

B EYOND THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: LOW-COST RESEARCH, LOW-COST RESEARCHERS, LOW-COST FREEDOM

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The article summarizes insider observations of a European “hybrid”—both research- and practice-oriented—institution. It goes beyond scrutinizing managerialism alone as the major source of detrimental effects for scholarly work and academic freedom and questions the role of market pressures by drawing attention to the maintenance of the organization’s symbolic status and legitimacy and to the effects of activity selection in favor of simpler forms of performance. The considered institute and its founders sought visibility in public and thus encouraged short-term and applied projects. The institute’s behavior resembled status rent extraction through the founders’ allocations and on the contribution of external and unpayable partners and guest scholars. The demonstration of activities regardless of their content and outcomes did not require the staff’s research capabilities and qualifications. Employees’ working modes correlated with the treatment of researchers as temporary and replaceable workforce in an insecure position. The management scheme based on the unlimited discretion of the administrative head and the lack of protective mechanisms led to the abuse of power and mistreatment of the staff. Academic freedom in its narrow sense becomes largely irrelevant in this environment. All these patterns are supported by broader societal environment: Academic community and scholars at all career stages seem to increasingly accept and interiorize neoliberal ethos as well as the rules of the game that rest on individual career considerations and individual flexible adaptation to employers’ needs.

Keywords: Hybrid Institution; Managerialism; Status Rent; Precariatization; Neoliberal Ethos

Nonuniversity research institutions are being increasingly scrutinized but seem to remain understudied; this disbalance primarily concerns the state of academic freedom. I am far from aiming to close this gap and rather intend to question some stereotypical views that prioritize the role of managerialism. This essay is about my personal insider observations of a European institute that is doing research and that is outside the university system. Calling my approach autoethnography would be an exaggeration; I did not conduct a true study and never intended to carry out systemic participatory observation.

I worked at an institute (hereinafter RI) located near one of the internal EU borders in 2010s, and I do not have a detailed picture of what was going on before and after that. I cannot claim that my reflections and conclusions are directly applicable

to other scientific institutions. However, I have heard much about other European as well as North American organizations that reaffirms my own experiences.

I need to remark that as an observer I am biased. I was employed at the mentioned institute that focuses on national minority issues as senior research associate and a head of a cluster (the basic internal unit) for almost seven years. I was also the acting head of RI's largest project at that time that had begun in 2014 and was to end in June 2017. In early 2017 I accidentally discovered that the director was planning the project's follow-up in a way that contravened our earlier agreements. I objected and started asking questions; in return I encountered what I cannot call other than bullying. During my vacation and in my absence in February 2017, the director wrote to me in a humiliating manner that I was demoted from the project's acting head to an aide of the already appointed successor, a person with no prior experience in East European studies. I informed about this development the supervising boards, the project's steering committee, and the project's participants. My job contract had no confidentiality clause, and I did not call for any disruptive activities but was fired, probably to teach me and other staff a lesson.

My focus in what follows is rather on scholars' general working conditions than on academic freedom per se. The two issues are inseparable, and a traditional professional definition of academic freedom as "the freedom, first, to pursue professional goals and, second, to specify for itself the appropriate means of realizing those goals" (Fish 2014:x) clearly implies this. UNESCO in its Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel considers the general treatment of academic staff including, involvement in decision-making and the right of appeal, as closely related to academic freedom (UNESCO 1997).

The problems that I address partly overlap with those highlighted in scholarly literature as managerialism (Klikauer 2013; Lynch, Grummell, and Devine 2012) and its effects, such as the primacy of administrative expediency, closed decision-making, and the curtailment of the academic staff's rights. RI is a small institute, and what I faced would be rather framed as managerialism light, where one encounters merely closeness and arbitrariness instead of complex bureaucratic structures and red tape procedures.

I am going to offer a broader and a more nuanced outlook going beyond managerialism and market-induced corporate rules; my observations reveal other issues that allow doubting their central role. In particular, I have reasons to question the effects of market involvement and instead to place the emphasis on rent seeking and symbolic exchanges for the maintenance of the institution's status position. My point is that the organization's rationales and operating mode seem to be detrimental to research staff along and in combination with corporate design and management style. I also need to address the role of external academia in the maintenance and reinforcement of the problematic patterns in questions.

Below I will briefly describe RI's mission, structure, and operating modes and then overview its external relations and internal functioning, assuming that the institute's positioning vis-à-vis its environment (usually marked as "organizational legitimacy" [Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Singh, Tucker, and House 1986]) shapes the

in-house treatment of the staff and their academic freedom. In my view, the issue of organization's legitimacy can be divided into two substantively different parts: institutional relationships based on the fulfillment of the entity's functions and interpersonal relations within a broad academic community. The analysis of internal relationships will be placed below in between my description of the organization's performance and the external colleagues' attitudes and reactions.

THEORETICAL REMARKS

Scholars who study academia primarily address two major types of threats to academic freedom: censorship, or ideology-driven interferences and restrictions (no matter where they appear—in liberal or authoritarian environments) (Barendt 2010; Bilgrami and Cole 2015; Hudson and Williams 2015; Russell 1993), and market pressures with related transfer of corporate rules to academia (Burton and Bowman 2022; Giroux, Karmis, and Rouillard 2015; Vatansever and Kölemen 2023).

I must admit from the outset that the first issue, the issue of censorship, did not matter at RI with some minor exceptions. My own focus is, as mentioned, closer to the second area and to the effects of managerialism, such as the supremacy of administrative expediency over substantive activities; *inter alia*, “the centralization of decision-making, the hierarchical professionalization of administrative positions and relations . . . , an organizational culture of secrecy, and superficial consultations with faculty” (Giroux et al. 2015:143). It is widely presumed that managerialism stems from the transfer of market-driven corporate principles and rules aimed at the increase of efficacy, in part at the expense of the employees' remunerations and conditions in the workplace.

Increasingly insecure working conditions in academia are mainly caused by global shift to short-term contracts and the reduction of social guarantees (Alberti et al. 2018; Berry 2003; McKeown 2022). The new uncertainties and vulnerabilities prompt application of the term “precariat” (Foti 2017; Standing 2011) to research and academic staff (Burton and Bowman 2022; Ivancheva 2015). Professional, social, and related psychological insecurity in turn cannot but limit scholars' rights and opportunities undermining the grounds for creative work (Arday 2022; Burton and Bowman 2022; Myers 2022; O'Connor 2020).

These conclusions are mostly drawn from the university system, whereas many scholars do research in other organizational frameworks. Nonuniversity research centers and “hybrid” institutions that combine research- and practice-oriented activities have been increasingly studied over the last decades, but mainly from the angles of research efficacy, scholars' identity, and academic career perspectives (Lam 2019; Posner 2009). The treatment of the research staff and the state of academic freedom seem to remain overlooked. Some scholars argue that research in conjunction with entrepreneurship, consultancy, artistic work, and other businesses beyond inflexible university framework may provide stronger incentives for creativity and better career opportunities (Fini, Perkmann, and Ross 2022; Lam 2018). I can barely share this optimism.

My own observations prompt anticipation of managerialism and its effects in “hybrid” institutions as well as questioning its sources and the related mistreatment of the staff. In this regard I will address, first, RI’s involvement in the market and consider what can be viewed as the search for and extraction of rent, or the resources granted for the status position rather than outputs. Second, I will analyze performance modes and the significance of short-term activities that resemble the so-called event-based gig economy (Ness 2023; Woodcock and Graham 2019). Thirdly, I consider the so-called organizational legitimacy: “congruence between the social values associated with or implied by their activities and the norms of acceptable behavior in the larger social system of which they are a part” (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975:122). This issue is about the acceptance of an organization by its social environment, and this acceptance shall not equate legitimacy with market efficacy, or the organization’s ability to deliver a certain output to the market.

THE INSTITUTE

MANDATE

RI is located in one of the internal EU borderlands with an ethnically diverse population and was established as a joint endeavor of three—two national and one regional—governments. The institute’s thematic scope is limited to the so-called autochthonous national and ethnic minorities. The institute is supposed to study minority issues across Europe (and whenever necessary across larger Eurasia) and to propagate good practices of minority protection, including the ones elaborated in the area where it is placed. RI thus has a double mandate: It must engage in academic research but also in awareness raising and trust building among policymakers and civil societies.

There are hundreds of “hybrid” institutions across the European Union and North America (Gulbrandsen 2011), and RI is one of them. It combines the features of a research center and a public interest civil society organization; it is a private law entity that is established by governmental bodies, enjoys public funding, and disregards boundaries between scholarship and applied activities. RI is an international Anglophone institution (albeit a small one: 10 years ago with fewer than 10 permanent full-time employees) with international staff, composed of EU and non-EU nationals.

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

RI practices what is called unicameralism—administrative management is not separated from academic planning and guidance. The executive board, which represents the founding governmental bodies and some intergovernmental organizations, is the supreme authority. During my employment, it was composed mostly of national and international bureaucrats and politicians (such as director general of a national agency for science, a member of a national parliament, a provincial commissioner on national minorities, unit heads of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and so forth)—assumingly with respective views on research—plus a couple of scholars. The board

is supposed to approve annual plans and the budget, appoint scientific staff, and supervise the institute's general activity. The director compiles working plans and the budget, provides routine scholarly and scientific management, and hires administrative personnel. External evaluations are expected to correct the course when necessary.

But it is only a formality; my observations and those of my colleagues show something different. The board always worked behind closed doors, and I have no evidence that it ever engaged in *executive* issues proper. Neither have I any signs that the board members cared about the academic value of the institute's output, its research priorities and strategies, and even the recruitment and treatment of the personnel.

The actual governing model rested on the unlimited discretion of the organization's executive head. This in fact includes all staff's direct subordination to the director, as well as the lack of autonomy of the clusters and their heads in decision-making (although senior researchers were promised this during the recruitment in 2010). In my memory, the board automatically sealed all the director's decisions (including senior staff hiring and firing) and secured cover-ups. I cannot be sure that there was a well-thought-out organizational design; probably, the founders followed an originally German academic tradition of basing the autonomy of professorships and department heads on the dependence and precarity of the subordinates (Peacock 2016).

As mentioned, the executive board functioned neither as an executive nor as a supervisory body. The board members almost never contacted the personnel directly. The staff once, in May 2011, tried to discuss their concerns about the planning and the employees' treatment. During the sole 40-minute-long meeting, the board ignored what the personnel were telling and delegated future solutions back to the director.

RI must undergo external evaluations every five years. The outcomes of these inspections allow to conclude that the last thing the evaluators want is to be troublemakers and to engage in substantive criticism lest cause public resonance. The last evaluation was held in 2019 (had been planned for 2017 but was postponed); it followed dramatic developments. In the spring of 2017, senior researchers complained in a letter to the executive board and the advisory council about bad management and the treatment of the staff. The director immediately accused the signatories of misdeeds (including harassment) and fired two people; the board obviously approved this solution and did not consider the senior researchers' complaint. All the following developments were consequences of this conflict that the evaluators pretended to "overlook." The events were briefly mentioned in the evaluation report as a kind of natural occurrence without obvious reasons. Ironically, by that time (at the beginning of 2019), RI's administration already indirectly recognized that the accusations against the staff were false, and even before everyone had known that they were a libel.

RI has an advisory council (AC) composed mainly of academics. The council's functions and competencies are not clearly defined; after all, the council convened on average once in five years. The AC members during my employment probably had

neither time nor desire to care about what was going on in the institution they were supposed to advise.

In sum, the management scheme rests on full discretion on the administrative head with actual noninterference of the founders and supervisors.

EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONING

ACHIEVEMENTS

I suggest starting the consideration of RI's functioning from its achievements. RI's website and official reports leave an impression of large-scale and multivectoral scholarly and applied activities including analytical work, conferences, and publications. However, there was not too much of full-fledged and original research, and RI is hardly a flagship in minority studies. The institute has never come up with theoretical or methodological innovations, pushed forward a theoretical discussion, or raised a new topic. An excuse would be that RI's statutes do not explicitly prescribe this. The institute engaged in a very few original or even salient research projects, failed to set up databases, and has not established in a given thematic area a sustainable scholarly network or at least a durable research team. Notably, a large share of the work was done by external scholars hosted by RI and in joint endeavors. Most salient monographs are external publications with a varying degree of RI staff's contribution.

The other substantive component—public communication and awareness raising—includes applied conferences, seminars, trainings, lectures, and publications, as well as consultations. It is worth noting that applied activities rarely follow requests from policymakers, international organizations, or civil society (except for invitations of speakers to one-off conferences), but rather they are carried out on RI's own initiative and at own expense. RI has never launched a pan-European or even a regional campaign, initiated a wide public discussion, or established a permanent platform for public deliberations. In a few cases RI contributed to expert debates in individual countries.

STRATEGY AND PLANNING

I never heard or read any clear explanations (only general wording) from the RI leadership concerning the institution's rationales and strategy. Neither the statutes and any other documents nor oral instructions specified the proportions of research and applied activities.

The initiative in formulating or selecting research topics belonged to the staff and the director. I cannot recall any bans on particular research topics or interference from the director or the executive board into the choice of research topics or approaches. Nor was there any criticism targeting the studies' conclusions or recommendations for the public.

Surprisingly, at the beginning of the staff's employment (most were hired in 2010, almost simultaneously), at least for the first half year, the institute was almost entirely preoccupied with drafting strategies, such as annual, five-year, academic, publishing,

and other working plans, instead of doing research and fundraising. Later on, planning became less intensive and ambitious but remained in place. At the same time the major motto was “RI’s work follows the money”; the personnel were encouraged to look for external funding and be ready to work on a grant’s topic whatever it would be.

The statutes envisage the institute’s funding by the founders and from external sources, but do not specify the desired proportions. The founders provided the basic financing, and the staff were pushed into fundraising. Accordingly, the institute was to adjust to potential grant-giving organizations’ needs and visions.

Notably, in the 2010s ethnic minority issues became unpopular among donors. Applied activities (such as trainings and awareness raising) have better chances of funding. Indeed, there was external financing of academic endeavors too, but grant-giving institutions are mainly ready to allocate money for conferences or small-scale projects. In the RI case, external money covered approximately one-third of the overall expenditures.

This obstacle was not fatal, but RI failed to establish a fundraising unit or even to hire an individual specialist. The strategic planning and performance turned into stick-poking in all directions in the hope that something will finally work out. As I recall, there were motions aimed at RI’s engagement in Roma issues, minorities in the Arab Spring, Indigenous affairs, climate change, the refugee crisis, and so on and so forth, notably, the issues in which the institute had no expertise at all. No surprise that chaotic rushes back and forth were not quite productive for financing even small happenings, save long-term innovative projects.

WORKING MODES

The institute at large and staff members had no KPIs in formal or informal sense. To be sure, there was supervision over the personnel: Once in three months each research employee was obliged to submit a written report, and, as usual, all had a meeting with the director concerning individual performance. However, there were no announced criteria for evaluation; the director was concerned more with the quantity than the quality and neglected such issues as scholarly relevance and novelty.

My own employment can be divided into two parts: the first almost four years of routine job and the other almost three years when I concentrated on Eastern Partnership countries. I recall the first period as predominantly secretarial assignments: managing editorship of a periodical with endless circulation of reminders to authors and editorial board members, writing proposals (which in many cases failed), preparation of workshops or public lectures, drafting programs, plans, and reports, and so forth. The second period was much more rewarding—along with most old tasks and new paperwork there were also field observations with good opportunities for scholarly reflection and analysis.

As I could see, other employees were occupied mainly with paperwork with blurry (or nonexistent) boundaries between applied and scholarly activities. Short-term administrative assignments, editing, and lecturing became the priority and the major workload. Too little time remained for writing and even for following the literature, and no resources were allocated for research proper. Most things resembling scien-

tific work that RI was doing neatly fitted into the categories of “desk research” and “recycling”; in other words, it was about producing overviews based on other people’s original research or on own studies done before the employment at RI.

In theory, public communication and awareness raising can be effectively combined with research, but RI was not the case. One could not but conclude that the institute tended to opt for simpler forms of activities that did not require sophisticated human, intellectual, and financial investments. Although this led to the dispersion rather than concentration of resources, brought no added value, had no follow-ups, and did not raise institutional and individual capitalization rates, it seems to be acceptable to the leadership, founders, and other stakeholders.

THE TREATMENT OF THE STAFF

Most RI researchers worked under short-term contracts (from one to three years); some were employed part-time. Some were granted permanent job contracts (me, for example). However, a permanent contract was not a panacea and did not provide immunity from dismissal. Besides, the principle of offering a permanent employment was completely unclear. Lastly, the character of work and the treatment do not depend on the contract’s type.

The effective managerial leverage was the fear of losing the job (in most cases, non-extension of the short-term job contract). The institute’s location is in a small city in the midst of nowhere; moves in or out are costly in all respects, particularly for people with families.

The organization of work is such that most staff members can and do perform the same functions interchangeably, and they can be easily replaced by new ones—“not a stock but a flow” (Stargardt 2015:317). There is an employee who works on language rights; you can easily replace them with a new one who is an expert on, for example, social media. There would be no increase of capitalization, but that does not affect the institute’s visibility.

I cannot say that the staff’s (particularly, the senior staff’s) subjectivity and initiative were denied. Researchers in their remaining working time or in their free time were allowed and even encouraged to draft article manuscripts or come up with fundraising initiatives. Likewise, it won’t be correct to say that the personnel could not partake in decision-making. It was a noneffective participation and rather a ritual; general and other staff meeting were regular and obligatory, but discussions did not determine the result.

There were no career prospects (as I recall, junior staff were never promoted to senior positions), the institute did not facilitate sophisticated research, and the already small salaries were increased in exceptional cases only. Management of personnel was thus based on a “stick”—mainly on keeping the people in a shaky position and routinely reminding them of this. An assumed rather than declared requirement to the staff was to fit in the director’s schemes; since these schemes changed quite often, one could not build any research and personal strategy or build up any risk management.

The cherry on the pie was the lack of protective mechanisms. The board never got in contact with employees and never cared about what happened to them. RI as a small enterprise until recently had no employees' council or a representative body. Trade union membership is costly but in fact useless as some people's experience has shown. Court is not a remedy. It is not a solution in most situations, and no staff member (unlike RI, which has unlimited resources) can afford long court proceedings and substantive consideration of their cases; all disputes end up with pretrial agreements. Finally, the internal equality unit established in 2018 was a kind of mockery, a way to justify earlier accusations against the former researchers about harassment.

ATMOSPHERE

On the surface, personal relations in the office—both vertical and horizontal—were mainly friendly and largely informal. In-house reporting was not a big burden. The director was always saying mantras “we are a team” and “we have a special mission.” At the same time, everyone routinely got indirect but clear messages that the personnel's interests and motivations did not count, the staff's opinion was of meager importance, and major decision-making was not their prerogative. The management toolkit included manipulations: buying loyalty of the juniors by promises, divide and rule, creation of a privileged inner circle of trusted two or three people, and so forth. RI's double mandate suits these purposes too. When necessary, the administration stopped an initiative that it disliked on the grounds that it was not directly related to public policy or, conversely, that it was not academic enough. A layoff may be justified by the reason that the researcher, being too academic, insufficiently contributed to applied activities; in another case, the explanation was the opposite—the staff member allegedly did not demonstrate sufficient academic achievements.

A significant part of staff management was the cultivation of obedience. Those who demonstrated disloyalty were to be taught a lesson; for example, people who looked for another job got extra workloads and never days off if they asked for them. A disloyal former employee or an employee in the process of leaving could be discredited by false allegations (harassment or plagiarism, for example). Appropriate strategies include cutting this person from access to the office intranet or ordering someone trusted to examine their mail in search of something compromising.

Manipulation sometimes took sophisticated forms. Instead of just discontinuing a job contract, the administration can offer a consultancy on conditions that the person will definitely reject. A productive solution is to make and announce a decision that the employee would not like (such as contract termination or removal from a project) when that employee is away (on leave or on a business trip).

An important task is to justify the dismissal afterward to avoid annoying questions. P., probably the most productive scholar in the entire RI history, was told in December 2010, one day before his field trip abroad, that his job contract would not be extended. It happened about one week before the contract's expiration and contrary to earlier promises. Afterward, I myself heard from the director five different explanations of the reasons for P.'s layoff, partly contradicting each other.

To wrap up, the management scheme based on the unlimited discretion of the administrative head and the lack of protective mechanisms leads to the abuse of power and mistreatment of the staff.

INEQUALITY

Inequality based on race, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, and other characteristics is an important issue already addressed in the studies of academia (Arday 2022; Myers 2022). My experience tells little, and I would rather underline the need for further research. My own observations detect filters that separate and reject people who may look less understandable, less appropriate, or potentially more problematic for the employer because of their origin or biography. The reasons for rejection, non-promotion, or layoff may correlate with citizenship or age; I have had no observations of my own concerning gender or other characteristics. Besides, the cost of conflict with administration and ultimately of the dismissal are dramatically different for EU and third-country nationals, particularly if the latter have non-EU diplomas. I regularly heard three opinions from other scholars, and my personal experience does not contradict them. First, Eastern Europeans are mainly regarded as experts on their native countries, and their task is to help “true” Westerners to do their own research. Second, in a conflict between a Western and an Eastern European, people will presume that the Westerner is right. Third, in the eyes of many, an Eastern European must agree to any job conditions and any kind of treatment.

EXTERNAL ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

RI is in close touch with academics across Europe and North America. Presumably, being under the external observation of peers, the institute would be compelled to comply with some academic standards and rules of conduct.

One can divide external scholars into two categories. The first one is higher-rank and authoritative figures who could be conditionally designated as *Professors* or *small bosses*: people with privileged and protected academic, administrative, or political status. The other one comprises lower-status employees. The involvement of both categories in theory may contribute to a kind of public opinion and solidarity with employees who experience abuse. In practice, both prefer noninterference (disregard, to be precise) and exhibit reluctance to know anything.

With regard to would-be vertical professional solidarity, my impression and my verdict are straightforward: There is no such thing except for possible cases of personal patronage. Despite seeming friendliness in formal and informal communications, *small bosses* in fact regard lower-status employees as expendables and no-names. Neither joint projects nor years-long professional communication matter; academia is a rigidly hierarchical environment.

In fact, *Professors* are reluctant to somehow criticize a partner institution in public or in private; presumably, there is a kind of class solidarity. There are also utilitarian reasons. As a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe who served on the RI advisory council clearly explained,

I really needed this chance to travel [to Ukraine] at [RI's] expense and hold my own business meetings there. I don't need any conflict with [RI]; I have plenty of such troubles besides. As for your problems, it is for the board, not for us [the AC members]. Probably, you have misunderstood the board's strategy. I cannot do anything about this.

RI holds conferences and seminars and sometimes pays for their attendees' travel and accommodation. There is also an opportunity to take part in RI's publications. On the other hand, no one needs tensions with an institution backed by governments.

Moreover, RI's leadership is a part of crony academia: *Small bosses* communicate regularly and have known each other for a long time. Crony academia is a two-way traffic and a system of reciprocal exchanges; RI gets something in return. In a case of conflict with the staff, the AC members and other RI high-ranked friends either pretended that nothing happened or overtly supported the administration, primarily by disseminating the official explanations. The institution of reputation seems not to function in this environment: "Ours" enjoy immunity, and status considerations prevail.

One may expect that solidarity among employees who are in the same position and face similar risks is a different story. There is evidence that academic employees and even academic precariat are able to form solidarity networks and arrange collective resistance campaigns or protest actions (Atkins et al. 2018; Vatansever 2023). I witnessed two acts of professional solidarity at RI, in May 2011 and May 2017. Both involved collective complaints of the staff to the executive board; both were disregarded.

My own conclusion is that collective action of this kind emerges in exceptional cases when the administrative head gets in conflict with several people simultaneously and exceeds some qualitative and quantitative thresholds. In other instances, employees are handled on case-by-case basis behind closed doors. As a rule, lower-status peers expect to resolve their potential problems individually.

I got the impression that absolute priority for most was individual advancement: access to resources and a better position in labor market. Individual career considerations require flexibility and adaptability to employers' needs; engagement in any conflict can backfire. Protests are generally unwelcomed; a protester is by default perceived not as a person who has tried to defend their rights and dignity but merely someone who has had *problems with former employer*.

In a conflict between an employer and an employee, the last thing that people pay attention to is who was right and who was wrong. The public supports the side that is more resourceful, powerful, and of a higher status. Besides, this stronger side can be vindictive (in the case of RI this is definitely so), and there are no reasons to demonstrate disloyalty by engaging with a weaker troublemaker.

The conclusion is that academic environment in fact creates mutual cover-ups and the veil of silence; silent disregard or even proactive support from the outside contributes to abuse in the office.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY. DISCUSSION

RI was expected to demonstrate and “sell” an image of an institution with academic expertise rather than its scholarly capabilities as such. Thus, the actual strategy (if this word is appropriate here) followed the formula “make it beautiful.” RI had to be visible notwithstanding what it was doing; no surprise that one-off events, preferably of low cost, objectively were most desirable and feasible option. The RI board and the founders (the main donors) seemed to be in fact satisfied with the outputs: They must have appreciated the very existence of RI and the very fact that it was doing something.

References to managerialism and its effects in academia usually imply the forced alignment of scholarly work with the requirements of market efficiency. RI did not sell its academic outputs, consultancy, and training services to other agents. Instead, RI’s interactions resemble rent seeking, rent extraction, and clientelist relationships. One can talk about the rent of two kinds. First, rent is granted by the founders to the client entity for its “cultural legitimacy” (Bourdieu 1985:19) and the maintenance of a symbolic status; the founders thus might show their social responsibility before their constituencies regardless of the institution’s outputs. Second, the institute gains intangible rent from its brand, its rare thematic specialization, and its role as a meeting point through the involvement of externals in unpayable internships, events, and publications.

RI paradoxically combines the features of rent economy with event-based, or gig, economy. In a formal sense, the latter term cannot be used in its direct meaning—there was no one-off or individual project-based contracting. Rather, it is about the character and the rhythm of work based on individual events or short-term undertakings with optional follow-up at best. This blend generated temptations of sliding into simpler forms of activity and led to narrow planning horizons, the dispersal of resources, and rushes back and forth. RI was in fact doing what was easier to do and was likely to bring funding notwithstanding long-term consequences and the institute’s own capitalization rate.

Image maintenance for status rent extraction is in some way a rational and effective model; no one would care that the institute functions as a generator of white noise. A positive image would be incomplete without demonstrating a consistent strategic planning. The solution was a gulf between image creation and performance, or what is called “systemic hypocrisy” in organizational activities (Brunsson 1989); I mentioned the combination of sham strategic planning with the motto “activity follows the money.” Another significant element of image maintaining is secrecy and nonrecognition of earlier setbacks; RI follows this tendency of papering over to this day.

The concept of managerialism is applicable here but should be better used in a broad meaning, as supremacy of administrative expediency over substantive activities and as a set of related values and principles that derive from neoliberal ethos and expand onto different types of organizations worldwide (Klikauer 2013). The entity in question is, first, barely engaged in market activities and, second, is a small

one and thus doing without complex and burdensome techniques of government and control.

Event-oriented and applied activities do not require a deep engagement in scholarship and related skills. Consistency and complexity in research did not promise immediate grant support and visibility and thus were neither obstructed nor encouraged. This routine made the issue of academic freedom largely insignificant: little room for academic work—little room for academic freedom. Research staff's major function is paperwork; academic expertise was required mainly for telling banalities about minority issues in public, either orally or in writing. Academic credentials of senior researchers are necessary, of course, as part of the institute's image as an academic organization. The staff's professionalism, experience, research capability, and seniority were, diplomatically speaking, of limited value. A side effect is the cultivation of militant dilettantism as the working style.

The same logic might apply to the directorship. If the main purpose is the institute's visibility, the required candidate must be first and foremost a talking head. This can explain how a person who is not a scholar, a manager, or a leader could occupy this position for two five-year terms. Probably, the founders look for someone predictable and understandable with a right social origin, proper credentials, a reliable appearance, and the ability to pronounce right words in the right sequence.

The increasingly precarious position of academic employees is already a global trend and global problem. Usually, insecure working conditions derive from short-term contracts and the related lack of professional and social guarantees (Alberti et al. 2018; Ivancheva 2015; Myers 2022). The situation at RI is generally within this trend but has some peculiarities: Precariatization stems from the character of activities and the treatment of the staff.

A researcher regardless of their position was expected to be flexible, have no ambitions, and be ready to go where they have been assigned to. Indeed, neoliberal ethos prescribes that an employee, as a market player, first and foremost must be adaptable to market needs (Chandler and Reid 2016; Frase 2013; Hassard and Morris 2018). In the case of RI (and, perhaps, similar institutions), it is unclear what market needs are, and instead we have the administration's fantasies, wishes, and whims only.

An organization's placement before its societal environment and stakeholders referred to as "organizational legitimacy" (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Singh et al. 1986) is a multilayered set of relationships and outcomes. The observations summarized above tell that an institution's external support does not depend only on this organization's market-oriented performance and efficacy but also (or alternatively) on other circumstances. The founders seek the institution's visibility; policymakers and donors expect loyalty to their agendas; individual scholars seek extra opportunities for publications, fellowships, and networking. An organization that meets these expectations, even if it did not demonstrate market capabilities and scholarly performance, would be sustainable and legitimate. Related managerial style and the treatment of the staff would be by default acceptable too.

CONCLUSION

My reflections, albeit being fragmental and incomplete, reveal a coherent picture and prompt research questions relevant to both academic institutions in general and specialized analytical centers or hybrid institutions in particular. Encroachments on academic freedom as such are barely conceivable or effectively applicable as an analytical tool in this environment; rather, one should talk about employment and working conditions and the effects they generate.

There is a general problem of research staff's transformation into precariat. Insecure job positions, short-term contracts, increasing loss of control over the workplace, and effective exclusion from decision-making worsen conditions for creative jobs. Even if scholars had full-time jobs with formal social guarantees independent of individual projects, their work is bound to event-based activities and unpredictable and nontransparent decisions of the executives; besides, the administration has a wide discretion in not extending or terminating job contracts.

Precarious position of research staff shall be explained not only by managerialism as such and austerity in the running of academic institutions but also by these institutions' performance modes. The production of scientific knowledge may be substituted by securing a symbolic status within the area of expert performances. The administration's task may be the maintenance of a rent-extracting position rather than participation in market competition, as it happened in the RI case. The image of an analytical center or research institute regardless of its substantive outputs suffices as a condition for sustaining a desired symbolic status of a unique institution and the related funding. The institution's subsistence is largely secured by the founders' allocations and to a much lesser extent by market-style exchanges.

An institution's founders and administration may be concerned primarily with the organization's visibility in public and thus with quantitative rather than qualitative indicators. This mode of operation stimulates one-off, short-term, and simple undertakings. An aggravating circumstance is the founders' and the administration's desire to stick to austerity principles and to imitate the institution's search for financial self-sufficiency. Fundraising (even if random and unprofessional, as in the case of RI) leads to the institution's loss of its own agenda and dependence on donors' preferences that usually envision applied and short-term projects. Another important circumstance is an opportunity to get rent through networking and external unpayable contributions based on the institution's symbolic status and rare specialization.

Selling the image of a research institution and/or rent extraction make the production of knowledge at best optional and at worst unnecessary. Status rent seeking and/or symbolic exchanges require only academic credentials but not expertise and capabilities of the staff; applied activities predetermine employees' flexibility rather than long-term successive work. Hiring short-term employees and keeping them in a shaky position are thus an adequate employment strategy. This mode of institutional activity reinforces the general trend of academic staff's precariatization.

The same development leads to the unlimited discretion of the executive head as an adequate managerial strategy. But then a well-known principle kicks in—power corrupts. Closeness, secrecy, impunity, and cover-ups multiply this effect. Aca-

demic work in its basic sense and the notion of academic freedom become largely alien to this environment.

The precarious position of research staff is an outcome not only of the operating mode of research or hybrid institutions but of a broader societal environment. Academic community and its members at all career stages seem to increasingly interiorize and accept neoliberal ethos. Most acknowledge the rules of the game that rest on individual career considerations and individual flexible adaptation to employers' needs. Demands for better working conditions as well as employee's solidarity are tacitly rejected, while the established order is perceived as quasi-natural and having no alternatives.

To sum up, the study of both the symbolic market and rent-based relationships as well as the behavior of the players—founders, supervisors, managers, donors, partner institutions, publishers, and individual scholars—looks as a promising and practically relevant research task.

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ВНЕ УНИВЕРСИТЕТСКОЙ СИСТЕМЫ: ДЕШЕВЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ, ДЕШЕВЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛИ, ДЕШЕВЫЕ СВОБОДЫ

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В эссе суммируются инсайдерские наблюдения за европейским «гибридным» – одновременно исследовательским и практико-ориентированным – учреждением. Автор выходит за рамки изучения менеджериализма как основного источника негативных последствий для научной работы и академических свобод. Он подвергает сомнению роль рыночных стимулов, обращает внимание на поддержание символического статуса и легитимности организации, а также на последствия предпочтения более простых форм деятельности. Изучаемый институт и его основатели стремились к обеспечению публичности и потому поощряли краткосрочные и прикладные проекты. В результате деятельность центра стала выглядеть как извлечение статусной ренты в виде взносов учредителей и безвозмездного вклада внешних партнеров и приглашенных ученых. Демонстрация деятельности независимо от ее содержания и результатов не требует исследовательской эффективности и квалификации персонала. Модусы работы сотрудников вытекают из обращения с исследователями как с временной и заменяемой рабочей силой в прекарном положении. Схема управления, основанная на неограниченном усмотрении администратора центра и отсутствии защитных механизмов для сотрудников, приводит к злоупотреблению властью и ненадлежащему обращению с персоналом. В такой обстановке академическая свобода в узком смысле становится в значительной степени неактуальной. Подобные отношения поддерживаются и более широкой общественной средой: академическое сообщество и ученые на всех этапах карьеры все больше усваивают и принимают неолиберальный этос, а также правила игры, основывающиеся на индивидуальных карьерных соображениях и гибкой адаптации к потребностям работодателей.

Ключевые слова: гибридное учреждение; менеджериализм; статусная рента; прекариатизация; неолиберальный этос