

MODERN SOCIETY BUILDING THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION IN LITHUANIAN AFTER 1918

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***Abstract.** The development of the modern state of Lithuania after the declaration of independence on February 16th, 1918 triggered many changes both in the development of the state and processes related to modern society building. Education and the opening of modern university in Lithuania was closely related to historical, social and political changes. The occupation of Vilnius and the transfer of the most important state governing and state developing institutions to Kaunas as the temporary capital of Lithuania was closely related to the establishment of Lithuanian University in Kaunas in 1922. The society was also impacted by the socio-historical context since some members of the society took an active part processes of the emergence of the Lithuanian University as the establishment of modern system of higher education in Lithuania. Taking into consideration not only the historical context and the approaching celebration of one hundred years of the opening of modern Lithuanian University in Kaunas in 2022, this article aims to discuss processes, factors and context that made prerequisites for the development of modern university in Lithuania in Kaunas in 1922 that, in turn, influenced the development of modern society and nation with a specific focus on its identity.*

***Keywords:** identity, higher education, Lithuanianess, modern society, university.*

Introduction

In 2018 Lithuania celebrated 100 years of its existence as an independent, democratic state. Emerging in the world as a new modern and democratic republic it had to spread news about itself to the remaining world. The state was recognized as an independent and modern state only in the 20th century. Through its experience and past inheritance, the Lithuanian state needed to construct its identity to itself and (re)present its identity to the outer world. The state with a predominant nation was at the same time representing multiculturalism and other nations, thus, it was / has been looking for the core and boundaries of its identity.

Taking into consideration the socio-historical context mentioned above this type of research is relevant and important to systematically recapture past events related to the development of modern society and higher education and understand

how past events have impacted and shaped current processes, self-perception of the society and patterns that exist in current Lithuania as well as the system of higher education (HE) and education in a young and newly emerging state. On the other hand, this type of social historical research might be interesting to other researchers interested in conducting a comparative research on how modern education system and society developed during state and nation building processes due to the fact that similar processes took place in many European countries (Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland and other) at the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, the approaching jubilee to commemorate one hundred years of the establishment of modern Lithuanian University in Kaunas in 2022 requires to draw attention to the rudiments of the modern educational establishment of higher education in Lithuania and Kaunas city as well as the importance of the event that had and still have strong impact on the development of the state, society and Kaunas city in general.

During state-building and development processes the society needed educated people. Intellectuals and members of government developed as personalities and were educated abroad in foreign universities in the previous epoch. However patriotic feelings brought them back to Lithuania with an aim to devote their potential to develop the new modern state and society as well as disseminate new ideas. The same trend has been observed during other historical periods and epochs when representatives of the generation adjusted to and took active parts to establish and develop the system of education in Lithuania. A newly established modern state University in Kaunas during the first period of the Lithuanian statehood (1918-1939) has become the cradle of thinkers and developers of new standards of the modern society (Veilentienė, 2011; Zabarskaitė, 2017). The representatives committed to and contributed to the implementation of state building and development strategies. Education was one of strategic priorities of that time and education related state policy was put into practice through the development of institutions of higher education and orientation of the society towards education through teacher training.

Education related policy was also closely related to the state language related policy. During the period of the first independence the Lithuanian language was officially granted the status of the state language for the first time and became a tool to represent and consolidate both the state and the society as well as entrench the elements of patriotism. At the same time the establishment of the Lithuanian language as the state language made prerequisites for capturing language policy in terms of the use of other ethnic languages that were also granted particular status in terms of education, legislation and other spheres of life. Translation of documents, books, information leaflets from the Lithuanian language to the predominant business and tourism related languages such as English, German,

French or Russian served as a means to construct and express Lithuanian identity, i.e. Lithuanianess.

Taking all that has been mentioned above, this research / article aims at analysing how identity and development of the modern society and its Lithuanianess was constructed and entrenched through processes of establishing modern higher education institutions, i.e. Lithuanian University that was opened in Kaunas in 1922. The research into people and society, its social and demographic composition, qualification and education is of the utmost importance due to the fact that society and people is the most important resources of every state as well as the background of the state's economic capacity (Vaitekūnas, 2002). The research also introduces state-building processes through the establishment and development of higher education which, in turn, made prerequisites for the modern state and society of Lithuania to become equal to other states of Europe and / or the world. Tasks, experience and insights of the state policy of the first independent Republic of Lithuania might serve as guidelines in other state development processes and could be compared with other state transformations after the period of one hundred years from 1918 till 2018. Since his type of research is based on the reconstruction of historical context, it is methodologically underpinned by historical-descriptive approach and primary data (sources) analysis (documents, laws, orders and other data in archives and libraries).

Methodology of the research

This research and paper focuses on a particular case study, i.e. the establishment and development of modern University in Lithuania and its impact on state and nation building processes and the development of Lithuanianess during the period of the first independence of Lithuania from 1918 till 1939. The article employs historiographic data analysis and historical, descriptive and reconstructive approaches. The social historical research as a research method which offers theoretical explanations of past historical events that influence the present turn of events was described in publications of Hamilton (1993), McDowell (2002), Leedy and Ormrod (2005) and other is appropriate due to the fact that a theoretical understanding theoretical is essential, but is not sufficient for an understanding of the educational system. This, as Fend states, also requires a historical perspective on the origins of “institutional actors in human design” (Fend, 2006, p. 11).

Research, related to the analysis of historical context and especially state building processes in terms of language policy, education and other was studied in Latvia by Veisbergs (2009, 2016, 2018), and Monticelli and Lange in Estonia (2014), Amirejibi-Mulen in Gegorgia (2011) and other. Similar type of research

in Lithuania, though rather fragmented, was published by Vaitekūnas (2002), Veilentienė (2011), Zabarskaitė (2017) and other.

Seeking to reconstruct the context and events of the past that have influence on the present system of HE, authentic historical data and primary sources, various documents (the Statute of the Lithuanian University, Regulations and accounting documents of the University in Lithuania) that are related to the foundation and development of the Lithuanian University and are available at scarce edition funds at the library of Kaunas University of Technology as well as different laws, orders of ministers and various articles and publications, available in archives of the Legal Documents at the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the Register of Legal Acts, the Universal Lithuanian Encyclopaedia and the Virtual Electronic Heritage System have been examined.

The authors of this article ground the idea of this particular research on the conception of education as a key factor to have a strong impact on language policy as well as modern society and state building processes. Subscribing to the point of view of researcher Knabe (2000), the development of public and modern education is perceived as part of the broader nation and state building process, identified through modernization, industrialization, homogenization and secularization of the society. Whereas the understanding of modernism and modern society is conceived through the understanding of nationalism and national identity on the basis of which modern states emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. Development of the state, nation and nationalism is underpinned by modernism. Nationalism and strong promotion of national identity by means of language and culture encourages societies to rediscover the appropriate past which, in turn, moves the society towards the nations of modernity (Smith 1998, pp. 159-165).

Historical context

The establishment of the modern state after the declaration of the independence of the Republic of Lithuania in 1918 triggered the development of modern University in Lithuania where education was considered as one of strategic priorities in the development of the state and nation building. Vilnius University, established by Jesuit order in Vilnius in 1579, was closed by the order of Tsar Nikolaj after the rebellion in 1831 since it was considered as the cradle of national power and the source of literacy and light that was used to form the educated society (Rūgytė, 1979). However soon after the declaration of the independence of Lithuania in 1918, Vilnius was occupied by Poland (1919-1939) and Vilnius University became a Polish university where all subjects were delivered in Polish.

During the period of Vilnius occupation, the most important institutions of state government, i.e. the President's Office, ministries and other were moved to Kaunas and the city became the temporary capital of Lithuania and the most significant centre of culture and education of those days. Within circumstances of difficult historical period the leaders of the state as well as members of the society understood the need to educate the society, thus on January 27, 1920 Higher Courses that had the status of the private higher educational establishment were founded in Kaunas. The vision of founders of Higher Courses was related with the idea of developing Lithuanian system of higher education that would bring the society towards the independence of the mind and would raise self-esteem and pride of Lithuanian citizens through research, education and culture by means of the native tongue, i.e. the Lithuanian language.

It is interesting to note that the state at that period was politically and economically constrained, however, the society understood the importance of education and leaders encouraged people to learn, get educated and aim for education (Lithuanian University, 1922). The newly established state lacked and felt a great demand for teachers, doctors, officials, lawyers, and civil servants who could work in different institutions of public governance to be trained in Lithuania. Thus, the first strategic priority was to develop and establish compulsory primary education and the second one was related to the foundation of the state university that would become not only the center of excellence, research and studies but also the source of Lithuanianess and Lithuanian national identity to further collect and gather society, develop Lithuanian elite of broad and universal competences. Therefore, representatives of the society, understanding the significance of having educated society, donated money to the establishment of Higher Courses in Kaunas (Veilentienė, 2011). When the opening of Higher Courses was announced in a newspaper and citizens were invited to enter the courses, 300 hundred people expressed a wish to study in one day.

Higher Courses served as the basis for the foundation of the University in Kaunas. After two years on February 16, 1922 the Lithuanian University as the first modern university in Lithuania was established in Kaunas. Initially the university was composed of six faculties, i.e. the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Law, and the Faculty of Technical Sciences that was structured of 4 departments, i.e. the Department of Electrical Engineering, the Department of Mechanics, the Department of Chemistry and the Department of Civil Engineering (The Statute of the University 1922; Veilentienė, 2011). The Statute of the Lithuanian University was approved by the Lithuanian Government in 1922 and was amended in 1930 and 1937. Interestingly enough, the establishment and functioning of the Lithuanian

University was described in the article about the development of state university in Kaunas by Oskar v. Büchler in the journal *Osteuropa. Zeitschrift für die gesamten Fragen Osteuropas* in 1928. The author presented historical-political context of the state and the historical development of the modern state university in Kaunas alongside other academic, research, studies and financial issues (Büchler, 1928, pp. 20-30).

Many prominent leaders, writers, poets, ministers, lawyers and doctors became teachers at the University of Lithuania. In addition to this many well-known figures of the society who acquired their education abroad, i.e. in Universities in St. Petersburg, Tartu, Tomsk, Kharkov, Odessa, Krakow, Berlin, Leipzig, Missouri, Yale, Maryland, Riga and other (Raudonikis, 1933), came back to the independent state to contribute to the nation and nation building processes with an aim to share their experience and knowledge gained abroad. Many members of diaspora also donated money and books to the newly established institution of higher education in Kaunas. In 1930 the University of Lithuania was renamed Vytautas Magnus University and carried out its activity till the outbreak of the second world war. The University of Lithuania became the foundation of currently performing state universities in Kaunas, i.e. Kaunas University of Technology, Vytautas Magnus University, the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences and the Academy of Agriculture.

The University as the Cradle of Lithuanianess and the Lithuanian elite

The modern state of Lithuania was re-established in 1918 in the spirit and the movement of *the Spring of Nations*, a socio-political shift in Europe that appeared after the revolutions of 1848 and revived the feelings of nationalism, national pride and identity as well as stipulated the emergence of the national language. Members of the new elite were supporters of “linguistic Lithuanian nationalism” (Snyder, 2003, p. 36) and supported the idea of developing national identity-based society. This laid the foundation for the modern national Lithuanian movement, which triggered the development and establishment of the modern state of Lithuania in 1918. The modern state of Lithuania was established within the territory where the Lithuanian language was prevailing and spoken, the status of the Lithuanian language as the official state language had to be fixed. It is significant to note that Lithuanian had never been established as a state language in the history of Lithuania before 1918. Only after the declaration of the independence of the Republic of Lithuania, the Lithuanian language was officially defined as the state language in legal documents of the Lithuanian government. The first Lithuanian Constitution, approved on August 1, 1922 determined Lithuanian as the state language and the use of local languages (as stated by the Constitution with no specific mention of languages) was regulated by the law

(Lithuanian constitution, 1922). The first Constitution regulated the use of the Lithuanian language in official settings however described when other ethnic languages could be used alongside Lithuanian.

The newly established University of Lithuania promoted and also aimed to entrench the use of the Lithuanian language in all spheres of social and academic life due to the fact that Lithuanianess and national identity in those days was perceived through the revival, significance and the emergence of the Lithuanian language as the state and national language. At the same time, it was obvious that due to the status of Lithuanian as non-state language until 1918, not every member of the society spoke proper or standard Lithuanian. Hence the authorities and prominent leaders of both Higher Courses and the University of Lithuania perceived the need to teach the society and members of the academic elite the proper Lithuanian language as the core to perceive self-identity, newly formed state, culture, art and modernity of the society.

The Statute of the University of Lithuania, approved in 1922 and published in 1923, was printed in Lithuanian with a translation in English taking into account the fact that large Lithuanian diaspora resided in the United States. The Statute of the University defined that studies at the University are organised in the state language, except in those cases when delivered subjects required the use of other languages, for example, when foreign languages or Theology was taught (Raudonikis, 1933, p. 139). All professors were supposed to speak and use the standard Lithuanian language, however, the University's Council could make some exceptions by allowing some professors to temporarily teach in other languages. At the same time the Report about the Performance of the University indicated that the Faculty's Council could select and appoint as young research fellows only those staff members who could deliver their subjects in the Lithuanian language. Exceptions could be made only to language professors lecturers (Raudonikis, 1933, p. 501).

The majority of students, i.e. 67.4% were of Lithuanian origin. Yet, around 32% of students were non-Lithuanians, i.e. representatives of Lithuanian local minorities, i.e. 26.2 % of Jewish, 2.5 % of Polish, 1.6 % of Russian and other ethnic groups (Raudonikis, 1933, p.399). Both foreigners and representatives of local minorities were admitted and could study at the University of Lithuania, however they were supposed to pass an entrance examination of the Lithuanian language and submit all documents with translations into Lithuanian. If the proficiency of the Lithuanian language of the entrants (both non-Lithuanians and Lithuanians) was insufficient, students were granted possibilities to improve their Lithuanian language skills by a special decision of the Senate to postpone the examination of the Lithuanian language till they can demonstrate sufficient linguistic competence in the Lithuanian language, necessary for further studies at

the University. However, in the fifth semester of their studies students were required to have perfect Lithuanian language skills.

At the same time studies of other foreign languages were promoted and after the fifth semester students had to pass an examination of another foreign language and demonstrate good knowledge of it especially in their professional fields and major studies. Purposeful inclusion of foreign languages as subjects in study programmes and curricula demonstrate the pragmatic attitude of the founders of the modern University, i.e. to disseminate news about the state, research, innovations, science and culture to the rest of the world as well as provide possibilities to young students and researchers to become an integral part of the global academic world. The resources and study materials were provided to students with an aim to get the latest news of specific research areas. Professors and researchers were also active in publishing Lithuanian course books and study materials. Funds of the library at the University demonstrate that alongside Lithuanian publications that made up 64%, literature in German (17%), Russian (14%), Polish (2%), Latin (1.3%), English (1.2%), French (0.7%) and other (Jewish, Latvian, Ukrainian, Italian) was available (Raudonikis, 1933, p. 307). The functioning of the library of the University of Lithuania corresponded with aims and mission of the University to contribute to the development and education of academic community and society in general. In such a way standards of European research and studies in the Lithuanian language began to form.

The teaching staff and researchers of the newly established university took active part in research activities with an aim to develop and spread the latest trends and innovations of science in the Lithuanian language. This was the direct way to develop Lithuanian researchers and scientists, however at the same time there was a requirement to publish doctoral thesis in the state language. The Statute regulated that all dissertations had to be written in Lithuanian except for those in the fields of Humanities and Theology, where Latin was allowed. Sometimes a special exception was made to publish and defend dissertations in another language by the decision of the Faculty (Raudonikis, 1933). The facts indicated above demonstrate that the authorities of the University of Lithuania not only encourage the use of the state language in academic and research fields but also contributed to the development of academic language in Lithuanian. Many researchers and scientists became developers of their research field terms and terminology in Lithuanian.

The State University of Lithuania in addition to research and studies provided possibilities to both students and teachers to develop talents and intellectual potential of the academic community through the establishment of various organizations, supported by the state and private initiatives. Members of various research, scientific, artistic and sports organizations carried out public, social and cultural activities that fostered patriotic and national feelings as well as

raised national identity based spirit and cultural and artistic sophistication. Representatives of local ethnic minorities, i.e. Jewish, Polish, Russian, German, Latvian or other could also create their organizations to take care of academic or their culture related issues (Raudonikis, 1933, pp. 481-482). However, all documentation, reports and regulations of those groups should have been taken and recorded in the state language, i.e. Lithuanian. It is interesting to note that the University financially supported students in their academic and non-academic activities by means of granting scholarships, yet only students who had Lithuanian citizenship were eligible candidates for student scholarships with an aim to encourage studies of Lithuanian residents.

The foundation of the University of Lithuania also had an impact on the development of socio-cultural life in Kaunas as a modern city. Taking into consideration the fact that many prominent members of the society and the elite returned to Lithuania after their studies abroad, the theatre and other institutions as places to spread news about Lithuanian identity, Lithuanianess emerged. Thus, during a short time frame a modern state and a gradually modernizing society, open to the rest of the world, formed. The values that entrenched during the period of the existence of the first modern state of the Republic of Lithuania since 1918 till 1940 were sustainable during the period of the occupation and are still viable, visible and felt in the society and the Republic of Lithuania after the regain of the second independence as the core to perceive modern Lithuanian identity.

Conclusions

The analysis of the beginning of the 20th century opens a historical retrospective that enables to examine, view and compare social challenges that the newly developed state of Lithuania faced with. The formation of its own statehood, Lithuanian identity based society and the emergence of the elite was strongly linked with the establishment of the first modern Lithuanian University in Kaunas. Decisions and initiatives taken were and are still directly related to the common idea and a clear vision related to the future development of the modern state of Lithuania and sustainability of the modern society.

The research and analysis of historical data indicates that the newly founded Republic of Lithuania, as a fully-fledged country of European cultural space, striving for the global recognition, needed its own university as an institution to educate, train and bring together the scientific, political and cultural elite of society. In the early stages of the development of the modern statehood, there was a need for at least one higher educational institution that would take responsibility in the education of young people and highly qualified citizens who could help to build the state. The foundation and the performance of the University of Lithuania

as well as activities of the academic community, i.e. scholars and students, made the newly established country known to the rest of the world.

The emerging academic elite contributed to the development of the intellectual power of the emerging modern Lithuanian society that was responsible for its ideas and decisions to the rest of society. The University gained a high degree of authority in Lithuanian society, and studies there became an attractive prospect not only for city citizens but also members of the society coming from different regions. The university was also open to local ethnic minorities that could acquire qualified knowledge and be directly involved in the management of state and public affairs. The inclusion of ethnic minorities into all spheres of state functioning affected the development of modern, tolerant and open society. The first state university founded in 1922, became the symbol and the centre of science, culture and public education with the core values that are viable and sustainable in the present Lithuanian society.

Finally, after the declaration of the first independence of the state, Lithuania experienced the turn becoming free as a state. In the creation of statehood and its consolidation the direct connection between nation, state, language and education is of key significance. And similar processes that Lithuania experienced during the historical period that has been discussed in this paper can be observed after the declaration of the second independence of the state of Lithuania in 1990, however the comparative analysis of processes then and now might be discussed in future research.

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