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THE UNIVERSITY'S ROLE IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING A BETTER SOCIETY

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to reflect the changing role of a university in relation to the contemporary society. Higher education is one of the key investments in the future of global society. Not only in the context of the Slovak society, there is an obvious need to transform the education system, which is, in its current form, not able to adequately respond to the problems of nowadays. We believe that the key player in meeting this goal is a university that can be strongly supported by academic ethics as a direct application of ethical tools to the academic environment. Our paper is divided into two consecutive parts. In the first part, we focus on the analysis of academic ethics so that we can then, in the second part of the text, address the "controversial" question of the role of an intellectual in the present public space.

Keywords: university, intellectual, education, humanities, crisis of values, academic ethics, service learning

ROLA UNIWERSYTETU W PROCESIE TWORZENIA LEPSZEGO SPOŁECZEŃSTWA

Streszczenie. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest odzwierciedlenie zmieniającej się roli uniwersytetu w stosunku do współczesnego społeczeństwa. Szkolnictwo wyższe jest jednym z kluczowych inwestycji w przyszłość globalnego społeczeństwa. Nie tylko w kontekście społeczeństwa słowackiego istnieje oczywista potrzeba przekształcenia systemu oświaty, który w obecnej formie nie jest w stanie odpowiednio reagować na aktualne problemy. Uważamy, że kluczowym graczem w osiągnięciu tego celu jest uniwersytet, który może być silnie wspierany przez etykę akademicką jako bezpośrednie zastosowanie narzędzi etycznych do środowiska akademickiego. Artykuł podzielony jest na dwie części. W pierwszej części skupiamy się na analizie etyki akademickiej, abyśmy mogli w drugiej części tekstu odpowiedzieć na "kontrowersyjną" kwestię roli intelektualisty w obecnej przestrzeni publicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: uniwersytet, intelektualista, edukacja, humanistyka, kryzys wartości, etyka akademicka, nauka usług

Introduction

The human's need for education is treated as very important in every society, which is well evidenced by the amount of documents that have been, and are being, adopted in this area both in Europe and worldwide. Every year, states make higher or lower budget allocations for the development of education, science and research at all levels, from primary schools to universities. Actual expenditures depend on not only the country's economic level but also the government's awareness of the necessity of investing in education as a durable and irreversible value for both an individual and the society as a whole.¹ Universities are thus making a fundamental contribution to the social and economic advancement and provide the inevitable basis for sustainable development. In view of this importance of universities for the development of Slovak society and economy, the tertiary education system poses one of major challenges nowadays, as is obvious from the on-going nation-wide debates focused on an analysis of internal and external changes of the system, a search for more effective models of education and new learning concepts, intensification of scientific work, as well as financing, management, evaluation, etc.

To support the claimed society's commitment to enhancing the quality of university education, which goes hand in hand with awareness of the important role of universities as specific cultural and educational forums, we call attention to the document of Bologna referred to as *Magna Charta Universitatum*. This document expresses the conviction of rectors of Slovak universities that:

“ 1. At the approaching end of this millennium the future of mankind depends largely on cultural, scientific, and technical development; and that this is built up in centres of culture, knowledge, and research as represented by true universities;

2. The universities' task of spreading knowledge among the younger generations implies that, in today's world, they must also serve society as a whole; and that the cultural, social, and economic future of society requires, in particular, a considerable investment in continuing education;

3. Universities must give future generations education and training that will teach them, and through them, others, to respect the great harmonies of their natural environment and of life itself.”²

¹ For details refer to: Suchožová, E. 2013. *Globálne vzdelávanie – vzdelávanie pre 21. storočie*. Bratislava, 2013, ISBN 978-80-8052-474-6.

² *Magna Charta Universitatum*. Available at: [<http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/the-magna-charta/english>]. Cit.: 2017- 06-30.

The key statement is the one in paragraph two which clearly declares the role of a university in the society-wide context. Despite a number of positive steps made in the education policy in the last two decades, we still cannot see the developments as a real success. The standard of education process and the rating of universities' quality necessitate reflection in two areas. The first one is focused on the quality assessment of, and possible options for, the education process, and the other lies in the quality mapping of the institution in which the process takes place. Both the two areas undoubtedly involve an ethical dimension.

Our paper aims to examine available options to improve the second area with a direct link to the universities' third mission ensuing from the declared commitment to service to the society. The present paper comprises two interlinked parts: The first one explores and examines who could be an intellectual and whether there are any members of this "species" any longer, and if yes, whether they are still needed for a university and what their relationship with a university is. Should a university be, or is, socially engaged? The second part of this article shifts our focus to a more practical level, to the efforts toward improving ethical climate across academic environments. The core mission of a university is to protect and disseminate knowledge, develop education based on scientific learning and on creative and artistic work with an emphasis on national and humanistic traditions and cultural heritage, and to contribute to the development of scholarship as a part of the culture of the entire society in order to promote its scientific, technical and economic level.

This universities' mission goes hand in hand with the fostering of its reputation, which is closely linked to the respect for academic ethics and for codes of conduct stipulating the ethical values, principles and standards which academic professionals and students should observe in order to achieve fairness, justice, honest interpersonal relations, a good working atmosphere, and trust of the general public. Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica is also committed to provide a broad, multispectral university education and learning; to pursue creative scientific research to contribute to the development of science, education and knowledge; and, last by not least, to contribute to shaping ethical and socially responsible personalities and thus support the development of knowledge-based society.³

1. Intellectual: Where? Who? How and Why?

If the present is fluid, is there any sense in asking about it? If it does make sense to ask (about something fluid), who is asking? And who gives the answer? What is the role of

³ Tertiary Education System in Slovakia. Reality – Problem – Possible Solutions (e.g. Chap. 4.5 Corruption at Universities; or Chap. 5. SWOT Analysis of Tertiary Education System); Draft Strategy for Development of Tertiary Education System (2017); 12 Solutions for Improved Universities; etc. (see References).

humanities in this cycle? And what about universities? And what is the role of academics? Do they have any? And are academics what we ordinarily call “intellectuals”? All these questions have been asked more and more frequently. Our formulations may, and certainly do, vary but the subject of our queries is principally the same: what is the role of humanistic disciplines and of humanistic scientists nowadays, or more specifically – for the purposes of this paper – who is an intellectual?

There is a general tendency to referring to the current epoch as a “post-factual” era: the key arguments are not facts or the truth but anything affirmed by a mass that is willing, often out of emotional engagement, support even obvious untruth. And this era is thus “dangerous” to all and to intellectuals in particular.

We could spend a long time analysing the causes of this situation and utter lots of critical remarks on postmodernism⁴ and sedulously defend the key role of reason, and nothing of that would be unveiling or useless. Nevertheless, the focus of our paper is narrower: it is a reflection on the concept of an intellectual. In the centre of our interest is the question, who can be considered an intellectual today and whether any intellectuals are needed at all in the present time, or the term only refers to a phenomenon that was typical of the previous century.

We will proceed in this section as follows: from a clarification of the ambiguous meaning and the history of ‘intellectual’ as a term we will advance to the examination of the cause of its pejorative connotations, to conclude our thoughts with a reflection on the link between a university and an intellectual, to eventually put a question whether universities, and their failure to properly function as creators of an intellectual spawn within the society in particular, have any part in the today’s unfortunate value disorientation.

The history of the concept of an intellectual is ragged just as is the content it conveys. ‘*Intellectual*’ as the term was coined in connection with the “Dreyfuss affair” when the writers Emile Zola and Anatole France, protesting against unjust conviction of the young artillery officer Alfred Dreyfuss, referred to themselves as the “voice of the people” and “*des intellectuals*”.⁵ In Germany and Austria, an intellectual is usually understood as a publicist or a journalist. France and Slavic countries use *intellectual* as a reference to a well-educated individual who speaks and acts publicly, particularly in the social and political sphere⁶. Antonio Gramsci writes that: “*All men are intellectuals, in that all have intellectual and rational faculties, but not all men have the social function of intellectuals*”.⁷ All those “definitions” incorporate the key element of public engagement.

A more radical approach to the concept is found in, for instance, Maurice Barres and Ferdinand Brunetiere who use it as a reference to people publicly engaging in affairs that are

⁴ Though we will work here with the ideas of one of its representatives, V Bělohradský.

⁵ Lobkowicz.M.2012. Co a kdo je vlastně intelektuál? Přemýšlení o jednom mnooznačném pojmu. In: Intelektuál ve veřejném prostoru. Ed. P. Hlaváček. Praha: Academia, 2012, ISBN 978-80-200-2083-3, p. 31-40.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

beyond their competences.⁸ Similarly, as mentioned in Lobkowitz, Robert Michels considers intellectuals to be people who failed to integrate themselves into the society.⁹ But how is it today? M. Lobkowitz writes: “Eventually, in the international context, “intellectual” is a reference used primarily as a means of evaluating or devaluating others. This is why it rarely happens that somebody calls himself or herself an intellectual.”¹⁰ But what is the cause of this bitter connotation? The answer can be found in J Peregrin: “The role intellectuals used to play in the Europe’s peripeties during roughly the last hundred years seems to be just strange. While those people with their education are predetermined to see at least a bit farther than others, too often they find themselves in the role of “useful idiots”¹¹: people who, for the sake of ideals, keenly assist in leading states and nations to dictators’ bondage...For me, personally, the question of how to be an intellectual who is socially engaged without becoming a “useful idiot” is a fundamental one”.¹² There are more than many reasons for such scepticism and the 20th century saw several exemplary intellectuals’ failures, including Jean Paul Sartre and his blind admiration for USSR and many others.

Is it then possible to see an intellectual as a kind of a dangerous relic? And may such an attitude be attributed to the crisis of humanities due to which all individuals with a humanistic orientation have become “victims”? Even though a research into the causes of the present-time crisis is beyond the scope of this paper, we cannot omit pointing out that Slovakia is notably lagging behind the more advanced countries which do realise the important role of humanities¹³. As a result, economy-based approaches penetrate into all spheres of the society, which entails the value disorientation mentioned above.

Obviously, there are manifold understandings of the concept of an intellectual, so it might be more effective to explain it through an analysis of the functions an intellectual plays in the society. We think, however, that the functions outlined below are conditional on viewing an intellectual as someone how is predetermined to think objectively, as supposed by Karl Mannheim. He thinks of an intellectual as an independent intelligence since he or she cannot be systematically categorised in a particular social class, which frees him or her from certain limitations.¹⁴ This allows us to consider an intellectual as someone who:

1. dynamises the society
2. advocates the principles of rationalism
3. contributes to the society’s self-awareness

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 38.

¹¹ Peregrin.J.2012. Jak nebýt užitečným idiotem. In: Intelektuál ve veřejném prostoru. Ed. P. Hlaváček. Praha: Academia, 2012, ISBN 978-80-200-2083-3, p. 306.

¹² Ibidem, p. 306.

¹³ <http://remakelearning.org/blog/2014/03/13/why-silicon-valley-wants-humanities-majors>
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-innovations/why-you-should-quit-your-job-and-study-the-humanities/2012/05/16/gIQA vibbUU_story.html?utm_term=.2c4436086ebe

¹⁴ Bělohradský. V. 2012. Etika řeči. Intelektuál a jeho věc. : In: Intelektuál ve veřejném prostoru. Ed. P. Hlaváček. Praha: Academia, 2012, ISBN 978-80-200-2083-3, p. 129-142.

4. creates the secular culture
5. acts as a societal and cultural critic¹⁵

All those roles an intellectual plays in the society indicate the intellectual's importance for the development of the society. Similar views can also be found in Bělohradský, who bases his reflections on intellectuals on the concept of "writer's engagement", as coined by Heinrich Böll, meaning that a writer should engage in dealing with that what the moral majority conceals in its moral judgments¹⁶; or as claimed by Arendt, to whom Bělohradský refers, an intellectual should be open to experience from which others derive their trueness and legitimacy.¹⁷ Bělohradský summarises this referring to "democratic imagination" – the ability to "feel others' experiences as our own". A historic precondition for democratic imagination is equality of people, whose source is art as a means of conveying other's pain "as our own".¹⁸ The role of an intellectual then is, according to Bělohradský, to defend democratic imagination against the morals and catechism of the majority.

A moral judgement is a mere judgement of winners over losers, and as such it conceals that in what the winners are similar to the losers (e.g. the Nuremberg process). Catechisms of the majority's morals often amount to affirmative self-optimisation scenarios (living manners). The intellectual's duty is thus to point out at the untold and reveal what is hidden. Bělohradský refers to works by Claus Offe who claims that a modern society consists of „steam and ice at the same time”.¹⁹ Ice refers to motorways, supermarkets, bureaucracy, or the structures in general which restrain the freedom of choice. Steam, on the contrary, denotes rights. As we have already mentioned, each increment of steam is counterweighted by an increment of ice. According to Bělohradský, an intellectual is thus tasked to speak about ice which a man of steam often forgets; or put in other words, the intellectual's duty is to protect democracy.

Hence it can be concluded that an intellectual is undoubtedly an actor (co-)shaping the Europe's cultural and social development. As an independent, engaged intelligence, intellectuals are key "players" in advocating the democratic principles of our society through a critical reflection of the moral majority with its moral judgments. We believe that the humanistic environment provides the spawn from which intellectuals are born; and the crisis of current society is characterised by the absence of bold intellectual forces that would drive the society forward in a democratic direction, and it is at the same time a symptom of the crisis of humanities. Being an intellectual does not automatically amount to being a humanistic scientist and vice versa – not every humanistic scientist must necessarily be an intellectual. Nevertheless, what the two should have in common is responsibility to the society.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

2. Academic ethics – an instrument to create ethical environments at universities (exemplified by Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica)

Universities serve as centres of scholarship and, as was already mentioned above, in addition to protecting and spreading knowledge and enhancing education with the application of both the latest scientific learning and cultural heritage, and thus helping to promote the society's scientific, technical and economic standards, the universities' mission is inseparably connected with the cultivation of goodwill and reputation. This ambition, which is at the same time an obligation, is tightly interlinked with respect for academic ethics and for codes of conduct that lay down the fundamental ethical values, principles and standards which should be observed by all of the academic professionals, non-pedagogic staff and students with a view to establishing fairness, justice, honest interpersonal relationships, a good working atmosphere and trust of the public.

As follows from the foregoing, the standards and quality of the education and learning process is at the same time a prioritised topic of academic ethics, which implies that universities as conveyors of education and knowledge should not focus merely on human competences and the development of individual intellect, but they should also foster the system of values as a guarantee of active self-development and cultivation of one's personality. "Hence education not only provides certain knowledge, but it also is a measure of overall wisdom."²⁰ Accordingly, being "providers of education as an investment in the future", universities are drivers of the society's advancement.

Čmelíková properly states that "we are living in an era which demands us to realise that underestimation of social and ethical problems may cause not only comedown of organisations, but also decay of the whole society",²¹ and this is true for universities as well. That's why we need to remember that if our organisations (universities and colleges) are to work properly and achieve their societal and scientific goals²², they must go through certain changes. And ethics is a means of the developments desired by the society today.²³

Understood as a kind of applied ethics, academic ethics is a set of ethical values, principles and rules designed to guide the behaviours of all members of the academic community, and as such it has become an increasingly frequent and urgent topic in peer discussions. An examination of the essence of academic ethics reveals two interlaced

²⁰ Guitcheva, G., Fobel, P., Kremničanová, E., Vincúr, B. 2011. *Akademická etika. Tvorba a implementácia etického kódexu*. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, Fakulta humanitných vied, 2011, ISBN 978-80-557-0215-5, p. 15.

²¹ Čmelíková, Z. 2010. *Etika ako nástroj morálneho rozvoja organizácie*. Vyd. Computer press, a. s., 2010. ISBN 978-80-251-3358-3, p. 15.

²² At this point, we cannot omit mentioning the destructive consequences of viewing a university as a firm, which is often seen in the academic environment, including in particular a tendency to quantify all key parameters, and the hard economic factors that impair the quality and humanism of scholars' work.

²³ Čmelíková, Z. 2010. *Etika ako nástroj morálneho rozvoja organizácie*. Vyd. Computer press, a. s., 2010. ISBN 978-80-251-3358-3, p. 15

elements: a professional one and an organisational and institutional one. This means that academic ethics does not operate purely as professional ethics: it also incorporates organisational ethics as an important constituent that reflects the specific ethical circumstances of a particular organisation, which is a tertiary-level school or university in this case. According to Fobel: "Organisational ethics encompasses a complex and relatively broad-spectral constructive ambition to change the ethical profile of various modern institutions, set their ethical standard and preserve their moral fitness, and to rearrange employer-employee relationships towards ensuring not only the organisation's efficient operation and its inner objectives, but also the social goals and social reputation."²⁴ Guitcheva emphasises in this connection that academic ethics has three levels: the behaviours of scholars as individual actors; the behaviours of the organisation (university or college) as a whole, reflecting its internal values and organisational structure; and the behaviours of a university in external relations, i.e. in its specific social environment.²⁵

The need for ethics is widely written and spoken about and discussed even within the academic environment itself. The academic milieu and the mission of universities and their activities give rise to an array of questions, issues and dilemmas, and this goes along with a need for reviewing the position and role of tertiary-level schools in the life of the society, compelled by the on-going social changes. They challenge teachers, academic officials, various experts as well as students. The main subject of academic ethics is a standard and quality of the education and learning process with which the dissemination of knowledge and imparting of important skills to students would be aligned with the cultivating and shaping effects of the school's educational activity on the professional and personal growth of students and future graduates.

While this topic is relatively new in the Slovak tertiary-schooling environment (it emerged only after 2000)²⁶ and the first presentations in media were seen only in 2007-2008²⁷, a positive shift in the implementation of ethics at universities and colleges has been perceived recently. The impulse came from the emergence of concrete ethical issues in the academic environment. Most experts agree that for university teachers, they include bias in evaluation, permissiveness toward cheating and plagiarism, teaching that lacks true interest in students, taking bribes for examinations, inappropriate preparation for teaching, sexual harassment, and

²⁴ Fobel, P. 2006. Konceptualizácia organizačnej etiky ako špecifického typu aplikovanej etiky. In: Zborník z vedeckej konferencie: Podnikateľské prostredie a etika podnikania. Bratislava: Ekonomická fakulta, 2006. ISBN 80-225-2199-X

²⁵ Guitcheva, G., Fobel, P., Kremničianová, E., Vincúr, B. 2011. Akademická etika. Tvorba a implementácia etického kódexu. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, Fakulta humanitných vied, 2011, ISBN 978-80-557-0215-5, p. 15.

²⁶ Krupková, V. Kvalita vzdelávacieho procesu s ohľadom na etické aspekty. /online/Odbor strategických projektu, Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy. Available at: <http://www.kvalita.reformy-msmt.cz/> cit. /2017-06-23/.

²⁷ O etických problémoch v prostredí vysokých škôl a dôležitosti akademickej etiky píšajú aj viacerí slovenskí autori. Okrem nami spomenutých autorov napr. aj Fobel, P., Fobelová, D., Hvorecký, J., Kročitý, P., Plátková Olejárová, G., Komenská, K., Klembárová, J., a i.

superiors' reluctance to address the violation of ethical principles by teachers. As regards university teachers' research activities, issues of ethical concern include the misuse of students for research work without mentioning their co-authorship, misinterpretation of data, mentioning among authors persons who even did not take part in the research work, etc.²⁸ We must assent to the opinion that "scientific staff's and pedagogues' violations against academic ethics set an improper model for students and beginner scientists".²⁹ Specialist literature mentions cheating and plagiarism as the most frequent ethical trespasses on the part of students.³⁰

Recently, we have seen an increased commitment to ethics and efforts to support it through certain ethical programme instruments aiming to mitigate unethical behaviours. The most common ones are codes of conduct. They are, however, only one of a variety of options for an organisation to declare its position on internal ethical issues and to institutionalise ethics within its sphere of operation.

As an example, the Faculty of Philosophy of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (UMB) has implemented its ethical programme through its Code of UMB Student Conduct, Code of UMB Employee Conduct, employees' and students' Ethics Committees, Discussion Forum, online training in ethical decision-making in an academic setting, and the Applied Ethics course led by the Department of Ethics and Applied Ethics of the UMB Faculty of Philosophy.

In our opinion, however, one of the most important steps in implementing ethics in university education is the introduction of ethics as a separate course in study programmes, irrespective of their general profile. We believe that the awareness of ethical values, theories, principles and standards may provide useful guidance to (not only) a student to be able to assess what is and what is not ethical behaviour and conduct.

The Academic Ethics and Etiquette (1 and 2) courses were implemented as a compulsory course option within the block of so-called basic competences for bachelor's and master's degree programmes. The scope of the course is 26 lessons (in the winter term) and it is designed for bachelor's degree students irrespective of the particular profile of study. The course provides students with knowledge in the field of academic ethics as a special (applied) type of ethics. Students acquaint themselves with its theoretical basis, beginnings and development both in the world and in Slovakia. Students get the understanding of ethical issues occurring in the academic environment (plagiarism, cheating, bribery, biased evaluation etc.) and the reasons for which a course in academic ethics is needed. They obtain knowledge concerning the complaining mechanism, the Codes of Conduct for both employees

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem.

and students of UMB, and the students' and employees' Ethics Committees as an important instrument of the University's ethics policy.³¹

The course provides students with an array of competences and skills; to mention just some of them: the ability to analyse and apply acquired knowledge in the academic environment and to assess the rightness and appropriateness of one's own and other's behaviours and conducts against the principles of academic ethic and etiquette and the University's Codes of Conduct for students and employees. A student is expected to be able to identify moral concerns in the academic setting, and to evaluate the ethical climate prevailing at his or her university and actively present his/her ethical attitudes in public.³²

The course in Academic Ethics and Etiquette 2 is designed for the master's level. Students get the understanding of ethical issues occurring in the academic environment and ethical reflections on the effects of science, technology and media on the today's society and the academic mechanism. They learn about the ethical standards and rules applied in the process of development and social transformation of scientific knowledge, and the role the media play in that process; and they get understanding of why it is important to speak about a scientist community's ethos and code of conduct. Students get information about the major concerns of current technology and media ethics in relation to technology, culture and the society, and the role of a university in the context of civil society.³³

Important competences that students acquire through the course include the capability to analyse and control the obtained knowledge against the academic environment and apply it in the practical sphere; and to assess the appropriateness and rightness of scientist's behaviour and conduct against the rules and standards of academic ethics, the code of conduct, and the society-wide context.³⁴

While the above courses are rather new at our Faculty³⁵, they enjoy a positive feedback from students, as indicated by seminar papers presented by students and discussions and final colloquia where students expressed their opinions, observations, attitudes, experience and inspirations regarding this optional course and the University's academic environment. A great majority of students gave a positive rating to the Academic Ethics and Etiquette course, and some even deemed it so important that they recommended the inclusion of the course among compulsory subjects for the entire University. The implementation of codes of conduct and the existence and operation of Ethics Committees as necessary instruments to implement ethics in the academic sphere at our University also received many positive responses.

Some of the students' statements were particularly sympathetic and encouraging; here are a few examples: "It is very important to not overlook the important role of ethics in our

³¹ Academic Ethics and Etiquette 1 Information Sheet. Department of Ethics and Applied Ethics. Faculty of Philosophy, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica.

³² Academic Ethics and Etiquette 2 Information Sheet. Department of Ethics and Applied Ethics. Faculty of Philosophy, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Two years have passed since the introduction of the education and learning process.

society and of academic ethics in academic environments, to refrain from scepticism and to enhance the engagement in ethical programmes and the promotion of ethical conduct“ (a student in the first year of the bachelor’s programme in History and Physical Education); or: “The Academic Ethics and Etiquette course has been introduced at our Faculty this year, which I see as a very positive thing since I’ve learnt many things at the course that I never realised before...” (a student in the first year of the bachelor’s programme in Geography and English Language). Young people mostly relate their recommendations for the improvement of the ethical climate in academic settings to university employees, “those pedagogical in particular”, since they are of the opinion that “authorities as moral models may have and do have a substantial influence on young people, since it is more important what a teacher is than what he or she teaches” (a student in the first year of the bachelor’s programme in Geography and English Language). And we will conclude this with one more observation of a student in the first year of the bachelor’s programme in Spanish Language and Physical Education: “Ethical values are all the more important in the academic setting, since they are shaping us for our future professions...We have opportunities to examine fair action, respectful behaviour, honest conduct and the freedom of thought ...This is one of those things which we will be able to apply in any area. We appreciate that academic ethics will help students to realise the importance of ethics and its inseparable place in our everyday life...”

The quality of the education process is generally evaluated against the benefits of the process for the range of graduates’ competences including specialist knowledge, language skills, teamwork capabilities and awareness of the importance of ethical conduct and behaviour in their future profession. A particularly important role in the pursuit of this aim is played by the academic ethics of the university or college, which is increasingly becoming an integral constituent of academic environments in Slovakia. It should be noted, however, that academic ethics still isn’t treated as a priority issue by tertiary level schools. Annual status reports on the tertiary school system pay a limited attention to this topic, and a peer analysis of the current situation in ethics is missing even though it could contribute to the improvement and desired development of the ethical climate in university settings.³⁶ Also, a more comprehensive expert discussion on the academic ethics as such (the expert definition of the concept and subject of academic ethics and of its values and standards and its relations to other applied/professional kinds of ethics, and a more systematic analysis of ethical issues and dilemmas emerging in academic settings) and on its importance is absent.³⁷

We believe that an active discussion on academic ethics (with the participation of ethics experts) would usefully support the academics’ and students’ identity building, and it could eventually help to make academic ethics an integral part of the academic environment. In

³⁶ Olejárová Platková, G. 2011. Stav a perspektívy akademickej etiky na slovenských vysokých školách (analýza cez etické kódexy). In: Fobelová, D. a kol. 2011. Aplikovaná etika a profesionálna prax. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici, Fakulta humanitných vied. ISBN 978-80-557-0217-9, p. 151-162.

³⁷ Ibidem.

view of our own experience, we can state that the implementation of the Academic Ethics and Etiquette course has, at least, helped us to establish a functional dialogue with the direct actors from the academic environment, focused on its ethical reflection.

3. Conclusion

We are of the opinion that universities play, or should play, a key role in the dynamic development of the today's society. Values that are typical of the academic milieu, such as honesty, loyalty, responsibility, excellence, humanity, truth and education are the ones which should increasingly be integrated into the public conscience and should provide the mythic lighthouse which is more and more sought for desperately in this era lacking any non-destructive value orientation. As we have already mentioned in the text above, not every humanistic scientist must necessarily be an intellectual, but with regard to the call for social responsibility, every humanistic scientist should be a socially and civically committed actor. We are experiencing consequences of the absence of such commitment today; one example is the immense growth of extremism among young people, many of which are fresh graduates from universities and colleges. It is not necessary to further detail what light this casts on universities and other educational institutions. As humanistic scientists, we may constantly publish our observations and engage in extensive mutual discussions about these concerns; but if our learning is not manifested to the benefit of the entire society, it will amount to our failure.

As a matter of course, if universities want to carry out their mission, they must "reform" themselves. Academic ethics may serve as a driver of such renaissance, and accordingly, it should guarantee proper intellectual qualities of scientists as well as students and graduates. Another possible way of interlinking universities with the civil society in the context of enhancing students' social engagement and anchoring key prosocial values is, for example, through the didactic strategy referred to as service learning.³⁸ Universities cannot be operated as a firm, and scientists, those humanistic ones in particular, should not carry out their scientific and pedagogical mission in a business fashion.³⁹ At least so if we don't want to see the recurring of the past mistakes which were often attributed to a failure of Europe's intellectual forces.

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³⁸ Broznanová Gregorová. A. 2014. Service learning Inovatívna stratégia učenia sa. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici, 2014. ISBN 978-80-557-0829-4, p. 200.

³⁹ This is also evidenced by documents concerning the development of science and education at the university and college level, such as the Draft Strategy for Development of the Slovak Tertiary Education System, etc.

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