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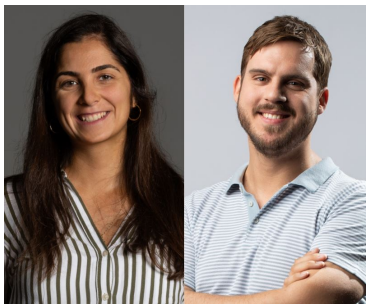
Fanni Maszlag – Barnabás Gulyás: Teaching community coordination in higher education - a turbulent context



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Causes of change in higher education

The massification of higher education together with the diversification of activities within higher education institutions such as lifelong learning, and the increasing role of non-traditional forms of education (distance learning, e-learning, m-learning, blended learning) pose challenges for educators. These challenges affect both the structure of education and the competences that educators need to acquire. The rapid development of technological innovations impacts all levels of education, but the changes in higher education particularly demonstrate the profound effects of these advancements (Polónyi, 2018). New digital tools, platforms, and AI-based solutions are transforming the functioning of educational systems, the interactions between teachers and students, and learning methods. Higher education institutions are increasingly required to adapt to these changes to maintain their competitiveness and meet the needs of 21st-century students. In this paper, we examine the impact of technological innovations on higher education, highlighting the role of digital platforms, e-learning, and artificial intelligence in pedagogical processes (Halász, 2013, 2018).

According to mainstream opinions in higher education research, the higher education system in developed countries has been significantly impacted in recent decades by the increase in student enrollment, the transformation of research structures, the decline in state funding, the changing role of the state, and the intensifying competition (Barakonyi, 2004b; OECD, 2008; Halász, 2009). As a result of these changes, universities and colleges have not only introduced new technologies and services, such as IT systems, career counseling offices, or student services, but have also increasingly integrated management methods from the business world. This includes the use of controlling, human resource management, strategic planning, quality assurance, and performance measurement systems (Sporn, 2006).

Technological innovations

The rise of digital platforms and online learning

Digital platforms, which support the accessibility of educational content and interactivity, have revolutionized the world of higher education. Online learning, popularized by platforms like Coursera, edX, FutureLearn, and Udemy, has made education widely available, particularly for students who, due to geographical or time constraints, could not enroll in traditional universities (Al-Atabi, 2020). These platforms not only provide access to high-quality educational materials but also offer interactive learning experiences through online communities. In addition to traditional forms of education, online courses allow students to choose their own pace and tailor their learning to their needs and lifestyle. In the “flipped classroom” model, for example, students can watch lectures at home and focus on practical application and problem-solving during class time (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). This approach can make lectures more effective and improve learning outcomes by allowing students more time for in-depth practice and discussions with the instructor. Moreover, digital platforms allow for richer educational content. Furthermore, this approach suggests to facilitate an alternative learning process by embracing and challenging the same time the role of teachers and the use of class hours, it requires system-level conditions to reach its goals also at an individual level, in other words, this approach requires sufficient resources and time allocation for enhanced interaction and quality.

Learning based on videos, interactive simulations, and digital tools enhances engagement and deepens understanding. In addition, online discussions, forums, and group work among students help ensure that education is not one-directional but builds on active student participation, which is a key pedagogical principle. However, it is important to note that online learning also comes with challenges. Some research has shown that the lack of in-person presence can negatively impact motivation and requires greater independence and discipline from students (Means et al., 2013). Moreover, online education is dependent on technological infrastructure, which can pose problems, especially in developing countries, where not all students have access to reliable internet or digital devices (Selwyn, 2010).

Artificial intelligence and personalised education

The role of artificial intelligence in higher education is becoming increasingly prominent. AI-based systems can offer personalized educational content that takes into account students’ learning styles, progress, and difficulties. Adaptive learning platforms, such as Knewton or Smart Sparrow, provide real-time feedback to students, continuously adjusting to their individual needs (Luckin et al., 2016). This is particularly important for personalized education, as each student learns effectively at different paces and through different methods. AI-based analytics systems also enable continuous monitoring of students’ performance. With learning analytics, educators can gain a detailed picture of students’ progress, identify potential difficulties, and intervene promptly if necessary (Siemens & Baker, 2012). This approach not only supports students’ individual development but also helps reduce dropout rates, as instructors can more accurately identify which students need more attention.

Another application of AI is the emergence of chatbots and automated educational assistants. These tools can answer administrative questions, help students quickly access study-related

information, and even respond to questions related to the course material. Georgia State University's chatbot, Pounce, for instance, has helped hundreds of students stay on track by reminding them of deadlines and answering questions (Aoun, 2017). Such AI tools reduce administrative burdens on universities and help students navigate the educational system more easily. In the long term, AI technology could make the learning process entirely personalized, as learning paths continuously adapt to students' needs. With the advancements in AI, the future of higher education is likely to focus more on the individual needs of students, resulting in increased educational efficiency.

Distance and hybrid learning

Distance and hybrid learning models are among the most important results of technological innovations in higher education. The COVID-19 pandemic forced higher education institutions to quickly shift to distance learning, highlighting the central role of technology in the sustainability of education (Polónyi 2022). Hybrid learning models, which combine online and in-person instruction, open new perspectives in learning and allow education to be more flexible and personalized (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). One advantage of hybrid learning is that it can adapt to students' different learning styles and schedules. This approach allows students to follow classes online while using in-person sessions to deepen their understanding of theoretical knowledge. Instructors gain greater flexibility in processing course material, as digital tools and platforms help them better support students' individual needs. Hybrid models also allow instructors to take advantage of technological tools to enrich education. Online tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet enable synchronized distance learning while offering interactive features that enhance the educational experience. These platforms allow students to participate in lectures in real time and actively engage in discussions, while instructors can use interactive tasks and simulations to make classes more dynamic (Picciano, 2009). However, it is important to note that successfully implementing distance and hybrid models requires significant investment and thoughtful strategy. Institutions must provide technological infrastructure and offer proper training for educators to take full advantage of the opportunities technology offers. Furthermore, it is essential that students have the necessary digital skills to use these technological tools effectively.

The widespread application of technological innovations presents new challenges for higher education institutions. Introducing new technologies not only imposes financial burdens but also necessitates developing the technological infrastructure and adequately training educators to use new tools effectively (Selwyn, 2010). In the future, higher education will likely need to focus more on technological developments. Global competition and growing student demand are pushing institutions to create more flexible, inclusive, and effective learning environments. The continuous advancement of technology provides opportunities for the learning process to become more dynamic and personalized, thereby increasing the efficiency and accessibility of higher education.

Global and local challenges (European policy changes)

Higher education is undergoing a dramatic transformation worldwide, influenced by various global and local factors. European higher education is also part of this ongoing transformation, which is becoming increasingly dynamic and complex in light of policy changes. European higher education

systems must respond to various global challenges, such as digitalization, global competition, climate change, and the management of international student mobility. At the same time, local challenges like funding issues, labour market demands, and addressing educational inequalities play a significant role. The European Union’s policy guidelines and initiatives help shape the future of higher education, aiming to create a more sustainable, inclusive, and competitive educational system.

Globalization and higher education

Globalization is one of the most important factors shaping the transformation of higher education. The intensification of global competition encourages European universities to be competitive on an international level. Universities today are not only competing for regional or national students but also on a global scale. This increases pressure on educational institutions to make their programs more attractive, improve research infrastructure, and strengthen international cooperation.

With the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), European countries aim to create a more unified and transparent educational system through the harmonization of higher education. Within the EHEA framework, the Bologna Process has played a significant role in the reform of higher education, facilitating the introduction of a three-tiered education system (bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral) and the widespread adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). This has eased student mobility and contributed to the international recognition of degrees (Witte, 2006).

One of the biggest global challenges is managing international student mobility. EU programs such as Erasmus+ provide significant support for facilitating the mobility of students, educators, and researchers. The success of the Erasmus+ program has greatly contributed to making European universities more attractive to international students and has fostered cooperation among educational systems. However, Brexit and other geopolitical developments present new challenges for the European higher education system, particularly regarding relationships between British universities and the EU (Fleming, 2020).

Digitalization and technological challenges

The rapid advancement of digitalization fundamentally shapes the functioning of higher education systems. The proliferation of online learning platforms, distance education, and hybrid learning models offers new opportunities for making education more flexible, but also presents significant challenges. During the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions were forced to rapidly transition to online education, highlighting the importance of digital infrastructure while also revealing technological inequalities (Marinoni et al., 2020).

European higher education must adapt to digital transformation, particularly in the application of artificial intelligence, data science, and digital analytics. Among the EU’s policy objectives is the development of digital skills and the strengthening of universities' digital infrastructure. For instance, the „Digital education action plan 2021-2027” sets specific goals for advancing digital education, emphasizing the enhancement of digital competencies among teachers and students (European Commission, 2020).

Educational inequalities, particularly the digital divide, pose serious challenges for European higher education systems. Not all students have access to adequate technological tools or stable internet connections, which can hinder successful participation in online education. European policy initiatives aim to reduce these inequalities, for example, by increasing funding for disadvantaged students (Halász, 2013, 2018).

Sustainability and social responsibility

European higher education institutions are placing increasing emphasis on sustainability and social responsibility. Addressing climate change and sustainability issues has become crucial in universities' strategies, as younger generations are exerting more pressure on educational systems to tackle these global problems. EU policies also support the transition to sustainability in education and encourage institutions to integrate sustainability principles into teaching and research.

European universities are launching initiatives aimed at developing sustainability skills and supporting the research of green technologies and solutions (Hrubos, 2014). Under the framework of the „European Green Deal," the European Commission aims for higher education institutions to take a leading role in promoting sustainable development, particularly in combating climate change and developing a sustainable economy (European Commission, 2019).

Local challenges: funding and labor market demands

According to Polónyi (2010), one of the most important local challenges facing European higher education is the issue of funding. In many countries, due to declining state support, universities are facing increasing financial burdens. The rising costs of education, as well as the need to sustain research and development activities, demand new solutions from higher education institutions, such as industrial collaborations and engaging the private sector (Brennan et al., 2013). Such collaborations not only help diversify funding sources but also contribute to the transfer of knowledge and technology, which is fundamentally important for economic development (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). European policies play an important role in strengthening the connection between labor market demands and higher education. The EU aims to enhance graduates' competitiveness in the global labor market and support the innovative involvement of higher education institutions in economic development (Salmi, 2020). The „New skills agenda for Europe" aims for higher education to place greater emphasis on skill development and adapting to labor market needs (European Commission, 2016). Through these initiatives, higher education can respond to rapidly changing labor market expectations and train graduates who are competitive in the global market.

Higher education stands at the crossroads of global and local challenges, the resolution of which is essential for the competitiveness and sustainability of 21st-century higher education systems (Polónyi 2017). Europe's policy initiatives play a significant role in enabling higher education to adapt to global trends while considering local characteristics and challenges. Issues of sustainability, digitalization, international mobility, and labor market demands are all determining factors in shaping the future of higher education.

Competency-based education and interdisciplinary approaches (LLL)

Competency-based education and interdisciplinary approaches are increasingly playing important roles in higher education and the process of lifelong learning (LLL). Adapting to modern labor market demands, along with a rapidly changing social and technological environment, requires that education not only be limited to the transmission of knowledge but also focus on developing students' practical skills and competencies (Schneider et al., 2019). This approach is particularly significant in the context of lifelong learning, where learning does not end within formal educational frameworks but occurs continuously as part of professional and personal development (Candy, 1991).

The Importance of competency-based education

Competency-based education is a pedagogical approach that focuses on the development of learners' practical abilities and skills alongside theoretical knowledge. It emphasizes the application of knowledge in real-world contexts, enabling students to understand not just the "what" but also the "how" of their learning. The European Commission underscores that developing competencies is a crucial element for adapting to economic and social challenges, thereby equipping learners to thrive in dynamic environments. The European Union's "New skills agenda for Europe" highlights the importance of developing labour market competencies and skills, particularly in foundational areas such as digital literacy, and entrepreneurship, as well as problem-solving and collaboration skills (European Commission, 2016).

Competency-based education is designed to be learner-centred, allowing individuals to progress at their own pace and take ownership of their learning journeys. This approach provides an opportunity for learners not only to acquire theoretical knowledge but also to develop practical, real-world applicable skills (Mulder, 2017). It emphasizes mastery of competencies over time spent in a classroom, thus fostering a deeper understanding of the material. Furthermore, competency-based education promotes learners' autonomy and personal accountability in the learning process, which helps adults navigate the constantly changing labour market with greater confidence (Tynjälä, 2008).

This focus on self-directed learning also prepares students to engage in lifelong learning, as they become accustomed to identifying their own educational needs and seeking resources to address them. Additionally, competency-based education can enhance motivation and engagement, as students see a direct correlation between their efforts and tangible outcomes in their personal and professional lives.

The rise of interdisciplinary approaches

Interdisciplinary approaches are also gaining prominence in higher education and LLL programs. The complex problems of the 21st century—such as climate change, digitalization, globalization, and social inequalities—cannot be solved within the confines of a single discipline (Repko, 2012). As challenges become increasingly interconnected, the need for holistic solutions has driven the

adoption of interdisciplinary curricula. Interdisciplinarity allows students to combine tools and approaches from various fields of study, enabling them to find more complex and innovative solutions to challenges (Frodeman, 2014).

In competency-based education, an interdisciplinary approach can be particularly beneficial as it fosters the development of a wide range of skills among students, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities. By working on interdisciplinary projects, students learn to appreciate diverse perspectives and methodologies, enhancing their ability to tackle multifaceted problems. Interdisciplinary projects and programs allow students to solve real-world problems and integrate knowledge acquired from different disciplines. This type of education fosters the development of transversal skills, which are crucial in the rapidly changing labour market (Repko et al., 2020).

The popularity of interdisciplinary approaches is also increasing in the fields of sustainable development and social innovation, where holistic thinking is particularly important (Miller, 2017). Such programs are designed to cultivate systems thinking, enabling learners to understand the interconnectedness of various societal challenges. LLL programs that employ an interdisciplinary perspective allow adults to prepare comprehensively for the challenges of the labor market and to better understand global issues such as climate change, health crises, or digital transformation (Cummings, 2021).

Integration of LLL and competency-based education

Within the framework of lifelong learning, competency-based and interdisciplinary approaches are closely related, as both aim to ensure that learners can continuously develop their skills and competencies throughout their lives. This continuous learning environment supports the idea that education does not stop after formal schooling but is an ongoing process throughout one's career and personal life. In the various stages of LLL, learners can integrate knowledge acquired from many different fields of study, which they use to achieve their labour market or personal goals (European Commission, 2007).

This type of education promotes flexibility, which is essential in the 21st-century labour market, where continuous learning and the acquisition of new skills are key to success. The ability to pivot between disciplines and adapt to new challenges enhances individuals’ resilience in the face of uncertainty. As individuals train in different disciplines, they will be better able to adapt to labor market changes and enhance their employability (Illeris, 2016).

The integration of competency-based education and interdisciplinary approaches in lifelong learning is one of the most significant trends in modern educational systems. This type of education promotes the development of students’ practical skills and complex problem-solving abilities, which are essential in the 21st-century labour market. Moreover, it encourages the cultivation of a growth mindset, where learners view challenges as opportunities for development. European policy initiatives support the rise of such educational models, which are increasingly being applied within LLL programs, ensuring that education remains relevant in an ever-evolving global landscape.

The role of universities in professional education – The third mission of institutions

The third mission of universities plays an increasingly important role in professional education, as higher education institutions are no longer limited to the traditional domains of education and research. They are now actively involved in social, economic, and regional development processes. Universities not only provide knowledge to students but also contribute directly to the development of local and international communities, sustainable economic growth, and the creation of social innovations.

The concept and significance of the third mission

The third mission of universities, in addition to education and research, is a set of activities that highlight the direct social and economic impact of higher education institutions. This concept became widely recognized in the 1990s when the role of universities evolved under the influence of globalization and digitalization. Beyond their traditional functions—transmitting knowledge and generating new insights—universities increasingly focus on responding to the immediate challenges of society and contributing to economic development. The third mission can take various forms, including the model of entrepreneurial universities, regional economic development, technology and knowledge transfer, as well as social innovations.

Etzkowitz (2014) introduced the concept of the „Triple Helix" model, which posits that the collaboration between universities, industry, and government plays a critical role in fostering innovation and economic growth. In this model, universities are not passive actors but active intermediaries, making the results of education and research directly accessible to economic stakeholders (Leydesdorff, 2013). The European Union has also recognized the importance of the third mission of universities, supporting closer cooperation between universities and society through various policy initiatives. The „Innovative Universities" initiative aims to transform European universities into innovation hubs where research results can be directly utilized by businesses and society (European Commission, 2015). The third mission not only supports the development of an innovation ecosystem but also plays a key role in adapting to labour market needs.

The role of universities in professional education

Professional education is one of the most important functions of universities, as they provide essential human resources for society and the economy. Universities continuously adjust their training programs to the changing demands of the labour market to ensure that students acquire the competencies and skills that meet the expectations of economic actors. One of the most important aspects of the third mission of universities is building closer cooperation with industry players and businesses so that students can gain practical experience during their studies (Hrubos, 2018). This practice-oriented approach is especially important in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, where the rapid pace of innovation and technological development requires professionals to have up-to-date knowledge.

Through various industry collaborations, universities provide opportunities for students to participate in research and development projects, work in business incubators, and interact directly with labour market actors. These collaborations allow students to engage in solving real industrial problems and acquire practical knowledge that they can apply directly in their professional careers (Hrubos, 2014). One of the key areas of the third mission is knowledge transfer, through which universities not only make research results accessible but also offer practical solutions valuable to society and the economy. Forms of knowledge transfer, such as patents, spin-off companies, and industrial research collaborations, all facilitate the direct application of academic knowledge in the economy (Perkmann et al., 2013).

The role of universities in regional development and sustainable economy

The third mission of universities is closely linked to regional development and sustainable economic growth. Higher education institutions are often key players in revitalizing local economies, particularly in regions where industrial or economic sectors are developed based on university research and innovations. University training programs and research collaborations support the growth of local businesses while transforming the economic and social structure of regions. For example, technology parks and innovation centres established by universities are integral parts of the third mission (Polónyi 2012). These institutions create ecosystems that support start-up companies, promote industrial and technological developments, and contribute to the sustainability of the local labour market.

Collaboration between universities and local industries often yields long-term economic benefits, as professionals trained locally strengthen the competitiveness of the local economy with their knowledge and innovations.

The third mission and lifelong learning (LLL)

The third mission of universities is closely related to the concept of lifelong learning (LLL), which is becoming increasingly important in the 21st-century labour market. Due to rapid technological and economic changes, professionals must continuously update their knowledge to keep up with labour market requirements. As part of their third mission, universities offer LLL programs that allow adults to acquire new skills, retrain, or further develop their existing knowledge.

One of the key elements of LLL programs is interdisciplinarity, which enables participants to acquire the competencies needed in the labour market across various fields of study. These types of programs not only improve the employability of professionals but also contribute to the development of local economies, as the knowledge of modern professionals is directly utilized in local industries and businesses (Välimaa & Hoffman, 2008). The relationship between LLL and the third mission of universities is important because the constantly changing labor market requires professionals who can master the latest technologies and methods. LLL programs offer opportunities for knowledge expansion not only as part of formal education but also in the form of short courses and specialized training.

Interdisciplinarity plays a particularly important role in these programs, as combining knowledge from different fields increases competitiveness in the modern economy (Kálmán, 2013). In

Hungary, for example, initiatives such as the Adult Education Strategy (2014-2020) specifically support lifelong learning and encourage universities to offer adult education programs for continuous development. In this process, the role of universities is not limited to educational tasks but requires close cooperation with industry players and local communities as well (Sitku, 2019).

As part of LLL, universities often offer courses where participants can acquire up-to-date technological, economic, and social knowledge, thereby improving their labour market prospects and contributing directly to local economic development.

Methods

The role of universities in influencing the professional identity development of students is particularly significant in today's crisis in higher education, which fundamentally affects the relationship between teaching and research as well as the professional and educational pathways of students. The following analysis presents in more detail how the changing societal expectations, economic pressures, and institutional structures shape the identities of university actors.

Given the changing and challenging context of higher education, we wanted to reflect on a specific yet crucial role within this system: that of the lecturers. As authors of this article, we are directly involved in teaching activities at ELTE University in Budapest, primarily in the undergraduate community coordination BA program.

One noticeable change is the evolving role of lecturers in the teaching and learning process. We have observed that lecturers today must prepare for multiple roles to effectively support students in acquiring and developing competencies (cf. Czető et al., 2017). The approaches to teaching and student support vary significantly, influenced by the diverse identities of lecturers. Carlile and Jordan (2005) offer a valuable framework for understanding how different theoretical perspectives inform and influence our teaching practices.

In our own teaching experience, we often find ourselves acting not just as instructors but also as facilitators of learning processes, trainers for soft-skills development, and mentors who encourage participation and critical thinking among students.

To better understand the various experiences lecturers have regarding their roles, we organized a focus group interview. This stage of our research was designed to explore how lecturers perceive the changing context of higher education and their role in shaping students' professional identities. In the next phase, we plan to conduct individual interviews to delve deeper into lecturers' perceptions of their professional fields and roles.

We identified two key research questions for our qualitative data collection:

1. What are lecturers' perceptions of the profession of community development and coordination?
2. What experiences do lecturers have in developing their professional identities?

In June 2024, we conducted a focus group interview with our colleagues from the institute where the bachelor's program is hosted. The interview was held face-to-face and recorded using a mobile phone. We employed an expert-sampling approach to select participants, aiming for a diverse group. This diversity included lecturers connected to disciplines other than community development, as well as those who are practitioners embedded in the community development field. Four colleagues participated in the focus group interview. The audio recording was transcribed using speech-to-text software (www.alrite.com) and carefully reviewed.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the ELTE University Faculty of Education and Psychology (approval number: 2022/712.). We utilized various AI tools to enhance the quality of our article's text, specifically Grammarly for correcting mistakes and ChatGPT for improving language quality and coherence. It is important to note that we created the initial text in English independently before using these tools.

Results

The crisis of higher education and the formation of teacher identity

The strengthening of the „managerial" function of universities exerts a strong influence on teachers, who are often forced to navigate between teaching, research obligations, and administrative expectations. According to Stephen Ball's (2003) theory, the introduction of neoliberal educational policies has led to the „marketization" of the education sector, directly impacting the professional identity of teachers. Ball argues that teachers increasingly find themselves under „performativity," where measurable performance (number of publications, student results, etc.) defines their success. However, this can lead to an identity crisis, as teachers may lose the meaning and autonomy of their work.

Teachers described the university-shaped identity as follows: *„I started teaching to be able to conduct research. Meanwhile, I realized how much better I could research by teaching because by continuously translating the research results into the courses, I noticed where the mistakes were."*

Teachers often juggle between their teaching roles and research duties, and this duality generates tension. However, by integrating research findings into teaching, they can open up new perspectives in their own research, further shaping their identity.

The market expectations and standardization in higher education are particularly problematic when the professional independence of teachers is at risk. According to Ronald Barnett (2000), the „supercomplexity" of higher education presents new challenges for teachers, as traditional academic values, such as academic freedom and autonomy, are increasingly pushed into the background by economic pressures.

One interviewee spoke of the conflict in the teaching role: *„My identity as a teacher is very fluid. Sometimes I feel like I am at home everywhere and nowhere, which seems to be a problem, but I am beginning to accept that diversity is okay."*

This quote reflects the fragmentation of teacher identity in today's higher education system, where balancing research, teaching, and administrative tasks is difficult and directly influence performance in all areas.

Student identity formation amid the crisis of higher education

For students, the university is a space where they partake in shaping their professional identity, yet the crisis in higher education also complicates their situation. Students are often seekers, trying to find their future and professional identity in an uncertain world. According to Ulrich Beck's (1992) theory of the „risk society," students' careers are becoming less predictable, and universities can no longer offer as stable a path as they once did.

Members of the focus group had the following thoughts about the opportunities and challenges offered by the university: *„The university is a treasure trove of opportunities, but many students have no vision for the future, and they don't know what they want to do with their lives."*

This statement reflects the challenge facing today's higher education: universities are increasingly trying to meet the demands of the labour market, while the support for students' personal development and identity formation may fall into the background. According to Beck, it is difficult for students in modern societies to establish a stable professional identity due to the uncertainty of life paths, and universities do not necessarily provide the environment where they can do so.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1988) theories of „social capital" and „cultural capital" also point to the role universities play in shaping students' social positions and identities. Obtaining a university degree was once a clear path to social mobility, but the value of a diploma has significantly diminished. This makes it especially difficult for students to form a stable professional identity, as their success is increasingly influenced by factors based on resources outside the university.

Another interviewee expressed the tension between higher education and the labour market: *„Many people come to university just to get a degree, but they don't really know what they want to do in the future. During their university years, they try to figure out what to do, but often the same uncertainty remains after earning their degree."* This quotation is also evidence of a much larger problem, that students in higher education are under high (financial) pressure because there's are lack of opportunities besides being in employment or education.

This statement also aligns with Anthony Giddens' (1991) theory of „reflexive modernity," which posits that individuals increasingly have to construct their own lives and identities amidst uncertain social relations. Higher education, in this sense, is part of the „reflexive project," where students try to plan their future, but encounter difficulties due to growing uncertainties.

The social role and challenges of higher education

The social role of higher education has undergone significant changes in recent decades, especially under the influence of globalization and the digital revolution. The traditional university model, where universities focus on the production and transmission of knowledge, is increasingly facing market and technological challenges. As a consequence, universities today focus not only on knowledge production but also on meeting economic demands, promoting labour market

competition, and supporting technological innovation. This duality often causes tension, particularly in the professional identity formation of teachers and students.

According to Ronald Barnett (2011), modern universities operate in so-called „supercomplex" societies, where the pressure on universities is growing, as these institutions must meet both academic and economic expectations. „Supercomplexity" expresses the situation where the old hierarchical, linear university structures are no longer sufficient to manage social, economic, and technological changes.

Barnett argues that the main challenge lies in universities' ability to balance knowledge production with the increasingly managerial expectations. Therefore, the role of universities needs to be redefined: in an increasingly competitive world, students must posse ss competitive knowledge while maintaining universities' autonomy, critical thinking development, and commitment to social justice.

Neoliberalism and the marketization of higher education

The „neoliberalization" of higher education accelerated from the 1990s onward and continues to have an impact on the daily experiences of teachers and students. Stephen Ball (2003), in his theory of performativity, emphasizes that teachers are increasingly evaluated based on measurable performance, such as the number of publications, student satisfaction, or employment rates. This causes teachers to lose their autonomy, as their success is increasingly judged by numbers and statistics, rather than the quality of their scholarly activity.

One interviewee described this problem as follows: *„Universities today not only produce knowledge but increasingly meet economic demands. Our autonomy is lost when measurable results become the main measure of value."*

This marketization also influences students' experiences. For students, obtaining a degree is increasingly becoming a tool for entering the labor market, rather than a space for self-development and intellectual curiosity. According to Michael Apple's (2006) critical pedagogical theory, in the neoliberalization of higher education, knowledge increasingly becomes a commodity, and universities aim not at developing critical thinking, but at meeting the needs of the labor market.

The effects of technological innovation and digital transformation

The development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence also poses significant challenges to higher education. Technological progress not only transforms the forms of education (such as the spread of online education) but also reshapes the labor market, demanding new competencies and skills from students. According to Manuel Castells' (2009) theory, the „network society" results in the decentralization of knowledge production and its sharing through global networks, which also changes the role of universities.

The digital transformation presents new challenges for both university teachers and students. The spread of online education and the growing popularity of distance learning platforms mean that universities no longer operate exclusively in physical spaces. This flexibility can offer advantages,

but at the same time, it questions the traditional community role of universities.

Another interviewee referred to this: *„The opportunities of online education have expanded the boundaries of universities, but at the same time, they can alienate students, as the lack of community experience and interactions changes the nature of learning."*

Therefore, alongside the benefits of technological innovations, the fragmentation of university communities and the marginalization of subjects requiring personal interactions can also cause problems. In this new digital world, universities must find a balance between applying new technologies and preserving traditional forms of education.

Discussion

Instead of providing a lengthy description -we recommend Juhász's article - (Juhász, 2020) on the history of the university-level program designed to educate professionals who can work with individuals, communities, and in various activities—such as adult learning and education, cultural or public education, animation, and youth work—we aimed to highlight a key tension. This tension arises from the continuous evolution of the professional educational program and the ever-changing context of the profession itself.

The current program, called community coordination (or organization) BA, carries inherent tensions even in its name. One of the key concepts underlying this program is community development, a value-driven professional practice that emphasizes the idea that communities develop themselves (cf. Vercseg, 2020). However, interpretations of the program's title vary. Some may perceive it as suggesting that communities need to be organized or even created, while others might see it as referring to self-organized groups that may require additional support to grow.

As community organizers and educators, it is important not only to reflect on the current challenges of our profession but also to think together about the direction we want to shape the future of community organizing. We invite educators and practitioners in the field to reflect on and further explore questions that can help improve the quality of university education:

- Universities are increasingly focused on meeting labour market demands. How does this shift affect the field of community organizing, which has traditionally focused on social justice and community well-being?
- How do market-driven universities influence the social responsibility of community organizers?
- The profession of community organizing requires a strong commitment to social justice. However, increasing pressure is being placed on practitioners to meet labour market expectations. Can we find a balance between working for social justice and meeting economic demands? What role should university education play in this process?

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