analyses the postulates of frontier territories, looking at different territorial scales: global, national, urban. He points to the aims of the university and writes that the university should promote a particular way of thinking in which knowledge is the leading tool used to strengthen networking and integration. Anna Gomóła asks the question: Who is the university for? After a semantic analysis concerning provincialism, periphery and frontiers in the context of space and values, and an analysis of the centre-periphery opposition, it focuses on a historical perspective, recalling the efforts to establish a university in Upper Silesia. The text by Paulina Wisniewski, Tomasz Leś and Jacek Moroz deals with the vagueness of the frontier-centre dichotomy on the example of individual universities. Julian Stern writes about the lonely university, trying to answer the question: how can universities be together in their loneliness.

The other three parts of the book provide different contexts for the functioning of universities in the frontiers. The second part, entitled “Historical Contexts”, contains eight texts in which the authors look at universities from a historical perspective, enabling them to draw attention to factors contributing to the formation of academic centres that are remote from the centre but closely involved in the development of regions located in the frontier areas. Józef Górniewicz discusses the establishment of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. Elwira Kryńska presents the University of Białystok as a leading university and symbol of the Eastern Borderland community. Ewa Barnaś-Baran and Elżbieta Dolata present the problem of social, economic and cultural transformations as factors determining the formation and development of the University of Rzeszów at the beginning of the 21st century. The path of the Kielce academic community towards a classical university is the subject of the text by Małgorzata Stawiak-Ososińska and Adam Massalski, who show the efforts leading from the Higher School of Education to the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce. Eleonora Sapia-Drewniak presented the aspirations of the Opole community and their realisation, culminating in the creation of the University in Opole. Eleonora Sapia-Drewniak presented the aspirations of the Opole community and their realisation, culminating in the creation of the University of Opole. The University of Wrocław as heir to Lviv’s science and culture is the subject of Barbara Jędrychowska’s analysis. Dariusz Dolański is the author of a text on the formation and functioning of the scientific community of Zielona Góra in the context of borderline. The historical and socio-cultural conditions of the creation of the University of Szczecin are presented in a text by Joanna Król.

The third part of the book, entitled “Scientific and Educational Contexts”, contains two texts. The first, compiled by Alicja Korzeniecka-Bondar, Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak and Ewa Bochno, shows the scientific and creative activities of universities on the frontiers (analysis based on RAD-on data). The second, compiled by Appa Murawska and Piotr Walkowiak, focuses on the situation of university graduates abroad in the context of employability and functioning on the labour market.

The fourth part of the book, entitled “Contexts of Cross-Border Cooperation”, also contains two texts. Hubert Kupiec presented support for the development of emotional intelligence of students participating in a Polish-German cross-border cooperation project. Monika Zięciak, on the other hand, presented research results on students’ cross-border cooperation in the context of developing their social competences.

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