

## Research tip

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*Don't ask, academics, what your minister can do for you;  
ask what you can do for your minister<sup>1</sup>.*

### 1. Introduction

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education has just announced the results of the 'research university' competition. The term, introduced by bureaucrats, is an obvious and nonsense pleonasm, because research is – next to didactics – the essence of the university, because there is no university without research (Jałowiecki 2019a).

Twenty universities entered the competition and ten of them were qualified to be part of the winning group. These are – as it was easy to predict – the largest and richest universities (Kochan 2019). However, the competition itself, like many other ideas of the Ministry, seems to be a 'surprisingly unserious undertaking' (Kochan 2019), since serious competition should be based on clear rules that should adapt the requirements to the possibilities of all participants of the competition. In this context, children from the youngest primary school classes do not compete with high school students, and 'small and medium-sized enterprises do not get an order to break the profit records achieved by Amazon and Apple' (ibidem). However, Polish science, and especially its ministerial management, has different rules because the strongest compete in the same 'competitions' as the weakest.

This competition required the preparation of detailed information about the state and achievements of universities. About a hundred people worked at the Uni-

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<sup>1</sup> According to <https://www.facebook.com/komitetdlahumanistyki/photos/a.333019320192691/1260878980740049/?type=3&theater>.

versity of Warsaw for several months preparing data for the 'competition'. Materials were partly reviewed by international experts. 'These relatively long and expensive works have confirmed the universities' positions in various rankings known for many years' (Jałowiecki 2019a). As a result, the academic community has known the results of the 'competition' for 'research universities' for years. 'So a lot of good but unnecessary work was done, which resulted in the promise of increasing the subsidies' (ibidem) for the winners. No team was needed to identify these winners (Kochan 2019). It was not a competition, but a statement and confirmation of the fact that the largest and richest universities are located in major Polish cities (ibidem), while the 'competition' granted them even more money for it.

However, the promised increase in subsidies was 10% (ten percent), i.e. as much as 'the usual tip to a waiter. This shows the attitude of the state authorities to science' (Jałowiecki 2019a), to which about 1% of GDP is allocated, i.e. one of the lowest expenditures in the European Union. This limits the country's development opportunities (ibidem), and 'balanced policy, equal opportunities, support for regional universities [and] appreciation of their role in the regions' (Kochan 2019) are 'concepts [...] alien to the current [ministerial] administration' (ibidem). Despite this, the Ministry does not hide its complacency, and in the photo from the presentation of the awards 'the Minister stands proudly' (ibidem) among the winning rectors.

## 2. Idiocy instead of *scoriosis*

On 31 July 2019, following a seven-month delay (Leszczyński 2019a), the Ministry of Science and Higher Education proudly announced that it had finally published the long-announced list of journals with their scoring assigned by the Ministry (Koniec..., 2019). This announcement amused the audience by claiming that this is the end of the *scoriosis*. This list is an administrative certificate of the scientificity of the respective journals, and publication in them is considered by ministerial bureaucrats as making science (Leszczyński 2019a). The list is also a testimony to the 'disciplinarity' of the respective journals, i.e. their sociological, geographical, philosophical, etc. nature. In this way, the authors publishing in journals recognized as sociological will receive a certificate of making sociology, or rather – according to the ministerial new-

speak – ‘sociological sciences’, which, without this certificate, no bureaucrat would believe in. It is not clear, however, why ministerial officials are convinced that because of this ‘[r]esearchers will publish more valuable works in more prestigious titles [whatever “publishing in titles” means], and Polish science will strengthen its position in the international circulation of thoughts’ (*Koniec...*, 2019), with the result that the ‘effects’ of these researchers’ work ‘will have a greater and lasting impact on global science’ (*ibidem*).

Nor is it clear how this is related to the announced end of *scoriosis*, since it is expected that each researcher can submit for evaluation no more than four publications in four years, i.e. one per year, preferably articles, so as not to bother himself/herself, and, especially, ministerial bureaucrats, with writing and evaluating books. This will certainly prevent authors from intensifying research, and especially publication. It is difficult to resist the impression that the new *scoriosis* is to eliminate the old *scoriosis*, but, in the context of the former, a bright future awaits Polish science under the rule of incompetent bureaucrats, sometimes misidentified with scientists.

Contrary to the recommendations presented above, the present writer dared to publish three books in the first half of 2019, which is undoubtedly a demoralising example for young people, although the author, who has just retired and does not have to score any points, can calmly engage in publishing activities for science rather than for scores. Moreover, he will no longer be assigned to the discipline like a serf to the land, so he will be able to move with impunity on the borders of various disciplines of humanities and social sciences. Because the new ministerial regulations declare the pursuit of the focus of scientists on ‘valuable research’ (*Koniec...*, 2019), whose value will be determined by bureaucrats, the present author, with their characteristic anarchist satisfaction, will be able to submit their publications to the assessing of impact factors rather than the recognition of bureaucrats.

The list includes over 30,000 journals (*Koniec...*, 2019), of which there are ‘as many as’ (!) 100 in the Polish language (Tumański 2019). Declaratively, this list ‘is based to a large extent (*italics ZR*) on large-scale international interdisciplinary databases that index high-quality publications’ (*Koniec...*, 2019), including Web of Science and Scopus. However, the connection between the Ministry’s declarations and the

contents of the list is slight, which results from the clutter, clerical incompetence and ideologisation of the process of drawing up the list. One example of this is omitting our journal “Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)”, indexed in Scopus and ERIH+ databases. (However, the Ministry was kind enough to grant us – after our intervention – the lowest possible score, like a journal trying to enter the publishing market). It cannot be discounted that the list of journals, containing several thousand items for each discipline, is not only an example of rush and clutter while compiling the list (Leszczyński 2019b), but even intentionally chaotic and disordered so that it would not be easy to analyse (Nowakowski 2019).

‘Making a score list of world scientific journals was an impossible and meaningless occupation because of their number’ (Jałowiecki 2019c), which therefore highlights ‘the impossibility of assessing them’ (ibidem). The presence of the journal in the Web of Science or Scopus databases does not prejudge the value of the journal, as the rankings are determined by the economic strength of large commercial publishing companies (ibidem). Many indexed journals publish materials at the expense of their authors, and the Web of Science database first considers paid journals aspiring to be included in this database. The assumption that journals and publishers recognised as reputable ensure the high quality of published materials is therefore questionable, and the institutional adoption of such an assumption is a symptom of dependent development, if not parochialism.

The list of journals was prepared with the participation of 400 experts who were to assess, in less than three months, tens of thousands of scientific journals from around the world, assign them to individual disciplines and award scores (Leszczyński 2019a) at their own discretion. It is difficult to assume that each expert looked at each rated journal, because it was hardly possible. The entire list was ‘a lot of [...] work’ (Jałowiecki 2019b) with no ‘positive significance for the development of science’ (ibidem); rather, on the contrary, it has had a negative impact. Science is creativity, which is not subjected to scoring. Awarding some work points ‘says nothing about its quality, innovation [or] potential for impact’ (ibidem). According to Bohdan Jałowiecki (2019b), the attempt to quantify the substantive achievements of a scientist is ‘a complete idiotism that will have serious effects, because employee grades will be

added together within disciplines and then universities' (ibidem). On this basis, universities will be awarded money. Although the ministry claims that the scores are to be used only for the evaluation of individual research units, and not scientists, in practice the authorities of these units expect individual scientists to provide the appropriate number of points, which are sometimes even included in employment contracts (Leszczyński 2019a).

It is a part of a much larger phenomenon, which is the imperative of quantification of reality, i.e. the accountability of everything (Szpunar 2019). Quantification becomes a fetish, even if it is ridiculous and sterile, and the assessment of people and their actions is reduced to technical aspects and non-human contexts. This leads to such a form of dehumanisation, which is the post-modern incapacitation of man by indicating him as a form of control over individuals and social groups. The primary goal of quantification is therefore not diagnosis but surveillance (ibidem).

As B. Jałowiecki (2019b) rightly points out, scientific work and papers should be evaluated on the basis of the number of reviewed publications, citations and scientific criticism rather than on the basis of a priori administrative criteria. The problem, however, is that scientific criticism is declining in Poland, and the 'reformatory' activities of subsequent governments deepen this process rather than inhibit it. Reviews are not included in the subsequent systems of *scoriosis* in scientific achievements, and on interpersonal grounds they are perceived as a threat rather than a challenge.

Creativity, including scientific, does not succumb to 'the principles of Fordist work efficiency' (Jałowiecki 2019b). Scientists do not write for fame, prestige, and especially for scores (Szwabowski 2019). Every *scoriosis* results in a flood of publications written not because the author has something important to communicate, but to 'feed the system'. Science is, therefore, no longer practiced, and only scores are accumulating (Szpunar 2019). Additionally, the ministerial complex of 'worldliness', identified with English-language communication, causes a flood of scientifically and linguistically weak publications of Polish authors addressed to Polish readers, but in English, even if on social relations in the local parking lot (Jałowiecki 2019b). The question may thus be asked, if it is just idiocy or paranoia. Doubts can be dispelled by a set of traits characteristic of the paranoid personality (*Paranoia...*, n.d.).

### 3. Absurdities

Critics of the ministerial list of journals also pointed out that it reflects the level of journals publishing the results of scientific research in some disciplines, discriminates against some of the disciplines and favours others (Nowakowski 2019), often on the basis of ideological premises (cf. Leszczyński 2019a). It was also pointed out that the way the list was drawn up is questionable (Wierczyński 2019). The list is not representative, because it depends on unrepresentatively selected databases and is prepared by unintelligibly selected and unprofessional teams (ibidem). It was also noted that the preparation of the list of journals violated the principles of law in places. These included:

- (1) a violation of the principle that the law is not retroactive, since the list has been in force since 1 January, despite being published on 31 July, i.e. in the middle of the parametric period to which it relates (Nowakowska 2019b; Tomala 2019); for three years, scientists published their work in journals, which at the end may turn out to be worth little in scores terms, because the rules of the game were changed during it, which may distort its result;
- (2) inexplicable differences between the proposals developed by the teams and the final version of the list (cf. Nowakowska 2019a; Śliwerski 2019), including the understatement of the ranking of prestigious journals (Leszczyński 2019b); therefore the members of the journal evaluation teams distanced themselves from the ministerial proposals that were ultimately presented (Leszczyński 2019b; Nowakowska 2019a; *Oświadczenie* 2019; Wierczyński 2019);
- (3) a lack of transparency of the journal evaluation process (Leszczyński 2019a) – even for members of the expert teams (Wierczyński 2019), including arbitrary scoring (Leszczyński 2019b);
- (4) no appeal procedure against administrative decisions of the Ministry (Leszczyński 2019a).

It was also pointed out that the Ministry does not assess scientific publications in terms of their substantive value, because no one examines it, but bases its judge-

ment on the titles of the journals in which they appeared (Igielska 2019; Leszczyński 2019a, b; Nowakowska 2019a; Śliwerski 2019). As a result, little-known, pseudo-scientific and not very prestigious journals, especially ecclesiastical ones or those favouring the current government for ideological reasons, have the same or higher scores than journals with an international reach and stable impact factor (Leszczyński 2019a, b). The ministerial list, therefore, includes curiosities, e.g. the “Journal of Parapsychology”, rated at 40 points, even though parapsychology is not a science, the popular business magazine “Forbes” (40 points) and the journalistic “New York Review of Books” (100 points) and the “New York Times Book Review” (70 points). Theological journals – “Mission Studies” (140 points) and “Studia Warmińskie” (40 points) found a prominent place on the list of sociological journals, significantly ahead of the prestigious Polish sociological journal “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” (20 points). Indeed, “Polish Sociological Review” (40 points) is scored lower than the “Porn Studies” journal (70 points) – (Leszczyński 2019a, b).

In addition, in the ministerial list, journals so far included in the Scopus database have fewer points than those not found there (which is also the case of our journal), and more than those which are better listed in the database (Igielska 2019; Nowakowska 2019b). The situation is even worse when compiling articles and books. It turned out that scientists rationally maximising the scores of their achievements in 2017 acted unknowingly to their disadvantage, while those were lucky who published texts that did not meet the standards of scientific journals, despite the fact that the Ministry verbally encourages publishing in the journals that do (Nowakowska 2019b). Scores were also awarded for non-existent journals (Nowakowska 2019b).

The allegations against the list of journals can be summarised as follows (cf. Leszczyński 2019b):

- (1) numerous factual errors (cf. Nowakowska 2019a): the presence of pseudo-scientific journals and wrong assignment of journals to disciplines;
- (2) ignoring the opinions of experts, who the Ministry itself appointed (cf. Igielska 2019);
- (3) changes in the list made in unclear circumstances, it is not known by whom and on the basis of what criteria;



- (4) the need to assign journals to individual disciplines, which strikes interdisciplinary periodicals (Tomala 2019);
- (5) journals assigned to different disciplines may have had different scores in each of them, and it was bureaucrats who unified them (Leszczyński 2019a);
- (6) guiding primarily by data on citations from commercial databases – Web of Science and Scopus – at the expense of expert opinions;
- (7) a huge rush; the list containing almost 30,000 titles was created in less than six months, of which experts had about three months to work on this;
- (8) the Ministry's demand from experts for 'utilisation of materials' from works, which would make it difficult to compare the experts' recommendations with the final content of the list (cf. Leszczyński 2019a).

Far-reaching doubts regarding the assumptions and procedure for drawing up the list of scientific publications were presented by members of the bodies entrusted with this task by the Ministry. Comments on this matter were included in the petition of 272 members of the philological community to the Prime Minister. It was indicated there (*Petycja...*, 2019), by a delicate suggestion rather than – as the present author did below – indicating with all openness that:

- (1) the Ministry requested a consultation of the scientific community during the summer holidays;
- (2) the consultation was to take place within two weeks;
- (3) in such a short time it was expected to collect data on most foreign publications;
- (4) publishing procedures in individual countries are different, long developed and not necessarily in line with the expectations of Polish ministerial bureaucrats;
- (5) reputable foreign publishing houses, as a rule, do not publish plagiarised work, as a rule do not accept weak books for publication, and for this reason they do not make statements on such matters on their websites, even if this could be shocking for Polish ministerial bureaucrats;



- (6) it cannot be expected that foreign publishing houses will adapt their customs to the wishes of the Polish Ministry in order to be honoured by the inclusion in the Polish ministerial list;
- (7) as a result, representatives of the humanities in Poland, if they wish to worry about *neo-scoriosis*, will have to resign from publishing in foreign publications that have not had the privilege of being included in the Polish ministerial list;
- (8) the list of journals drawn up by the Ministry 'has serious omissions and the scoring in many cases has no substantive justification' (*Petycja...*, 2019);
- (9) if the Ministry imagines that the internationalisation of Polish scientific research consists of adapting the external world to the whims of the Ministerial bureaucrats, this is a problem for the Ministry rather than the international environment of Polish science;
- (10) if the Ministry really wishes to internationalise the research results of Polish scholars, it should encourage them to publish in the best world publishing houses rather than be ridiculed by imposing the principles of its *neo-scoriosis* not only on Polish scientists, but also on the international environment of Polish science.

Considering the formal and substantive absurdities outlined above, it can be concluded – after Antoni Dudek (cf. Leszczyński 2019a) that the entire operation of *neo-scoriosis* is a bureaucratic fantasy, which will now be modified in different ways to be placed in a few years 'in the garbage can of unsuccessful attempts to reform Polish science'. This, of course, is a pessimistic scenario, assuming that the current Minister will hold his position after the parliamentary elections of October 2019, which did happen. 'Any other Minister, flooded with a wave of protests' (Leszczyński 2019a), which will start rising his autumn, would withdraw from this nonsense even faster, because in 2021 the system will be crashed (Tomala 2019).

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The philosophy of the current ministerial administration seems to be based on the following assumptions (cf. Kochan 2019; *Stanowisko...*, 2019):

- (1) the neo-liberal scientific policy harmful to Polish universities continues under the bizarre banner of the Constitution for Science;
- (2) only leading centres are needed;
- (3) science is only research and inventions at the highest world level;
- (4) teaching is a secondary issue;
- (5) the strong and the richest will get even more, and let the weak and the poorest try to catch up with MIT's level;
- (6) arbitrary and bureaucratic evaluations of scientific publications, focused on their de-Polonisation, are pushed, which deepens – under the slogan of internationalisation – not only the dependent development of Polish science, but also its peripheralisation;
- (7) university and journal rankings are fetishised, ignoring the fact that the rankings are a function of funding for science and marketing activities and not of bureaucratic activities;
- (8) differently defined short-term udarnik's publication norms are forced, preventing the development of long-term development strategies for scientific institutions and individual scholars;
- (9) scholars and scientific journals are rigidly assigned to disciplines, which discourages them from conducting interdisciplinary research, including groundbreaking ones;
- (10) humanities is a marginal field, and an ideologically suspicious one, because (a) it gives no practical benefits, (b) while being a habitat of – hated by those in power and often imaginary – leftists;
- (11) it is, therefore, necessary to disintegrate the scientific community by opposing politically harmless representatives of natural and technical sciences to – potentially dangerous to those in power – representatives of the humanities and social sciences (Leszczyński 2019c);

- (12) the primacy of bureaucratic requirements of quantitative rather than qualitative efficiency is the tool for political and ideological control over the scientific community;
- (13) undertaking new research directions is a suspicious fad, so 'it is best to work in classic, developed fields' (Bendyk 2019: 54), in which high scores can be obtained without unnecessary risk;
- (14) the tool for 'a drastic weakening, already weak, scientific circulation in Poland are, established by officials of the Ministry [...], lists of high-score publishers and journals' (*Stanowisko...*, 2019), combining 'arbitrariness of choices with disproportionately high scoring for English-language publishers and journals' (ibidem) results in 'silencing Polish scientific debate and cutting off scientists from Polish readership' (ibidem), including non-academic.

Based on these assumptions, neo-liberal policy, coupled – paradoxically – with nationalist ideology, proposes wishful thinking, according to which deregulation instead of solid financing will lead to the development of inventiveness comparable to that of the global scientific and economic core. In fact, it will lead Polish science to ruin (Kochan 2019). This is happening because 'education and science at a high level are slowly becoming reserved [...] for the richest' (Kochan 2019; cf. *Kiepskie perspektywy...*, 2019), and the Ministry's approach has neither 'concern for Polish culture and language [...], nor [...] any programme at all' (Kochan 2019). As such, one should expect the intensification of emigration of scientific elites 'which, under state protection, would be resistant to competition and drainage' (Kochan 2019). Chronic underfunded and increasingly bureaucratic Polish science is experiencing 'a series of continuous disasters, and the atmosphere at universities is the terror of *scoriosis* and a storm of bureaucratic requirements that effectively pull scientists away from science and condemn them to an administrative struggle for projects and eternal writing of applications' (Kochan 2019).

In his election campaign in autumn 2019, the Minister of Science and Higher Education was full of optimism, stating that his greatest achievement was 'the course of the reform of higher education. It is indicated as a model in the European Union'

(Woleński 2019). Everything indicates that the Minister actually believes so (Woleński 2019), unlike most of the Polish academic community, as well as the voters of the Minister as a candidate for MP; the voters cast the least votes in his entire political career. One may also think that ‘no one serious can treat [the] reform [...] as a model one’ (Woleński 2019), since this costly reform is implemented irrationally. Further, it is taking place within specific conditions: namely one of the lowest rates of funding for science and higher education in the European Union in relation to gross domestic product (GDP). Meanwhile the Minister himself, ‘a declaratively great supporter of democracy, totally disregards the critical voices of the environment towards [his] “reform”’ (Woleński 2019).

A counterpoint to the official optimism of the Minister is his announcement that ‘it will be much more difficult to increase expenditure on science and higher education than it was possible [...] in the last four years’ (Kochan 2019; cf. *Gowin...*, 2019). There can therefore be no noticeable increase in public spending on science (*Kiepskie perspektywy...*, 2019). In a word, it was better already even if it could hardly be seen.

Because after the parliamentary elections of October 2019, the Minister of Science and Higher Education remained in his position, the current governmental camp takes responsibility for actions against Polish culture, including the humanities and social sciences. The declaratively right-wing government is not interested in Polish scholars publishing their texts in national journals in their native language (Tumański 2019), favouring instead, with ‘all spells about patriotism’ (ibidem: 71) ‘writing to foreign journals at the expense of Polish ones’ (ibidem). It follows from the logic of this political camp that Polish is not to be a language of thought and creation, but a language of nationalist screams and political witch-hunts. ‘It is hard to find a greater contempt for Polishhood’ (*Komitet...*, 2019) from the camp claiming to be patriotic. ‘Publishing in a Polish scientific journal is reprehensible for the Ministry of Science. But a worse crime can also happen; an article in Polish’ (Tumański 2019).

Our journal „Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)” is not and does not intend to be a tool of *scoriosis* or other bureaucratic inventions. still intends to promote texts that make an important contribution to science, and not to feeding the system. This

does not mean, however, that we will reject any possible evidence of formal recognition from the Ministry as long as it exists.

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