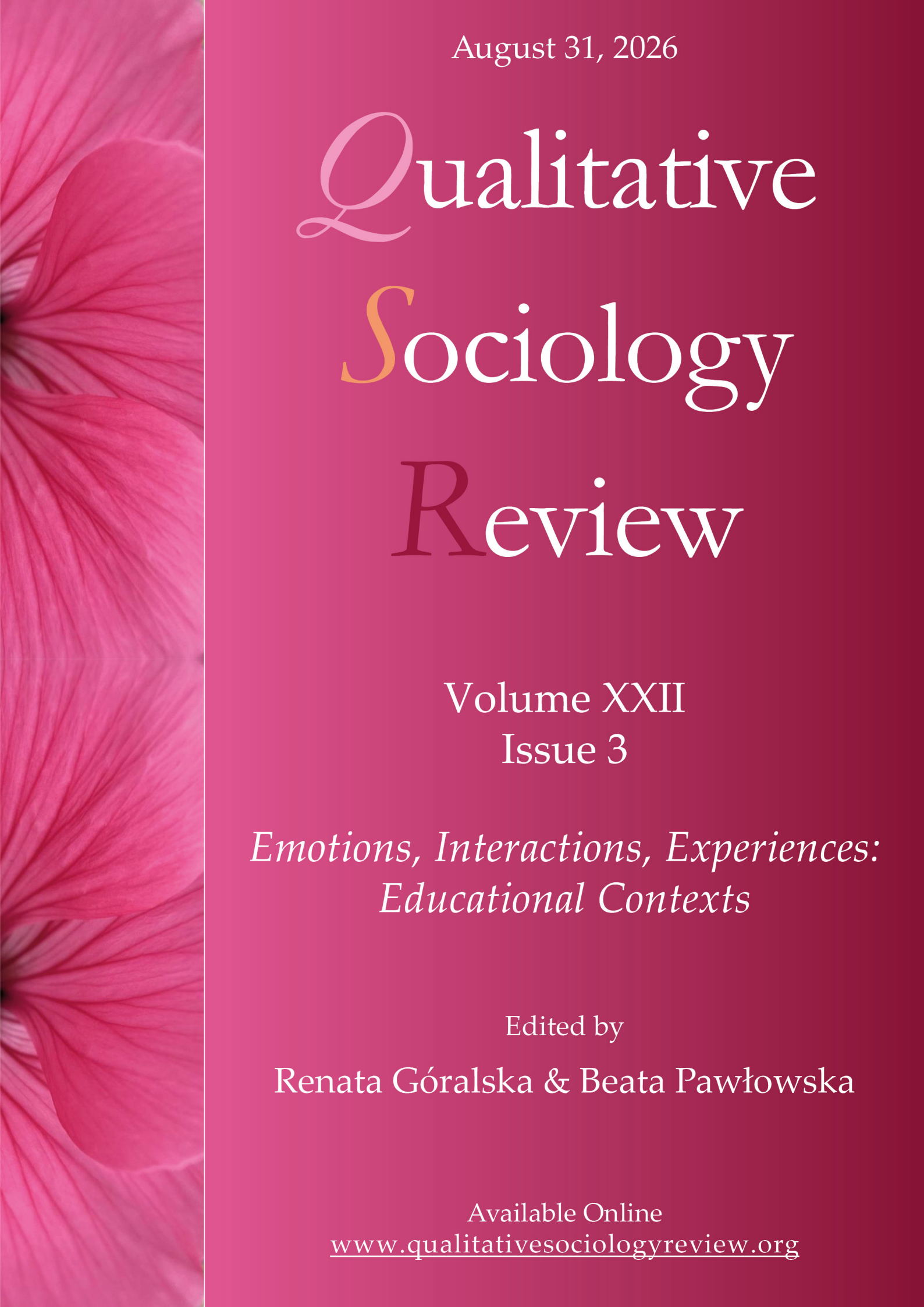


A close-up photograph of a pink flower, likely a gerbera, with its petals clearly visible. The flower is positioned on the left side of the image, with its petals extending towards the center. The background is a solid, deep pink color.

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*Emotions, Interactions, Experiences:
Educational Contexts*

Edited by

Renata Górska & Beata Pawłowska

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Emotions, Interactions, Experiences: Educational Contexts

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Contemporary research in the social sciences and humanities demonstrates that education and socialization are inextricably linked to the cultural and structural dimensions of human emotionality. For decades, the sociology of emotions has examined the social conditions underlying the emergence of emotions, as well as their dynamics and duration across interactional, individual, social, and organizational contexts. Emotional life, in turn, constitutes a fundamental dimension of society and culture (Stearns and Stearns 1985; Turner and Stets 2005). The accelerating pace of social and technological development, together with the commercialization and commodification of living conditions, generates tensions, stress, and uncertainty. At the relational level, social bonds are increasingly eroded and require continuous reconstruction, contributing to heightened feelings of alienation and estrangement. Consequently,

managing one's own emotions—as well as those of others—has become a crucial competence in both professional and everyday life. Against this backdrop, the study of educational processes requires moving beyond traditional transmission-based and cognitivist theories of education.

This special issue responds to the need for a critical reflection on the emotional dimension of education. The articles collected here are grounded in interpretive and critical approaches. From these perspectives, emotions cease to be regarded as a marginal aspect of social life and instead emerge as a key driving force of institutional processes, shaping the subjectivities of social actors.

Our understanding of emotions is informed by philosophical and sociological theories of emotion, particularly the scholarship of Arlie Russell Hochschild

(1983, 2024), Eva Illouz (2007, 2023), and Megan Boler (1999). Their work not only redefines emotions as social, relational, and discursive phenomena, but also demonstrates that emotions are inextricably intertwined with sociopolitical conditions, structures of power, and ideological mechanisms of control and discipline. Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983) was among the first to demonstrate how, within a service-based economy, emotions—once considered part of the private sphere—became commodified and incorporated into paid labor. She also identified the detrimental consequences of this process for workers, including alienation and burnout. Meanwhile, Eva Illouz (2007) argues that contemporary culture is characterized by a profound entanglement of affective and economic relations, in which emotions become instruments of evaluation, self-regulation, and market productivity. She conceptualizes this as “emotional capitalism” and defines it as follows: “Emotional capitalism is a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other, thus producing what I view as a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behavior and in which emotional life—especially that of the middle classes—follows the logic of economic relations and exchange” (Illouz 2007:5). Within such a culture, emotional experiences are alienated, commercialized, and subordinated to the institutional logic of efficiency. Likewise, in her foundational contribution to critical pedagogy, *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*, Megan Boler (1999) demonstrates how educational systems and pedagogical theories throughout the past century have regulated, suppressed, and ignored human emotions. Boler argues that education is inherently political and that, to study emotions in education, one must expose the ways in which power—par-

ticularly in its neoliberal and bureaucratic forms—colonizes individuals’ affective well-being by imposing institutionalized rules governing emotional experience and expression.

Focusing on the academic context is particularly timely given the continuing consolidation of the neoliberal agenda in higher education, characterized by an increasing emphasis on productivity, performance, excellence, and entrepreneurship (cf. Potulicka and Rutkowiak 2010; Giroux 2014; Kwiek 2015; Szadkowski 2016; Bonfanti, Cannito and Naldini 2025). Capitalist logics and practices have permeated the academic field to such an extent that the future of the public university appears increasingly uncertain (Shore 2008; Wright and Shore 2017), while academic staff are compelled to engage in emotional labor in order to align their feelings with the emotional norms governing their workplaces (Gill 2018; Steen-Johnsen, Magnussen and Trysnes 2025).

Sociological and philosophical theories of emotion draw the attention of educators—and not only educators—to the (non)presence of emotions within educational practices and institutions. They encourage critical inquiry into the ways in which power, particularly in its neoliberal and bureaucratic forms, appropriates individuals’ emotional well-being by imposing institutionalized norms regulating how emotions should be experienced and expressed. Such questions are especially pressing today, in an era marked by relentless metrics-driven evaluation, bureaucratization, and enforced competitiveness, where a market-oriented emotional discourse increasingly permeates educational institutions and where experiences of uncertainty, anxiety, guilt, shame, and exhaustion have become ever more pervasive.

The theoretical perspective outlined above provided the foundation for the Interdisciplinary IDUB Research Grant *Engagement and Burnout as (Un)Expected Consequences of the Emotional Labor of University Teachers*, conducted between 2023 and 2026 by a team of educational researchers and sociologists at the University of Lodz. The project's primary objective was to reconstruct the emotional experiences of university teachers. It rested on the assumption that these emotional experiences serve as a distinctive "mirror" that reflects the challenges of the contemporary corporate university, where emotions have become harnessed to the imperatives of institutional productivity and managerial control. One outcome of the project is the present issue: *Emotions, Interactions, Experiences: Educational Contexts*.

The issue opens with an article by Renata Górska, who draws on Shiloh Whitney's philosophical work and the theory of affective injustice to reconstruct the emotional experiences of university teachers, focusing on trajectories of engagement and burnout among academic staff. The article portrays the university as an alienating environment and calls for renewed discussion of more equitable educational practices. It exposes the neoliberal university as a site of alienation and affective exploitation, arguing that academics' emotional labor—as manifested in trajectories leading from engagement to exhaustion—provides a compelling point of departure for reimagining more inclusive and just working conditions within higher education.

The theme of institutional pressure and its emotional consequences is further developed by Beata Pawłowska in her article, *Acquiescence to Criticism: The Meaning of Emotions in the Multidimensional Evaluation of an Academic Teacher's Work*. Addressing the

issues of performance evaluation and audit culture, she argues that the developmental purpose originally attributed to employee evaluation has gradually eroded under neoliberalism. Drawing on qualitative interview data, the article reveals the mechanisms through which emotions—from pride to anxiety and shame—are managed within an environment characterized by permanent competition.

This theme continues in the two subsequent articles. Małgorzata Kosiorek centers her analysis on the concept of empowerment in the work of university teachers. Her article explores the dichotomy of emotional experiences associated with teaching and research, locating them along a continuum between subjective empowerment and institutional subjugation.

Alina Wróbel, in turn, examines the phenomenon of manipulation in academic practice. She conceptualizes manipulation at three interconnected levels: the macro level, encompassing the consequences of top-down educational policies; the mezo level, involving hierarchical institutional relations and abuses of power within universities; and the micro level, referring to interpersonal interactions among academic staff. Proceeding from the premise that autonomy and agency constitute indispensable conditions for the development of a thriving academic community, the author demonstrates the destructive effects of both micro- and macro-political practices of manipulation on university teachers' professional identities.

The account of university teachers' emotional experiences is complemented by a curricular perspective in the fifth article, authored by Violetta Kopińska. She examines the extent to which affective and re-

lational dimensions are incorporated into the process of fostering young people's civic identities. Through a comparative analysis of the Polish national core curricula for civic education introduced in 2018 and 2025—developed under markedly different political circumstances—the article reconstructs the institutional potential for promoting citizenship as a shared and relational experience. The analysis demonstrates that although both curricular documents provide space for affective categories, the 2025 reform offers a substantially more comprehensive and structurally integrated representation of concepts central to a relational and political understanding of civic subjectivity. In doing so, it reveals a continuum in which affect is systematically

embedded within earlier stages of institutional socialization.

Taken together, the articles assembled in this issue offer an interdisciplinary map of contemporary educational realities by exposing the mechanisms through which emotions are systematically governed within academic institutions. The findings and analyses not only diagnose the emotional costs of neoliberal audit culture in (Polish) higher education but also contribute to broader debates on the humanization and democratization of the university. At the same time, they offer an impetus for rethinking prevailing institutional practices toward greater agency, empathy, and affective justice.

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Engagement and Exhaustion as (Un)Expected Consequences of Academic Teachers' Emotional Labor: Affective Injustice in Higher Education

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to reconstruct the emotional experiences of academic teachers, specifically how they relate to identity and power relations. I assume that the experience of emotions is embedded in the context of socio-political needs and interests. The theoretical background consists of research from the philosophy of emotions, specifically the conceptualizations of emotional labor by Shiloh Whitney, along with studies and analyses on affective injustice, such as those by Francisco Gallegos, Katie Stockdale, Alfred Archer, and Georgina Mills. Based on these concepts, I argue that working in contemporary, neoliberally managed academia has important consequences for the development of subjectivity, both positive and constructive, as well as negative, destructive, and degrading. Emotional labor can serve as a tool for self(trans)formation and (self)reflection; at the same time, it can affectively marginalize teachers' subjectivity and decrease their sense of agency. This provides the theoretical context for research grounded in a qualitative framework. The reconstruction of academic teachers' experiences was based on qualitative semi-structured interviews. The research results indicate that the emotional labor of academics is a response to the emotional culture of a university governed by neoliberalism. The findings

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indicate that academia is an alienating and emotionally exploitative space for workers, where various manifestations of affective injustice are evident, primarily as a loss of emotional well-being and a diminishment of agency among academic teachers. By situating the emotional experiences of university staff in the context of affective injustice, the article proposes that educational research on academia should open up a space for discussion on more equitable and inclusive institutional practices in higher education.

Renata Górska is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Theory of Education at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Lodz. She has authored two monographs and numerous academic articles in the fields of education theory, higher education pedagogy, and pedeutology. She is a former Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Studia Dydaktyczne*. Her current research interests focus on the role of emotions and affect in education, with a particular emphasis on critical emotional education, emotional competence, emotional capital, and affective injustice in educational institutions.

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Educational institutions are impregnated with feelings (...) Emotions contribute to the coherence of institutions, but they can also lead to their disintegration. They affect identity building and the development of the individual's personality. They produce well-being but also illness and suffering.

[Karlsohn 2016:137]

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing interest in the emotional aspect of the human experience in the social sciences and humanities, referred to as the "affective turn" or "critical affect studies" (see, e.g., Clough 2007, 2008; Amsler 2011; Leys 2011; Glosowicz 2013; Burzyńska 2015). The affective turn marked a turning point in the way emotions are conceptualized by scholars in the social and human sciences, as it brought to light previously unnoticed social, cultural, and political dimensions, expanding research on emotions to include categories such as culture, politics, subjectivity, and identity. As Patricia Clough writes, "The affective turn invites a transdisciplinary

approach to theory and method that necessarily invites experimentation in capturing the changing co-functioning of the political, the economic, and the cultural, rendering it affectively as change in the deployment of affective capacity" (2007:3).

Studies on affect draw inspiration from critics and theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1999) and Brian Massumi (2013, 2015), who conceptualize affect as pre-individual bodily forces that increase or decrease the organism's capacity to act (Clough 2008). From this perspective, affects are understood not as psychological dispositions but as fields of emotional tensions that are created, emitted, felt, and distributed by various communities, including institutional and educational communities. Affects thus have the power to shape both individuals and collectivities, as well as the potential to bind and divide them (Ahmed 2014). These studies reveal how individuals and social groups construct their (embodied) emotional experiences and how these experiences are embedded in a broader

context of social and political forces, needs, and interests. The affective turn examines the interdependencies and interrelations between discursive practices, human corporeality, cultural and social forces, and individually experienced, yet historically conditioned emotions and affects. Affects are treated as social, cultural, and political practices that have the power to bind and divide, with the potential for creation and destruction (Ahmed 2004; Glosowitz 2013).

The affective turn brings new perspectives to education, directing educators' attention to the (non) presence of affects and emotions in educational spaces/institutions. The openness of educators to philosophical and social theories of affect creates new research perspectives by highlighting the political entanglement of the emotional experiences of individuals functioning within educational institutions.

The purpose of this article is to reconstruct the emotional experiences of academic teachers, specifically their work with emotions on both individual and organizational levels. Referencing the literature on the philosophy of emotions and critical university studies, I draw on the conceptualization of emotional labor rooted in feminist studies and the critical tradition, as proposed by the feminist phenomenologist and philosopher Shiloh Whitney (2018a, 2018b, 2021, 2023). By adopting Whitney's definition of emotional labor, I similarly introduce issues related to affective injustice into the analysis.

Theoretical Framework: Emotional Labor and Affective Injustice

To analyze the emotional experiences of academic teachers, I draw on the category of emotional labor

introduced to the social sciences by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983), a proponent of the socio-cultural theory of emotions. According to Hochschild, emotions belong to the cultural system along with shared social knowledge about recognizing and expressing one's own and others' emotions. Hochschild argues that culture determines both how we experience emotions and how we express them. Emotional labor is associated with a professional role, which is closely linked to the emotional rules prevailing in educational institutions, i.e., socially accepted norms and expectations placed on employees, which serve as disciplinary techniques.

Studies on immaterial labor—which in the contemporary global economy is work of fundamental importance, as its products are immaterial goods: knowledge and communication—are pivotal for research on the concept coined by Hochschild (Lazzarato 1996; Hardt Negri 2000, 2012). From this perspective, emotional labor involves producing and manipulating emotions, and its products include well-being, engagement, satisfaction, passion, and a sense of connection or community. Emotional/affective labor is the most important link in immaterial labor, as it generates agency, subjectivity, sociality, and community, thus forming society (Hardt 2012).

Emotional labor can, therefore, have many positive consequences for the development of subjectivity, autonomy, and a sense of agency; it can contribute to building (self)reflection, self(trans)formation, and emotional understanding (Denzin 1984). Emotional labor concerns teachers at all levels of education, including academic teachers, and carries numerous consequences for the subjectivity of academic teachers, both positive—constructive, and negative—destructive or degrading. If the emotional rules organizing a teacher's work are very

different from what they truly feel, daily emotional labor carries enormous costs, including emotional self-alienation, anxiety, shame, embarrassment, inauthenticity, and a sense of being manipulated and exploited (Hochschild 1983; Szanto 2017).

The emotions produced during the teacher's work do not leave them even after the "production process" is completed; they constitute a lasting "by-product" (Whitney 2018b), marginalizing their subjectivity and impoverishing their agency. The teacher is forced to metabolize the "excesses" and "waste" produced, and to "absorb" them. The result of this "emotional metabolizing" is felt at the individual level as anxiety, fear, stress, fatigue, humiliation, contempt, guilt, a lack of engagement, and exhaustion. If structural, institutional conditions force the teacher to produce this kind of "surplus" for many years, and if such emotions are long-lasting, strongly shaped, and modulated from the outside (often without the individual's consent and contrary to their value system), then the emotional rules prevailing in the workplace may lead to so-called "hacking" of the teacher's subjectivity (Slaby 2016).

In this text, I draw on an expanded conceptualization of emotional labor, rooted in feminist studies and the critical tradition, proposed by critical phenomenologist and feminist philosopher Shiloh Whitney (2018a, 2018b, 2021, 2023, 2025). Whitney expands the concept of emotional labor by incorporating issues related to affective injustice into the analysis. She argues that since emotions are regulated primarily by institutions and structures of dominance, individuals or groups are systematically restricted or have emotional patterns imposed on them, leading to what she terms affective injustice. This phenomenon involves the systemic distortion, delegitimization, or limitation of emotional ex-

pression and credibility of individuals and groups. Whitney shows that emotions are simultaneously a tool of resistance, a site of oppression, and an element of structural inequality. She contends that the source of affective injustice lies in socially recognized and constructed emotional norms, systemic differences in the credibility of social actors, cultural emotional scripts, and institutional sanctions for emotional "deviations." Affective injustice is thus a form of dispersed oppression, embedded in social structures. Other researchers in the philosophy of emotions (Srinivasan 2018; Archer and Mills 2019; Archer and Matheson 2020; Gallegos 2022; Krueger 2023; Stockdale 2023; Whitney 2018a, 2025) have also addressed affective injustice, like Whitney, using this term to describe situations where someone's ways of experiencing emotions or their expression are ignored, distorted, marginalized, devalued, or otherwise depreciated.

Similarly, Canadian philosopher Katie Stockdale (2023) asserts that affective injustice is an element of a broader theory of "affective injury." Stockdale clearly distinguishes affective injustice from psychological oppression. She claims that psychological oppression is a mental and emotional state, while affective injustice is a structural phenomenon, existing outside of the subject. Stockdale emphasizes that affective injustice is a form of violence, the source of which lies in social structures and power relations that distort, disorganize, or delegitimize the emotional lives of individuals and groups, weakening their ability to respond affectively in a morally just and politically effective manner. She states, "It operates primarily outside of us: in affective norms, practices, and relationships that are embedded in social conditions of injustice" (Stockdale 2023:113). This means that the source of affective injustice is located outside the subject: in emotional

rules prevailing in interpersonal relationships, institutions, and organizations.

Alfred Archer and Georgina Mills (2019) deepen the understanding of this phenomenon by analyzing it from the perspective of emotion regulation theory. They argue that affective injustice can be understood as a demand for effective emotion regulation. The latest work by Alfred Archer and Georgina Mills (2025) on affective injustice convincingly shows that many forms of this phenomenon are related to fear and anxiety.

American philosopher Francisco Gallegos (2022) proposes a novel way of conceptualizing affective injustice, defining it as a state in which individuals or groups are deprived of “fundamental affective goods.” Affective injustice is a violation of fundamental affective goods, meaning that if someone’s emotions are systematically ignored or ridiculed, that person loses access to the good of “emotional credibility.” Gallegos argues that the consequences of affective injustice can be extensive for the subject’s individual experience and include emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, and despair. Affective injustice contributes to experiencing heightened stress and psychological suffering (2022:185). Another form of affective injustice involves privileged groups imposing their emotional norms and standards on weaker groups, demonstrating that injustice does not require open violence or discrimination; it can take a subtle form, in which the individuals’ emotions are systematically devalued or presented as irrational. Alfred Archer and Benjamin Matheson (2022, 2023) call this form of injustice “emotional imperialism.”

The openness of educators to philosophical and social theories of affect creates new research perspec-

tives precisely because they highlight the political entanglement of the emotional experiences of individuals functioning within educational institutions. The theories of affect reconstructed above show that the emotional experiences of teachers are subject to ideological and political regulations that exert power over their emotionality.

In light of these considerations, investigating the emotional experiences of teachers working within contemporary academia is justified. Critical university studies demonstrate that in modern academia, there is progressive neoliberalization and the related transformation of the academic environment into a space of economic efficiency organized around the market model and instrumental rationality (Potulicka and Rutkowiak 2010; Giroux 2014; Kwaśnica 2014). This has led to the development of an increasingly prevalent “audit culture,” in which a range of disciplinary practices are employed to instill new behavioral norms (Shore 2008; Szadkowski 2015; Leszczyński 2018; Krzeski, Łojewska and Szadkowski 2025). Audit culture transforms not only institutions but the entire work environment, inducing a sense of uncertainty and instability among academic staff. Working in such conditions is exhausting, diminishing agency and self-worth. The consequence of the academic audit culture and the “soft” management of all aspects of life in contemporary late-capitalist universities is a “culture of fear” (Berg, Huijbens and Larsen 2016). Moreover, the negative effects of paternalism and manorial relations are reproduced in Polish universities, which deepens social inequalities and results in the breakdown of the social fabric and trust in employees’ interpersonal relations (Hryniewicz 2004; Hryniewicz 2007; Leder 2017; Bohuszewicz 2019; Zawadzki 2019), thereby reproducing affective injustice, which manifests primarily as a loss of emotional well-being and

emotional agency (Gallegos 2022). Marginalized individuals must perform emotional labor to adapt to these requirements, leading to exhaustion, sadness, and anger—in short, affective suffering.

This underscores the significance of studying the emotional experiences of academic teachers and what produces them. This article reconstructs the emotional experiences of academic teachers in a neoliberally governed university. Two research questions guided the study: What emotional experiences do academic teachers have in neoliberally governed universities? What regimes resulting from neoliberal university governance constitute the sources of academic teachers' emotional experiences?

Methodological Framework

The text is the result of research carried out under the IDUB Interdisciplinary Research Grant entitled Engagement and exhaustion as (un)expected effects of an academic teacher's emotional work (decision no.: 3/IGB/2022, project code: B2311813000200.07).

The research project is grounded in the framework of interpretive and critical research (Konecki 2005; Urbaniak-Zajac 2008, 2019; Chomczyński 2012), with qualitative semi-structured interviews, also known as in-depth interviews, as the main research technique. This methodology enables direct contact with respondents and the creation of an appropriate atmosphere conducive to obtaining full, in-depth responses and emotional experiences (Konecki 2000; Babbie 2004; Niedbalski 2012). These encounters are called active qualitative interviews (Holstein, Gubrium 1997), where the interviewed teachers are also active participants co-creating the narrative, allowing the conversation to be steered with flexibil-

ity depending on the situation. This type of interview provides opportunities to reach the emotional dimension, "feelings and flowing depths of heart-felt viewpoints and values" (Holstein and Gubrium 1997:57). The interview is viewed here as a "social event during which the interviewer is a participating observer" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2000:161).

The empirical material comes from online interviews conducted between April and July 2025 with ten women and seven men working at eight Polish public universities. The interviewees—who included professors—work in the social sciences and had at least ten years' experience at the time of the interview. The respondents varied in terms of status and power; for example, some had previously held the positions of dean, vice-dean, and vice-rector, while others had never held such positions.

In-depth interviews provide opportunities to access the private, intimate sphere of teachers' emotional experiences related to work and interpersonal relationships in academic institutions, while also being an important element of projects in critical university studies, especially when we want to investigate the relationship between the subjective and the institutional in academic practice (see, e.g., Holstein and Gubrium 1997; Niedbalski 2012; Konecki and Pawłowska 2013; Skórzyńska 2023).

The following analytical categories were used to survey academic teachers' emotional experiences. First, the analysis focused on the types of emotions and emotional efforts (emotional labor) of academic teachers operating within a culture of surveillance and audit. Second, it examined the regimes resulting from neoliberal university governance to explain the sources of these emotions. These analytical categories provide tools for describing the emotion-

al labor of academic teachers in a contemporary university, where passion and commitment to the educational process have become entangled with the neoliberal culture of academic governance. I argue that academics' emotions are shaped by institutional dynamics and cultural and political norms and regulations. In other words, academics' emotional labor is deeply intertwined with the emotional culture of a neoliberally governed university, which can generate various manifestations of affective injustice.

Research Analysis

Engagement and Exhaustion in the (Emotional) Work of Academic Teachers

The interviews with the academic teachers provide a complex picture of emotional experiences related to academic work, revealing both satisfaction and frustration arising from interactions with students and colleagues. The greatest source of satisfaction for academic teachers is their relationships with students, an experience that evokes positive and profound emotions filled with enthusiasm and personal commitment.

Teachers view students as a source of inspiration, hope, and personal fulfillment, emphasizing the value of mutual respect, trust, and authenticity. These relationships inspire, motivate, and reinvigorate their own view of the world and are characterized by a lively intellectual exchange. One participant states:

For me, the value is that they (students) are not afraid to say certain things (...) they don't just pretend to know that if they express their authentic opinion, it won't affect their final grades. That is also very satisfying for me. And it allows me to reflect on myself (...)

it's invigorating for me. One feels that what they say sparks a fire in their eyes. [I3]

Another participant shares a more optimistic view:

I work very well, and I really enjoy working with students. But quite recently, I had a moment... a thought that maybe I can't handle it anymore, that this generation is different, that maybe we just can't communicate anymore. But I noticed in the last two years a wave of improvement, and I would say that I feel we are getting along very well. We work well together, and I also get feedback that people enjoy working with me. [I5]

Similarly, another respondent highlights the broader societal value of teaching:

[Students] provide me with the greatest satisfaction—they engage me emotionally, and this often keeps me going. And that is hope (...) I also speak of hope in a social sense because these are young people, and soon they will be working in various places, replacing our generation, and somehow taking care of us if they already provide such positive emotions and concrete actions. So, it awakens hope and the conviction that it will be good to entrust them with responsibility. [I8]

For these respondents, teaching gives meaning to their lives; it is their passion and a source of energy, even personal fulfillment. This goes beyond personal feelings, as the latter statement shows that the teacher sees in students a "hope" for society. They regard them as a future, competent generation that will replace the current one and "take care" of the older generation. This reflects a deep trust in young people and faith in their positive impact on the future. It indicates that the teacher has created an atmosphere of trust, openness, and safety.

Conversely, many accounts describe conflicts and frustrations arising from interactions with students. The teachers note that their well-being and motivation depend on the quality of interactions with students, particularly regarding student engagement, response, and authenticity. As one interviewee notes:

[A student] wrote that this grade was very unfair, and I could see from her facial expression and the way she communicated that she was quite dissatisfied with our cooperation (...) Sometimes I have the impression that classes are a punishment for students, that it's something that disrupts their daily routines, and then one loses passion (...) because there is no response from the other side, I burn out, it makes me less willing, and a growing frustration and dissatisfaction arise within me, and I even begin to think... I start... it sometimes scares me a bit, but I begin to see the world through such bitter... bitter glasses. [I3]

[Students] have a very entitled attitude, often those who give little of themselves but are very demanding of lecturers, with their demands often disproportionate to the effort they put in. They want lecturers to be very tolerant, very indulgent, yet at the same time fair, so these expectations are inconsistent. [I3]

These statements from academics highlight the conflict between a passion for teaching and the realities of the academic system. They show how difficult conflict situations can be and how destructive it is for a teacher's passion to feel that students are attending classes out of obligation. A lack of student engagement leads to burnout, decreased motivation, and increasing frustration. The metaphor of "bitter glasses" illustrates how negative experiences can change one's perception of the world and lead to cynicism. The respondents note that the time dedicated to students and teaching is sometimes

seen as "wasted" in terms of career advancement and performance evaluation. This indicates a systemic problem within universities, where the passion for teaching is undervalued, and work time is accounted for based on publication metrics, which frustrates dedicated educators and highlights a significant issue present in universities: the academic system demotivates educators while primarily rewarding publication activity.

Teaching has always been very important. I really enjoy working with people, but unfortunately, it is not very significant today; in fact, it is a burden because good preparation for classes takes a lot of time, and that time could be used for writing articles, which translates into our performance evaluation and overall university performance metrics. [I3]

Several accounts focus directly on the negative impact of student evaluation systems on academic culture, interpersonal relationships within the university, and the sense of security for teaching staff. They discuss how the evaluation system undermines the academic ethos, turning education into a commercial relationship, which leads to frustration and restricts teaching freedom.

I have had unpleasant experiences with evaluations, of course—on the one hand, we are aware that we keep things in perspective, and if I have reasonably wise superiors whom I trust, I will approach the evaluation calmly (...), but it can be a tool that will be used against you. [I6]

The current evaluation system makes you feel like a servant, performing the role of a service provider in the eyes of students, where you must be very careful not to offend anyone's tastes (...) it is somewhat constraining. [I3]

We can be called in by the dean or the rector to discuss our behavior in meetings with students, which has created a huge precedent and a sort of communist, almost totalitarian system, where we have dirt on you. If necessary, we will pull it out... [I3]

These testimonies describe an atmosphere of fear and insecurity at universities, where student evaluations become a tool for controlling academic staff. Although the existing evaluation system was introduced to promote transparency, it instead intensifies an atmosphere of fear, frustration, and lack of trust within the academic environment, becoming an instrument of control and potential abuse of power. Evaluation has become a tool for administrative power and is often used to discipline lecturers rather than to constructively improve the quality of education. This leads to a loss of autonomy for lecturers, generating feelings of helplessness, uncertainty, and alienation, as they feel that their efforts and work quality are devalued.

The teachers also express negative emotions when describing relationships with colleagues, both superiors and subordinates. They talk about the conflicts and divisions present in the academic environment, expressing deep disappointment with the work atmosphere, which is far from the ideals professed by academics. The academic environment is seen as emotionally unhealthy, dominated by low motivation and a lack of trust. It is also where conflicts of values arise, requiring compromises with their own conscience, engaging in dishonest games, or accepting unethical behaviors:

We cannot live without conflict, which is very depressing. Considering that we are educators, we should strive to build community, to develop unity in diversity—and yet we go against that. The institute is

very divided. It has always been divided. There have always been factions (...) we are dualistic, like our country (...) it is terrifying. [I3]

Holding a position is associated with dealing with various conflicts. Negative emotions are primarily rooted in malicious behaviors that cause tension, such as slander or gossip, which, unfortunately, is quite prevalent. The following respondent notes that the academic environment is not lacking in jealousy:

I resigned from this position due to the tensions that existed. At that point, I decided to step back, as it was more important for me to behave decently than to hold on to the position. I don't want to elaborate on it, but it was quite a difficult—I would say a very difficult—experience, that resignation. (...) It was one of the toughest events I have experienced in my adult life. [I11]

One interview provides a critical diagnosis of the entire academic environment, where the teacher expresses pessimism regarding the possibility of changing an organizational culture that is chronically divided and contradicts its own basic ethical values. These chronic divisions hinder effective collaboration and build an atmosphere of fear and distrust:

[At the university], we do not feel safe, and it is no longer a value in itself for us. It is very hierarchical (...), we do not treat employees with lower titles or lower academic degrees as equals. We do not want to treat them that way; we fear it will threaten our authority. [I3]

There are no relationships... No, there aren't... everything is very superficial, and we just pass each other by. [I3]

These accounts portray the academic environment as toxic, hierarchical, and oppressive, characterized by fear and superficial relationships, resulting in exhaustion and professional burnout. It undermines the traditional ethos of the university as a community and signals a crisis in academia caused by the transformation of universities from communities into corporate organizations. This leads to the dehumanization of relationships, a loss of a sense of security, neglect of specific employee needs, and a feeling of injustice.

The Neoliberalization of Academia as a Source of Affective Injustice

The neoliberalization and transformation of academia into a space of economic efficiency and increasing competition have shaped all aspects of academic teachers' work according to the market model. This has led to the development of an increasingly prevalent "audit culture," characterized by a range of disciplinary practices through which university administrators attempt to instill new norms of conduct within organizations (Shore 2008).

Market-inspired audit and evaluation systems in academia have been designed to create competition within and between academic staff. Changes concerning evaluation have been implemented, focused on indicators and procedures, overlooking the human factor. Audit culture transforms not just institutions but the entire work environment and, most importantly, alters the sense of self, impacting identity and a sense of agency. Academic teachers view these mechanisms negatively:

It was done in a very technocratic way, which has dehumanized our relationships—that were not very good to begin with—and the job satisfaction and

sense of security that should also be felt there have evaporated. [I3]

Academics critically assess the corporate system, which they describe as unjust and sometimes ruthless, particularly towards women, who often have to fulfill multiple significant social roles, such as motherhood:

It's simply the fault of a system that has become very corporate, which has stopped paying attention to the human side, where many women work, and women have to juggle many roles... [I3]

The teachers criticize the academic system, focusing on the lack of stability, unclear evaluation criteria, the oppressive nature of evaluations, and the subjectivity of reviews. Their statements indicate that they are under constant pressure and uncertainty. The interviewees speak of unclear criteria, chaos, a lack of predictability, and the misalignment of evaluation criteria with the specifics of academic work, generating frustration and a sense of lacking a vision for academic development:

The evaluation changes like the wind; when we start the audit period, we have no idea what will happen in a year, and certainly not in four years. So, it is simply unacceptable for a person to be subject to evaluation without knowing the criteria. We constantly struggle with how we will be evaluated. An expert evaluation is about to be introduced, and I'm already scared because I don't know who the expert doing the evaluating will be... [I6]

The introduction of soulless, technocratic metrics has destroyed the sense of community, security, and satisfaction, replacing it with fear of job loss. The result of this technocratization is the erosion of

interpersonal relationships. People cease to be partners, which worsens the work atmosphere, generating continuous pressure and fear:

I can't stand being evaluated. I get anxious and angry when someone scrutinizes me. I feel a sense of injustice that someone wants to harm me, as it usually involves searching for faults rather than recognizing what has been done well. I really cannot stand evaluations. I hate it... I can't stand it... I can't stand being evaluated. [I11]

Academic teachers view the parameterization system as oppressive, opaque, and based on subjective assessments, forcing submission to arbitrary decisions and causing continuous fear:

I am increasingly frustrated. I see that other things are becoming important to me; I have different criteria. Generally, I get less and less satisfaction from this work. Yes, unfortunately, I think it greatly contributes to professional burnout. Fear arises... such uncertainty about whether I will manage to meet expectations... [I3]

Academic teachers uniformly criticize the ongoing commodification of the academic space, which they believe is characterized by continuous evaluation and reporting, a lack of stability, regulatory chaos, and subjectivity and injustice in the evaluation process. The emotional costs of constant evaluation are highlighted in their statements, with teachers mentioning alienation, frustration, and helplessness in the face of the system, stress, a sense of injustice, and fear.

Conclusions

The research demonstrates how the emotional experiences of teachers are embedded within the culture

of educational institutions and how deeply they are entangled in the power relations that prevail in academia. It shows how cultural factors—expressed in the rules governing academia, educational programs, and ministerial regulations—define what a teacher should feel and how they should express emotions while performing their professional duties. The analyses confirm the growing number of research reports on the rising tensions, emotional burdens, and distress among academic teachers (see, e.g., Kwiek 2015; Szadkowski 2015; Gill 2018; Szwabowski 2019; Zawadzki 2019; Skórzyńska 2023; Steen-Johnsen, Magnussen and Trysnes 2025; Zembylas 2026b).

The findings indicate that audit and evaluation systems in academia shape standards of behavior; they define norms and rules of conduct and influence the well-being and sense of agency of academic teachers. Recently, work in higher education has become a source of uncertainty and fear, driven by job insecurity, high expectations regarding grant income, and the enforcement of academic mobility—meaning the preference for short-term employment forms (e.g., project-based)—which results in frequent changes of affiliation, especially among younger university staff. This evokes feelings of uncertainty and instability among academic staff. Working in such conditions is exhausting, diminishing agency and self-worth. It can thus be said that a “culture of fear” has firmly taken root in academic institutions, as a consequence of the academic audit culture and arising within the framework of “soft” management of all aspects of life in contemporary late-capitalist universities (Berg, Huijbens and Larsen 2016).

The analysis demonstrates that academic teachers' emotions are an adaptation to an academic culture in which passion and commitment to teaching and

research have become “entangled” with neoliberal trends in university management. Heightened anxiety, uncertainty, frustration, and a sense of injustice lead to a state of profound exhaustion resulting from constant assessment, exposure to stress, and a lack of a support system. Exhaustion is a “structural emotion” that emerges and is shaped by political and institutional dynamics. It is also a form of affective survival shaped by constant exposure to volatility and uncertainty, which, most importantly, weakens teachers' capacity for long-term engagement in teaching and research.

The participants described academia as an alienating and emotionally exploitative space for workers—one in which manifestations of affective injustice are evident. Affective injustice is a concept that adequately captures the emotional reactions verbalized by the respondents, as well as their foundational character, situating them within structures larger than the individuals themselves. Affective injustice arises as a result of educational policies and privileged groups imposing emotional norms. As individuals working in academia must perform “emotional labor” to adapt to these requirements and rules, they experience exhaustion, sadness, and anger—in short, affective suffering.

The research highlights the political entanglement of emotions, feelings, and affects—a thread that has been marginalized in educational theory and research. Thus, it directs attention towards an educational framework of empowerment (Biesta 2010, 2013), and towards an approach centered on dialogue and tolerance that fosters individual development, autonomy, and the ability to make independent and critical judgments (Kwieciński 2019). I align myself with Krzysztof Maliszewski (2021) in advocating for “an idea of education that serves the work of awakening—it does not make us hostages of the here and now, nor reinforce the bubbles of fleeting collective imaginings, but helps us live with open eyes and cope—as much as we can—with our flawed, fractured condition and with social phantasms” (2021:22; author's translation).

According to this framework, education involves building critical consciousness. The core of this approach is to evoke emotional engagement that will liberate learners from a “culture of silence,” allowing them to view themselves as individuals capable of resistance and autonomous action (Szkudlarek 2019:578). It also fosters agency and responsibility, especially regarding structural injustice (Boler 1999, 2015; Boler and Zembylas 2003, 2016; Zembylas 2026a).

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Acquiescence to Criticism: The Meaning of Emotions in the Multidimensional Evaluation of an Academic Teacher's Work

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Abstract: Emotions play a central role in the professional work of every employee, shaping interactions and cooperation. In the work of an academic teacher, they can build motivation to work and influence the perceived satisfaction and self-esteem (pride), although they can also strongly contribute to burnout and demotivation (shame, fear). Interactional situations in which an academic teacher finds themselves arouse certain emotions and create the need to manage them. The work of an academic teacher is constantly assessed, which influences self-assessment. Strong rivalry and competitiveness make it necessary to develop mechanisms for managing emotions to deal with criticism, work through failures, and adjust the level of one's own ambitions to institutional requirements. The article is based on qualitative research embedded in the interpretative paradigm, conducted with academic teachers. It presents their self-protection strategies developed in response to the continuous criticism and evaluation of their work, demonstrating that the idea that performance evaluation does not hold in contemporary realities. Employee evaluation, along with excessive bureaucratization and a neoliberal mode of management, contributes to the demotivation of academic staff.

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The work of an academic teacher is commonly recognized as highly demanding and embedded in a complex set of professional expectations. It demands a broad range of competencies, understood as a configuration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Król 2006:86). These competencies cover subject-specific and general knowledge; behavioral competencies concern effective conduct and communication; leadership competencies relate to managing staff or students. Emotional competencies are particularly wide-ranging, encompassing empathy, enthusiasm, forgiveness, optimism, self-confidence, educational authority, the ability to build interpersonal relationships, a sense of social justice, trust, and familiarity with student culture (Madalińska-Michalak and Górska 2012:124-135). Together, these define describes as the full competency profile of the academic role. Academic work additionally requires creativity, the ability to make swift decisions, manage

stress, withstand criticism, and effectively organize time, set goals, and pursue them.

Academic teachers in Poland, who are most often employed in combined research and teaching positions, are therefore expected to meet highly diverse and often competing criteria to function effectively. On the one hand, they act as educators who work with young adults and impart up-to-date knowledge. On the other hand, they function as researchers who pursue their own research agendas, engage in analytical work, publish research results and reflections, and contribute to the development of new theoretical and methodological concepts. All of this is undertaken in a context of relatively low societal recognition, frequently accompanied by remuneration that does not exceed the national average.

Academic work is also subject to continuous, multi-level evaluation. Academic teachers, like

most employees, undergo periodic performance assessments conducted at Polish universities every four years. In addition, both academics and the institutions in which they are employed are subject to a research audit, in which individual scholarly activities may directly influence the scientific category assigned to a given organizational unit. Within this framework, scientific and creative achievements, research potential, and the practical impact of research activities are taken into account (see Dz.U. 2018 poz. 1668 Ustawa z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. – Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce [Journal of Laws of 2018, item 1668, Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science]).

Beyond formal procedures, academic teachers are also continuously evaluated by students, colleagues, and superiors. The products of their work—such as articles, books, and textbooks—are assessed and multiple peer reviewed. By disseminating their research, academics are additionally exposed to secondary forms of evaluation, as each publication made available online may generate further commentary. Conference presentations likewise involve not only the demands of public speaking but also critical feedback and assessment of their work. These evaluative pressures are further intensified during professional advancement, where a single review can decisively shape a career trajectory, all within a broader context of intensified competition and rivalry.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that repeated and multi-level evaluation can exert a strong influence on the looking glass self and, consequently, on self-evaluation. In order to deal with criticism, process both minor and major failures, and adjust their aspirations to institutional requirements, academic teachers are required to manage their emotions effectively, engaging in emotional labor and develop-

ing emotional competencies. Emotions experienced and aroused in the course of their professional work shape interactions and patterns of cooperation. While they may foster work motivation and influence perceived job satisfaction and self-esteem, including feelings of pride, they may also contribute to demotivation and burnout, evoking emotions such as shame, embarrassment, fear or anxiety¹.

Numerous studies emphasize the role of employees' emotions as a factor influencing job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, burnout, and turnover intentions (Pawłowska 2013, 2020a, 2020b; Cho et al. 2017; Edgerton et al. 2024). In recent decades, academics in Poland and elsewhere have experienced substantial changes in the nature of their work. These changes include an intensification of teaching and administrative duties, growing publication pressure, increased competition for research funding, and heightened job insecurity, particularly among those in the early stages of their academic careers (see Berlant 2011; Barcan 2013; Halfman and Radder 2015; Gill 2018). In the literature, these phenomena are commonly described as the intensification of academic work (Kinman 2014; Edgerton et al. 2024).

Moreover, engaging in invisible work may significantly impact an individual's emotional well-being, as while it is expected by university administrations, it is absent from formal employee evaluation systems and career advancement (Gordon, Willink and

1 Fear and anxiety are often treated as synonymous, but "fear is associated with a real, here-and-now threat, while anxiety is associated with one whose source lies in our mind" (Krzysztofowicz 2017:113). Fear is always triggered by a specific threat here and now, while anxiety is not specific; it is formless. When experiencing anxiety, we know we are afraid of something, but we cannot define their essence or pinpoint its exact cause. Because this state is long-lasting and does not dissipate quickly like fear. Anxiety can impact our daily life.

Hunter 2024). Thus, these institutional shifts have adverse consequences for academic well-being, with the literature documenting rising levels of occupational stress, a deterioration of work–life balance, and an increased risk of burnout. Burnout is understood as a constellation of symptoms encompassing emotional exhaustion, cynicism (or depersonalization), and a reduced sense of professional accomplishment (Demerouti, Mostert and Bakker 2010:211).

The present article seeks to describe the emotional labor inherent in the work of academic teachers in the context of continuous and multifaceted evaluation of their professional activities. It shows how events interpreted by individuals as success or failure shape the emergence of specific emotions, such as pride, satisfaction, and joy, as well as embarrassment, shame, anger, frustration, fear, and anxiety. These emotions, in turn, may affect job satisfaction and the effectiveness of their work. The analysis also indicates that dealing with criticism is inherent to academic work, contributes to the construction of professional identity and self-identity, and is socialized during the early stages of academic careers. The article examines emotions elicited in response to institutional demands, systemic requirements, and organizational frameworks, focusing specifically on the role of emotions when working in academia. Emotional labor serves as the analytical backdrop for the discussion of coping strategies, including the circumvention of institutional requirements as a means of maintaining congruence with the self.

Research Methodology

The analysis presented below is based on research conducted as part of the IDUB Interdisciplinary Research Grant implemented at the University of Lodz, entitled *Engagement and Exhaustion as (Un)*

Expected Effects of the Emotional Labour of Academic Teachers (decision no. 3/IGB/2022, project code: B2311813000200.07). The project aimed to reconstruct the emotional experiences of academic teachers, including their emotional labor in individual, interactional, communal, and organizational contexts. Underlying this exploration is the premise that emotional labor carries significant consequences for the development of academic teachers' subjectivity, both positive (constructive) and negative (destructive and degrading). Thus, while such labor can foster self(trans)formation and (self)reflection, it can simultaneously drive the affective marginalization of the teacher's subjectivity and the erosion of their agency (see Górska 2022).

The research project was embedded within the tradition of interpretative and critical research (Konecki 2005; Urbaniak-Zajac 2008) and was primarily oriented towards the exploration and reconstruction of academic teachers' emotional experiences. The main empirical data collection technique involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews, also referred to as "in-depth ethnographic interviews" (see Konecki 2000:169). The study was conducted with 17 academic teachers from the social sciences, comprising ten women and seven men employed at eight Polish universities. The respondents' professional tenure varied, ranging from 10 to 37 years. The interviews were carried out between April and July 2025 by four researchers (project team members) in the form of online meetings via MS Teams. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, which enabled the "ordering of chaotic or overlapping statements" (Silverman 2012:187). Subsequently, initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding were applied (see Charmaz 2009:60-64), which revealed patterns that emerged directly from the empirical material (see Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The qualitative approach adopted in the study made it possible to “*address issues that go beyond what is objective and measurable, thus enabling engagement with problems related to evaluations, values, and lived experiences*” (Bauman 1997:56), which is highly relevant to this article. The semi-structured interview is characterized by a general and modifiable outline of thematic issues around which the conversation with the respondent is structured (cf. Przybyłowska 1978:63; Babbie 2004:327). The questions focused on areas of knowledge in which respondents felt at ease. Crucially, all interviews fell within the scope of qualitative “active interviews” (Holstein and Gubrium 1997), in which the participating teachers were active contributors who co-constructed the narrative. The interview was understood as a “*social event in which the interviewer is a participant observer*” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2000:161), creating an open atmosphere conducive to obtaining comprehensive, in-depth responses and accounts of emotional experiences (see Hammersley and Atkinson 2000; Konecki 2000; Pawłowska 2013). The average interview lasted 1 hour and 26 minutes.

The analysis revealed several categories, including job satisfaction, subordination, empowerment, engagement, emotional exhaustion, emotional competencies, authority, pseudo-relationships, emotion management, and—of particular relevance to this article—emotional labour, acquiescence to criticism, the employee as an instrument, and enforced competition. These categories were operationalized multidimensionally. With regard to the concept of receptivity to criticism examined in this article, four analytical dimensions were distinguished: acceptance of others’ legitimate right to express criticism, openness to receiving critical feedback, willingness to engage in reflexive consideration of critical remarks, and—most importantly—emotional toler-

ance of criticism, understood as the degree of emotional discomfort experienced in response to critical evaluation. More generally, acquiescence to criticism is conceptualized as the degree to which an individual accepts the possibility that their views, actions, or behaviors are being evaluated and critiqued by others, while remaining willing to listen to and reflect upon that feedback.

The second component of the research project was evocative autoethnography (Borowska-Beszta 2009; Bielecka-Prus 2014; Kacperczyk 2014). However, because this analysis is ongoing, this method was not utilized for this article.

The chosen data collection methods enabled access to the private, intimate, and often shielded emotional experiences of teachers related to their work and interpersonal relations within academic institutions. The semi-structured interviews proved to be the most appropriate technique for collecting data on emotions in the workplace. The only difficulty encountered lay in coordinating the interview schedules to ensure participants had sufficient time to provide detailed and in-depth accounts. These interviews not only provide participants with an opportunity to recount their own experiences but also enable researchers to capture the nuanced ways in which individuals construct meaning around their work and the emotions associated with it, integrating these experiences into their identities and everyday lives (see Bonfanti, Cannito and Naldini 2025).

Emotions in Professional Work

The study of emotions remains an important area of inquiry across many academic disciplines, including sociology. Aristotle defined emotions as “those things that bring about a change in the human con-

dition that impairs judgment" (2001); since then, they have been understood as states that regulate individuals' actions, behaviors, and decisions. Contemporary cognitive approaches view emotions as processes arising from a specific interaction between an individual and their environment (Lazarus 1991), triggered by rewards or punishments, and their accompanying context (Rolls 1999). Emotions are described as processes that "*establish, maintain, change, or interrupt the relationship between the individual and the environment in matters of importance to the individual*" (Campos et al. 1994:285), and they serve to create and sustain social relationships (Pawłowska 2013:14). In this article, emotions are understood as complex narrative structures comprising a story that includes somatic and affective events as well as plans of action (Shweder 2002:42).

To analyze emotions in professional work, it is important to examine how these emotions are interpreted and expressed through membership in the professional group of academic teachers. Consequently, emotions are defined from the perspective of the interactional paradigm, which conceptualizes feelings as emergent experiences shaped by social factors (see Pawłowska 2013:49). Within this paradigm, several theoretical approaches to emotions can be distinguished; for this analysis, the focus is restricted to three of them.

First, exchange theories conceptualize society not as a static structure, but as a dynamic network sustained through ongoing transactions. Each individual is driven by the pursuit of profit, understood as the acquisition of greater or more valuable resources than those relinquished. When individuals succeed in this pursuit, positive affective states emerge; when they fail, negative affective states arise. Positive emotions are associated with increased motiva-

tion and a greater willingness to participate in social life, whereas negative emotions are linked to frustration and apathy (see Pawłowska 2013:49, 2020a, 2020b).

Second, dramaturgical theories emphasize the metaphor of the individual as an actor, others as an audience, and the social world as a theatre. Actors perform roles in accordance with a given script, directing their behavior in ways that are shaped primarily by the emotions they evoke and/or experience (see Goffman 2006, 2008).

Third, theoretical approaches focused on the construction of individual identity and self-concepts conceptualize these as regulators of behavior. Through action, individuals strive to maintain a positive self-concept (Turner and Stets 2009:174-176). Emotions thus belong to social interaction and activate processes of emotional role-taking. A distinction can be made between emotions that require role-taking, that is, the adoption of another person's position and perspective, and emotions that do not require the presence of another (whether real or imagined, concrete or generalized). Emotions that do not involve role-taking include anger, fear, and joy, whereas emotions requiring the definition of another's role include embarrassment, shame, guilt, pride, and vanity (see Shott 1979:1321-1324; Scheff 1990, 2000).

The expression and suppression of emotions occur in culturally accepted and socially prescribed ways (see Wisecup, Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2006). As Kemper (2005:73; see also Kemper 1991) notes, it is the social setting of the individual that determines which emotions are expressed at a given time and place, on what basis and for what reasons, through which means of expression, and by whom. Emo-

tions, although generally considered subjective states experienced by individuals, should therefore be reconstructed in relation to the actions and social processes in which actors are involved (cf. Pawłowska 2013, 2020a, 2020b).

Emotional Labor

Originally introduced to sociological literature by Arlie Hochschild (1983, 2009), emotional labor functions here primarily as a contextual framework for the analysis. This labor is closely linked to professional roles and institutional emotion rules, which are the socially accepted norms and expectations governing employees' conduct. Individuals actively manage their emotions to align their demeanor with the demands of their professions. Emotional labor involves suppressing or evoking specific emotions to maintain the expressions and displays that elicit appropriate responses in others. As Turner and Stets note, "emotional labor will be most visible where people confront emotional ideologies that contradict their actual feelings and where social rules require them to express emotions they do not feel" (2009:53). Emotional labor encompasses not only displaying (or feigning) emotions adapted to workplace rules, but also altering emotional engagement, actions, and the management of experienced emotions, understood as working with emotions.

It occurs at two levels. The first is surface acting, defined as using facial expressions to convey the emotions deemed suitable for a given situation, regardless of the individual's actual feelings (see Hochschild 2009:7,41-42,54; Pawłowska 2013:68; Kępińska-Jasny 2014:54). This constitutes an external action where the individual modifies emotional expression while concealing their genuine emotions. The second level is deep acting, understood as in-

tentionally altering one's own feelings so that they become congruent with the appropriate emotional expression (see Hochschild 2009:7,42-47,54-56; Pawłowska 2013:68; Kępińska-Jasny 2014:54). Deep acting occurs when an individual seeks to alter the feeling itself, its cognitive interpretation, or the evaluative process that gave rise to the emotion, as well as basic physiological elements such as muscle tension or heart rate (Kemper 2005:80). Deep emotional work involves "changing experienced emotions by adopting a specific way of interpreting a situation. This is internal work, in which the individual ultimately comes to experience the desired emotions and expresses them. This expression is natural; it is not a mask worn for the purposes of a given interaction, but an internally experienced emotional state" (Pawłowska 2013:68).

When discussing emotional labor below, the term is used in its broader sense to encompass both *emotional labor* (within the organizational environment) and *emotional work* (relating to the private sphere) (Kępińska-Jasny 2014:54) and to work with emotions.

Evaluation as a Source of Affective Practices

As indicated in the introduction, academic teachers experience both successes and failures in their professional work. In managing their emotions, they engage in what are referred to here as affective practices (see Wetherell 2012; Nycz 2014:9-10). The concept of affective practice emphasizes human activity and negotiation, intertwining subjective experiences with the social organization of affect. It may be analyzed both in terms of individual feelings and emotions and as shared patterns of emotional action (Wetherell, McConville and McCreanor 2012:13-14).

An integral dimension of academic work is the experience of ubiquitous criticism, which the analysis identified across several distinct areas. Emotions experienced in response to criticism across different domains of academic activity form a continuum, shaping various defense mechanisms to protect the self. Acquiescence to criticism constitutes one of the analytical categories distinguished in this study. It is discussed here in relation to two areas of academic teachers' professional activity: the publication of scholarly articles and employee evaluation, together with the closely related parametric evaluation of universities. This acquiescence is a broader category that also encompasses the evaluation of conference presentations (with emotional labor beginning as early as conceptualizing the presentation and submitting a conference proposal), the evaluation of teaching by students (which is particularly salient given the relatively low weight accorded to teaching in employee assessment), and the evaluation to which academic teachers are subjected when deciding to undergo promotion procedures. In each of these cases, teachers—compelled by external regulations as well as by personal beliefs, desires, and ambitions—submit to criticism, knowingly consenting to the emotional and identity-related exposure of the self. A category closely related to this acquiescence and to the evaluation of academic teachers' actions is that of "consent to exploitation" (undertaking unpaid activities, heavy service workloads) (see Edgerton et al. 2024). Due to its complexity and its links to organizational-level practices, this issue is not addressed in this article.

Employee Evaluation – a Demotivating Motivator

In discussing the consent to criticism within the evaluation of academic work, it is necessary to refer to individual employee evaluation. In Polish uni-

versities, this assessment regime is closely linked to faculty publication output and institutional research audits. Like other forms of employee evaluation, it is intended to motivate action, intensify effort, and increase work efficiency. However, as one respondent noted:

The more they try to motivate us to act, the more they actually demotivate us. [R2]

The evaluation criteria, review procedures, and administrative instruments trigger intense emotions, prompt informal "corridor" discussions, and shape various publication strategies. Academic teachers in Poland are formally assessed every four years across three main areas: research, teaching, and organizational activity. Organizational activity includes service to the university, institutional promotion, committee participation, administrative roles, conference attendance, and outreach activities. The scope of these organizational criteria varies by university. Meanwhile, the primary criterion for teaching activity is fulfilling the minimum required teaching load². The most significant element of the evaluation concerns research activity, including high-scoring publications (a phenomenon commonly referred to in the Polish academic community as "punktoza" ("pointosis," "points-mania"), the management of research projects, and securing research grants.

The sharp imbalances between these evaluated areas create significant complications. In practice,

² The teaching load refers to the mandatory number of instructional hours a faculty member must deliver per academic year. At most Polish universities, these loads are tiered based on academic rank and title. For research assistants and assistant professors, the requirement is 230 hours per academic year, whereas for professors (associate professors and full professors), it is reduced to 200 hours.

teaching is barely evaluated; course preparation, delivery, and individual mentorship remain largely irrelevant within the system. Organizational activity is similarly marginalized. Consequently, teaching and education—one of the university's fundamental missions—is not reflected in the objectives and criteria of employee assessment. As one respondent observed:

Generally, this is precisely what is paradoxical. On the one hand, it's fine, because we are in a research and teaching position, so this is in a sense the most important thing. It's just that no one pays attention to the teaching aspect. It is also difficult to evaluate, and it is equally important. [R11]

The evaluation system shapes job satisfaction and entails emotional labor, while simultaneously generating opposition and provoking resistance among academic staff. It is not the evaluation itself that generates resistance, but rather the manner in which it is conducted and the criteria that govern it. The close connection between employee assessment and the requirement to produce publications valued at over 100 points³ leads to the perception of the regime as oppressive and unreliable. One experienced

academic with over 30 years of tenure described the current system as follows:

Well, when I started working at the university, there were three groups of employees: some focused primarily on teaching, others focused primarily on research—treating teaching as a necessary evil—and others focused primarily on organization, for example, on fulfilling their functions and so on. What has changed since then is that today, what is expected, especially from research and teaching staff—because here too we would have to differentiate—is the status of the individual groups and the resulting consequences. But I'll focus now only on the group of employees employed in research and teaching positions: that we are expected to be simultaneously excellent researchers, excellent teachers, and excellent organizers. And, of course, we are also expected to obtain funding for research activities. Yes, well, well, that's part of this scholarly evaluation. And now, what's easily observable is the greatest importance placed on research activities. That is, if you fill the slots, and those slots are still highly scored, then everything is fine. Yes, you can be there, I mean, you can meet the minimum requirements in terms of teaching and the minimum requirements in terms of organization. But what makes it okay is that there's a tilt, you know, towards an overemphasis on academic activity in this assessment, and I'm talking, of course, about the research and teaching staff. Because the assessment of teaching staff is different. But let's be clear: there are significantly fewer of those employees, right? Well, in Poland, we currently have probably 90% of people employed in research and teaching positions and 10% in teaching positions. This means, you know, it means that we immediately, you know, try to act rationally, that is, to put it briefly, we play the game according to the established rules, yes, and that, for example, is discouraging. And I'll also add that in

3 Journal articles published by Polish academic teachers are evaluated on the basis of a point system established by the Minister of Science in its list of academic journals and peer-reviewed international conference materials (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 349, Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego w sprawie sporządzania wykazów wydawnictw monografii naukowych oraz czasopism naukowych i recenzowanych materiałów z konferencji międzynarodowych [Journal of Laws of 2020: 349, Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education on the preparation of lists of scientific monograph publishers and scientific journals and peer-reviewed materials from international conferences]. A journal's rating ranges from 0 to 200 points, with articles published in journals carrying 100, 140, or 200 points considered the most desirable. The full annex to this list is available on the Ministry's website: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/62739f3a-6a1d-4659-98ad-59dd63108ee7>).

this academic activity, again, not everything is, you know, equally important. For example, organizing a conference no longer counts at all. Yes, it doesn't matter anymore. Just like if you publish a slot for 100 points and organize a conference, even an international one, only those 100 points will count. However, this conference will be noted somewhere, of course, but it won't matter for the assessment, yes. In short, when we play this game, we act rationally, that is, we focus our efforts on what we are primarily assessed for. Of course, there are people—and I am one of them—who value teaching very much and will continue teaching regardless of whether it is appreciated or not. But when it comes to the mechanism itself, I see clearly that, you know, it doesn't reward this type of activity; on the contrary, it marginalizes it [...] So, you know, when I think about this assessment we are subjected to, I think it's bad that it has reached such a tipping point that the other two types of activity don't balance the first one. No. [R5]

This longer excerpt from the interview is included because, while addressing the lack of proportionality in the evaluation of academic staff, the respondent simultaneously points to numerous other activities undertaken by faculty members that shape their academic identity. The employee is expected to be an all-rounder with extensive knowledge in many areas, including accounting. When submitting grant and conference applications, academics are responsible for preparing cost estimates, settling received funds, and exercising financial oversight. At the same time, they are expected to fulfill the university's primary mission: educating future generations and imparting reliable knowledge. A growing body of scholarship has demonstrated that academics are required to undertake substantial amounts of unsatisfying and frequently invisible labor (Belas 1999; Gill 2018). Moreover, the distribution of

such tasks remains highly gendered, with women disproportionately responsible for what has been conceptualized as “academic housework”—forms of labor that tend to be accorded lower status and receive less institutional recognition and reward than other academic activities (Heijstra et al. 2017). These structural dynamics contribute to the reproduction and entrenchment of a neoliberal regime within higher education, characterized by the normative construction of the productive and competitive “ideal academic” as the dominant institutional subject (see Thornton 2014).

The aforementioned “*punktoza*” (“pointosis” or “points-mania”), although intended to be motivating, may in fact lead to stagnation and limited publishing, transforming research into an unpleasant obligation and fostering an attitude of simply “waiting for retirement”:

Especially since I'm starting to see [publishing – author's note] as increasingly forced. You have to accumulate these points somewhere, check them off, and so on. So, while a few years ago I could experience some excitement, let's say. Now, I sometimes feel happy that I've written something cool, but that's just a rare occurrence, and I treat it more as an unpleasant obligation than a joy, yes, and that's how it is. So, these are the main reasons why I probably won't stay on too long beyond the time I have to retire. [R2]

Employees experience regret, but also fear and uncertainty. Employee evaluation, which is intended to increase efficiency by emphasizing the importance of publishing valuable and reliable articles, does not translate into higher quality or enhance the university's standing. In fact, excessive pressure generates a strong emotional burden, including stress that may become chronic and lead to burnout:

Of course, I can't get used to this—with this “grant-oza” [“grantosis” or “grant-mania”] and “punktoza” [“pointosis” or “points-mania”]. And maybe it's not even a matter of the “grant-oza” or “punktoza”, but rather the importance assigned to these points, that some other activity, for example, is not important. Yes, it is, you know, it's so unpleasant for me, for example, you could say unpleasant. [R10]

Unlike the emotions experienced during the publication process, the emotions associated with employee evaluation do not concern the very fact of undergoing the evaluation procedure, but rather its course and the perceived unfairness of the redistribution of outcomes. Although the evaluation is formally individual, it takes on the character of a collective assessment. The evaluation involves more than two entities (the evaluated person and the evaluator); instead, the evaluating body is collective and spans multiple institutional layers. It ranges from the immediate superior up to the Rector, and includes separate evaluation committees at both the university and faculty levels. The evaluation also relies on administrative staff who oversee the submission of documents, signatures, and related procedures. Given this relatively complex and multi-layered framework in Poland, there is no chance for anonymity. This not only triggers the emotional processes accompanying employees in many organizations, but also, and perhaps above all, renders the evaluation public.

Written evaluations of academic performance pass through several organizational levels until they are approved by the Rector, and because they are communicated openly, each involved entity—including administrative units—has access to the documentation. Discretion is therefore difficult to maintain. Consequently, information about these assessments

circulates informally within the Institute, and sometimes even at the Faculty level, stripping the individual evaluation of privacy and giving it a distinctly public character.

Therefore, when an employee's evaluation is reviewed by dozens of individuals across these layers, the emotional impact is not limited to a private discussion of performance with the immediate superior, as it should be. Instead, it inflicts a complex and intense emotional burden, directly impacting the employee's scholarly identity. Many respondents pointed to the profound uncertainty and frustration associated with a total lack of control over an unpredictable final outcome. Furthermore, this public exposure can lead to severe social consequences, with some respondents referring to social ostracism and the stigmatization of those who do not publish or who publish less.

Emotional labor is closely linked here to Goffman's framework on facework, understood as actions undertaken to protect the self (see Goffman 2000). Two strategies are evident in this respect. The first involves presenting oneself as a victim who, for various reasons, was unable to obtain a positive evaluation. Such individuals appeal to external factors, accusing others of a lack of understanding, forbearance, or empathy. Although, as one interviewee notes, “it's practically impossible to receive a negative evaluation based on such criteria” [R11], there are individuals who have not been able to publish a single article for four years. These are the individuals who present themselves as victims of the system's actions. Emotional labor performed at a superficial level, in the case of the “I as a victim of the system” strategy, can quickly lead to emotional exhaustion and affective emptiness. The struggle to defend the self and the public enactment of such a

strategy involve a tremendous expenditure of energy in relation to the emotional costs incurred.

Work performed at a deeper level, in turn, may transform an individual's self-image. For those who are evaluated negatively, such an assessment can extend to all areas of their activity, including the self. Consequently, employees may begin to evaluate themselves negatively as a person. For those assessed positively, the underlying emotional mechanism may be similar, but the affective outcome is the opposite. Moreover, an employee receiving a positive evaluation does not need to engage in face-work practices, and the unintentional transparency of the assessment may further reinforce feelings of pride and satisfaction.

The situation is different regarding the institutional criticism leveled during the university's research audit. Because the audit operates at the macro level and applies directly to the institution rather than the individual, it does not immediately threaten the employee's self-image. Even if employees do not fill all their publication slots or if their publications receive low scores, their identity remains unthreatened because audit findings are typically presented at a high level of generality. Consequently, employees participate in the auditing process from the periphery, shielding them from direct negative consequences if their research outputs are insufficient. This structural distance is precisely what links the macro audit to the individual evaluation through the distinct category of acceptance of criticism; since the threat to the self is minimized, a baseline acceptance of institutional critique becomes possible.

However, this dynamic shifts when evaluation data is made public, moving the emotional focus from mitigating threats to generating collective or indi-

vidual validation. Feelings of satisfaction, pride, and contentment may emerge when superiors recognize an individual's contribution to achieving a high scholarly category for the research unit. In some institutes, the names of the most highly published employees are publicly disclosed, which may evoke personal pride and, at times, even hubris. Interestingly, even with a relatively small individual contribution to the audit, employees may experience pride simply by association, belonging to a university, faculty, or institute that holds the highest research category (A or A+).

As we have observed, the employee evaluation system in its current form does not increase productivity and may even exert a demotivating effect, as excessive pressure deprives individuals of scholarly creativity. At the same time, at many universities, the evaluation criteria do not differentiate among faculty members and are not linked to any incentive system. Consequently, while the evaluation triggers the wide range of emotions discussed here—including anger, frustration, envy, pride, and satisfaction—it fails to directly account for the emotional labor performed. The situation is different in the case of criticism of publications. Although publishing constitutes an element of the formal evaluation framework, the acceptance of criticism described here is distinct and internalized.

Criticism of Publications: Playing the Game of Status Defense

As indicated above, the category of "acquiescence of criticism" also applies to the formal criticism of publications. Every academic is obliged to publish research results, reflections, opinions, and analyses. When writing an academic article or book, academics strive to ensure that their work is compelling and

robust. From the perspective of the respondents, they view their completed manuscript as a polished, definitive contribution, although the review process often undermines this belief in their work's completeness and infallibility. Initially, this evokes frustration, anger, resentment, and even a desire for retaliation against the reviewer. Because peer reviews are anonymous, the desire for retaliation is redirected towards editors. However, the pressure to publish in top-tier journals makes acting on this resentment impossible; antagonizing editors—particularly those at journals valued at over 100 points—would be counter-productive and amount to “publication suicide.” With only a handful of journals in pedagogy or sociology offering top-tier scores, authors cannot afford to take offense at negative reviews or extensive revision demands. Securing these high-scoring publications thus becomes the primary objective for an academic teacher. As demonstrated above, these metrics constitute a key element of formal employee evaluation, the university's research audit, and promotional procedures.

Consequently, staff members have developed mechanisms aimed at reducing the level of negative emotions. Academic teachers have learned to protect the self and to separate the self-as-employee from the product of their work. As interviewees noted, receiving a review with comments is never pleasant; however, authors view these critiques as constructive, and revising the article is intended to bring them closer to the goal of publication. Emotion management is evident here, unfolding chronologically. The journey begins with initial fear and anxiety (“Should I submit it? Will it be accepted?”), which briefly gives way to euphoria (“I can share my research results”), uncertainty and anticipation (“When will the review arrive and what will it be like?”). If the review is negative and the article is

rejected, or when it contains numerous comments and suggestions for revision—especially those that the author disagrees with—it inevitably triggers anger and rage. Ultimately, however, this turmoil resolves into joy, satisfaction, and pride⁴ once the article is finally published. Pride may appear even earlier, when a fully positive review with few or no comments is received, although this is relatively rare. Interestingly, after publication, anger, frustration, stress, and shame subside, and the emotions accompanying the publication process are forgotten.

This raises the question of the extent to which the emotions described by respondents are actually experienced versus how much they constitute self-presentation. Do anger and shame indeed disappear, leaving the author with only satisfaction and pride? Is this merely a strategy of self-manipulation or self-deception? Does the academic teacher, experiencing joy after publication, truly no longer experience negative affective states, or are these emotions suppressed through surface acting as part of emotional labor aimed at protecting the self?

4 Pride is most often described as a type of attitude or motivation that emerges as an expression of self-evaluation. It is “a positive emotion that attunes individuals to one another's reactions (through role-taking)” (see Turner and Stets 2009:174). “The emergence of pride depends on the quality of social relationships” (Pawłowska 2020a:103). Pride, like other social emotions, is an element of the reflected self and constitutes a basis for social control. The consequence of experiencing pride is social conformity and a high degree of social stability (see, among others, Scheff 1990, 2000). Individuals experiencing pride focus on a specific behavior rather than on the self as a whole, evaluating their actions (behavior) as a success. The self remains separated from the object of evaluation (Lewis 2000). Pride is a relatively enduring emotion, centered on self-approval that inherently motivates individuals to experience it. By behaving in socially expected ways, individuals secure the approval of others, which in turn leads not only to the emergence of pride but also to group solidarity (Shott 1979). Ultimately, pride enhances professional efficacy and job satisfaction (see Pawłowska 2013, 2020a).

Furthermore, is criticism that is labeled as constructive always constructive? Does the management of emotions when receiving a review that contains critical comments actually shield individuals from feelings of frustration and anger? The participants accept the right of others to criticize, and agree that everyone is entitled to express critical opinions. They are also open to addressing critical comments, which constitutes an indispensable element of the process of working on a manuscript and adapting it to publication requirements. Although reading a review “may at times be painful” [R5], and even at this stage requires emotional work, it nevertheless represents an internalized practice.

The next stage involves reflecting upon criticism, manifested in a declared willingness to analyze and consider the critical feedback received. This is a crucial juncture, as reflection gives rise to emotional tolerance. Depending on how the author evaluates the feedback and on whether the reviewer's comments are recognized as constructive and legitimate, different levels of discomfort emerge following exposure to critical evaluation. The less accepting the author is of criticism at each of the preceding stages, the more intense and enduring the negatively valenced emotions become. Such emotions may subsequently evolve into a mood state that inhibits further action.

Let us examine the transformation of frustration and anger into pride. Shame is deliberately omitted here—although it may emerge in specific circumstances—because the rejection of an article or the receipt of numerous critical comments remains hidden from public view. Rejection usually remains unknown to others, as academics rarely share such information. This professional isolation may have negative consequences, as individuals are often

unable to process negative affective states independently and internally. Typically, as noted above, reviews are anonymous: the author of the article does not know the identity of the reviewer, and vice versa. This arrangement partially prevents the emergence of shame (see Scheff 1990), understood as a social emotion arising in externalized interactions. A negative evaluation of the manuscript initially evokes anger, which is most often redirected outward. More experienced researchers have, therefore, developed self-protective mechanisms. They seek to prevent self-endangering cognitions, adopting the strategy: “It doesn't matter, I'll send it somewhere else.” This does not mean that the author of a rejected article does not experience negative emotions; rather, it indicates the use of self-corrective (protective) strategies:

Recently, I had an article rejected by a journal I would say is highly ranked. I thought it was quite well written, so it came as a surprise. I do not entirely agree with the review, but it was a rejection, [yet] there was no point in tearing up the manuscript [...]. So I somehow got through it. I really trusted that it was well written [...]. I have already moved on, and now I am trying elsewhere [...]. I hope everything will be all right, but, but it was just so unexpected. [R2]

Accustomed to criticism in many areas, and in order to achieve the ultimate goal of publication, academics transform anger into creative action by taking reviewers' comments into account. This also constitutes a deliberate action strategy: “achieve the goal.” The author and the reviewer engage in an interactional game, which I term the “status defense game”. It is generally accepted in academic circles that “the reviewer's role is to point out imperfections even where they do not exist” [R15]. Therefore, to protect their status, reviewers must demonstrate supe-

riority and formulate critical remarks accordingly. The author is aware that addressing the reviewer's comments ensures that the text will be published sooner and their status will increase relative to their colleagues. Consequently, the criticism received in this manner evokes emotions but does not lead to negative self-assessment. Only the author is aware of this emotional labor. They experience anger, sadness, or even shame⁵, but in the privacy of their office, in front of their computer screen. Success in the form of publication, however, is public. Colleagues may become jealous, which can indirectly serve as a source of satisfaction for the author of multiple publications or as a source of fear and uncertainty.

One strategy employed by authors is "publication silence." Faculty members do not discuss planned publications with one another, nor do they discuss those that have already appeared. On the one hand, this strategy aligns with the previously described defense mechanism against shame, for instance in the case of article rejection. On the other hand, it serves to protect against colleagues' envy:

5 Shame is an emotion, a feeling that is linked to thinking and, above all, to recognizing this emotion as one's own. It operates through one's belonging to a given social group, and its emergence requires an audience or the thought of one. The feeling may arise even when an individual merely thinks that they might be evaluated. Because it is an exceptionally strong and uncomfortable feeling, it makes it more difficult to violate certain norms and injunctions. Consequently, this emotion possesses remarkable power in social relations (see Krzysztofowicz 2017:155-156). Shame is also a signal of a bond that is threatened or in some way violated. If the idea of the social bond is suppressed, the emotion will likewise be suppressed (Scheff 1990:15). As a social emotion, it is therefore dependent on the reflected self. However, individuals do not always need to be consciously aware of the process of self-evaluation for it to arise, as self-evaluation may occur outside of awareness (see Lewis 2000). Finally, the experience involves the evaluation of the self as a whole; a person experiencing this evaluates themselves negatively as such—"I am a bad person" (Tangney 2002).

However, when it comes to peer relations, I know that our achievements would irritate some people. So, if there were no need to boast, we would not boast. And there is this evaluation, yes, —sometimes you apply for an award, so like it or not, there is some form of boasting. But I never boast about my publications because I have learned that it makes other people angry, irritated, jealous, and envious, so no, I definitely do not engage in talking about a published article worth 100 points. [R11]

Consequently, publications in high-scoring journals are automatically considered excellent, and polemics, discussions, or critical debate within the academic community occur only rarely. Theorizing and engagement with theoretical thought are not required, nor is the scholarly rigor of the text subject to verification (see Banaszak 2025). There is a tacit assumption that if articles are published in journals valued at 100 points or more, they must be of high quality.

We are bidding on those proverbial points, and someone who publishes a paper worth 140 points feels better than someone who publishes for 70—or twice as good—although... well, that does not necessarily mean that the published paper is more valuable. [R5]

However, the moment of publication does not mark the end of the emotional process. Authors fear the subsequent evaluation of their publication. The uncertainty accompanying the beginning of the publication process (whether to submit or not) and the period of waiting for the review continues as they await feedback from the academic community. This continuum of uncertainty can only be interrupted by comments from colleagues and the broader community, expressed face-to-face or through social media. When feedback is positive, uncertainty

dissipates and is replaced by pride and satisfaction. When feedback is unfavorable, uncertainty gives way to frustration, anger, despondency, and even shame. Fear fueled by shame may lead to even greater resistance to writing and submitting further articles:

I just broke down. For a year and a half, I did nothing; I conducted no research. I decided that I was stupid and not fit to continue, and I did not know what would truly become of me. I felt blocked—blocked from moving on. [R11]

Such experiences may subsequently lead not only to inhibiting further publication activity but also to significant consequences for the development of the author's academic career. As the quotation above demonstrates, a single negative evaluation may come to encompass the individual's sense of self as a whole. Intense negative emotions that remained unresolved had a clear impact on the participant's self-concept and self-evaluation. Consequently, diminished self-esteem became a source of creative inhibition and constrained the participant's ability to engage actively in academic work.

Summary

While the interviews were situated in the Polish context, the issues raised can be described as global in scope. Similar observations were made by Heiden-Rootes, SmithBattle, and Hankins (2024), who point out that although universities formally highlight goals related to their social mission and educational values, the everyday work practices of academic teachers are strongly shaped by neoliberal pressures in which efficiency, profitability, and competitive practices take precedence (Gill 2018; Lund 2025; Bonfanti Cannito and Naldini 2025).

This results in a discrepancy between institutional declarations and actual practices. As a product of neoliberalism, service workload constitutes a responsibility that is frequently not adequately reflected in evaluation and promotion criteria, despite consuming substantial amounts of time and energy. Such organizational practices contribute to the production of work that remains invisible and undervalued yet is essential to the functioning of the university. The imperative to produce high-scoring publications compels academic staff to act in a rationalized manner, directing their energy and commitment towards activities that generate tangible returns, such as financial bonuses, faster promotion trajectories, or prestige within the academic community.

Academic teachers thus participate in the "game" according to predefined neoliberal rules. For some, this generates resentment and frustration; for others, it becomes a source of emotional energy accumulation. In the latter case, this accumulation fosters pride, which translates into a positive self-image and increased job satisfaction. Some academics build their emotional capital through what I referred to in earlier publications as "sticking (attaching) oneself to success" (see Pawłowska 2020).

As Rosalind Gill observes, academics' growing complicity in the neoliberalization of the profession is troubling, particularly when manifested through the public display of affiliation with institutions associated with "success": "I am always surprised when I see that otherwise apparently sane, critical, and smart colleagues have added little statements to the bottom of their emails, informing people how (well) their department scored in the Research Excellence Framework, or where they are located in some league table or other" (Gill 2018:206).

Academics frequently experience pride derived from their affiliation with an organization that occupies a high position in rankings or holds an excellent institutional rating, despite having made no individual contribution to the institution's success. In such cases, employees symbolically "stick themselves" to the organization's success, becoming "infected" with positive emotions, including pride.

The undervaluation of teaching and organizational activities by universities remains a source of concern, particularly in relation to the mission of higher education institutions. A potential consequence is a decline in the quality of teaching, which in the long term may result in lower levels of education not only among future academic staff but also among the workforce in general.

The juxtaposition of employee evaluation and publication activity in the analysis of evaluation practices is not accidental but reflects the coexistence and intersection of these processes. Academic evaluation is primarily based on publication output, which entails the management of emotions from the very early stages of selecting a research topic, choosing a journal, and adapting a manuscript to editorial requirements.

The cyclical nature of the publication process—writing an article → submitting it to a journal (sending the manuscript to a journal) → waiting for a review → receiving reviews → rejection or critical comments → revising the text → resubmitting it either to the same or a different journal—can lead to emotional exhaustion. This exhaustion often manifests as somatic symptoms, detachment from their own research, cynicism towards the publishing system, a decline in engagement, or even complete withdrawal. What is visible here is the concept of exchange, as well as

the construction of identity and selfhood as regulators of the participants' actions.

At each stage of this process, authors can experience different emotions. For example, during the preparation and submission phase, hope and excitement might emerge in connection with the possibility of disseminating research results, expectations of recognition and acceptance within the scientific community, and prospects for career development. At the same time, however, anxiety and fear can also arise, particularly among those who have experienced repeated failures, including the rejection of manuscripts. The period of waiting for peer review is often accompanied by uncertainty and a sense of helplessness⁶, linked to the perception that nothing can be done. This helplessness results from a lack of control over the review process and, although often experienced unconsciously, contributes to the formation of academic identity. A specific form of fear—referred to here as evaluation anxiety—also appears. It is associated with the arbitrariness of assessments and the unpredictability of editorial decisions, which can result in the manuscript being. This anxiety is particularly salient within the context of the university evaluation system, where publication productivity constitutes the primary criterion for assessing academic staff.

6 Helplessness is also linked to anger, which may emerge in response to the experience of powerlessness. The energy generated by anger is often wasted. In the initial stage of helplessness, an intense desire appears, aimed at satisfying a particular need. This is followed by a stage in which signals of impending obstacles become apparent. In the third phase, when the need cannot be fulfilled, anger arises and decisions are taken that result in subsequent actions failing to produce positive outcomes. Frustration then emerges, prompting further actions undertaken in the belief that success will be achieved this time. Ultimately, helplessness signals the necessity of coming to terms with a fact that can no longer be changed (Krzysztofowicz 2017:196-197). Experiencing helplessness over a prolonged period may lead to stagnation and withdrawal.

Immediately after receiving a positive review, authors typically experience relief and joy, with relief often outweighing joy, especially when the review process has been prolonged. This feeling is indicative of the oppressive character of the publishing system. Subsequently, satisfaction and pride emerge. A positive review accompanied by comments can strengthen commitment to refining the manuscript and motivate authors to pursue further publication, thereby reinforcing a sense of empowerment.

In contrast, the rejection of a paper is associated with disappointment, sadness, frustration, and sometimes a sense of injustice, particularly when reviews are perceived as inadequate, lacking substantive merit, biased, or contradictory. These emotions—especially during the early stages of academic socialization—are often suppressed due to prevailing norms and asymmetric power relations within the academic field. The resulting shame can, in turn, undermine self-esteem as a researcher. A negative review might also trigger anger and frustration, potentially leading to anxiety, decreased motivation, and a blockage of further actions.

In sum, the publication process and the associated employee evaluation cannot be reduced to a merely technical procedure. By submitting their work to assessment, academic authors consciously subject themselves to criticism, implicitly accepting evaluative anxiety and emotional labor. They expose their well-being and self to risk, which points to a deeply

affective process in which emotions fulfill regulatory, motivational, and identity-forming functions.

The acquiescence to criticism referred to in the title is inherent in academic work. At the beginning of their careers, academics quickly internalize patterns of criticism while developing their professional identities. This occurs not only through accepting critique but also through criticizing others, for example, in reviews or during conference discussions. Regardless of whether the criticism is constructive, it remains criticism, and the mechanisms for managing emotions remain the same.

Although individuals generally dislike being criticized, academic teachers consciously engage in practices that expose them to criticism, including publishing the results of research, giving presentations at conferences, making media appearances, and conducting their teaching activities. Academic work requires accepting assessment and criticism and necessitates the use of self-protective strategies such as denial, “game of status defense,” “I as a victim of the system,” “it will be sent elsewhere,” and publication silence. In processing criticism, external support from significant others like family members and, above all, colleagues, plays a crucial role. Mutual understanding, seeking sources of satisfaction beyond professional work, engaging in hobbies, slowing down the pace of work, withdrawing from competition, and coming to terms with their position and status are also of importance.

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Between Enslavement and Empowerment. The Idea of Empowerment in the Work of a Polish Academic Teacher

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Abstract: Reflecting on the concept, meaning, and properties of empowerment prompted an analysis of selected forms and areas of academic teachers' activities. The author examines the factors that support and limit academic teacher empowerment, as well as its various dimensions. Depending on the emotional states that accompany the actions undertaken by the respondents, a sense of agency or enslavement appears. The research is situated within the interpretive paradigm, and the article is based on the findings of qualitative research conducted using unstructured interviews with academic teachers.

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The future must be created by a free,
ethical, socialized, and complete person.
[Grzegorzewska 1947:48]

The 21st-century human is viewed as an independent entity capable of deciding their own fate, taking conscious action, and achieving mental well-being. Therefore, throughout the development process, it is crucial to support self-awareness while strengthening and developing an active and creative attitude (Freire 2000; Ryan and Deci 2000). Theoretical considerations and research undertaken within these areas have led to the development of the empowerment approach, which aims to enable individuals to gradually take responsibility for the consequences of their actions in both individual and social matters. As empowerment is a multidimensional construct and is frequently built on individual value systems and beliefs, interest in its concept and practice continues to grow, both in science and in practice. The term is currently used in psychology, pedagogy, social work, sociology, economics, and feminist studies. It is also present in politics, business, and in the language of international organizations dealing

with development issues and equal opportunities in various areas of life (Szarfenberg 2015). This article examines empowerment in the specific context of Polish higher education, with particular attention to academic teachers.

In pedagogy, empowerment is a process of developing critical thinking, a sense of competence and agency, and the ability to make conscious decisions in order to foster more independence and active participation in the educational process (Freire 2000; Czerepaniak-Walczak 2025). Empowerment understood in this way is aimed primarily at strengthening an individual's competencies, making them self-directed, independent, and responsible for themselves. This process is strongly anchored in the context of an individual's life. It takes into account not only their personal deficits and barriers, but also the context of the groups in which they play specific roles, the context of institutions that outline the socio-legal framework of life, and the context of the local environment that provides a broad perspective for social interactions (Rappaport 1987; Zimmerman 1995). Therefore, within education management and frequent educational reforms, the

state teacher empowerment—including that of academic teachers—and the mechanisms for achieving it warrant careful examination.

Polish legislation on higher education and science delineates the duties of an academic teacher by linking them to the employee's appointment profile: teaching-only, research-only, or combined research-and-teaching. In statutory terms, the core responsibility of teaching staff is the education of students, whereas research staff are primarily tasked with conducting academic research. For research-and-teaching staff, these responsibilities are integrated, encompassing both conducting research and educating students. One key organizational parameter that shapes academic work is the differentiated teaching workload (known as the *pensum*) specified in the Law on Higher Education and Science (Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science, Journal of Laws 2024, item 1571, Art. 127). Depending on the position held, the annual teaching load amounts to a maximum of 240 hours for research-and-teaching staff, up to 180 hours for professors within this group, and up to 360 hours for teaching staff. In addition, every academic teacher is required to undertake administrative duties for the university and to engage in continuous professional competences (Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science, Journal of Laws 2024, item 1571).

The Concept and Dimensions of Empowerment

The term *empowerment* derives from the English verb *empower*, which emerged in the seventeenth century and originally meant to authorize, enable, or confer the capacity to act. The noun *empowerment* was first recorded in the nineteenth century,

and ultimately traces its roots to the word *power*, itself derived through Old French from Vulgar Latin *potere* (“to be able”), carrying the sense of enabling someone or investing them with agency and capability. Although the term has a much longer history, its contemporary social and political significance developed in the United States during the 1960s and expanded in the 1970s alongside movements seeking to combat discrimination, reduce social inequalities, and improve access to education and healthcare (Twardowski 2012). In contemporary usage, empowerment generally refers to the ways in which individuals or groups gain greater capacity to act, influence decisions, and shape the conditions affecting their lives. In Polish, the English term is often adopted directly or rendered through a range of expressions, including *wzmocnienie/wzmacnianie* (strengthening), *upodmiotowienie* (recognition of autonomous agency), *upęłnomocnienie* (authorization/enabling), and *uprawnienie* (enfranchisement or entitlement) (Szarfenberg 2015:1).

The aim of empowering, validating, and agency-building activities is to achieve a state in which individuals and groups regain control over their own lives, circumstances, objectives, rights, space, and language. At the same time, they become able to define their needs and goals, and also have a sense of influence over key life events (Jarczyńska 2017). Empowerment is often seen as a process that awakens individuals' strength and motivation to act, directing their efforts toward issues that they consider important. This approach is corroborated by Anna Emmanuele Calves, who notes that empowerment “assumes the ability of individuals and communities to take action to ensure their well-being or the right to participate in decisions that affect them” (2009:736).

Meanwhile, Julian Rappaport (1987) posits that empowerment is a process through which individuals and groups gain control over their lives and participate in their communities on democratic principles. It is a dynamic process that manifests in everyday practices, institutional structures, and community life. From this perspective, what matters is not only the issue of individual agency, but also the extent to which the social and organizational environment creates conditions in which that agency can be enacted. Empowerment thus incorporates individual dimensions (a sense of influence and competence), collective dimensions (community, solidarity), and structural dimensions (rules, resources, hierarchies, and mechanisms of power).

For academic teachers, Rappaport's definition takes on particular significance: a university is simultaneously a space of epistemic authority, autonomy, and academic freedom, while also being an organization subject to strong mechanisms of regulation, evaluation, and oversight. In practice, this tension manifests itself in a discrepancy between the idea of the university as a community and the everyday reality dominated by efficiency pressures, task overload, bureaucratic procedures, and a strong dependence on external evaluation criteria. In such a context, the resulting erosion of agency can translate into a perceived lack of autonomy and influence over decisions, employment insecurity, and, consequently, doubts about the meaning and purpose of academic work.

These approaches show that empowerment is a multidimensional construct that includes elements such as a sense of efficacy, an individual's ability to make decisions about themselves, the belief that their actions are valuable, and the ability to meet their own needs. It also encompasses the ability to utilize available resources, an understanding of

the social environment, willingness and commitment, and the ability to speak up for themselves (Twardowski 2006). Based on these dimensions, the following types can be distinguished (Blachowska-Szmigiel 2017:203):

- societal empowerment, which involves increasing citizens' participation in democratic governance;
- the empowerment of communities and target groups, which reflects the dynamic interactions between individuals and groups that ultimately improve their place within the broader social environment;
- individual empowerment, defined as third parties (such as community organizers, trainers, pedagogues, psychologists, coaches, or teachers) facilitating and expanding the personal efficacy of individuals or groups. The essence of this support is to foster self-esteem, self-trust, initiative, mastery, and control over their lives;
- self-empowerment, understood as autonomous actions taken by individuals to increase their own power.

Empowerment acts as both a process and an outcome. As a process, it entails facilitating, enabling, and promoting the ability to function optimally and competently. In this sense, it serves as a goal in itself, allowing individuals and groups deprived of agency to overcome this state and become capable of establishing and rebuilding their status as equal, competent citizens. In this context, empowerment includes both individual and collective dimensions, as well as subjective and objective ones.

The individual dimension involves targeted activities aimed at increasing an individual's autonomy, self-confidence, and belief in their own abilities, while enriching their knowledge, competencies, and skills. It is understood as an individual's internal motivation, which encompasses four aspects: giving personal meaning to one's work (meaning), awareness of one's own abilities and skills (competence), belief in the possibility of making proactive choices (self-determination), and belief in the value of one's own work. By contrast, the collective dimension refers to social structures, barriers, and power relations that sustain inequality and injustice, thereby reducing individuals' chances of taking control of their own lives.

The subjective dimension encompasses an individual's sense of agency, while the objective dimension is characterized by a real expansion of the scope of that agency. The latter is understood as a sense of internal control, i.e., the awareness that subsequent events are directly related to a specific action of the individual participating in them (Jarczyńska 2017). When viewed as an outcome, empowerment represents the final state of acquiring the strength (power) and agency that enables individuals, groups, institutions, or communities to fight for wider systemic change (Karwacki et al. 2017).

The analysis demonstrates that the word empowerment has a positive connotation and is inherently relational. Granting, adding, or increasing strength, agency, and power for individuals who previously lacked them or faced severe restrictions inevitably reshapes established relationships and institutional dynamics (Jarczyńska 2017). It is the antithesis of powerlessness. At the core of empowerment lies the assumption that individuals possess the ability to take control of their own lives, the possibility of

self-development, taking initiatives, and transforming the social environment. Ultimately, empowerment is a process-oriented approach involving actions and outcomes aimed at strengthening an individual's personal power to increase control over their own lives, foster active participation in social life, and enable them to shape their own circumstances and those of the entire community.

Methodology of the Present Study

The study was conducted as part of an interdisciplinary research grant.¹ The research is grounded in the interpretative paradigm, the fundamental concept of which is action taken by social actors (Wyka 1993; Hałas 2006; Chomczyński 2012). This approach made it possible to capture the social reality under study from the perspective of the actors themselves. Within this paradigm, social reality is not hermetic or absolute; it is created by social actors and reflectively reproduced. Moreover, social roles and assumed statuses are constructs subject to negotiation, which makes them fluid and relative. Crucially, these mechanisms are mediated through communication (Hałas 2006; Blumer 2009). The empirical findings presented in this article emerged from qualitative analyses conducted in accordance with the procedures of grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967), utilizing focused category coding (Konecki 2000, 2005).

In accordance with the adopted interpretive paradigm, empowerment was treated as a socially constructed, relational, and processual phenomenon revealed in the narratives and practices of academic

1 IDUB Interdisciplinary Research Grant entitled "Engagement and Exhaustion as (Un)Expected Outcomes of the Emotional Labour of Academic Teachers" (no. 3/IGB/2022, project code: B2311813000200.07).

teachers. Consequently, the analysis is anchored in grounded theory to reconstruct the meanings and mechanisms of strengthening and weakening agency in specific institutional conditions.

Within qualitative empirical research anchored in the interpretive paradigm, a distinction is made between the object of knowledge and the object of study. The object of knowledge in the present study is the empowerment of academic teachers, understood as a socially constructed process of meaning-making surrounding academic work from the perspective of social actors. The object of study, by contrast, comprises the professional experiences, narratives, and interpretations of academic teachers elicited through in-depth individual interviews concerning factors that either build or undermine their empowerment.

The aim of this analysis is to reconstruct and critically examine the idea of empowerment in the work of academic teachers. Given the particular context of this research, the study prioritizes a cognitive (knowledge-generating) aim consistent with the interpretive paradigm and grounded theory methodology, whereas practical aims are secondary and application-oriented. The epistemic aims include:

- identifying elements and experiences that build or strengthen the empowerment of academic teachers;
- identifying elements and experiences that destroy or weaken the empowerment of academic teachers;
- explaining academic teachers' professional experiences and their reflective engagements with institutional reality.

The operational aims are:

- providing knowledge that may serve as a basis for reflection on the working conditions of academic teachers at Polish universities;
- indicating areas of institutional action that foster either the strengthening or the weakening of academic teachers' empowerment;
- supporting institutional change and the development of organizational culture in higher education institutions by drawing on insights derived from the study.

The empirical data are derived from 17 in-depth interviews conducted with ten women and seven men working as academic teachers at eight Polish universities. The participants represent the social sciences, with varying lengths of service, but no less than 10 years. Before the interviews began, each participant provided written consent, which was subsequently digitized and archived. After the interviews, the material was initially analyzed, encrypted, and anonymized to ensure additional data protection. The anonymization process was coordinated by the project manager. To ensure strict compliance with personal data regulations and institutional data security, the data handling protocols adhered strictly to the University of Lodz guidelines; consequently, all empirical material was encrypted and anonymized immediately following data collection. The semi-structured interviews, conducted online between April and July 2025, revolved around two central inquiries: what elements build the empowerment of academic teachers, and what elements destroy it. The participants were highly receptive to detailing their everyday professional experiences. The supportive atmosphere established during

the interviews ensured participant comfort and security, thereby enhancing the depth and reflexivity of the gathered material. Significantly, several participants noted post-interview that they found the session to be a deeply cathartic experience.

Elements that Foster a Sense of Empowerment Among Academic Teachers

Academic teachers today face rapid change and educational uncertainty. New expectations and the need for professional transformation are emerging alongside shifting socio-political conditions. When analyzing the factors that contribute to a sense of empowerment among these academics, three areas can be distinguished:

1. a sense of self-fulfillment and satisfaction with their profession,
2. didactic work and cooperation with students,
3. social relations and the need for recognition.

With the development of science and technology, the requirements for teachers are increasing, their qualifications are constantly expanding, and new professional tasks are being set. Consequently, there is a need for continuous training in how knowledge is transferred, applied, and produced. In the present study, this was noted by the narrators, who stressed the importance of acting in accordance with their own interests and values, and the value of self-fulfillment and self-improvement in professional practice. One of the respondents puts it this way: "I am very grateful to be where I am, at university (...) I am passionate about the discipline itself, pedagogy; it allows me to develop my interests". Undoubtedly, the opportunity for per-

sonal and professional development is a factor that supports the empowerment of academic teachers. The narrators believe that their profession requires openness to the world and people. They analyze and interpret many professional situations to consciously introduce changes into their actions. This is accompanied by a sense of influencing others, so they try to encourage reflection and critical thinking both in themselves and in their students. In their statements, they highlight the constant pursuit of development through acquiring new knowledge and skills, developing creativity, and overcoming their own limitations. On the one hand, the ability for self-transcendence in overcoming individual barriers in professional work is very important, as it helps them keep up with a changing educational landscape. On the other hand, there is a need for self-actualisation, which manifests itself when one feels the imperative to improve one's skills, unleash creative potential and constantly strive to "become" a teacher, because "a good educator is an erudite person, someone who is interested in the world, someone who is ready to work on themselves first and foremost, because then they are able to inspire others, so it is important to me that they (students) are independent thinkers."

The dominant factor in the narrators' stories regarding empowerment was the area of didactic work and cooperation with students. The words "I like teaching; it is something that is important to me" were repeatedly mentioned in the conversations. At the same time, teaching often brings positive emotions and feelings, while successful classes and good relationships with student groups often generate a sense of satisfaction and professional fulfillment: "(...) there is also joy. I mean, I really like it when it resonates. Yes, I also experience such emotions of joy. When there is a good group. I need such

positive reinforcement.” The didactic aspect takes on particular significance when the results are visible in the form of students’ interest in the content and material: “It’s incredibly nice when you meet a student who is interested... You feel that what you say lights a fire in their eyes.” The described “fire in the eyes” of the students is a powerful expression of appreciation for the narrators, who receive a signal that their message is engaging and moving. The reinforcing mechanism is the feedback from students (interest, activity, “resonance”), which confirms the effectiveness of the teacher’s actions. This phenomenon can be described as relational dynamics. Some see the purpose of teaching as building a sense of security in students, encouraging them to share their views and opinions, which translates into the courage to express their position and motivation to continue studying. As one of the narrators points out, this safety is a necessary condition for achieving their goals and taking on new challenges:

... they are not afraid during discussions that they will be criticized or that someone will tell them that their answer is wrong and that they will feel ridiculed in front of the group. It is also valuable to me that many people write, for example, that they dared to speak up for the first time, that they did not feel such freedom in other classes, and here they know that even if we disagree, or what they say is not quite the perfect answer, there will still be space for it.

Safety and dialogue are key conditions. The teacher creates a space where students can speak up without fear of ridicule, which increases their courage and motivation. Empowerment is relational and bi-directional: the teacher empowers students (by validating their voice) and simultaneously experiences empowerment (through meaning, satisfaction, and a sense of influence).

A key dimension of empowerment is a friendly working environment, which includes good relations and satisfaction with interactions with colleagues. An important factor in this regard is an organizational culture based on mutual respect, a positive atmosphere, and a sense of community. This theme appears in one of the statements: “Throughout my entire life here at the university, I have experienced a lot of kindness. (...) If I were to generate an average of these various relationships, I would say that this average would undoubtedly be 75%.” Good relationships in the workplace guarantee positive emotions and improved well-being, while the goodwill and support of colleagues build a sense of security and satisfaction. They are a source of support, aid personal development, shape social attitudes and behaviors, and provide an essential basis for building self-esteem and self-worth. One of the narrators recalls the beginnings of their employment as follows: “I felt grateful for such a warm welcome from my older colleagues when I was hired. That’s when X and Y, the oldest members there, took me under their wing. (...) I remember that it was so nice that I felt so safe.” Among the elements related to building social relationships, the need for recognition is a very important component of the empowerment of academic teachers. This need is fulfilled when work is appreciated by superiors or students. The individual perceives their work as valued by others, earning their recognition. As one participant noted, “I also see the social impact of my work, which is expressed somewhat in building a network of such acquaintances, relationships, bonds, and a certain recognition, through kind words, through invitations to various committees, [and] through invitations to give lectures.”

In the analyzed narratives, academic teacher empowerment emerges as a relational and affective

process embedded in teaching and collaboration with students. A key mechanism is feedback (interest, “resonance”) and the creation of a safe space for dialogue, enabling students to speak up without fear – which strengthens both students and teachers. Furthermore, academic teacher empowerment is deeply rooted in relationships and organizational culture: kindness, respect, a positive atmosphere, and a sense of community. Support from colleagues – especially at the beginning of the job (“being taken under a colleague’s wing”) – fosters the need for belonging, which is crucial for well-being and the quality of motivation at work.

Factors Undermining the Empowerment of Academic Teachers

Among the factors that undermine empowerment, academic teachers identified elements that can be classified into the following areas:

1. emotions associated with performing professional duties,
2. didactic work and cooperation with students,
3. social relations,
4. operating within a specific organization.

Two areas—teaching and working with students, as well as social relations—played a dual role, functioning as both constructive and undermining influences on empowerment.

Emotions play a special role in the educational process because they influence the motivation, interest, and achievements of both teachers and students. A teacher’s emotions are central to their mental health

and well-being, influencing their ability to impart knowledge and foster cooperation with and among students, while also contributing to their personal development and well-being.

Today, the professional role of an academic teacher involves experiencing a variety of emotions, often including tension and ambivalence. One of the narrators speaks directly about the emotions accompanying their professional activity: “Now there is this fear, this uncertainty about whether I can do it, whether I can meet these expectations in this professional situation, which is important to me because I am an ambitious person.” Another aspect related to negative emotions is the uncertainty and instability resulting from unpredictable situations and changing national education law and policy, which can lead to work overload and general discouragement. This is evidenced by the following statement: “I would like—and I think that I am not being original here at all—such stability. (...) I miss what I call vision, and I miss stability.”

Academic teachers often experience stressful situations and crises related to their teaching work. Stress often accompanies teaching, regardless of experience and seniority:

The thing is, I’ve never been able to get rid of stress. Of course, there are classes that come easier to me, and there are those that are more difficult. I used to really enjoy theoretical classes, reading books, and delving into who wrote what and so on. Now, not so much, because it requires a bit more concentration.

Another narrator draws attention to a decline in motivation to work, a sense of dissatisfaction, and the risk of burnout, noting, “People are so demotivated. I generally feel less satisfaction from this work—yes,

unfortunately, I think this (work) is very conducive to burnout.”

Another factor blocking the sense of empowerment among academic teachers is students’ attitudes towards the learning process. This decline in motivation, reluctance, and feelings of helplessness stems from a lack of involvement in the teaching process, which in turn is linked to a decline in the quality of education: “Because there is no response from the other side, I also burn out, which makes me less willing to work and even increases my frustration and dissatisfaction.” The passive attitude of students during classes often causes frustration and a sense of failure:

I often feel such a profound sense of futility and emptiness after leaving these classes—that we have all wasted our time. Them, because they were tired of sitting with me, and me, pretending that I was imparting something wise and that I enjoyed it. It’s just a very, very unpleasant feeling of failure.

In today’s world, studying is no longer valued. Instead, it is often just one of many activities undertaken by students, which, in their opinion, does not require effort or initiative.

And maybe if [the university] were more prestigious, in the sense that it was in a larger city, and even getting onto our program were more difficult... maybe that student would also be more committed, because he’d care more, because he would have come a long way, and would have had to put a lot of effort into just getting into the program. But that’s not the case.

These stressful situations and moments of crisis, especially when they last for a long time and remain unresolved, can lead to a decline in commitment to

teaching, discouragement, and falling into a routine. Consequently, classes with students become a source of weariness and chronic fatigue.

Another factor that undermines the empowerment of academic teachers is the relationship between faculty members. Teachers are subject to institutionalized social norms, and the hierarchical structure inherent in universities is not conducive to building a sense of empowerment. As one narrator observed: “We are very hierarchical here, we do not treat colleagues who are in lower positions—who have lower titles or lower degrees—as our equals. We do not want to treat them that way because we are afraid that it will threaten our authority.” The hierarchy of positions at the university is intended to facilitate the organization of work, but personal favoritism overrides employees’ skills and resources, as one narrator noted: “I do not agree with this, and I will certainly not accept what is called ‘the structure’ in academia until the end of my career. (...) It’s not competence that counts, but connections.”

Conflicts and rivalry often arise between faculty members in the course of their various tasks. Misunderstandings usually lead to a decline in mutual trust and social withdrawal, as one teacher explains: “I can see that there are various tensions at the Institute, sometimes even conflicts. And I’m afraid I’ll have to take a stand. Well, you can’t be nice and polite to everyone (...), but you have to be honest with yourself, just be honest with yourself.” The lack of agreement, understanding, and unanimity at one university was clear from the following account: “The institute is very divided. It has always been divided. There have always been different camps; we are a bit dualistic, like our country. It’s terrifying!” Sometimes relationships are destroyed as a result of top-down actions and decisions: “We had to ac-

cept that there was a strong desire for us to be at the same level as international universities, but it was done in such a technocratic way that it dehumanized our relationships, which were not very good to begin with.” The same teacher later described an evident lack of relationships and bond building within the institution:

I have the impression that there are no relationships between employees at our institute. There are no relationships. It’s all very superficial, and we pass each other by. There is a lack of nice touches that would really create such openness. There has never been any of that, that is, an atmosphere that costs nothing, but at the same time builds bonds.

The undermining factors of empowerment presented here can be described as relational and cultural dysfunctions within the institution. Strong hierarchies, cronyism, the favoring of connections over competence, increasing conflicts and rivalry, and divisions into opposing camps all contribute to a decline in mutual trust and lead to sham superficial relationships.

For some time now, market mechanisms have been introduced into higher education, posing new challenges for academic teachers, including the need to activate their “managerial competence resources” (Sajdak 2015:55). As a result, the most desirable academic skills now include proficiency in preparing research project applications, the ability to secure funding, and financial accounting. The narrators commented extensively on these shifts:

I believe that the university is also a place that should create space for learning, it should provide opportunities for development, it should not be focused solely

on generating research results, but we should also use these research results to develop future generations. However, this is a mission of sorts.

The respondents note that being a teacher is often considered secondary to the role of researcher, with teaching duties sometimes regarded as unnecessarily time-consuming and an obstacle to academic work. This is because the most important factor in faculty member evaluations is always academic activity, including scholarly publications, active participation in nationally or internationally funded research and projects, citation rates, scientific academic conferences, etc.). “Job satisfaction and the sense of security that should also be felt have evaporated. (...) There is no sense of security; we can be eliminated at any moment because we may stop producing good publications.” Academic work has become a field of competition for points, driven by the necessity to meet publication quotas. These requirements cause great resentment among academic staff, who feel the pressure to publish “for points,” and this structural shift demonstrates how utilitarianism and technocracy are overtaking the traditional mission of the university. As one narrator observed:

It is a space we do not identify with, which has no meaning for us. It is like a railway station or an airport, where we are only there to achieve a specific goal. In our case, that goal is to get paid and then reach retirement age. Once we get our pension, we are happy. This is only an illusion, however, because very often people start to miss their workplace, as they have this syndrome where they don’t know what to do with themselves. But until that time, they hope that the magical moment will finally come when they will be free—freed from these shackles.

The topic of “forced” publishing aroused a lot of emotion and often came up in conversations.

I’ve written quite a bit in my life, and it started to wear me out, quite simply. Especially since I’m starting to see it more and more as something forced upon me. You have to tick off those points accumulated somewhere and so on. A few years ago, I used to feel some excitement about it. And even now, I sometimes feel happy that I’ve written something interesting, but it rarely happens, and I treat it more as a rather unpleasant duty than a joy.

Some people even describe the pressure to produce articles or publish scholarly books as oppression: “There have always been expectations to publish, but now it’s so normalized and described in all these criteria and parameters—which I can never understand anyway—that it’s exhausting. Yes, it’s exhausting, and I treat it as oppression, which I find harder to accept now.”

In the contemporary university, publishing is experienced not as a creative practice but as an externally enforced obligation subordinated to “ticking off boxes,” leading to fatigue and a decline in teacher satisfaction. The compulsion to publish can be seen as a manifestation of an audit culture (governance by metrics), which alters the meaning of academic work, limits autonomy, and creates the risk of burn-out.

Formal assessment of research and teaching performance, alongside student evaluations of teaching, further compounds this pressure. Assessment is an integral part of the academic profession, regardless of position or seniority. Every aspect of professional life is subject to assessment, which does not have

a positive or motivating effect on commitment and identification with the workplace.

Our work has always been related to evaluation, because we are evaluated by students and other colleagues, and there is career advancement in general [to think about]. We are always being assessed. Submitting a text to a journal is always an assessment. When I go to work, I constantly feel that someone is comparing me to someone else, that they are about to say that so-and-so has a text worth so many points, and you still don’t have any, or she is doing a project, and you don’t have one at all.

Assessment is associated with many negative emotions, which one of the narrators describes as follows: “I hate being assessed. I feel anxious and angry that someone is scrutinizing me. I feel like someone is trying to hurt me, because it usually involves looking for mistakes rather than looking for what has been done well.” The constant assessment process to which academic teachers are subjected creates a sense of pressure and constant accountability. This often comes with significant emotional costs, manifesting as constant anxiety and a sense of injustice.

Another aspect directly related to assessment is the evaluation of teaching, which aims to improve the quality of instruction and quality of instruction and inform the university’s personnel decisions. The results of the evaluation are one of the elements of the periodic assessment of an academic teacher and are subject to detailed analysis by those responsible for the implementation of the teaching process within their department. These evaluations are another element that has a destructive impact on the well-being and empowerment of academic teachers, as one narrator observed:

What is still a burden on teaching is the evaluation system that is currently in place, which gives you the impression that you are at the service of others, that you are performing the function of a service provider from the student's perspective, [and] that you have to be very careful about everything because you may not meet their expectations.

Building empowerment in the work of an academic teacher involves removing the fear of assessment and failure. Unfortunately, contemporary universities fail to foster such environments.

Conclusions

If we accept the Cornell University Empowerment Group's (1989) definition that empowerment is a dynamic phenomenon embedded in local communities and grounded in mutual respect, critical reflection, social support, and group participation, then our research shows that this occurs to a very limited extent among academic teachers. In light of Julian Rappaport's definition (1987), according to which empowerment is the means by which people gain control over their own lives and participate in their communities according to democratic principles, it can also be seen that a sense of enslavement dominates over a sense of empowerment in this professional group. The dominance of practices that centralize decisions, impose heavy bureaucratic burdens, and are shaped by pressure from external performance indicators decreases motivation, removes influence over decisions, prompts doubts about the meaning of work, and weakens identification with the academic community.

Empowerment presupposes the existence of a safe environment in which academic teachers can reflect on their work without fear of judgment. An environment that is conducive to development focuses on feedback and constructive criticism rather than permanent assessment and evaluation. In the context of empowerment strategies, it is important to support teachers' motivation and create opportunities for them to act, publish, and generate conditions for creative confrontation. Individuals are empowered when they can participate in social relations with a personal sense of agency. If there is no opportunity for empowerment, participation, power sharing, or joint decision-making in higher education institutions, then empowerment will not be possible.

The findings reveal the complexity of empowerment as a phenomenon that spans the individual, social, and organizational aspects of academic teachers' work. In all these areas, they are closer to enslavement than to a sense of empowerment. The respondents speak openly about being treated as objects and point to frequent abuse of power. Fostering empowerment requires a high level of professionalism on the part of management, which should provide employees with support and create conditions for the development of the competencies necessary to make decisions and implement them responsibly. It should also be guided by greater trust and a deliberate shift in hierarchical structures through the redistribution of power, control, and authority with subordinates. However, at present, transformations in higher education institutions seem unlikely, as they first require changes in underlying attitudes.

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Manipulation from the Perspective of Academic Teachers

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Abstract: The following text concerns manifestations of manipulation that occur within academic practice. Here, manipulation is understood as forms of influence grounded in a complex mechanism that underlies a covert method of influencing and controlling people. The study was situated within the interpretive-critical paradigm, and the article is based on the findings of qualitative research conducted through unstructured interviews with academic teachers. Manipulative mechanisms were conceptualized based on descriptions of academic teachers' experiences, and analysis of the interview data identified examples of phenomena and procedures whose characteristics correspond to those of manipulation understood as a method of exerting influence on individuals. These findings are discussed from three perspectives: the macro perspective, encompassing decisions and procedures implemented within educational policy and their consequences; the meso perspective, referring to the university as an institution with hierarchical relationships based on the abuse of power; and the micro perspective, concerning interpersonal relations among academic teachers. These considerations are grounded in an understanding of the academic community that treats the autonomy and agency of all members of this community as essential conditions for the community's authentic development and for strengthening academic teachers' professional identity.

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The following text concerns manifestations of manipulation that occur within the academic sphere. This study aimed to analyze the personal experiences of academic teachers as described in the interviews they participated in. I proceed from the premise that concepts carry interpretative assumptions that shape the research process, which is why, before analyzing academic teachers' experiences, the meaning of manipulation itself must first be addressed. For this reason, the most important theoretical context for this study was the understanding of manipulation adopted here and the characteristics of this mode of exerting influence on people. The theoretical framework presented here was developed based on an interdisciplinary review of the relevant literature, with the framework's fundamental assumptions drawn primarily from research in political science.

The article is based on the findings of qualitative research conducted through unstructured interviews with academic teachers. While my understanding of manipulation fundamentally shapes the interpretation of the experiences described by the interviewees, analysis of their experiences identified examples of phenomena and procedures whose characteristics

correspond to those of manipulation understood as a method of exerting influence on individuals. This is understood as forms of influence grounded in complex mechanisms that underly covert methods of influencing and controlling people (see Karwat 2022:67-97; Metelski 2024:115-117). These examples were identified from the participants' descriptions of the states they experienced, accompanied by a sense of objectification, restrictions imposed on their capacity for action and self-determination, and the resulting violation of their right to self-realization. The procedures described by the participants constitute manifestations of such mechanisms of influence. They involve manipulative, deceptive, and dependency-producing practices, often based on covert mechanisms concealed behind the formal and legal frameworks governing higher education institutions. This situation leads to the "depreciation of European traditions of understanding the academic community, its cognitive and institutional autonomy, and its independence from political and ideological contingencies" (Karwat and Pierzchalski 2022:8).

The analysis presented here is situated within the interpretive-critical paradigm and, more specifi-

cally, within the perspective of the construction of meanings and identities through social interaction. In this context, the dynamic transformations taking place within social, cultural, political, and economic life acquire particular significance, as they generate numerous phenomena within academic practice itself, and more precisely within the functioning of the university. The vision of the university as an ivory tower (Soley 1995) has long since faded into the past, while the pace of contemporary change directly affects higher education institutions, the status of academic teachers, and the possibilities for them to develop autonomously.

Theoretical Framework of the Study: The Nature of Manipulation

The analysis of manipulation presented in this study is grounded in theoretical perspectives that conceptualize manipulation as a form of exerting influence on others that simultaneously constitutes a form of violence. Violence is understood here as a mode of influencing people—their thinking processes, behavior, or conduct—to obtain resources or achieve objectives while restricting their rights and freedoms (see Pratkanis and Aronson 2003:VII-VIII). In characterizing various forms of social influence, Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson distinguish manipulation from other modes of communication, such as persuasion. In their view, persuasion is a communicative act, a form of argumentation, debate, and discussion—that is, a type of discourse aimed at supporting or opposing a particular standpoint. It is oriented toward reaching an understanding and preserving the target's freedom of choice. Manipulation, by contrast, is identified as a strategic action with concealed aims, intended to control the target's behavior, often against their will. This is precisely how it is interpreted in the humanities

and social sciences (cf. Hołówka 1993; Siemieniecki 2007; Rogaliński 2012; Fleischer 2023; Hannon 2023; Metelski 2024).

Social psychologists further argue that there are only two ways of inducing someone to act in accordance with another person's wishes: through the use of power (or relationships based on force) and through manipulation (Joule and Beauvois 2006:16). The former is typically interpreted as natural, socially accepted, and deriving from the social order or from the established principles governing an institution. The essence of the latter lies in its covertness and in the restriction it imposes on the autonomy and freedom of action of the target.

The concept of manipulation appears in the humanities and social sciences in a variety of meanings. These range from denoting precise manual operations, through sequences of activities associated with specific procedures—for example, administrative procedures—to the covert influencing and controlling of other people. The negative connotation of the term dates back to the eighteenth century, when it began to refer to actions aimed at exerting an influence over another person (d'Almeida 2005:24-27).

While the concept continues to function across multiple semantic fields (see Wróbel 2006:17-19), its broadest meaning concerns ways of influencing the behavior of others. Manipulating an individual's consciousness, mind, or behavior—as opposed to manipulating objects—is generally associated with dishonest practices or scheming (see Winn 2003). Understood in this way, manipulation refers to covert, backstage, and deceptive actions (d'Almeida 2005:10-23). It denotes a form of influence whose mechanisms remain hidden from the target (see Łukaszewski et al. 2009:20-24). It is not only the ma-

nipulative procedures that tend to be concealed but also the goals. The concealment of purpose is often linked to the assumption that if the method of influence must remain hidden, the intended goal is somehow unworthy or harmful to the target. This assumption, however, is not universally accepted.

The etymology of the term manipulation directs attention toward the objectification of the target. Depriving an individual of subjectivity has consequences for personal freedom as it restricts the space available for autonomous choice and reduces freedom beyond what is necessary. In such circumstances, the target mistakenly believes that they are independently deciding upon their actions, when in reality, they serve merely as an instrument of the manipulator, advancing that individual's goals. This situation often grows more complex when the manipulator creates an illusory sense of agency in the target. The manipulator can be understood as seeking to outwit others in such a way as not to alienate them—indeed, sometimes even to gain their appreciation and gratitude—while simultaneously pursuing personal objectives. The manipulator's welfare or interests are neither identical to nor necessarily compatible with those of the target. Thus, manipulation involves exploiting an advantage—not through force or legal authority, but through psychological, situational, or tactical superiority. It involves taking advantage of any favorable circumstances, an advantage that frequently emerges through the creation of confusion and the use of deception.

Manipulation may, therefore, be characterized as an activity that is:

- deceptive,
- based on exploiting tactical advantage,

- undertaken intentionally in pursuit of goals the manipulator defines and regards as valuable,
- objectifying towards the target,
- founded on concealing its actual aims and mechanisms,
- generating and/or sustaining false consciousness in the target,
- resulting in a temporary or permanent loss of the target's capacity to act according to their own intentions, knowledge, and rational judgment,
- undermining resistance to such influence (see Wróbel 2010:9-16).

One form of manipulation, which constitutes a narrower and more stereotypical understanding of the concept (see Karwat 2022:251-274), involves actions undertaken with the explicit aim of instrumentalizing the target. According to the theoretical assumptions adopted here, classifying a form of influence as manipulation depends primarily on intentionality, the goals pursued, and the calculated nature of the action. The mechanisms employed, their characteristics, and the circumstances in which they occur do not, in themselves, constitute defining attributes of manipulation. Within this perspective, manipulation is understood as a form of influence in which the manipulator, drawing upon knowledge of human behavioral patterns, seeks to exert a desired effect on another person or group without their awareness that they are being deliberately influenced. The manipulator's goals represent the envisioned states of affairs they intend to bring about.

Based on definitions of manipulation in the literature, it can be argued that manipulation occurs when the primary motive of the manipulator is maximizing their own interests, or those of a group or institution with which they identify. Two essential characteristics emerge from this understanding: manipulation is always planned and concealed. Its planned nature follows directly from its purpose. If manipulation is undertaken to achieve a desired objective, that objective must first be recognized and specified by the manipulator. The intended goal subsequently determines the procedures employed in the manipulative process. Targets generally enact the manipulator's objectives unwittingly. However, the degree to which their awareness is suspended may vary—from complete unawareness of external control, through forms of apparent participation, to fully conscious involvement in manipulative activities.

Once again, concealment—already defined as a defining characteristic—becomes evident: the goals of the action remain outside the awareness of the manipulated individual. As participants in social life, people are constantly exposed to influences that they either recognize and interpret in their own way or perceive without identifying their true purposes. Manipulation is, therefore, a form of intentional influence exerted upon an individual or group in such a way that, without realizing it, they undertake actions that satisfy the manipulator's needs (Maruszeński and Ścigała 1999:14).

Given the understanding of manipulation adopted here, disclosing its aims to the target effectively renders it ineffective, since the individual can then resist. The subtlety and precision involved in selecting manipulative methods make this a form of

influence whose interpretation requires careful attention to context.

Taking into account the nature of manipulation described above, forms of interpersonal influence constitute an integral part of social reality and are enacted across diverse social contexts, groups, and institutions. Consequently, manipulation as a form of influence will be analyzed from three different perspectives:

- macro level – social life and its structures, including educational policy;
- meso level – the university as an institution with hierarchical relationships based on the abuse of power;
- micro level – interpersonal relationships among employees within an academic institution.

Although different mechanisms of manipulation may operate within each of these three perspectives, they are united by the essence of the phenomenon and its consequences—namely, objectification (and at times instrumentalization), as well as the false sense of agency experienced by the manipulated person (see Wróbel 2006:37-39). Mirosław Karwat (2022) argues that:

(...) a valid intuition, and consequently a rational premise in attempts to grasp the specificity of deceptive actions referred to as manipulation, lies in recognizing the clear opposition between forms of influencing others that are based on equality, reciprocity, partnership, and respect for people's right to make independent decisions regarding matters that

concern them, and forms of influence characterized by arbitrariness. The latter involves ignoring another person's will or preventing them from exercising self-determination, making decisions about another person's situation or behavior, and even determining someone's fate by acting in their name without their consent or deciding behind their backs and over the heads of entire communities. (p. 275)

For the present study, manipulation is understood as a form of influence that is:

- intentional and subordinated to goals defined by the manipulator,
- objectifying toward the target,
- restrictive of the target's autonomous action,
- based on exploiting an advantage over the target and using deception.

Finally, I wish to emphasize that I do not equate workplace harassment with bullying. These concepts refer to other forms of violence that fall outside the scope of the analysis presented in this article (see Helios and Jedlecka 2017).

Methodological Framework

This article presents findings from research conducted as part of the Interdisciplinary Research Grant (IDUB) entitled Engagement and Exhaustion as (Un)Expected Outcomes of the Emotional Labour of Academic Teachers (Decision No. 3/IGB/2022; Project Code: B2311813000200.07).

The research project was situated within the interpretive and critical research paradigms (Konec-

ki 2005; Urbaniak-Zajac 2008, 2019; Chomczyński 2012). The principal research technique employed was the unstructured in-depth interview, which enabled direct contact with the participants and created an atmosphere conducive to obtaining in-depth accounts (Konecki 2000; Babbie 2008; Niedbalski 2012). The interviews took the form of active qualitative interviews (Holstein and Gubriu 1997), in which the participating academic teachers actively co-constructed the narratives. This approach allowed the conversation to be guided flexibly in response to the circumstances and the unfolding dynamics of each interview.

The empirical material analyzed in this article derives from 17 interviews conducted with ten women and seven men employed at eight Polish universities. The participants came from the social sciences and varied in terms of professional experience, although each had at least ten years of academic experience. The interviews were carried out between April and July 2025 as online meetings via MS Teams. The in-depth interview provides access to the academic teachers' private experiences of their work and interpersonal relationships within universities, particularly relationships that take the form of manipulation. This mode of inquiry becomes especially valuable for examining the relationship between individuals' subjective experiences and the institutional—and at times even violent—dimensions of academic practice (see, among others, Konecki and Pawłowska 2013; Nowak 2023; Skórzyńska 2023; Rakowski 2023).

Manipulation was conceptualized through analysis from three perspectives: systemic (macro), institutional (meso), and interpersonal (micro), which also constitute the analytical categories applied to the empirical material.

Academic Teachers' Experiences of Manipulation

An analysis of the interview material reveals that the narratives contain numerous references to experiences that either originated from, or continue to be shaped by, manipulative practices. In recounting their pathways into and through academia, the participants referred to three principal areas of academic activity: research, teaching, and organizational work. Their personal accounts were embedded within the broader context of their academic trajectories, ranging from the factors that initially motivated them to pursue careers in higher education, through the successive stages of becoming academic teachers, to identity-related choices and the institutional and systemic transformations affecting science and higher education in Poland. These interviews reveal how the participants' personal experiences and choices intertwine with changes taking place within academia and the broader socio-cultural environment.

The following discussion concerns manifestations of manipulation within academic practice, analyzed through the interrelationships among three perspectives: macro, meso, and micro. The analysis of the empirical material suggests that these perspectives are interconnected and continually influence one another. However, the micro perspective was least evident in the interview data as participant reflections were dominated by the systemic embeddedness of academic practice and the institutional frameworks shaping their professional activities. Consequently, this article focuses primarily on the macro and meso perspectives, recognizing the particularly strong interdependence between them. Nonetheless, the findings demonstrate that transformations at the systemic and institutional levels

also affect interpersonal relations among academic teachers—that is, the micro level.

The Macro Perspective: The Evaluation of Academic Disciplines and the Changes It Entails

An important experience shared by all the participants was finding their place in the world of research. In describing their entry into academic life, participants frequently referred to personal aspirations and a fascination with the academic community, which sometimes emerged as early as their student days. Over time, however, this fascination often diminished over time, and becoming an academic increasingly involved difficult experiences.

Reflecting on the changes that have occurred within academia in recent years, the participants emphasized that the introduction of current rules and criteria governing the evaluation of academic disciplines has significantly altered the meaning of research engagement. Academic activity and personal passion for one's field of inquiry have gradually lost their significance. Research has become an obligation whose rationale no longer aligns with individual ambitions and intellectual interests. One participant described this situation as follows:

You simply have to accumulate those points and tick the boxes. Whereas a few years ago, I could still feel some excitement about it. And even now, sometimes I am pleased that I've written something worthwhile, but that happens only occasionally. Most of the time, I treat it more as an unpleasant obligation than a source of joy. [I2]

The attitude reflected in this statement suggests that motivation to engage in academic work is no longer driven by personal choice, intellectual passion, or

the need for self-realization. Instead, the principal motivating factor becomes compliance with formal requirements resulting from evaluation criteria. This example illustrates how personal interests and choices are pushed to the margins, while rigid systemic demands, which constitute forms of institutional violence, come to determine the quality and character of academic practice.

Participants also reflected on broader institutional transformations and their consequences. Referring to earlier experiences in academia, one interviewee described the situation in the following terms:

Of course, there have always been expectations that we should publish. But nowadays everything has become so formalized and described through all these criteria and parameters, which, to be honest, I never fully understand. It's exhausting. Yes, it is exhausting, and I experience it as a form of oppression—one that I find increasingly difficult to accept because I am becoming less and less willing to consent to such extensive oppression. [I3]

This excerpt reflects a sense of systemic entrapment, or what the participant herself describes as oppression—a form of symbolic violence that restricts freedom of action. In consequence, it undermines individuals' agency in designing and pursuing their own professional development, while being masked by regulations governing evaluation procedures. This example demonstrates that research is not necessarily motivated by authentic personal choice but by systemically imposed evaluation requirements. Academic teachers are further objectified: their intellectual interests become secondary to institutional goals, for example, achieving higher positions in academic rankings. In this environment, they find it

difficult to operate autonomously; instead, they are required to operate within systemic frameworks.

The obligation to publish, obtain research funding, and increase the internationalization of universities has also generated a growing sense of insecurity regarding professional stability and future career prospects. One participant described this experience as follows:

[...] We had to accept that there was a strong desire for us to be at the same level as international universities, but this was done in such a technocratic way. As a result, our relationships became dehumanized—even though they had never been particularly good—and the satisfaction we derived from our work, as well as the sense of security one ought to feel in such a place, simply evaporated. [There is this feeling that we could be] let go at any moment because we might stop producing the “right” publications. [I1]

Participants associated these experiences with dehumanization, being fired, and oppression. Such experiences were also accompanied by fear:

There is now this fear, this uncertainty: will I manage? Will I be able to meet these expectations? My career matters a great deal to me because I am an ambitious person, and I have become accustomed to doing well in my work. I would still like to continue succeeding, but perhaps that will no longer be possible. My productivity may no longer be what it once was, and I will have to come to terms with the fact that I may no longer be one of the top performers but somewhere in the background. I will have to find fulfillment in other areas as well, and this is something I still have ahead of me. [...] I think that job satisfaction has declined. [I1]

The persistent sense of threat and continuous competition deprive interpersonal relationships of their fundamental humanistic dimension, transforming them into arenas where achievements are constantly compared. The pressure described above becomes a source of experiences that, in the participant's view, require emotional processing and may contribute to declining job satisfaction and professional burnout.

Another participant highlighted the risks these ongoing transformations pose to universities:

I can also see numerous dangers in moving towards turning universities into corporations. Universities can then be controlled very easily and lose their independence when all financial resources depend solely on parameters and on whether decision-makers—put simply—approve of something or not. Those decision-makers are outside academia. We have already experienced several educational reforms that demonstrated just how easily everything can be manipulated, overturned, and transformed. Suddenly, predatory journals receive a hundred points for virtually nothing because they correspond to a particular philosophy or worldview. It becomes very easy when governance is effectively externalized, because ministries ultimately decide on all these indicators and parameters. [...] Perhaps this is also connected with the fact that academia is looking less like academia and more like a corporation. [I2]

Continuous and often antagonistic competition contributes to the erosion of university autonomy as institutions become permanently engaged in securing resources for research. Academic freedom in its traditional sense—associated with intellectual independence and the pursuit of truth—loses significance under pressure from those governing the

higher education system. Indicators of academic achievement become instruments through which power is exercised over universities, particularly in contexts shaped by ideological differences and the concealed interests of those holding authority.

Relationships became dehumanized under evaluation pressures—a recurring theme throughout the interviews—undermining the fundamental norms and principles that have traditionally underpinned the academic community. This transformation affects the principles governing the formation of research teams and the evaluation of their achievements, for example. At present, collaboration with colleagues from one's own academic unit may no longer be regarded as advantageous, even when individuals share a common scholarly tradition or research school.

The Meso Perspective: Hierarchy, Informal Networks, Divisions, and Factions

According to the participants, one of the most difficult experiences was—and continues to be—finding their place within the hierarchical structures of the university, which do not foster community. On the contrary, they often give rise to domination and symbolic violence, including abuses of power rooted in formal authority and organizational hierarchy. As one participant noted:

The university is certainly a relic of authority. The so-called Act 2.0 has, unfortunately, granted His Magnificence [the Rector] absolute power, and that is very harmful. [I4]

One characteristic aspect of everyday life in academia is that:

...there is still a very hierarchical culture here... we do not treat employees who occupy lower positions—who hold lower academic titles or have lower academic degrees—as our equals. We do not want to treat them as equals because we are afraid that this would threaten our authority. [I1]

Among younger faculty members, this hierarchical structure is often accompanied by the conviction that:

One is not regarded as a significant element, but [...] as a tool for achieving a particular goal. Unfortunately, because of this, the university is increasingly becoming a non-place for us. We do not become attached to it; it feels very temporary, and people simply think about when they will retire. [I1]

An individual's work is valued more when, for example, their publications generate points that contribute positively to the evaluation of the discipline. As a result, the implicit message becomes: I matter when I bring in points. Hierarchical relationships are experienced particularly acutely by early-career researchers. One participant described this experience as follows:

I can say straight away that this is something visible in our academic environment: many young doctors, early-career academics, experience what I would quite literally call humiliation, simply because we occupy a lower rank. It is extremely painful. For a long time, it caused me to withdraw and left me with a profound sense of inferiority. And I can honestly say that without support—both from a professor at the university and from my family—I would not have managed to cope with it, because it really clips your wings. [...] We are human beings, yet someone deprives us of our subjectivity. [I5]

These accounts describe situations of humiliation and the calculated exploitation of professional dependency and organizational position, both of which ultimately restrict subjectivity and individuals' right to self-realization. Here, manipulation manifests itself through the instrumental treatment of younger colleagues, whose commitment and efforts are used to serve their superiors' goals and personal interests.

Participants also described the hierarchy as sustained by informal systems of influence:

I simply cannot accept—and I probably never will accept throughout my academic career—what in academia is referred to as “the system.” You know very well what I mean: competencies do not matter; connections do. And that is disastrous. Until this changes, Polish education will not make significant progress. Competence must matter. Individual academic achievements and teaching accomplishments must matter, not who knows whom or who has coffee with whom. [I4]

Similarly, another participant observed:

Cliques and resentments continue to operate and play an important role, instead of substantive values. For someone in their thirties, for example, this could have serious consequences—they might simply become discouraged from pursuing this kind of activity. [I6]

The abuse of power relations also extends to interactions involving students and can be used as a means of harming colleagues within the workplace. One participant recounted:

These are very difficult issues. For me, it is completely incomprehensible that a lecturer—even one holding

a habilitated doctorate—would use students in order to spite another lecturer. [...] These are painful experiences because I simply cannot understand such behavior. How can someone avoid speaking directly to a colleague from the faculty and instead question students during lectures, portraying another lecturer as strict, critical, or saying that “he will make your life difficult”? Students then form this opinion of a lecturer without having experienced any of it themselves. And because students talk, these kinds of stories inevitably spread. [I5]

Another particularly distressing experience concerns navigating divisions and competing “camps” within a university environment, as illustrated by the following statement:

The institute is deeply divided. It has always been divided. There have always been different camps. We are a bit dualistic, much like our country as a whole—there always has to be an enemy. It is frightening. First, there was the former dean’s camp, and now two new camps have emerged once again. [I1]

These experiences of navigating this complex institutional environment the individuals’. As one participant explained:

Whenever I take on a new role, I know that this also involves forming various relationships. And I can see that there are tensions within the Institute, sometimes even conflicts. Sooner or later, I will have to take a stand. [...] It is impossible to be pleasant and agreeable to everyone—not only because you cannot satisfy everybody, but because you must remain honest with yourself. To give an example, there is one person in whose presence I genuinely felt what Hegel described: when you encounter them, the principle immediately comes into play that “I am the master,

the other is the servant;” these roles become instantly established. [I7]

The divisions described above, fueled by conflicts of interest and competition among faculty, generate attitudes characterized by calculation and deception aimed at exploiting others in pursuit of personal objectives—strengthening their own achievements and consolidating their own position within the institution. Another participant commented:

We seem incapable of living without conflict, and that is deeply depressing. Considering that we are educators, we should strive to build community and foster unity in diversity. Instead, we go against that. [I1]

The conflicts that emerge reinforce existing divisions and shape interpersonal relations within academic institutions. Participants noted:

Some people undermine others, but they do so in a more calculated way because they are simply more intelligent about it. [I1]

The strategies employed in such situations rely on psychological and sociological mechanisms that ensure effectiveness by exploiting a tactical advantage. In these circumstances, the common good recedes into the background, while personal success becomes the dominant priority—often achieved at the expense of ethical principles.

The Micro Perspective: Alienation and Loneliness in Academia

The quality of interpersonal relationships and the divisions that exist within academic institutions contribute to feelings of alienation and loneliness among academic teachers. Many of the interviews

contained accounts of negative experiences resulting from competition among academic teachers, a lack of mutual goodwill, and increasingly competitive attitudes. One participant described this state of affairs as follows:

There are people with whom I simply work well, and whenever I lead a project, I invite those individuals regardless of which department they belong to, because I have the feeling that there is also a kind of competition between departments here. [I8]

Some participants attributed the origins of these conflicts to the legal frameworks governing higher education and science. One interviewee explained:

The changes introduced through the legislation meant that we had to accept that there was a strong desire for us to be at the same level as international universities, but this was done in such a technocratic way. As a result, our relationships became dehumanized—even though they had not been particularly good—and the satisfaction we derived from our work, as well as the sense of security one ought to feel in such a place, simply evaporated. I myself lack that sense of security, because at any moment we may be let go if we stop producing the ‘right’ publications. [...] So, you have to do something about yourself, because otherwise you become a disgrace to our Institute. This deforms people; generally speaking, it diminishes job satisfaction and strongly contributes to professional burnout. Being there no longer provides satisfaction for its own sake; instead, one becomes merely a tool for achieving some external objective. Unfortunately, because of this, the university is increasingly becoming a non-place for us. We do not become attached to it; it feels very temporary space, and people simply think about when they will retire. [...] Yes, a non-place—a space

with which we do not identify and which no longer holds any significance for us. [I1]

This account illustrates how the macro, meso, and micro perspectives intersect: systemic solutions reshape institutional frameworks, which in turn negatively affect the quality of interpersonal relationships, contribute to their dehumanization, and foster feelings of alienation. The participants described experiencing a lack of security, constant competition, and anxiety about failing to meet publication expectations. This situation becomes a source of frustration and a sense of instrumentalization. The individual—their needs, personal motivations, and intellectual interests—ceases to matter. What becomes important is their achievements, but only insofar as they serve the institution’s objectives. Hence, the participants repeatedly described themselves as “a tool for achieving some external objective”—an objective disconnected from their own aspirations and values.

Teaching is another important sphere of academic teachers’ experiences. The quality of the teaching and relationships with students can also become sources of negative experiences. Although the participants frequently mentioned the importance they attach to teaching and to their interactions with students, teaching itself was likewise described as generating feelings of objectification and instrumentalization. When reflecting upon the beginnings of their academic careers, the participants often associated teaching with satisfaction and fulfilment. However, when discussing their current experiences, they noted significant changes in academic practice and the adverse consequences that have followed. One such consequence concerns the status assigned to teaching within evaluation systems and the result-

ing decline in motivation to maintain teaching quality. Participants described these changes as follows:

I increasingly have the impression that the current system for evaluating teaching means that we are essentially providing a service, acting as service providers from the students' perspective. We have to be extremely careful in everything we do because otherwise we might fail to meet students' expectations. [I1]

The contemporary student is increasingly positioned as a customer, whose satisfaction with the quality of the "service" provided becomes paramount:

We are expected to be available during holidays; students can email us even on Christmas Eve. I remember one student who sent me five emails on Christmas Eve because he demanded an answer. That was when I realized that we genuinely have no boundaries—or perhaps we fail to establish them—in terms of our availability and our constant readiness to be there for others: for university authorities and for students. And in all of this, where is the space for being there for ourselves? [I5]

Matters are further complicated because teaching evaluation systems are sometimes experienced as instruments of control and repression directed towards academic teachers. One participant described this issue in the following terms:

We are not allowed to know exactly what is written in those surveys, yet we can be summoned to the dean's or rector's office to discuss our behavior during interactions with students. This has created an enormous precedent, almost a communist or even totalitarian system, where we have dirt on you and can bring it out whenever necessary. I find this deeply disturbing

because, first of all, it establishes a dangerous precedent and reinforces students' mistaken belief that anonymity previously did not exist, and secondly, it fundamentally undermines the original purpose of these surveys. [...] The survey has become a tool—a genuine instrument in the hands of superiors. [I3]

The sense of objectification and subordination to students' opinions leaves participants feeling pressured by their institutions, diminishing their sense of agency and weakening their personal engagement in teaching. Such pressure runs contrary to treating academic teachers as active and autonomous agents (see Archer 2013), marginalizing their autonomous capacities—the right to make reflexive choices and pursue activities they themselves deem meaningful within their social and institutional settings.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis presented above shows that objectification and instrumentalization are experiences that accompany contemporary academic practice. From the macro perspective, systemic solutions—including laws and regulations—generate feelings of fear, uncertainty, and a lack of professional stability among the participants. These experiences have fundamental implications for both individual development and the quality of academic work undertaken by university teachers. Here, one may speak of a form of "large-scale manipulation" operating at the systemic level. Academic teachers become subjects of manipulation enacted through political decisions concerning science and higher education.

This macro-level perspective shapes what happens at the meso level, determining the institutional frameworks within which academic teachers operate. The hierarchical structures of the university,

together with the abuse of power and forms of violence, do not foster the development of community; instead, they become sources of objectification. These patterns of interpersonal relations, reinforced by existing divisions, contribute to experiences of alienation and loneliness.

At the micro level, manipulation becomes particularly evident in academic teachers' experiences when participants recall the hopes, aspirations, and commitment that accompanied the beginning of their academic careers. The stronger the personal investment in the ideals of academic work at the outset, the more pronounced the experience of manipulation appears in retrospect. Within the contemporary university, there seems to be increasingly limited space for academic teachers' genuinely autonomous development.

Here, important questions emerge concerning the academic ethos—a set of fundamental values, norms, and attitudes that shape both the scholarly community's identity and the principles governing academic practice. The manifestations of manipulation identified in academic life challenge the foundations of this ethos as an ethical category. Ethos—the ethical substance of our community—is both given to us and entrusted to us. It constitutes the core of our identity and our most important point of reference. If we accept this, then we should insist that humanity, both within ourselves and in every other person, always be treated as an end in itself and never merely as a means (see Kant 1953).

This orientation constitutes a counterweight to the forms of manipulation described by the participants in this study. These manipulative practices restrict autonomous action, subordinate academic work to objectives that conflict with academic teachers' per-

sonal motivations and needs, and objectify them in the service of systemically imposed interests. Persistent uncertainty and competition intensify relationships of dependency, facilitating the exploitation of power asymmetries to the detriment of the targets.

These dynamics reflect the logic of symbolic and structural violence, as evidenced by the interpenetration of the three perspectives of influence discussed throughout this article: the macro, meso, and micro levels. Revealing these interconnections constitutes the essence of the analysis undertaken here and provides an important impetus for further research into academic teachers' experiences and the factors shaping contemporary academic practice.

Researching the manifestations of manipulation in academic settings and disseminating knowledge on this topic is one way to strengthen academic freedom and academic teachers' right to autonomous development and agency. Analysis of manipulation from systemic, institutional, and interpersonal perspectives revealed examples of decisions and procedures made at the ministerial level (formalized in laws and regulations), power relations based on abuse, and relationships within academic environments that bear the hallmarks of manipulation and limit the scope of academic teachers' autonomous action. These actions and decisions are manipulative precisely because they are not communicated directly but are pursued behind the scenes to achieve hidden goals.

Therefore, knowledge of this issue and the ability to accurately identify manipulative phenomena should be a core competency of the modern academic teacher. In today's world, manipulation continues to take new forms and presents academ-

ic teachers with new challenges. Consequently, to effectively combat manipulation, its contemporary aspects should be examined and practical conclusions drawn from the research. Academic teachers can take the following practical steps:

- develop and implement ethical principles to prevent manipulation;
- develop critical thinking skills;

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- organize training to recognize manipulation.
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Emotions and Relationships in Polish Citizenship Education: Mapping Opportunities and Change Through an Analysis of Secondary School Core Curricula

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Abstract: Is there room in school-based citizenship education to shape citizenship identity as an emotional and relational experience of community membership? Given the importance of school core curricula in many European countries, this paper analyses the core curricula in Poland to identify the provisions that facilitate the recognition of the concept of lived citizenship. The data comprise two core curricula (from 2018 and 2025) for citizenship education in Polish secondary schools, which were created in different political conditions. The aim is to identify, at the curriculum level, potential opportunities to include the affective dimension and to recognise the changes in this area resulting from the curriculum reform. The results demonstrate that both curricula reveal such potential. However, the 2025 reform offers a significantly better representation of categories that appear vital to grasping the affective dimension of citizenship.



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Citizenship education (hereafter: CE) remains at the forefront of national education policy agendas. In light of democratic crises, armed conflicts, migration, and the resurgence of far-right movements, CE is considered an essential imperative, with the cultivation of an understanding of democratic principles, critical thinking, and civic engagement being widely advocated. This raises the question of whether there is space within this framework for shaping citizenship identity as an emotional and relational experience of community membership, and whether school education is capable of capturing citizenship in specific contexts. Indeed, for more than two decades, the importance of emotions and relationships as integral parts of citizenship and CE has grown (Zembylas 2009; Wood and Black 2018; Kallio, Wood and Häkli 2020; Góralaska 2023; Keegan 2023). The question is whether this is reflected in the curricula in any way.

This article aims to identify potential opportunities created by the text of the core curriculum for CE to include the affective dimension and, in doing so, to recognise changes in this area resulting from the reform of the core curricula in Poland.

The research presented in this article contributes to curriculum studies. While it contributes to the study of CE among children and youth in the context of the critique of citizenship universalism, the focus is not on examining the effects of implementing specific programmes or student experiences. Instead, this article pursues a different approach. Given the central role of school core curricula in many European countries (including Poland), the study analyses core curricula through the lens of the concept of lived citizenship. This task is challenging not only because of the nature and genre of the research material, but also because of the purpose of the national core curricula. The study also contributes to a strand of curriculum research that focuses on comparative analyses of curricular change.

Dimensions of Lived Citizenship

The concept of lived citizenship is the starting point for the analyses presented in this article. This concept has been present in citizenship research for over two decades and developed in part from the growing focus on everyday life that has characterised critical theories since the 1960s (Kallio, Wood and Häkli 2020:713-715). Unlike the universalist un-

derstanding of citizenship as status and associated rights and obligations (Marshall 1950), it is the experience of being a citizen and citizenship recognised in those experiences and relationships with others that shapes belonging (Wood and Black 2018; Kallio et al. 2020). Kallio et al. (2020) identify four intertwining core dimensions of lived citizenship drawn from research in this area.

The first dimension—spatiality—holds that citizenship is always linked to a time and place. It is and has been classically identified with the idea of nation and state. Social and political changes have scaled this thinking both ‘up’ and ‘down’ (Kallio et al. 2020:717). However, citizenship can also be understood in local terms, close to everyday life. This understanding is part of a critique of the traditional conception of citizenship as being closely tied to the political actor and the public sphere (Lister 1997:42). Furthermore, it can also be understood as a transnational concept linked to political unions, such as the European Union (Kallio et al. 2020:717), whether global or glocal (Abu El-Haj 2015:56). While political and economic migration does not appear to weaken the concept of national citizenship, it certainly alters the way people think about citizenship, both in terms of how migrants function in their new countries and in terms of their relationship with their countries of origin (Abu El-Haj 2015:54; Nunn et al. 2016:388).

The second dimension—intersubjectivity—is a consequence of the reconceived understanding of spatiality. Citizenship does not emerge in isolation, but at the intersection of interpersonal relationships (Kallio et al. 2020:717). These interpersonal relationships can occur in physical, but also metaphorical, places (Staeheli 2010:394), and, therefore, attention is drawn to the combination of both dimensions (Wood and Black 2018:192).

Performed dimension of lived citizenship (the third one) refers to practices and actions that signify the realisation of citizenship (Kallio et al. 2020:718). Finally, the fourth dimension—affective—focuses on the emotions and feelings associated with being a citizen, especially in the context of belonging or not belonging to a group, community, or country, and of deeper engagement and responsibility (Wood and Black 2018:191; Kallio et al. 2020:718).

It is the affective dimension that is central to this article, although its connection with the other dimensions cannot be ignored, as lived citizenship arises at the intersection of these dimensions. Distinguishing between them serves primarily to organise areas of research and illustrate that studies of lived citizenship can focus more on one dimension than on the others (Kallio et al. 2020) without rendering the remaining dimensions irrelevant or simply “switching them off.”

I take the view that emotions and feelings are an integral part of citizenship, allowing it to be experienced in different spaces—physical or metaphorical—(spatiality), during different activities (performed dimension) and in relationships with others (intersubjectivity). If children and youth are seen as a group that is somehow excluded from citizenship (due to age and the resulting lack of, or incomplete, legal capacity), if they are seen as “half-citizens” (Lister 2007), who are only preparing for the role of adult citizen, then the feeling of what it is like to be a citizen and the experience of what that citizenship entails challenges the abstract sense of belonging that is embedded in the concept of the universal citizen. CE that takes into account the affective dimension of citizenship is relevant not only because of the diversity of national, cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, and ideological backgrounds (par-

ticularly in highly politically polarised countries) of children and their families of origin, but also for including children and youth and empowering them as citizens.

Research Questions and Key Assumptions

The aims outlined in the article give rise to the following research questions:

What opportunities are provided by the core curricula (CCs) for CE in Poland in terms of lived citizenship, especially its affective dimension? In other words: How is the concept of lived citizenship – particularly in its affective dimension – represented in the CCs to CE? Or, how do the texts of the analysed CCs legitimise this concept? Is it possible to capture changes in this area following the reform of CC in 2025, and if so, what do they involve?

These questions rest on two assumptions:

1. The CCs can provide opportunities to capture citizenship in the affective dimension;
2. Changes in the CCs brought about by successive government reforms may also lead to further changes in this area.

These two assumptions are at least partly related. As Schmidt (2008) argues, ideas are formed at different levels, and translating them from the institutional level to the programmatic level and then to the level of political solutions is not linear (Schmidt 2008:306–308; Steiner-Khamsi 2014). Furthermore, Wahlström and Sundberg (2017) point to the usefulness of these levels of idea formation for analysing the CCs. The shape of the CCs is the result of various intertwining

influences, including directions and trends at the international level (Nordin and Sundberg 2018:822). These influences themselves result from the translation of ideas into programmatic and concrete solutions, and are further interpreted in interaction with state policies and the cultural, historical, and socio-political context. In the case of changes to CCs, this means that political ideas are translated into specific party programmes, including those concerning education. These programmes, in turn, undergo specific modifications and are then to some extent translated into particular core curricula (Kopińska 2022). Consequently, the effect of such a blend is not entirely predictable, which makes studying it an interesting endeavour. These assumptions imply that analysing changes in the core curriculum is worthwhile, and this becomes even more significant when connected to a country's political change (Kopińska 2022). In addition, this also means that certain ideas and concepts regarding CE that are recognised at the international level may also permeate national curricula to some extent (Steiner-Khamsi 2014). As criticism of the universalist figure of the citizen has been present in the academic literature for several decades, and the concept of lived citizenship itself has also already generated a substantial body of research, some elements may be discernible in national approaches in school CE.

Returning to assumption (1), however, it is important to temper expectations regarding what the CCs can realistically deliver. Every state, regardless of its political system, is invested in “making” citizens (Pinar et al. 1995; Tröhler 2016). Therefore, any national CC should exhibit a universal, normative conception of citizenship constructed across differences and, therefore, often insensitive to the diversity of social experiences. Furthermore, the CC itself, which frames learning objectives and outcomes, is

a document devoid of emotion and feeling. This is partly because the CC is a legal act that operates in formal language, and partly because its learning objectives and outcomes follow a specific linguistic formula. The focus on knowledge and skills—and rarely on attitudes—further hinders the search for anything relating to the experience of citizenship.

Therefore, the question arises: How can one interpret lived citizenship from CCs? The research question guiding the analyses focuses on opportunities. The term opportunities here encompasses all parts of the CCs—general subject descriptions, objectives, learning outcomes, conditions, and the way of implementation—that relate to knowledge, skills, and attitudes or the way of implementation that, at the textual level, enable the identification of lived citizenship, particularly in the affective dimension. The essence is that the text of the analysed documents points to categories, or combinations of categories, which are essential for lived citizenship. I, therefore, identified seven main codes: locality, citizenship activities, relationships with others, social sensitivity, sense of belonging, responsibility, and engagement.

The codes were derived from the relevant literature and, in particular, from the characteristics of the various dimensions of lived citizenship described in the previous section of the article. The first three codes emerged at the intersection of the affective dimension with:

- the spatial dimension (locality), or
- the performed dimension (citizenship activities), or
- the intersubjective dimension (relationships with others).

The next four codes result from combining the affective dimension of lived citizenship with two other dimensions: “sense of belonging” combines the affective, spatial, and intersubjective dimensions. The codes “social sensitivity”, “responsibility”, and “engagement” combine the affective dimension with the intersubjective and performative dimensions. Table 1 lists the definitions of the codes and provides sample guidelines on how to assign them.

Table 1. The main codes used in the analysis

THE MAIN CODES
Locality: The code is assigned to all passages of the CCs that relate to the local context and how a student navigates everyday life in society, i.e. those environments that are spatially accessible or close to them (e.g. school, family, local community, municipality) or relevant in terms of everyday problems (e.g. young people’s problems, their legal situation, and their entitlements). In spatial terms, the code does not primarily refer to the place itself, but to those passages of the CCs text that concern the student’s relationship with that place. The code is applied to passages that contain references to, for example, everyday situations or matters of importance to a student. It also includes those requirements that explicitly indicate that a learner should address (by expressing an opinion, entering into a discussion, or drawing on their own experience) certain issues.
Citizenship activities: The code includes all requirements in the CCs for forms of individual and collective student activity that serve to develop citizenship skills in the environments accessible to the student. This includes both knowledge and cognitive skills (e.g. the ability to critically analyse and evaluate, the ability to design specific solutions, and knowledge of available options for dealing with a situation or the procedures in place) and actual engagement. The code goes beyond standard forms of citizenship activity; for example, acting to solve a problem in the school community counts as citizenship activity. The code is assigned to those passages in which the student acts as an active agent (e.g. initiates, reacts, plans, or defends their opinion in a public forum).

THE MAIN CODES

Relationships with others: The code is assigned to all passages in the CCs concerning relationships formed at the intersection of “me” and “others” (both familiar and unfamiliar people). This includes knowledge of these relationships and the problems they involve (e.g. conflicts, discrimination), as well as attitudes (e.g. respect and openness to different views). The coding of passages relating to the knowledge and attitudes described above assumes that they indirectly reflect the affective dimension on which they are based. The code primarily includes relationships of various kinds and forms (e.g. relationships with peers at school, cooperation on tasks, as well as official contacts or interactions with people or representatives of organisations in the local environment—for example, to obtain specific information or become involved in particular activities). The code therefore applies to those passages that concern the student’s interactions with other people.

Social sensitivity: The code refers to those passages in the CCs that relate to recognising, diagnosing, understanding, or responding to social and ethical problems, or rights violations perceived especially in the immediate environment. This may involve the use of knowledge to assess a given situation, the development of empathy, and the cultivation of specific skills related to the student’s response to identified problems or violations. The code is assigned to those passages of text that concern not only knowledge of a given problem, but also sensitivity expressed through a reaction or a readiness to react.

Sense of belonging: The code refers to those passages in the CCs that concern patriotism, and belonging to different social groups and to the country. It can include both the knowledge relating to different social identifications and requirements concerning the development of the ability to use knowledge to evaluate certain phenomena, to take action as an expression of these identifications, and above all to develop relevant attitudes. Those passages of the CCs that provide students with the opportunity to express their own opinions and feelings, engage in discussion, or present their own interpretation of an issue related to their social identities are particularly important in this regard. The code is applied in those passages where the student is expected to relate to the community in a value-laden and emotional way, and where they are expected to assess their relationships with social groups.

Responsibility: The code includes all requirements in the CCs that relate directly to students’ responsibility, as well as those that require them to act responsibly by taking action for the common good, responding when someone else’s well-being or the common good is threatened, or fulfilling their responsibilities in a collaborative team activity. This code can refer to the requirements of knowing how to react, how to behave, or how to act, but it is particularly concerned with acting responsibly and the student’s ability to articulate their own emotions, feelings, and point of view in relation to such actions. The code is assigned to those passages of the text where the student is expected to carry out a task or consider the consequences of making specific decisions; crucially, this must be done with consideration for others, the group, and the wider community.

Engagement: The code refers to an engagement that is understood not as the mechanical following of procedures, but as issue-driven agency. The code is assigned to those passages of the CCs that relate directly to student engagement, as well as those that involve cognitive engagement (understood as an interest in social issues and problems, especially in environments close to the student, and identifying opportunities to participate in related activities) and/or behavioural engagement (participation in these activities). Particularly important are those passages of the CCs that provide students with an opportunity to express their emotional involvement—that is, to express their emotions and feelings associated with these activities.

Source: Self-elaboration.

Analysed Material and Methods

The analysed material comprised two CCs for secondary schools: the 2018 core curriculum for the subject of *Wiedza o Społeczeństwie* [Knowledge about Society] (hereafter: CC 2018) (MNE 2018) and the 2025 core curriculum for the subject *Edukacja Obywatelska* [Citizenship Education] (hereafter: CC 2025) (ME 2025). The preparation and publication of CC

2025, which has been in use since the 2025/2026 school year, is linked to a political change in Poland. CC 2018 was implemented in connection with the 2017–2018 education reform under the government formed by the eurosceptic, right-wing *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* [Law and Justice] party. The *Knowledge about Society* curriculum, which was compulsory for all secondary school students, was abolished and replaced by *Historia i Teraźniejszość* [History

and Present Time] (HiT) in 2022. While this subject contained elements of the earlier Knowledge about Society, it was oriented more toward recent history than citizenship education. After the 2023 elections, the new government formed by the more liberal Civic Coalition announced that it would abolish the subject and begin work on preparing CC for citizenship education. Comparing CC 2018 and CC 2025, therefore, means comparing CCs of analogous subjects implemented under different political circumstances, which, as argued above, may translate to some extent into their final form.

The analysis compares documents relating to the basic scope of the subject, as it is this part of CC that all students follow. Content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) was employed, with all analyses performed in Atlas.ti. The coding units varied depending on which part of the CCs was analysed:

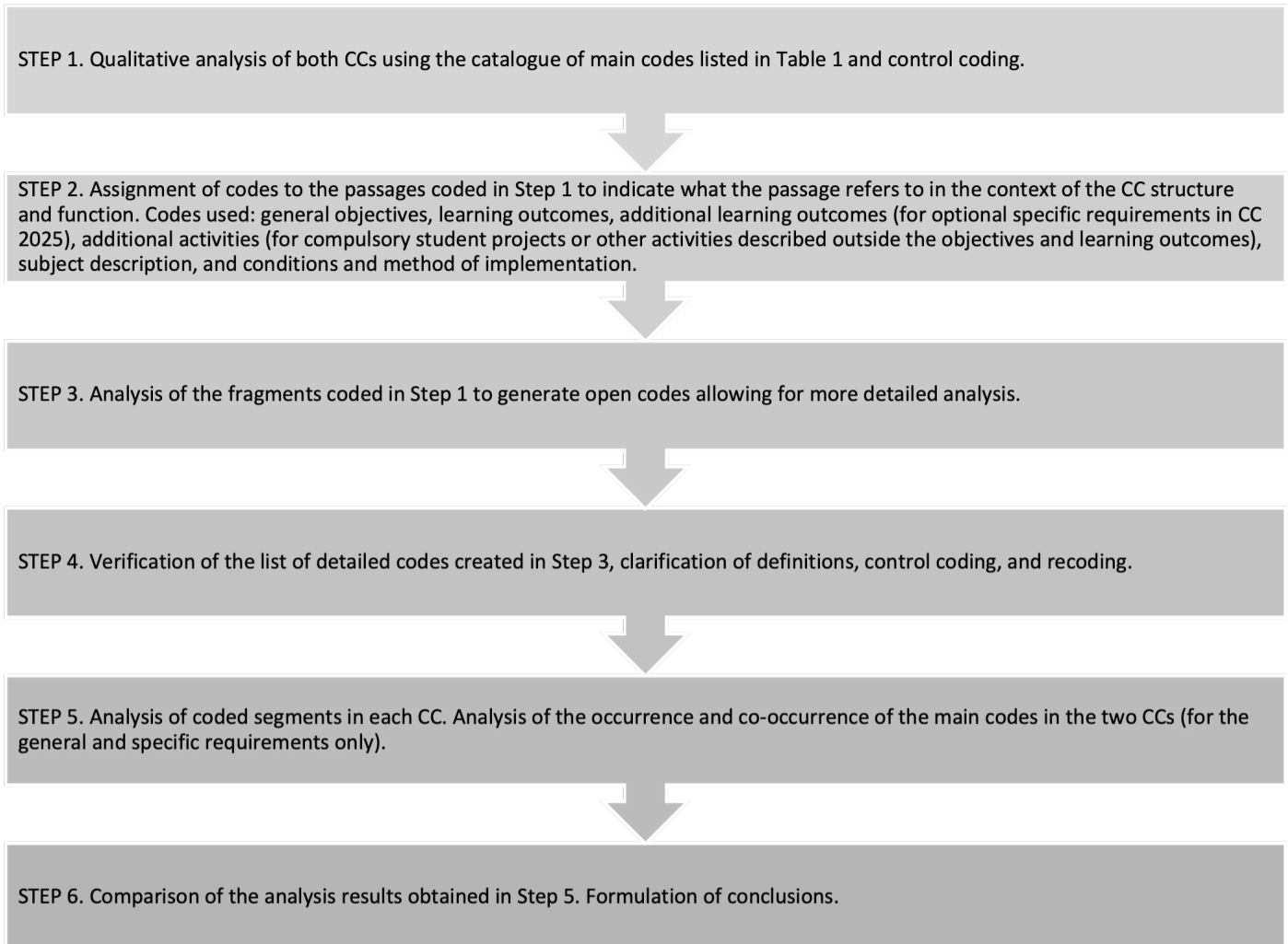
1. For the parts defined as *Learning objectives (general requirements)* and *Learning content (specific requirements)* (for CC 2018) or *Specific require-*

ments for knowledge and skills and *Specific requirements for citizenship activities* (for CC 2025), separate points were used as the coding unit;

2. For the other parts written in continuous text, the coding unit was a single sentence, or groups of several sentences that related thematically to the same objective, activity, method, set of methods, or organisational form.

In line with these differences in coding units, comparisons based on the number of code occurrences and co-occurrences refer only to those parts of the CCs described in point 1. Although general and specific requirements constitute the largest and most essential part of the CCs in Poland in terms of quantity, they do not represent the entirety of the CCs. The analyses were, therefore, intended to support the main argumentation, which focuses on the interpretive analysis of the documents.

The different steps performed during the analysis are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Steps of the analysis

Source: Self-elaboration.

Findings

There are several differences in the structure of CC 2018 and CC 2025 that are relevant to the analysis. Table 2 presents a comparison of the structural components of the two core curricula.

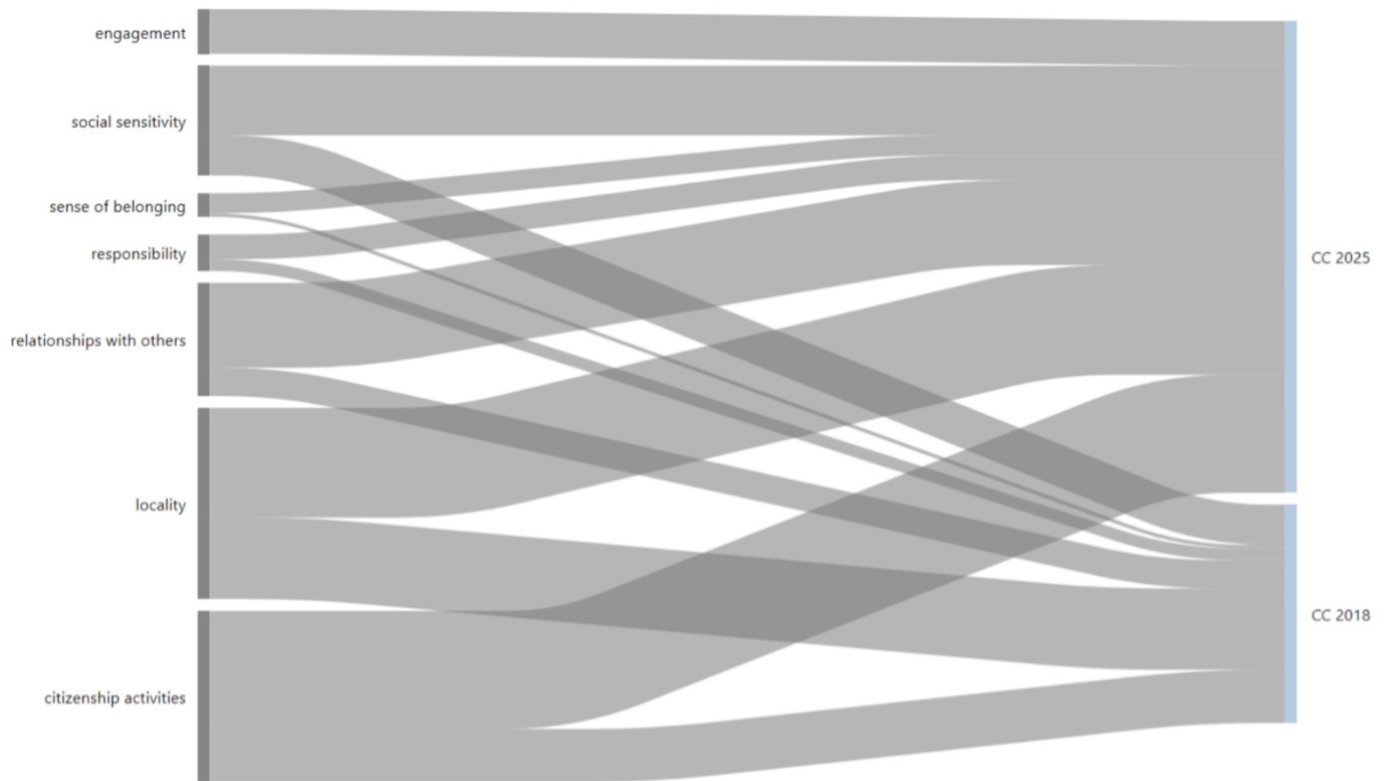
Table 2. Comparison of CC 2018 and CC 2025 designs

CC 2018	CC 2025
• Course description • General requirements: 19 learning objectives • Specific requirements: 64 learning outcomes • Conditions and the way of implementation, which include: 4 educational objectives, methods, forms of achieving objectives and learning outcomes, including the implementation of at least two student educational projects. • Total: 23 learning objectives, 64 learning outcomes and two student learning projects	• Course description including 3 learning objectives • General requirements: 6 learning objectives + 6 skills • Specific knowledge and skills requirements: 45 learning outcomes • Optional requirements: 37 additional learning outcomes assigned to each thematic unit of which at least seven should be selected (one from each section) • Specific requirements for citizenship activities and citizenship projects, including: one educational goal, a list of 18 citizenship activities, from which at least four must be selected for individual or team implementation, and an obligation to implement at least one team student project. • Conditions and the way of implementation • Total: 10 learning objectives and 6 skills, 45 learning outcomes +7 selected from the optional list, 4 citizenship activities, 1 team-based student project

Source: Self-elaboration.

The comparison shows that, in terms of the number of individual requirements, the two CCs are comparable, although CC 2025 contains fewer general and specific requirements. In addition, CC 2025 includes catalogues of optional requirements and citizenship activities, although it remains unclear which of these will ultimately be selected for implementation during school classes. For this reason, the comparison of the two CCs focused primarily on mandatory elements. After comparing the two CCs, the analysis was extended to selected elements. Accordingly, the comparison of code occurrences in the two CCs was limited to general and specific requirements (see the previous section).

The results show that despite fewer general and specific requirements in CC 2025, the codes listed and defined in Table 1 were assigned a higher number of quotations, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Distribution of main codes in CC 2018 and CC 2025 across general and specific requirements

Note: The width of the bands in the diagram shows the representation of each selected code that was assigned to the goals and learning outcomes of CC 2018 and CC 2025. A thick band indicates a higher prevalence of the code within the text, whereas a thin band indicates that the code appeared only occasionally in the document. The coding comprised the general and specific requirements presented as bullet points. The diagram was generated using Atlas.ti 25.

Source: Self-elaboration.

However, these findings provide only a preliminary basis for concluding that there is a difference in the representation of the affective dimension of the concept of lived citizenship in both documents. A more detailed analysis is presented below.

Lived Citizenship in CC 2018

The best represented main codes in CC 2018 are *citizenship activities* and *locality*, which were often identified together (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Network of relationships among the main codes in CC 2018 for general and specific requirements

Note: The height of the nodes at the ends of the bands indicates the extent to which a specific code is connected with other codes in the co-occurrence network. The diagram illustrates textual proximity, indicating that two or more codes are assigned to individual goals and learning outcomes. The coding units comprised the general and specific requirements presented as bullet points. The diagram was generated using Atlas.ti 25.

Source: Self-elaboration.

This means that goals and learning outcomes basically combine a spatial and a performative dimension. But what do they actually refer to?

The local aspect of lived citizenship in CC 2018 is revealed primarily in the fact that the knowledge and skills addressed by the objectives and learning outcomes are related to:

1. the student's own situation, including:
 - a) his/her legal situation, entitlements, and ability to exercise these rights, as well as to recognise mechanisms for asserting his/her own and others' rights and protecting these rights;
 - b) evaluating his/her own decisions and actions in society;
 - c) recognising and seeking solutions to everyday problems, local social issues, or problems specific to the student's age group;
2. the student's daily experience at school, especially in the classroom, including:

- a) discussing social issues, which also requires student to formulate, justify and defend one's own position while respecting views different from their own;
- b) cooperating in a group, which in turn translates into developing the ability to communicate, to take on different roles, distribute tasks, take account of conflicting opinions, and establish a framework for reaching the consensus necessary to complete a task.

The spatial dimension involves shifting the focus from the formal-legal status of citizenship to what is available to students both in terms of their legal situation and entitlements (1.a.), the social experiences that are close to them (at the spatial or problem level) (1.b-c; 2.a-b). It is closely related to the performed dimension of citizenship, i.e. the specific practices and activities through which citizenship is actively constructed. However, not all learning objectives and outcomes correlating with the spatial dimension and lived citizenship provide the same opportunities to capture the intersubjective dimension. Relationships with others are particularly evident in the objectives and learning outcomes re-

ferred to in points 2a and 2b, which concern local citizenship experiences associated with interacting within a class group. The analysis revealed only four passages in CC 2018 in which the codes *locality*, *citizenship activities*, and *relationships with others* appeared together. Two of these passages are learning objectives:

1. [the student] develops discussion skills—formulates, justifies and defends his or her own position in a public forum, respecting dissenting views.
2. [the student] cooperates in a group, taking into account the division of tasks and the values of society.

The other two passages are situated in the *conditions and the way of implementation* section and deal with the methods and forms of implementation of the learning outcomes. More specifically, they address the organisation of educational excursions designed to establish contact with people or organisations that may serve as sources of specific information, as well as the use of various forms of discussion to implement specific requirements. In addition, the need for each student to participate in a minimum of two student learning projects is indicated. This means experiencing citizenship in relationship with others, not just side by side. Collaborating, performing tasks in a project, and participating in discussions on political, social, and legal issues are definitely also conducive to grasping the affective dimension of citizenship. Thus, the affective dimension is evident in those parts of the CC 2018 text that concern the group process and are oriented towards achieving a common goal. Affect can also be discerned in those parts of the document that refer to dialogue and respect in matters of dispute.

The emotions and feelings associated with being a citizen can also be inferred from an analysis of the goals and learning outcomes coded as *social sensitivity*. The analysis of CC 2018 revealed that this code includes learning outcomes related to recognising violations of the law (human rights violations, discrimination, corruption) and recognising social problems (divisions in society, stigmatisation, intolerance, unethical behaviour, and systemic misconduct in public life). To a much lesser extent, it also encompasses knowledge about “others” and foreign nationals, seeking solutions to social problems, and understanding the need to oppose discrimination. However, none of the passages coded as *social sensitivity* refer to actions taken in relation to diagnosed violations or problems. It may, therefore, be inferred that sensitivity is represented here merely as the observer’s attentiveness, while the scale of the issues is fundamentally macro-social.

Regarding the passages assigned the codes *engagement*, *responsibility*, and *sense of belonging*, there are only a few examples present in the text. In the case of *engagement*, only one general objective relating to the formation of pro-community attitudes is formulated in CC 2018; furthermore, the subject description states:

3. The learning content is formulated in such a way that the student is aware of the influence of citizens on public life, but at the same time understands the need to take responsibility for their own choices and decisions.

Affect is here linked to an understanding of the need to take responsibility for one’s own choices. Consequently, the motivation for engagement derives from a sense of duty and a reasoned evaluation of the consequences of one’s actions. The implicit focus

on responsibility found in the passage quoted above is also evident (although not articulated explicitly) in the case of general objectives relating to the protection of human rights and freedoms. In contrast, a *sense of belonging* is only evident in two passages of CC 2018—specifically at the level of the general objective related to shaping attitudes (4) and at the level of the learning outcome related to knowledge (5):

4. This education is also intended to lead to the fostering of attitudes of respect for the national and world heritage as well as cognitive curiosity, open-mindedness and tolerance.
5. [the student] characterises human social roles in relation to their membership of different social groups; analyses the principles of reciprocity, trust and assistance.

Passage 4, while relevant to the state, exhibits a highly limited affective dimension, which can only be inferred indirectly from an attitude of respect

for heritage and openness. As regards Example 5, there is an absence of reference to the specific social groups to which the student belongs. Such a formulation suggests that the focus is predominantly on the cognitive aspects of a sense of belonging.

Lived Citizenship in CC 2025

For CC 2025, the best represented main codes are *citizenship activities*, *locality*, *relationships with others*, and *social sensitivity*, respectively. In this sense, the two documents are similar. However, the difference between the two core curricula at this level (restricted to general and specific requirements; see the 'Analysed material and methods' section) is that all the main codes are significantly more robustly grounded in CC 2025 (Fig. 2). This remains true even though CC 2025 contains fewer general and specific requirements than CC 2018. The corresponding co-occurrence network (Fig. 4) also reveals that the requirements contained in CC 2025 have a different structure from those in CC 2018.

Figure 4. Network of relationships among the main codes in CC 2025 for general and specific requirements



Note: The height of the nodes at the ends of the bands indicates the extent to which a specific code is connected with other codes in the co-occurrence network. The diagram illustrates textual proximity, indicating that two or more codes are assigned to individual goals and learning outcomes. The coding units comprised the general and specific requirements presented as bullet points. The diagram was generated using Atlas.ti 25.

Source: Self-elaboration.

The spatial dimension of lived citizenship in CC 2025 is, as in CC 2018, related both to the student's general situation—including: his/her legal situation, his/her own entitlements, the recognition of mechanisms for asserting his/her own and others' rights, and the identification of solutions to everyday and local social problems—and to his/her daily experiences within the school environment. Notably, a comparison of the two core curricula reveals a clear shift in emphasis towards an active performative and affective attitude. This shift is evident in learning outcomes related to taking action to protect human rights, responding to violations, or working to solve social problems, especially at the local level.

The co-occurrence analysis of CC 2025 indicates that *citizenship activities* and *relationships with others* are the most closely linked codes. Significantly, the majority of the goals and learning outcomes that were coded simultaneously with these two codes relate to discussing social, political, and school issues in the classroom. Citizenship activities outlined in these requirements—such as presenting and defending one's own position in the classroom—highlight the performative and affective dimensions of citizenship. This means the performative construction of oneself as a political agent, which is inherently linked to affective engagement. The emotional and ethical dimensions of dialogue are strongly emphasised; students are expected to respect the perspectives and opinions of others and to engage in dialogue on contentious issues with respect for differing views. This approach views intersubjectivity as a process of mutual recognition of subjectivity, rather than merely the resolution of disputes. This is illustrated by an excerpt from the description of the subject:

6. School should be a place where students seek to understand what unites and what divides Polish society, as well as a place where they learn to verify information on these issues, become acquainted with a variety of positions, try to form their own opinions, justify them, present them with respect for others and enter into dialogue with those whose views may be different.

As with CC 2018, the high potential for the affective dimension of citizenship to emerge in CC 2025 is provided by those passages assigned the code *social sensitivity*. Among the objectives and learning outcomes that relate to social sensitivity are both those confined to the cognitive sphere—with a possible performed dimension limited to undertaking a discussion on the topic (7)—and those that involve taking specific actions in response to diagnosed violations or problems (8, 9).

7. [the student] identifies and describes the specific characteristics of his or her local community and the heritage that builds local identity and local patriotism; forms an opinion and engages in discussion about the major challenges facing the community;
8. [the student] recognises examples of xenophobia, stereotyping and prejudice and discrimination, including hate speech, and responds to their manifestations in their environment;
9. [the student] describes the meaning of school rules set out in the statutes or other intra-school documents as well as students' rights and duties, knows their sources and justification, and reacts in situations of rule violation.

Such learning outcomes, especially those that simultaneously relate to the codes of *citizenship activities* and *relationships with others*, provide an opportunity to capture the affective dimension of citizenship. The point is that such learning outcomes not only emphasise the importance of being attentive to various issues that can affect group dynamics or to violations of human rights, but also explicitly call for a response. At the heart of such a response lies affect: a sense of injustice, or being affected by specific problems or the plight of others.

The affective dimension of citizenship is also related to the emotions and feelings connected to being a citizen, the sense of belonging, and the care associated with acts of citizenship, which in turn implies a deeper engagement and responsibility. Regarding *engagement*, the importance of a “commitment to the common good” is already emphasised in the description of the subject (10), which is also evident at the level of objectives and related skills (11).

10. The main objective of the core curriculum for the subject of citizenship education is to prepare students for informed and responsible citizenship engagement in a democratic society.
11. The student identifies social problems and seeks solutions to them, and engages individually or in cooperation with others in activities for the common good and the homeland.

Learning outcomes assigned the code *engagement* primarily focus on taking action for the school community (12), the local community, but also taking action at the state level (13). In the case of the state, the affective dimension of citizenship is definitely more limited, yet it is present, albeit indirectly. The

use of forms of citizen engagement in the lawmaking process (e.g. participating in a public hearing or preparing a petition) signifies a performative presence in the public sphere and entails a sense of responsibility for the common good; whilst this is embedded within a procedural framework, it is also linked to the affective dimension of citizenship.

12. [the student] diagnoses the problems and needs of the school community, proposes constructive solutions and, where possible (independently or as a team) takes action on the issue;
13. [the student], using a selected law as an example, presents the course of the legislative process in Poland; explains possible conventional and unconventional forms of citizen engagement in the law-making process and uses them where possible.

Half of the passages coded *engagement* in CC 2025 also refer to *responsibility*. In addition, the code *responsibility* has been assigned to those passages in CC 2025 where reference is made to identifying specific social problems and finding ways to solve them (14) or taking specific actions in that direction (8), but also when recognising and responding to violations of the law.

14. [the student] explains the causes and consequences of the climate crisis; analyses global and local initiatives to stop climate change and identifies actions that citizens can take and, where possible, engages in selected activities.

Regarding the sense of belonging, references to different identification groups are evident in CC 2025,

reflecting a shift in the structure of the learning outcomes. This is illustrated by the following learning outcome:

15. [the student] identifies different social groups and communities (from the family, to the local and national community, to the global community); evaluates the relationships between components of identity related to membership of specific groups and communities.

As with CC 2018, this outcome falls within the domain of knowledge without any clear reference to the student's personal circumstances, which reduces the affective dimension.

When identifying passages from which the feelings and emotions present in CC 2025 can be inferred, one should point to explicitly articulated pride on the one hand (16) and concern for the "small and large homeland" on the other (7), both of which are intrinsically linked to responsibility.

16. [the student, using the results of research, identifies what unites and what divides Polish society; indicates what we can be proud of as a country, and formulates an opinion and undertakes a discussion on this.

Both learning outcomes, by referring to discussions on these topics, shift the focus to the emotional foundation of citizenship.

Regarding the optional learning outcomes (see Table 2), the analysis showed that every section contains outcomes coded *citizenship activities*, *locality* and *relationships with others*, providing an opportunity to support the spatial, performed, and intersubjective dimensions of lived citizenship. Learning outcomes

relating to *social sensitivity* are present in six of the seven sections, followed by *engagement*, *sense of belonging* and *responsibility*. The additional learning outcomes are dominated by the recognition of social problems. The learning outcomes for developing openness to different views, recognising one's legal situation and rights, and finding solutions to everyday problems are also well represented. In summary, each section reveals additional learning outcomes that incorporate the affective dimension of lived citizenship.

Such potential can also be seen in the required citizenship activities. Many of the citizenship activities listed in the document demand a deeper engagement, which in turn is linked to responsibility and social sensitivity. The selection of four of these activities (see Table 2) may therefore further support the affective dimension of citizenship in CC 2025. In addition, as in CC 2018, a team project (at least one) is mandatory. CC 2025 indicates that this can be a community or research project. This requirement can be interpreted as the intersection of the performative, intersubjective, and affective dimensions of lived citizenship, matching the dynamics discussed regarding CC 2018. Such a task necessitates deeper involvement, responsibility for the task at hand, collaboration, and communication between team members. Furthermore, if the project is community-oriented and responds to a specific social problem, the importance of the affective dimension increases, as the actions taken reflect a concern for the common good or the well-being of a specific group.

Conclusions

Assessing the potential for capturing emotions and relationships in citizenship education, the basics of which are laid down in the core curricula, is a

challenging task. This article argues that this potential can emerge at the intersection of the different dimensions of citizenship, defined here as lived citizenship, and can be read mainly from the learning objectives and learning outcomes defined in the core curricula. The affective dimension of citizenship is only one of several dimensions intersecting with the spatial, intersubjective, and performed dimensions; therefore, in seeking the potential to capture the affective dimension in the core curricula, the analysis examined the presence of all the codes associated with the different dimensions of lived citizenship.

The analysis showed that both CC 2018 and CC 2025, although created under different political conditions in the country, reveal such potential. However, the 2025 curriculum revision introduced general and specific requirements with a different structure compared to CC 2018, whereby:

- despite a smaller overall number, all the main codes identified in the research are better represented; and
- an analysis of the co-occurrence of these codes indicates that individual learning objectives and outcomes combine the main codes to a greater extent.

The conclusions regarding the frequency and co-occurrence of codes are only preliminary in nature. The findings of detailed qualitative analyses of the texts of both CCs are of crucial importance.

In spatial terms, CC 2025 shows a clear downscaling of citizenship. Whilst the objectives and specific requirements that enable students to consider citizenship in local terms—both in spatial terms (local community, school community) and in terms of

issues (matters affecting young people, their legal status, and their entitlements)—are present in both documents, in CC 2025, the school becomes a key element of locality as a micro-scale of public space. The emphasis also shifts to what is important to students and their community. Even interactions with institutions and issues of a macro-social scale—such as human rights, environmental concerns, and global issues—are related to everyday situations and student engagement. In this way, a stronger foundation is built for the affective dimension of citizenship.

CC 2025 also shifts the emphasis towards active agency. In the formulation of learning objectives and outcomes, civic activities intersect with relationships with others. Even if these predominantly concern members of the class group, they nonetheless reinforce the affective dimension of citizenship present in the document. A highly conspicuous change in CC 2025 is that *social sensitivity*—which serves as a booster for the affective dimension of citizenship—includes not only goals and learning outcomes relating to the cognitive area, but also involves taking specific activities, action in response to diagnosed social problems and violations of the law. This change is crucial and, at the same time, linked to the significantly reinforced performed dimension of citizenship in CC 2025. Additional opportunities for capturing the affective dimension of citizenship exist in the elective requirements and citizenship activities. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that, although these are elective elements—viewed positively from the perspective of educational autonomy—they weaken the overall assessment of CC 2025 in terms of its representation of the concept of lived citizenship.

The above analysis suggests that changing the core curricula regarding citizenship education represents

a decisive step towards a concept based on more active citizenship experienced locally by students. And it is this change that seems to be most important for being able to grasp the affective dimension of citizenship. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this study addresses only opportunities, not the

differences between what is assumed and what is implemented in schools. The scope of this article is strictly confined to the interpretative potential of what is written in the core curricula, which ultimately means that the affective dimension of citizenship is poorly represented in both CC 2018 and CC 2025.

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