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UNIVERSITIES IN CRISIS? THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC CAPITALISM AND McUNIVERSITIES ON CZECH SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

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Abstract: Since the beginning of their existence, the social sciences, like the humanities, have been gradually formulating and searching for both the central elements of their activities, and how their findings can be applied to society. A significant part of this search takes place in universities. Currently, academic capitalism and the McDonaldization of universities are entering this process. Using data (both qualitative and quantitative) on the economic, cultural, and political frameworks of science and development from the Czech Republic, the paper identifies potential threats and crises in the social sciences and humanities. The results point to a long-term underfunding of the humanities and social sciences and the risk of their being relegated to the position of auxiliary sciences to the natural, medical, or technical sciences. Here we see a possible identity crisis in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in the role of critical reflection on the system or individual areas of human existence.

Key-words: McUniversities; Humanities; Social Science; Academic capitalism; Academic identity; Critical role

1. Introduction

In addition to major and global crises, hidden crises occur in specific sectors of society, but can have serious consequences for society and individuals alike. Examples include changes in the academy and science functioning, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. After the collapse of the communist regime, Czech society underwent a rapid transformation toward democracy and capitalism (Machonin 1994; Matějů and Lim 1995). The same applies to the field of science and higher education, and a large space of academic freedom has opened for the Czech humanities and social sciences (Linková and Vohlídalová 2017; Pavelka 2014). Unlike the natural, technical, and medical sciences, the social sciences and humanities were persecuted and destroyed for much of the twentieth century; the fascist and communist regimes, in several waves,

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destroyed intergenerational continuity in these sciences, which are based on critical thinking (Jeřábek 2019; Skovajsa 2011; Šikl and Vobořil 2020).

After 1989 and the Velvet Revolution, individual disciplines began to be rebuilt. At the same time, however, academic capitalism, based on the ideology of neoliberalism, emerged in many countries, introducing the principles of market economics and competition into academia. The social sciences and humanities, weakened by discontinuity and persecution, were forced to compete for financial resources and reassert their raison d'être. Some politicians, technocrats in industry, and colleagues in the natural sciences have raised, and continue to raise, the question of what the humanities and social sciences are for. The distrust has manifested itself in funding, both institutional and of salaries. The same applies to the amount of funding from grant providers.

In our paper, we focus on assessing the current state of the humanities and social sciences in the Czech Republic, concerning their funding and their place in the narratives of official documents and news articles (according to Ritzer's (2018) description of globalization). We ask the following question: *How is the shape of the humanities and social sciences currently constructed in terms of economic, political, and cultural framework in the Czech Republic*? To answer this question, we first define the conceptual framework (academic capitalism, McDonaldization of universities), and briefly present the historical context of the humanities and social sciences. We then describe the methodological framework of our investigation and, using data from the Czech Statistical Office (hereafter CZSO), the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, as well as newspaper articles and government documents, we formulate a conclusion about the risk of a critical identity crisis in the social sciences and humanities.

However, the definition of the humanities and social sciences is not entirely clear. Humanities tend to include theology and philosophy, but also the sciences of culture or linguistics. This definition refers to the fact that the results of spiritual activity are studied in these sciences. Sometimes philosophy and theology are singled out from this broad group as specific approaches to investigating the world (Hudson 2014; Mittlestrass 1989; Wallerstein et al. 1998). Defining the social sciences is equally difficult. There is no consensus on whether it coincides with the definition of social studies, just as the boundary between the social sciences and the humanities is not clear. As early as 1916, the study of human society and the functioning of the individual within social groups was defined as the field of social sciences (Coleman 2021). However, even according to the current field of science and technology classification (FOS 2007), the list of sciences is not clearly defined (logically concerning evolving human knowledge), primarily by the inclusion of items 5.9 (Other social sciences) and 6.5 (Other humanities). In this article, we follow the FOS 2007 definition, and understand psychology, sociology, political science, law, social work, etc. as social sciences, and philosophy, theology, history, linguistics, etc. as humanities.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical background of this study consists of two concepts that we understand as interrelated. The first is the concept of McDonaldization of universities, based on the more general concept of McDonaldization (Ritzer 2013, 2018). The second is the concept of academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie 2001). Given the focus on the Czech environment, this section also presents a basic overview of the situation of the Czech humanities and social sciences from a historical perspective.

2.1. McDonaldization of Academia

The concept of McDonaldization was formulated by Ritzer as an approach to the organization of a particular group (enterprise, firm, state, society) that is structured around rationality as a fundamental characteristic of such a group. This rationality is then followed by characteristics such as efficiency, predictability, calculability, the tendency to substitute human resources with

technology, and the high control of uncertainty. Ritzer formulated efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control as the basic characteristics. Ritzer himself elaborates on Max Weber's, and therefore describes, in addition to rationality, the theses of bureaucracy. In recent years, McDonaldization has been conceptualized as part of the process of globalization (Ritzer 1983, 1998, 2013, 2018). As such, the concept has gradually been applied to different sectors of human activity (James 2010; Treiber 2013; Špehar 2010; Weaver 2005, etc.), and to different levels of education (Etherington 2008; Goode and Lumsden 2018; Romanowski and Alkhateeb 2020). It has also been used in reflection on higher education (Gutiérrez 2012; Liessmann 2015, 2018; Nadolny and Ryan 2015).

At the tertiary education level, then, the same principles described above as fundamental characteristics of McDonaldization are manifested. It is possible to observe a tendency towards predictability and controllability of teaching and learning, ideally using technology to replace human resources. A typical example of these efforts, which we believe, have also been strongly supported by the antiepidemiological measures against COVID-19, is e-learning, using tools that allow both the availability of learning materials, and the creation of curricula by learners, and then, in some cases, also allow for machine-driven verification of the knowledge achieved through tests. The emphasis on performance control, resource optimization, or efforts to link university education with industry and the commercial sector to promote economic and social growth is making its way into research and education processes. While pursuing these goals or directions may lead to universities producing good workers for the present time, it may equally lead to a failure to emphasize critical thinking, and the ability to produce people who are good citizens in a free and responsible world. Furthermore, by doing so, universities also run the risk of simplifying the content of their studies as much as possible to serve as many so-called "*learning customers*" as possible (Carroll 2013; Dumbili 2014; Gerland 2008; Hartley 1995; Holmes and Lindsay 2018; Morrish 2000; Nadolny and Ryan 2015; Olaya 2019). Nadolny and Ryan bring the process of McDonaldization closer to home by arguing that it is the transformation of universities from "*knowledge generators to rational service organizations*" (Nadolny and Ryan 2015, 142). Morrish, following Norman Fairclough, then understood it as a way of technologizing discourse (Morrish 2000). However, this process is not accepted by all universities. In some cases, there is what Hayes and Wynyard (2022) refer to as a therapeutic turn, that is, a tendency to counter the above by emphasizing emotion over intellect. The connection with the process of globalization also allows us to view the levels of McDonaldization of universities in the context of the economic, political, and cultural spheres. These areas are defined by Ritzer (2018, 8) as the general domains in which globalization is realized, and which are often generally perceived as important and interrelated areas of society (Bell 1978).

2.2. Academic Capitalism

The McDonaldization of universities also appears to be a breeding ground for academic capitalism. The latter is defined as a reaction to neoliberal tendencies, whereby faculty environments (and therefore their staff) adopt elements of market behaviour. If part of academic capitalism is the tendency to react as if it were a competition in the market for finance (grants, contracts, funds, university-industry partnerships), then the very elements of McDonaldization mentioned above may prove crucial. In this respect, within universities, faculties, and other units, there is also the need for individual employees to make the organization worthwhile - their activities must generate outputs that help to gain or strengthen their position in the funding market. This may also lead to major restructuring, which may include the abolition of individual departments or divisions. At the same time, however, we cannot speak of capitalism per se, because universities do not generate knowledge for the individual owner, and also because it is still recognized and accepted that universities are not corporations, and cannot apply the same principles and practices (Bori and Block 2023; Brunner et al. 2022; Poutanen 2023; Slaughter and Leslie 1997, 2001; Sundell 2022, 2023). In the European context, the so-called "*Bologna process*", which was

adopted as the direction of tertiary education by European ministers of education at the end of the last millennium, has contributed significantly to this concept of education. Its substance has been criticized, because of its significant interference with the mission of university education, which is manifested, among other things, by the division of the unity of research and teaching (Liessmann 2008). Brunner et al. (2022) then point out in a quantitative study they conducted that those universities that follow the logic of academic capitalism perform better in quality assessment and accreditation. However, it is important to point out that quality in this case is measured at the levels of managerialism, income generation, entrepreneurship or outsourcing of services, competitiveness, and focus on achieving results. In this context, Poutanen (2023, 29) talks about "*a new paradigm of* (...) *competitive edge in global competition*". This also brings with it increasing pressures (varying from university to university), not only on finance, but also on administration and ideology (Jessop 2018).

2.2. Czech Social Science and Humanities after 1949

In the Czech Republic, the development of the humanities and social sciences has been significantly influenced twice. First, with the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and the emphasis on basic views of not only the social sciences that were in line with the theses of national socialism. The second time was between 1949 and 1990, when the humanities and social sciences were subordinated to communist ideology. In the latter period, the influence of the state-emphasized Marxist-Leninist science on both theology and philosophy (humanities) and the social sciences can be observed. In terms of the humanities, the prevailing ideology did not allow much free development of the disciplines and contact with the West. Theology taught in universities was strictly controlled, not least because religion was considered an outdated and unnecessary ideology (Vanáč 2006). Social work as a developing university discipline and practical activity, which had enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy even during the Second World War (the journal called »Sociální pracovnice« (Social Worker) was still legally published, albeit in a reduced form, in which Western texts were sometimes published in their Czech translation), was essentially abolished by a decision of the state authorities. It was envisaged as a practical activity that would eventually disappear as social problems disappeared (Klimentová and Thelenová 2014). Political science, as we know it today, did not exist (Sommer 2016). Also, sociology.

Sociology was also fundamentally confined to areas and principles of scientific work influenced by the prevailing Marxist-Leninist framework of worldview. Although there was a clear desire for contact with the so-called "*western direction*" of sociology as a discipline (Jeřábek 2019). However, as Skovajsa (2011, 16) points out, in practically all countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc, there existed something like "*unofficial or even oppositional social sciences*". Despite this unofficial social science, there was a present tendency to use ideologically tinged language in the context of sociology as a way of a) emphasizing one's loyalties, b) presenting one's ideological position to the public, and c) a way of training social scientists in ideologically acceptable language. Emphasizing the "we" position, and emphasizing the practical-political relevance of the field, were also characteristic. There were also ideologically neutral texts, which often had a purely methodological focus, or were presented as empirical studies. Officially, there were also publications in which the reflection of the prevailing ideology was carried out in a few sentences, and space was given to theses that were not in line with this ideology. Similarly, one can also consider the treatment of official ideology in the context of psychology (Šikl and Vobořil 2020). The effort and possibility of using Western (i.e., essentially anti-regime) theoretical concepts and research is then also pointed out by Lišková (2018), or Ghodsee and Lišková (2016).

However, it is also important for our text whether it is possible to talk about academic capitalism in the Czech environment, and therefore about the McDonaldization of universities. Pavelka (2014) perceives the Czech university environment as applying capitalism. Linková and

Vohlídalová (2017) then describe two processes that can be identified in Czech universities after the Velvet Revolution. According to the authors, since the 1990s there has been a depoliticization of universities, and thereby of the social sciences and humanities. Between 2004 and 2008, it was possible to detect a gradual growing influence of neoliberalism and academic capitalism. However, Linková and Vohlídalová speak of a so-called "*hybrid situation*", in which academic capitalism is applied in some organizations, but not by others.

In the countries of the European Union, the Czech Republic ranks 13th out of 27 countries in terms of funding science and development, not only within university departments. In 2021, a total of €1,416 million were directed to this area. On the one hand, this is significantly less than in Germany (€39158 million), or France (€17660 million), but at the same time, more than in Malta (€35 million), Latvia (€84 million), or Cyprus (€93 million). On a per capita basis, the Czech Republic falls two places lower. At the same time, since 2005, support for science and research activities has increased from €54.1 per capita to €139.2. However, despite this gradual increase, it does not reach the EU average level of R&D funding (€152 per capita in 2021), or the median (also €152 per capita in 2021).

3. Research Design and Methodology

Considering the question (*How is the shape of the humanities and social sciences currently constructed in terms of an economic, political, and cultural framework in the Czech Republic*?), we chose a mixed-method research strategy. The economic framework was analysed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation coefficient. For the scope of analysis of the political and cultural framework, qualitative content analysis (Lune and Berg 2017) was used to identify the main themes regarding the position of the humanities and social sciences (hereafter referred to as Hu&SoSc).

Data for the economic framework analysis were obtained from the website of the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO), the website of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and additional data provided by CZSO staff. The material for the qualitative analysis was obtained from two sources: a) government websites related to science and development, and b) websites of Czech newspapers. Government websites were searched manually and all relevant documents (related to science and development) were included in the sample. The websites of the most influential Czech newspapers (due to sales of the printed form of the newspapers) were searched using keywords: social science, science, humanities, science, philosophy. The keywords were chosen to reflect the focus on science as such, rather than on specific fields of science. Such generic keywords were also chosen to be as inclusive as possible of newspaper articles dealing with the status of the social sciences and humanities. All searches were limited to texts/data in the Czech language (in order to analyze the Czech higher education environment). A limitation to the years 2010 to 2023 was also applied (in order to describe the current situation). The searches were carried out on seven social media platforms. A total of 51 articles were included for content analysis. Those were also analyzed (to identify thematic units) whose full text was not available, and therefore only part of the article (often the perex and the first third of the text) could be analyzed.

Table 1: Data, data sources, analytical procedure

Oblast (Ritzer, 2018)	**data**	**Source of data**	**Analytical procedure**
Economical	- Government budget allocation – four data sets containing data from 2010 to 2021 - Average monthly wages for individual categories of employees at HEIs (data from 2022)	- Czech Statistical Office - Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	Descriptive statistics Pearson correlation coefficient r
Political	Government Strategy for Science and Development and related documents (n=11)	Web pages	Qualitative Content analysis
Cultural	Newspaper articles (n=51)	Searched on 7 online news platforms with national reach	Qualitative Content analysis

Source: Authors

Quantitative data was analysed using proportional representation (see Figure 1, Figure 2) and, in the case of gross salaries of academic staff, using aggregated average salaries (see Figure 3) in Microsoft Excel. The newspaper articles were copied into Microsoft Word. Government documents were downloaded in PDF format. Subsequently, newspaper articles and government documents were uploaded to Atlas.ti, where they were coded (Saldaña 2021) and then categorized (see parts 4.3, 4.4) according to a schedule of basic qualitative content analysis (Lune and Berg 2017).

4. Research results and discussion

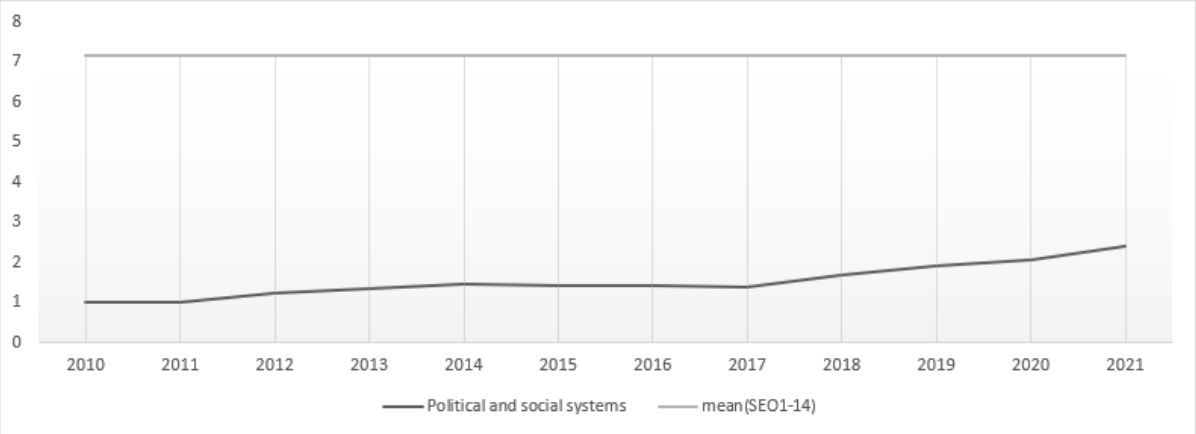
Building on the areas identified by Ritzer (2018), we first describe economic indicators of the state of the contemporary social sciences and humanities. We then discuss political indicators and, last but not least, cultural indicators. Although this is a macro-level analysis, this insight can offer a broader understanding of the factors contributing to the shape of the humanities and social sciences in the Czech Republic.

4.1. Economic indicators

As part of the economic indicators of the current situation of Hu&SoSc, we use data on Government budget allocations for R&D (research and development) in two socioeconomic objectives (SEO; Political and social systems, structures and processes, and General advancement of knowledge), and data for salaries of academic staff of universities. We tracked the first two indicators from 2010 to 2021 (data for 2022 was not available at the time of data analysis). The last indicator (wages) is tracked for 2022, as published by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (data for the previous round was not available at the time of data analysis).

The first area monitored is the percentage of the state budget spent on R&D in an area directly related to the Hu&SoSc - that is, the study of political and social structures and systems. In this area, we can observe a gradual slow increase in support from 1.01% of the budget to 2.39% between 2010 and 2021. Although this is a gradual increase, it is still below average (if all 14 SEOs were funded equally, it would amount to 7.14% of the budget) - see Figure 1.

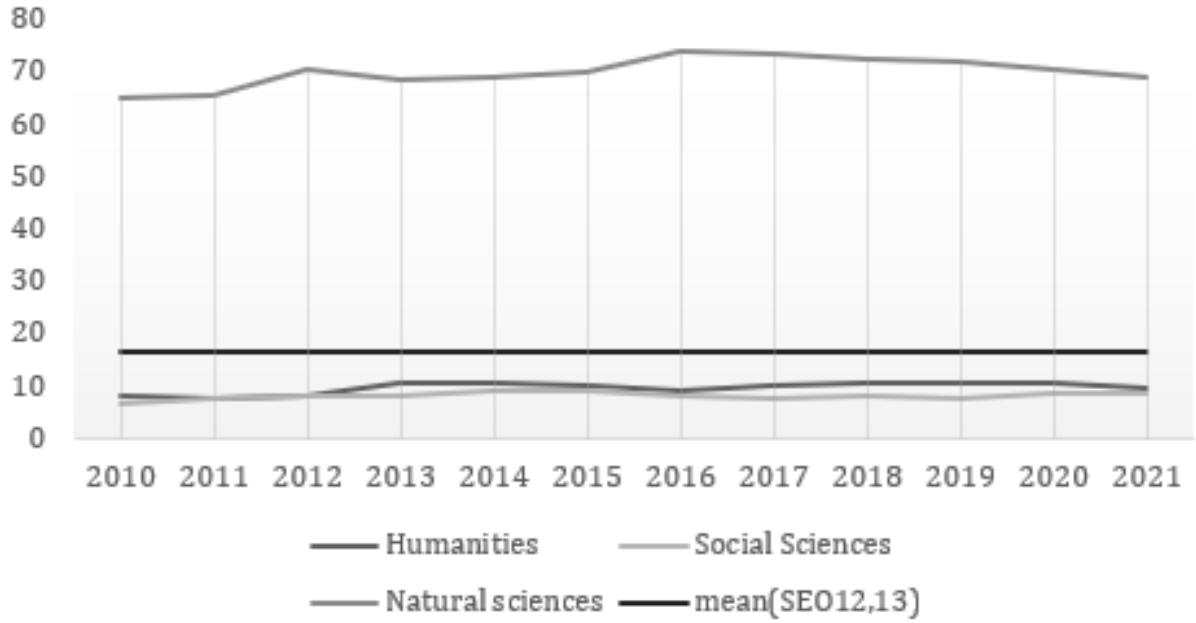
Figure 1. Percentage of budget devoted to the area of research Political and social systems



Source: Authors according to data: GBARD by main socioeconomic objectives, the form of support, providers, and beneficiaries during 2010-2020 (CZSO).

We get similar results (relative to average funding) when we look at the support for the General Advancement of Knowledge (see Figure 2). The average support (mean form budget for 12 + 13 SEO) is 16.67% of the budget, with the humanities being funded at 7.66% to 10.73%, and 9.74% of the budget in 2021. The social sciences are funded between 6.63% and 9.13% of the budget in the long term, and 8.76% in 2021. Therefore, funding for both sciences is around half of the average long-term funding.

Figure 2. Percentage of support for general advancement of knowledge relative to average support for all disciplines



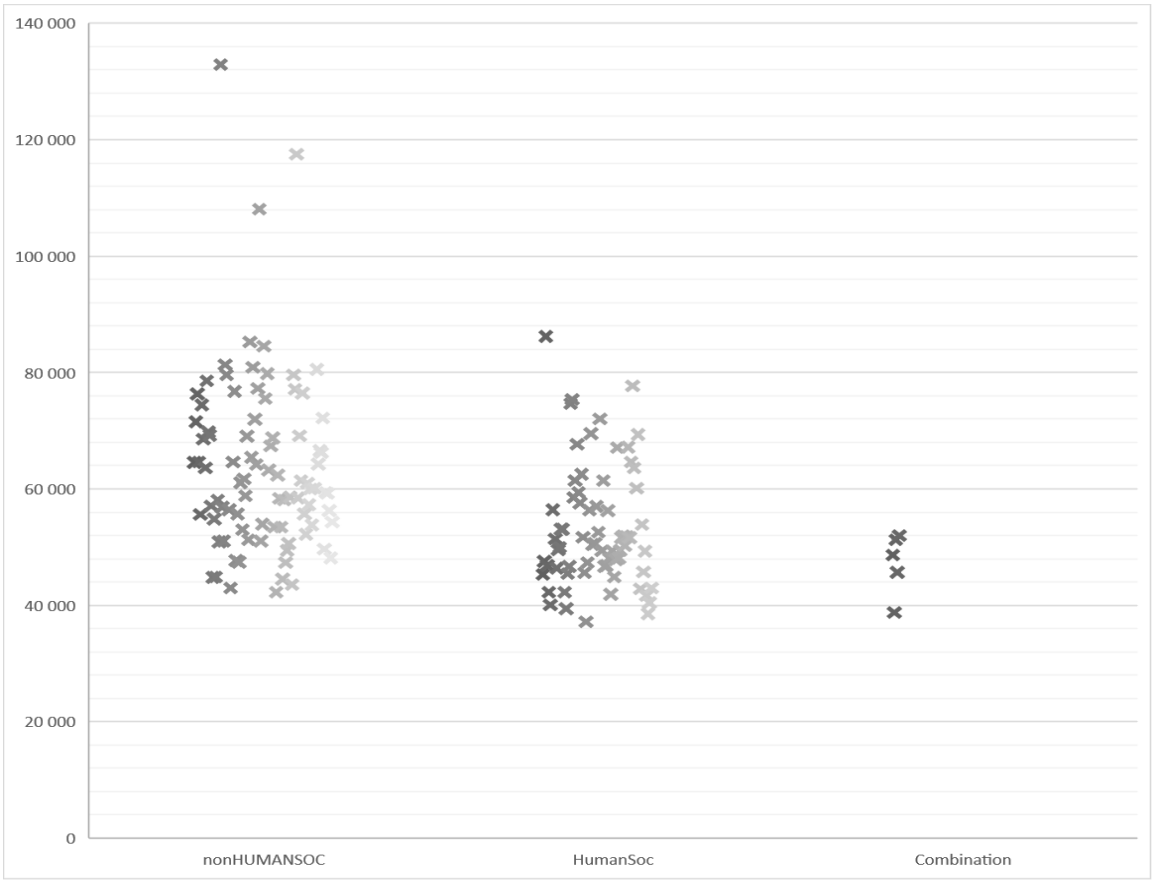
Source: Authors according to data: Government budget allocations for R&D in the socioeconomic objective of general advancement of knowledge (SEO12+13) by field of science, 2010–2021 (CZSO)

In contrast, the support ratio of support for the natural sciences ranges from 64.7% to 73.7%. From 2016 onward, a slight decrease from the above minimum can be observed, with up to

69.05% support in 2021 (see also Figure 2). If we look at the university sector in terms of funding, which would include funding from companies and businesses, then the humanities would draw 6.54% of the total funding going toward universities in 2021, and 6.65% in 2022. The social sciences would then draw 7.79% and 7.89% of the total budget and funding (Data on Research..., 2022). The funding correlation between the two fields is rather medium (r=.552; R^2=.304), therefore, it can be assumed that their financing is not governed by a similar logic, or with the same intention. It can be assumed that if the humanities and social sciences were funded with the same intention, the value of the correlation coefficient and the determination coefficient would be higher.

The last economic indicator is the level of gross salaries (here calculated as the mean for all academic staff, from assistants to professors) within disciplines. The average gross salary in universities in Hu&SoSc faculties ranges from 37,167 CZK (€1,486) to 86,251 CZK (€3,450) with an average of 53,286 CZK, and a median of 50,546 CZK (€2,131 and €2,021). In non-humanities faculties (science, technology, medicine, etc.), it ranges from 42,273 to 132,920 CZK (€1,690 to €5,316), with a mean of 63,830 CZK, and a median of 61,006 CZK (€2,553; €2,440).

Figure 3. The average salary of all academic staff in faculties divided by type for 2022 in CZK



Source: Authors according to data: Average monthly wages for individual categories of workers in universities in CZK (CZSO).

Legend: Faculties of humanities or sciences are labelled HumanSoc; other faculties (science, technology, etc.) are labelled as nonHUMANSOC. Faculties combining HumanSoc and nonHUMANSOC disciplines are labelled as a combination. Each cross indicates the value of the average salary at a particular faculty.

It is also important to know that the value of the third quartile of gross salaries lies at 58,774 CZK (€2,350) for Hu&SoSc, and 70,678 CZK (€2,827) for other faculties. Combined faculties (often combining natural sciences and humanities) are the worst off in these indicators (mean 47,283 CZK (€1,891), median 48,690 CZK (€1,947); given the total number of five faculties, QIII is not calculated). Leaving aside the outliers, the two main areas do not differ from each other in terms of wages. At the same time, however, the so-called non-humanities and non-social science faculties (technical disciplines, natural sciences, etc.) have a higher density of average faculty salaries, between 52,000 and 80,000 CZK (between €2,080 and €3,200), whereas Hu&SoSc faculties have between 40,000 and 60,000 CZK (between €1,600 and €2,400; see also Figure 3).

4.2. Political framework

The following trends are evident in the framework documents that address the position of the humanities and social sciences within a more general approach to the sciences as such, or to the topics and areas that are perceived as priorities to be addressed.

- The topic of Hu&SoSc (referred to as social sciences in the documents) is seen as both interconnected and separate from the other sciences.
- Use of Hu&SoSc results for the domains of other sciences
- Excessive attention to other sciences in terms of research focus domains

The National Research and Innovation Strategy for 2021-2027 considers Hu&SoSc topics as a specific theme, along with technology and application topics. Yet, in terms of the language used, Hu&SoSc is often formulated outside the other sciences: There is a broad knowledge base in the domain, underpinned by strong R&D in the physical, chemical, materials, and computer sciences, as well as in the social sciences and humanities (P7:p59[2]; authors' emphasis). The "*but also*" indicates a certain insularity with respect to the other science areas, as well as the possible non-expectation that the Hu&SoSc research area would be supported by "*a high number of scientific publications*" (P7:p59) - see also the utility theme on this in Section 4 below. Similarly, in reflecting on the areas to be included in the reflection on science and research, "*the specificities of the technical, medical, or natural science disciplines should be taken into account, as well as the potential of the social sciences and humanities*" (P9:3). Similarly, in the statement about the quality of research, which covers "*both the social sciences and humanities* (...) *and the technical, environmental, or industrial disciplines*" (P11:p8).

The results of the activities carried out within Hu&SoSc are understood as those that should reflect the elimination of "*risks*" in terms of "*society-wide*" impacts, as well as those of other disciplines. Therefore, in relation to other disciplines, Hu&SoSc is temporally framed as "*research engagement in the field*" (P7:p63). In addition to risk elimination, social resilience (P7:p74) and well-being (P7:p69) are also mentioned as goals. However, it is significant that these are "*themes that use research findings in the social sciences and humanities* (…) *in a context relevant to the domain focus*" (P7:p6). The narrative supports the linking of Hu&SoSc with "*natural, medical, and technical sciences*" (P14:p6), but to meet the objectives of other domains. In its extreme form, Hu&SoSc is then framed as having the potential to be "*a useful adjunct to purely technical research*" (P14:p21).

The last areas mentioned are the research areas themselves, the domains of specialization, which are also formulated as priorities concerning science funding. Of the total of nine domains, only one domain (culture and creative industries as a tool for accelerating the socioeconomic development of the Czech Republic) is devoted to Hu&SoSc. In this sense, it is the field of humanities as such,

[2] The designation of the document in Atlas.ti is given in brackets. The colon is followed by the page on which the text cited in the document can be found. Due to the availability of documents in PDF format, it was not possible to refer to a specific paragraph, as we do in the referencing of the cultural framework (see also footnote 3).

and not the field of social sciences. Moreover, it is also emphasized here that research activities must be related to the acceleration of economic and social development.

4.3. Cultural framework

In the context of the reflection of the humanities and social sciences in the mass media of newspaper nature, the following themes can be identified with which these areas of human activity are associated:

- the economic situation,
- usefulness
- link to broader social issues.

The long-standing low funding described in Chapter 4.1 is also reflected in the way the topic of funding is reflected in the Czech mass media. As early as in 2010, it was possible to read that compared to 2003 "*universities have increased their budgets, but this has not solved the lack of funding*" (P4:347[3]). However, in 2010 it was also presented in narratives that "*it is significantly better to be a university teacher than a supermarket clerk*" (P4:348). During 2023, the narratives in the media are more likely to point to "*low salaries*" that "*do not reach a civilized level*" (P6:008). Or even describing the situation as "*alarming*", and salaries as "*extremely low*", leading to "*many renowned teachers leaving the faculties for regional education*" (P2:029). Concerning the supermarket point of reference mentioned in the 2010 narratives, the situation in 2023 is described as "*many associate professors are making less than cashiers*" (P2:037). The situation has recently been described in the media regarding "*teachers* (...) *running out of patience*" (P5:025). The economic situation is also reflected in the media by politicians, who on the one hand perceive the underfunding of universities, while at the same time stressing that universities should also take concrete steps, and "*must contribute, for example, through better use of state resources*" (P3:199).

The economic situation is also associated in the media with the area of usefulness of science. On the one hand, it is associated with the quality of science compared to science in other countries ("*Is our science world-class? Is it well-funded?*" This topic was discussed by university faculty representatives; P2:188), and also with the issue of good use of resources ("*The grant agency has not encouraged greater use of research in practice*"; P2:258). The theme of usefulness is either explicitly named ("*Social sciences and humanities make us function*"; P4:026), or implied by pointing to what we can owe to the social sciences or humanities. In the latter sense, for example, "*Thanks to all the humanities, we find that we really can live a very good life and be ourselves*" (P3:019).

A final area is the link of the humanities and social sciences in universities with wider social issues. An example is the link to the topic of sexual harassment and the sexualization of relationships: "*he sat down and put his hand on my thigh*". After complaints from female students, another teacher left the university (P3:069). In addition to themes of equal and respectful treatment of students, information about pro-environmental activities in the faculties of social sciences and humanities also appears in the press: "*Students call on the government to make tackling the climate crisis a priority*" (P2:130).

[3] The link indicates the designation of the document in Atlas.ti and the paragraph number of the document there.

4.4. Interpretation

The theses presented above can be summarized in the following statements:

- Humanities and social sciences tend to be less supported areas (see Figures 1 and 2)
- However, they are funded steadily in the same way, with minor fluctuations from year to year.
- Although the range of average salaries in the faculties of humanities and social sciences, on the one hand, and other faculties, on the other, overlap, it can be said that academic staff at the faculties of humanities and social sciences are less well remunerated than academics in other sciences (see Figure 3).
- Hu&SoSc are defined as essential in government strategies, but their position is often framed as instrumental in relation to other disciplines. At the same time, they do not have their own specific domain of specialization.

So what makes the situation specific? How can it be perceived as problematic? We believe that the essence of the problem lies in the combination of financial undervaluation (which is stable and therefore not something new), with a gradual tendency to fulfill the characteristics of the so-called McUniversities, i.e., universities built on the principles of McDonaldization, together with an emphasis on seeing the social sciences as helpful to other disciplines.

When Nehring and Brunila (2023) discuss in their summary chapter of Affective Capitalism in Academia the potential negative effects of academic capitalism, which, as we have shown, is associated with the McDonaldization of universities, they mention in particular the following: disengagement from the public sphere, performance surveillance, metricisation, and the limitation of long-term employment. We would like to highlight precisely the risk specific to the humanities and social sciences, which we see in that potential dependence on merging with the technical and natural sciences in the role of supporting the main objectives of these other disciplines (see Part 4.2).

The risk we have identified (based on data of both quantitative and qualitative nature) can be supported by Jessop's (2017, 856) assertion of somewhat irreconcilable strategies for approaching tertiary education. The author distinguishes between a public good strategy and a competitive private good strategy. The former strategy tends to be associated with the promotion of citizenship, equity, inclusive society, nation-building, or civil society). The second strategy emphasizes the individually perceived impacts of education, the use of higher education as part of the resource for building the so-called "*knowledge-based economies*", and thereby also the direction of the meaning of undergraduate and postgraduate education, as well as the functioning of universities towards these goals.

5. Conclusions

In the following paper, we ask the question: *How are the humanities and social sciences currently constructed in terms of an economic, political, and cultural framework in the Czech Republic*? We assume that elements of academic capitalism are present in the Czech environment (Pavelka 2017; Linková and Vohlídalová 2017). Following this assertion, we analyse the political, economic, and cultural framework of universities of humanities and social sciences (or faculties so oriented). The answer to the question posed lies primarily in the long-term underfunding of the field (or in the long-term underfunding relative to other disciplines), as well as in the overwhelming need to link the social sciences and humanities with other scientific disciplines, with a tendency to be supportive of their research areas. Both of these themes are also reflected in the media, where both the financial situation and the usefulness and uselessness of Hu&SoSc are discussed.

This, in our opinion, leads to the risk of undermining or questioning the role of critical reflection on social issues. Although the changes that took place after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 have led

to the possibility for the humanities and social sciences to realize and build their image of the disciplines, the tendency for measurable results, which is linked to competition for support in the market for funding universities, science, and research, limits this freedom again. The (national state-level) way of evaluating science structurally further weakens the position of social and human sciences, and leads to pragmatism and technologization of academic institutions. In other words, we believe that the social sciences and humanities are losing parts of their complexity described by Dilthey, and are in danger of ceasing to be investigations of the complex lived and historically anchored lived experience of human beings (Rockomre 2003). This results in the loss of both the critical potential of science and education, and the potential for major breakthroughs, as the functioning of academic institutions becomes increasingly orientated towards the maintenance (or development) of science as an "*operation*" that ensures the income and functioning of universities or university departments. Tools (quantification of outcomes and quality) that could serve as a basis for reflecting on the functioning of individual departments have become the purpose.

This macro-view can be seen as an initial prerequisite for further exploration of a given topic. First, it can be assumed that the response to the policy framework may vary from faculty to faculty, and also according to the level of funding (see Figure 3 above), which could indicate the degree of ability or willingness to adapt to function in the context of academic capitalism. Support for this claim could also be found in Linková and Vohlidalová's (2017) thesis on the heterogeneous approach to this principle of university functioning. This perspective could provide more information on how the above-described tendencies are handled with the organizational culture of individual faculties (Jessop 2017). It would be equally useful to see how the frameworks described above manifest themselves in the context of Ph.D. programmes, and to what extent the topic of the current situation of the social sciences and humanities is an integral part of the Ph.D. curriculum, and also how this situation manifests itself at the level of undergraduate provision.

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