



University of the  
West of England

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND THE CULTURE OF SOCIAL  
PARTICIPATION IN BULGARIA

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## Abstract

This research explores the unconscious processes that occurred on organisational as well as on individual level in an academic institution in Bulgaria when the task of the liberalisation of higher education system in the country has been set as university mission.

Using a combination of action research and psycho-social methods this study focuses mainly on the implementation of four practical interventions in organisational culture that tended to increase the opportunities for more democratic, cooperative and caring relationships between its members. It has been assumed that such kind of change a) would facilitate the process of students' personal development as socially engaged citizens in opposition to the traditional public passivity and conformity; b) would stimulate staff engagement with its values and mission creating balance with the more individualistic entrepreneurial tendencies in the organisation, and c) would encourage more appreciative and supportive student – teacher relationships that could challenge the traditional authoritarian style of education in the country.

The analysis of the data in this study when exploring three types of relations in the organisation reveal: a) horizontal relations of collaboration within the academic community; b) powerful hierarchical relations between the formal roles in the organisation; and c) the hidden learning relations between teachers and students. The findings demonstrate how a) under the pressures for fast change of academic role identities and habits during the transition period in Bulgaria since 1989 and b) in the presence of what I define as 'discredited community in the mind' raised during the socialism culture of relationships is co-created by the university members that marginalises the efforts for collaboration, evokes traumatic type of leadership and deprives the process of learning and change. Some opportunities for overcoming such dynamics are seen in what Lawrence suggests as 'politics of revelation' and in the creation of informal spaces for individual and group reflection and dialogue.

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

BIHR	Bulgarian Institute for Human Relations
EU	European Union
LAP	Liberal Arts Programme
NBU	New Bulgarian University
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PDC	Programme Development Committee
VCC	Volunteering in the Community Course

## Preface

The idea for this research arose in the process of my work in New Bulgarian University (NBU) in Sofia where in the beginning of 2002 I was engaged as lecturer and researcher in one of its departments called Bulgarian Institute for Human Relations (BIHR). Right after my appointment there a project for the development of a two year experimental programme Artes Liberales was launched in NBU. Its aim was to create a context-appropriate model of liberal education, on the basis of which the whole university could be transformed later on. As a member of the Programme Development Committee I was assigned a task to elaborate the component related to civic engagement of the students and the university as a whole.

A lot of issues that needed more thorough consideration and informed action sprung up while I was working on this task. The present research makes an effort to explore in a more structured way these issues and to make sense of the processes that occurred on different levels of the organisation when an internal transformation was initiated. Individual, group and organisational levels of relationships are explored in relation to four specific interventions within the organisational culture and structure. The broader social and political context in which this kind of change happened was taken into account in order to reach more systemic and thorough understanding of the complexity of the situation in which new ideas and practices were implemented.

The main issues that I am interested in are related to the exploration of such questions as:

- What kind of dynamics occurred in the emotional life of the individuals and groups in NBU as a result of the implementation of concrete interventions concerning the university declared mission of social participation and formation of active democratic citizens?
- How did these relational dynamics shape the meaning of the work task for the concrete participants in this process?
- In what ways did such dynamics govern the relationships between the existing roles and how were they embodied in the university structure and principles?
- How did the concomitant social and political context of transition from totalitarian to democratic public relations influence the dynamics of the internal relationships in the university?

The main task of the research is to explore, while following the principles of action research, the ways in which the notions of “active social participation” and a “socially engaged university” are interpreted and implemented within the university mission, structure and relations. The research study is focused on four specific interventions made on the organisational level there that tend to confront the traditional view about the university education in Bulgaria and to provoke changes that will facilitate implementation of the liberal model of education.

Being one of the initiators and implementers of these changes in the organisation I tried to analyse the stages through which my colleagues’ and mine six years’ experience passed through and to develop deeper understanding of the issues related to the process of liberalisation of higher education during the period of democratic transition in the country.

## Introduction

*“Lift up your eyes, look at this world.  
Life goes now forward not backward.  
Lift up your eyes, the world is with us!  
Lift up your eyes and know you have a chance.”*

*(From Valdy Totev’s song that in the early 1990s  
became a symbol of the end of communism  
and the beginning of social transformations in Bulgaria)*

The aim of this introduction is to put the topic of current study in the frame of the personal story that brought me to the decision of undertaking the research. The failed efforts to follow my personal academic and professional interests are described here as a starting point and moral motivation from which to organise my thoughts and experience in a more structured exploration.

In 2008, during my first presentation of a piece of my study in the PhD workshop at the Center for Psycho-Social Studies in Bristol, one of my colleagues asked me a simple question: “Why did you decide to undertake this study?” My immediate answer was: “Because of the injustice. In order to bring more justice in university relations.” Later on I found that I was astounded by the question but also by my answer to it as I realised that I had never before asked myself about my deeper moral motivation for performing this research. I understood then how strong was the relationship between, on the one side my personal experience of the higher education system in my country and the situation of social transformation in which I was very actively involved during this time and, from the other side, the issues I decided to explore in my research.

My personal story concerns my two attempts during the 1990s to apply for and study on PhD programmes in two Bulgarian universities. The first attempt concerned my application for a PhD in Sofia University where I had finished my MA degree in Slavonic philology. Right after my graduation a competition was announced in the department for PhDs in the area of the theory and practice of translation. This was the area of my interests and I decided to apply for it. As the PhD was tied with a steady work place there were many candidates for this it. The competition passed through two stages – a written and an oral exam. Only three candidates passed after the written exam and I was one of them. I and another colleague of mine had slightly lower marks in comparison to the third candidate. During the oral exam two of us identified some signs of corruption:

- For some of the themes included in the putative curriculum there was no existent literature and these themes could be an object of scientific exploration. That is why I and some other candidates organised ourselves as a group to search for the missing materials and to learn together even though we were in competition with each other. Perhaps, we thought, the curriculum was organised in this way in order to discourage most of the candidates.
- In spite of the difficult curriculum the commission chose for the written exam topics that were in fact very simple and easy to develop.
- During the oral exam the commission behaved strangely. The examiners didn't ask me any serious questions compared to the very detailed and difficult curriculum that was prepared by them. Most of the time they spoke between themselves as if waiting for some reasonable time to pass. I was so surprised that when the chief of the commission said that we finished I naively asked him: "And when you will examine me?" The same attitude was shown towards the other colleague with whom I shared my suspicions about the exam.

So, both of us decided to ask the secretary of the department to show us our written application submissions. Initially the commission refused to do it but we insisted and at the end we were able to look at our submissions. We were very surprised to see that there were no comments or notes written by the examiners to justify our lower marks. There was only one formal sentence present at the end of the two works saying "Lack of systematic presentation of the material".

Therefore both of us decided to ask for independent commission to evaluate our written works as we could not do anything about the oral exam. The lawyer of the university discouraged us saying that a) there is no procedure in the organisation for an independent commission; b) there are many such complaints but there is no precedent that students could win in the court proceedings and c) the formal procedure is to normally to send the complaint to the chief of department, but in our case it would be actually the same person who was the chief of the commission.

Nevertheless we decided to send the written complaint to the department but of course never received an answer. Later on I was informed by a colleague who worked at the department about the way in which the work positions were distributed between different internal groups

of interest. During the next few years I heard about similar cases happening to other candidates in other departments. When preparing my materials for this study I found a book that collected stories of people from different universities that presented different cases of the corrupt, humiliating or arrogant abuse of formal power in higher education institutions in Bulgaria (Marinova, 2004).

Very soon after the democratic changes beginning in 1989, I learned (in 1991) about the development of New University that was the first private university in the country, one which offered programmes on professions that hadn't existed before in the country. One of them, an MA programme in clinical social work, related to the forbidden during the socialism psychoanalytic knowledge. I graduated in it in 1998 as a member of the first group of alumni.

I chose to study at the New Bulgarian University because of the entirely new principles and structure of education that it offered in comparison with the other universities in the country:

- Programmes and education focused on development of practical skills;
- Curricula based on modern scientific theories and thought through a range of interactive teaching methods;
- Opportunities for individual choice of courses better fitted to student's personal educational needs and interests;
- A clearly declared mission for the democratisation of higher education.

I also cannot forget the warm, respectful and supportive way in which the administrative staff of NBU treated us as students during the first years of its establishment.

Thus, NBU offered to me an alternative model of education, one that respected freedom of knowledge and freedom of choice. It nurtured my hope that democratic changes could become real part of our lives.

And here comes my second attempt to enter the PhD programme, this time at NBU in the field of clinical social work. This happened in 2000 when the PhD programme was settled at BIHR. There were ten people who formed the PhD students' group. All of us had our own personally chosen topics of study that had been defended during the oral exam and officially accepted by the examiners.

In 2001, before my entrance into this PhD programme, I spent the summer of an academic year at Smith College School of Social Work in Northampton in USA where I took courses on research methods and social policy. During the vacation between the two summer semesters there I visited different community services in Boston in order to learn more about different models of care that could be implemented afterwards in Bulgaria. I was very inspired by this experience and decided to put my efforts into the just initiated process of de-institutionalisation of the orphanages. I hoped to develop a programme that would educate and support care leavers from these institutions and to use this topic as my PhD topic.

In 2001 I was also invited to join the staff of BIHR. As part of my responsibilities there I was asked to coordinate the group of PhD students to which I belonged. This happened in a situation of the initial creation of the first psychological and social services in the country. That is why all members of the PhD group had topics of study concerning some clinical or social work issue with clients with different problems. The group met twice and we decided to use the PhD workshop to develop our research knowledge and skills. Each of us chose to present to the group a specific research method or a theory related to his or her topic of study.

We started to accomplish this task but the chief of the Institute came to the third meeting with two requirements. The first one was that PhD workshop is not a place where we could teach each other in research methods as it is our individual responsibility. We had only to share our findings on these meetings. The second requirement was that all of us had to choose a new topic of study that concerned not individual or group therapeutic work with clients but an organisational level of study as the Institute's interests at that time were focused on the development of psychoanalytic knowledge on this level. As none of us was very familiar with this area of knowledge, all of us disagreed with such decision. The group stopped working and people went to study abroad or to develop their clinical practice.

I myself decided not to continue with my PhD too as the way in which our topics of interest were replaced by the interest of the organisation reminded me about what existed during socialism as a system of recruitment of PhD students. In such system, students were not attracted as a group but as individuals who were affiliated to university professors who in turn defined the student's topic of study depending on the professors' areas of interest. There were some exceptions but the rule was that the student has not enough knowledge and competence to choose a significant enough object of study. I disagreed with such kind of

treatment of student's interests and choice of development and therefore I decided to "freeze" my PhD. At the same time I was curious and started to learn more about organisational studies informed by psychoanalytic thinking. Even though it became part of my interests I decided to develop my PhD in a place where I would be free to explore issues that are relevant to me and my professional development.

This decision brought me in 2006 to the Center of Psycho-Social Studies at the University of the West of England in Bristol, UK. My choice of this centre was led by the fact that Paul Hoggett, the founder of this centre, was one of the leading specialists in group relations from Britain who came during the 1990s to Bulgaria and, in collaboration with BIHR members, had created several annual group relations conferences. I had participated in one of them too. Other important fact that directed my choice was that two of my colleagues from BIHR were allowed by the chief of the Institute to start their PhDs in this centre. So, I decided to apply and study at CPSS in Bristol. This decision resulted in serious conflict with the chief of BIHR who tried to repudiate it. This incident convinced me even more to study in a university that:

- a) has an expertise in the issues studied by me;
- b) respects my personal choice and interests, and
- c) supports my personal needs and development.

After seven years of study as part time PhD student at CPSS I can confirm the rightness of my decision. As a result of it first of all I was able to receive firsthand experience from a different culture of relationships between university staff and students at the CPSS and could use it as a model when studying the culture of higher education organisations in Bulgaria. Secondly, this experience gave me more authority to take real steps for change in my academic work and gave me the resilience to sustain myself in situations of either neglect of my efforts and/or attacks on and exclusion of my ideas and positions.

My personal experience resulted in a set of questions that I tried to explore in this study. Mainly they concerned:

- The ways in which models of social control over and abuse of people's freedoms and individuality are pervasive in organisational and social relations and in turn destroyed the possibility of real moral transformations in people's life during the transition period in Bulgaria.



- The unconscious mechanisms that ruled such destructive, authoritarian and over-bearing models in the higher education system.
- The opportunities for such relations to be challenged and replaced by more democratic values and educational practices.

In order to find out answers to these questions I organised my activities around a long term exploration of several NBU projects for the liberalisation of the university environment. The research *University education and the culture of social participation in Bulgaria* focuses on the unconscious processes that occurred on an organisational as well as on an individual level in this academic institution when the task of the liberalisation of higher education system in the country had been set as university mission.

Using a combination of action research and psycho-social approaches, this study focuses mainly on the implementation of four practical interventions in the organisational culture of NBU, ones which hoped to increase the opportunities for a more democratic, cooperative and caring relationships between its members. It was assumed by me and others that such kind of change a) would facilitate the process of students' personal development as socially engaged citizens in opposition to the traditional public passivity and conformity; b) would stimulate staff engagement with its values and mission creating balance with the more individualistic entrepreneurial tendencies in the organisation, and c) would encourage more appreciative and supportive student–teacher relationships that could in turn challenge the traditional authoritarian style of education in the country.

*Chapter 1: Liberalisation of Higher Education System in Bulgaria* offers a thorough description of those historical pre-conditions that brought the need for reform in higher education system in the country. To the main characteristics of traditional style of organisation of higher schools a new version of university is opposed based on the two key values of freedom and enterprise.

The early attempts at the liberalisation of higher schools are presented further in the context of transitional processes occurring in society after 1989 to a market economy and to democratic principles of public life. Special emphases is given to the way in which a still centralised state system, the absence of regulations in emerging business relations and the

lack of civil society in this period seriously affected the efforts for new model's implementation.

In order to explore deeply the process of liberalisation of the field, this research focuses mainly on the reformative mission of a newly established university setting and in particular on its formative task for the development of socially engaged citizens in its students. Four separate but interconnected projects for organisational transformation are studied here concerning a) the establishment of Liberal Arts Programme, b) the organisation and teaching of a Volunteering in the Community course, c) the (non)engagement of the university top management with a programme for an entrepreneurial and caring university, and d) the introduction of an informally supportive student – teacher relationship using the model of tutoring. These projects are seen as specific interventions in the organisational culture aiming to increase the opportunities for all members to work in a collaborative and creative way. The assumption was made by me and others that such kind of environment could be used as an alternative role model for the young people to follow in their social relations.

The methodological part of this study is presented in Chapters 2 and 3. The conflict that arose between the need for coherence of the topic and the methodology of research from the one side and the difficulties of applying the method of participatory action research in an authoritarian organisational culture from the other is the core issue presented here.

*Chapter 2: Exploration of the Process of Organisational Change* provides an overview of the research process. Several models of action research cycle are discussed in relation to their fit with the activities done in this study. The risks of indoctrination and abuse of power when conducting a value driven study and the approaches used to minimize this are further discussed. Through the implementation of action research as a general frame of the study, special attention is given to the opportunities for a combination of realist and constructivist epistemologies. This endeavour is a result of trying to integrate psycho-social studies methods with the psychoanalytic knowledge on which it is built. One needs to do this if one wants to explore in a deeper way the threats that occur in this frame during its real implementation.

The changes in contemporary research cultures that lead to the rehabilitation of the emotional side of human experience as an important part of the process of learning and social

transformation are addressed in *Chapter 3: Psycho-Social Knowledge and Methods Used*. The unconscious, relational and intersubjective character of this experience is emphasised as a key point of departure that is used in the data analysis process. The ways in which specific psychoanalytic concepts were applied, in order to reach an understanding of the emotional dynamics at the university and in society, are detailed here.

The researcher's experiences and knowledge about psycho-social approach as developed in the process of exploration are also offered here and the issue of the validation of the researcher's interpretations are more specifically emphasised. The chapter ends with a short description of the concrete technologies used for data collection and analysis as applied to different groups of participants.

The analysis of data is presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 and explores three types of relations in the organisation. The first one, presented in *Chapter 4: Development in the Periphery*, is focused on horizontal relations of collaboration within the academic community. The predominant feelings of exclusion, neglect and destructiveness were identified in all groups of participants as a defence against their incapacity to occupy what Hinshelwood defines as 'third position'. The roots of such relation with the other are found to be connected with what I called 'discredited social relations in the mind'. The basic official as well as hidden strategies of systematic destruction of trustful relations in Bulgarian communities and public institutions during the socialism were covered here. It is also demonstrated how such social dynamics have been enforced by newer transitions in the society after the changes which validated individual interest and freedom to the detriment of collective interest and freedom. Some opportunities for overcoming such dynamics are seen in what Lawrence (1995) suggests as 'politics of revelation' and in the encouragement of creation of informal structures on the local level as an opportunity for collaboration and dialogue.

The second dimension of analysis, offered in *Chapter 5: Inclusion of the Top Management*, explains the pressures on the members of the organisation to change their identities and habits in relation to the roles they were performing at the university setting in order to meet new challenges in the reality of transition period. The collusive effort of all groups at the university to mobilise powerful hierarchical relations and the culture of amoral familism in order to prevent painful feelings of threat, uncertainty and a lack of knowledge of how to capture their emotional life is presented here. Further exploration, on how this kind of culture

alienates people from their work task and organisation is then based on my personal experience. The positive side of such alienation is considered here as one that broadens one's professional identity and helps overcome the unproductive illusion of a fusion between individual and organisation, thus allowing for more creative and independent connection between them.

The third dimension of data analysis in *Chapter 6: Learning under Fire* focuses on learning relations seen from the one side as part of the main work task of the university and on the other as related to the process of change. The material explored here shows how the lack of individual recognition and care for each of the members of the organisation deprives them of opportunities for learning. The reproduction of a traumatic situation of control and dependence on what I define as "the authority of knowledge" leads to an interpretation of the relationship with the knowledge as a dangerous one. The role of self-reflection and reflection in a group is underlined here in order to create transitional spaces through which thinking and learning can occur.

*Chapter 7: Discussion of the Research Findings* summarises the main findings from the research concerning peer and hierarchical relations in the organisation. Sources of hope and opportunities for positive development in the future for individual as well as on organisational level are identified and discussed.

The study ends with *Chapter 8: Conclusion* where the extent to which the main aims of this study were realised and the questions raised in the beginning found their adequate answers are commented upon. Some issues and topics for further exploration in the fields of psycho-social research implementation, social participation and learning in organisations are emphasised too.

## **Chapter One**

### **Liberalisation of Higher Education System in Bulgaria**

*“There has not been a single conflict – throughout Bulgaria’s history and up to the present day – in which an individual has prevailed over the state. And not only has an individual never prevailed alone but neither has any group of people or corporation ... We actually have the same kind of institutions as existed in the most advanced states of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but our concepts of state come from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.”*  
(Dr. K. Krastev, Bulgarian literary critic and writer from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)

The current chapter will focus on description of the social and political situation within the country in which the idea of a socially engaged university has been applied. The historical context and the preconditions for the search for a new form of university will be presented in *Part 1: Two versions of university*. The traditional version of university will be discussed here as it developed along with the early formation of the modern capitalist state in the country at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and as confirmed after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in the circumstances of socialism and state controlled economy. The main tasks of this model of the university as well as the philosophy and values on which they are based will be depicted. To the characteristics of this widespread view on higher education, a new reformative project for liberalisation will be opposed. The first steps of this process were rooted in the 1970s and 1980s when the socialist system and its state control were being systematically and gradually eroded.

The accomplishment of the idea of ‘new Bulgarian university’ in the period of 1990-2010 and the challenges that the contemporary context of transition to a market economy and democratic government, as well as the process of state accession to EU, created to its implementation will be addressed in *Part 2. New vision implementation and the challenges of transition period*. The analysis of this context will be used further to make some initial conclusions about the main tensions and conflicts involved in the implementation of New University (NBU).

In *Part 3. Case description* four initiatives for the organisational transformation of the university environment will be introduced. They demonstrate the efforts of New University management to realise that part of their work task that is related to the formation of

autonomous and socially engaged citizens. For the purpose of this study these initiatives shall be referred to as ‘interventions’ as they actually represent purposeful and preliminary planned activities for change in the organisational structure and culture of the university as a whole and of some of its units. Each of the interventions, the objects of this study, will be described in a similar frame of components following the cycle of action research.

It is important to emphasize right at the beginning that the interventions studied here don’t exhaust all forms and initiatives developed at the university with regard to its civic mission. Nevertheless, a systematic analysis of them could bring new knowledge about some of the basic dynamics in the organisational relations that occurred when a liberal model of higher education was applied in a context of transition from socialism to capitalism, from totalitarian to democratic social relations.

## **1.1. Two Versions of University**

### **1.1.1. The Old Version**

The existing system of higher education in Bulgaria was established during the formation of a capitalist style of government and economics after the Russian-Turkish War in 1878, when the Bulgarian nation became independent from the Ottoman Empire. The first higher school (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ochridski”) had a status of a state institution and followed the good traditions of the German polytechnic. This model of education was pervasive in the newly developed educational system first of all through the large number of Bulgarians educated during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. The so-called Humboldt model of the university was further promoted during the first decade after liberation as part of the creation of the new government and its administrative structures, according to the Russian state model of that time.

During socialism, this model was kept, and some of its main characteristics were further enforced, formalized and distorted, in order to serve the Communist party pursuit of total control and indoctrination of citizens.

Approximately twenty German universities, founded during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, strongly affected and served as models for almost all institutions of higher education established thereafter in Central and Eastern Europe. ... The structure of the German university was transferred to the Sofia University and has

been further used as a model for all other higher education institutions in the country. ... the polytechnic – a school based on subjects, was popular in the country between the two World Wars. It gets even more popular after 1950, when the country was under Soviet influence. At that time, the multidisciplinary spirit of the polytechnic was pervasive in Bulgarian universities. The discipline of strongly fixed subjects and the precise educational time frame gave a polytechnic flavor to the humanities. (Bogdanov, 2006, pp.34-35)

For the purposes of the current analysis, it is important to describe the main features of this model as far as the contemporary reformative view on university builds its conceptual frame of change in a debate with this model on the meaning, aims and structure of this degree of education. I organised the main work tasks of higher education institution in five functional characteristics according to which these two models could be compared – teaching, accessibility, research, moral education, and economic sustainability. According to them, the main features of the two models can be described and compared:

a) Teaching models:

These models include the specific curriculum content used by a given university and the teaching methods applied with it. They also include the aims that underlie certain models of teaching which attempt to serve specific social needs.

b) Accessibility:

This includes the level of access to higher education and to which degree it fits with certain public expectations or affects the structure of this society.

c) Knowledge creation process:

This characteristic depicts specific attitudes towards thinking, truth, and ways of world exploration accepted by higher schools, as well as the aims with which the new knowledge is produced and applied.

d) Formative task:

This concerns the moral values on which higher education is built and the way in which they are promoted to the students. It answers the question: ‘What kind of citizen does higher education form in regard to democratic values and power distribution in the public sector?’

e) Financial sustainability:

This defines the level of financial security of higher schools and the sources that guarantee it with regards to their autonomy and control from the state.

These characteristics are important as they help to analyze in a more thorough way different versions of university from the point of view of its power relations. Actually the drive towards autonomy from the excessive state control represents the core aim of the initiated academic reform.

Bogdanov, the key initiator of the reformative movement in higher education in the country and the founder of NBU, describes the situation in which the new model of the university has been created in the following way:

Our recent higher education, especially in the field of humanities, existed in immediate dependence on the ideological mechanisms of that period. It has supported them and suffered from them. Perhaps we have to pay special attention to the three following values of the old way of orientation in the world, which have been watchfully guarded by the higher education too – uniformity, hierarchical order, and passivity. Therefore, in the presence of many higher educational schools, we avail of and continue to avail of essentially one university, with one and the same form of production of specialists – civil servants. (Bogdanov, 2006, p.35)

When criticizing the traditional form of higher education in the country, initiators of the debate on change pose mainly two questions. The first one concerns the relationships between university and state. In the “old” version of the university, the state exercised total control over academic life in a situation of lack of real academic autonomy. The reason for that is that during socialism the main purpose of education was the promotion of the dominant ideology. There was a lack of private initiative, since all areas of production, including the production of specialists with higher degrees, was state-owned. The university budget was part of the state budget and all its products were owned by the state alone. Higher education, as with all other areas of public life, was instructed by the planned economy to define precisely the number of specialists to be produced in each area of knowledge and professional practice. When entering higher schools future specialists had already secured work in the administrative region from which they came to study at university. Security of work places and clear pathways to a professional career were guaranteed at the expense of free choice and flexibility in professional development. When allocated to a certain predefined work place, it was then hard for one to change one’s job or to study something different. The reason for that was the absence of a free labour market.

That is why the opinion of the champions of reform in higher education is that such uniformity and dependency doesn’t bring development to the universities, especially in the



new conditions of the market economy, democratisation of social life and free mobility of human resources in the sphere of education.

The second question raised by the reformers concerns the internal management structures and the process of power distribution between them at university as a whole and in the teaching-learning relationships in particular. Generally taken, the traditional type of university in Bulgaria is characterized by a hierarchical structure, with unevenly distributed power. Knowledge and the management of educational process are totally controlled by the teachers. Any existence of knowledge and experience in university students is completely denied. As a result of this, the only form of traditional education is lecturing and examinations, which follow the principle of the repetition of teacher's lectures. There is usually only one true version of knowledge and it has to be ideologically acceptable. What is missing in this educational process is such forms of relationships with knowledge as critical thinking, debate and confrontation of different but equally valid versions of truth.

What does teaching from the desk imperceptibly do? It divides the space in the auditorium, hierarchically – a lower level occupied by ignoramuses as well as a higher level for the wise who speak the truth. The transition between the two sides is full of obstacles. Nowadays in our universities one rarely asks questions and it is not easy to interrupt or contradict the teacher. The form of teaching from the desk itself defends him. (Bogdanov, 2006, p.15)

This type of organisation leads to the formation of citizens who are expected to blindly follow the “right” version of reality and to become merely the (barely adequate) interpreters of other people's thoughts. This task is implemented through specially organized obligatory programmes, part of which consists of ideological disciplines – courses that prepare in the only legitimate political version of science.

The most maleficent part of these mechanisms was the uniformity. ... Because of the partial concern for order and one-man management, our higher education has been left without internal dynamics and more complex structures able to resolve many problems at once. The contemporary Bulgarian university can do only one thing –produce, for the needs of the state, clerks in the area of spirituality. Specialized in a sphere of knowledge, or rather habituated not to leave it, rather than being real specialists, they have been prepared to be state employees. At the time of their study they have already been habituated to the principle of being aware of their place. (Bogdanov, 2006, pp.18-19)

Civic participation has also been controlled using the branches of Komsomol - political organisation of youths (DKMS) and of the Communist Party (BKP), established at the

universities. These structures played the role of student organisations. Spontaneous civic initiatives were not allowed. The public lives of young people were organized in such specific activities as parades, political meetings and 'brigades' for "voluntary" work. Part of young people's pathways to successful professional careers passed through their membership in these organisations where the trustworthiness and leadership skills of the future political leaders were ascertained.

Access to higher education was restricted by the ideological criteria of class and party affiliation. At the same time a double standard was applied to the enrolment of party members in the university. They were included in the so called RabFac (Working class Faculty) with a specific regime of studying and with many privileges. A very valuable analysis of this part of university policy applied during socialism is the research done by Boiadzieva (2010). The conclusion made by the reformers is that this type of university is helpful for the formation of bureaucratic minds. It doesn't fit with the new time which needs autonomous choices and flexible solutions of complex social tasks.

Therefore, from the reformers' point of view, the old vision of university served the needs of a totalitarian model of public relations that produced uniformity and dependency. When accepting the values of democracy as ruling principles of its social relations, Bulgarian society was confronted with the need for a new vision of the university that produces more diversity and autonomy.

### **1.1.2. The New Model**

Based on such arguments, a new liberal model of higher education was developed in order to fit the principles of a free market economy and the democratisation of public relations in the country developed during the period of transition from 1989. Described in two key words this model envisages the successful individual as becoming 'free and wealthy'.

Following this vision, the new model builds on an internal logic, according to which, first of all, the university as an organisation has to become free from the still rather controlling state. This freedom could be achieved through the university's financial independence from the state. This creates further opportunities for the university to become a good competitor in the market of higher education, more creative in its efforts to serve the immediate needs of business, and therefore more successful and wealthy.

Secondly, in making a free choice for its development as a structure, regulations and relationships with the other institutions in society, the university creates in its internal relationships the same culture of free choice and diversity. This way new kinds of professionals and citizens are formed by the university that are more autonomous, creative, socially responsible and wealthy.

Thus the new model was established on two basic value priorities: a) acquisition of university independence from the central government and b) achievement of personal freedom for the members within the university.

#### **1.1.2.1. Acquisition of University Independence from the Central Government through the Encouragement of Private Interest and Enterprise**

The first priority in relation to this model is to find out an organisational form which could provide the independence for this initiative from the external control of the status quo and unreformed governmental structures.

Self-government is one of the most difficult problems of university structure nowadays. ... autonomy is an old component of university relationships inherited from the medieval universities. Currently the issue is in the balance between self-government and dependence on higher institutions. (Bogdanov, 2006, p.14)

In order to achieve such a balance, university management chose to develop its organisation as private initiative with noncommercial aims i.e. as NGO. This way, its survival and development would depend more on its members' free initiative with minimum participation from the government. Its functioning actually depended on a) students' fees, b) funding from big western foundations that in the beginning of the transitional period established their branches in the country with the aim to support internal democratisation processes, and c) project activities in the areas of research and professional practice.

If the contemporary university is a state one and offers free of charge education to its flock as a result of its unavoidable dependence from the government, let's have another one, private, joint-stock, one that takes its resources from different sources but mainly from its students. Let these students make provisions for a bank or another sponsor which, giving them money, will make them responsible and dependent on it in the best sense of this word. In such a situation when concern will be transferred to the learner

and to some concrete society the first to feel relieved will be the parents. In this sense the private university in practice will become in every respect more humane than the state one. It spares parents and makes students more active. Active in every respect: as learners and as confident people who have requirements to those who teach them. Will students who pay high prices for their education and are debtors of certain institutions bear to be taught by uneducated teachers and study in attics and very often without available books? (The last sentence envisaged the conditions of education at the first state university in the country “St. Kliment Ochridski” – my remark) (Bogdanov, 2006, p.19)

In this sense the university is accepted also as an entrepreneur. As a result of this, the spirit of private initiative and self-support of departments became a key priority during the model implementation.

Even though this term doesn't sound as academic, the entrepreneurial university is seen as a social system that requires effort and energy and therefore the main factor for its development is risk taking when undertaking new practices, the results of which are usually uncertain. But this is just one more challenge to our power to chose, to take risks. (Apostolova, 2006, p.96)

This kind of thinking emphasizes the constant process of change in contrast to the rigidity and immovability of the old model of education. It is part of the entrepreneurial spirit that supports such a version of organisation in which it is in a constant connection with reality and changes according to the fast changing expectations of it.

There is one basic thing that has to be taken into account when describing the future structure of such a university. It has to be flexible, to envision alternatives, to respect a student's individuality, to be aware that it would be surmounted and changed. Otherwise, what we could expect is the scleroses of the existing education in the country or, putting it politely, the security of the hard form where the only valuable thing is the form itself. (Bogdanov, 2006, p.21)

#### **1.1.2.2. Achievement of Personal Freedom for the Members within the University through the Respect for their Individual Choice**

The second priority was to bring back to individuals such types of freedom as to practice autonomous choice, to have different views from those which are traditional or generally held, to share personal position publicly, and to function in one's full potential in society. From the point of view of this model, such kinds of rights could be secured if more opportunities were created in the university environment for the development of the capacity for free choice and self-determination. Therefore, this model introduced forms of administration and teaching as well as types of organisational structure and power

distribution which could facilitate the democratisation of educational relationships in university.

The concrete dimensions of individual freedom performed in university include provision of:

- a) Free choice for each student. For example: choosing between different and alternative courses in the programme; more time for self-dependent learning; the freedom not to visit classes; broad criteria for enrolment in university; opportunities to move between different programmes and departments during academic study; the chance to visit and study in partner universities abroad.

The civic role here was formed through the provision of enough time for the student in order that he can practice “public activities”. This expectation was based on the assumption that, once formed at university as a person with an individual position and capacity to exercise an autonomous and competent choice, the student will develop his concern about the society to which he belongs and will actively engage with it. As a president of the university Board of Trustees whose main task was to create the strategy for university development, Bogdanov describes this capacity of an individual to simultaneously pursue personal aims and to be sensitive and active towards societal problems as a key part of the formative mission of the new model of university:

Education guarantees such overjump (of one’s personal capacity – my note) when giving knowledge, but it does even more – it familiarizes one with social concerns, with a non crisis way to pass from separateness to conjunction and vice versa. In my opinion, this is the thrilling aim of contemporary Bulgarian higher education. (Bogdanov, cited in Butzev, 2006)

- b) Freedom from the formal hierarchical relationship between student and teacher, (for example: the introduction of teaching methods such as workshops, reading seminars and group work and the encouragement of student participation in research projects).

This view about the relationships between student and teacher that the new model follows resembles the “Socratic model” of educational relations offered by Jaspers (1961):

The teacher and the student in principle remain at the same level. As a rule they are both free. There is no fixed way of learning but boundless asking and not knowing of

the absolute. In this way, personal responsibility is introduced in the highest degree and nothing is made easy for anyone. The education is 'maievtic' (maternal) i.e. the student's productive power is supported, his capacities are awakened, but not by force from the outside. Imposed is not the random empirical individual in his particular specifics but a self that is in a constant process of looking for and realizing itself. To the student's effort to turn the teacher into an authority or master, the Socratic teacher resists the greatest student's temptation referring the student from himself to student's self alone; he hides himself in paradoxes, pretends to be inaccessible. As a process between them, only the fighting love, not subdued attachment, is present. The teacher knows himself as a person and insists the student make distinction between man and God. ... University education is, in its essence, Socratic education. (Jaspers, cited in Boiadzieva, 1995, p.342-343)

- c) Freedom from the centralised control relationships between departments (i.e. development of interdisciplinary programmes and projects, leaving more power to the departments to form their teams and programmes, administrative consolidation of departments in faculties, not according to subjects, but according to educational degree, cooperation with other universities, public and nongovernmental structures).
  
- d) Freedom of the departments and university as a whole to actively engage with the environment and to participate in its change. This characteristic is developed from the one side on the basis of John Dewey's suggestion for closer exchange between schools and their communities. From the other side, the concept of the socially engaged university has been interpreted in the new model as engagement with the business world. It looks at the educational institution as an equal participant in the production of goods (Gibbons et al., 1994). The connection with society is argued mainly through the university functioning more as a business than as an agent of social change. Nevertheless this new university really challenged the status quo in the field and was perceived publicly as a leader in educational reform. The concrete model on which this social role of the university was established is taken from the type of English college developed in Oxford and Cambridge and contemporary American liberal universities.

This system of spaces for inclusion, of complex dependency and freedom of choice at the same time, is realised also externally – in the relationship of the university with society, in the complex interwoven relations of self-funding and control from government, state and private institutions. On this basis a need has been developed to study the reality – in order to ensure funding, to find jobs for the alumni and to guarantee the attraction of new candidates. The system of dependency and binding of interests eliminates the possibility that students will have no attitude towards the cost of their education and, through it, towards its quality.

This brings flexibility to the curriculum and the teaching methods. The American university has the capacity to create new professions and in general to participate in social development. Open to the outside environment and internally flexible, it cares about balance between the functions of order and change. (Bogdanov, 2006, p.79)

It was assumed that this type of common attitude in university could be developed in its young members, and later on could be applied in society.

Schools and universities are models of human environment. Hence, it is natural that people in them should acquire certain habits of connecting or separating, and this way develop their “self”. (ibid., p.73)

And further:

The American university carries on the corporative characteristics of the medieval university as a place of concomitance in a net of communities. Each particular student or teacher knows and takes advantage of his rights but relies also on a certain community. In the complex net of personal and community interests, the student is taught socially, is taught to participate in the subjects of different bodies. There are, of course, emotions, extremes and failures. But even in the presence of some mythology and oftentimes unconsidered symbols of university, the collective belongings, the opportunities for making connections, are so many that university communities can't easily develop the imperative of total belonging. The university sociality can still be seen as a variation or play. (ibid., p.80)

These are the specific characteristic of the new liberal version of university developed in the project for the new Bulgarian university. The person and the provisions of opportunities for him to fully exercise his right to make choices is the main focus of this model. This focus on the individual and his rights is based on the assumption that individuals formed in such a liberal environment will lose their historically formed habits of being blindly subordinate to authority, and will gradually take responsibility for things that happen to them and to the world around them.

## **1.2. New Vision Implementation and Challenges of the Transitional Period**

### **1.2.1. An Early Effort for Liberalisation of the Higher Education System in Bulgaria**

In order to better understand the topic of this study we have to put it in the context of the historically changing view of the university in Bulgaria. It is important to mention that the attempt to create the liberal kind of university undertaken by the NBU founders is, chronologically, the second such attempt. The first, even though it failed, happened in

1920. It was started by a group of Russian professors – immigrants and their colleagues from the first state university here. They established the Free University – the first private university in Bulgaria. (Boiadzieva, 2003) In 1938 it was renamed “Higher Special School of Business and Administration Sciences”.

I have chosen to pay some attention to the history of this early attempt for the liberalisation of higher education in the country because it has many parallels with the history of the creation of NBU and the conditions in which NBU started its functioning. There are two basic similarities between the situations in which both universities were created. The first one is that they were both developed in a period of political and economic crisis and in a period of the reconstruction of the social notion of government, public institutions, capitalism. The second similarity is that in both cases the new model was developed in opposition to the old publicly accepted academic principles: diversity vs. unification, private initiative and pragmatism vs. academic values and closeness, and free competition vs. centralised management.

According to the founders of the Free University, our country needed not just more educated people, but people educated in a new, different way from the existing method of education, people with reformative spirit and skills who have the potential to transform not only the public but also the private sphere. ... Our state university didn't succeed in meeting the new needs not because of the lack of resources but because of the essential, qualitative discrepancy between societal needs and state universities main aims and functions. (Boiadzieva, 2003, p.111)

A similar comparison was made during the transitional period between NBU and the same first state higher school.

The Free University existed for 20 years and was then nationalised. The analysis made by Boiadzieva shows that such an act of nationalisation eliminated any opportunity for the existence of alternative versions of higher educational institutions right from the very beginning of their creation in the tradition of Bulgarian education. According to her, this act demonstrates the kind of public attitudes which existed during the period:

It is obvious that the denial of specific features of the Free University means, in essence, the prohibition of certain principles of development of educational institutions and of the regulation of the sphere of higher education. First of all, the Decree rejects equality of state and private higher schools and endorses the privileged status of the state one. Secondly, the Decree denies the principle of competition as a regulator of relationships between higher schools. Contested also is the principle of diversity as a



way to structure *educational field*. Actually, the autonomy of state higher schools has been violated, as their right to govern alone their internal academic life has been restricted. (ibid., p.117)

St. Bobtchev, another scientist who has studied the early efforts for the reform of higher education in the country, explains this act of unification of the system by pointing to existing attitudes towards the development of a capitalistic type of public relations as a whole. According to him, the process of unification came from “an attitude in general currency in this country against each activity that produces business goods” as far as “hostile intentions have been envisioned in each big business activity, in each manifestation of capital – an enemy of the common good” (cited in Boiadzieva, 2003, p.119).

Something important to be mentioned here is the reformers’ fear of confrontation with the state and the status quo, and their attempt in both cases to reach a balance between the two models of higher education. In the first case, the political circumstances of crisis have been an adverse factor when reaching for such balance. The economic stagnation and the social reliance on the state, despite the corruptive characteristics of the government at this time, gave priority to the state control over higher education. As a result of this the private university was transformed in a state one.

In the current case with NBU, the opportunity to reach a balance and to keep the new model alive was strong compared to the old attempt to promote it because the process of political and economic transition in the country was in favor of supporting it. External pressure for change related to the struggle for some degree of standardisation and synchronizing of higher education systems in EU member countries actively supported these new developments. Nevertheless, the fear of governmental control and the pressure from the status quo on the one hand, and the attempts to reach reasonable accommodation and mutual existence of the two models on the other, are strongly present in both cases.

In this way, the destiny of the Free University shows that in Bulgaria, even in the sphere of higher education, the notion of capitalism is not a “tactical” but cultural and developmental problem related to the rejection of its values by Bulgarian society and by its political elite. (Avramov, 1998, cited in Boiadzieva, 2003, p. 121)

This first attempt at liberalisation demonstrates a certain type of stable attitude towards education in Bulgaria that has its roots far beyond the frame of socialist tradition alone.

Rather, it is connected with a lack of sufficient life experience in the domain of private initiative as a result of a lack of national state and, therefore, lack of experience and engagement with a process of government. The fact that this attitude and skill for living in a modern society is lacking is very important for understanding the way in which the public sphere is present in the minds of contemporary citizens.

### **1.2.2. The New Generation of Active Intellectuals and Their Reformatory Project**

NBU was created right after the democratic changes in Bulgaria in 1989 with the conscious intent of its creators to challenge and change the existing system of higher education in the country, and to offer a new model of education based on the liberal traditions of higher education developed in Western countries. Therefore, it was created with a clear political mission.

But NBU has its pre-history, which started earlier, during the communist regime in the 1970s and 1980s. The first efforts for change began as the different and badly coordinated activities of some of the members of the new generation of intellectuals in the country. Their personalities demonstrated four main characteristics that made them very appropriate to initiate changes in the system of higher education even before the change in the overall political system:

- a) They were highly educated and spoke two or more foreign languages; they were successful in their academic and professional work; they had good leadership skills.
- b) They were socially and politically well positioned – were publicly recognised and valued as professionals and academics; had flourishing careers; for many and varied reasons, they were accepted politically by, or had gained the trust of, the Communist Party leaders.
- c) They were familiar with Western models of life, education and science – some of them were allowed to travel to countries outside of the Communist block. After the period of unfreezing of political relations between the East and the West during the 1980s the chances for professional and academic contacts with Western knowledge and professional practices significantly increased.
- d) They were in terms of life cycle, at an age of self-confirmation and professional development – most of them were in their 30s and 40s at this time and had the ambition to succeed in their leadership and career.

Lavergne (2010) saw their potential in “their ability to attract resources, their privileged networks with foreign academic institutions and other international actors, as well as with the world of media and policy” and in “their capacity also to integrate and assimilate other academic and social networks.” (Lavergne, 2010, p.404) Such qualities later became crucial for the survival and approval of their vision. According to Lavergne, they formed the new elite of the transitional period.

Each of these people tried to make some difference, of course in the frames of the existing system, through the roles and the power that they had. These efforts were made independently of each other, but all of them tended to introduce some liberalisation in the system of higher education, through the implementation of or experimentation with new knowledge, methodology, organisational principles etc. that they drew from their own experience with the “West”.

The political transformations that started in the country after 1989 allowed for those peoples’ ideas and experiences to be brought together in a form of scientific community called *The Society for the New Bulgarian University* and, further, in a more organized form of new model for university education in Bulgaria.

In July 1989, university professors, scientists and entrepreneurs established The Society for the New Bulgarian University. Bogdan Bogdanov was elected as its chairman. The purpose of this society was to work for the reform of the Bulgarian university – autonomous, entrepreneurial, with its own mission, rich and free. A year later, the Society started to offer training to people at any age, on topics that were not present in the university space in Bulgaria. The Society was socially known as “free university”. (Facts from the history, p.1)

What consolidated this group of people was their criticism of the existing model and their liberal vision on higher education. After the changes, the group grew with some of the new leaders of the political transformations who represented new right or democratic powers in society. The positions of the group members were consolidated in a *Vision for NBU* based on the philosophy and practice of liberal education.

NBU will be acknowledged as a model of liberal education. University alumni will acquire a high level of academic knowledge and life skills, professional qualifications for successful integration in the fast changing labour market.

The university will become an open, liberal institution developed with entrepreneurial structures. University programmes will become independent units connected with the external environment that have their own independent development and fund raising system. As a result of this, NBU will broaden its competitive advantages and will diversify its revenue. (Vision for NBU, p.1)

Implementing the main characteristics of the Western universities, NBU tended to adapt to the standards and principles that organize higher education in Western countries. The purpose was to become part of the Western educational system. It was expected that adapting the structure of this system would facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources with it and would bring stability and growth to NBU in order to survive in the potentially insecure and unfriendly political, economic and public situation in the country.

NBU will be approved as a European center of scientific research and arts that participates actively in the European scientific and artistic space with many projects. The university will have several centers of scientific and artistic achievements, on the European level, available.

NBU will have at its disposal professors with high achievements in research and lecturers from the practice that are skilful in modern educational technologies.

NBU will become part of the international university network. Its programmes will offer joint education and diplomas with foreign universities as well as education offered in the main European languages. They will engage with intense international mobility of lecturers and students.

NBU will become a center with a well developed infrastructure and high standard of material environment. (Vision for NBU, p.1)

This is why the new university, from its very beginning, was organized structurally with principles and roles following the main features of the organisational structure of Western universities – bachelor and master degrees, major and minor specialization, credit systems, partnerships with business, applied research, continuing education, distant education, exchanges of students and teachers, international network of supporters, high standard of the educational environment, constant development and revision of knowledge in the curriculum and a well organized material environment.

It is important here to emphasise the shift that occurred during the time in which the models of higher education on which NBU was built. In their efforts to discover an appropriate model to fit their vision the reformers initially looked at the university traditions developed in the USA. The model of liberal education applied in contemporary US universities and colleges was utilised by the developers. With that end in view, a group of people from the Society went to the USA and visited several big universities with liberal

educational platforms. This kind of model was used later on in the creation of the programme of *Artes Liberales*. During its preparation process, a literature review of the liberal education in the USA was used, as well as the experience of newly opened American University in the city of Blagoevgrad.

This focus on American models and practices was not accidental. During the first decade of transition the interest of society as a whole was focused mainly on the USA as a symbol and practical model of freedom, capitalism, success, and democracy. There was even a popular slogan during these times asking “How can we reach the Americans?”. The Open Society Foundation was the first and the most popular political actor in the democratisation process, with its efforts to create the first local structures and practices of civil society. Actually NBU was funded and supported for long time by the financial resources of this foundation.

... it was the first university – NGO in Bulgaria, developed on Gorge Soros’ initiative. At the head of the university is Bogdan Bogdanov who for a long time also held the position of the president of the Open Society Foundation. ... the Political School of NBU was developed on Dimi Panitza’s idea and is part of a network of schools managed by the Council of Europe settled in former Communist countries and former Soviet republics. This school was funded mainly by USAID and other American foundations with the aim to develop in the spirit of democracy and tolerance cadres coming from all parties represented in the Parliament. (Lavern, 2010, p.414)

After 1999 when the official status of EU candidate-member was given to the country, the focus of NBU leaders shifted towards the creation of a network with European universities in order to compete successfully on the educational market and to survive and overcome the attacks from other universities in Bulgaria and the centralised state administration concerning its legitimacy. This shift again followed the shift in the overall societal and political orientation.

There was also a shift in the financial resources for the third sector development in as much as after the entrance into the EU, the main funding of the transitional process was assured by EU structures attached to the government. The Open Society Foundation and many other non-EU, large donors withdrew from the political and social scene of Bulgaria or at least now played a secondary role.

As a result of this, the main networks and resources for university development came from its relationships with EU structures. However its dependence on the government increased, as a) the EU money passed through the state administration and b) the Bologna process (1999) of unification and adjustment of the higher education systems of EU member countries led to the development of common accreditation criteria of higher education.

In September 1991 The Society for the New Bulgarian University was given by Parliament a status of university called *New Bulgarian University*. As an academic initiative, NBU started its work within the areas of human sciences, communications and the arts. The interest of the developers in such areas of science was guided by their efforts to understand the processes of social change, the failures that happened during this process and their effects.

New Bulgarian University started the reform in higher education in Bulgaria. The direction was towards development of various forms of education, new types of academic communication, financial diversification, and achievement of high standards in the development and functioning of university resources. The main task of NBU is to study the changing reality and to create new educational programmes and new professions. (Facts from history, p.1)

### **1.2.3. Higher Education between the Principles of Centralism and Unadjusted Market Economy**

Two basic features characterised the internal political, social and economic situation in Bulgaria during the first 20 years of change when NBU was established. In some degree they are present even nowadays: a) a centralised, rigid and controlling state and b) a competitive market without rules.

A rather centralised system of higher education continued to exist during the transitional period and kept to uniformity and rigidity. It remained inadequate to new public needs. There was serious gap between the quality and the content of programmes offered by the universities on the one hand, and the qualities of human resources that business here and abroad looked for, on the other. Part of the reason for that was in the previous organisation of higher education around narrow professional specialisation and the lack of provision for lifelong learning. It was also because of the lack of flexibility and enterprise in university management.

The model developed at NBU initially confronted both of these characteristics. Following an entrepreneurial approach the university management started with programmes that offered education in new but important professional fields. Narrow specialization was overcome by the organisation of faculties and departments on multidisciplinary principles. In order to bring academic work closer to the current day issues, some of the departments accepted the designation of applied research centers (School of management, Center for Social Practices, Bulgarian Institute for Human Relations, Political School etc.). They acquired a special status of being comparatively independent from the central management and administrative structures and became financially self-supporting.

The technologies of evaluation in higher education were also inadequate to new realities. Their accreditation relied on formal, predominantly quantitative criteria far from the contemporary requirements of educational quality. They measured only characteristics on the entrance but not on the exit of the educational process; neither did they measure the long term effects of education. The self-evaluation of higher schools was also missing. The newly accepted unified state requirements in the different areas of professional education showed again the inability of the state to overcome its predominantly controlling and sanctioning function. One example of this is the very punctual description of the curricula that prevented universities from being creative, diverse and competitive. Totomanova (2001) describes the restraining features of Ministry of Education and Science management style:

The administrative structure of the MES (Ministry of Education and Science) doesn't fit the requirements of Euro-integration. It remains largely unchanged even nowadays and continues to suit a centralised type of management. As a result of this, administrators and experts in MES still prefer to manage the whole process using predominantly normative acts and documents. That is why even if the normative acts are on European level, in respect to their content and conception, their implementation encounters substantial difficulties. They evolve from the longing of administration, formed predominantly under different circumstances, to exceed its managerial functions and to assume the responsibility for extrinsic tasks ... A consideration has to be taken to train the Ministry staff in order that it become able to serve the needs of negotiations and forthcoming membership. What I mean relates not only to the skills in foreign languages which consists of one of our weaknesses, but rather the acquisition of particular types of management habit and skills appropriate to the new circumstances. (Totomanova, 2001, p.52)

In order to resist this control, NBU management developed practices of constant internal evaluation by its Center for Quality Control, as well as of accreditation by foreign universities and bodies. At the same time university representatives actively participated in the debate on changes in accreditation standards.

Another feature of the higher education system at this stage was the lack of clear policy for reform in this area and the lack of resources to support it. The economic crisis of the transitional period led to a decrease in the budget for education. This fact made educational careers in the country unattractive. Some research (Znepolsky, 2006) from this period describes the process of the aging of university staff and the clumsy and inadequate system for the training of new teachers and researchers. The public image of academic work gradually decreased.

At the same time, NBU attracted many teachers. The university succeeded in this because of its spirit of innovation and the freedom it gave to the professionals to create new courses, programmes and teams. It also happened because of the high quality of administrative services, a well developed technological environment and a well organised payment system. University staff was collected mainly from the members of old universities and from Bulgarian Academy of Science.

These advantages of NBU made it a leader in educational reform but at the same time an object of attacks both from the government and from other universities or educational structures. Attacks were focused on its legitimacy as well as on the quality of education. They were based on the dominating negative attitudes in society, (especially in the beginning of 1990s), towards the growing private initiatives. The sources of these negative attitudes were a) the view developed during socialism about the exploitative nature of capitalism, and b) the corruptive, criminal or mafia-like practices of some of the first big business in Bulgaria established after the changes.

Part of this negative picture describes NBU as a place students can enter easily because they pay for their education; they can easily receive diplomas as they buy them; allegedly professors taught in Sofia University in order to gain prestige and taught in NBU in order to gain money.



### 1.3. Case Description

The object of this study concerns four comparatively independent interventions in the university organisational environment implemented between 2004 and 2010. My choice of giving special attention to them is that they pursued a common goal: to study and to actively transform the relationships at the university in a way that would increase the opportunities for all members to be successful, through connecting with and supporting others. So, the aim of this study is to recognise how, in all four initiatives, this goal was interpreted and practiced, in order to form citizens who think democratically and are actively engaged with the processes of social transformation in the country.

Another common feature of these interventions is the fact that I have participated in each intervention development, implementation and exploration. I worked on these projects in my role as a member of one of the independent centers attached to NBU (BIHR). Its aims were connected with reform in the fields of mental health, social welfare and education in the country, during the transitional period. Trained in psychodynamic and systemic thinking, the members of the institute tried to introduce the emotional aspect of human relations in those fields of public life.

Following the action research cycle of activities, each of the interventions is presented in this study through its key components:

- a) **Issue** in relation to which the concrete intervention was developed;
- b) **Main action hypothesis:** this explains the situation and direction of the efforts to solve the problem;
- c) **Tasks** planned for implementation of the intentions;
- d) **Process** of their implementation and the results achieved and lessons learnt;
- e) **General conclusions** about knowledge gathered during the process of implementation.

In Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2. I describe more thoroughly the reasons for choosing such a model of case description and the internal logic of its components.

#### 1.3.1. Pre-history of the Interventions Studied

There is a pre-history of the events focused on in this research that happened in the university during the period of 1999 - 2003. It created grounds for the development of the

four interventions studied here. The main efforts of management at that time was to overcome the strong tendency among the university staff to be overly formal, disengaged, and to overcome the lack of collaboration and the withdrawal from university mission and tasks. These kinds of relationships further lead to intense competition between departments and intellectual and administrative “privatisation” of different areas of knowledge.

Therefore, in 1999 a task was developed by the university Board of Trustees and by its president in particular, for the consolidation and re-connection of the staff with the reformative agenda for liberalisation of higher education inside the university. It was an important step, as the ambition of the management was to retain the public image of the organisation as a leader in the reform of higher education. The assumption was made that the engagement of staff in an active participatory debate on moral issues of education would re-connect people with the university mission and would strengthen the participants’ reformative identities and their sense of belonging to the university.

During the period of 1999 – 2001 several activities were implemented in this direction. A series of open debates, in which large number of representatives of teachers, administrators and management participated, resulted in the creation of a common mission, vision, academic profile, educational philosophy and strategic plan for action.

A group of external evaluators with expertise in liberal education, known as the *Salzburg Seminar* were invited to evaluate the situation, and to suggest concrete steps for further development. As a result of these consultations, initial steps were undertaken for the development of the *Basic Programme*. It was suggested that the principles of the liberal arts model of education be implemented. A special subcommittee to the Board of Trustees was created to manage this task. Unfortunately the few separate projects of implementation ended soon afterwards, with no substantial, practical success.

In order to bring together the inconsistent efforts of different university groups in 2002, the president of the Board of Trustees took the decision of reorganizing the Basic Programme in a structure including a separate department called the *Department of Basic Education*. It consisted of courses from different disciplines. Each department was represented in this programme with its own course. This managerial decision decreased tensions between departments, but the exchange of knowledge and practices between them was still missing.

The second external evaluation of Salzburg Seminar held in 2003 suggested the creation of an experimental programme in which a liberal arts model, the educational philosophy behind it and its specific teaching methods could be systematically studied. It was expected that such efforts would crystallise, in a practical model of liberal education, that which later would be disseminated through the entire organisation. Some of the representatives of the sub-committee and BIHR took responsibility for the development of the Liberal Arts Programme (LAP).

### **1.3.2. Intervention 1: Liberal Arts Programme**

As described above the LAP was developed as a management solution to overcome the lack of collaboration at the university and this way to promote the further liberal idea of education. Therefore, the LAP was envisioned as a specific space in which the values of liberal education could be applied in a way that produces real collaboration between specialists from different fields of knowledge. It was assumed that in such a way the necessary conditions could be created for the development in students of those characteristics that would make them professionals and citizens which fit better to the new realities of democracy, free market economy, fast changing technologies and globalisation.

Relying on Schumpeter's concept of "creative destruction" (1950) the suggestion was made by the university Board of Trustees that a specific project for change, (in the form of a two-year LAP at Bachelor level), had to be developed. It was thought it might take the form of an action research project, developed in the periphery of the organisation, in order that it be used as an experimental laboratory in which new curricula, teaching methods and student - teacher relationships could be tested. This way the new thinking about higher education would meet the university reality and the most appropriate model for implementation of liberal values in this concrete organisation would be created.

In order to accomplish this aim, in 2003 the first stage of preparation started with three main tasks:

- The development of an internal management structure to consider the LAP philosophy and action plan; to establish an appropriate set of criteria for teachers' selection; to manage the process of identification of programme staff with the new educational philosophy and to study the process.

- Selection of the teaching staff according to the predefined set of criteria.
- Engagement of the staff with the process of thinking, application and exploration of new models of work.

Two departments took responsibility for the management of the LAP – the Anthropology Department, to which the programme was formally affiliated, and BIHR. Together, they formed the Programme Development Committee (PDC) which included the Project Coordinator and the Executive Director from the Anthropology Department and three members from BIHR. One of them was also a chief of BIHR and a member of the university Board of Trustees.

I was included as a member of this staff group right from the beginning of the programme's creation. My personal responsibility concerned the establishment of Volunteering in the Community Course (VCC) that would help students to develop further their capacity for active social engagement and informed participation in the transitional process in the country. It was one of my first tasks in BIHR as I started to work there in January 2002.

Right after its formation, the PDC took several important decisions. The first one was to create a new curriculum and to define its general content. Following the principle of pragmatism introduced by Dewey's philosophy in education (1897; 1998; 2007) it was aimed at making a strong connection between knowledge and social realities.

The second decision was to invite teachers from within and outside the university who shared the LAP philosophy and were ready to work together. It was expected that in such a way a community of teachers would be created that would share common values and would promote reform in the area of teaching.

The third decision concerned the teaching of new courses to first classes of students, their evaluation and further change. Regular meetings were organized with teachers to discuss their experience and concerns.

During the first two years of the implementation of these tasks (2004-2005) two issues arose that are important for the aims of this study. The first one was related to the work with teachers. They were confronted right from the beginning with the task of discussing

and revising course material and teaching methods that they planned to use in their courses. It was an unusual requirement as traditionally the territory of teaching was perceived as the teacher's private area. It symbolised academic freedom and the right of authorship. The only strong requirement during socialism was that the content must fit the communist ideology.

In this new task teachers were expected to rework their courses content and teaching methods according to the overall philosophy and educational aims of the programme. They were asked to discuss them and receive critical feedback from their colleagues. An idea was also introduced that the materials prepared by the teachers would become university property.

Another challenge provoked by this task was that it created a relationship that went beyond the formal academic hierarchy. It allowed participation on an even keel between teachers with different academic degrees. As the new models of teaching and the new method of content organisation were tasks equally unfamiliar to all people in the project, they challenged the formal boundaries of academic power and put all participants in an uncomfortable position of not knowing.

Some of the teachers reacted to these ideas with anger and anxiety, seeing in it an attack on their competence and their academic freedom. A few of them decided to leave the programme. Others just stopped coming to the meetings. Nevertheless, there still remained a group of teachers who embraced the idea of revising their courses for the programme. So, the PDC decided to work for a while with a small group of teachers who agreed to work together on their course development. After the elaboration of the courses, the group meetings stopped. The effort to create a learning team that would explore together and find a meaning common to all participants failed. The overall responsibility for the implementation of the accepted standards of work was left in management hands.

The second important issue at this stage came from the first alumni of the LAP, when some of the departments refused to accept them into their programmes or asked them to take additional courses and, therefore, to pay additional money. The LAP management responded to this attack from outside, winning over the top management of university. As a result of this, and after intensive and passionate debates, central management reached

agreement with some of the departments to enroll students according to the initial rules, and with other departments to negotiate the specific requirements under which students could study there. In the course of these events, the project coordinator discovered the fact that other departments were not informed about the meaning of LAP as an experimental project for change of the university culture and didn't have a role in it.

During its second stage of development, (2006-2010), the LAP succeeded in forming its own, more stable, team of teachers. They met twice a year, but their work together still suffered. Thus, the meetings gradually became traditional administrative and more formal events. At the same time, the LAP received public recognition, and many students were attracted by it. The focus of activities then shifted from teachers to students. It was assumed that when developed in this new environment provided by the LAP, students would become a natural corrective force for the teachers inside and outside the programme, that they would push forward educational reform at the university. The tasks related to this assumption were:

1. To introduce students to the values and aims of the LAP.

This task was performed with the development of an additional workshop called *Artes Liberales* where teachers and students worked in a form of debate on different scientific topics. The administrative meetings of PDC members with the students were also used to discuss with them, and to present to them, some of the basic distinctions between the traditional and the new model of university relationships.

2. To develop an individualised style of working with students.

Two main activities were performed in this direction. The first one concerned students' tutoring, organised in small groups. During 2007, the project coordinator and I organised this additional space for students in order to meet in an informal way. They were able to develop more personal relations between each other, to ask questions about the LAP project and to discuss the issues and plans that they had for their professional development. Administrative consultations given by the executive director in order to facilitate students' transitions to other departments were also accepted as an opportunity for individual work.

3. To engage students with programme evaluation and further development.

In order to perform this task students were invited, twice a year, to share their problems and to ask questions about the quality of the knowledge offered. They were also encouraged to participate in different initiatives related to programme refinement: to participate in an external evaluation of the LAP, to support newcomers in the programme to settle into the university, and to develop new initiatives.

The key issues during this stage of development concerned the relationships, first of all, between teachers and students in the class. Both sides shared their disappointment with each other. On the one hand, many students expressed their dissatisfaction with the content of some courses, with the non-participative style of some teachers and with the aggressive or devaluating behaviour towards them, of others. Teachers, on the other hand, complained that some of the students didn't come to the lectures and thus destroyed the teaching process. Other teachers were unhappy that they couldn't teach the planned material of their courses to such low quality students as, according to them, they were illiterate, incompetent, stupid, undisciplined or totally disengaged from their studies.

In order to make sense of these conflicts, the project coordinator and I developed a specific procedure for conflict mediation. Unfortunately, it was not able to resolve all the tensions inasmuch as some of the teachers' complaints towards students were actually manifestations of the teachers' disagreement with certain university procedures or relationships. However, those kinds of feelings were kept in silence and became enacted in the conflicts with students. Our experience during the conflict mediation was that:

- a) Some of the conflicts were actually created by the clash of two different educational cultures, of two different visions of the student – teacher relationship. For some of the teachers or students it was tremendously difficult to overcome their habits of seeing this kind of relationship through the notions of hierarchy and subordination, formality and distrust.
- b) It was difficult to communicate with some of the teachers about their conflicts with students, as they understood this conversation with the students or with the management as a way to be blamed, but not as an opportunity to figure out the student's unexpected or unacceptable behaviour in a more thorough way.

As a result of this process, some of the teachers remained unsatisfied, or decided to leave the programme. Some students' previous distrust towards institutions was reconfirmed. Other students learnt to manipulate the existing hierarchy in their favour.

Another area of tension which predetermined the future development of this project was related to an initiative for restructuring and standardisation of all programmes at the university introduced during 2007-2008. Because of this, the university administration asked the LAP management to obey the general administrative rules. This way, the very opportunity to experiment and undertake creative and unusual decisions was blocked. The consequence of this was that even though the programme continued to function it actually stopped being a place for learning and a source of new ideas in the educational practices.

The inclusion of the LAP in the mainstream of all programmes eliminated in practice the authorisation of PDC to take decisions about its future development. Its power to make changes in the programme based on students' and teachers' experience was abolished. In order to keep alive some of the principles of liberal education management, the decision was taken to make some compromises and to follow some of the new rules while circumventing others.

Another issue that challenged the management of the programme was that it followed the same culture of subjection to the hierarchy of formal roles, as present in traditional university relations. This kind of thinking persisted from the organisation to the team, and, thus, prevented the creation of a real learning environment. For instance, the massive negative projections on the person with the most formal power in the team led to his quiet decision to keep distant and not to participate so actively in the decision making process or in teachers' group work. This behaviour, didn't cause considerable changes in the relationships inside the team, as this issue was never discussed openly.

The general conclusions made during the project were that even though teachers embraced the idea of participating in the process of the liberalisation of higher education, it was difficult for some of them to challenge their habits of following the old model of hierarchy, control, distrust and exclusion. The collaborative style of working together and the critical discussion and reflection of one's personal experience challenged the existing hierarchical structure and the security that goes with it.



The project as a whole was accepted by top management, but received serious resistance from some of the university structures who were reluctant to act in a collaborative way during its implementation. It was recognised that middle level management was not well informed about the aims of the projects. Their role and responsibilities were not included in the project nor negotiated with them.

There were a lot of new components and practices to implement that frustrated the participants in the project, as none of them had experience with the new model of education.

### **1.3.3. Intervention 2: Volunteering in the Community Course**

Public participation during socialism was characterised by total control over personal initiative. Its authoritarian philosophy envisioned the “good” citizen as an obedient follower of decisions, prescribed by the party leaders, not questioning at all or participating in the decisions concerning his personal life and social fulfillment.

In opposition to that, democratic citizenship needs well informed and autonomous personal positions, as well as active participation in public issues. This is why the reformative mission of NBU was focused also on the formation of a new kind of citizen that would further support the process of the real democratisation of social relations in the country. In order to perform this task, the LAP included a specific course on Volunteering in the Community (VCC) with the purpose of including civic roles and social participation as a valid part of academic skills and knowledge for the NBU students. It was run from 2004 to 2011.

The course was based on Dewey’s idea of the engaged campus. First-hand experience with social issues and reflection on them using knowledge received in the university was behind the main logic of course design and activities. This model of learning was actively applied in many USA universities in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under the name “service learning”, different activities were combined in the field, as well as in the classroom, with the purpose of the mutual development of both sides in this learning process. Thus, students benefit through the development of moral positions and reach an understanding of

social reality while society benefits through the use of students' creativity, knowledge and opportunities to support the most vulnerable of its members.

Such a position was taken as a mile stone in the development of this course. The hypothesis on which this project was developed, as part of the LAP, was that teaching democracy is not possible only by giving lectures and reading books about it. The most effective way to develop moral identifications with the new role of socially engaged citizen for students is to have firsthand experience of it. During reflection in class, it was expected that students would acquire academic knowledge that would confront their prejudice and that they would explore their experience from volunteering in the community in order to make sense of the real challenges in the society to which they belonged.

I was chosen by the PDC of the LAP to develop such a course, following the model of service learning, and to study its performance through the frame of action research. That is why I decided to invite another colleague from BIHR, in order to form a research team. The initial tasks for VCC development covered:

1. Formation of a project implementation team.

In order to pursue the reflective part of the course design, I and my colleague decided to invite volunteers from our students from bachelor and master programmes of psychology, clinical social work and family therapy to engage with group and individual reflection sessions with the students. Two students signed for this kind of work and four of us formed the core team of this initiative. We met regularly to explore the process of course implementation and to take decisions about its further development.

2. Negotiations with some NGOs in which students could practice some kind of social activity.

As volunteering was generally absent in the practice of third sector organisations in Bulgaria, we decided to start with three familiar NGOs with which we had established partnerships. We expected that our previous trustful relationships with their leaders would facilitate the process of negotiation and work.

3. Sharing of the results from this course with the LAP staff.

In consideration of the long term perspective, it was planned that other teachers in the LAP could include a service learning approach in their teaching, or could collaborate in the development of knowledge and activities in this course.

The first three years of course implementation (2004-2006) brought a lot of tensions among the groups in the project:

- During our negotiations with the NGO leaders, one of them refused to participate, asking for money that we were not able to offer to him for such collaboration. The second one agreed, but was very confused about the way he could use volunteers who are not qualified in the field in which this NGO operated. As there was no experience with volunteering in the country this social activity was usually perceived as a kind of students' professional internship.
- Two of the students were very unsatisfied with their first visit to one of the NGOs. They reported of being blamed by the leader of NGO for their ignorance about the social problem with which this service was engaged.
- The leader of this service initially kept silent about the conflict, when speaking with me as a coordinator of the project, but shared it in an informal conversation with my colleague. His position was that the students behaved suspiciously and aggressively questioned some of his positions on the issue. He experienced that behaviour as devaluation of the hard work done by his team.
- Some of the students experienced difficulty in participating and reflecting on their experience in class. They shared the fact that, during their secondary education they were never asked for their opinion in class or to work in groups on certain task.
- One student refused to engage with the course requirements, arguing that social problems are issues to be solved by the government. Her expectation was to be taught in a traditional lecturing way and not to perform activities. Nevertheless, she decided to stay on the course and to try to adjust to the requirements. This conversation provoked discussion in the study team. My colleague suggested that students had to be tested against predefined criteria as to whether they were ready to come to such course or not.
- The initial enthusiasm, with which the group of students started, gradually disappeared when they had to engage in some concrete activity. Some of them stopped coming to class or to the individual reflective sessions. This is why I decided to initiate a special conversation with them about the reasons for their passivity. It helped a lot, as students were able to share the worries that some of them had because of their lack of experience with such tasks; the disappointment of the programme and university in relation to the issues mentioned above; their difficulty in performing the many activities in this course, (group reflection sessions, individual reflection sessions, development and implementation of project activities), as many of them also had jobs.

- The team decided to share the above-mentioned issues with the teachers in the LAP in order to receive their feedback and to engage them in conversation about the aims of this course. Only three of the participants demonstrated some interest in the topic. All their associations or positions were skeptical about the existence of real opportunities in society to think about social engagement, as people are poor and government controls everything. At the end of this meeting we were left with the impression that the aim for development of socially engaged citizens was something that concerned only us.
- The process of administrative standardization mentioned above, put the course in danger of being cancelled, as the general rule was to teach only theory not practice or discussion courses, in the first two years of study. The LAP coordinator was inclined to cancel it, but after discussing, with me, the meaning of this course in the overall structure of the LAP, she decided to compromise and to formally describe the course as a theoretical one.
- One of the volunteers in our team shared her anger about the way in which she was treated by my colleague, with whom she had worked in group reflection sessions. Identifying with the students, as she actually was one herself, she disagreed with some of his practices, qualifying them as neglecting or aggressive. Another class of students informed the programme management about such behaviour towards them too. My efforts to meet both sides and to discuss this issue failed, as both parties, the teacher and the programme management, declined to participate in such conversation. My colleague decided to leave the programme and the course.

The main findings from this very intensive process are that NGOs don't think about themselves as important factors in the country, for the establishment of more democratic social relations. They are not prepared to gather followers and to think about themselves as agents of change. The distrust with which NGOs have been publicly viewed, as well as the difficulty of surviving economically, made them closed and unwilling to receive critiques or to participate in collaborative projects.

Volunteering was a new practice and most of the participants in this project had no direct experience with it. That is why it was mistaken to offer it as an internship. The usual way in which an internship was provided was by visiting some services but not really doing or learning anything. So, volunteering was thought of in a similar, formal way. It also became obvious that the design of the VCC didn't fit the reality of resources and attitudes which

could provide a reliable structure for the students' learning. In addition, there were too many activities and too many groups with different interests, but the same lack of knowledge, in this course for it to be managed effectively. The course needed simplification and refocusing of its tasks.

Analysing these facts, I decided to simplify the design of the activities, not to negotiate with specific NGOs, and to shift the focus from doing to exploring. Thus, students had to create their own projects on issues that were important for them, and they wanted to change things using the available resources no matter how small they are. This way they learned to plan and write projects and to attract followers of their ideas. As the main task was to explore the role of the socially engaged citizen, students had to reflect on the question: "What does it mean to become an engaged citizen nowadays, in Bulgaria, in relation to the given social problem?". This design created opportunities for students to follow their own choice in their own way. My intention was to keep the design as close as possible to the natural way in which people in society relate to problems, and then to try to make sense of this experience.

Following such a vision I developed three tasks for implementation starting from the 2007/2008 academic year:

1. New course design development and implementation.
2. Application of research methods: first of all, for students' reflection on their experience and secondly, for my study of the overall process of course implementation.
3. Sharing of the products or results of this project with the broader university community.

The new design was simple and consisted of group consultations and reflections in class and work outside the university, according to the individual projects developed by the students individually, or in a team. This form of work was very well accepted by the students and during the next four years, a lot of small but meaningful initiatives on a huge variety of social problems were performed. Students who were not able to develop their own ideas joined their colleagues' projects.

For the facilitation of student reflection and learning from experience I used two tools. Students were introduced to the approach of reflection-diary writing. At the end of the course students were also asked to write a short assignment about the way in which their

knowledge and attitudes changed towards a) a social problem they had worked on; b) the role of the socially engaged citizen; and c) themselves, as people with certain values and positions. Both tools were used to facilitate class discussions.

Some of the students used reflective diaries very successfully but, as it needed additional time and discipline to make notes, most of the students preferred only to discuss their project in the group. Students usually got very excited at the end of the project when their teams presented the work that they did together in front of others. These kinds of feelings and student feedback on the course convinced me that I was headed in the right direction.

However it was difficult to share the students' successful work with the university staff. My several attempts to use the university or department website failed. As PDC gradually stopped working, it was not possible to discuss the successes and issues in the course there. The financial crisis in BIHR that started in 2006 with the withdrawal of most of the foreign donors from the country as a result of country accession to EU also put this topic second to more important issues of the day. The results from my work in this project were presented, in 2010, at an international conference on volunteering and received with curiosity and great appreciation.

Despite this, in the beginning of the academic year of 2011/2012, the course was excluded from the LAP curriculum. The reason for that was the crisis in the departments brought by the world economic crisis from 2008 and the effects of the demographic crisis from the beginning of the transitional process in the 1990s.

The implementation of a second intervention raised serious questions about the nature of the obstacles that prevented people working together. It became obvious that NGOs in Bulgaria at that time couldn't be used as role models of active social participation. A more thorough analysis of internal and external factors that prevented the civil sector playing its important function of democratisation of public relations in the country was needed. That is why my colleague from the course and I engaged, between 2007-2009, in an additional international project, in order to explore the role of the NGOs in governance spaces (Miller et al., 2009). Some of the research findings and conclusions made there are used to support the findings of the current study.

The relationships with the authorities of power were another territory for further exploration. During the following intervention I had the chance to learn more about this kind of relationship in the university.

#### **1.3.4. Intervention 3: Programme for Stimulation of Entrepreneurial and Caring Relationships in NBU**

The work on the two projects described up to now show that the idea of implementing changes in an organization through the development of an alternative environment, at its periphery, collapsed because of the culture of isolation, reticence, and competition between the departments.

The entrepreneurial agenda was diminished by the necessity of survival in a hostile environment given a) attacks from outside the university, b) insecurity for the future, introduced by the economic and demographic crisis, c) lack of capacity in the members to develop trustful and collaborative relationships.

The opportunities for real enterprise and social participation were drastically narrowed, as I mentioned above, with the withdrawal of foreign foundations. As a result of the increased control of the state on the EU resources, corruption, and hard and unjustly organised international project collaborations during 2006, the BIHR economically crashed. It was created as an experimental project, established with the aim of exploring opportunities for the development of self-subsidised entrepreneurial units at the university.

During 2007-2008, negotiations started with the university to include this unit back in to its financial structure. In order to succeed in these negotiations, the team of BIHR decided to invest effort, knowledge and experience in specific project activities focused on refinement of different aspects of university relationships, and thus to receive funding from the university for its further existence. As the director of the Institute asked the staff to think about such initiatives, which could further develop the university environment, I devised an overall programme for the liberalisation of university relations. This programme, for internal organisational transformation, integrated, on the one hand, specific areas of interest and competence of all members of the Institute and, on the other, activities that would support the further development of the three main groups at the university – students, teachers and administrators.

*The programme for stimulation of enterprise and care at the university* was based on the conception of care ethics as established by feminists such as Carol Gilligan (1982). The director of the Institute at that time defended the idea that the culture of individual survival covered by the version of an entrepreneurial university could be overcome, through the promotion of a different version of relationships, prompted by the values of care-ethics.

At the same time, my experience with the two previous projects led me to the conclusion that there was no real effort to include and engage all groups in the university, as well as the top-management, in concrete roles and tasks in these projects. This is why the two main principles on which I built the programme were those of caring and inclusion. The programme consisted of 11 different projects, organised in four stages of implementation. During the first stage of this programme, the university was engaged in promoting the culture of care in its internal environment and in this way in facilitating the development of different groups of participants (students, teachers and administrators). During the second stage, the experience of the internal liberalisation of university relationships was planned to be transferred to other organisational cultures, (in our case those of one institution for children and of two secondary schools). This way, the university could really engage with present social problems. Following the reflexive learning stages, in its third phase, the programme invited the participants in both previous stages to reflect on their experience and to develop new knowledge. This new knowledge was planned to be transformed into teaching materials or courses that were more relevant to social reality and its issues. During the fourth stage, this new knowledge would be implemented at the broader community and policy level. (*For a more thorough description of this programme see Appendix 1. Programme for stimulation of enterprise and care at the university, p.248*)

After a few discussions in BIHR, the decision was taken to promote this programme at the university. Promotional activities included:

- a) Each colleague had to develop an initial conceptual frame for his/her project;
- b) The director and I had to submit and defend the programme on all levels of management: President of the Board of Trustees, Conference of the Board of Trustees members, Board Rectors' Council.



The programme was accepted by all levels of university management. An official decision was taken that the Institute team had to further elaborate its proposal into a concrete action plan and budget for each of the projects included. A special office was offered for this purpose and a centre for programme management was formed there, with the aim of creating interdepartmental teams for each of the projects.

It was recommended that the team include: (a) participants from other departments that showed interest in some of the projects ; (b) additional projects that fit the programme's conceptual frame offered by other departments, groups or individuals. In the process of programme preparation, only two partners who had traditionally worked with our team were included in this initiative– the LAP and the Department of Economics and Business Administration.

It was expected that in the beginning of the 2008/2009 academic year, the programme with its thoroughly described activities, time frames for the first two years and group of participants in each project, would be submitted to the University Strategic Development Fund in order to be supported and funded.

At the end of the second round of negotiations, it became clear that only two projects from this programme had been approved by top management. The first one concerned the development of individual tutoring of students. It was led by the director of the Institute and coordinated by myself. The second project was related to the introduction of individualized care for the children, from an institution, and was run by another colleague from the Institute.

One of the reasons for the failure of the conceptual frame of this programme was that internal competition and distrust between different groups at the university prevailed over the readiness to cooperate which they had declared in the beginning. During the meeting with the chiefs of departments only four short comments were made about the programme. There was not much enthusiasm, but rather scepticism, distance, passivity and cautiousness as well as expectation that the boss would decide what would happen next. The programme was generally discussed as a private project of our team, as part of our coming back to the university.

Such opinions also held true for some of the members of our team. They actually assumed that the programme had been developed in order to ensure our financial security, rather than to really make change i. e. it was seen as a smokescreen with which to hide our shame from failing to survive financially, and a way to get out of the situation with some dignity.

All responsible parties neglected the meaning of the programme, not seeing it as cyclic and step-by-step but as consistent interventions and activities. The overall meaning of the values of care and inclusion was destroyed by the choice to focus on the parts and on the projects, but not to see them in a systemic way as building on each other. That is why it was only possible for two projects to be approved in the end.

So, the effort to balance the arguments of survival and those of investment in new cooperative relationships ended in the destruction of the programme's meaning and aims. Ultimately, the members of the university showed that they did in fact care for the colleagues from the Institute by including them once again in the financial structure of the university. But, actually, this gesture was used in a way that avoided the opportunities for change.

The conclusion was made by me, of this experience, that university units were not ready to leave the mode of competition and control in relationships with others. The fear of the sanctioning authority, the double agenda of negotiations and the distrust in relationships remained unchanged. All participants very easily forgot about the programme after the entrance of our team into the university. The culture of entrepreneurship, understood as individual survival, triumphed. Symbolically, it happened when the programme office was quickly and gladly occupied by another project, financed not by the university, for its internal development, but by EU funds, in order to create a relationship with business.

#### **1.3.5. Intervention 4: Tutoring as an Individual Approach for Establishment of Informal Student – Teacher Relationship**

The last project studied here was one of the two approved projects from the programme described above. It was called *Development of individual education at NBU: Programme for tutors' training*. Its aims were: (a) to increase teachers' sensitivity towards students' individual needs, and (b) to create opportunities for the students to develop individual

relationships with the teachers and to use the teachers as role models of academic and professional success.

The initial hypothesis with which I started this project was that no matter how big the competition is, and how little collaboration there is in the university environment, there are always people in the organisation who, because of their personal characteristics, are more inclined to connect to others through care and support. They develop out of the roles prescribed to them by the organisation, more close, individual, caring and supportive relations with the students. This capacity of some people to become natural mentors for students, some universities succeed in consciously managing and use through the model of tutoring.

The previously described interventions in the organisational environment had focused on the development of new models in the periphery of the organisation, or on active engagement of the management and had been seriously embarrassed or distorted during their implementation. They were focused on specific problems and the efforts for their resolution.

On the contrary this last intervention focused more on the positive part of the organisation and the efforts to enlarge it. Therefore, the aim of the tutoring project was to use this positive side of the organisation, and to try to validate it, and to develop circumstances in terms of standards and procedures that would facilitate their existence and dissemination.

When searching for appropriate models of tutoring that could be followed conceptually, but not literally, a British version of tutoring was chosen. It recognised the individual relationship between student and teacher as: (a) stimulating student's overall personal development and (b) provoking mutual learning, change and growth in both sides. This conceptual model was preferred to the American one, which emphasises more an instructional way of counseling and pragmatic tasks which aim to develop personal characteristics in students in relation to their successful career development.

A positive aspect of the beginning of this project, was that it was thought to rely not on socio-technical principles of external models of implementation, or business principles, but

on existing university expertise and knowledge, fruitful contacts and teachers motivated to work with students, as well as students ready to accept professional support.

The idea for the introduction of such kinds of relationship at the university was offered by the director of BIHR. My task here was to coordinate the activities and to facilitate the exploration of their implementation. My research approach in this project was framed, as in the three previous interventions, by the principles of action research and, more specifically, by those related to the participants' active inclusion and recognition of their personal experience in the field.

In line with the principle of participation, my suggestion was to organize events in which all people from the university staff, who identified themselves with such a role, could come together and to share their practice. It would initiate the development of a community of people in the university interested in working with students on their overall personal and professional development.

This kind of thinking was cast aside by the university management. Partners were pointed out in the face of our traditional partners from the two other departments (the LAP and the Department of Economics and Business Administration) only. Their directors had, for their part, to invite people from their departments' staff to participate voluntarily. However, I used my individual conversations with each of the directors to identify people from other parts of the organisation that they knew to be practicing some kind of tutoring. So, the directors of the Russian Language and Literature Programme and of the Centre for Teaching Resources were also included in the project.

In regard to the second principle of this project, the utilization of existing university experience, I suggested a design of work through which some of the already existing practices would be collected and explored. From these informal and unregulated practices, the new and contextually fitting model of tutoring would be developed by a select committee.

This model of work was also rejected. The management version suggested that teachers had to be taught in the new role and that our team knew what they had to learn. Then, for a year, they had to practice tutoring with not less than three students. All activities were

intended to result in several procedures for role implementation in the entire organisation, and, for tutors, a clear profile of skills and knowledge was needed, to practice this role.

Thus, right from the beginning a conclusion was made that there were two different discourses in the university about participation in the process of learning and change. One of them saw organisational change as a top-down process not recognising the knowledge and experience potentially acquired by the staff and not including them as an active part of organisational development. Another one understood the change as a process of mutual learning of all members of the university and tried to integrate and utilise the existing yet creative ideas and practices.

This intervention was organised around several activities:

1. A collection of students volunteering to participate as co-researchers of the tutor's role implementation. It was decided by the management that they had to be chosen from the departments included in the project. With this purpose in mind, a special event was organised, in which the aims and meaning of the project were presented to a group of interested students, and the volunteers among them were able to choose one of the ten tutors with whom to work individually.
2. Teachers passed through a theoretical course on psychoanalytic theories of personal psychosocial development, group and organisational dynamics. The new tutors were expected to use this knowledge in their consultation sessions with the students. In order to support their work, tutors were provided with individual and group supervision.
3. Elaboration of concrete procedures for the tutor's role implementation during the discussions in the group of tutors and using the feedback of participating students.

Both students and teachers included in the project started enthusiastically sharing their internal interpretation of being part of this work. However, during their training and the beginning of their work with the students, the teachers became anxious about their capacity to perform the task adequately. They considered that role profile was developed in a rather "clinical" way, building student – teacher relationship around the formulation of student's social or emotional problems or deficit. Some teachers said that it is difficult for them to recognise the difference between psychological counselling and tutoring. So, they stopped coming to the group meetings or frequently cancelled their meetings with students. Most of

them didn't utilise individual supervisions. The usual explanation of this behaviour was that they were overburdened and had no additional time to fully participate.

Such behaviour on the teachers' part made some of the students feel like intruders. For others, it was difficult to interact with their teachers outside of their formal authority. Nevertheless, students evaluated their experience in this project very positively and strongly supported the implementation of tutoring in the university. One of their main suggestions was that such a service should be offered to all students, not only to these with serious personal or professional problems, and not be defined by students' deficiencies but through students' needs and interests.

One interesting dynamic that is important to mention here was that the leader of this project, silently and without clear negotiation, started to withdraw from the group work. This became an additional source of tension and anxiety in the group. Because of his high position in the university formal hierarchy, he symbolised the source of trust that guarantees that these additional efforts would be recognised and valued by top management and that this role would be really implemented in the university structure. They soon learned that he was engaged in another project related to business and felt abandoned. As a result of this, my further efforts to engage the group in more active participation in thinking and writing the procedures that had to be given to the management as recommendations for standards, failed. Only three of the ten teachers agreed to participate in some of the initial activities. Others took the position that this was work that had to be performed by the project team, accepting my invitation for participation not as a way to be included in a decision making for these role regulations, but as a way to be abused again by the university. The situation was even more complicated, as most of these arguments were not communicated to me directly during the group work. I didn't learn about this kind of positions until the end of the tutoring project when I decided to conduct individual interviews with some of the participants in order to collect their personal experiences from our work together and their suggestions for further implementation of tutoring at the university.

The project ended with the collection of student and teacher feedback, where the problems described above were shared. The results were submitted to management. A final conference to present the results from the project was planned, but it never happened. The

participants waited for some feedback from the top but it didn't come. The only positive thing was, that after a year the tutor's role was included in the strategic plan of the university. However it was not clear how exactly it would happen.

The main conclusion made from this intervention is that the issue of control and misrecognition of academic staff expertise still exists as part of the university culture. It resulted in the development of relationships of distrust between staff, the belief that their efforts were not valued and that the people with power at the organisation did not care about them.

Another conclusion is related to the difficult task that teachers were confronted with: not only to learn new knowledge that puts them in a low power role, but also being challenged to change some of their initial attitudes and beliefs about the students and about their role in the development of young people. This kind of personal vulnerability, when provoked in an environment that was generally accepted as abusive, competing and devaluating by the participants, additionally demobilised them and made them less motivated. The project team was not able to contain those kinds of feelings, as it suffered from the same lack of recognition and fear of severe competition and control. All efforts for the liberalisation of the university environment actually provoked painful feelings in the staff.

On the contrary, students reacted in a more balanced way, supporting the meaning of the role and validating their needs to have such figures of support and guidance in the university. At the same time they were not afraid to share their dissatisfaction with some of their encounters or to give very practical advice for the tutor's role performance.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Exploration of the Process of Organisational Change**

*„It is one thing to want to do something, another to be able to do something,  
and only third and fourth thing - to really do it.”  
(From Nikolai Haitov’s tale “Manly Times”)*

This chapter provides an overview of the process of exploration of the organisational change undertaken in the university setting through four interconnected interventions in the organisational culture with the aim to liberalize the relationships between its members.

In *Part 1 - Research Methodology Planned and Performed* the steps through which the research methodology was chosen and later performed are described. It starts with the story of the initial efforts for application of action research methodology to the process of certain organisational change. These first steps are followed by discussion about different models of the action research cycle and how some of their components have been used when describing the case with its four interventions as presented in Chapter 1. Later on, the methodology used for data collection and implementation is presented in regard to the introduction of the action research approach. Comments are made on the risks that occurred during the implementation of this research.

In *Part 2 - In the Search for Coherence* the issues that arose during the study from an epistemological and from a methodological point of view are addressed. Special emphasis is given to the issues of value driven research approach and the risks that it creates for indoctrination and control; the principles of participation and reflection as an effort to overcome the partiality of the positions are commented on, as are the opportunities for combining of the epistemologies of realism and social constructionism in general and in the current study.

#### **2.1. Research Methodology Planned and Performed**



This part of the chapter illuminates the practical reasons for the initiation of this study. It concerns my discovery early in the process of first intervention implementation of a certain discrepancy between the chosen action research methodology and the way in which it was actually applied. This finding provoked me to develop a presumption that there is something in the organisational culture of relationships in the university that prevents the systematic performance of the chosen research methodology, particularly in its collaborative part.

As a response to this issue, more systematic steps in the implementation of the action research methodology were undertaken. An additional effort for a better understanding and following of the principles of this type of study in this concrete work on each of the four interventions is made. As a result, the threats to the action research methodology that occurred during the process of change were thoroughly studied. Part of the knowledge developed in this way was then applied to the refinement of the interventions or was made an object of deeper exploration.

### **2.1.1. My Decision to Undertake this Study**

One of the main characteristics of a professionally developed research is the coherence and precision of the relations between the chosen epistemology, the aims of the study, the methods to reach these aims, and the theory through which the results will be interpreted (Anastas, 2001).

Following such statement I will try to present here the first challenge that emerged in the process of exploration of the topic of a socially engaged university. The challenge was related to the fact that the method of action research which was the inspirations for the four interventions at NBU had been initially assigned by the director of the Institute. He suggested this method as the most appropriate way for studying the change and its name became very frequently mentioned by most of my colleagues as a mantra when discussing some research or practical projects.

The problem was that none of us had any firsthand experience with this method of study. The agreement amongst the team in regard to the first intervention in implementing this method came from the authority of the leader rather than from a critical exploration and discussion between the team members and other participants in the project.

The alleged value of this approach was that it introduced more democratic relationships in the research process as it presumed the engagement of participants in a discussion and recognised the different positions that they could take in the process of thinking and making decisions together. Another value which I identified in this method was that it fits very well with the task of my study, in that the very rhetoric and philosophy of action research demonstrates larger social engagement of scientific interests with the more immediate tasks for social and individual change. Since my Institute had worked on many projects aimed at mental health system reform, social welfare and education it became very reasonable to see this method as consistent with the research task. The action research paradigm helps to shift the traditional way of doing science by emphasising the importance of the value of individual choice and listening to different voices in society.

Orthodox scientific method aims quite systematically and intentionally to exclude the subjects from all choice about the subject-matter of the research, all consideration of appropriate inquiry method, all the creative thinking that goes into making sense; and it therefore excludes from the field of research just that aspect of being – self-determination – which particularly characterizes the subjects as persons.

In doing so these inquiry methods are not only epistemologically unsound, but contribute also to the impoverishment of our world, and to the quite frightening consequences of the mechanical world-view, which in the end treats all living beings as things to be manipulated and exploited. (Reason, 1988, p.4)

Participation as basic characteristic of this paradigm has appealed to the team of the Institute and to the PDC members when creating LAP meaning and action plan. It corresponded to the reformative values accepted by the university as a whole – freedom of the individual and his/her voice. The similarities between the direction of change and the approach applied to perform it became the main argument for the acceptance of this method of study in all four projects. It was considered a hallmark of the Institute.

Therefore, the initial arguments which shaped the choice of research methodology had an entirely emotional character: a) trust to the authority's expertise and b) a feeling of belonging to similar values and ideology concerning the process of change. However during the first intervention I found myself in the difficult situation of not seeing the real application of this method behind its declaration, or at least not in the way in which I expected it to be applied. On one hand, there was no discussion about the specific technologies and roles in this research i.e. there was no structure, on the other, most of the

time the spirit of discussions did not demonstrate the common reflection and free sharing of positions. Participation was either missed or was sabotaged in the cases when special efforts were made for collaborative thinking. The usual situation was that only the formal leaders gave their explanation to the process and suggestions for further action.

To develop meaningful participative practice, organisations have to establish the infrastructure that will promote and support new ways of working. This means becoming learning organisations that experiment and reflect on practice. Change needs to happen at staff levels, at senior levels, and in policy. (Kirby et al., 2003, p.7)

The four projects for change were accepted as structures in which the new culture of relationships could be established. However the threats that occurred during the implementation of this new culture of learning from experience were not approached in a way that would allow their exploration and understanding as part of the long process of change.

Meaningful participation is a process, not simply the application of isolated participation activities or events. This requires developing new child/youth-adult relationships: rooted in mutual trust and respect and engaging in child-adult dialogue. (Kirby et al., 2003, p.7)

The failures in the establishment of opportunities for participation, both in the process of model-implementation, as well as in its exploration, challenged my curiosity to start learning more about this method and the issues of collaboration through the topic of university social engagement. In relation to these issues I tried to answer the question ‘Is it possible to study non-participative organisational cultures with participatory research methods?’ This question was asked by one of my colleagues who considered that all efforts to create such culture are doomed to fail. Another one of my colleagues was trying to introduce the action research approach in its form of first person inquiry in which issues of personal development or professional change are addressed on individual level. I decided to stand behind such kind of decisions and to try to establish a more complex and integrative view of the situation by combining action research with the psycho-social studies approach.

Thus I decided to study this issue and my efforts to work on it more thoroughly when entering the PhD programme of the Center for Psycho-Social Studies at the University of the West of England in Bristol. What I needed was an environment comprised of people who were experienced in these methods of study and whose cultural background had well-

established traditions in practicing democratic debates, thus possessing the capacity of thinking and discussing the issues, as well as attributing them with different or new meanings. According to Kirby, action research methodology is seriously challenged when applied to organisational transformation. This includes ‘profound changes in an institution’s prevailing attitudes, behaviours, norms, skills and procedures.’(Kirby et al., 2003, p.7)

The difficulty of engaging with such a task and the contradictory feelings experienced by me when making such a decision can be better demonstrated by a dream that I had while I was writing the methodological chapter and was trying to analyze the reasons for choosing to conduct this study. Here is the vignette of the dream and the reflections on it in relation to the methodology.

I dreamed that I was going to some kind of a public event (conference or training) with a big group of colleagues of mine. The impression was that the event was held in London.

The group passed through the main entrance of a huge building but I somehow couldn’t follow the group fast enough. I started shouting to the people behind me to wait for me but they continued to recede.

I wondered how all these people knew where to go. There were no instructions or people to inform us where the event will happen. The impression was that it is only me who has not acquired the necessary information.

I walked through the corridors and finally decided to catch the underground train hoping that the group is still on its way to the event and I will catch up with them. The main feelings in this situation were such of inconsistency, lack of meaning and direction. Nevertheless I felt I could manage to orient myself and was focused on the pragmatic task to reach the place of the event.

Finally my train stopped next to the bus with the group. The doors opened and I just had to jump into the bus. But this was dangerous since both vehicles were moving slowly forward and I had to find the right moment for jumping in order not to be crushed. I did this successfully and all of us together arrived at the place of the event.

Then someone informed us that the trainer is not there and perhaps will not come at all. The group rushed again in some direction and I lost them again. I caught the train as I did before but while I was travelling I changed my mind and asked myself: “Why am I doing the same thing? I couldn’t expect to find the group again as London underground has many lines. It is unrealistic to find them again.” I decided to stay in the train and to surprise myself by seeing where this train will take me.

Immediately after taking this decision I found myself staying in a comfortable and informal room with some other people and we engaged in a very meaningful discussion about something together. (Reflective diary)

There are several things that this dream expresses concerning the research process:

- a) First of all it expressed my difficulty in orienting the direction and the meaning of the initiative (action research and LAP) as there was not enough practical knowledge on how to apply these models.
- b) At the same time my colleagues behaved as if they knew the method and how to apply it in the project. It seemed as if I was the only one who was not familiar with the new method of study. As a new member of the organisation I accepted this situation as being normal and tried to learn more in order to catch up with the others. However, I had gradually realised that no one has been clear enough about how to work according to the action research principles as they were deeply unrepresentative of the scientific tradition in Bulgaria. There was some propositional knowledge but practically all of us started from the same position of not having experience and skills on how to apply it in this specific project.
- c) The dream represented also the very nature of the action research process with its lack of clear and predefined direction, lack of authority in the form of controlled environment, and lack of experts to show us the right direction. Even though there is a cycle of learning – action – reflection, the steps actually follow the natural process in a very pragmatic way.

The dream also symbolises my initial effort to stay in the common track, to be with the group, to behave like the others. But this put me in danger. It gradually became evident that it is impossible to stay in both vehicles at the same time, i.e., it was not possible to try to learn more about the application of the method (in my dream I was travelling to a learning event) and at the same time to stay with the status quo. Both in dream and in reality I decided to travel in a different direction. The underground goes under the surface of things and my purpose when initiating this project was to make sense of the failures of working together and engaging with the process of humanisation of the relationships between us in the organisation. This was perhaps the biggest dilemma during the implementation of this study, as to staying with the others sometimes meant to stay with conformity, with the status quo, with the old way of doing research.

- d) My choice was to follow my curiosity and to explore other opportunities and resources in order to learn new things. When I attended the PhD programme at UWE I found another group of people with whom I was able to express my position and to discuss

the issues raised in my study in a comfortable enough situation without putting myself in danger of being “crushed”.

From the very beginning the problem was that I felt alone in my efforts to apply some of the action research principles in the first project. Nevertheless, I continued to do this and made an additional effort to share some experiences with some of the participants in the first and second interventions, as well as to engage with active participation most of the participants in the third and fourth interventions. When sharing some of my thoughts and experiences in informal conversations with colleagues of mine I found that many of them wanted to travel with the underground train too – they wanted to try new methods of study, to make their own mistakes. This discovery supported me in my further efforts to broaden the opportunities for mutual collaboration and thinking in the university.

### **2.1.2. An Action Research Model of Case Description**

While I was searching for the model of case description in this study I decided to use the research cycle of an action research approach. The reason for this was the fact that the method of action research has been chosen as a framework for studying the process of implementation of all four interventions described in Chapter 1.

As a result, each of the interventions was organised as a separate project for implementation of certain changes in the structure and culture of the university or in specific parts following the principles of action research. I accepted this way of thinking and tried from the very beginning to think of my role as a researcher and a participant in each of the four projects as well as my relationships with other people in the organisation through the principles of the action research process. The choice of action research as a basic methodology of study also defined the technologies that I used to collect and analyze data. That is why I decided to follow the framework of the action research cycle when examining the performance of the four liberalisation projects liberalisation at the NBU. (see Chapter 1)

The structure used here for the case description builds on three main models of the phases through which action research methodology is implemented in the practice of organisational and social research.

The first model used is that of the effort made by John Heron (1971, 1981a) to organise the action research cycle in its three components of planning – action – reflection. He subordinated the model to the process of learning and particularly to the division of knowing in three forms: “propositional knowing, or knowledge *about*”, “practical knowing, or knowledge *how to*”, and “experiential knowing, or knowledge *by encounter*”. Thus, according to him, each stage of the cycle of co-operative inquiry represents acquisition of one of the three specific ways of learning about the world.

This kind of division helped me in defining the components of case description as it fitted well with the way in which the process of change was thought about and followed up in the projects in my case. This division of knowledge helped me also to analyze the specific research methodology that I used during and after the end of the projects implementation. According to this model, the knowledge reached in different phases is different in its nature and therefore will require different methods of acquisition.

In its first stage each of the studied interventions began with clear definition of the problem and with a hypothesis based on concrete theory about the aims and the methods through which the change would be studied. That is why the description of each intervention done in Chapter 1, section 1.3. *Case Description* starts with paragraph concerning the *Issues or Problems* as they have been formulated by the initiators of the concrete project for change. The next part of the description offers discussion of the *Main action hypothesis* that explains the meaning of this problem according to specific theoretical framework.

I decided to introduce the concept of an ‘action hypothesis’ for the assumptions made in the beginning of the change process when, on the basis of some preliminary experience and theoretical or propositional knowledge, ideas are developed for further action. This concept differs from the positivistic notion of hypothesis as it is performed in real and complex situations but not under controlled conditions. It is made from a value driven position of a certain subjectivity and is pragmatically oriented to serve the concrete situation of change but not the generalisation of specific knowledge. This is this action component that it acquires in comparison to the traditional experimental hypothesis. Its purpose is not to verify cause – effect relationship but to use propositional knowledge in order to make some difference in reality with full consciousness of the imperfection of the propositions made.

This way, the whole uncertainty of the environment in which real social or organisational changes occur are allowed to become part of the study.

Another fruitful idea in Heron's model is the distinction that he makes of the two roles that each participant in the action research undertakes, these of co-researcher and co-subject, as far as both researcher and participants share both roles in the process of study. What is emphasized here by such distinction is the difficult position that person has in an action research model of relationship when being simultaneously in two different roles. We can assume that such a situation would create a lot of opportunities but also a lot of tension between the roles.

Heron's thinking also allows for a distinction to be made during the process of an organisational change between the influences created by the role itself and its nature as opposed to the effects created by the concrete personalities entering this role with their subjective stories and specific characteristics. In my case this kind of distinction facilitated the analysis not only in terms of the roles that were constructed and performed during the process of change. It also helped in the study of some of the participants' personal stories that gave specific interpretation, for instance, of the meaning of the role of the actively engaged citizen in Bulgaria. It was very useful also to explore in a self-reflexive way my role in organisational change and how the other people interpreted it in comparison to my personal interpretation based on my social and emotional experience, and also how these two sets of meaning, the socially constructed one and subjectively experienced one, related to each other in any given situation.

However in his effort to stick to his initial thesis that each phase in the co-operative inquiry leads to the acquisition of a certain type of knowledge, Heron formally divides the action phase in two separate stages: the research and performance activities. In the research stage or stage 2 of an action research cycle, researchers follow very strict procedures of applying certain behaviors, noting the outcomes and recording their discoveries (Reason, 1988, p.5). This activity is very conscious compared to the stage 3 where "co-researchers become fully immersed in their practice in such a way that "they may actually forget that they are taking place in an inquiry" (ibid., p.5). In this way, Heron describes the specific modes of acquisition of practical and experiential knowledge.



In the reality of action research, as was in my study, the two activities are performed together and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish if some activity belongs to the implementation of the research or the change. What I also think is that, in opposition to this division of knowledge between the phases during the action phase, practical as well as experiential knowledge can be acquired. Another important thing that I discovered during the analysis of the data was that research activities are also legitimate material to be studied especially when threats to the planned activities for studying the change process occurred, as was in my case.

Before describing the action phase, I introduced one more stage as part of the planning phase related to the “operationalisation” of the action hypothesis. For the purposes of sticking to the case description structure I named it “*Tasks*”. In this stage of the planning process the action hypothesis of the direction of change is divided and organized in a system of concrete steps and activities. Also, the forms of work are chosen and the participants and their roles in the change process are agreed upon in each of the activities. Operationalisation concerns both types of activities in the action research, i.e., implementation and exploration activities. This kind of the case description stage allows for a comparison later on during the phase of reflection between the planned and the actual implemented activities.

The next step in my description, formulated as “*Realization*”, includes the story of both performance of activities and their simultaneous exploration. I decided to divide the reflection phase in to two stages, according to the level of knowledge acquired during the reflection process. The first level of exploration is done during the performance of a certain activity for change. This kind of exploration leads to an initial understanding of the process. It is comparable with single-loop learning described by Argyris and Schön (1978). The main learning here occurs in the framework of a defined hypothesis and strategy for action. The strategy could be changed but its underlying assumption about the meaning of the problem and the direction of change remains the same. For instance, when introducing VCC our team tried to keep the initial design of service learning as a model for liberalisation and social engagement of the university. The changes that we made during the implementation remained in conformity with the philosophy of this model. Thus, in this model students had to have tutors from the services, though, during the individual meetings with service managers we recognised that they were not very clear about such a role in

relation to young people. Even though, we were not very eager to invest in such effort we decided that the members of our team would assume the role of individual tutors.

Single-loop learning is the most common style of learning as it focuses on problem-solving as a means to improve the existing system of thinking and working in the organisation, including the project of change itself as a temporary organisation. During this type of exploration some initial data were collected and explanations made regarding the process and its related challenges, the main themes and tendencies that led to the need for further and more complex exploration were identified.

In my case, some of the most thorough exploration of the process happened at the end of a cycle of action when some of the aims have been reached, serious difficulties have been experienced, and there was a need for special effort to be made for reconsidering the aims or the direction of the action research project as a whole. This kind of exploration could be compared to double-loop learning, as it aims not just to fix the obstacles during the implementation process, but it rather involves questioning the underlying assumptions, designing new values or assumptions and engaging in a process of reconsidering, reframing, reconnecting and reflecting in a more systematic way. In the above given example with the VCC this kind of learning occurred when the efforts to keep up the model had failed and a lot of evidence from different participants' experiences showed that there were dynamics in the relationships in the project that prevented its smooth application. Some thorough exploration of the situations and experiences were done in order to identify where the obstacles lay – in the design of the course, in the structure of the roles and principles on which the model was implemented, in the context in which it was realised or in the existing culture of relationships established in the university and the project in particular. As a result of this analysis a decision was taken to change the focus of efforts from model implementation to students' interests and ideas for social change.

In Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning this double-loop learning leads to paradigm shift, emergent knowledge, and new understanding. This new knowledge can then be used for a new action hypothesis formulation and thus the cycle of action research continues.

Action science uses a metaphor called the 'ladder of inference' as a means of addressing the problem of testing (Argyris et al., 1985: 57) This metaphor posits that people construct their reality images through a series of inferences made from observed

phenomena. This construction process begins at the bottom of the ladder with the most concrete, directly observable data (e.g. the words that were actually spoken) and a literal interpretation of the data. It then builds to ever-increasing levels of abstraction such as attributions and evaluations, and finally theories of these phenomena. (Friedman, 2001, p.161a)

In my case this second type of more thorough exploration is included in Chapter 1, Section 1.3. *Case Description* under the heading *General conclusions*. Such learning occurred first of all at the end of each cycle of activities and at the end of each of the interventions and secondly at the end of all activities related to this study during the data analysis process. So, we can conclude that the reflection on experience in my study occurred in two phases: during the experience and after it.

One important feature of my study concerns the inclusion of positive experience as part of the study of the change process. Usually, action research is used to identify obstacles and to resolve them properly in the course of change. This makes implementation more effective. To this notion of action research as a problem solving tool, Tony Ghaye (2008) adds the opportunity to learn from the positive experience too. He describes this model of thinking about the philosophy and methodology of action research as a “participative and appreciative action research’ or PAAR. In this way he uses the developments of positive psychology in order to reach new knowledge.

Following such ideas I tried to capture the positive experiences of participants during the second and fourth interventions. The data gathered this way helped me to present a more complex, but at the same time, more balanced picture of the situation. It was useful during the data analysis process when searching for opportunities for future developments in the organisational and social culture concerning the increase of social engagement. That is why at the end of each analytic chapter I make some suggestions about further efforts to overcome the difficulties identified from this experience. However it is important to mention here that the collection of positive experience is not part of the research tradition in Bulgaria and I made an additional effort to include it in the study process, as well as, in the activities.

Another important model used in the case description structure was that of John Rowan (1981). The main feature of this model is that it underlines the intuitive and subjective nature of the action research methodology. According to Rowan, there are no precise

criteria for the beginning and the end of a certain phase of the action research process. The only criterion used is the researcher with his/her knowledge and senses. The action and reflection process is described here as an exclusively personal and emotional act. It is a process that includes not only the rational but also the emotional side of the researcher.

I start by resting in my own experience. But at certain point my existing practice seems to be inadequate – I become dissatisfied. So the first negation arises; I turn *against* old ways of doing things. A real problem has arisen. ... So I move into the phase of needing new thinking. (Rowan, 1981, cited in Reason, 1988, p.7)

Rowan depicts very ingeniously the constant shift of researcher between inward and outward activities demonstrating in this way the contradictory and intricate nature of the choices made during the action research. The choice is shaped both by the external factors of the environment as well as by the internal emotional experience of the researcher. For each of the research phases Rowan defines the main sources of internal conflicts with which the researcher is faced in his effort on one hand, to achieve balance and control over the uncertainty of the situation of change and on the other, to fully understand the situation.

This emphasis on the subjective character of the data, as well as, on the validity of the emotional experience as legitimate research data is a very important feature of the action research epistemology and methodology in comparison to the positivistic one. An important part of the reflection is focused on the emotional experiences of the participants and the values by which their activities are driven. Similarly an important part of my study is focused on this kind of data collection and analysis. Rowan's stand on the subjective side of the action research creates common ground for the practical combination of its methodology with this of the psycho-social studies approach despite of some epistemological differences between them. Psycho-social studies are based on the psychodynamic understanding of human emotional and social functioning in groups and organisations.

The third important idea of Rowan's model is the introduction at the end of each cycle of a stage in which the acquired knowledge is shared with the other participants or external people and in this way became integrated into a broader community. Rowan also describes this stage called 'communication' as a stage in which people are able to identify with new knowledge and to use it in their further thinking and acting.

But at a certain point, after I have been immersed in this for some time, I begin to get dissatisfied. Analysis is *not* enough. I must start telling people what it means and how I have understood what we have been through. What have we actually accomplished or achieved? Can I explain it to somebody else? Can others learn from our mistakes and false starts? From our successes? I or others may write papers, give lectures, go to conferences, go on the radio, on television, in the popular press, or whatever, either individually or collectively. COMMUNICATION is again an *outward* movement. This is the stage where we have digested what has happened, and made it part of our new accommodation to reality. Our mental structures become richer and more complex. Our consciousness expands. I communicate with myself about what it has all meant for me. (Rowan, 1981, cited in Reason, 1988, p.8)

This aspect of action research is related to the individual or group's capacity to learn from theirs or other people's experiences. This stage is very important for analysis in this study. That is why I included it as a separate part of the case description structure by calling it *General conclusions and their communication*.

The third source of ideas for the case description I have drawn from the concept of 'action science' elaborated by V. J. Friedman (2001). His view on building 'theories in practice' (Friedman, 2001, p.161a) corresponds with my thinking about the action hypothesis as a specific type of hypothesis that supports the process of learning from experience and the construction of valid knowledge in a way that differs from the positivistic way of hypothesising. In contrast to the hypotheses based on the pre-existing explicit scientific knowledge about the phenomenon, the hypotheses in action research combine the paradigmatic knowledge with the 'tacit knowledge' or the knowledge drawn from direct experience.

The objective of action science is to make these tacit theories explicit so that they can be critically examined and changed. (Friedman, 2001, p.161a)

However the knowledge from experience is not represented as a universally valid and unified version of reality but exists in different often contradictory versions about it as constructed by the points of view of the particular participants extracted from their personal stories. Therefore an action hypothesis could consist of different and sometimes contradictory assumptions about reality creating this way more rich and complex picture of this reality.

Drawing on the concept of ‘theories of action’ developed by Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978), Friedman emphasises their unconscious nature and the importance of their rationalisation. The process of reflection helps to transform this tacit knowledge into an explicit one.

Thus, action science aims at helping practitioners infer theories of action from observed behaviour so they can be critically examined and changed.

A theory in practice consists of a set of interrelated theories of action for dealing with problems typical to practice situations. The work of action science involves constructing and testing theories in practice by inquiring into the actors’ behaviour and the reasoning behind it. (Friedman, 2001, p.161a)

The main questions included by Friedman in the process of action exploration coincide to a great extent with the components drawn by me when describing the process of change which in my case entails the following: participants’ hypotheses which demonstrate their explanation of the situation; inclusion in these hypotheses of an aim for change; strategic tasks for its implementation; what strategies have been realised in practice; results achieved and further hypotheses about the discrepancy between the planned and the performed action.

The structure of the case description has therefore been developed as a result of the comparison between the above mentioned models and my personal experience from the application of action research principles. It includes the following parts: Issues, Main action hypothesis, Tasks, Realization, General conclusions and their communication (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3.). If during one intervention two or more cycles of learning – action – reflection occur, each cycle is described by using the same framework.

### **2.1.3. Implementation of the Research Methodology**

There are many variations in action research methods in relation to research practice. Reason divides them according to the priority that one or another version gives to some of the following research aims: a) knowledge creation, b) practical implementation of change or c) the establishment of participatory and therefore empowering relationships in the organisation.

Another more unifying version of action research is presented by Cassell and Johnson (2006) which is based on epistemological shifts in research, starting from a positivistic

view about knowledge, and ending with forms of action research that apply constructivist ideas of reality, knowledge and learning. These authors interpret action research as a broader frame that could meet the aims of different epistemologies. According to this categorisation there are five different approaches to action research practice: experimental, inductive, participatory action research, participatory and deconstructive (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1. *Realism and the Issues of Value Driven Study*)

What actually consolidates these epistemologies under the frame of action research is the moral value of serving societal needs and offering practical decisions to problems i.e. the value of the social engagement of science. This was the initial idea from which historically this methodology was developed by Kurt Lewin (1946) when applying theories of social psychology and its experimental logic to the resolution of practical social problems out of the controlled laboratory environment.

Rapoport (1970) describes the field of action research as developing after the Second World War in four streams, all of which are characterised by the specific combinations of fields of knowledge and methods used as well as by the specific focus of study on particular social areas or social issues. He divides them into Tavistock, Operational Research, Group Dynamics, and an Applied Anthropology stream. Two of these streams seem to be more relevant for the aims of this study.

The Tavistock stream is important first of all with its “attempt to integrate medical and social science disciplines for the solution of social as distinct from individual problems” (Rapoport, p.500). It uses psychoanalytic ideas and methods of work with individual clients in the process of study exploring the relationship between researcher and participants. Thus to the area of study is applied the idea that:

The contract with the client has always been based on an understanding that the effort would be a collaborative one to help work through a problematic situation. Often the presenting problem masked a deeper underlying problem and a good deal of the early work was based on analogy to the psychoanalytic situation, with concern for the effects on the client of confrontation with the researcher’s perception of what was ‘really’ going on.” (Rapoport, p.502-503)

In the second and third Tavistock generations this position was refined by seeing the relationship between researcher and participant in a more complex open-system way in

which both of them affect each other's thoughts and behaviour and are part of larger system dynamics too.

Secondly, the Tavistock stream is valuable for me with its main aim being "to get collaboration from members of an organisation while attempting to help them solve their own problems" (ibid.). The main effort in my research was also to encourage participants' collaboration in the process of change. The difficulty of getting such participation became one of the basic focuses of exploration.

Influenced by Tavistock stream, Group Dynamics emphasises is on the areas of leadership, power, and relations in groups. The difference between these two streams in using psychoanalytic and social science knowledge and methodology is that the former focuses on the relations between individual and larger social systems when latter is more interested in individual and small group relations (Rapoport, p.501). Both of these focuses are present as a topic of exploration in my study as I explored the unconscious dynamics that occurred at the individual and group level in the teams running the four interventions whilst also developing an understanding about the processes of change in the organisation which in turn took into account the broader political and social context of higher education and the social transformation of Bulgarian society at the time.

There are two other relevant ideas coming from the representatives of Applied Research stream. One of them concerns "single and double loop learning", as developed by Argyris and Schön in 1978. This describes the process of reflexive learning as existing in two different modalities of reflecting on personal experience in a process of action for change. During the single loop learning, difficulties which occurred and questions that were raised in the process of implementation were resolved using the developing frame of ideas, strategies and methods of work. In the double loop learning cycle, barriers to change implementation engage people in looking for new solutions from the established frame thus creating new strategies and methods of work. In my study I used double loop learning during the second intervention when searching for a design for the Volunteering in the Community course which was different from the predefined model of service learning and which would fit better with the existing resources in the NGO sector and with the needs and capacities of students.



The second relevant idea comes from Schön's (1991) work on the link between experience and learning when trying to identify the characteristics of a mature professional (Stapley, p.21). The two concepts relevant here are these of "reflection on action" that happens after the event and "reflection in action" that happens as the event unfolds. My study combines individual and group activities to learn in both ways.

Thinking about the way in which the research methodology was introduced and realised during the first intervention, it seems clear that its meaning was closer to the traditions of the 'collaborative inquiry' or 'action science' based on Bill Torbet's desire 'to establish an action science useful to the practitioner at the moment of action, rather than a reflective science about action' (Reason, 1988, p.2). The central priority in this kind of interpretation of action research method was to follow the pragmatic purpose of implementing certain change in the organisation rather than to explore in a deeper way the obstacles that prevented some of the activities. In the intervention concerning LAP there was a PDC that organised the conceptual and practical framework of the project and gradually invited teachers from inside and outside the university to follow it. There were discussions with them about the developed meaning and structure of the LAP and further collaborative creation of the course materials, but still the general frame of values and principles of work were produced by the PDC. The role of the leadership in such kind of study was very important, especially in its capacity to inspire other people for its cause. Dialogue and participation here played a subordinated role in relation to a set of predefined values and priorities.

The same relationship was established during the first stage of the second intervention concerning VCC where a ready-made model of service learning course was implemented. Regarding the third intervention for the development of entrepreneurial and caring university, I initiated it as a collaborative undertaking of different people and groups at the university. Eventually the leadership of this programme eliminated the few spontaneous and authentic decisions of some people to participate in it. They were seen as attacks on the meaning and implementation of the programme.

This was similar to the situation during the implementation of forth intervention. My initial idea and activities for broader inclusion of people from the university who appreciated tutoring relations between teachers and students and practiced some forms of such relations

were canceled by the top management in favour of more hierarchical structure of the roles in this intervention. An expert position was applied that restricted the opportunities for action research to occur.

As a result of such dynamics in the process of implementation of the four interventions neither the development of new knowledge derived from the experience gained, nor the co-creation of the new practice has been part of the research priorities set. In the beginning of interventions one, two and four a preliminary search was done and the existing models of academic programmes or courses were chosen. The task was to find the right form through which the model introduced by the group of experts could be applied with the collaboration of a group of selected teachers. Using the distinction introduced by Maxwell (1984) between 'philosophy of knowledge' which "is primarily concerned with intellectual problems of knowledge and technology" and 'philosophy of wisdom', "in which the primary attention is given to the promotion of human welfare" (Maxwell, 1984, in Reason, 1988, p.3) we can say that in the beginning of these interventions study served the second philosophy following the pragmatic task of introducing a concrete model of liberal education to the university environment with the intention of improving the welfare of its members.

One risk with such a focus of study, as I identified during the first intervention, was that of indoctrination of the participants in the new model by not giving them an opportunity to critically think about it.

Experience so far shows that such groups are usually initiated by one or two people who have an idea and passion for an inquiry project and wish to recruit others to join it. ... Often these initiators are committed both to the issue and to the method of inquiry. ... This kind of personal commitment is typical, and sets up the possibility for tension between initiators and the group: if one person strongly wants to pursue a particular line, can they genuinely co-operate with a larger group of people? (Reason, 1988, p.20)

Furthermore, we can say that even starting from an action research position of expert group that includes followers of its predefined ideas for change actually in the process of their implementation these interventions turned into an ideology, serving the needs of power and control of the expert group. This turn prevented any opportunity for real learning and organisational development. As a result of this all four interventions ended with the

destruction of the initial good achievements, the loss of real meaning for the followers and the slow and quiet extinction of these initiatives.

In order to overcome such shifts in the implementation of action research methodology I undertook activities promoting more a participative and reflective approach in the process of study and change. My aim was that different voices could be heard and new and more complex understanding be received.

This different model of participative and reflective research methodology was present most strongly in the second stage of the intervention concerning the development of a context-appropriate design for the VCC and its further implementation and refinement. As both co-researcher and participant I facilitated, explored and integrated different even very critical points of view towards the initial service learning model. On this basis I was able to make double loop learning during the second intervention when, despite initially looking for new ways of introducing one predefined model, I eventually decided to change it. I shifted the focus of my activities towards the creation of a model that fitted more with the students' interests and needs, while at the same time kept the general values and aims with which the VCC had been created. Reason (1988) defines this kind of focus in action research as 'participatory research', in this way emphasising the preference for the establishment of dialogue between researchers and people from the field 'in order to discover and realise the practical and cultural needs of those people'. He believes that 'any problems of initiation, ownership, and power can be resolved through authentic negotiation and confrontation' (p.20-21). Reason also recommends the inclusion of research supervisors, colleagues or even friends who are able to facilitate reflection by the project's leadership and participants on the issues of ownership and power.

The important point here is to be sure that the project the initiator wants to do is one that makes sense to potential group members; and to be careful that any differences in power or status deriving from organisational or social position do not make it impossible to negotiate an open contract. ... But if there is no such possibility of a shared inquiry task, then the group will have been set up on a phony basis, and the possibilities of co-operation remote. (Reason, 1988, p.21)

Basic signs of participatory and reflective inquiry during the VCC implementation were:

a) inclusion of students in the course development team;

- b) discussions with the students that I initiated in situations of crisis, conflicts and failure of their performance;
- c) collection of feedbacks at the end of each course performance;
- d) introduction of reflective tools and approaches such as reflective diary, reflective essay, peer consultation, artistic activities etc.;
- e) sharing the knowledge gathered during the course with other teachers in the LAP.

Taken alone, and in comparison with the first version of action research which works with the predefined model developed by a group of experts, such effort for increased participation and co-creation of meaning and values and challenged the hierarchy and the authoritarian culture of organisations in Bulgaria. For example, when I offered a more participatory and dialogical way of work in the fourth intervention related to the establishment of informal tutoring relationships in the university, once again the more controlled version was preferred to this role implementation by the management. I even felt that my suggestions for a more inclusive way of working together were interpreted as naïve in that a) it is not necessary to “discover America” again when well described models of work are already available and we could just critically apply them to the reality of the university, and b) people were not aware of this new thinking and would engage in endless and ineffective discussions serving only the narcissistic needs of some people. I partially agreed with such positions but was afraid that the well-known pattern of formal engagement with the tasks would be enacted once again.

Even though there was a difference between the two versions of action research, based on the priorities that they give to certain type of results (new knowledge, practical change or increased participation), they were represented differently in each of the four interventions. As we have already mentioned, the emphasis on the practical model of implementation was the priority for the first, second and fourth interventions. At the same time, the increase in opportunities for dialogue and co-creation was the focus that I first started to introduce while I was refining the concept of VCC during the second intervention. This was also true in the most of time of the third intervention and partially during the fourth one. As a whole this focus was present in the spaces in which I had some authority to lead the activities.

This shift of focus created some new challenges in relation to models of implementation but it brought new opportunities for dialogue as well as for confrontations from which it

became possible to learn more about the way in which university culture relates to the task of university social engagement.

The tensions created by the implementation of action research methodology and the notion of participation into the existing culture created the need to explore the complexity of the implementation process and the failures in it in a more thorough way. It brought me further to an epistemological dilemma - choosing between realism and constructivism (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1. *Realism and the Issues of Value Driven Study*) or searching for a fruitful combination between the methodologies which are built on them.

## **2.2. In Search for Coherence**

In this second part special attention will be paid to some of the key issues concerning action research methodology implementation. First of all the challenges of applying a realist epistemology in a specific university culture will be discussed by focusing on such methodological areas as value-driven study, participation and power relations. Later on, the efforts made to overcome such threats to the principles of action research when implementing a constructivist stance in the process of knowledge development will be discussed. The opportunities for a meaningful balance between realism and constructivism on the topic of university liberalisation and social engagement will be presented.

When examining closely the method of action research and trying to reach coherence between the nature of my research question and the research methodology used to study it, I have actually applied a combination of two epistemological frameworks, those of realism and constructivism. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter I started with the predefined frame of action research focusing on pragmatic research questions. They were organised around my effort to establish a VCC course according to the model of service learning.

However in the process of its implementation as part of LAP I discovered several challenges to the application of this research methodology that occurred when it has been applied in the existing organisational and social culture. This fact led me further to research questions whose aim was to explore and understand in a deeper way these features of the organisational culture and structure that prevented the establishment of a more

collaborative and supportive environment. This shift in the research questions required an epistemological shift in my research that served not only the pragmatic task of the implementation of certain models, but also helped me understand, in a more complex way, the processes that occurred in organisational relations in the process of change. Some of the features of constructivist thinking related to the inclusion of different voices as well as its focus on the avoidance of one predefined true version of reality as well as the capacity of language to create specific discourses through which different groups can think in a specific way about reality.

In this part of the chapter I will explain some of the reasons for such a combination of the two epistemologies and the opportunities that it offered to the knowledge creation process.

### **2.2.1. Realism and the Issues of Value Driven Study**

Action research approach offers broader frame for implementation of different epistemologies and methods of study. An overview of the opportunities for development of action research design based on positivist, realist or constructivist stand point in regard to the process of knowledge creation and its validation is presented by Cassell and Johnson (2006). They claim that “this diversity is inspired by different philosophical stances which usually remain tacit in published accounts thereby fueling ambiguity and controversy about what action research should entail in practice and as to its ‘scientific’ status” (p.783). Exploring research done for nearly seventy years in the organisational studies domain they distinguish five different types of action research based on their variation in:

- a) the aim of action research;
- b) its conception of social science;
- c) the role of the action researcher and their relations with members;
- d) the validity criteria deployed and the internal tensions that arise. (Cassell & Johnson, p.783)

The authors noted that the main three distinctive categories of action research’s philosophical basis come from different combinations of assumptions about ontology and epistemology. First combination between realist ontological and objectivist epistemological stance is accepted by positivism.

Many contemporary positivists assume that any social science researcher, provided that they follow the correct methodological procedures, which must derive from those used in the natural sciences, can neutrally collect data from an independent social reality so as to empirically test causal predictions deduced from a priory theory. (Cassell & Johnson, p.787)

Guba and Lincoln (1994) criticise such commitment to methodological monism as it imposes an observer-derived logic that neglects participants' subjective experience. Exactly the attitude towards the possibilities for admission to actors' subjective perspectives and the opportunities to create legitimate scientific knowledge from it outlines the main distinction between *erklaren* (causal explanation) represented by positivism and *verstehen* (interpretative understanding) represented by subjective epistemologies for studying social phenomena.

As a result of this evolution in thinking about the subjective nature of human experience and learning a second combination was created between ontological realism and epistemological subjectivism (Habermas, 1972, 1974).

Realism asserts that an external world exists independently of our representations of it. Representations include perceptions, thoughts, language and material images such as pictures. Realism claims that our representations are underpinned by this reality, although they are not necessarily simply accurate reflections of it, and that we can at least in principle gain knowledge about this reality. (Burr, pp.22-23)

This way realism departs from the idea of a total fit between reality and our knowledge of it as defended by positivism. Human knowledge is seen in realism as fallible thus requiring special attempts to be recognised and explored. In positivism this subjective part of the human way of learning about the world was seen as something that has to be avoided by applying special research procedures of controlling it in the name of reaching objectivity. In realism subjectivity becomes an object of study. This kind of division allows for such subjective phenomena as values, emotions, experiences and thoughts to become part of the research data. For instance Polanyi (1962) rejects the notion of the objective observer and broadens the idea of legitimate scientific knowledge introducing the concept of "tacit knowledge". In this way he "joins facts and values in a participatory mode of understanding". (Reason & Bradbury, 2001a, p. 11)

Insofar as the main aim with which action research approach was developed was to apply scientific theory to practical social problems (Lewin, 1946) through 'systematic self-

reflective scientific inquiry by practitioners to improve practice' (McKernan, 1996, p.5), the focus of research shifted from ends to means, from 'espoused theories' towards "interpretative understanding of members' 'theories-in-use', ..., to help reduce defensive routines and thereby contribute to single and double loop learning so as to reconfigure organisational decision-making" (Cassell & Johnson, p.784).

In realist paradigm different subjective points of views of researcher and participants have to be explored and shared in order to reach certain level of consensus about the direction of organisational change. That is why action research is seen by some analysts as dialogical approach opening communicative spaces in order to "promote critical consciousness which exhibits itself in political as well as practical action to promote change" (Grundy, 1987, p.154, cited in Cassell & Johnson, p.785).

This kind of emancipatory and liberating agenda in action research brings the issue of power and ideology use into the process of research and change. Some authors argue that in some cases such focus actually promotes "more effective forms of organisational control" (Cassell & Johnson, p.785) through the consultants as authority figures. Cullen (1998) sees the main contribution of action research as its ability to "open up and facilitate spaces within which alternative social and organisational paradigms could be nurtured" (Cullen, p. 1559, cited in Cassell & Johnson, p.785).

And here comes third combination of ontological and epistemological subjectivism as represented by constructivism.

In this relativistic position, reality becomes a self-referential and arbitrary output of discursive practices. ...

Postmodernism is characterised by a profound skepticism regarding the idea that language can represent reality. Rather, through this 'linguistic turn' discourses are thought to construct the objects which populate our (hyper)realities rather than describe them. The result is that knowledge, truth and reality become linguistic entities constantly open to revision for we can rhetorically produce as many realities as there are modes of describing and explaining. (Cassell & Johnson, p.788, 803)

As we mentioned in the beginning of this part Cassell and Johnson (2006) categorise action research into five different approaches depending on the combination of epistemological



and ontological views on which they are built: experimental, inductive, participatory action research, participatory and deconstructive.

1. Experimental action research is organised around the aim of bringing the gap between 'general laws' and the 'diagnosis' of specific social problems exploring phenomena in their natural context (ibid., p.790). As such attempt brings threats to strong positivistic basis of this type of action research it usually applies quasi-experimental designs. The content and the process of knowledge production are delimited to the scientist's agenda according to which hypothesis are developed and experiments to check them are created in a cyclic way.

2. Inductive action research creates another differentiation as it is based on inductive not deductive logical procedures with the aim of inductively accessing participants' cultures in their natural context (ibid., p.793). It aims for thick description of one more complex but nevertheless objective realities. That is why this type of research is called also neo-empiricist or qualitative positivist. It is seen by its critics as replacing subject-object dualism by a subject-subject dualism which retains a pivotal expert role and privileges the consciousness of the action researcher (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, cited in Cassell and Johnson, p.794). In relation to issues of validity it creates the dilemma of 'rigor or relevance'. The provision of variety of sources and the process of building and testing propositions are used to bring validity to the data produced.

3. Participatory action research is again embedded in positivist epistemology as the hierarchy of meanings is retained and knowledge is limited to the organisational elite's versions of social reality. In this action research process the "majority of organisational members are implicitly construed as passive recipients, rather than active architects, of any organisational change" (Cassell and Johnson, p.797). Nevertheless its aim is to create more a democratic research process transforming researcher's role from an expert into an enabler or facilitator of all voices to be heard.

4. Participatory research is built on a strong moral imperative to promote people's participation in a democratic research process. Using the combination of realist ontology and subjectivist epistemology it suspects any claim to epistemic authority. Its validity comes from the pragmatic criteria of 'what works' (Gustavsen, 2001, p.19) and the level of

realization of different groups' expectations. It radically questions the moral authority of the action researcher.

5. Deconstructive action research uses constructivist point of view about reality as constructed from different and contradictory points of views of the groups represented in society in order to 'produce a plurality of localised understandings' (Cassell and Johnson, p.803). Relativist perspectives allow for the collection of polyphonic data and their validity is evaluated according to the quality of the consensus established between different voices in an organisation or society.

I decided to use this kind of categorisation offered by Cassell and Johnson (2006) as it could help to present the shifts in epistemology that occurred in the process of the four interventions implementation in the university environment.

The first very important feature of my study is that it is aimed to promote certain values in the organisational life of a concrete educational institution functioning in a concrete social situation. There was declared moral position from which the research teams began when making their efforts to change some of the organisational structures and roles (see pp.32-3). It concerned the establishment and expansion of opportunities for more collaborative and caring relationships with others in a culture of transformation from authoritarian to more democratic social relations. Thus my study started with certain values that had to be implemented during the action research process. The existence of and defence of a moral position is an unavoidable part of the process of change and it has an impact on the study process as well. In the preparatory stage of first intervention for the implementation of LAP (See Chapter 1, Section 1.3.1.) the research attempts were based on a realistic approach to change. The University leadership invited all members of the university into a process of the creation of its mission and vision; then different groups of interest created several initiatives in liberalisation of the university environment; external consultants were invited to give an outside point of view on this process and later on all different streams and efforts were consolidated into a structured project for implementation of LAP.

This meant that a group of initiators from the top management of university made a systematic effort to introduce changes that were based on unpopular values in a concrete

organisational culture. For their purpose they attracted followers from different groups in the university.

The aim of inquiry is the critique and transformation of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind, by engagement in confrontation, even conflict. The criterion for progress is that over time, restitution and emancipation should occur and persist. Advocacy and activism are key concepts. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.113a)

Such a stance was established in opposition to the positivistic effort for the objectification of knowledge. According to realism and constructivism, science is not value free.

However in certain conditions realism could create serious problems in change implementation. One issue is related to the value of democratisation of the research process: could it reach a position beyond having one predefined moral position about reality usually established from an expert position? Some tensions could arise during the implementation depending on whether and the ways in which and the positions from which the direction of change was established, vulnerable groups identified, and voices of disagreement heard.

In my case three main challenges arose when following the realist paradigm of change implementation:

- a) To be able to hear some voices, especially those that disagreed with the change on offer or the way in which it was implemented.
- b) The production of partial or biased versions of the needs of different groups in the organisation by the more powerful person or group.
- c) The establishment of specific oppressive relationships in which the views of groups recognised as vulnerable are interpreted as incompetent and unable to understand what their real needs are.

Some of these tendencies have been mentioned in the case description in Chapter 1, Part 3. More concrete examples and their analysis will be offered in Chapter 6 when exploring the ways in which fear of learning poses limitations upon members' inclusion and participation.

Therefore when the project for LAP started, a process occurred that led to decrease in the previously established culture of dialogue and reflection. The established practices of learning and inclusion of all participants as witnessed for instance, by regular meetings of the PDC of LAP or of the teachers in the programme in order to create consistent curriculum, as well as the discussions with students to evaluate these courses, gradually lost their authenticity and spirit of free discussion. The action research process in this first intervention acquired more a positivistic stance becoming similar to inductive or participatory action research as described in Cassell and Johnson's categorisation (2006).

Furthermore, the aims and the model of LAP implementation turned into ideology as it served the interests and covered the positions of a small group of experts on powerful roles in the organisation and the project.

Similar characteristics also apply to:

- the initial process of implementation of the service learning model in second intervention of development of VCC;
- the limitations imposed by the top management on the broader inclusion of participants from the university in the third and fourth interventions and on the initial exploration of tutoring in the university.

These ideas and initiatives that I created in order to overcome the ideologisation of the transformative activities were replaced by models of relationships in research that defended an expert position and hierarchical order in relation to access to knowledge creation and change implementation activities.

Such relation to knowledge creation also has implications at the level of Bulgarian society in the way in which scientific evidence was collected about the value of the social changes that occurred after 1989. Serious conflict arose between the leading experts who actively promoted democratic changes in the country and academic researchers. These conflicts concerned the validity of the new knowledge established in the area of social and political transformations in society. An ideological view about the knowledge developed about social transformations had been established during this time which in some of cases neglected core principles of scientific ethics, validity and reliability. Lavergne (2010) describes this clash during the transition period between the two practices of research

developed by the “world of projects” for social transformation and the “academic world”. The confusion of “analytic and moral inferences” in some cases led to pieces of research with problematic scientific value but with clear ideological aims reminiscent of the era of socialism. This kind of distortion is for Lavergne “the big ideological pledge of the past/present dichotomy” (pp.381-382).

Rahman has a similar position. He says Reason’s view (1994) “argues that movements for social change are normally led by intellectuals who are in a position to provide leadership not because of any particular aptitude but because they are privileged by their economic and social status”. He points to the many dangers of relying on an elite leadership for social transformation: the dangers of inflated egos; the fragility of commitment in the face of attractive temptations; the problems of the growth in size of the elite class as a movement grows and the danger of attracting new adherents holding altogether different commitments; and, finally, the self-perpetuating character of the institutions created to provide leadership. He argues that ‘democracy ... is a necessity for revolutionary development’ because it gives ‘freedom to take initiatives’.” (Rahman, 1991, p.20, 22, cited in Reason, 1994, p.334b)

In order to reach more coherence between the research aims for liberalisation of educational relations and research epistemology I attempted to combine principles of exploration specific for realist or constructivist research philosophies.

Some elements of realist thinking were applied in relation to my efforts to promote critical thinking towards the process of change implementation in all four interventions and to achieve a power balance in research relations.

Therefore critical theory questions the moral authority of action researchers, and of course any practice based upon the exclusive mobilisation of higher order participants, to impose their will upon others. Rather, critical theorists are concerned to engender critiques of the status quo and simultaneously emancipate people from asymmetrical power relations, thereby enfranchising the usually marginalised, and promoting alternative forms of organisation. (Cassell and Johnson, p.798)

Several steps were undertaken by me in different interventions in order to increase the participation of different groups in the university:

- a) hearing of their positions and their inclusion as important data in the research and in the decision making process;
- b) empowering for action in order that their position be recognised;
- c) encouraging more thinking and reflection for learning from personal experience;
- d) supporting particular efforts for leadership and creativity.

Examples of this could be seen in the activities for:

- Discussing the difficulties that our team experienced when implementing a service-learning model in the VCC with the teachers from LAP and with the students from the course;
- Inclusion of students in the team for implementation of VCC;
- Inclusion of teachers in the Programme for entrepreneurial and caring university and in the Tutoring project;
- Giving more freedom to students in VCC to create their own projects for volunteering in the community.

Some authors who explore the process of empowerment and emancipation of marginalised groups emphasize the dangers that arise in such struggles in “replacing the old voices of authority (e.g. managers) with a new hierarchy of truth which inscribes new power relations that negate their liberatory aims” (Humphries, 2000, cited in Cassell and Johnson, p.803). I followed Freire’s observation (1972a) that democratic participation requires development of ‘critical consciousness’ in participants in order to overcome their internalised models of oppressive social relations. According to him, such critical consciousness could be achieved by creation of opportunities for authentic dialogue between action researcher and participants perceived as ‘equally knowing subjects’ (Freire, 1972b, p.31).

To overcome the dangers that come from such attempts for democratisation that could lead to further exclusions, alienation and partial knowledge I decided to include the constructivist positions that a) there are no voices that have privileged ownership on truth and b) the language plays an important role in creating plurality of localised understandings and practices. My attempts were focused on the creation of spaces for thinking and reflection more than giving immediate explanations or acting.

Within this framework it is enormously difficult to say that some ideas or ways of thinking about the world are correct or true and other false. If we accept the possibility of many different realities constructed within different historical and cultural contexts, we have no way of asserting that one of these is the right one. There are no absolute, historically and culturally transcendent standards against which we can confidently judge local variations. This is the position of relativism; different constructions of the world can be judged only in relation to each other and not by comparison with some ultimate standards or truth. (Burr, 2003, p.81)

From a methodological point of view, the Foucauldian idea about the existence of different 'regimes of truth' was very useful for the purposes of my analysis. Thus the aim of the study was "to deconstruct the discourses which uphold iniquitous power relations and to demonstrate the way in which they obscure these" (Burr, 2003, p.84). The constructivist critique towards such an approach holds that such analysis still requires "some notion of reality or truth that the discourses are supposed to obscure."(ibid., p.84).

There are three more epistemological views on ideology in constructivism that were helpful during the analysis of the data: ideology in relation to power; ideology consisting of ideas but also of rough experience; and ideology as presenting dominant social dilemmas. First view can consider ideology as knowledge in the service of power.

This view detaches ideology from questions of truth and falsity. ... Thus ideas in themselves cannot be said to be ideological, only the uses to which they are put. The study of ideology is therefore the study of the ways in which meaning is mobilised in the social world in the interests of powerful groups. (Burr, 2003, p.85)

The challenges that I have listed above in relation to my study demonstrate such kind of use of certain knowledge for the purpose of endorsement of one privileged point of view about the meaning and the direction of change.

According to second view on ideology developed by Althusser (Burr, 2003), besides the ideas through which concrete ways of thinking of a particular group in the society are demonstrated, ideology also includes the practices through which these ideas come to reality including such things as human feelings, behaviour, or patterns of social relations. Such an expanded view of ideology was important for me as, on one hand, it legitimated direct experience as an important and valid part of analytical material and on the other, it enabled me to see both the language of change and also the activities undertaken during the change process as expressions of a certain ideology.

This view of ideology therefore mirrors the concept of discourse as incorporating not only representations in language but also social practices and social and institutional organisations. (Burr, 2003, p.86)

The three challenges that I mentioned (see p.89) also demonstrate the third view of the dilemmatic character of ideology as described by Billig et al. (1988). These authors' thesis is that a) the nature of human thinking is dilemmatic as it usually takes the form of oppositions and b) concrete dilemmas are present in each society created by the dominant ideologies. Whilst not stepping back from the main thesis of social constructionism that language shapes our thinking in the same way as ideologies shape our understanding of the world, these authors suggest that individuals take an active role in this process.

It suggests that, although the content of our thoughts is provided by wider social concepts and values, we do not simply absorb them uncomplicatedly and live them out in our lives. ... human beings are not like sponges, soaking up ideas from their social environment, but are rhetoricians, arguers, people who are constantly engaged in exploring the contrary implications of ideas. The person here is an active thinker, someone capable of exercising choice and making decisions about the strengths and weaknesses of values and ideas. (Burr, 2003, p.87)

For instance, in the beginning of my study I was affected by the “democratic magic” of action research as it was presented to me. But in the course of my work I tried to study and practice it in a more critical way in order to really understand its values and weaknesses. Thus my relationship to this method evolved from an ideology to a fruitful method for understanding the facts from reality.

In order to achieve this kind of transformation away from seeing action research as an ideology I had to introduce several techniques. They helped me to locate prejudice, partial thinking and to identify more points of view in relation to the problem:

- a) Keeping a reflective diary of the events and taking into account the positions of other participants in the interventions helped me to overcome some of the idealisations with which I started my work on this study (for example, the introduction of VCC according to the model of service learning).
- b) I sought a diversity of points of view and feedback about the limitations of my personal version of change by including the thinking of professionals who were not part of the Bulgarian context (for example, I discussed pieces of my data in the group of PhD students from the Center for Psycho-Social Studies in UWE and with a group of



professionals whose work is informed by psychoanalytic thinking during the annual OPUS Conference in London).

- c) The method of self-reflection and the associative thinking of my colleagues in the role analysis group (in the PhD group) supported in a very productive way an exploration of the complexity of my personal role of an agent of change and a researcher (for example, it helped me to recognise my productive capacities in a situation of alienation).
- d) The identification and inclusion of alternative or confronting positions was done in three main ways: through the inclusion of such people in the planned activities, through the inclusion of the opinion of such participants, and through the revision of my personal position on certain issues.

One specific issue concerned the acknowledgement, in an authentic way, of the leadership position because of the existing culture of control and corresponding lack of practices of reflexivity and learning from personal experience. That is why I decided to explore this role mainly by observing different situations and by analysing my personal experience in a leading position.

### **2.2.2. The Principles of Reflexivity and Participation**

In order to surmount the restriction of the idea for change to the leaders' view only I tried to follow two of the main principles of the realist perspective – reflexivity and participation.

The notion of reflexivity in my research corresponds with the epistemology developed during the 1980s and a model of knowledge acquisition in social sciences called 'fallibilistic realism' (Manicas & Secord, 1983).

This model seeks to incorporate the critiques of logical positivism without abandoning the concept of a knowable reality entirely. It is based in realism as outlined by Harré (1972) ..., stating that although 'our knowledge and the real world are different things (p.34), plausibility in the connections drawn between what we know and the way things are is a key criterion of knowledge that is scientific. (Anastas, 1999, p.17)

This kind of realism underlines the importance of historical as well as immediate context as 'an integral part of the process that must be understood in evaluating its products' (Anastas, 1999, p.17) and sees the real world as a complex and open system. The context itself is seen as fluid and unstable. Even more, "what is content and what is context must be

arbitrary defined for each occasion of observation. Context, therefore, is inherently unpredictable before the fact.” (Anastas, 1999, p.20)

Such a thesis fits well with my effort to analyze the facts in their context; to see the phenomena in their changing form; to search constantly for validation of the initial action hypothesis through comparison between the intentions and the real results of the action; to study phenomena in their natural environment whilst including this environment as part of the research data.

The validity of such knowledge is contextual and subjective. The aim of the study, though, is not just to diagnose the organisational functioning but also to develop a rich description and understanding of specific phenomena in their complex interaction with other phenomena in an open system in which knowledge is transformed as time passes and new data more relevant to the context insights is created. (Anastas, 1999; Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

This conception of the fallibilistic realism creates common ground with constructivism where social phenomena are also studied in their complexity and context. Constructivism also views the capacity of the researcher to be reflective on his/her own role in the study as an important part of the creation of new explanations of reality. As the researcher co-constructs reality to an equal extent with other participants his/her perspective is also an object of thorough exploration.

The second principle of participation is derived from such position on reflexivity. In part of the realist research design and in constructivist paradigms participation is accepted as more than some kind of physical inclusion of the participants in the processes of implementation and research or as a simple integration of their positions. The emphasis is also on the relationships that are created and the underlying meanings that have been constructed about these relations on a deep emotional or unconscious level between different participants, between the participants and the work task and between the researcher and the participants. From a methodological point of view such exploration could be described in the following way:

The variable and personal (intramental) nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents. These varying constructions are interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques, and are compared and contrasted through a dialectical interchange. The final aim is to distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions (including, of course, the etic construction of the investigator). (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.111a)

The achievement of this kind of deeper understanding of the relationships in the organisation as the activities occurred, became possible through the introduction of a psycho-social studies approach based on the psychodynamic knowledge about human relations. The psychodynamic paradigm makes distinctions between the facts of the real world and those deriving from our internal world of subjective interpretations of this real world. This mental reality is the main focus of study in the methodology of psycho-social studies and the way in which these two realities affect each other.

We can conclude that the topic of social change based on liberal values which were studied in the process of tricky implementation in a rapidly changing environment found their appropriate method of study in the frame of action research and more specifically in its participatory and practice oriented model. "Knowledge arises in and for action." (Reason, P., 1994, p.333a)

At the same time, the threats that arose during the implementation of this model concerning the challenges that the change created to the internal realities of values, beliefs, thoughts and fears of the participants was explored through the application of the psycho-social studies approach.

I see these two approaches as complementary to each other. The former was focused mainly on practical knowledge that would facilitate the immediate implementation of the predefined model of change. The later supported the development of a deeper and complex understanding of the subjective, emotional side of the undertaken change. This kind of thinking about the study process and its final aims seems to stay close to the ontological perspective of Paulo Freire (1982):

For me, the concrete reality is something more than isolated facts. In my view, thinking dialectically, the concrete reality consists not only of concrete facts and (physical) things, but also includes the ways in which the people involved with these facts

perceive them. Thus in the last analysis, for me, the concrete reality is the connection between subjectivity and objectivity, never objectivity isolated from subjectivity. (Freire, 1982, p.30 cited in Reason, 1994, p.332b)

In my understanding the action research approach can be seen as a broad frame which has the capacity to balance between some purposeful action, learning from this action and deeper understanding of this experience in the broader context in which it occurs during and after the end of the project for change.

If we think about this method of study as being a part of the ethics of deliberative democracy we have to take into account the conclusion made by Thompson & Hoggett (2001) that the effort to introduce the principle of participation and dialogue without considering psychodynamic knowledge about the emotional functioning of groups and organisations could lead to failure and even abuse. A simple and narrow following of the participation principle is seriously criticised by authors like Cook & Kothari (2001), Hickey & Mohan (2004) as some of the practices actually lead to abuse of this principle.

Despite the critiques of action research as a method of study romanticising the democratic process and ignoring the destructive side of participants' experience some of action research has paid attention to the influence of the subjective experience on the process of learning from research. Salazar (1991), for instance, describes collusion between researcher and participants in reproducing the same authoritarian kind of relationships in the research community that were present as a dominant pattern of relations in Columbian society. In his endeavor to classify different models of action research Reason also represents co-operative inquiry as more focused on the psychological rather on the political side of the process of change, on micro processes in the small groups at the expense of the overall political process. (Reason, 1994, p.335)

### **2.2.3. Fruitful Combination of Two Epistemologies**

The combination of the two epistemologies of realism and constructivism was possible first of all because of the three similarities that I have found in them. The first one regarded the efforts made by both epistemologies to overcome a positivistic notion of objective truth that could be reached and validated only by a limited group of experts in the field. Both epistemologies helped me to deal with my educational background in the field of science and research which was developed first during my higher education, framed by a

positivistic relationship to knowledge and its production, and secondly, acquired through my professional identity as a clinical social worker where good diagnosis and clear formulation of the problem, as well as an attempt at finding unambiguous response dominates practice.

The second similarity I have found is in the opportunities that these two epistemologies create for more democratic relations in the field of research. Both perspectives on truth and the ways in which it could be discovered belong to the 20<sup>th</sup> century where, in the context of two world wars and many local ones, of super powers and severe authoritarian regimes, of failed ideas of communism, the striving for a more collaborative and joint society has persisted and this struggle has even shaped the world of science. In comparison with the positivistic scientific practices still prevailing in Bulgarian society these epistemologies proposed the creation of opportunities for hearing the voices of all groups in society, empowering marginalised groups; their inclusion and non-formal participation in the decision making and meaning creation process; the development of sensitivity to the social differences and the capacity for public dialogue. This is the common value ground of these epistemologies that I identified with during the study.

The third area of paradigmatic interface concerns the issue of academic traditions in the Bulgarian educational system that tends to split theory or knowledge from practice and from its social and political meaning. “Pure” theories and classifications presented in an encyclopedic way constitute the traditional line of thought. In this way the university alumnus will become a learned person who can cite many great names from the scientific field but will be totally unaware of how to apply their theories in his personal and/or professional life. The realist view of knowledge creates a natural and active connection between knowledge and practice pursuing very pragmatic and practical aims when using or creating knowledge. This way, the traditional split between theory and practice, between the processes of knowledge implementation and knowledge creation has been overcome.

What constructivists add on this issue is on one hand their emphasis on the social role of scientific knowledge through their understanding of how language affects human thinking and our understanding of the world. On the other hand, they aim to contextualize knowledge and to understand theories in the social situations in which they have been created or applied. There is even a third characteristic of constructivism that has value in

the current study which is related to the authorship of knowledge belonging to different members of a given community, organisation or society.

Researchers have seen the opportunities for combination of both epistemologies in different ways. For example, Kenneth Gergen (1999) considers the productive sides of such combination as applicable under specific conditions.

Another combination, which resembles my own approach, is offered by Parker (1992), who defines it as a conjunction of ontological realism in which constructions are based on reality and an epistemological relativism in which knowledge is constructed by the different views of the members informed and validated by the social context of their realisation.

She is arguing for a social constructionism that, in addition to challenging our assumptions about the world, can also function as social critique. ... things we observe and experience are 'generated by underlying, relatively enduring structures, such as biochemical, economic or social structures' (p.45). ... the existence of these structures and the events that they produce means that some ways of making sense of them, some constructions, are more likely than others. (Burr, 2003, p.96)

Also in favor of the possibility for such merging of paradigms are the arguments given by Nightingale and Cromby (2002) who look at personal experience as co-constructed by the forces of both reality and language.

In a dialectic fashion, material conditions generate, but do not determine, social constructions which in their turn ground actions and decisions which then have real consequences. So that although material conditions provide the ground in which discourses may take root, once constructed those discourses channel action which itself then transforms the nature of the real world. (Burr, 2003, p.100)

Drawing on Harré's (1993) division of an 'expressive and practical order' Burkitt (1999) also makes an effort to recognise 'both the material and the discursive, both agency and social constraints.' (Burr, 2003, p.100) Reality here is a constantly changing phenomenon constructed 'both discursively and practically by people'. (Burr, 2003, p.101)

## **Chapter Three**

### **Psycho-Social Knowledge and Methods Used**

*“Ne varietatem time amus.”*  
*“Don’t be afraid of diversity.”*  
*(Motto of NBU)*

This chapter completes a review of the main theories and methods used in this study from the psycho-social perspective of work.

*Part 1. Psychoanalytic knowledge in the service of the understanding of organisational and social life.* This section addresses the changes in contemporary research practices which led to the rehabilitation of the emotional side of human experience as an important part of the process of learning and social transformation. The unconscious, relational and intersubjective character of this experience is emphasised as a key point of departure in the data analysis process. The ways in which specific psychoanalytic concepts were applied, in order to reach an understanding of the emotional dynamics at the university and in society are also specifically included here.

*Part 2. Psycho-social approach applied* explores some more specific experiences of this research methodology as applied in this study. The issues of validation of the researcher’s interpretations generally and in the current study are discussed. Part 2 ends with a short description of the concrete techniques used for data collection and analysis as applied to different groups of participants.

### **3.1. Psychoanalytic Knowledge in the Service of Understanding of Organisational and Social Life**

#### **3.1.1. Action Research and the Psycho-Social Studies Approach – How They Could Work Together**

In the previous methodological chapter I have presented the way in which the method of action research was applied to the exploration of the four interventions. The basic challenges and obstacles to such implementation were discussed as leading to the search for

an additional research methodology that could bring a different perspective on this experience and could offer a deeper explanation of the difficulty of applying action research principles in the reality of the project for change.

It has already been stated that, despite the fact that the methodology of action research provides a well-structured frame for learning from experience and the implementation of specific social change, it lacks technologies and a set of knowledge through which the hidden dynamics of the emotional life of the organisation can be revealed and understood. In order to reach such an understanding, I decided to include a psycho-social approach and the psycho-analytic and systemic knowledge on which this approach is based.

Both action research and psycho-social approaches have a common aim that creates an opportunity for their combination in this study. This aim concerns the improvement of human functioning in society. Both methodologies are focused on discovering the ways in which individual experience is shaped by the discourse to which it belongs whilst also seeing the individual as an active agent that affects the reality through the ways he interprets and acts upon this experience. In this sense Frosh sees the 'psycho-social *subject* as a meeting point of inner and outer forces, something *constructed* and yet *constructing*, a power-using subject which is also subject to power, is a difficult subject to theorize, and no one has yet worked it out' (Frosh, 2003, p.1564)

Both approaches are organized around a set of assumptions about the nature of human relations, thinking and learning. Actually, it can be assumed that each of these methods of study is focused on a different aspect of human relations. Action research is focused on the rational, conscious side while psycho-social approach concerns more the irrational, unconscious side.

As an approach, action research has the aim of developing an effective structure through which the process of social change can be managed. It follows the principle of the constant adjustment of the preliminary ideal, and partial version for social change, to the issues and opportunities in the reality of its implementation. An orderly frame is developed by this methodology via the creation of a hypothesis based on existing knowledge, hypothesis implementation, reflection on the results and further fitting of the model of change to



constantly changing circumstances including knowledge about the context in which the change occurs.

This kind of stable logical structure of action and reflection implicitly contains three assumptions about human functioning in groups and organisations. These assumptions involve the capacity of individuals:

- a) To make sense of the results of their activities or choices and to change the latter in order to fit with the requirements of reality and their intention to succeed in their endeavors - i.e. the capacity to learn from their personal experience;
- b) To acknowledge and make sense of their emotional experience and to transform it into helpful knowledge - i.e. the capacity for symbolisation;
- c) To organise themselves for common purposeful activities - i.e. the capacity for collaboration.

This model assumes human functioning in social groups and organisations is a rational, emotionally mature and collaborative one. However, such a description doesn't include other aspects of human functioning. It can identify some of the difficulties in the process of change but is not enough to give explanations about the reasons for such difficulties, even overlooking others.

In contrast, the psycho-social approach facilitates the revelation of unconscious, irrational or destructive parts of human personalities and systems, as well as the ways in which this part of human nature can be productively used for the improvement of social relations (Hoggett, 2000, 2008).

Science and emotional experience go hand in hand. ..., integrating thinking and analysis cannot be achieved without a link between the rational and the emotional, and between the rational and the irrational. Linking disciplined thought with feeling is necessary not just for clinical practice but for any political or policy strategy that intends to engage individuals or groups on the basis of their intelligent, lived experience. (Cooper & Lousada, 2005, pp.2-3)

Using psychodynamic understanding of the emotional functioning of organisations developed by Menzies Lyth (1959) one of the assumptions on which this approach is created is that under the pressure of certain unconscious fantasies of exclusion, annihilation or loss, individuals and groups tend to organize themselves in a way that minimises or

eliminates the created anxieties. Thus, rational and pragmatic thinking usually shifts to a mystic and idealised version of reality which prevents individuals and organisations thinking and learning from their own experience. Such a transformation becomes indispensable for understanding, especially in cases where there is a huge gap between the vision for change and reality. This could lead to painful feelings of failure. A system of primitive defensive mechanisms is then called to life, at the individual as well as at the group and organisational level, in order to prevent the experience of failure becoming present in the participant's emotional life. Actually, the overall organisation of the roles and activities around the tasks is replaced by another one that clouds meaning, blocks thinking and allays fears. Such defensive functioning also hinders efforts for collaboration and encourages the processes of division and confrontation.

It becomes clear how important the knowledge about these processes is if one makes efforts for the systematic implementation of action research principles for the purpose of making positive change.

### **3.1.2. The Importance of Emotional Experience**

Traditionally the affective side of human relations in the organisation is neglected or not taken into account when certain changes or decisions are undertaken by the management. A managerialist approach prevails in university practices shifting between what Hanley (2007) calls as 'fantasy of aspiration', in which students make their initial professional choice, and what he calls as 'fantasy of efficiency' created by the highly structured and rigid principles of education management. The leaders and followers of Bulgarian organisations, including universities, have tended to treat this side of organisational life in a way that is dominated by a positivistic epistemology, according to which, knowledge is proven by rigorous data developed through direct observation and logical processes of deduction. Inasmuch as the emotional experience of individuals, and still more of the groups and organisations, is most of the time not easy to observe directly or manipulate in laboratories, it is not possible to collect and validate such knowledge using positivistic technologies.

Totally based on the spirit of positivism, management and professional education in Bulgaria are created with the belief that good management ignores emotions, resists them,

can control them and can keep working in a regime of strong 'objectivity'. Paying attention to emotions in the organisation is accepted by both staff and the management as a weakness and a retreat from working relations.

The psychoanalytic knowledge, on which the psycho-social approach is built, however, demonstrates that emotions are a natural part of the organisational life that cannot be avoided, and are of tremendous importance for the success or failure of the organisational task.

These dynamics can distort the process of deliberation, lead to sub-optimal outcomes and may even destroy the spaces of deliberation themselves. More positively, these affective forces can be harnessed to further the aims of deliberative democracy. For these negative and positive reasons, it is necessary to understand the emotional dynamics of groups and to apply this understanding to the design of public spaces for deliberative democracy. (Thompson & Hoggett, 2001, p.351)

Lawrence (1995) underlines the importance of being aware of the emotional dynamics in the organisation, as in his view, most of the time they dominate and govern the choices we have in our private and public life.

To put this another way: despite beliefs in the 'democratic way of life', desires to have, what Popper (1966) called, an 'open society', and valuing the fact that individuals manage themselves in their roles (Lawrence, 1979), there is always a tendency in institutions, and in the larger containing society, to regress to simple, hierarchical models of authority as a way of preserving a sense of security and stability. (Lawrence, 1995, p.2)

The psycho-social approach has the potential to give answers to questions about the psycho-social mechanisms through which learning from experience occurs on an individual or group level, and how it can be avoided or resisted. Leaning on psychoanalytic knowledge about the psycho-social functioning of individuals, groups and organisations, this approach has the capacity to offer thorough and complex explanations of social relations. Building on the idea of Alvesson & Skoldberg (2005) of the third element that psychoanalytic knowledge introduces through the notion of the unconscious dimension of human being and knowing, Alexandrov (2011) sees the psycho-social approach as one which develops a triple hermeneutic:

Psycho-social research can be defined as triple hermeneutics since it attempts to interpret the interpretative activity of both the actors in the studied field and the

researcher in the context of their interaction. ... Supplied with the demanding yet liberating method of triple hermeneutics, the researcher is free to engage in a variety of unpredictable and anxiety provoking situations and interactions and still withstand a reflective and ultimately an ethical stance by retaining the capacity “to think under fire” as Bion famously suggested. Thus psycho-social research embarks on the bold undertaking of interpreting the world of interpretive beings, governed by unconscious forces – the infinite, volatile and constantly reconstructed world of meaning. (Alexandrov, 2011, p.55)

The usefulness of knowledge about emotional and social dynamics is also important as it can facilitate the process of the development of adequate strategies for capturing, mastering and transforming destructive feelings and behaviours into productive social relations and organisational structures.

More positively, it is our contention that, if we do have a plausible account of such affective forces, we can harness them in furtherance of our political aims. ... Thus, it follows that we need an account of group affectivity if we are to be able to understand both how these adverse effects can be avoided, and how group emotions can be put to achieving the aims of a particular group. That is, if a group is organized effectively, and its processes conducted appropriately, then it can draw on the energy of its emotions, all the better to realise its objectives. (Thompson & Hoggett, 2001, p.352a)

The affective side of educational relations is very important also, as it facilitates the process of thinking, learning and identity formation in the personalities of young professionals. Teaching relations are seen here as a process of exchange of knowledge, but also the understanding of feelings that can facilitate or prevent the process of learning.

From such a point of view, Dewey (1963) defends a version of education that values the individual experience of the learner and suggests its integration in the curricula. He believes that student educational achievement will increase if educational institutions devote a serious amount of their engagement to offering opportunities to their students to receive direct experience with reality through different practical tasks. He believes that such a practical and pragmatic connection of the student with the issues in society will developed in him the democratic values of a socially active citizen. Also, Nussbaum (1997) following the spirit of Dewey’s ideas, asserts that:

If they are going to become good citizens in their future roles, they need not only logical ability and knowledge, aspects of citizenship already stressed in their curriculum. They also need to be able to participate imaginatively in a life such as that of Bigger Thomas [6], seeing how aspirations and emotions are shaped by their social setting. (Nussbaum, 1997, p.13)

As Long (2004) emphasises, human experience is a complex phenomenon that can be subjective in nature, direct or transformed and complex, symbolized or not, linked to behaviour, and reflexive. Specific technologies and knowledge are needed in order to explore it, as well as to apply it purposefully. In this regard, Thompson and Hoggett emphasize the risks that may occur when introducing this part of human experience to the democratic spaces of public debate, risks of not being aware enough of its nature, meaning and functioning.

... the proposal simply to welcome emotions into deliberative public spaces, without any understanding of the nature of those emotions, is somewhat naïve at best, and dangerous at worst. In short, then, while it is misleading to talk as if it were possible to exclude emotions from deliberative forums, it is unwise simply to include them without trying to understand their hazardous potential. Hence it is vital to understand the nature of the affective forces that can be mobilised by groups in order to successfully design public forums in which they can be contained rather than suppressed. (Thompson & Hoggett, 2001, p.353a)

An important characteristic of this research approach is that it explores the constant interaction between the external, social reality in which individuals and groups perform their activities and their internal, subjective reality.

The goal of psychosocial research is to explore ways of understanding that do not reduce to either psychological or social explanations and do not uncritically locate these in 'the individual' or 'society', or in 'internal' and 'external' worlds. (Holloway & Froggett, 2012, p.1)

Following on from this kind of thinking, in my study I started with the exploration of the larger political and social context, both historical and contemporary, in which the cases of the four interventions were situated. During the analysis of the data I was trying to show the existence of similar emotional dynamics or responses to the context on different levels – individual, organisational or social. Such an approach helps in understanding the large scale on which these phenomena were present. It allows also for initiating changes on different levels in order to bring more effective solutions to the organisational issues.

Another important fact of affective experience is that, because of its predominantly unconscious or pre-verbal nature, it needs to be explored in circumstances that can facilitate what Bion (1962) calls transformation of the existing  $\beta$  elements (raw, unsymbolised experience) in  $\alpha$  elements (conceptualised experience). According to him

specific conditions of ‘containment’ have to be created that acquire an intersubjective nature and are based on the early baby-mother relationship.

Therefore, the psycho-social approach looks at the emotional experience of the individuals and groups not as a simple combination of external and internal factors, but rather as a system of interactions with reality which a) has its own unique meaning (contextualised experience), b) presumes a relationship between two objects (relational experience), and c) has the capacity to create a new and different understanding about the world based on the exchange of both subjectivities (intersubjective experience).

### **3.1.3. The Relational Character of Human Experience**

Human experience and development are always mediated by the presence of another person whom I call in this study, especially in concern with the learning situation analyzed in Chapter 6, ‘the authority of knowledge’. Such a view begins by accepting the early relation between mother and baby as a learning situation in which the baby is dependent on the capacity of the mother to recognise his learning needs and through her mirroring function to give meaning to baby’s early relations with the world. From the power relations point of view the mother is invested with the fantasy of having the knowledge,. This kind of object relation is later reproduced in the situation of learning with other people in powerful positions. Thus the presence of pre-existent models of learning from the authority of knowledge in the mother could predetermine the later ways in which people connect with each other when trying to explore and transform their world.

The relational nature of individual learning and development is very important when studying the process of learning in a situation of organisational or social change. The focus of such type of analysis is not the individual alone but rather the relationships that are created with others.

There are difficulties with the term ‘emotional experience’. One difficulty is this. Ordinarily we tend to locate emotional experience in the individual, as if such experiences were matters of private ownership. Those of you familiar with groups meeting to study their own behaviour will recognise the irritation that a member or members often express at the use of the pronoun ‘we’. ‘Speak for yourself, that’s not what I feel, think, believe etc.’ One understands this irritation, indeed has felt it oneself. I am often nevertheless surprised at our readiness not to be equally irritated at the use of ‘I’. As if one could be so sure not just of *what* one is feeling oneself, but also of the

extent of one's participation or non-participation in the feelings of others. (Armstrong, 1995, pp.2-3)

There are several theoretical frames and concepts in psychoanalysis that help us comprehend the processes of learning and the organisation of the autonomous self. These models are based on research and clinical work with early human experience with the other and the world as described in the object relations theory of Klein (1946), and also in the concepts of the 'transitional object' and 'transitional space' as suggested by Winnicott (1971). These authors describe the way in which the key other is used as a secure base for a relatively untroubled and free exploration and experimentation with reality during early childhood. This is also discussed by Bowlby (1988). In this chain of theories special place is taken by Bion's (1962) understanding of the container – contained relationship which represents the complex and reciprocal way in which the relationship between the child and the important other are created in order to provide the child with comparatively independent mind. Ogden (1994) offers a specific point of view on this kind of relationship seeing it as unique and intersubjective and as co-creating unconsciously an 'analytic third' seen as a factor of relative autonomy.

The above mentioned concepts were used in this study when exploring the processes that occurred during the change implementation process at the individual level of participants. This knowledge also had the potential to be applied to the exploration of group and organisational dynamics at the university, for example between students and teachers, between the departments and between the leaders of four initiatives and their followers.

One important part of the analysis of the phenomena in my study was connected with explanations about human relations offered by the theory of object relations where conclusions are made on an assumption of the existence of internal representations of objects based on the reality of a human psyche organised through intensive early interactions between the child and his immediate environment. On the basis of object relations theory and the theory of symbolisation process as developed by Segal (1957) it became possible to explore the mechanisms through which individuals relate to complex and abstract phenomena from the social realities of knowledge, institutions, and community.

For instance, one of my first findings in the work with students in the Volunteering in the Community Course was the absence of the notion of community in their social experience. When they described their relationships with the others they put them in the categories of family and close friends on the one side and state and business on the other. Later on, the new internet technologies brought opportunities for social networking that in my view seriously changed the situation, especially for the young generation. The lack of representations of community relations in the minds of the people in Bulgaria explained in some degree the absence of informal civic participation in the public life in Bulgaria during the 1990s. The findings from my conversations with the students referred me to the psychological phenomena described as ‘the institution-in-the-mind’ of Armstrong (1995) or ‘the workplace-within’ of Hirshhorn (1988). Such concepts about the presence of an internal reality and its relation with the external one helped me to develop my understanding of the existence of ‘discredited social relations’ or ‘discredited community’ in the mind in this society and the sources of their formation in what Lawrence calls ‘totalitarian states of mind’ (1995), when studying mainly the factors concerning the time of socialism in the country.

Winnicott (1985 [1971]) builds on such concepts but emphasizes a third area in between external and internal reality which facilitates the relations of the individual and society in a creative and contained way. This is this transitional area in which learning occurs. Here, the important relationship is the way in which ‘the infant endows objects with significance so that they appear to come neither from within nor from without’ (Holloway & Froggett, 2012, p.4).

The concepts of transitional space and the transitional object were very fruitful when describing the opportunities for overcoming my alienation in the organisation and the development of a more autonomous and meaningful orientation to work as described by Hinshelwood (2001). These kinds of spaces are both real and fantasised as they are invested by the individuals with specific meaning, having the capacity to contain anxiety and facilitate the capacity for thinking. The dream that I discussed in Chapter 2 leads in its end to such kind of space in which the threat of loss, uncertainty and lack of meaning were mastered and the relationship with others became possible in comparison with the initial situation. During my study CPSS and my group of PhD colleagues played the temporary



symbolic role of holding environment and transitional objects for me in the process of recovery and re-discovery of my professional identity.

Bion also emphasises the importance of the quality of the setting in order to contain the threats to thinking and symbolisation that raw experience brings up. It means that learning 'requires two minds to think a person's most disturbing thoughts' (Ogden, 2009, p.91).

As a substantial part of my interests in this study were invested in the area of learning relations (See Chapter 6. Learning under Fire) relational and intersubjective theories supported my exploration there too.

Unfolding his genetic programme during the first months of his life (Fonagy, 2002) the infant 'borrows' the mind of the primary authority of knowledge, usually of his mother, in order to construct a relatively coherent picture about the world. Provided with some basic mediated experience and skills, the infant is encouraged by his sense of curiosity and connectedness to gather some direct experience not mediated by the presence of the other. However, this must raise negative experiences. There are two interpretations of the negative feelings with which such initial effort for independent learning are accompanied - catastrophic anxiety and castration anxiety.

In order to avoid this kind of anxiety which arises from the process of independent exploration the infant needs the authority of knowledge described by Bowlby (1988) as a secure base from which he separates, not only physically but also mentally, in order to collect experience and knowledge. This separation process takes the form of constant fluctuation between separation and return to the object. Thus learning is always related to a process of fluctuation and relatedness actually to two objects – the authority of knowledge and the world or knowledge seen as an internal object invested with contradictory emotions itself.

Bion (1962) describes the necessary qualities that the secure base has to have in order to ensure its function as a container of infants' anxieties and experiences. From the one side, it is the capacity of the authority of knowledge to identify such feelings of anxiety in the infant and, what is more important, from the other side, to lend her mind to the infant in order that he can process the experience and create meaning of it i.e. can learn from

experience. According to Bion (1970) three types of relations can occur in this process: commensal, symbiotic or parasitic.

Using this model of relations in a situation of learning and including Winnicott's concept of different modes of attachment I have developed two basic models of leaning relations between the authority of knowledge, the learner and the knowledge. In *Figure 1: Productive learning relationships* (see Chapter 6, section 6.1.2.2., p. 209) I describe the kind of relations in which the authority of knowledge has the capacity to successfully perform its containing function allowing the learner to leave it and create his own independent relation with the world simultaneously staying close by in the case of failure. It creates between them a relationship of respectful dependence in that through the trust invested in it, the learner is allowed to approach reality in a creative way. The capacity of the authority of knowledge to celebrate and value the new knowledge created by the learner and to learn from it also develops opportunities for mutual learning and development and enriches knowledge itself. In the Bionic model this type of relationships is close to the commensal one.

At the same time from my experience from the study I have found features of what I called 'traumatic learning relationships' (see *Figure 2: Traumatic learning relationships*, Chapter 6, section 6.1.2.2., p. 211). The encounter of the learner with an insecure and narcissistically organised authority of knowledge can produce relations of total dependence in which the learning relations will be used to ensure the dominance of the knowledge of the authority and its personality rather than the learning and developmental needs of the learner. Any effort from the learner's side to relate independently and to create his own knowledge is interpreted as destructive towards the authority and its version about the reality. It further creates a traumatic situation that provokes castration anxiety in the learner as far as capacity to think and create new knowledge is sanctioned by the authority. As a defence against this and mutually destructive feelings of envy, both sides project onto the new knowledge fantasies of it being bad, dangerous or irrelevant. This creates further alienation from the processes of curiosity and discovery. The situation of learning now serves power issues in which learner is alienated from knowledge and authentic learning and the authority of knowledge keeps the privilege of appropriating the knowledge and the mind of the learner. In the Bionic model this is described as a parasitic relation which

destroys the situation of learning, mutual development and the opportunities for depressive position functioning to be established.

One important point to add when studying the situation of learning as relational is the one given by Bion (1994) when looking at the symbolisation process in a relational way. To Segal's (1957) 'three-term relationship' model of symbolisation process, he adds a fourth element, 'the other subject, or the whole group for whom the initially arbitrary linguistic code has already been converted into a potentially communicative and interactive instrument' (Archangelo, 2010, p.325).

Now we can better understand the effects of social exclusion on the individual. In interpersonal relations, a subject needs to feel that there is interest in what he communicates through shared symbols; that is, there needs to be resonance, 'containment' in relation to the subject's attempts at communication. When this is not the case, words become empty signifiers, not filled with meaningful contents for the mind. (Archangelo, 2010, p.326)

Thus in an authoritarian culture the legitimacy of certain knowledge is given by the authority of power but not by dialogue and consensus between different points of view.

#### **3.1.4. Emotional Experience in Groups and Organisations**

From the point of view of an organisational level of analysis of university relations there were two sets of knowledge of key importance in explaining the difficulties that occurred in the process of change: a) the way in which a system of defences was organised in order to prevent the anxiety from the process of transformation from overwhelming the group mentality, and b) the character of the leadership that evolved in a situation of uncertainty and fear of loss or annihilation.

Building on the psychoanalytic knowledge about the defence mechanisms applied at the individual level of functioning Bion (1961) developed the concept of 'group mentality' as a shared set of feelings that dominate all members of the group and change them in a way that either serves the performance of the group aim, or in a case of internal or external sources of danger, shifts its task in favour of keeping dangerous and destructive feelings away from it. These two regimes of group mental state are called 'work group' or 'basic assumption group'.

Bion's basic assumptions can all be seen as different ways of unconsciously resisting the threat, actual or potential, which this context poses to the boundary around the individual subject. The paradox is that these unconscious resistances or defences themselves annihilate that boundary. (Armstrong, 1995, p.3)

Such dynamics were identified in the relationships between the departments during the first intervention. The boundaries of the relationships of collaboration were destroyed and more rigid procedures were established in order to keep the change at the periphery of the organisation. Similarly, a process of shift of the departments to closed system functioning led to the ineffectiveness of the entire organisation. This occurred in a situation of uncertainty and economic crisis in Bulgarian society.

To such destructive regimes, Bion (1961) contrasts the work group mentality. The important point here is that through the concept of work group Bion makes a connection between the consciously developed work task and the emotional life of group members. From this four styles of group functioning are identified: work group functioning as opposed to basic assumptions dependency, fight-flight and coupling. The group fluctuates between them depending on the emotional experience of its members in one or another moment of their working relations and this way supports or prevents the implementation of the work task. Bion's delineation of the four characteristics of the work group were used when analyzing the four initiatives at the university undertaken in order to introduce the culture of free, caring and participatory university environment:

- a) A clear goal or sense of common purpose;
- b) The absence of rigidly defined internal subgroups;
- c) The contribution of every member valued;
- d) Members with clearly defined and fully accepted roles. (Thompson & Hoggett, 2001, p.357b)

This kind of definition combines elements of organisational structure with the positive emotions that people invest in the group in order to create a sense of belonging and engagement. Thus, a clearly formulated work task creates an external but also an internal emotional boundary that fulfills the emotional needs of members for personal meaning and for belonging to a set of common values, activities and authorship.

In the same way, the internal boundaries between subgroups or between one group and others has to be created on principles that allow for the exchange of knowledge and

resources that will support the development of the group as a whole. The existence of rigid boundaries leads to exclusion and marginalisation and a sense of injustice on the part of members.

Recognition of each member's contribution as part of the organizational principles ensures the emotional needs of the members are important and are valued by the others. This in turn develops members' sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and engagement with the organisational task.

Roles as part of the organisational structure when clearly defined give a sense of security and, when mutually agreed on and accepted by their performers, give sense of authorship and responsibility for the products of these role implementation.

All four elements of the work group are constructed in a way that looks for the balance between group or organisational needs with those of its individual members. This is this fragile balance between the group and the self that each individual makes constant effort to maintain. Failure in each or any of these four principles can lead to some kind of alienation and emotional withdrawal of the members from the group. Hinshelwood (2001) describes such situation as demoralisation of the organisation. He identifies two basic factors that could lead to such an experience: the absence of common meaning shared by the members and the lack of a 'sense of securely belonging to an integrated social group that devotes itself to the purpose' (p.33).

I see these two factors as two senses of belonging that individuals need to experience in their social relations, - belonging to a cause and belonging to a group. In my study the balance between the two senses of belonging created issues as sometimes, in order to belong to the group, one could not belong to the mission or organisational task. In situations of insecurity when basic assumptions dominate one of the ways for a person to orient himself or herself in the chaos is to turn back to the meaning of the organisation, to its work task or mission. Even more, to the authority of power the only authority that one can effectively oppose is the authority of the work task. Sometimes this opposition can't happen in the real relationship with the very authoritarian leaders but it can happen internally in the personal relation of the professional with the organisation. Such kind of

internal opposition can be used as a moral argument when one makes his choice to break the rule of loyalty.

In a situation of demoralisation Hinshelwood distinguishes five basic strategies that individuals undertake in resolving the situation:

- a) creation of personal empires, sub-groups within the organisation that destroy the integration;
- b) inappropriately aggressive pursuit of the organisational task as a desperate attempt to demonstrate the value of the work performed;
- c) conversion of frustrations into sensations and horror stories as an abreaction of the painful feelings;
- d) engaging in some sort of political activity to try to sort things out;
- e) trying to cope with the demoralisation seeking out the root cause and putting it right.

(Hinshelwood, 2001, pp.31-32)

As all of these strategies were present in some degree in the process of change at the university this categorisation was very helpful. It also helped me to orient my personal experience of alienation and subsequent efforts for further re-engagement with the university. The effort to undertake this study is part of my strategy to overcome the destructiveness of the constructed relations and to look for better understanding and opportunities to shift the relationships and my personal experience towards more positive and productive ones.

As a result of demoralisation, management of an organisation can collude by co-creating a culture of paranoia that prevents difference or fruitful competition to occur. To the extent that I saw these kinds of relations in the process of my study I can say that such defences, although covering some painful feelings, are severely destructive for human relations as they leave leadership vulnerable to contradictory and strong projections. They create situation of traumatic experience for any person who enters a leadership role. That is why I prefer to call this kind of collusive paranoid leadership a traumatic one. No matter how aggressive, marginalizing or grandiose is the performance of the person in this regime of emotional relations with the others, an internal fragility and lack of coherence are apparent.

In relation to the leadership function in such group mentality Lawrence (1995) describes the characteristics of what he calls 'narcissistic' or 'hubristic' leadership. This kind of leadership is co-constructed by the organisational managers and the other role holders as a defence against psychotic anxieties. In such a paranoid-schizoid culture leaders are under pressure to harden the boundaries of the organisation in a way that prevents threatening feelings from seizing the organisation.

Thus a 'social system of defence' comes into play. It is for this primary reason that a totalitarian-state-of-mind comes to be acceptable to the majority of the role holders and because it offers the fantasy of security....The wish for psychic and political security by the majority of the role holders is realised by projecting into the management, particularly the 'top' ones, the feelings that they are omnipotent, omniscient and capable of satisfying all desires for dependency. The price which has to be paid for this unconscious projection is a rigid, authoritarian organisation with its associated culture of dependency. (Lawrence, 1995, p.6)

Defining this kind of mutually destructive and humiliating relationships as characteristic for the 'totalitarian state of mind' Lawrence identifies three main tendencies in it:

- a) 'False self' public behaviour as the true self has to be kept secret – a situation that diminishes social capital in the organisation;
- b) Capacity for thinking is almost eliminated: thinking brings doubt and new ideas that could destabilize the situation of blind faith.

The culture only rewards, and so only enforces, thinking which is sure-fire and certain, which is logical, which is convergent, because the overarching fear is of making mistakes. The fear of mistakes is such that it becomes dangerous to have thoughts which are different from the majority. (Lawrence, 1995, p.7)

- c) A culture of omnipotent certainty called by him 'the politics of salvation'.

What Lawrence opposes to such culture is good leadership that a) allows for reality testing, b) shares concern for others, and c) broadens 'the field of its vision' taking into account the different points of view in the organisation. Lawrence describes it as the reaching of a state of disillusionment and the capacity to oscillate between the two positions, paranoid-schizoid and depressive, developed by Klein. He calls it 'the tragic position'. It means the capacity to acknowledge and accept the tragic in our lives. This kind of strategy of relating to life and to others he calls as 'politics of revelation' opposing it to the 'politics of salvation'.

Despite the fact that Lawrence describes this politics as ‘more a state of being than doing’ his positions encourages standing active in relation to social issues, having one’s own voice and sharing it publicly rather than but not keeping to silence and passivity:

Let us not commit treason, once again, against the human race by remaining silent because we do live in an eco-systemic environment in which, as Meister Eckhart pointed out some centuries ago, ‘everything is in everything else. All is one.’ ... Our silence will have catastrophic consequences. (Lawrence, 1995, p.7)

One important aspect of so called transformative leadership is its understanding has the potential not to offer fast, adequate and ‘right’ solutions to existing problems but rather to create spaces for the containment of anxieties caused by lack of knowledge about the future or direction of change, and for participation and dialogue between the members. Such leadership could be called also participatory leadership. Such position is defended by Armstrong (1995) when analyzing a dilemma with the head of a school tracking the way in which the relationships with the school gardener become representative for the issues in the organisation:

To be free to work creatively as a head of the school meant to be able to formulate this dilemma, given to him by the gardener, as the thought that was there, and to find a way not of solving this dilemma himself but of giving it back to the school in a way which might liberate emotional energy in others, not in himself alone: energy to realise thought. (Armstrong, 1995, p.5)

This interpretation of the leadership role in one learning organisation is close to the way in which Bion describes the role of the mother as a container of the child’s insecurity caused by the contact with the world when facilitating child’s capacity to think and learn. He calls this kind of mutuality reverie and it consists of the infant projecting personal feelings of threat to the mother which she then processes and ‘gives back’ to the child in a way that gives meaning to his feelings. In other words, the mother helps the child to transform his beta elements into alpha elements. This is similar to the way Armstrong describes the role of the leader in the organisation.

To realise thought, I suggest, is to receive, to formulate (give expression to) and give back something that is there, which is not of oneself alone, is not bounded by one’s own physical or mental skin. It is a mental process which stands out and against a more familiar model of thought as made an object of ownership; ‘my’ thought, ‘your’ thought, ‘our’ thought. (Armstrong, 1995, p.5)



In a situation of failure in such relationship the child or members of the organisation are left with their painful but unrecognised and not worked through emotions, that is, emotions which remain unnamed and unsymbolised, emotions that continue to be unbearable and overwhelming.

As demonstrated in Chapter 6, such a situation co-constructs the relationship between the authority of knowledge and the learner as threatening and dangerous and therefore to be avoided. It creates opportunities for the development of false learning relations in which both sides are engaged in preventing authentic relationships which might allow new knowledge to occur.

Another important principle offered by systemic thinking was used in the current analysis and according to this principle individuals can be analysed in terms of the boundaries of their roles.

Although the consultations are one to one, I do not construe the client simply as an individual, but rather as a person-in-role in a system: the system being the 'organisation' seen as 'activities with a boundary'. (Armstrong, 1995, p.3)

In this version of analysis individuals are not seen in an abstract isolated way but in their relationship to a specific context, specific role requirements or social expectations. Such a distinction is very important in order to distinguish between the tensions that come from the specifics of the role as constructed in an organisational or social context and the way in which the individual characteristics of people are mobilized by the dynamics in the organisation to use these roles in a defensive way. For example, in my study, this differentiation showed the process through which individual characteristics on the part of teachers were mobilised in order to prevent the feelings of insecurity and devaluation from ever becoming available for conscious discussion. My personal experience with the researcher's role analysis group helped me to reflect on my performance in several roles in the organisation and to understand the way in which the shift from the role of change agent in my organisation to researcher helped me to understand better the former one.

## **3.2. Psycho-Social Approach Applied**

### **3.2.1. Intersubjectivity, Interpretation and Change**

When using the experience from his individual work with clients Armstrong (1995) describes the stable organic link between interpretation and action. The process of problem formulation is seen by him as only the beginning of the process of change. The developed interpretation is not definite truth but rather a hypothesis available for further development or change. According to Armstrong, the interpretation itself is not able to provide an answer about the right direction of the action. Its function is to create space for thinking and creative decision making by the participants.

An important aspect of such learning is the interaction between the interpretation and the subsequent action, between the process of giving meaning to the thing and the process of generating new activities, moving ‘from culture to structure, rules to roles, actuality to intentionality’ (Armstrong, 1995, p.9). The action is not seen here as simple implementation of a set of activities but is accepted in its relation with knowledge i.e. it is an ethical action through which one undertakes the responsibility for the process of learning and change while staying with the uncertainty that it might also be wrong.

True action, unlike behaviour, requires formulation. But equally, true formulation, unlike speculation, requires action: taking authority for what one knows, knowing that one may be proved wrong. Within organisational analysis, as I conceive it, one is always moving from the one to the other: formulation to action, action to formulation. (Armstrong, 1995, p.9)

Therefore one of the important aspects of this study was my constant shift from a hypotheses about the phenomena observed (my subjectivity) to initiation of activities in order to check their validity in the real context of the organisation (intersubjectivity). Some of the activities concerned changes in the structure of relations like when I changed the design of Volunteering in the community course and then observed the effects of this change on students’ performance. Other types of activities were to check hypotheses through creating spaces for dialogue via individual or group interviews or meetings in order to receive other participants’ positions on the issue and to check my own. There was also a third type of activity for the validation of my hypotheses, one which engaged me in a process of constant reflexivity - on my role of researcher and change-agent, and the relationships in which I had been involved through them. The combination of these three aspects of exploration of the emotional experience led to a process of learning from experience.

... learning about the other does not necessarily entail learning about self, whereas learning from the other necessarily entails learning about self. (Hoggett, 2008, p.124)

This is the intersubjective nature of human experiences that psychoanalysis describes through the processes of transference and counter-transference. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) emphasise the importance of attention to these unconscious processes so that the research interview captures the emotional side of the participant's experience. In order to avoid unhelpful counter-transference processes from the researcher's side the authors suggest developing the therapeutic skills and technologies needed for the methodology of 'free association narrative interview'. According to this method, the interviewee is left to unfold in his own way his life story through free associating with the topic of study. The role of the researcher is just to facilitate the process and, unlike the clinical practitioner, to keep the interpretations made during and after the interview unshared with the participant. Clarke (2002) offers very structured description of this kind of methodology.

... first, the use of unstructured interviews; second, a minimum of intervention from the researcher – the ethos behind this is to encourage free association which allows unconscious ideas to come to the fore; third – and most important – as we are not psychoanalysts, psychoanalytic interpretation does not take place in the interview, but in the analysis of the data collected. Finally, interviews are transcribed in great detail which allows researchers to 'immerse' themselves in the interview material. (Clarke, 2002, p.174)

Is it possible to keep to such neutrality during the interview? Hoggett et al. (2010) are skeptical about this and argue for a more dialogical character of the interview.

The validity of the psycho-social method to some extent hangs on the capacity of the researcher to share his or her thinking with the interviewees and involve them in a joint process of sense-making. This is an important methodological innovation given that psycho-social approaches are sometimes criticized as being top-down. (Hoggett et al., 2010, p.173)

There are two main reasons that underlie such a suggestion one of which is that this way the hypothesis of the researcher can be validated through conversation and a later sharing of the differences and similarities of both participants' positions. Another reason for more active participation of the interviewer in the interview process is the argument that this would democratize the relationship engaging both parts in a situation of dialogue. The interpretations could be checked this way and according to the authors their positive effect could be seen during the interview a) if they lead to strings of new associations and

connections, b) enrich and deepen the dialogue, and c) provide the interviewee or the interviewer with new insights (p.178).

Therefore it becomes obvious that the research methodology in the psycho-social studies approach has the intention not just to register some facts of reality but to understand them in a way that provokes changes in both sides. But this kind of potential creates risks as it challenges the points of view with which participants have entered the dialogic space.

Learning from the other therefore presents a double challenge, and if change is to occur it requires a conflictual renegotiation of ways of seeing both other and self (Maoz et al., 2002). ... Because of the anxiety it evokes. Many communities, including occupational communities, prefer to fight or engage in relations of mutual misunderstanding rather than engage in conflictual dialogue. (Hoggett, 2008, pp.124-125)

Most of the experiences that I had during the study were of spaces that had no capacity to contain such anxieties or to engage in an active and conflictual dialogue. Such spaces were characterised more by passivity and disengagement. People were able to express their positions during the interviews or in an informal conversation rather than in such open public spaces. Thus one of my main efforts in this study was to start creating such spaces for dialogue starting with the students and to try to share some of my ideas and findings with other professionals too.

In order to avoid the risk of what Hunt (1989) calls 'wild analysis' I tried to share pieces of interviews and interpretations with other professionals and receive their feedback about the dynamic that occurred between me and the interviewee. I also shared my reflexive thoughts about some of my internal experiences in relation to issues in the research process. What I also received through such sharing with colleagues was their own interpretations of the issues associated with their experience from their area of work. This gave me a broader picture of the problem and the way other people understood and experienced the same issues. Sometimes the effect of such discussion on some of the participants was unexpectedly profound and long term. For instance, almost six years after presenting a paper about my experience of alienation to a small group at an OPUS conference I met a colleague who shared with me how deeply this presentation changed her point of view about her relation to the work place and her professional identity.

These kind of examples show how on one hand there are deep and long term effects of sharing personal experience with others and on the other, that the data and findings collected during the study could continue to be a source of thinking and reaching new knowledge even after the end of the formal research process.

Another way of trying to overcome some of the researcher's predefined ideas is to use the classical triangulation typically applied in qualitative studies in order to ensure validity of the data. I did this by comparing my perspective with those of others and reflecting on the meaning of the existing difference. The time dimension was also used in order to provide different views about the issues. For example, I read the material from my research diary or the analytical texts that I produced several times during the process of implementation and writing of the thesis. Doing so brought new thoughts as the reality changed which in turn created opportunities for further understanding as well as for the validation or disproof of the initial explanations.

As a conclusion I can say that using this methodology was a big challenge especially in a culture in which the dialogue was not part of the culture of problem solving or bringing understanding between people. In my experience dialogical spaces are usually invested with fears and destructiveness that lead to false public behaviour. That is why the issue about the way in which the knowledge produced by this study could be effectively shared with some of the other members of the organisation especially with those on powerful positions remains unclear. Some of the issues still need further exploration and understanding. For me, it looks like a long term personal project for developing my personal skills in such methodology as well as for creating more opportunities in my organisation and my relationships with the others for thinking and learning from each other.

### **3.2.2. Methodology Used for Data Collection and Analysis**

The main feature of this methodology is the emergent character of the knowledge developed. In contrast to the preliminary strongly defined steps of positivistic study, here the researcher uses the overall process of exploration to practice his creativity when searching for answers and to apply different theories and approaches to data collection and analysis. Following the tasks of the study, parts of the technologies used were mobilised to

explore the process of change in the planned four interventions. So, the first aim of this was to identify important facts and events in the process of implementation of different activities, in order for them to be further studied and interpreted. Two technologies have been used mainly with this purpose:

1. Keeping minutes and protocols of important events (administrative or team meetings, conferences, negotiations with the university management, meetings with different groups of participants to discuss specific activities).

For the purpose of this study, the minutes and protocols prepared by some of my colleagues who participated in the initiatives have been also included. When events that were not part of the activities are included as a source of analytic material (like the protocol from the international conference organised by the university about the higher education in Europe and the establishment of community of knowledge) the criteria used was that they demonstrated aspects of the organisational relations important for the intervention implementation and informative for the context in which they had to occur.

2. Keeping my own reflective diary about the events included in the research project.

Part of the reflections in this diary are of events in organisational life that demonstrated a certain way of thinking and interpretations of the relationships in the organisation used by different participants and described in the context of specific situations. So, it includes participants' statements, my observations of the participants' relations with me in a concrete role, as well as, with other participants.

During the analysis these two technologies were very useful for the description of the context in which the overall project of a socially engaged university was implemented. They allowed for chronologically tracing the specific stages in each of the interventions and the challenges that they pose.

In addition to this first research aim, another task to which the research methodology was applied was collection and exploration of the different groups of participants' points of view on the meaning of the undertaken changes and the shifts that occurred in the process of their implementation.

A collection of data about the official position of the university management in relation to its vision, mission, aims and history of organisational development as illustrated in its interpretation of the notion of university social engagement was presented in the beginning. The data included:

- a) Official documents of the organisation describing its mission, vision, values and history; annual university reports and studies;
- b) Books, articles and public speeches of people in leading positions who have set the university work task or have ruled certain type of relationships in it;
- c) Research done in the area of higher education and civic sector development in the country;
- d) Non-official conversations with some of the leaders about the history of the organisation or the initiatives related to the topic.

The data gathered in this way were used as a basis for an analysis of both the historical background of the interventions and versions of organisational leadership about the meaning and the direction of change. It allowed comparison between the official and non-official versions, as well as versions given by different participants in their different organisational roles.

Here it is important to mention that the top management group is less than fully represented by direct structured individual interviews. This is one of the challenges and weak points of my study and is related to the way in which the power was distributed among the organisation and the difficulty articulating and discussing openly critical positions in the organisation. The lack of space for open debate and the discouragement of my efforts to create such space as well as mine and my other colleagues' concerns about officially declaring our positions was an obstacle that made it difficult for me to get the authentic positions of some of the participants, especially of those in leading positions.

As some of my colleagues who also studied the organisation struggled with the same difficulties in dealing critically with official positions and shared similar fears of sanctions and marginalisation, I decided to study on one hand the official versions of leadership and on the other to compare these official versions to my collected observations, the minutes and protocols of the meetings and some of the unofficial positions shared with me.

Despite this weakness of the study concerning the leadership role, I tried to explore it deeper during the implementation of the four interventions. Building on the statement given by Foucault (Foucault, 1991; Gaventa, 2003) about the power as belonging to the role rather than being a characteristic of a person I decided to explore to what extent the choices made by the participants are predetermined by their roles and the power with which they were associated in the university or by their specific psychological personalities. Such kind of thinking made possible to compare how different roles in the organisation were invested with images of power and how some of the characteristics of leaders' personalities were used for the purpose of resolving emotional problems in the organisation.

Secondly, I tried to deepen my knowledge about the leadership role when having direct experience from it reflecting on my role as a leader of part of the initiatives taken in some cases officially and in others informally. These versions about the leadership at the university I have compared with the versions of people in the role of participants or followers in order to reach more systematic view about them.

The participants' points of view have been explored through different techniques applied to different groups:

### **The students' points of view**

#### **1. Individual interviews and self-reflective approaches**

Such interviews were done at the end of one of the VCC cycles with 6 of the students who agreed to discuss their personal point of view regarding civic participation and their experience during the course. Similarly 6 interviews were done with the students who participated in the tutoring intervention.

Each student was invited in an appropriate for him or her time in the office of BIHR where calm and confidential conditions were ensured. Interviews took from one to one and a half hours. The semi-structured interviews were organised around seven major themes:

- Individual's personal background including previous experience in volunteering;
- Student's family and community tradition in the area of active social participation;
- Student's reasons to study at NBU, in LAP and to take VCC or to participate in the tutoring project;
- Student's knowledge of NBU mission and social engagement;



- The story of the process through which student's participation in the project passed;
- Reflection on personal emotional experience in the role of change agent;
- Student's critiques and recommendations in relation to the future development of the VCC or tutoring.

The aim of these interviews was to explore the immediate experience of students in their role of socially engaged citizens who studied certain roles as co-researchers. Their personal stories have been used to identify specific patterns of thinking about the role of the university in the process of democratisation of society and about the specificity of relationships in the university as a model of such democratisation as perceived from the student's role.

When comparing students' personal positions to those of their parents or teachers some generational differences have been identified in relation to a) the citizens' role in the social changes in our society and b) the role of the university in creating opportunities that encourage students' actions.

Two other self-reflective approaches were used to explore student's personal experience:

a) Students' self-reflective diaries and essays

This technology of gathering data was introduced as part of the learning process in the VCC. It was offered to students as an optional approach when exploring their experience during and after the implementation of their project for social change. Each important for the student event was described through a) the facts, processes and roles that occurred during the event; b) the important questions or ideas for action that arose during and after this event; and c) the emotional experience of the student during and after the event. One of the students agreed to offer the material of her diary to this study.

Most of the participants preferred to write self-reflective essays in order to describe their experiences, thoughts and new knowledge acquired during the course. The essay had to cover answers to three main questions – “What I learnt more during the implementation of my project for social change about:

- a) the social problem with which I engaged;
- b) the role of change agent nowadays in Bulgaria;
- c) myself as an individual with certain values and qualities.

Students were expected to present their essays at the end of the course.

These kinds of reflexive approaches allowed for discussion during and at the end of the VCC – especially of the emotional side of the social engagement. Through the concrete projects students created change in their social environment and rich material was collected on the way in which different institutions and people from different generations react to the fact of young people’s active social engagement with a certain problem.

b) Art objects and students’ reflections on them in relation to the topic of active social participation

Students had also the option of expressing their experience through drawing or in another artistic way. The object or product of this work was shown to the group and its meaning and the feelings related to the experience were explained and further discussed. Three drawings, 1 art object, 1 photo, 1 poster and 1 short documentary have been used for the purpose of this analysis.

The introduction of such techniques of exploration and experiential learning was meant to overcome the difficulties of the students in communicating their experience, feelings and thoughts in order to learn from them. As such methods are not part of the educational culture in this country, the experiential learning process used these objects in order to facilitate safe and contained exploration. This approach was used also to facilitate the dialogue between students and to stimulate collaboration between them.

## 2. Group discussions

Group dialogical spaces were created in the VCC as part of the course design and also during the LAP management meetings with the students. Here students had the opportunity to ask questions, to explain their needs and difficulties and to offer their critical views and suggestions for further development. When constructed in a concerned and open way these kinds of spaces facilitated the expression of students’ positions. They were very useful for me when trying to understand students’ passivity in the first iterations of the course and helped me to revise the VCC’ design in a way which was more appropriate for the students and less ambitious for me. My personal experience of running such dialogical spaces with students as well as with other groups gave me specific knowledge about the challenges of creating and keeping such spaces authentic and constructive.

## **The teachers' points of view**

### 1. Group discussions

All four interventions were organised through different forms of working groups. Hence, the main part of the analytic material included the description of the way in which groups of participants related to each other during these events and the specific tasks and meanings around which they organised their activities.

### 2. Individual interviews

Eight interviews were done with teachers in the tutoring project in order to explore their personal experience of the role and the personal meaning that this role gave them. Some of the tensions concerning leadership and participation in the university were revealed during these interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the office of BIHR and consisted of six main areas of exploration:

- Teacher's personal story including their role in NBU;
- Personal expectations in the beginning of tutoring project;
- Reflection on teacher's personal experience in the role of tutor;
- Feedback on the quality of the structure provided by the tutoring project;
- Teacher's reaction on students' reflections on tutoring;
- Teacher's critiques and recommendations concerning the future implementation of tutoring at NBU.

### 3. Informal situational statements

This kind of data, even though unstructured and uncontrolled in the positivistic sense, when used in a situation of lack of control and sanction can evoke interesting and authentic reactions to the situation of change in the participants. For instance, one such reaction occurred right after an individual interview with one of the teachers in which she shared very important information about the way in which the group of teachers reacted to my invitation to them to participate in the decision making process related to the tutoring role adjustment to the university structure and procedures. The culture of fear of authority and the usual reactions of conformity and passive aggressive behaviour seemingly prevented some of the participants from sharing their thoughts during the "official" interviews. Such data are very informative for studying obstacles that prevent collaboration and expression

of concern for others. They provide snapshots of organisational reality that are available for further comparison and analysis.

### **The NGOs leaders' and members' points of view**

#### 1. Individual meetings with the leaders

This group was included mainly as part of the initial design of the VCC. Three meetings were conducted with leaders of NGOs in their role as agents of change and promoters of socially engaged citizens. During these meetings the leaders' opinions regarding their role and that of the higher educational institutions in the formation of democratic thinking in the young generation were collected.

#### 2. Interviews with the NGO representatives

For the purpose of this study I have used some parts of the interviews with NGO members about their experience of this role which I took on in another study in which I explored the tensions between the government and the newly developed civil sector in the governance spaces (Miller at al., 2009). They have been used to validate some of the already existing findings from the students and the NGO leaders.

### **The researcher's own point of view**

#### 1. Reflective diary

My reflective diary was one of the main instruments for the analysis of my personal point of view in my roles as an agent of changes in the university, as a leader of some of these changes and a researcher. The difficulties which I encountered while reflecting on some of the situations became also part of the data.

The aim of the diary was to explore the data as the events occurred and to try to make sense of them but also to follow up later on the overall process of change when studying the changes of my positions and my colleagues' positions on concrete issues.

This method of work has been very productive when exploring, amongst other things, the experience of alienation in the role of an agent of change, the reflective researcher's position as a "transitional space", the topic of personal disillusionment in the process of organisational and social transformation, etc.

## 2. Research role analysis group

The process of my self-reflection has been very productively facilitated by the inclusion of external points of view towards my role of researcher and the issues that I have experienced while I was in it. I have collected those external perspectives during my participation in a role analysis group in my PhD programme. Those external to the local context views gave me alternative interpretations of the dynamics that occurred in my role and in the process of organisational change. The technology of free association used in this kind of group work supported the containment and validation of my anxiety and allowed me to explore the issues in a more constructive way. Here, I critically discussed these processes and gathered other peoples' points of view regarding some of my ideas.

## 3. Meetings with my PhD supervisors

These meeting were used also as reflective spaces to understand some of my opinions and to receive alternative interpretations of the facts. The questions asked and the debates that occurred during the supervisions had given me more opportunities for mutual thinking with others and for using other people's ideas for developing a more complex picture about the process.

## 4. Formal and informal group discussions

These discussions included checking my ideas while presenting some of my theses to different events in and outside of the country. They also included such events as PhD workshops, OPUS conference in London, and two international conferences on volunteering in Sofia. The questions and discussions that occurred there have been used also as part of the analysis. They helped me to fit my personal and local experience in the frame of a more global context of issues and anxieties concerning the area of social relations and engagement with others.

## 5. Informal individual discussions

Finally, in the situation of an identity crisis that affected me personally but at the same time my institute, the university and the transformative agenda of Bulgarian society, there were valuable informal conversations which helped me check my personal experience of reality and compare it with other people's experiences. I had such conversations mainly with colleagues from the institute. The dynamics and the topics of these conversations helped

me to clarify my personal position and the role that I have in the process of change, as well as, to keep following my personal mission and to stay active and creative.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Development in the periphery**

*“We have to take care of each other most of the time. This is the task for mutual protection as much as possible. Not to engage mainly with ourselves. Our first task has to be the Other. To accept each other’s weakness.”*  
*(Marius Kurkinski, Bulgarian actor and director)*

As a result of an analysis of those processes described in Chapter 1, several basic explanations were formulated about the specificity of the organisational culture developed in the university and the LAP, on the one hand, and in the NGOs, on the other, in regard to their common aim of introducing the idea of a socially engaged university in the Bulgarian higher education system. These explanations help to highlight the hidden emotional dynamics that arose during the implementation of this task, using the four interventions presented above.

In this first analytical chapter, my aim will be to explore the emotional life of the organisation on the broader level of relations between university departments and structures, as well as between the university and the NGOs. This section also makes an effort to capture the context in which organisational change occurred, and to draw a parallel between the dynamics of the emotional life of the university and the LAP, and the surrounding dynamics of public relations in Bulgaria during the same period of time. How the historically developed stable patterns of thinking and acting in the public area were recalled on the level of organisational relations and how the very nature of the task of active social participation created serious challenges to its performance will be demonstrated here.

#### **4.1. From Periphery to Marginalisation**

The initial hypothesis to which the LAP, and the VCC as part of it, subscribed, was that successful organisational change can occur if initiated firstly in its periphery, in one of its parts. Once checked and adjusted to the existing context, it could be later transferred to the entire organisation. One of the main findings of this study was that the implementation of a

liberal educational model in the periphery of the organisation created a type of psychological dynamics on the organisational and individual level that, instead of facilitating its acceptance, actually enforced its marginalisation and destruction. As a result of this, the task of liberal education and active social participation was reduced to a private initiative or a whim of a separate group of people.

The reason for this lies in the fact that the university environment, represented by its departments and administrative structures, didn't accept this task as a project for their own internal transformation. Regardless of the fact that it was announced in the official mission of the university, in practice, the project through which the liberal model of education started was not accepted by the other structures as being their own responsibility.

For instance, even though the principle of internal mobility from the LAP to other university programmes was negotiated at the level of central university management, some of the departments refused to accept in their bachelor specialisations, (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year of Bachelor education), students who had passed through the LAP (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Bachelor education). So, it became indispensable for the liberal arts project coordinator to initiate, at the last moment, individual meetings with the chiefs of those departments and to renegotiate with each of them the special conditions of students' enrolment. In one of my discussions with students in the VCC, about their difficulty in performing course assignments, they expressed their disappointment about the LAP and the university as a whole. The reason for this was that they were not allowed to continue their education in the programmes that they chose, as was promised to them during their enrolment in the LAP.

#### Vignette 1:

Student A related how she visited the director of one of the Bachelor programmes in order to discuss with him her enrollment in it as a continuation of her study after finishing Liberal Arts Programme. The director then informed her that she had to pay a tuition fee for one more year. To her surprise and disagreement the director answered: "We have enough students this year. There is no shortage in their number. So, it is up to you."

I asked both the student and the whole group what this statement tells us about university relations. The group remained silent for a while, then student A said: "We all know that the university is not liberal, but traditional. So what is the point in discussing it?"

I asked A what further steps she planned to take, and if she had yet contacted the LAP management. She replied that she had not done it yet, since she reckoned she must cope with it alone.



Another student, B, said that she didn't believe that anyone from the administration staff could help her so she had come to a compromise about her choice, deciding to enroll in another programme.

A third student, C, related that she felt angry about the programme because, if she had been informed earlier, she would have taken some of the additional courses during her first and second year of study, in order to successfully cope up with the additional requirements.

Statements of discontent from various difficulties students had faced during their study started to arise. Somebody threw out: "And what shall we do when we get into a traditional cultural programme like the one A is talking about?"

Student D answered mockingly: "What a waste of our culture!", and after that, more seriously, he remarked that he liked a lot of things in the Liberal Arts Programme and mainly the friendly rapport between teachers and students, and then students go to a place, nobody seems interested in them, and they are told to do everything on their own.

I used this conversation to make a connection with the course task for active participation and suggested students transform this problem into a project on the improvement of programme practices and its connections with the other university structures. The students got excited. They told me they liked the idea of refining their own programme.

Student E said that they were well aware of the programme because they had been in it for two years, and because of this they had plenty of things to suggest. (From the Reflective diary)

In addition to these examples, some LA students had several times reported, unofficially, to me and to other members of the programme management team, situations in some programmes when they had been treated in a way that differed significantly from that established in the LAP.

#### Vignette 2:

In the process of interviewing one of the most active alumnae of the LAP, she shared her experience with a teacher from another programme. During a lecture there she had, several times, tried to ask questions to the lecturer which interrupted her teaching. This style of being free to ask questions during the lecturing she had acquired in the LAP as a legitimate part of class relations. However, the lecturer got angry about this type of student participation, misinterpreting the student's curiosity as questioning the lecturer's competence or area of knowledge she had been teaching, and responded to this behaviour with aggression and irony. The student explained to me how ashamed and stupid she felt as a result of this interaction.

Examples of similar reactions were given to us by several other students who described the way in which they had been welcomed by some members of other departments. In some cases they shared that they had been considered undeservedly privileged, in comparison to other programmes students, as they came from the LAP (From the Reflective diary).

The conclusion that the programme management team came to during the LAP implementation was that there was a conflict between two relational cultures that coexisted in the university after the project's initiation and that this conflict had affected the students who had been newly versed in liberal values. This situation created difficulties in their education that further led to an experience of disappointment and anger towards the programme and the university, something that the programme management team had not expected and had not been prepared to manage before that moment.

This conclusion reminded me about a question asked by my supervisor, Christopher Miller, when I explained to him the way in which our team was planning to introduce liberal values and a new culture of relations in the university: 'How do you prepare students from the LAP for the feelings of disappointment with which they will be confronted when trying to practice these new values in the currently existing conditions?'.

Just as the LAP wasn't accepted by other departments as their own work task, the efforts to develop the values of active social participation in students didn't become part of the LAP Development Committee's agenda. Teachers from the LAP considered it a responsibility that didn't concern them. One example of such behaviour was evident in a meeting with the teachers from the LAP, organised by me and my colleague from the VCC. Our aim was to share the results of our work with students in this course and to ask them for collaboration and for discussion about the ways in which these kinds of values could be introduced into their courses too.

### Vignette 3:

The VCC team decided to present course aims and design to the other teachers in the LAP, to explain to them some of the issues that occurred during its implementation and to offer an opportunity to think together about how to integrate civic role formation in other course's curricula. My idea was that the notion of active social participation, as a formative university task, could be saved, even if the VCC might be canceled in the future. The project coordinator agreed with this idea and, during the next meeting of the programme staff, we had the opportunity to open such a discussion.

During the presentation, my colleague and I invited others to share their experience and to offer suggestions. Unfortunately, this effort ended with no success at all. Only three colleagues took part in this discussion, telling stories that demonstrated their skepticism about the possibility of introducing such an educational task in the currently existing education system as a whole.

The stories revealed a lack of trust in the capacities of local and central power in Bulgaria in recognizing and encouraging such efforts. They described how the culture of care would come across and would be swept away by private interests, corruption and destructiveness in relation to the spaces for general use in the neighborhoods that have been privatised in a ruthless and annihilating way.

“We have to divide the two results from the education in this programme: on the one hand there is the cognitive aspect – the recognition of the way in which the view on societal inequalities can be understood, and, from the other, the moral effect of education – the ability of the student to undertake some responsibilities towards a stable environment. We have a big problem with the later effects of education, as there is no such micro-environment with stable people that can demonstrate, through their actions, such responsibility.” (Teacher 1)

Another colleague confirmed our experience, relating that “our organisations and society as a whole are very closed, and are themselves learning now how to be active”. She gave an example with the American College in Sofia. Trying to introduce such a culture in the relationship between its students and the neighborhood, the college management took an effort to engage parents with the renovation of a local playground and a bus-stop, asking them to donate money or participate in this activity. The initial idea involved the participation of the parties and the municipalities in a broader campaign, but, finally, it was reduced to a college initiative. During the last year, as our colleague explained, the renovated playground was demolished by a building company and turned into muddy lot. Soon after its installation, the bus-stop was destroyed by vandals and its construction materials were stolen.

The rest of the participants in the meeting didn't show any interest in this discussion, demonstrating that this issue didn't concern them. As a whole, the group related to this task as if it was not part of the common task of the programme but related only to several of its members. The conversation readily shifted to the students' low motivation and capacity to participate in any activity and the lack of good instruments to measure their psychological profiles and motivation.

One of the teachers even made a suggestion that, after measuring their motivation to study and participate actively, students could be divided into groups, and then efforts would be focused only on those students who were motivated.

The conclusion that the course team developed after the meeting was that most of the teachers in the LAP Programme didn't recognise the task of active citizens' formation as their own task. All of them were skeptical about the opportunity of practicing these values in the broader public context, as it is not prepared for that. The shift of the focus of discussion on the students' low capacities demonstrated the helplessness of the teachers in generating ideas and engaging with this task. (From the Reflective diary)

As a result of the facts mentioned above, a question arose about the reasons how and why the members of LAP related to part of their work task concerning introduction of liberal values of social participation through a process of marginalisation.behaviour

The basic argument, with which the form of the experimental project was chosen, in order to introduce the new model of educational relations, was that this form allowed an easier experimentation with new and different approaches, in order to find the most appropriate one. In this form of the liberal education laboratory it was expected that the obstacles to the process of model implementation would be easily identified and practical decisions would be created to overcome them. There are three arguments in favor of this form of change implementation:

- A) The experimental form allows participants to go out of the traditionally accepted frame of organisational roles and procedures, and to become freer to create new procedures, roles and models of relations, in a safe enough environment.
- B) The implementation of the experiment in a small part of the organisation facilitates the control, management and exploration of the system in which change occurs.
- C) As literature on successful entrepreneurship shows, change usually starts in the periphery of the organisation, so a programme was created away from the central management general tasks to explore the opportunities for liberal education in the university.

It was expected that, once studied, liberal education principles would be easily adapted to the entire organisation in a more effective way, as the basic challenges had been studied and could then be predicted and prevented. However, this form of experimental project was in practice used by some of the staff in a way that actually isolated the process of change, keeping it in the frames of the programme and the course in which they were initiated. The main organisational effort of NBU shifted from dissemination of the knowledge and practices achieved by the project to other organisational parts, to an active keeping of the results away from the other departments. This kind of reduction of the common organisational task, to a task of only one of its chains, was achieved through undertaking a specific set of activities on the administrative and departmental level.

These activities had an entirely defensive purpose, as the process of keeping the liberalisation change within the boundaries of an isolated project, in the periphery of the organisation, served to keep the change a safe distance from its other parts, from other departments. The existence of such boundaries helped to control the situation and to calm down all members that could have been affected by the change, sending to them the hidden message that nothing serious would happen, that everything would continue as before, and

that this was only one project and no one knew if something important would result from it. This separation of the task of formative liberal education from its natural connection with the overall mission of the university to modernise and democratise the system of higher education in Bulgaria made it insignificant.

This is the usual mechanism through which stigmatisation and discrimination occur as described by labeling theory. Here, it was applied to a group of people with the concrete task of introducing differences in their organisation. According to Slattery (2002), this difference is perceived as deviance from the norm. Labeled in this way, it results in devaluation and social stigma. Following this mechanism, the peripheral place of the project and its experimental character were emphasized as an important sign of its difference, and of the difference of the programmes, teachers and students involved in LAP. This difference was then announced as dangerous, and activities were undertaken in order to marginalize it and its importance, and finally to eliminate the project in order to induce “normality”. The process of stigmatisation is very clearly shown by Bruce Link and Jo Phelan (2001), describing the convergence of four specific processes:

1. Individuals differentiate and label human variations.
2. Prevailing cultural beliefs tie those labelled to adverse attributes.
3. Labelled individuals are placed in distinguished groups that serve to establish a sense of disconnection between "us" and "them".
4. Labelled individuals experience "status loss and discrimination" that leads to unequal circumstances. (p.363)

The authors also connect the stigmatisation process to access to power “that allows the identification of differences, construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct groups, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination.” (ibid.)

From the point of view of the theory of unconscious defence mechanisms (Freud, A., 1993), the main defence mechanism applied here is that of splitting what works on an individual level, dividing programmes into old and new, good and bad; teachers into being or not being familiar with liberal education or into following the university procedures or overlooking them; students into entering the specialisations in a “normal” way or through the LAP.

For a short time, the illusion that change concerns only a small part of the organisation was successfully endorsed. However, as the LAP project continued, this fantasy was confronted by the appearance of the first alumni of the programme who had to apply to programmes in other departments. The enrolment of these students required flexibility and new kind of management from other programmes and departments. It was not possible yet to overlook the need for change in them. In order to cope with increasing insecurity, the departmental management, instead of reacting as might have been expected for an experiment with a readiness to collaborate and think together, mobilized its defence mechanisms, again using projective identifications. As was demonstrated in Vignette 2 students were divided into two groups, and those from the LAP were regarded as undeservedly privileged. Such an interpretation of the LAP students' status allowed the management to enviously attack the programme through their rejection or devaluation.

In comparison to the first type of marginalisation through disregard, devaluation or limitation of programme results, marginalisation now happened using an active and aggressive projection of bad qualities. From an object of disregard, the programme was transformed into an object of envy. In this sense, a vision of it was developed as being a privileged space, legitimized and supported by top university management. The new principles and procedures developed in the programme in fact made its functioning different from that of the other programmes. Rather than being accepted by those departments as a source of their own refinement, these new principles of organisation were actually seen as an example of organisational injustice. Such an envious interpretation of the LAP generated in other departments, teachers and students, feelings of inequality, unfairness, isolation and marginalisation. This way, the aggression of departments against the LAP was mobilised to eliminate the anxiety provoked by the need for internal transformation. This legitimised their right to openly attack the project for change from the moral position of bringing back justice into the organisational relations. This kind of defensive functioning on the individual level produced, on the level of organisational relations, the culture of fight-flight functioning (Bion, W. R., 1960).

The LAP management responded to this attack from outside, winning over the top management of the university. As we saw on page 35 as a result of this, after intensive and passionate debates, central management reached an agreement with some of the departments to enroll LAP students according to the initial rules, and required other

departments to negotiate the specific requirements under which LAP students could study there. In the course of these events, the LAP project coordinator discovered the fact that other departments were not informed about the meaning of this experiment, were not enlightened in this regard at all and didn't have their own role in it. This fact itself shows that, during the planning phase of this experiment, it was still thought of in a way that created inequalities and marginalisation.

The envious attacks against the LAP continued even after this period of negotiations, with most of the NBU departments regarding the programme as secretive, failing to inform them about the process. They were also envious of the different status of this programme towards the general university rules. This made departments feel excluded and they interpreted the programme as privileged. One example of these continuing efforts to destroy the programme is the way in which the university administration was mobilised to erase the differences that the LAP introduced in the formal procedures and forms of work with students there. The administration did this by asking the programme management team to obey the general administrative rules and this way to depart from its experimental character. The very opportunity to experiment and undertake creative and unusual decisions was blocked. The consequence of this was that, even though the programme continued to function, it actually stopped being a place for learning or a source of new ideas in educational practices.

#### Vignette 4:

Another level on which insecurity was brought into the LAP relationships was the level of its connection with the university management and administration. During the third year of VCC implementation a process of restructuring of the bachelor programmes appeared at the university. So the middle level management introduced new requirements about the courses and asked the LAP director to follow them. These requirements, however, violated the programme's basic conceptual frame, making it equal to the other programmes. For instance, the number of courses offered by the programme was drastically minimised, and this way opportunities for the students to make their individual plan of study were also minimised.

One of the changes prescribed by the bachelor level reform was that, during the first two years of their study, students must take only theoretical courses presented in the form of lectures. In their third and fourth year students could take courses that use reading seminars, discussions or out of class activities. This decision was mainly provoked by the unsatisfactory level of preparation measured in the newly enrolled students down through the years. Through this reform, on the bachelor level, the university in fact made an attempt to compensate for the shortcomings of the poor secondary school education in Bulgaria. Such a decision, however, came into conflict

with the interactive, dialogical and practice-oriented teaching methods developed by the LAP staff. As a result of these changes, all courses in the programme that used such kinds of teaching methods had to be canceled and replaced with lecturing.

As the VCC fell into this category, the LAP coordinator met with me to discuss the situation. What surprised me during this conversation was how easily she accepted the new rules and thus agreed to cancel the two years work of the Programme Development Team and the teachers there. All efforts to introduce new, more participatory and inclusive teaching methods in the programme, were canceled, even though the university had paid money for their development and the students appreciated them immensely.

I shared my disagreement with the coordinator of this easy acceptance of the middle management decision to cancel the experimental character of this programme, and to reduce its methods to lecturing. I also reminded her about the formative task of the VCC. She replied that, unfortunately, no one had asked her about her position. After a short discussion we agreed that the VCC and some of the similar courses would remain in the programme, but officially they would be presented as lecturing only courses. (From the Reflective diary)

This case shows how weak the programme leadership was and how difficult it was for it to keep its work in an environment that didn't value the projects of change with which it was engaged. In this case, as in the cases with students and teachers, the formal authorities of power were accepted as total, as not allowing any dialogue and not supporting learning and change processes in the university. Such a view opened up possibilities for the development of a culture of hypocrisy in the programme and increased distrust between hierarchical levels in the university. The LAP continued to function, but at the price of serious compromises and losing some of its meaning and values, as well as some of the valuable efforts of its staff.

One further question arises here as to what in the emotional life of this organisation and its members made them so anxious about their participation or nonparticipation in this project? Why the fact that one group from the university participates in an experiment that is expected to bring new developments for its entire staff and this doesn't make the staff curious and cooperative, but rather causes deep feelings of exclusion and isolation? And also what in the way in which the change was communicated and managed at the university made the participants in this experiment experience similar feelings of lack of recognition and respect from their colleagues and top university management?



It seems that all participants in the university developed a fiction about the LAP, and the VCC course in particular, that reconstructed a patriarchal or totalitarian type of organisational relationship. According to this fiction, the programme was seen by other departments as the favorite child of top management. The formal authorities are seen as playing the role of totalitarian parent – the chief of the University Board of Trustees or the chief of the Institute, who is also a member of this board. For example, one of the explanations as to why the VCC had never been discussed in the LAP Development Committee and other programme meetings, could be related to the fact that both I and my colleague from the course were members of the Institute. This is probably the reason why the LAP director and the coordinator never asked me about the design and the process that occurred in this course. At the same time, right after being legitimised by a higher level of authority, they readily cancelled it from the programme. I can say that to a certain degree their lack of knowledge about the content and the aims of the VCC helped them to cancel it much more easily, as their ignorance allowed them to develop or support versions about it that could serve as arguments for its elimination. One such version, for example, was that there was no theory, but only practice, in this course, so it couldn't impart any fundamental knowledge. Another later version, developed by the chief of one of the competing departments, was that it was related more to values but not to concrete scientific study. Despite the fact that both arguments were not correct, they were considered valid in the moments of pressure from one or another authority.

It took several years for these two managers to develop trust in me, to understand the meaning of the VCC and to make efforts to defend it in their discussions with the university management. On the one hand, it became possible because of the positive feedback given to them by the students in this course. On the other, it happened because of my readiness to stay close to them throughout the years of programme implementation, to discuss the issues together and to support their efforts when the other members of the LAP Development Committee who represented the Institute gradually and quietly stopped participating in it.

In this authoritarian, family-like version of organisational relations, the top managers alone decided about the future of all its parts, not asking their representatives at all. The LAP management behaved in a complementary way looking for managers' support only in situations of conflicts and crises.

Most of the time, top management is seen in the role of a severe and punishing father who is rather critical, and, therefore, it would be better to avoid all kinds of communication with him. This kind of projection of the organisational leadership prevented the process of the transition of knowledge from the programme to the other organisational parts. Unfortunately, top management itself behaved in a way that supported such a projection. It took the role of an external observer or user who entrusts the project team with the duty of developing a liberal model of university, but is not thought of as a directly involved participant in the real process of experimentation and creation of a supportive environment in the organisation for its implementation. Such a distant position of the leadership further intensified the process of mutual exclusion and the concomitant feelings of envy and anger.

In these circumstances, when trying to avoid attacks from the outside, the programme management entrenched itself in the programme, transforming it from a temporary experiment into a long-lasting and sustainable programme, and then to a permanent organisation. The lack of a time-table for this project, as well as the lack of planned activities for the transition of the knowledge and experience gathered by the project to the entire organisation, additionally facilitated this transformation of the programme into a sustainable organisation. This kind of thinking of the programme management, instead of supporting its aims, actually acted against them, creating opportunities for its further marginalisation and elimination.

Insofar as the programme was seen by its management as being dependent exclusively on the kindness of top management, each critical or different position made by the later was experienced by the programme management as an act of annihilation. In its effort to avoid similar future developments, the programme management resorted to the help of external authorities. Thus, the project coordinator invited the members of Salzburg Seminar, in order to receive additional arguments about the value of this programme from their external evaluation. Unfortunately, in the already created collusive culture of mutual exclusion, this activity led to further marginalisation of the programme, as it confronted the university top management authority with that of the external consultants.

As a result of these dynamics, the programme management shifted its focus from the implementation of changes in the university, to the defence of the programme's existence.

The team then began to create fictions about the LAP as a programme with strong boundaries that would prevent any further attempts at destruction. For example, the programme was envisioned as a four year bachelor programme that would not depend more on other departments' pretensions. Another example of this kind was the wish to sustain the results achieved in the liberal model of education in a form of college outside, or at, the university.

The conclusion could be made on the basis of these dynamics that in such a type of relational culture in the university it is possible to create a liberal model of education only through separation, confrontation and the development of strong boundaries between the two models of education. The risk, however, is that the change would occur in a small part of the organisation, and would enforce the privatisation of the university vision by one of its parts. Top university management refused to accept such developments, reminding the programme management about its initial idea.

In this part of the analysis I have described the process of the establishment of a culture of relationships in the university concerning the task of liberal education and active social participation, in which the predominant experience of all members of the university was that of being excluded. On the one hand, the departments experienced themselves as excluded from the relationship between top management and the LAP team, on the other, the programme management also felt isolated and unrecognised by top management, other departments and university administration. Furthermore, top management behaved as if not recognised and invested with enough trust by its staff.

The overall process presented above, demonstrates how, in the culture of hierarchical or patriarchal relations, social defences are mobilised to control change in a way that marginalises and, in the end, eliminates impacts on the organisation. The focus of interest of members is shifted from task implementation to an anxiety concerning the members' experience of exclusion, and to an effort to overcome the very unpleasant feelings that are created through envious attacks, exclusion and elimination of the difference.

Hinshelwood, (2001), explains the psychological mechanisms underlying such kinds of experiences of exclusion in the organisational members with a process of activation of Oedipal anxieties.

Such primitive relations, more typical of childhood, may be re-experienced continuously in adulthood, in an otherwise apparently real situation. Such hidden fantasies give meaning – albeit in this case a nightmare meaning – to ordinary life. Quite primitive fantasies of aggression, of being excluded from some institutions, creep into normal reality. (Hinshelwood, 2001, p.84)

He looks at the Oedipal sense of exclusion as “one of the most potent sources of violence and aggression in institutions” (Hinshelwood, 2001, p.103). This kind of traumatic experience of exclusion sweeps over the entire organisation and prevents the achievement of what Hinshelwood calls the “third position”. The achievement of this third position is very important, especially in an organisation that undertakes transformative activities:

This stance allows a flexible movement – a move into the emotions of the primal scene, but a sustained awareness of one’s own sense of self and identity. (Hinshelwood, 2001, p.87)

When describing the different levels on which the Oedipal conflict can be overcome in later life, Hinshelwood recognises three types of conflict resolution and three kinds of qualities of relationships: a) an identification by equation; b) an excluding separation; and c) a third stance (Hinshelwood, 2001, p.88). In our case, with the university dynamics, it seems that the second type of relationship was developed, representing an immature way of overcoming the Oedipal situation:

(b) an excluding separation, grounded in an awareness of that distinction with greater or lesser feelings of exclusion from them – where the intensity of that feeling is greater, there is an agonised pain, which may often be experienced in a paranoid form and gives rise to a fear of hostility between those others, and victimization by them. (ibid.)

In respect to Hinshelwood’s position, I can say that the sense of solidarity and the relationship with the other in this case is marked by the fiction of exclusion and destruction, rather than by feelings of recognition of the other, collaboration or acceptance of the fact that important relations in the organisation happen out of a person’s own participation.

Sharing fantasies and beliefs at an unconscious level is a kind of social glue which sticks people together as groups and societies. The earliest forms of these fantasies (Klein, 1932), the combination of a maternal figure with a male member that she contains, seem to be established socially as common fantasies ... (Hinshelwood, 2001, p.84)

The explanation given by Hinshelwood highlights the fact that instead of being curious about the experiment, the departments related to it violently. This stance of psychological functioning paralyzes the capacity of organisational staff to reflect and learn from the new experience, as was the initial meaning with which the experiment was created.

Clearly these primitive experiences are modified in a process of maturing. ... However, a new position with regard to that Oedipal exclusion is not easily attained. It has to be won, with a good deal of 'emotional work'. ... This step forward in the process of maturing is described particularly succinctly by Britton (1989).

'...If the link between the parents perceived in love and hate can be tolerated in the child's mind, it provides him with a prototype for an object-relationship of a third kind in which he is a witness and not a participant. A third position then comes into existence from which object-relationships can be observed. Giving this we can envisage *being* observed. This provides us with a capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view whilst retaining our own, for reflecting on ourselves whilst being ourselves.' (Britton, 1989, p.87)

The capacity to learn and think and know from this reflective third position is more truly social. Knowledge exists in contrast to simply *being* in a state of love or hate. When in the social context the capacity to know fades, and over-involvement in these phantasy institutions takes place, it makes the social situation particularly difficult to relate to realistically. (Hinshelwood, 2001, p.88)

We can draw a conclusion that the organisation relates to its task of introducing liberal education and active social participation in university relations, in a primitive way. Each attempt to create operative units that could effectively develop certain projects for organisational change is spoiled because of the low capacity of its members to tolerate the early anxieties related to Oedipal type of situations in the organisation.

In the next chapter, where leadership and authority relationships will be the focus of exploration, an emphasis will be made on the way in which most of the members identify with authority in a way that eliminates the boundaries between authorities and members. This makes impossible the achievement of the third position. It further prevents the capacity of individuals and groups in the university to connect to each other and to support each other's initiatives i.e. to increase the social capital of the academic community. The level of active social participation in society depends on the level at which these capacities have been achieved by its members in the process of their psychological and social development.

The development of the capacity to know about relationships, to be able to witness them from a ‘third position’, ...also lays down the possibility of developing relations with other institutions – play-group, school, and eventually workplace. (Hinshelwood, 2001, p.86)

## **4.2. Discredited Community in the Mind**

### **4.2.1. The Nature of the Distrust in the Community Relations**

The relations in the university and the LAP, analysed above, are also present to a great extent in the social relation of Bulgarian society as a whole. One of the explanations for the existence of such a culture, in which it is very difficult to tolerate the third position concerning social relations, can be found in the meaning with which the notion of community and public trust was invested during the socialist past of this country. This historical context of the development of a certain type of social relations is an important part of the reasons for the incapacity of organisational members to utilize the experiences and achievements made by themselves and by their colleagues for the purpose of organisational and personal development.

What I want to put here as an issue is the tremendous gap currently existing in Bulgarian society, in social and political life, between the state and the citizen, and the lack of those forms and practices of civil society that on the one hand, would facilitate the relationship between them and on the other, would serve as an alternative that broadens opportunities for development outside of dependence on state alone.

This part of my explanation about the currently existing situation at NBU rests on the heritage of a specific system of public relations in Bulgaria, which was developed during the socialist regime. I chose to call this heritage a situation of discredited community relations. This situation could be described as a lack of trust between citizens and state represented by its public institutions, as well as a total withdrawal or failed attempts of the citizens to participate in the social arena.

Here I am focusing only on the historical background of the socialist system of social relations, and how it still produces feelings of distrust, alienation, abuse and destructiveness

in Bulgarian citizens more than twenty years after the initiation of democratic changes in this country. I want to put a special emphasis here on the processes through which the totalitarian order systematically destroyed community life and, in fact, erased the fragile social connections developed in Bulgarian society in the period of the 66 years of independence between 1878[1] and 1944[2],[3].

This analysis is related to the initial hypothesis made at the beginning of the study that the lack of direct experience with authentic community relations creates difficulty in the implementation of democratic values and thinking in all groups related to the project. The danger was that the old model of false social behaviour established during socialism would be used in the process of change implementation, eroding the development of trustful relationships between the participants at university.

Community is an important, albeit very contradictory and questionable, dimension of the social and emotional life through which a person can exercise his rights and responsibilities as a democratic citizen. It is this social and mental space where he is envisioned as participating in a natural, free and voluntary way in the development, maintenance, and transformation of his society and receiving, in return, more opportunities for his personal life and welfare.

From the psychoanalytic point of view, through such kind of reciprocity in relations with the other members of the community, a person can cultivate two very important senses for his development: the sense of belonging and the sense of ownership. In Stern's theory on the four senses of self, it is called "the sense of transmitting meaning (without which there is exclusion from the culture, little socialisation, and no validation of personal knowledge)" (Stern, 1985, pp.7-8).

Community as a symbol of trust, solidarity and cohesion in the relationships with the others (Taylor, 2003) is usually seen as an important aspect of democratic social life. What I found, however, during the years of my professional life, when teaching students or developing new models of community, mental health and social care, as well as in my personal life as a citizen having experience of both socialist, transitional and capitalist periods of public life in Bulgaria, is that what is called 'community', 'collective' or 'social', is actually missing in peoples' minds. The way people did, and still do, think and

behave here includes two basic social categories: a) of the individual and his family and b) of the state. These are the categories with which totalitarian minds usually operate. During the changes what was added to the category of “individual” was his private interest and initiative or business as a new legitimate way for the person to participate in the public arena. One of the main reasons for the lack of other types of social relations and social roles can be seen in the way the notion of community was used during socialist times in this country.

The success of the totalitarian state is based on its ability to keep for a long time the illusion of building a happy, democratic society and the highest possible welfare for all its citizens in an unclear but certain future. This illusion, of course, sooner or later, faces reality and this can lead to the discovery of the real aim of the establishment to keep the power for itself. This is why, after developing an unrealistic ideal with which people can identify, the establishment of totalitarian power legitimises the use of terror and total control in social relationships in the name of this ideal. In order to manipulate people’s minds, it also creates a social situation of permanent insecurity and danger (called ‘permanent revolution’) and this way mobilises all primitive fears and paranoid fantasies that are part of the psychological functioning in a crisis.

Here (in Nazi Germany, remark mine), instead of the Bolshevik concept of permanent revolution, we find the notion of a racial “selection which can never stand still” thus requiring a constant radicalization of the standards by which the selection, i.e., the extermination of the unfit, is carried out. The point is that both Hitler and Stalin held out promises of stability in order to hide their intention of creating a state of permanent instability. (Arendt, 1994, p.89)

Thus, people’s choices are easy to manipulate because of the serious threat to their capacity to test reality i.e. to think critically about what a real problem or danger is, and what is not. Lawrence (1995) describes this situation from the psychodynamic point of view as ‘psychotic’:

... the fear of annihilation, the fear of being made a nothing, the fear of not being able to make sense of what realities may be, the fear of disorder and chaos, the fear of disintegration, the fear of loss, ending and death. These fears are actually present in psychic life during earliest infancy and can be reactivated at any time in our subsequent lives when persecutory circumstances trigger them.” (p.1)



And the persecution, terror and control were real and were part of the everyday life during socialism in Bulgaria. (Gospodinov, G., 2011)

One of the most severe examples of manipulation that used the specific nature of human psychological functioning was the so called Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976). There, what was abused were two of the core psycho-social developmental needs of adolescents: a) to question the authority of their parents, in order to become more autonomous and b) to promote their personal identities through attachment with a figure of an alternative adult, used as an ego ideal. The leader of the communist party and the state in China was proclaimed a legitimate and socially acceptable ego ideal, an alternative to the family authorities and opposed to them. As a result of this, a massive process of extreme violence of groups of young people towards the older generations of their parents, relatives, teachers and other authorities flooded through the country.

After the occupation of the overall state apparatus and the elimination of the private sector and private initiative, the next social area towards which the efforts of the totalitarian government were focused, in Bulgaria, was the area of the natural human communities. These were, for instance, the local communities of the city neighborhoods and villages, informal communities of interests, like clubs and associations, and natural communities of families. These were social spaces that remained uncontrolled and therefore dangerous.

In order to control these communities, the totalitarian government attacked the basic relation on which they were built – the relationship of trust between, members and the shared interest and purpose. The only legitimate relationship of trust that was officially declared, was the relationship between the individual citizen and the party. This was a subordinating relationship. The authority of the party was the only one, valid authority in which the socialist citizen had to trust unreservedly. The relationship between citizen and state is subordinating also, because the former belongs no longer to his family or community, but to the party. The citizen's sense of belonging to the natural community was cancelled, being socially unacceptable, and was substituted by formal membership in the communist party. The social relation of total dependence of the citizen to the state was established over all the aspects of his life. The only avenue to personal prosperity was in the creation of good relationships with the people in power.

Since the natural relations in the families and communities couldn't be just erased from individual lives, their control and validation were exercised in two ways:

a) officially – through different public formations: neighborhood watch, police departments, comrades' courts, pioneers' organisations and Komsomol, commissions for the fight with antisocial behaviour etc.. This was the official system of highly controlled and dictated forms of pseudo-communities.

b) secretly – a constantly developing net of locally recruited informers. Their task was to collect and report information about the behaviour of their colleagues in the workplace, neighbors, friends and members of their families, to the special 6<sup>th</sup> department to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This was the system of hidden control that kept a permanent feeling of insecurity and fear about a person's physical survivor.

Through this structure, the establishment created what Bion (1961) describes in terms of group dynamics as assumption of 'fight and flight'. This is a state of group mentality that constantly produces enemies with which to fight, as a way to consolidate the members of the group, using their primitive fears. Such functioning is a certain sign that the internal cohesion and trust between the members suffers and that there is a crisis in the group in its relation to the primary task.

Arendt describes this process of the constant production of enemies in two stages, where, in the first stage, the fight was organised mainly towards the real enemies, external to the communist circle, and in the second one, with the creation of a group of 'suspected', potential enemies called also 'internal enemies' or 'the enemy with a party card'. It created a social situation in which no one is safe.

In the first stage of a totalitarian regime, however, the secret police and the party's elite formations still play a role similar to that of other forms of dictatorship and the well known terror regimes of the past; ... The first stage of ferreting out secret enemies and hunting down former opponents is usually combined with drafting the entire population into front organisations and re-educating old party members for voluntary espionage services ... It is during this stage that a neighbor gradually becomes a more dangerous enemy to one who happens to harbor more "dangerous thoughts" than are held towards the officially appointed police agents. The end of the first stage comes with the liquidation of open and secret resistance in any organized form; ...

Only after the extermination of real enemies has been completed and the hunt for "objective enemies" begins, does terror become the actual content of totalitarian regimes. (Arendt, 1994, p.119-120)

The system of official and hidden control was used in order to identify those enemies and punish them. After the initial decade of severe terror of people that were sentenced to death, missing or sent to jail, camps or psychiatric clinics, the later form of more consummate control and punishment was developed in Bulgaria. It used the informants and their control over the person's natural environment of social relationships for the total social isolation of that person. One clear example of such a 'social death' is the story of the famous Bulgarian painter, Alexander Dzendov (Raynov, 2008), who was part of the communist artistic elite. Internal fighting for power in the party changed him into an object of systemic social isolation and caused his death.

Thus, generation by generation, public space became associated with the experience of danger, struggle for physical and social survival, false and servile behaviour. Using Winnicott's concept of the false self (1990), we can say that these social relationships created, on the individual level, a false social identity.

The second form of control, mentioned above, was especially destructive towards relationships of trust in the community. It shifted the trustful relationships between the members in relationships to one of constant fear, suspicion, and insecurity towards others. Relationships with the world, which were based on severe competition rather than on solidarity, were encouraged, and created a social culture of survival. This kind of paranoid-schizoid psychological functioning (Klein, 1975) as a main characteristic of social life, leads to the development of a false self. Lawrence (1995) explains the emergence of the false self as one of the three main consequences of "a culture which was based on a totalitarian-state-of-mind" (p.6). Sebek (1993) argues that in such social conditions the false self can be seen as a defence organised to protect the 'true' self:

The false self, in a totalitarian society, defended and protected the true self that can be expressed only in a limited, relatively "safe" space, for example, in a family, with a spouse... In the totalitarian system, as prescribed by communists, conditions were especially ripe for the creation of the false self. This false self was usually on the surface of the personality and supplanted the true self... the false self adapted to the requirements of the totalitarian power – in terms of subjugation, passivity, resignation and obedience. (Sebek, 1993, p.2, quoted in Lawrence, 1995, p.6)

The real place in which the authentic self can act was shortened, at best to the narrow circle of the family and close friends. The authentic self manifested illegally, behind power, in underground public spaces.

The perverse social relations, through which the false social self showed itself, prevailed on the public scene, creating the image of “the citizen devoted to the party and the state” [4]. As a result of the systemic destruction of the authentic communities the very meaning of community was devalued as a social space.

Insofar as the totalitarian system confronted the core human quality of relatedness, public space became an arena of passive, and to some extent, active aggressive response of the citizens. The alienation of citizens from participation in it became a stable characteristic of the identity of the socialist citizen. In this respect, Lawrence (1995) underlines two very important consequences:

- a) diminished “capacity for thought and thinking” that made people “less able to relate to the external environment which was perceived as being in a state of flux”;
- b) people “became entrapped in the inner, political world and life of the institution, in a life of action and reaction, doing, not being. The preoccupation was with personal survival, which is essentially narcissistic. The frame of mind didn’t allow them to anticipate the future in any way other than in individual terms.” (p.2)

As a result of these processes of collusive relationships between state and citizen, a culture of dependence was created. The collusive relationship, as described by Lawrence, helps us to explain the paradoxical shift of the perception of the totalitarian leader from Oppressor to Saviour. It can be seen as a product of the splitting of the object of leadership, where the good object is the leader as a model of right thinking and behaviour and the bad objects are his surroundings and all members of society that he constantly punishes for their mistakes.

Thus, a ‘social system of defence’ comes into play. It is for this primary reason that a totalitarian-state-of-mind comes to be acceptable to the majority of the role holders and because it offers the fantasy of security.

The wish for psychic and political security by the majority of role holders is realised by projecting into the management, particularly the ‘top’ ones, the feelings that they are omnipotent, omniscient and capable of satisfying all desires for dependency. The price

which has to be paid for this unconscious projection is a rigid, authoritarian organisation with its associated culture of dependency. (Lawrence, 1995, p.5)

I gave here special attention to this kind of more general analysis of the basic view on which social relations were developed in Bulgarian society, with the argument that it helps for better understanding of the deep and stable psychological sources of those traumatic fantasies that prevented the ability of people in the university to relate to each other and to the management representatives in a trustful and collaborative way. Any collective initiative, such as the projects studied here was, recalled fears of annihilation - physical as well as psychological. For this reason, the predominant feelings of all participants in the university were those of being excluded from the direct and constant relationship with the leader, which was akin to a feeling of total isolation.

In this first analytical chapter, I draw attention more to peer relationships, in as far as they created an important part of the active and collective social engagement. The success of any informal collective effort depends on the level of trust and engagement that participants invest in relationships with each other. The next analytical chapter will focus on relationship with the authorities in power and the issues that arise from this, in relation to the project.

In regard to peer relationships, the totalitarian-state-of-mind has been demonstrated in my study through three basic tendencies appearing in the partners' relationships.

The first of them is that there is no need to collaborate with others, as a person's social or organisational legitimacy comes through the authority of power, envisioned in this case in the personality of top management. So with such a social reality in the minds of the members of this organisation, others virtually don't exist as important objects in which to invest positive feelings and trust. As they exist in reality, they are recognised and interpreted only as competitors for the authority's love and appreciation. This kind of thinking about the relationship with partners or peers as not socially important and potentially dangerous, can be demonstrated in several examples:

Vignette 5:

During the first year of my work at the university I participated in a discussion about some future developments in the organisation. There were two conflicting positions,

represented by a top manager and a colleague of mine. I participated actively in the discussion which was basically run by both of them. The other colleagues were silent most of the time.

During the break, one of the colleagues came to me, saying that he used to be so passionate and emotional, like me, but as time went by, he realised that it was a waste of time. In the end the boss always decides. So, there was no reason to share your position and discuss it with others. It would still remain unrecognised.

I felt then like a naïve newcomer who was not yet familiar with the traditional “rituals” in the organisation. (From the Reflective diary)

This example demonstrates a model of thinking about collective decision making, according to which everything passes through authority, and peer discussions are not valued or valid sources of organisational development. Showing your own personal position publicly is not important as it will never be recognised.

Another example of the “only authority matters” kind of social relations, is the sentence with which different levels of university administration usually respond to someone’s expectation that they have to take certain decisions. They usually point to top management saying: “Only he decides”. These examples show that relationships with others look totally unreasonable in such a dual relationship with the authorities of power.

It is important here to underline the fact that this culture of relations is carefully cultivated in our primary and secondary schools where education is focused more on the relationship of the students with the teacher and his knowledge, than on communication with peers. Furthermore, it doesn’t stimulate communication at all, as school relationships create habits such as:

- toleration of students’ dropouts from the school;
- nonparticipation in discussions;
- lack of critical thinking and development of personal position;
- literal recall of authorities’ thoughts but not being allowed to produce their own thoughts.

For instance, some of the students in the VCC shared with us their difficulty or surprise in participating in group discussion, as this was the first time they had been asked for their opinion in an educational context. Other students explained their appreciation of the opportunity in the VCC to work in groups on a chosen project, as, in school, they had been invited only to compete with each other individually, and never to collaborate on special

tasks. As a result of such an individualistic and authority centered model of learning, some of the students in the course, especially in its first years of implementation, refused to participate in discussions or practical tasks, as they expected lecturing only. The participatory style of teaching in the course, and the LAP as a whole, made them vulnerable and they resisted it.

Vignette 6:

Student N said that, for her, this arrangement of the chairs in a circle and the discussions don't teach her anything, as it doesn't make any sense for her to see her colleagues' faces.

Another student, T, related an opposite opinion, saying this style of teaching made her feel more included in the group.

To that N answered: "This is true, but still I am very disappointed and angry with the programme because it constantly experiments on us. The programme is an experiment and the course is an experiment too. I don't agree that my education is not education but an experiment. (Protocol from the reflection group in the VCC)

The second totalitarian tendency in peer relationships concerned the deconstruction of situations initially constructed as equal and participatory. Such groups were created in all four interventions, as were the LAP Development Committee, regular meetings with the teachers of the programme, the VCC development team, collaboration with the NGO leaders in the VCC, Departmental Meetings for the discussion of the Project for an entrepreneurial and caring university, a group of teachers who participated in the development of the tutoring model of working with the students at NBU. In spite of having their formal leaders, all these temporary groups were created on the principle of participation and collective decision making as their task was to explore new forms of relationships in the organisation using the points of view of different participants in their different roles.

The main tendency in all the above-mentioned groups was one of deconstruction of peer relationships with which the group was formed, and rebuilding of them again in a hierarchical order, based on the power difference between members' formal roles at the university. The following examples show how actively members refused to imagine more equal kinds of organisational relationships and immediately transformed them into dependent relationships. They preferred to relate to formal power but not to the recognition of each other's values and qualities. One example of this kind is related to the group of

teachers who participated in the exploration and development of tutoring relations with the students at the university.

Vignette 7:

I invited the group of teachers to participate in the concrete description of the procedures through which tutoring could be better implemented in the university context, from the point of view of their positions as administrators, chiefs of department or teachers. I invited them also to think about the specific profile of a tutor at the university, taking into account their personal experience with students' consultations during the project. Only a few of them agreed to participate. The others explained that they were very busy. I suggested that I would draft these documents and they could add their ideas or examples. All agreed to do this through the internet, but only one of them in fact did it. Then I decided to discuss the drafts during our next meeting but few of them came and share their positions.

Later on I had an interview with J. and she expressed her concern that most of the participants actually didn't agree with being part of the development of these documents. This position they shared with each other after the above-mentioned meeting. The position was that this was the project management team's responsibility.

My invitation for a more participatory creation of the tutoring role, while being aware of all positions and experiences, which was the purpose of the Tutoring project in our case, was experienced as exploitative and abusive. (From the Reflective diary)

This example clearly shows how the group interpreted the situation in a formal, hierarchical way even when the participants had initially agreed to explore the role together thereby developing a context appropriate to tutoring their students. The participants didn't believe, almost in the same way as the students from the VCC didn't, that their experience would actually be taken seriously and valued by the management. During the project they behaved, overall, as if it was not their own project, even though they participated voluntarily in it, and had been very enthusiastic about it. They didn't trust that the management would value their position and therefore preferred to accept, as in Vignette 5, the situation as a formal one.

The problem with participation in the decision making process was that one has to engage with a specific position and share it publicly. However, in a totalitarian culture, this creates risks for the person, so that the situations of participation have to be actively avoided.

A similar model of the transformation of a participatory situation into a hierarchical one, has been demonstrated in the dynamics of the VCC development team, between R. and D.,



where D. (a former student in a master's programme in which R. and I taught) was invited to participate. (For more details see *Appendix 2: Tensions in the VCC development team.*)

Even though D. had already finished her study and wasn't dependent on us anymore, she continued to interpret the relationships in the team in a hierarchical way. First of all, D. expected that both R. and I knew everything about the service learning model of work and couldn't tolerate our insecurity and doubts when applying it. Secondly, in the case of the conflict with R. she didn't discuss her disagreement with him about the way he had treated her, and didn't inform me about the conflict with R., or put it up for discussion in the agenda of the team meetings.

This case shows how, in a situation of insecurity and tension in the team, some of the members shifted to formal disempowered positions, refusing to accept responsibility for the failures of the group and authorizing themselves to confront those whom they regarded as being in a more powerful position.

Another example of this type of defensive thinking is illustrated in the relationships with the NGO leader described in *Appendix 3: Tensions in the relationships with the NGOs.* Even after having been invited to take up a co-researcher's position in the VCC, the NGO leader again interpreted us as people in power, relating to us in our previous roles of his teachers. When I invited him to discuss the students' experience in his organisation, what I found during the meeting was that, on an unconscious level, he had organised our relationships in a hierarchical way, projecting a totalitarian type of authority onto myself, giving me the power to exclude, punish or blame him for the students' negative feelings toward his organisation or about his unacceptable feelings of anger towards the students. Again, as in the case with D., he kept silent in front of the formal powers, and allowed himself to discuss the issue only in the context of relationships that he had constructed as private, friendly and informal i.e. non-public, (as was his conversation with R.).

These cases show how, even when defined in a more peer and participatory way, public relationships could be defensively redefined, splitting the roles in the group into who was more, or less, powerful, thereby creating a situation of a traumatic relationship with totalitarian authority.

As a result of the two tendencies a) to accept as socially important only the relationship in a pair with the authority of power and b) to construct each public or collective situation as hierarchical, and include a relationship with a totalitarian authority, a third tendency is created in which collective efforts lose their meaning and are accepted as formal and non-authentic and, therefore, are not invested with real emotional and behavioural engagement.

Some of the studies undertaken during the first decade of the new century, about voluntary work in Bulgarian society, show strong negative associations in the middle aged generation of Bulgarians, of the currently developed by some NGOs volunteering initiatives, with the former forced Komsomol brigades or other public and collective initiatives organised during socialism that were *called* voluntary but had no such character at all, and were pursued with false enthusiasm. One of the students interviewed about the VCC explains such an attitude in her parents:

Vignette 8:

**Student:** It's quite interesting that they are not socially active like me. Even when I was little and there were these cleaning gatherings, they would hide themselves at home and tell me "Don't move because they can understand there's someone at home". This, of course, was due to the fact that they worked in shifts and were quite tired – not because of a lack of will in doing it. But in some way in my mind there is the non-active civic example from them.

**Interviewer:** These are the Lenin Sabbaths, do you know about them? It was probably these they opposed.

**Student:** I haven't heard about that but I'm talking mostly about democratic times, and a kind of cleaning, in order for all of us to feel good around the block. But I began opposing my parents when I was little; I wanted to go out and clean, "Stay here! Why are you going to rifle in the garbage of others! We don't throw ours out on the street", to which I answered "It doesn't matter, it has to be clean for all of us, doesn't it?". I have no idea where this instinct of opposition came from, but I had it. And I already feel independent enough to become an initiator of initiatives which they wouldn't even have thought of implementing. (Interview with T., student in the VCC)

And later on in the same interview:

**Interviewer:** Is there any point in trying to teach people to be active citizens, and can this happen through the course we're making for the students?

**Student:** I think the idea is profound, because civil activity in Bulgaria has been suppressed for quite a long time. I don't think it's a secret to anyone how things stood in communist times...

**Interviewer:** What do you know about that?

**Student:** My parents told me that everything used to come from above – you carry out direct orders and, how should I put it, you don't have any space for creative work.

Everything should be done strictly, the way it has been planned; you can't go outside the parameters of the party's ideology. Somehow, they haven't established in themselves the sense of such activity, or at least I don't notice such strong activity in my parents' generation. We are the children of democracy, which, although distorted in Bulgaria, is there, but we are also children of our parents – i.e we have been brought up according to the way in which they have built the picture of the world. And naturally they don't "teach" us civic initiative, because they lack it. There is a need to have vivid examples of such civil activity in society - examples of people who really get results - this also is very important. And secondly, I think the idea of creating such a course is very good because everyday problems are examined on a more academic level. The atmosphere that is created between colleagues can also provoke a lot of activity.” (Interview with T., student in the VCC) (See *Appendix 4. Interview with Student T.*)

The course work of two students from the VCC, concerning the Small Garden project, offers an additional and very vivid example of the way people in Bulgaria experience collective spaces. (See *Appendix 5. Small garden project in the VCC*). The strong connection with the past is demonstrated here through the chronic neglect of public spaces in the neighborhood.

In all examples given in this chapter, there is always a hidden, imagined figure of power that is being attacked in a passive, destructive way. Thus, social relations are constructed predominantly as relationships of fear and fight with a totalitarian authority. This was the reason I decided to more thoroughly explore the relationship with the authorities of power in the next analytical chapter.

#### **4.2.2. Possible Solutions to Overcome the Totalitarian-State-of-Mind**

As a result of the historically-created culture of dependency, current social and political life in Bulgaria is characterised by:

- a) lack of models of trustful public and political relationships;
- b) total dependence on the state and its institutions;
- c) intellectual and social impairment - inability for independent thinking, social responsibility, collective action or care for others.

One possible response to such a state of mind Lawrence sees in the mobilisation of such mental dispositions “which will not interpret the realities of the environment exclusively from a paranoid-schizoid position” (p.7). What he offers as a way to overcome these social impairments of the totalitarian societies, (and all social groups that are in a totalitarian

state-of-mind), is to enter the depressive position and to try to relate to the objects of social reality as whole objects with good and bad aspects. He cites Steiner saying:

The recognition of whole objects comes about because of ‘... an increased capacity to integrate experiences and lead to a shift in primary concern, from the survival of the self to a concern for the object upon which the individual depends. Destructive feelings lead to feelings of loss and guilt which can be more fully experienced and which, consequently, enable mourning to take place. The consequences include a development of symbolic function and the emergence of reparative capacities which become possible when thinking no longer has to remain concrete.’ (Steiner, 1987, pp.69-70, quoted in Lawrence, 1995, p.8)

Lawrence suggests that people replace the ‘politics of salvation’ with ‘politics of revelation’:

By contrast, the politics of revelation are more a state of being than doing. I mean, by revelation, the work of being available for experiences, whether psychotic-like or not, generating working hypotheses on these experiences and making interpretations on the significance of the experiences. (Lawrence, 1995, p.10)

We can think about this mode of thinking and doing that Lawrence calls a ‘policy of revelation’ in terms of the capacity to reflect on and learn from personal experience. It sounds very close to what John Keane (1998) promotes writing that:

... an open, self-governing civil society protected by various tiers of state institutions requires the cultivation of a complex habitat of nesting spaces. Within these spaces, citizens can protect themselves against the dangers of ‘uprootedness’ in a democracy by learning how to belong to a variety of organisations which enable them to put down roots, thereby preserving particular memories of the past, a measure of stability in the present, and particular expectations for the future. These spaces can further counteract nationalist pressures by helping citizens to overcome their own parochialism. Through their participation in the relatively local organisations of civil society, citizens find the most effective cure of their localism by learning about the wider world... (Keane, p.108)

The meaning that I want to extract from the rich ideas of this passage is that locally organised communities can become places for reflecting and learning, places in which the democratic debate could occur that would shift the values and would create new possibilities. When discussing the current situation of the NGO sector and governance spaces in Bulgaria, we will compare this idea with the reality, and the dynamics that prevent learning in such spaces. Nevertheless, this can be used as a starting point when we think about the university as an initiator of such spaces.

Kean consolidates himself with the position of Jan Tesař (1981) that when civil society structures are underdeveloped in one country, the danger of totalitarianism is higher. So we can draw the conclusion that, during the current stage of political transition, the model of totalitarian relations or some of its features can be activated again, especially in a situation of crisis.

At the same time, for Tesař, the only chance of such societies overcoming this model of social relations is to keep following and supporting the structures of civil society.

Civil society is the Achilles' heel of regimes such as Czechoslovakia: 'if the totalitarian systems, as a reversion to absolutism in the twentieth century, arise more easily in an environment where the structure of "civil society" is not sufficiently well formed, then the most reliable means of preventing their genesis is to encourage the development of that civil society'. (Kean, p.20)

Another very important implication of Lawrence's work is the idea of the inclination of some people to a depressive position. We can assume, for the practice of education and change, that such people can be used as role models, and can be supported in order to promote a culture of self-reflection in the organisations, communities and society.

Such people are those in institutions who have minds and thoughts and are capable of thinking and having dreams. They question finding the skull beneath the skin of contemporary life. (Lawrence, p.10)

## **Chapter Five**

### **Inclusion of the Top Management**

*For me it is important that people learn to change the things around them,  
to start believing that they are capable of changing things.*  
*(Team member from the VCC)*

In Chapter 4 I analysed the dynamics that were developed at the level of the university departments, as a result of the implementation of a task related to university social engagement. An experimental project of liberal education was established there (Intervention 1 and 2) with the purpose of exploring the process of this organisational change.

The analysis showed that the public proclamation of the task and its implementation into specific project activities themselves didn't guarantee the establishment of a liberal type of culture in the academic relationship.

An explanation has been given of the failure of this project, concerning the very nature of the task for social engagement, that relies on change, not so much in the organisational roles and structures, but in the moral view of its members about the ethics and meaning inherent in these roles and structures. The analysis showed the ways in which certain anxieties produced by the nature of this task on the individual and group level, blocked the capacities of the different structures and roles in the university from connecting with each other in a supportive way, from continuing to follow their mission and to learn from their own experience. A part of the explanation of the sources which provoked such anxieties, related to the inability to remain in the third position in a situation of organisational transition. The origin of this was found in the historically developed relationships of dependency and distrust between the citizens as the main characteristics of the totalitarian state of mind. This analysis of organisational culture was developed from the point of view of the notion of a good community and the level of social capital created by its members i.e. from the peers' relationship level.

From this point of view, data showed that an immature method of resolving the Oedipal situation in the organisational relationships prevents members from committing themselves, in a concerned and supportive way, to the development of other groups and members in the organisation and from tolerating their own position as non-participants in certain parts of the task performance, or retaining their capacity to think and learn from the experiences of others.

As has been mentioned in *Chapter 1. Part 3. Case description*, the team failed to develop a new type of culture in the periphery of the organisation. The hypothesis was made then that the traumatic experience of all members of the organisation of not being recognised and validated, and the preoccupation with the relationship with the figures of authority on the individual level, could be made available for conscious exploration and change through the fourth initiative, *The programme for stimulation of enterprise and care at the university*. It was hoped that, with the active engagement of the leadership and the members of the university in particular projects focused on the specific needs of the different groups at the university, the ethics of individual recognition and care could be promoted as part of the organisational culture.

Following this logic of analysis and the process of the changes implemented in the organisation, Chapter 5 makes an effort to explore hierarchical relationships and how leadership and followership roles were co-created in order to keep the existing specific pattern of power relations in the organisation.

### **5.1. The Culture of Familism**

In Chapter 1, I described the basic internal and external sources of anxiety that existed during the time of the implementation of the intervention. They were related mainly to the process of transition to capitalistic market rules and democratic principles of social and political organisation in the country, as well as to the world processes of globalisation, enlargement of the EU and economic crises from the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The anxieties created by the efforts for social transformation whilst faced with the still existing totalitarian model, on the individual and group levels, actually re-produced and reinforced the culture of “amoral familism” in the interpretation of Banfield’s rigid social

dichotomy (Banfield, 1958). Amoral familism is defined as “a social equilibrium in which people exclusively care about their immediate family, exploit those outside the family, and expect everybody else to behave in that way” (Ljunge, 2011, p.1). There is a set of findings that illustrate the ways in which power relations were constructed in the organisation in order to overcome the emotional challenges of complex societal tasks.

In this type of thinking, public relations were organised entirely through the defence mechanism of splitting into good and bad, secure and insecure.

### **5.1.1. Good and Secure Public Relations**

During socialism, good and secure relationships were preserved in the narrow circle of family and close and devoted friends. This kind of creation, of trustful relationships in a small group of people, was transferred to public and organisational life, creating a culture of family-like relationships between members. This rigid and close model of social life was applied as a reliable method of survival during the insecurity of the transitional period.

This image of the organisation was created as giving a) security and b) uniqueness to their members. My personal experience, with my organisation, was that it was described by many of the members and was experienced by me for a long time as ‘Iles du Salut’, out of which professionalism would fail and fall victim to abusive and unethical practices.

Likewise, the members of one of the NGOs that I studied (Miller et al., 2009) who were parents of children with disability believed that, not being part of this NGO, their children with disabilities would die or would become victims of the failed health care system.

Some of these arguments made about both organisations were based on the real facts of the situation at the beginning of the changes in the country during the 1990s, when the system of state institutions was destroyed; there was a lack of adequate law to defend the rights of citizens, and resistance to the bureaucracy in accepting new, more democratic principles of government. So, the reality of the active fight against the socialist past and its structures created a fertile soil for the development of such idealisations that persisted during the next decades.



As a matter of fact, our VCC development team acted according to the same culture of family-like trustful relationships, making connections with NGO leaders that team members had previously known, in order to guarantee the success of its activity. However, the dependence that these people experienced towards us as members of the NBU and the Institute was not taken into account. So, in this culture of discredited public relationships and power dependency it was impossible to create a space of authentic and open discussion and critique.

An additional aspect of the heroic image of the NBU was that it was a pioneer in reform, acquiring unique qualities, and being one of the first promoters of democratic practices in the country. This fiction lasted long after the emergence of many other organisations and practices, which also engaged with changes, having similar expertise and experience to the pioneers. The aura of the organisation, of being a special, unique place, added to the rigidity of its boundaries, preventing new members being included and new partnerships being developed.

Another characteristic of the positive closed circle was that, in the story of its creation, there was always one charismatic founder with specific qualities around whom a circle of followers was assembled. The internal trust in the group was based on all members' shared positive feelings towards the leader and their common hope that his special qualities and social position would save them from the surrounding enemies and dangers. So, leadership function was identified with one special person, on whom the group projected all its good qualities. The overall impression was that if this person disappeared the organisation would die and all members would be left desolate.

One important finding in this regard, developed from the study of the NGOs, (Miller at al., 2009), concerned the way in which the leader of an organisation, on the one hand, and the followers, on the other, interpreted each other's capacities for participating in the processes of social change. Both positions actually complemented each other, describing this patriarchal type of family relations in the NGOs. From both positions the leader was interpreted as indispensable, the only competent entity in the field of negotiation and management. Both sides nurtured the fear that if he, for some reason, withdrew from the organisation, the latter would also disappear. Similarly, both leaders and followers assumed that none of the followers had the required knowledge and skills to run the organisation, to

publicly fight for and defend its mission and to create productive decisions for its future development. Members were described as helpless, totally dependent on their charismatic and strong leader, lazy and disengaged, looking out only for their own interests. They dumped the whole burden of responsibility on their heroic leader.

A similar example of a vision of the members of a business organisation is given by Vansina (1995) from his experience of counseling in Eastern European countries.

Another set of observations puzzled me for a long time. When Eastern European managers talk about management or consultation, they do so most often in such a way that shows they despise the workforce. The workers are then perceived as “lazy and undisciplined”, that “one must kick them in the butt,” they are not motivated to be productive because “the state-owned companies provide easy employment,” and “one should fire some employees to show that we mean business.” These “macho statements” contrast sharply with my observations on the shopfloors, where the same managers do not intervene at all in the face of undisciplined behaviour, or the “waste” of time, effort, and resources produced by the lack of getting the activities organized. (Vansina, p.152)

My experience in the university showed that in many of the official events, a similar kind of thinking was applied. One of the members in the organisation, for instance, shared her experience about the way in which her manager accepted her new ideas:

I could never surprise him with any of my ideas. According to him, he had discovered them long before me. (Leader 3)

My presence at several formal meetings, in different levels of the organisation, showed similar dynamics of play-acting a democratic dialogue in which members were trying to guess the position of the leader towards the issue and to fit their own positions around it. In all of these situations, the members avoided their insecurity and lack of knowledge about the new and challenging situations by bringing into life a culture of relations, as described by Bion’s basic assumption “dependence” (Bion, 1961).

These mutual projections on the leader of being a Saviour and on the members of being saved by him transforms these public organisations into enlarged families whose task is to meet the needs and resolve the problems of its members. This way the NGOs stopped functioning as if they had a social purpose to preserve the rights of all members of the society.

This is why, during my interview with one of the NGO members who was seen by the leader as one of the few active members of the organisation, an interesting dynamic occurred. My questions were focused on her role as an active citizen who participated in the decision making process during one of the policy and legislation transformations. What I observed during our conversation, however, was that while I asked her about her role as an organisational member and citizen engaged with a specific moral cause, she shifted the conversation, speaking about her role as a mother, about her family and about the organisation as a part of this family. I realised that she thought about the organisation from the perspective of roles in the family with which she had experience. Not being familiar at all with the role of the politically engaged citizen, she preferred to see only the leader as politically engaged with the necessary changes, and not to think about herself in such a way.

This culture of closeness and dependence prevented the NGOs developing a real social participation and engaging with causes beyond their leaders or specific members' interests. It also explains the fact of the intense conflicts and competition for the scarce resources between the NGOs in Bulgaria. The research also showed that the government, in the form of its top executive bodies, readily supported such disunion, encouraging the conformity and false facade of democracy in the governance arena, in order to retain its centralised power.

In a similar way, departments at the university were competing with each other for students, for areas of competence, for power etc. An example of such feudalisation of areas of knowledge was presented in *NBU Management Strategy – centralisation and decentralisation (2002)*. The strategy describes how, in one of the earliest stages of university development, the effort of top management to decentralize power, through giving more freedom to the departments to develop new programmes and to invite external lecturers, resulted in managerial dissipation. Different departments occupied disparate areas of knowledge, developing new programmes without coordinating these efforts. This led to the offering of very similar programmes from different departments that rendered ineffective the educational process at the university as a whole.

The academic administration doesn't participate sufficiently in the management of the institution. It provokes centralisation as an effect – hierarchy, refusal to take responsibility and formal functioning.

There is a lack of strong enough horizontal communication between the university structures, as well as skills and attitudes towards team work. It leads to the dissipation of human and material resources, internal encapsulation and violation of the element of interdisciplinarity in the process of programme development as well as to the offering of courses which are alike, or similar in content. (p.21)

From a managerial point of view, this means that the simple structural distribution of power doesn't guarantee democratisation of the relationships in the system, as it still functions according to old totalitarian notions of leadership and followership.

The decentralisation of powers, or the decoupling of social systems as such, is insufficient to guarantee the containment of power. As a matter of fact, such steps often lead to just a greater number of centralised centers of power, where people are unable to change their internal representations of “leading” and “following”. At a deeper psychological level, it means that a lot of work needs to be done on mechanisms like splitting off and projections, that hinder genuine collaboration. As long as managers or political leaders, for example, continue to see themselves as all righteous and competent, and are only interested in personal gain, and these projections remain acceptable to the people, any social system nowadays is doomed to fail because of lack of responsiveness. (Vansina, 1995, pp.154-155)

With the beginning of the world economic crisis from 2008, this was additionally enforced in the higher education system in Bulgaria; by the demographic crisis from the early nineties and the considerable decrease of the number of students, this process of the hardening of the boundaries between the departments and familism as a culture of salvation, intensified and became more overt.

The outcomes of the implementation of Intervention 3 of this study, *Programme for stimulation of entrepreneurial and caring relationships in NBU*, showed a similar process of distrust between the departments and the members, which resulted in the engagement of only three departments in the implementation of the programme and its final refusal by top-management. Some of the arguments made included: “An impression is created that one and the same small circle of people is taking the responsibility of accomplishing all activities” (From an official letter of central university administration).

Another idealised projection in this culture was the idea that the closed circle is held together by the great idea for change, materialised in the leader's figure. When describing the context in which this study occurred, in Chapter 1, I placed a special emphasis on the enthusiasm and even exaltation with which the new structures and roles, that were expected to ensure more democratic relationships in society, were implemented. The new social order was entrusted with enormous hope for quick and easy change that would bring public relations close to real democracy.

Therefore, being part of the reformers was the most important and valuable characteristic of a citizen's social identity. During the first decade after the political transition in the country, citizens were split into red and blue, communists and democrats. As I have already mentioned, the university and my Institute were publicly accepted as belonging to the reformers. Reconstruction of the past and construction of new and better practices was the main aim of all the projects in which I participated in my career at the university before 2002. This brought to me and my colleagues a strong identity of the promoter of positive change and the right way of thinking and living in society. Reformatory identity was invested with a lot of hope, enthusiasm and power. These experiences were part of the grandiose projections made by the individuals themselves as well as by the groups and organisations. Any critical or reflective thinking was avoided as it would have brought contradictions of the social processes and would have opened the door for uncertainty and doubt about the future.

The dynamic of the organisational relationships described above created a romantic and heroic story about the process of change, about leadership and the establishment of the organisation. It helped members to organize their contradictory feelings around some more clear and stable boundaries and to simplify the complexity of the process of social transformation. In accordance with this romantic spirit, the outside world, the other, the non member, was experienced as a source of danger.

### **5.1.2. Dangerous Public Relations**

Aside from the grandiose fantasies about the family circle, the anxieties about the process of values and identities change was channeled through paranoid projections made on the outside world. The objects of such projections were the state and its institutions, the

neighborhood, top-management of the university and the other departments or groups in it, or the country as a whole.

One example of the negative image of the administration was the experience that many of the students from the VCC shared. They described their fear in relating for instance to municipal administration, expecting that they would be treated with neglect and misunderstanding, even though they had no previous contacts with it. In one of the pictures drawn in this course about the process of the implementation of a specific social activity, the meeting with the formal bodies of power was symbolically presented as a bush which is difficult to pass through. (See *Picture 1. Student's experience of the process of social change implementation in the VCC.*) The result of this experience is described as one of disillusionment, symbolised by falling into a ditch.

A positive result from this, as the student analyzed her experience, was that one can shorten one's ambitious and initially unrealistic ideas for total and complete change and can transform one's idea for change into a small but more realistic one. The student called this difficult and contradictory process of disillusionment and development of new and more realistic hope a 'process of landing'.

Another symbolic place for negative projections of the dangerous outside was the neighborhood. Many of the projects in the VCC were focused on the restoration of common public spaces around the blocks of flats in the neighborhoods. Symbolically, these spaces were experienced as outside the family and were objects of aggressive neglect and destruction.

Another dichotomy was created between the country, as a negative object, and the Western world, as an idealised good object. Thus, all dangerous aspects of the changes were put into the image of the country as a negative space in which to live, and a dream was created about the other, better family that one deserves to belong to, envisioned in the western countries. This process of splitting and projection resembles the way in which adolescents, in their effort for autonomy from their own family, create the romantic 'family tale' of being adopted and actually belonging to more successful, famous or better family that some day they will meet and join.

One example of the way in which the mutual feelings of distrust and aggression are shared in the organisation and split the members into good and bad was the already mentioned (see Chapter 1, section 1.3.3., p. 50) conflict between my colleague in the VCC and a group of students. This demonstrates how the culture of distrust in formal institutions and roles creates a situation of mutual abuse and misunderstanding.

Vignette 9:

In one of the discussions in the VCC, I asked students if they had opportunities to participate in the transformative social mission of the university in so far as they regarded it as their own. One of the students responded that students could participate in the development of their university and one example of this is the case with R.. “You see, he left the programme because students gave their opinion about his behaviour and it was taken into account.”

I suggested that students try to think about how this kind of resolution, of the conflict between teacher and students, concerned the university mission. Does this method of conflict resolution help both sides to better understand each other’s positions? Does this mean that the university is more liberal now than before? Were there any other ways to resolve this conflict?

During the discussion, students identified four types of their behaviour that were present during the situation of conflict with R..

The first one was defined as a passive aggressive reaction to the teacher’s aggressive behaviour. Some of the students chose to remain silent. They explained it as the only way not to withdraw from their position of the rejection of the teacher’s behaviour while at the same time punishing the teacher with their silence. They shared their distrust that any active position on their part could change the teacher’s opinion or behaviour.

The second choice of reacting to the situation was one of internal compromise, that students thought they had made. They decided to accept this behaviour as something that they couldn’t change and had only to stand for it for the time of the course. The practical benefit of this is that they would pass through the course without problems. “This is not a serious cause to fight for. We know that there are always such people but the system, the university will defend them. So, it is better not to take it seriously. We are at the end of our study in the programme. Let newcomers in the programme stand the racket!”

The third choice was of the group of students that decided to inform the executive director of the LAP. They decided to fight the injustice, activating the power system of administrative hierarchy in order to take revenge. They said that they were completely aware that if this level of power didn’t react to their signal they would go to a higher one. They knew how to manipulate the different power levels. Their strategy didn’t include conversation with the teacher.

The fourth reaction was performed by only one student: a woman reacted to the conflict in a way that didn’t allow for total denigration of the teacher’s image and his narrow interpretation as only a bad person. During the incident she participated constructively and actively, trying to demonstrate to both sides that their behaviour would not bring much understanding of the situation. She stopped the conflict, saying: “Well, wait for a minute. Such conversation is not constructive.” She communicated to the teacher her opinion that his behaviour was totally inappropriate but at the same time also criticized students as behaving irresponsibly in their tasks. She focused her critique

on the overall organisation of the education and on the way in which it produced unclear responsibilities in both roles and created an atmosphere which led to a lower quality of academic education. (Reflective diary)

This vignette demonstrates the way in which most of the students don't believe that they can change the situation of injustice at all. They are not prepared to take responsibility to go into more constructive dialogue with the people in power, but are instead more eager to use formal power for manipulation and revenge. Only one of the students had the courage and maturity to defend her moral position of intolerance to the aggression, while at the same time not allowing her feelings to obscure the complexity of the reasons that brought the two sides into such conflict.

The level of distrust at the university between formal power structures and between colleagues brought this case to an end; this demonstrated to the students not a democratic method of conflict resolution, in which formal power structures are used to facilitate the resolution of the conflicting parts, giving voice and understanding to each of them, but one of abuse of formal power in order to avoid taking responsibility and a splitting of the sides into good and bad. The next vignette demonstrates how power structures were manipulated in order to avoid the opportunity to learn from the situation. The anxiety here is that any conversation would bring the danger of being blamed or punished by higher level management. It was better to interpret the conflict in the narrow boundaries of an isolated event, concerning few people. Any additional focus on the case created the danger of discovering some serious conflicts at the university level. This vignette describes the way in which the programme's management reacted and managed the conflict resolution process. I am describing it from my own experience as the leading teacher responsible for this course.

#### Vignette 10:

When the group of students informed the executive director of the LAP about the several cases of the verbally aggressive behaviour of the teacher R. in the VCC, the director named me, as a leading teacher, responsible for this course. She told me that she had the agreement of the LAP project coordinator to ask R. to leave the course and the programme. She also added that such incidents would also negatively affect my standing at the university, so I had to remove him from the course. Another argument was added: that students had warned her that if she didn't take measures they would go to the top managers and then things would get worse. The management of the programme would be blamed that it had lost students and money.

I tried to calm the director down and to explain that both I and the LAP project coordinator had developed a special procedure for conflict resolution that we had used several times. According to it, we had to meet with each of the sides and try to



understand what had happened and listen to their arguments. I related my opinion that I didn't accept the decision to just remove the teacher as being appropriate. I was thinking that this case was a good opportunity to study the tensions in the programme and that any decision taken under the pressure of emotions would not support our idea of teaching students to engage in dialogue but not in revenge. As the director insisted on her position, I utterly opposed taking such measures and asked for a special meeting of the LAP Development Committee.

During the next day it became clear that the executive director had called the LAP project coordinator, as a higher level in the hierarchy, informing her about our conversation. Then, the LAP project coordinator called the chief of my institute and he then called me asking for some clarification. I informed him about my decision to initiate some conversation with R. and with the students. He agreed but mentioned that perhaps R. had to leave the programme.

I met R. the same day but he had already been informed about the position of the LAP management and angrily refused to speak with me and the director. He said he had taken the decision to leave the programme.

I felt totally alone in my effort to create some space for a more constructive exploration of the situation. The only thing that I was able to do was to discuss the situation with all students in the course in order that they reflect on their behaviour and learn from it. (Reflective diary)

In this case, a situation of mutual distrust was created in order to avoid knowledge about the organisation that could destroy the good image of the programme, which would bring the attention of the top management on it, and would undermine some serious issues of the principles on which the education at the university was based.

Some of the afore-mentioned examples from the university relationships were: the distrust of the students in the VCC towards the programme and university management; the skepticism of the teachers about the new university initiatives offered to them, or their passivity in the spaces formally defined as participatory. These are examples of the same type of emotional dynamics of distrust and aggressiveness in the organisation.

All these cases of the splitting of reality into idealised and dangerous objects were created in order to avoid the uncertainty of the complexity of the history of social transformation initiation and development. Avoiding the painful feeling of the loss of basic parts of our social identities during the transition hindered the possibilities open to us as a society and as individuals, to mourn and recover from this loss and to develop a more realistic vision about the future.

## **5.2. Traumatic Leadership and the Failure of its Containing Function**

As a result of the culture of familism co-created by the leadership and its followers in the university through the development of totalitarian versions of power distribution, the prevalent feelings shared by the participants were those of mutual lack of trust. Some of the findings in my study showed that not only was the role of the follower not recognised as important for the organisational change but also the leader's role.

The defensively created image of the leader in this culture prevented all members of the organisation, those in the followers' position as well as those in leader's position, investing this role with authentic feelings of trust and concern about the person in it. The conformity with which the followers behaved towards the leader's ideas and suggestions actually destroyed the leadership function of working on the boundaries of the organisation in a way that would bring development to its members. The schizoid projections of the group onto this function co-constructed leadership either as an object of uncritical admiration or one of total fear and rejection that again hampered the ability of members to share authentic feelings of care and support towards this figure.

The findings showed that the person entering such a position in the organisation was forced to defend her or himself against such unrealistic expectations and aggressive projections through a collusive development of a narcissistic identity. In the study, its features were demonstrated in organisational life through such characteristics as:

- a) Extreme tenderness and vulnerability in concern with the critiques and different from the leader's own positions. This leads to the creation of enemies and fosters a culture of a fight/flight basic assumption between members. Any productive thinking and learning is avoided in the name of the preservation of the special positive or negative qualities of the leader.
- b) Total fusion of the leader, with her/his own ideas and products and an envious way of sharing these with others. Here, instead, or additionally, the investment of the personality of the leader with specialness means that his ideas and products are treated as unique and are sacrificed in a specific way. Others are seen as impotent or unworthy of carrying these ideas further without the leader's authority. Such thinking narrows the resources of the organisation for new and creative decisions, calls for rigid implementation of the leader's ideas and alienates members from it.
- c) A spirit of conspiracy and hidden agenda in organisational relations. The feelings of violation and isolation of the leader usually lend a spirit of conspiracy to the

relationship between the leader and followers. The task is to identify who the real enemies and supporters are. This way, family-like circle of trustful people is created in the organisation. Official events have no value, as the decisions are taken beforehand in the informal circle of trust. So, these official events are formalised and the decisions taken there are not taken into account and implemented in reality. The paranoid order undermines relationships of trust and support within the organisation and again activates the destructive and marginalising tendencies within it.

A spirit of conspiracy was created at the university by the existence of the above-demonstrated split into the reality of good, trustful and authentic relationships in the closed circle of the friendly, informal relationships in the organisation, and the bad, dangerous and false relationship as a main characteristic of the official, formal relations expressed by the roles in it. As the close and conforming relationship with the leader is envisioned as the only source of power and recognition for the individual in this organisational culture, the only way to succeed is through the establishment of personal relationship with this figure

The leader's role itself was invested with intense fantasies of caring for the members of the closed circle of trust, in an unofficial but very special way. These kind of manic projections lend positive value and importance to this role. However, the culture of conspiracy creates trustful relationships in paranoid, unrealistic confrontation with the outer world, which is seen as being full of enemies. In order that the haven of security and support not be destroyed, the care and concern of the leader for his members has to be kept secret. This kind of defence against the insecurity and dangerousness of public spaces, and people in power in them, invests the leader's role with grandiose and magical characteristics.

Some examples of such experience in the university may be discovered, for instance, in the way that I felt as a newcomer in the organisation. During several different types of "official" or "formal" organisational events, established with the declared purpose of creating spaces for open discussion and participation in the decision making process, my feelings were that I had to be careful about what I was saying, as there was always something else that only the leader knew, as a result of some secret relationships with other "important" people that only he or she had access to. Only through this kind of friendly relationship, out of formal public discussion, can the leader promote our organisational mission and activities. If I tried to share my opinion, not being aware of the hidden agenda,

a message was given to me that I could have destroyed the good things that the leader had negotiated for us. It is important here to emphasize the main feeling that I and other members of the organisation report to have had in such events – the feeling of not having enough knowledge about the situation, the feeling of being stupid, the feeling of damaging the organisational good. In my reflective diary I have noted reactions of my colleague saying: “Don’t worry, he (the leader) always has a hidden plan as to what to do in this situation. He always knows more than he shares with us”. These kinds of fantasies actually destroy the potentialities of public spaces to share knowledge and experience and to empower people through authentic and free speech.

The sharing happens in the informal, non-declared places: during the breaks in the official event i.e. incidentally or in groups of sympathy i.e. secretly. (Participant in the Tutoring project)

The decisions taken, which were publicly declared, were not taken seriously by the group and the public spaces became places devoid of authentic feelings, rituals of formal decision making inciting, this way, real feelings of fear and distrust in their members. As the official spaces of debate and participation were confirmed through such enactment as being false and empty of meaning, a version of the organisation as having a double agenda which only leaders knew and shared bits of it when they decided and with only those members that they recognised as trustworthy developed. We can see how, through this kind of circulation of projections and splitting of public and business spaces, relationships are familiarised in order to bear the strong feelings of anxiety in an organisation undergoing change.

This is why the usual way in which members behave during public discussions is to try to guess what the opinion of the leader could be and to fit personal position to this. As a result of this, the predominant behaviour in this kind of event is to remain silent in order not to make a mistake.

As the vulnerability of the people in a leadership position is very high, because of the unrealistic, primitive destructive and “swallowing” desires of members towards the role, persons in such positions usually feel unrecognised and neglected. As a result of these traumatic feelings, they started to behave in a collusive way, interpreting each opinion different from their own as an attack against themselves.

I know that some of you don't trust me and are very skeptical about my ideas, but in the end you know that all of you will come to me saying that I had been right. (Leader during a formal event)

The culture of dependence on the leader's knowledge is demonstrated by projecting on him the responsibility of bringing the right knowledge that will make the transformation process easy for the group or the entire organisation. The new knowledge is therefore legitimised through the leader's figure, not through its application in the practice of the organisation. New concepts are taken for granted and the real reason and meaning with which they are established is missing as part of the motivation for use by the members. Such a split between concepts or procedures from their meaning, has been described by Hinshelwood (2001) as ritual performance leading to intrusions in the reflective learning spaces in the organisation.

Working procedures in organisations are normally the result of problem-solving arising from a flexible approach to the real problems. They are reality-based solutions, which are then handed on from one generation to another (Or, in our case during the transitional period in Bulgaria, from one context to another – my note). But, in this intergenerational passage, they change to become 'the way things are done' – they ossify and become rigid and unthinking. Memories of why they are done this way are forgotten, often quickly, and a moral tone, "We do it this way", takes over from the original practical one. Main talks of this distortion as a 'hierarchical promotion'; the idea changes its residence from the ego to the super-ego, remembering gives way to moralizing. Starting in the thinking parts of the ego, as solutions to particular problems, they later move into a fixed morality and achieve a super-ego quality: this is how things ought to be done, because the older generation (In our case it could also be the EU or Western countries as developed democracies – my note) did it so. In community terms, it stops being a realistic solution and becomes an unthinking ritual. Useful practices, now moral beliefs, hinder further creative thought and new solutions. The institution's practice declines into ritual unthinking performance, and reflection ceases.

To conduct one's practice on the basis of received wisdom saves the individuals from the emotional uncertainty and anxiety that would come from new thinking about current problems. Under the pressures of anxiety, people are freed from thinking, and become eventually possessed by the institution's practices. The individuals experience the received wisdom as a kind of institutional super-ego and feel dominated by it. They are required to internalize these practices as they enter the institution, and they may experience them as 'enforced introjection', as Menzies (1959 /1990/, p.460) said. The result is a powerful object inserted inside the individual. This super-ego-like object is an institutional intrusion into the private interior. It demands a kind of blind acceptance which feels persecutory, and, like the abusive intrusions of many of the patients, it achieves a restriction of the capacity for thought (Berlin, 1958; Kennedy, 1993; Segal, 1977). (Hinshelwood, 2001, pp.111-112)

Such processes further lead to members' emotional withdrawal and alienation from the organisation that I will discuss a little bit later in this chapter.

As I mentioned above, there is a conception of a fusion between the leader as founder of the organisation, and his work, as embodied in the existing organisation. For instance, the official story about the new university describes its creation as having been produced by the thoughts and the activities of only one person. The story of the organisation's creation is presented in a glorified way. It is quite impressive that not one of the founder's colleagues and followers with whose efforts and collaboration the organisation was created were included in this story. As a result of such thinking, massive grandiose projections were made, in regards to this leader, based on the illusion that without him the organisation would disappear, as only he knows the formula of its success.

The currently existing version of leadership in Bulgaria, based on lack of trust in the figures of power and a prohibition on the development of individual ideas about social relations, established during socialism, has made leader's role vulnerable to internal and external attacks. This kind of traumatic experience, with which the leader's role is associated, makes people in such roles relate emotionally to others in a paranoid-schizoid regime of thinking. People in such roles are seized by fears that other people in the organisation will destroy their ideas, or that there is no person in the organisation that could carry on and save the leader's creation. For instance, one of the managers in the university related his apprehension that he couldn't leave his position as he couldn't see any of his followers having the potential to continue his work. On the other hand, the potential of the followers was systematically cancelled or destroyed in order to maintain the leader's domination. So, some of the managers and followers behaved publicly in a very dependent and rigid way. Another example from my presence in one of the wider meetings with middle management demonstrates this. There were two representatives of middle management who presented in this meeting, to all departments, new changes in the regulations and the new tasks that derived, for the staff, from them. The people in the hall started to ask questions about the reasons and the meaning of this change and how specifically it would affect their work. The two moderators of the meeting got nervous. They referred to top management, saying that only top managers could explain this; they stopped people from asking specific, practical questions and quickly ended the meeting,

leaving the audience in confusion. They looked unauthorised and unclear about the meaning of the tasks that they were expected to manage.

The vulnerability of the leadership and its distrust of the capacities of its followers prevented NGO leaders included in the VCC from recognising students as their followers, rather treating them as invaders or people who serve their own or university tasks. I suppose that some kind of ‘blindness’ of the authorities in the university prevented them also seeing the positive qualities in the students. For instance, such reasons can be seen in the desire of the Tutoring project management to serve only the needs of students with psychological or social difficulties. A focus on the pathology of the students, on the one hand, is chosen in order to regard them as more vulnerable and dependent on the university position. It looks like other students have no need of support and recognition as they are independent and successful enough. Some of the students opposed such an interpretation of the tutor’s role. Feedbacks from one of the students interviewed were that tutoring services should not be focused on student’s difficulties or defects only. “Success also needs to be supported.” (*Reflective diary*) According to them, all students need to feel part of the organisation and to have a close sharing of experience with their teachers at the university. On the other hand, the pathological side of the personality was the main competence of the team of this project, so it was safer, in this territory, to work with other teachers and the students.

The vulnerability of the leadership makes it focused on its own confirmation more than on organisational task performance. So, keeping the members incompetent and unskilled can be seen from the family model of relationships as keeping children in a never ending process of growth or the students in a never ending process of learning. One of the teachers in the university expressed such feelings in relation to his boss, saying “She will always be very ambivalent about our competences and qualities. It is very difficult for her to acknowledge our abilities and accept us as her peers.”

In accordance with this experience was the widespread during the socialism practice in Bulgarian universities doctoral programmes, to serve the interests and the development of a student’s supervisor but not of the doctoral student himself. Thus, topics are chosen by the department, and after that students are added to them or the supervisor defines the topic that the doctoral student will study. These types of academic relationships, established in

relation to the production of knowledge, further alienate the young university staff, or followers of the authorities, from themselves as free individualities who create themselves and have authority over their own interests and ideas. My personal development as a student of two of the most valued universities in the country, and as a new member of the staff of some organisations has always been framed by the manager's phrase "I have plans for you." And I haven't been asked at all about my own plans for myself. Part of my choice to study abroad was motivated by my striving to avoid such control over my thinking and authorship.

The preoccupation of the leader with his own survival from aggressive attacks, real and fantasised, makes it impossible for him to serve the function of transformative leadership. It becomes very difficult for such a leader to manage the boundaries between old and new, between past and present, in the situation of transformation with its complicated and contradictory feelings. Cooper & Lousada (2005) describe this situation of change as "a difficult path between idealisation of the new and concomitant denigration of the past on the one hand, and nostalgic identification with the past and possible resistance to innovation and change on the other" (p.5). This is the containing function of the leadership that helps members to bear their fears about the situation of change.

Other boundaries that transformational leadership facilitates are those between the person engaged with the process of change and the reality of the transformation, supporting the process of his own thinking and creation of new knowledge. When preoccupied with the defence of his own ideas and authorship, the traumatic as opposed to transformational leader has no capacity to recognise other people's ideas and knowledge.

The third boundary that this kind of leader fails to manage concerns power distribution in the organisation. Members' individual needs are not recognised and their own achievements and contributions to the organisational development are not appreciated.

The experienced lack of recognition, concern and support in such organisational relationships leads to the development of an individualistically oriented culture, or, in its extreme, to a total emotional withdrawal from the organisation and its task.



Therefore, special attention has to be given to the people in leadership roles in the organisation, in order to handle the negative or grandiose projections and identifications developed in their emotional relationships with other people in the organisation. Organisational counseling of management is one of the efforts that could be made in this direction.

However, an alternative version of leadership is presented in the case of T., who was a student in the VCC. (See *Appendix 4. Interview with Student T.*) She was very creative in developing different social initiatives and her leadership role is to engage as many people as possible with their implementation. She seems to be very tolerant and sensitive to other people's ideas too. She describes herself as very emotional and not very strong in communicating with others, seeing these characteristics as her weaknesses. But during the interview, my impression was of a person who was both very sensitive to other people's needs, and dignified, as well as very engaged with the implementation of her idea in a way that allowed for other people to identify with it. Her work with another student in a very complicated project in the VCC showed her capacity for being flexible and at easy in adapting her initial idea to the changing circumstances and to her partner's different thinking. She managed to combine, in a balanced way, both sides of transformative leadership's entrepreneurial and caring side, or as seen from the personal emotional developmental point of view, those of a) the father's role as symbolising the process of socialisation and personal achievement and b) of the mother's one as a symbol of care and support for others.

### **5.3. Alienation from the Organisation**

In this part of the analysis I will briefly describe a situation from my personal experience in the university in order to demonstrate the way in which the culture of familism creates illusions of belonging and safety in the organisation but is not capable of producing authentic relationships of concern and recognition of member's contributions in a situations of real crisis. The concept of alienation is used here in order to describe the complexity and contradiction of this experience as a result of painful feelings of loss of a professional identity, helplessness and absence of meaning in the work place.

#### **5.3.1. Threat to Professional Identity and Alienation from the Organisation**

### **5.3.1.1. The Case**

The situation to which I refer when speaking about my experience of alienation in the organisational setting is related to my professional role of lecturer and researcher in the Institute. I have emphasized yet the spirit of reformation and pioneering work in the area of social transformations in Bulgaria that this department, and the university as a whole, lived in. This spirit of being a professional, who is fully engaged with the idea of developing new democratic thinking and new models of working with the students, and colleagues, was something that inspired me in my work. The department to which I belonged at the time worked on projects that aimed to bring about changes in the university culture and relationships as well as more generally in the area of social, educational and mental health policy in Bulgaria. During the last 20 years of my life I have felt closely related to this university, firstly as a student and then as a lecturer of clinical social work - a specialty that was still very new in Bulgaria. My choice to be part of this organisation was related clearly to its mission to bring positive transformations to society through education and research.

I am focusing on this public image and work task of the organisation in order to emphasize the strong emotional and moral relationship that I had developed during my time with this organisation and my strong identification with the role of change agent as part of my professional identity.

The concrete situation that I analyse here as threatening to my professional identity occurred during the second stage of this study when, as a result of financial crisis, my department lost its partial financial and administrative independence from the university. It was related to an experience of the violation of my strong emotional relationship with the organisation and a distortion of my personal idea of who I am, and where I belonged, as part of my stable professional self.

Several changes in society, such as: Bulgaria joining the EU; the increasing corruption of government institutions; the growing disillusionment in society with political parties; as well as the world financial crises brought my department in 2008 to this situation of financial collapse. As a result of this my colleagues and I had to be reappointed and became employees of the university but not of the Institute as was the case before. During a long process of negotiations with the university and re-engagement of our team, it became clear that two of us (me and another colleague) couldn't sign regular labour agreements with the

university because of the still unchanged socialist law that prohibits the appointment of people older than 33 years of age to the position of assistant professor.[5] Instead, my colleague and I had to sign one-year contracts as guest-lecturers, receiving a salary for only 10 months of the year, and renew our contracts each year.

These events brought a serious crisis to the life of my department as well as disappointment and insecurity in my personal and professional life.

### **5.3.1.2. The Experience of Alienation**

I started my exploration of this situation with the concept of alienation. This word came to my mind as I tried to summarise what I found different in my attitude to the organisation and its work task at that moment. I discovered in myself a tendency towards emotional withdrawal and a lack of happiness, meaning and prospects in my work. Schabracq and Cooper (2003) explore “the experiential side of the concept of alienation” and designate this as ‘primary alienation’.

Primary alienation refers to an experience or feeling that something is different from normal. So, primary alienation is an experience or feeling of difference. (2003, p.54)

Over time, this feeling of difference formed into three main tendencies or senses: a sense of loss, a sense of helplessness, and a sense of chaos.

First of all it was the sense of loss that I started to experience. The losses (potential or real) that I had experienced concerned:

- a) my belief in the real potential for democratic change in Bulgarian society;
- b) my trust in the decision making process at the top level of the university;
- c) my independence at work;
- d) my sense of security about having a stable work place;
- e) my sense of belonging to a particular professional community and organisation;
- f) and other private material losses resulting from the possibility of job loss in a time of economic crisis.

All the feelings that I have listed are vital elements that served to co-construct my personal professional identity. This identity was fed every day by my work and my relationships

within this concrete organisation. Maida et al. (1989) make a very important observation saying that:

Older workers may perceive work differently than do their younger peers, in that they often derive a sense of personal identity and competence from their commitment to a work role, not merely to a job itself.

The work role, when viewed as a life anchor and a form of centering, enhances one's self-image as a functional, financially independent, and thereby competent adult. The stresses associated with sudden job loss may, therefore, disrupt the balance of an adult's life, and may temporarily render that person dysfunctional as well. (p.4)

This distinction is very important. It shows that, initially, professional identity is built through identifications that individuals make with a certain profession or with work as a whole. Over time, especially when an individual works for a long time for one organisation, this professional identity narrows to a concrete organisation, work place and work role. As a result of this, the individual's professional self narrows too. Gradually the individual builds a secure and stable image about who he is in the labour world and in his professional community.

Some authors describe this as a fantasised relationship that an individual develops towards his organisation, an important object through which he organizes his professional identity. The unconscious belief is that the individual and the organisation in which he works belong to each other and that this will last forever. It helps the individual to sustain his physical and mental health and to keep the boundaries between him and others at work. It is very important, also, for organisational relations and organisational prosperity because people who identify with their organisations are very committed to them and able to invest a lot of their knowledge, skills and emotions to the organisation's success.

Maida et al. (1989) apply Bowlby's attachment theory to work place relations in order to explain the vital role of a sense of belonging to a particular group or organisation for the development of a professional identity.

This insight arises from the belief that the workplace is a significant social system to which an individual becomes attached through affiliations with others in the setting. Common ties emerge through time spent working together and sharing a role with respect to a specific authority structure, such as relationships and perceptions of supervisors, the company, and its management. The term "work family" has frequently

been attributed to this set of relationships. It is not accidental that the quasi-kin terminology of “brothers and sisters” is commonly used by union leaders to instill and reinforce relational ties among rank and file members. (p. 8-9)

But the price for nurturing such illusion of forever ensured security and connectedness with the organisation is that, sooner or later, it faces the reality of a changing world and leads to a professional identity crisis. When the change in reality is sudden and unexpected, or unplanned, these threats take on the characteristics of traumatic experience.

The more strongly attached to this work family they were, the more traumatic was the separation process. Many of these workers felt a tremendous sense of abandonment and disillusionment when the layoff occurred ... The “myth of security” that attracted them ... was destroyed. The satisfaction with the work was of secondary importance to job security and the camaraderie within the workplace. (ibid, p.8)

In my case, after the sense of loss came a sense of helplessness. The challenges that I confronted in my work didn’t result in success and further development for me or for my department. Every collective or personal effort to do something new and different ended in failure. I felt vulnerable to decisions made by others, with me having no control over the situation.

This sense of helplessness was strengthened by a lack of recognition, from other colleagues in the organisation, about the difficulties that my colleague and I particularly experienced in this situation. Facing the crisis, each of my colleagues was trying to survive in his own way, leaving no place for solidarity and support in our organisational relationships. The culture of the organisation developed features of individual survival and exclusion, of dependence on the leadership power and care, of staying silent about the traumatic event.

Organisations in crisis use these defences, in part, to sustain their functioning. A patriarchal model of relations is immediately called into play in order to recover a feeling of security and order. This kind of organisational dynamic further undermines an individual’s potential to use his strengths and available resources.

The perception of either the company or the union as an agent that protects employees from the demands and risks of the labour market can paralyze an individual’s personal sense of agency, or the capacity for action. (ibid, p.124)

If survival becomes a priority, then it is argued that one’s ability to influence and change becomes less effective. (Doring, p.143)

The sense of helplessness was related, also, to another very important psychological need that remained unsatisfied at that time - the need to have authority over, and ownership of, the products of one's personal work. These aspects of alienation from the work place that are related to the feeling of a loss of ownership have been thoroughly explored in sociological and psychological research during the last century. Referring to Marx's definition of alienation of the worker from his work, Gouldner (1971) develops a disempowerment perspective on alienation. He describes it as a situation "when men felt alienated from a society that they thought they had made but could not control" (Gouldner, 1971, p. 53).

In Gouldner's (1971) description of the meaning of alienation we can see its relation to a particular view about society as the product of an individual creative process over which its creators, or some of them, have no control. These are the same feelings that people can experience in their organisations. Individuals invest their thoughts, energy, competencies, and feelings - i.e. part of themselves - in the development and the prosperity of their organisation. This process evolves in them a sense of authorship and belief that they own their organisation. Gouldner emphasises the fantasised nature of such assumptions saying that "they thought they had made" the society. In the individual's mind the society (or the organisation in our case) becomes an object of possession. For instance, my participation in the university was coloured emotionally by the idea that I contributed to its creation; not only that I belonged to it but also, through my participation in its developments, that the organisation belonged to me too. This feeling motivated me to work and to be creative. It gave me personal authority and power.

When such assumptions and sentiments become questioned by external reality, an experience of disempowerment and exclusion arises around professional identity. From a power relations point of view, this alienation could be seen as a process in which the individual is faced with the reality of some external circumstances that show the boundary between the individual and the organisation. In this process, the individual realises that the organisation has gatekeeper/s and that, actually, only a few people decide who will belong to the organisation and who will not, whose efforts will be accepted as developing and creative for the organisation and whose won't, who owns the organisation and who doesn't.

These two senses – of loss and of helplessness – led to a sense of chaos. This was my inability to understand what had happened, why we - and I particularly - had brought ourselves to this situation and what was the right way to get out of it. It was impossible to predict what would happen and I felt as if I was in a slowly sinking ship, where no one had any idea what to do. The final result of this situation was that I lost the meaning of my work; I stopped making any effort and having ideas i.e. I stopped being active and creative. Schabracq and Cooper (2003) relate this experience to an absence of knowledge, a feeling of being incompetent.

So, invoking alienation is about admitting that we don't know. Once again, it appears, we find ourselves back in the world of our childhood anxieties and the less pretty outskirts of dreamland. ... a disturbance in a relationship, either between a person and his environment, or within the person himself, i.e. being alienated from a part of oneself or one's activities. (p.54)

This experience is accompanied, also, by feelings of guilt and shame resulting from incapacity to handle the situation. It is intensified by the expectations of organisational and societal culture. Usually, they are critical towards the weaknesses of their members and prefer to admire "the strong man's" behaviour in the face of difficulties.

The three senses that I have briefly described as ways in which an individual can experience alienation in his professional role could be thought of as a product of defensive splitting that attempts to simplify the complexity of the situation and in such a way to bring some meaning, order and control to it. The split relationship is then realised in binary oppositions such as:

- a) me as a victim – others as perpetrators;
- b) me as powerless – others as powerful;
- c) me as not knowing and incapable – others as knowing and capable.

Schabracq and Cooper (2003) refer to this kind of emotional functioning as:

As such, both terms represent an insufficiency, a state of being less than ideal, often as a consequence of a change. Alienation is often considered to be the opposite of 'engagement', commitment and involvement (Goffman, 1963, 1972; Kanungo, 1982; Maslach et al., 2001), though this clearly is not a one-dimensional opposition. Moreover, alienation always implies a lack or loss of control (Blauner, 1964; Seeman, 1983). (p.54)

Here two effects that alienation brings to an individual's emotional life are described: a) a threat to relations with others and b) a threat to one's personal identity.

### **5.3.1.3. A Positive Perspective on Alienation**

There are two positive aspects in the understanding of alienation that I want to emphasise here. The first one is related to the acceptance of the experience of alienation as a consequence of only external factors. An important turning point in Schabracq and Cooper's exploration of the meaning of alienation challenges this position. They suggest an empowering view on alienation as a) a matter of personal interpretation of the real events that happen in individual and organisational lives, and b) as one of many alternatives that person chooses himself and therefore has the power to change.

Then, we pay attention to the social scientific tradition of conceiving alienation as the result of an evil societal influence, which has turned out to be an unfortunate approach, and confront it with the notion of alienation as the outcome of a personal choice. (p.55)

In our opinion, this sociological tradition simply has been barking up the wrong tree. This doesn't mean that factors such as the means of production, bureaucracy, our society at large or even the 'cleavage between power and morality' don't play a part in bringing about alienation. They obviously do. However, again, these factors are hard to influence. At the same time, there is also something that allows these factors to have such an impact, and which can be influenced. We are talking here about man himself, who is in the position to choose, and who may or may not prefer secondary alienation above pain and unpleasantness, but is not only the passive battleground of external forces. (p.73)

In my case this position emphasised my role of co-creator of the bad-only picture of my professional development. This view gave me back my responsibility about the situation and in the same time acted as empowering factor that my career depends also on me, it is in my hands.

The second positive aspect is related to the challenge of traditional research on alienation that explores it in terms of an emotional detachment in binary opposition to the concept of commitment to the organisation.

Another positive way of thinking about alienation has been developed by organisational research (Schulter, 1980; Holsti, 1978) concerning the potential that some degree of personal alienation from the organisation has to provoke further development and change.



These authors show that in times of crisis those members who feel more distant in their relationship to the organisation, look more individualistic and don't share, for one reason or another, the close family culture of the organisation, are actually able to sustain their creative abilities and can contribute more to the organisation's further development.

The detached (emotional inoculation) management quality thus appears more effective in crises than the involved (commitment) quality. Often an individual's involvement results in stress that distorts the ability to process information and accept new information (especially if divergent), reduces his or her span of attention and time perspective, and increases his or her cognitive rigidity (Schulter, 1980; Holsti, 1978). These in turn obviously make the individual far less capable of dealing with crises than those individuals less involved (although not uninvolved). (Milburn et al., 1983, p.1152)

In my case I realised that what I was alienated from was not the organisation as a whole or the work task but one particular way in which the relationships were constructed there. It was impossible to confront them directly but I decided to become more selective in what I engaged with there and with whom. I was also able to broaden my professional identity looking for realisation in different systems and with different groups of people.

We can conclude that in situations of sudden and unwelcome change in an organisation, the experience of possessing a stable and knowledgeable professional self falters and is replaced by powerful feelings of alienation. However, this experience of alienation can help an individual to overcome painful feelings of emotional withdrawal, exclusion from the organisation, loss of professional identity, helplessness and absence of meaning in his/her work.

Alienation could be seen, also, as the first step towards a more independent, critical and realistic view about an individual's professional identity, his relation to the organisation and his role in the process of transformation; especially in very paternalistic and hierarchical organisational cultures.

## Chapter Six

### Learning under Fire

*“The luck to be noticed, heard, understood, joined and appreciated.”  
(Kiril Dobrev, Bulgarian composer,  
when awarded for his music for drama  
during the National theater Awards “Askeer” for year 2003)*

*“In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.”  
(King Solomon)*

In the previous two analytical chapters, the attempts for the liberalisation of university relationships was explored through the challenges that arose, on the one hand, on the horizontal level, between the different members of the academic community, and on the other, on the hierarchical level between the university management and the staff, between the leaders of change and their followers.

In this last chapter, the transformation towards more a socially engaged university will be explored as a learning process. The micro-level of relationships in the teacher – learner couple will be studied, in order to understand the specific ways in which the meaning of knowledge and learning are constructed there.

*Part I. Identity, learning and recognition*, addresses the challenges that occur in efforts to introduce to the organisation the culture of learning on the level of the individual relationships between its members, engaging them in the roles of “authorities of knowledge” or learners. Different ways are discussed, in which pressure for change confronts traditional notion of knowledge acquisition and sharing, which removes the authority of knowledge from its safe position as the only one and unambiguous source of knowledge, and tests the capacity of the members to tolerate situations of lack of knowledge, diversity and identity transformation. Several learning situations are explored, where critical thinking and opportunities for dialogue were spoiled or avoided. As a result of this, the emotional part of the process of identity change was not recognised as important and led to a defensive shift from a relationship of a mutual searching for understanding into a relationship of mutual blaming and control over others.

*Part II. Learning to engage*, is focused on my personal effort to learn from my personal experience in a self-reflective way. The role of researcher is seen here as a transitional space in Winnicott's terms, through which I was able to overcome the feeling of alienation and to think and behave more productively when further developing my professional identity.

## **6.1. Identity, Learning and Recognition**

### **6.1.1. Challenges to the Introduction of a Culture of Experiential Learning in the University**

Some of the organisational relationships observed during the process of the implementation of interventions formed the specific characteristics of the model on which the notion of knowledge and learning were constructed and communicated. These were the relationships between academics and students, as well as those between leaders and their followers, interpreted as situations of learning.

There are three main types of situation upon which analysis was developed of the ways in which different participants in the university formed their relationship with knowledge and learning.

#### **6.1.1.1. New Knowledge as a Threat to Academics' Authority**

The first situation explored here concerns the existence, among the teachers, of a consistent way of thinking and acting towards students. When describing the four interventions (see Chapter 1. Part 3) I mentioned that some academics regarded their students as predominantly stupid, illiterate, irresponsible and undisciplined. Some of the teachers included in the tutoring project also shared their lack of experience and knowledge in dealing with certain types of class situation and student behaviour.

One way to deal with such difficulties, for some of the teachers, was by punishing or disqualifying students. Another way to resolve the problems was opposite to this – a lack of care about student's failures and lack of requirements. Both behaviours, of over-sanctioning as well as of over-toleration, were discussed informally between teachers but were never explored. This kind of reticence about teachers' responses to students'

educational and personal problems was used to mask anxiety on both sides from the constantly increasing generational differences demonstrated by their different life styles, values and learning habits.

Most of the teachers acted according to a version of academic roles and attitudes to knowledge developed mostly in educational institutions. Such a version was challenged after 1989, during the transitional period in the country, as it was not able to produce useful solutions for new social phenomena that had become part of the present educational situation, such as drug abuse, violence, poverty etc. The dramatic difference in both generations' social experiences became a source of constant tension. This is why some of the teachers who had difficulty in containing such uncertainty, felt assaulted and reacted with aggression to the students' behaviour. Examples of this were my colleague's behaviour towards some of the students in the VCC (see Chapter 1, section 1.3.3., p. 50), as well as the behaviour of some of the teachers in the LAP using arguments of their power to engage the students in learning process (from the cases described in my reflective diary). These kinds of practice just strained relationships, not allowing the worries and needs of both sides to be heard, or lessons to be drawn from this negative experience.

The analysis of such situations of conflict revealed three challenges to the teachers' role:

A. The expectations of the educational market for new and fast changing knowledge and competencies.

This means that teachers have to be in a regime of constant learning. This expectation clashes with the long standing tradition of validation of the authority of knowledge not according to achievements in research and education, but according to a belonging or loyalty to a certain ideology and its authorities. In such a culture of familism and control over the truth and learning, the attempts to study the real problems in society and to reach productive explanations were not encouraged at all.

However, in the new situation, in order to retain professional authority, the academic person has to be more active in his relationship with knowledge. Such an expectation of the academic role is underlined in the EU educational policy of "the three Ls" or *lifelong learning*.

B. Attack on academic knowledge and thinking under the pressure for speedy social transformation.

The period of transformation, for its part, questioned existing knowledge because of the above-mentioned control and ideological limitations on the creation of knowledge during the previous period. As a result of this, the bearers of academic knowledge were compromised. Knowledge itself was transformed from something valuable, to a tool for the achievement of a certain social change (was politicised) or personal prosperity (was privatised).

One sign of such utilitarian use of academic knowledge and its authorities was the the engagement of academia more with the process of project implementation than with the creation of knowledge.

Another sign of the corruption and abuse of academic roles and principles was the tendency, in some of the leaders and performers of social change, to present themselves in the public space as belonging to different professional backgrounds, despite their actual education or rank. The reason for doing this was to fit the requirements of the sponsors and the comparatively higher public prestige of one or another area of knowledge. For instance, during one of the public events in which I participated, the leader of our team wanted to present me as a specialist in social sciences, rather than a clinical social worker, because the former sounded, according to him, more “serious and academic” than merely a ‘worker’ and especially a clinical one. As people don’t know what clinical social work meant, and as I was expected to speak about social policies, he wanted to tweak my educational background. This example is far from being isolated, and such practices additionally erode academic standards because people who should be upholding them don’t believe in their real value.

The third sign of threat to academic knowledge was a decrease in the scientific rigor of social studies: some of them were invited in order to prove the ‘good quality’ of new models, models through which democratisation of public institutions was expected to occur. Sometimes this was done to the detriment of scientific principles of knowledge acquisition. Such tendencies caused a lot of conflicts between different academic groups over being part of or staying outside the circles of the production of knowledge for

democratic change. Actually, these circles served certain social, economic and political interests during the transition period.

From the point of view of the process of the creation of knowledge, the public agenda for rapid social change prevented real processes of thinking and learning, as it introduced a reductionist approach to knowledge and truth. What was missing here was the complexity of the situation in which the efforts for change occurred and a critical exploration of the way in which these efforts were realised.

### C. Drastic differences between students' and teachers' versions of educational roles and relations.

I have mentioned that some of the differences in the social experience of both groups made teachers, in a way, vulnerable during the teaching process. Such new social phenomena as substance abuse, illiteracy, aggressive behaviour, disengagement and increasing differences in social status, provoked teachers' attitudes and habits. They were neither prepared to work with such phenomena, nor provided with additional services in or outside the university, to deal with such problems. Actually, the last intervention in this study, concerning the introduction of tutoring was created partly to cover such issues, helping the teachers more adequately meet such deficiencies in the environment that forms young people's identifications with destructive models of social behaviour. This fourth intervention was also planned to show concern and care to both groups whilst engaging them in a situation of support and learning from each other's individual stories and experiences.

But it wasn't only 'difficult' students who challenged the teachers' educational habits. The more active and engaged students also sometimes behaved not in accordance with teachers' expectations, asking questions, being critical of their positions, communicating their own positions. Many of them had experience with some kind of education or life in western countries, and could compare the relationships here and there, and to distinguish what required a different method. Thus, the notion of the teacher as retaining total control over knowledge and being the only source of access to it – a version that was, until recently, valid, and still exists in some of the teachers' minds – was seriously shaken by the expanding opportunities for access to knowledge and alternative learning experiences (for example, students' mobility, information technology, students' Summer work abroad etc.).

Therefore, a conclusion could be made that the idealised image of the academic teacher's role as an authority that keeps the whole power in the learning situation through the access to the right knowledge and through his administrative control was confronted by the new reality in which students a) didn't value the authorities, as a result of their systemic neglect, disappointment and lack of values concerning knowledge and learning, and b) had many alternative ways to access knowledge and to learn. So, the anxiety of the teachers comes from the demise of their vision about their academic role, and the challenges of the new reality for which this generation was not prepared – the dramatic change in life style, the relationship to thinking and the ownership of knowledge. This shift challenged teachers on the level of their intellect, which forms the basis of their identity – to know and to be able to give explanations. Their practical knowledge, however, was shaken and forcibly changed, without having real models or experience to learn from (for instance, how to live in a situation of transition and insecurity, developing the values of democracy whilst not having experience of it).

So, some of the attacks towards students can be interpreted as an effort to release, through projective identifications from one's own lack of knowledge, incompetent parts and their projection onto the internal representations of their students. Then students were interpreted as destroying their authority, their lessons and their fields of knowledge. This hostile image of the students prevented any kind of recognition of the needs of these students and prevented a mobilisation of some thinking on how to overcome the issues that prevented a situation of learning to occur.

One reason for such defensive behaviour and inability to empathize with students is that teachers' intellectual vulnerability was communicated in the organisation in a way that didn't help them reflect on this experience and adequately shape their role. There were no spaces in the university where their worries could be heard in a way that would help them to transform their vulnerability into the authority to explore and change themselves. As their concerns and needs remained unheard it led to alienation from their professional role. They gave up on the students, but the reaction of the entire society was similar: low quality on all levels of education, stressed and neglectful parents, lack of employment opportunities for the young people and a lack of real policies for their support and inclusion in social life.

### **6.1.1.2. Defence against Liberalising the Relationship to Knowledge**

As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, there were three types of situation in relation to the knowledge and learning which came from the research material. The next two situations demonstrate the way in which both the authorities of knowledge and also learners resisted the efforts for the liberalisation of the relationship between teacher, learner and knowledge as well as the relationship between leader of change, follower and knowledge about changes..

The first situation described below shows the process of elimination of different versions of reality acquired by the different participants in the learning process, in order that only one version be promoted. Usually it was the version of the teacher or the leader of change.

The second pattern of learning relationships describes how the fears of theft or destruction of one's personal ideas and thoughts prevented both the exchange of individual knowledge and thinking and the discovery of new knowledge together with another person.

These were the main phenomena through which a process of the elimination of differences in knowledge and meaning occurred in the learning relationships created during the four interventions which were studied. Their aim was to preserve the preliminary developed version about the nature and the direction of change, or the authority of the leader as an authority of knowledge about change.

The first phenomenon concerns the transformation of basic concepts relating to social relations and social change, like "democracy", "social participation", "learning organisation", "entrepreneurial university", "action research" and "reflexivity" into objective truths. Even though such concepts are objects of constant study, discussions and change, they were accepted by Bulgarian society as hard truths that were clear enough. In the spirit of socio-technical systems, it was expected that they had merely to be implemented through some models of structures, roles and regulations, in order to be put in motion. I see this phenomenon as part of the process of ideologisation, in as far as the concepts were used to legitimise certain power or private interests away from the intentions for real change. Such a phenomenon is part of the culture of imitation, in which some change occurs only on the surface while the relationships remain unchanged. Thus,



participants created a relationship only with the denominations of these concepts, but not with their meaning, the culture in which they were created, or the context that they were expected to serve.

My personal experience with two universities in Bulgaria has shown the existence of such contextually distant, formal and abstract presentation of theories in higher education. Knowledge is taught out of its connection with its practical implementation. In a similar way, the level of student competency is judged not according to their capacity to think and creatively apply knowledge to real problems, but according to their ability to reproduce, sometimes even to know by heart, knowledge which has been validated by the teacher. So, the processes of learning and of thinking are separate in this model of education. The process of learning is shortened here to an imitation of another person's thoughts, to a primitive borrowing from another's mind, without having space to use one's own mind or to legitimately produce independent thought. At the same time, any new knowledge easily becomes formal and empty of meaning and, further, is turned into a fetish.

The second phenomenon of the construction of relationships that aim to eliminate different points of view is the use of knowledge to disqualify competing positions. One example of this is the labeling of certain positions or choices of participants in the learning process as unconscious defences against the change. Such a form of psychoanalytic thinking can be used as a powerful tool in stifling critical voices and debate. These positions were considered, by both the leadership and by some of the participants in the changes, as dangerous and destructive towards the undertaken direction of change.

Vignette 10:

One example of this kind was a situation that happened during the training of teachers in the fourth intervention, concerning tutoring. The leader of the project – a person with formal power, as representative of the university Board of Trustees, and competent in psychoanalysis – was presenting some pieces of psychoanalytic theory to the group of teachers. It was the first lecture presented to the group.

A younger colleague from the department of philosophy interrupted him, saying that the thesis suggested by this theory reminded him of some philosophical ideas.

Another colleague added that it sounded very interesting to her too.

Then, a third colleague, close to the project leader, interrupted the conversation, ending the discussion about philosophical concepts. Later on, this third person explained his reason for interrupting the discussion as having been a way to prevent the unconscious destructive behaviour of the philosophy student towards the leader and the knowledge he was presenting to the group.

As part of the organising team and participant in the situation, I was surprised by such a reaction. My explanation of the situation was that when encountering a new area of knowledge, people usually try to classify the new ideas in the frame of knowledge that they already have, in order to understand it, to make it familiar. In his effort to understand the new concepts the philosophy student was trying to refer it to familiar philosophical theories. This is the way people learn, by making nets of meaning. My experience was of an effort on the part of the philosopher to understand the new concepts, interrupting the presentation in order to check with the authority of knowledge if he has understood the new ideas correctly.

Of course, we can suppose that in this first lecture, when confronted with some new knowledge, anxiety increased in this participant. To the uncertainty of not-knowing, he responded with an interruption of the leaders' presentation and opposition to the psychoanalytical knowledge of his own philosophical knowledge. Nevertheless, this is part of the learning process as I understand it, as a way of learning by creating boundaries, attacking and in the same way remaining dependent on, and admiring, the authority of knowledge. This is a difficult dialogue between two minds, two sets of experience, in which some new understanding can be achieved.

Unfortunately, the anxiety of the third colleague, that his admiration for the authority of knowledge and his identification with psychoanalytic theory would be destroyed by the ignorant situation of paranoid-schizoid type in which only bad intentions were projected onto the new learner, meant that he was interpreted and treated in the situation as a bad guy. The situation was transformed into a competitive one, in which two young wise men fight for the love and the acknowledgement of the father.

Such a transformation of the learning situation into a fight-or-flight relationship prevented all participants identifying with the new knowledge as the participants' anxieties weren't contained and the feeling of recognition of the insecurity, and its normalisation as part of the learning process, didn't occur. Thus, the participants' need for security and trust that would ensure the capacity of the person to learn wasn't acknowledged and met. (Reflective diary)

Thus, the thesis that every change provokes defences in the participants, feelings of fear and regress to primitive stages of thinking and doing, is useful in discovering those parts of the process that really prevent people actually implementing the change. When, however, used as an absolute truth, that doesn't need any checking or discussion, this thesis could turn people that try to think and criticize certain ideas into totally malignant, suspicious and primitive minds with which the leader and perhaps the group has to fight, in order to accomplish their highly moral mission.

Such use of psychological knowledge, supported by objective values, leads to partial interpretation of a person's struggle for understanding. On the one hand, it can be seen as a rejection of accepting a more complex position towards learning and change as inherently contradictory processes of connecting and dividing, of agreeing and disagreeing with certain ideas or meanings. This kind of description of the process of learning can be related to the concept of 'creative destruction' (Schumpeter, 2010) which describes the process of

change, inasmuch as learning also means change. On the other hand, this simplification of learning relationships demonstrates a lack of reflexivity on the leaders' own uncertainty and its effects on the learning experiences of the participants. It is sometimes not the situation of change itself, or not *only* this, but also the feelings of insecurity which are shared between the participants that prevents the acquisition of knowledge from occurring.

In dependency cultures, as in the examples mentioned in this thesis, the leader is not expected to learn, to not know or to hesitate. The experience in such cultures is that leader and knowledge are an inseparable whole, one and the same object. This way of thinking prevents opportunities to learn from participants' personal experience and relationship with knowledge as they are not expected to use their minds. There is only one mind in which knowledge is held.

The third way to stop dialogue is when some of the participants are seen as incompetent in understanding and thinking about change in a productive way. Thus, the knowledge of facts, or experts' knowledge, is accepted as the only valuable competence and is taken as a criterion for who will take the decisions and will implement the change. Using this phenomenon in learning relationships leads to isolation and discrimination. This kind of segregation of people into those who know and those who don't know ultimately prevents the process of understanding and learning from both sides of the experience.

Thompson and Hoggett (2001) designate such group relationships, through which one version of reality has been deified when all other points of view are ignored, as 'emotional tyranny' because such a regime of group thinking decreases the capacities of the participants to experience the situation in a complex and rich way, and to freely express their ideas. The opportunities for critical thinking and creativity, as well as the feelings of personal freedom and safety in the relationships within the group, are abolished.

We would argue that in each of these basic groups we can see a distinct type of emotional tyranny. That is, the prevailing basic assumption imposes a type of 'group think' (Main, 1985: 64) and 'group feeling' onto the whole group so that only certain ideas and emotions are acceptable to that group. Finally, it is worth observing that, in each of these cases, it is not just that no one will listen to dissident voices; the point is that in all likelihood they will be subject to attack (Hoggett, 1998). (Thompson & Hoggett, 2001, p.353)

An important moment in this process is this kind of mystical speaking, when certain concepts are invested with the fantasy that their following will prevent the group or its leader experiencing the turbulence of the change process and will make them competent and successful. This act of mystic connection with new knowledge deprives us of any opportunity for skepticism as a characteristic of scientific cognition, and mobilises it as a defence against the insecurity in relation to the right method of transformation, survival and success. This kind of corruptive use of the concepts actually prevents their implementation.

For example, where a dependent emotional culture is strong, Group Relations Theory describes cases in which a group finds or creates some sort of holy text, and then uses this text to discipline itself. In the most extreme case, if a dependent culture grips the group with sufficient force, then slavish obedience may be preferred to democratic debate; indeed, democracy itself may come to be regarded as a weakness that needs to be destroyed. (Thompson & Hoggett, 2001, p.356b)

Similar processes can be observed at the level of public and political life in the country where the vocabulary of democracy was acquired but not the principles of democratic living.

These strongly power-driven ways to keep the status quo create a culture of fear where paranoid fantasies of conflicts, robbery and destruction of one's personal knowledge predominate.

### **6.1.1.3. The Culture of Fear**

For example, fear of conflict among members of a forum, such as a regeneration partnership, often closes off avenues for exploration, or makes it difficult for members of one subgroup, for example older people, to listen to and learn from the experience of another (such as a local disaffected youth). (Thompson & Hoggett, 2000, p.352)

The fear of conflict and the efforts to avoid it were a characteristic feature of the relationships in the organisation. We have already mentioned, in Chapter 5, that the expression of an opinion different from that of the management was regarded by the leadership as an attack on its power and was eliminated in different ways, such as: direct abolition, devaluation, an interpretation as an attack against common values, exclusion, and control over the discussion process. In such a culture, participants described themselves as feeling totally incompetent and stupid, as losing the point of discussion or being blamed and ashamed.

The relationships in such a culture are constructed as manipulative and sanctioning. The avoidance of any discussion has the effect of protecting the participant from painful feelings and lack of recognition of his own position. The cases of direct confrontations usually resulted in serious conflicts, isolation, defamation, suspension or creation of such conditions that a person was forced into leaving university of his own volition.

Moreover, these emotional dynamics can adversely affect the ability of the group to carry out its self-assigned tasks. (Thompson & Hoggett, 2000, p.351)

In the process of my work with the teachers (see Chapter 1, section 1.3.5., p.56), two types of paranoid idea arose: a) that the knowledge that they had developed would be stolen by someone else in order to obtain higher status in the academic community and society at large; and b) that the individual contribution of the participant to the common process of thinking and knowledge achievement would be destroyed, discredited or unrecognised.

These kinds of fears keep the participants away from the efforts of thinking and working together and prevented organisational development. For example, as a result of such relationships of competition and suspicion between two of my colleagues, I stopped sharing my own ideas with them, or being curious about theirs, in order to prevent any accusation of stealing some of their findings.

In a similar way, I and most of my colleagues were not eager to present their topics of interest or their points of view in the group, as there was no space in the organisation in which people could share their thoughts safely and be appreciated for their efforts. The level of professional competence of each member was legitimised by the leader. He decided who is competent in what. And each of them had his own specific area of expertise legitimated by the leader. But even these strong boundaries didn't prevent silent competition between the members.

### **6.1.2. Learning as a Traumatic Situation**

The relationships in the organisation presented in the above-mentioned situations (see section 6.1.1.3.) will be analysed here as situations of learning and new knowledge acquisition. Two main sets of theories will be used. The first is related to the theories of recognition as developed by Taylor (1992) and Honneth (1995). These theories will be

used in order to emphasize the importance of the relationship of mutual recognition in the educational situation, in order that the process of learning and personal development can occur. The second draws upon psychoanalytic concepts concerning an individual's early emotional and social relationships, as represented by some of the concepts created by Klein (1932), Bowlby (1979; 1988), Winnicott (1971; 1973) and Bion (1962; 1967). On this foundation, an effort will be made to explore the meaning of the obstacles that prevented learning in the NBU and some of the opportunities that exist to overcome them.

As I emphasised in Chapter 3, learning from experience requires the development of an identity that is comparatively autonomous from authority. During early childhood, this autonomy from the authority of knowledge is developed through child's constant fluctuation between conditions of separation from, and remaining in, a relationship with the authority of knowledge. The authority of knowledge provides for the child a secure base for independent efforts to explore reality and to manage his/her contradictory feelings of curiosity and fear towards external reality.

Also underlined were the capacities of the authority of knowledge, not only to reserve her mind for the psychological development of the child but also: a) to allow for the child's separation from her mind and the independent development of its own mind, as well as b) to recognise the knowledge that the child has acquired through its own separate connection with the world. Such capacities are of key importance for the acquisition by child of its own mind, thoughts and meaning and the development of a sense of self as a creative, successful and valued person.

#### **6.1.2.1. Unrecognised Learning Needs**

Insofar as learning from personal or other people's experience depends on the balance between two contradictory tendencies in the relationship of teacher – learner (see section 6.1.2.), then the distortion of this balance through, for example, the creation of relationships of misrecognition or lack of recognition, could lead to the distortion of the learning capacity of the mature individual.

The first situation explored in this chapter, of the projection of the teachers' own bad (not-knowing) aspects onto the students, persists in the organisation because of its lack of capacity to acknowledge and contain the anxieties of teachers as provoked by the pressure

of reality on them to transform their identities as educators and professionals in certain fields of knowledge.

The data from interviews and from the work with the teachers' group during the fourth intervention demonstrated that teachers experience themselves in both roles as unrecognised, unsupported or blamed by the management. For example, when I was speaking about the aim of the project on tutoring to create a special space for the students to share their worries and needs and to feel that the people in this organisation were caring for them, one of the teachers said: "I like this idea very much. Well, we, the teachers, also need such a tutoring programme for ourselves." Many participants in the group agreed with this statement.

The initial idea of the tutoring project to create space for teachers to explore their own experience, interests and fears failed. So the activities concerning learning from experience and cooperative inquiry were transformed into those of lecturing and supervision. Thus, the relevance of the teachers' previous experience to the proposed tutoring role were not recognised or included in the study. The identities of people who think about their students in individualised and caring way were acknowledge at the beginning of the project but later on this resource of personal experience was left unused. This process made some of the participants anxious and confused. That is why most of them reacted with passivity to my invitation to participate in the creation of a tutor's profile. Thus, a process of mutual lack of recognition was constructed in the project similar to the existing relationships on the university level. This lack of recognition resulted further in a series of failed efforts on the teacher's parts to keep stable long-term relationships with their students. The enthusiasm of the students in participating in the project resulted in no adequate response from the teachers.

The interviews done with both groups at the end of intervention four showed that both teachers and students still valued the idea of tutoring. The difference in the positions of the groups was that students were even more optimistic about the importance of this academic role and used their experience of being tutored to give practical and critical suggestions for its future implementation at the university. At the same time, the teachers felt guilty that they were not able to adhere to the requirements of the role, describing themselves as overburdened by the many tasks that they were asked to accomplish and skeptical about the

opportunities for the real implementation of this role or a serious acknowledgement of their efforts.

This kind of experience in teachers demonstrates a lack of “politics of difference” or “identity politics” in terms of Charles Taylor’s (1992) theory of recognition. Such a thesis had already been developed in the third intervention, when emphasising the predominance of relationships at the university which were governed by the ethics of justice (see Chapter 1, section 1.3.4., p. 54). These relationships could be interpreted in theories of recognition as the “politics of universalism”. Then, arguments were developed to create a balance between these kinds of relationship on which the main roles and structures were organised at the university, and another type of relationship governed by the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982) that would allow for individual needs and difficulties of all groups at the university to be recognised and worked through.

The situation described above, of the elimination of alternative visions, shows that even the ethics of justice were not always applied appropriately. In some cases it led to over-unification. Another example of this kind is the idea of the guaranteed autonomy of the students, by allowing them to make a personal choice as to whether to be present in the lectures or not. It was expected that, when paying for their study, students would feel responsible, would participate actively in class and would ask for a better quality of study. However, some of the students appeared to assume that because they paid their fees they could “buy their diploma” irrespective of the poor level of presence in class, performance or knowledge.

In my opinion, such issues existed because of the lack of balance between the two ethics at the university. The lack of methods of working with students and teachers through which they could shape and transform their identities, receive support and learn from their experiences, resulted in alienation, in some of them, from the university agenda for liberalisation. When individual needs are not recognised, the principles of justice and equality can be interpreted as violation and abuse.

As far as the ethics of care and the politics of difference create a culture of relationships that from Honneth’s point of view (1995), represent solidarity with the other, an explanation can be developed about the absence of such a culture using the conclusions



from the previous two chapters, particularly the discredited notion of community and traumatic experience of leadership in the public life of Bulgarian citizens. These are some of the explanations of the absence of the politics of recognition in most of the relationships in the organisation.

However, in this chapter I have also demonstrated, using theories of recognition, how deeply the lack of recognition can disorganise the capacity of individuals and groups at the university to learn and develop.

Another conclusion, based on the above-presented examples, concerns the importance of the balance between the different types of politics of recognition as drawn by Taylor and Honneth. The achievement of a more democratic culture in the organisation is related to the constant effort to apply both ethics (i.e. care and justice), accepting norms that treat all members as equal, while at the same time offering opportunities for each of them to be supported in a specific way. Similar ideas are promoted by James Tully (2000) when suggesting that, “rather than seeking to achieve a final state of complete recognition, our primary aim should be to ensure that ‘agonic democratic games’, including struggle or recognition, can continue to be played as freely as possible (p.469, cited in Thompson, 2006, p.13).

Another conclusion that could be drawn here is that the relationship between the politics of recognition and the learning process is systemic, since the presence of such politics in the organisation facilitates members’ capacity to learn from experience. And, opposed to this, efforts to learn from experience lead to better understanding of the key importance for organisational development of creating a relational culture in which individual contributions are valued and different ideas are shared between members.

This connection, between recognition and learning, has its roots in the affective and relational nature of the learning process, seen here as a process of an overall personal, social and emotional development and as a process of identity formation. Referring to Taylor, Thompson, (2006), underlines that, ‘here recognition, in the form of the love of significant others, is crucial to the formation of identity’ (p.10).

#### **6.1.2.2. Unsupported Learning Minds**

Here I want to analyse the above-mentioned situations using object relations theory. The way in which the meaning of knowledge and learning are constructed in the dyad of learner – teacher are explored here. The model of the relationship between parent and child, in the process of early child development, is perceived here as an early model of the learning relationship which can later be applied to other situations of learning.

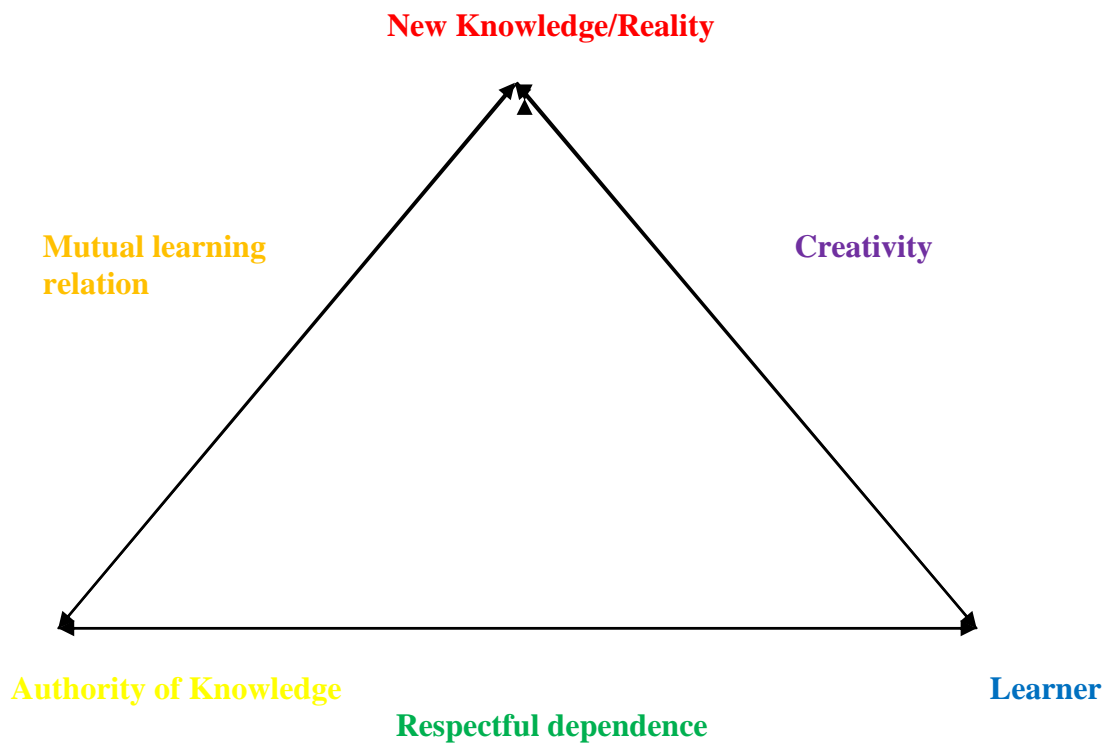
Using Bowlby's understanding of the early process of identity formation as a process of learning about the world whilst remaining in a complex relationship with authority, we can view teachers at the university as a secure base for student's personal and professional development. Three main aspects of the teacher viewed as an authority of knowledge may be defined, using Bowlby's theory of secure base formation which is important for the capacity of the learner to learn and to relate more independently to knowledge and the world:

- a) The capacity of the authority of knowledge to tolerate the efforts of the learner to relate independently to reality and to the existing knowledge, whilst not experiencing this process as abandonment. Such a capacity facilitates the development of an ability to learn from experience and to develop the identity of that of a knowledgeable person.
- b) At the same time, the capacity of the authority of knowledge to be present with his mind and knowledge when needed by the learner in situations of insecurity, failure and difficulty. This supports the development of a productive interdependence between both the authority of knowledge and the learner. It also encourages the learner to search for help, to search for other minds, in order to understand and learn about reality, without feelings of shame or fear.
- c) The capacity of the authority of knowledge to appreciate, value, and learn from the products of the independent efforts of the learner to create new knowledge. Such a relationship to knowledge and the learner creates a culture of relations in which mutual learning is allowed.

All these capacities of the authority of knowledge, viewed as playing the role of a secure base in the process of learning, contribute to a culture of learning characterised by a) creativity, b) respectful dependency, and c) mutual learning. (see *Figure 1: Productive*

*learning relationships*.) Such learning relationships later create opportunities for the learner to offer his mind to learning from other people in the same secure and balanced way.

**Figure 1: Productive Learning Relationships**



When applying this thinking to the situations presented at the beginning of this chapter, we can say that the authorities of knowledge interpreted the learning situation as a traumatic one, and reacted with anxiety to the perceived destruction of their own identity, using three types of attacks upon the triad teacher – learner – knowledge. Each of these attacks is focused on each of the links in this triangle.

The first kind of attack is on the link between teacher and learner. In a situation of insecurity about his identity, the authority of knowledge regains control, projecting his unknowing parts to the learner. These were the examples of teachers that regarded students as stupid and irresponsible and wanted to select them in a way that would allow them to

work only with the best ones. Likewise, previous experiential knowledge of the teachers from their tutoring was left unused. Such splitting of people into knowing and not knowing prevents real situations of thinking and learning occurring in the organisation as some of the expertise of the participants is destroyed. This process leads to the development of insecurity and distrust in the authority of knowledge and a cyclical process of envy and aggressive projections.

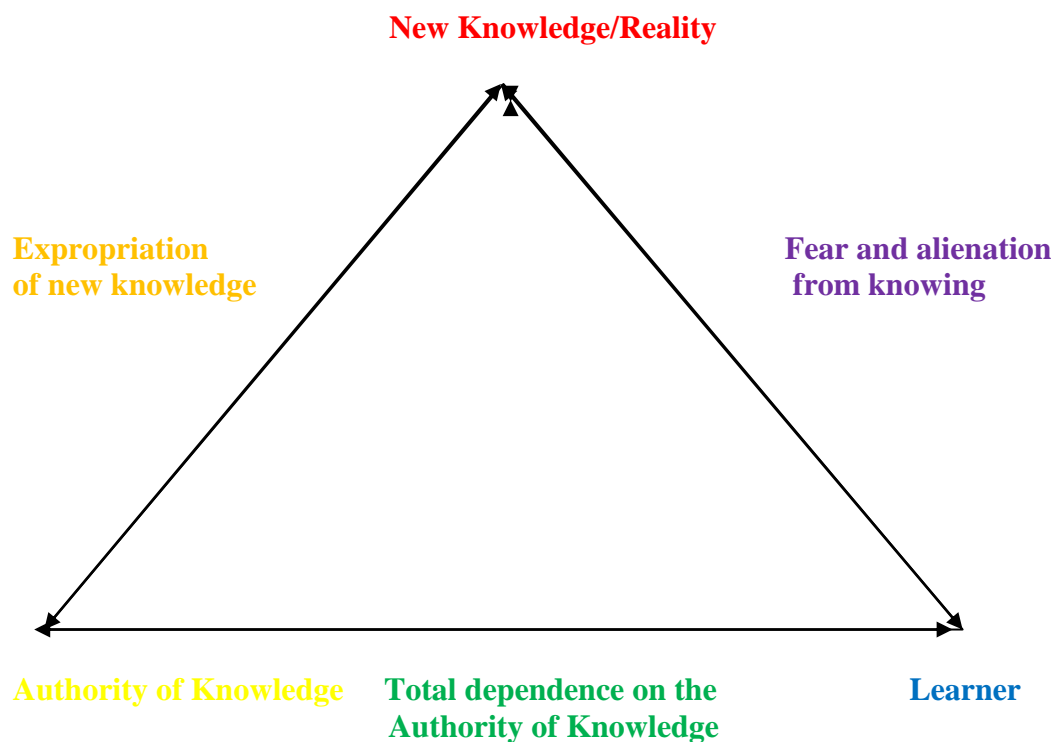
The second type of attack is created against the independent relationship of the learner with knowledge. Each effort of the student to think and to challenge the knowledge presented by the authority, or each attempt to explore reality independently and to learn from personal experience, is interpreted enviously as an attack on authority. Such interpretation of the learning situation, made by the authority, in turn leads to two types of defensive strategies. The first one alienates the teachers from their role as a secure base for students to learn; thus, they neglect their tasks. It is close to what Ainsworth and Bell (1970) describe as 'avoidant attachment' in the relationships between mother and child. The second defensive strategy is the opposite: when the teacher becomes preoccupied with the effort of controlling the ways in which the student relates to knowledge. In the above-mentioned situations (see section 6.1.1.2.), these were the examples in which the authority neglected the consideration of different points of view, in favor of only one, and the learners had the impression that their ideas had been stolen or destroyed. Such an impression can be explained through the emotional tie in Ainsworth and Bell's (1970) 'ambivalent attachment'. Thus the learning situation is interpreted in a paranoid way, provoking primitive fears of incorporation and destruction of the knowing parts of the personality.

The third type of attack is on knowledge itself and the link between it, authority and reality. Knowledge is seen as an inseparable part of authority. In a manic way authority identifies with a specific piece of knowledge and communicates it with others as if it were something precious. Thus, knowledge cannot be criticised by others as it would mean an attack on authority. But at the same time, it would never be possessed by others, as it belonged only to authority.

Such thinking about knowledge and authority destroys meaning and creates opportunities for formal or perverse learning relations. The learning situation is perceived by both sides as an unwished for space for identity formation and relationship with others. Knowledge is

perceived as bad, a dangerous object that has to be avoided. A culture is created of traumatic learning relationships, where the most important thing is not the relationship to knowledge, (to think and discover new knowledge), but the relationship with authority (to speak in the right way). (see *Figure 2: Traumatic learning relationships*)

**Figure 2: Traumatic learning relationships**



The example of the mystification of certain concepts or theories (see section 6.1.1.2.) serves to keep real thinking and learning away from learning relationships. They are turned into relationships of fighting for power and subjection. Thus, knowledge becomes a potentially dangerous object to relate to, as:

- a) One's knowledge could destroy the important authority of knowledge;
- b) The authority of knowledge could destroy or exclude one's knowledge or the person himself.

Such fears of the exclusion and annihilation of some of the personality of the learner can lead to the development of guilt, anger or fear of authority. He may split his creative and knowing parts and to project them on the authority or deny them.

One example from my own experience demonstrates such dynamics in the process of learning:

Vignette 12:

In the process of writing my thesis I left the theory and method chapters 2 and 3 to be finished last. When the time came to combine the pieces of theory developed before, in relation to the data analysis, I started to develop some arguments that perhaps I didn't need to have very much theory; I doubted whether it was relevant to have a theoretical overview in such research etc. I shared these ideas with my supervisors.

In one of our supervision sessions they asked me what kind of knowledge I wanted to include in these chapters. At that moment I had the feeling of being blocked and not knowing what to say. I shared this feeling with them and we started to discuss this unexpected and strange feeling of stupidity that I had. My director of studies reminded me of the pieces of theory that I had already sent to the supervisors as part of the planning process, showing me that I knew before what I had wanted to include there.

When reflecting on this experience I realised that there were a lot of fears related to the process of this study that I was constantly trying to overcome. First of all, the decision to undertake this study was made without the agreement of my chief of department, as had happened with the two other colleagues of mine with whom I studied on the same PhD programme. I entered the programme despite his objections and after having conflict with him. Secondly, I studied the projects implemented in my workplace, developing critiques on some of the practices there. It created anxiety that, when published, this study could be regarded as disloyalty and an attack against the university and some specific authorities which would lead to my discharge. One of the above mentioned colleagues, who studied some processes at the same university, also had similar feelings. Furthermore, I had the notion that some of my colleagues would disqualify my ideas as part of the competition for approval of the authorities. (Reflective diary)

So, the methodological chapters 2 and 3, in this regard, symbolised the castrating authority of knowledge that would punish me, destroying some of my professional identity or even myself as a professional. To write these chapters would mean showing the authority that I also had knowledge and it would lead to competition with him/them. There were also gender and generational issues that made the situation even worse. The authorities of knowledge were also authorities of power: they were men, they belonged to the previous generation and they were the famous founders of the university.

This and the previous examples show how deeply such anxieties and insecurities developed in one educational organisation can destroy the capacity of people to think and be productive. The learning relationship is constructed as an Oedipal situation in which all participants experience aggressive feelings towards each other. Knowledge and learning are accepted as dangerous and forbidden. There is no pleasure from learning in these relationships. It is experienced as opposite to the containment provided by the Winnicott's 'good enough mother': when the mutual experience of discovering and sharing new thoughts is created between mother and baby, and both of them have the capacity to tolerate the frustration of being lost or leaving one another, or from the insecurity of not having all answers.

This type of culture in the relationship to knowledge prevents the transformation of the organisation into a learning system i.e. prevents the transformation of beta elements into alpha elements. We can hypothesise that some of the rough knowledge of the beta elements in the experience of the members of the university is too painful to be allowed to be into thought.

However, Bion suggests that each organisation acquires both the tendencies of an alpha and a beta organisation. This means that, besides the destructive tendencies towards knowing or  $-K$ , there are also creative attempts at the university to understand and transform the reality of the university and to turn it into a productive space for the mutual sharing of knowledge, experience and development, or  $+K$ .

The interviews conducted with some of the students in the VCC, showed that some of the students still retain their capacity to create opportunities for learning. On the one hand, they easily recognise the authentic efforts of some of the teachers to support their learning and are able to use them. On the other, some of them feel authorised enough to create their own spaces for learning and sharing experience. For example, one of the students used her formal position as a member of the Students' Committee in order to create the special annual event "Spirit of Arts" in which, for several days, students use different spaces at the university to share their different skills, knowledge and positive feelings. Another example is one of a student who created a specific web-site in which students could find basic knowledge in the main fields of science, taught by famous lecturers and scientists from all over the world, and could discuss this.

These are temporary and informal spaces for learning run by students. Unfortunately, they are present in the periphery of the organisation and are not able to shape the overall landscape of university education. Sometimes they are seen as exotic or strange experiences of children.

At the same time the attempts of the students from the VCC to engage followers of their initiatives showed that they preferred to relate to people from their generation. (see *Appendix 5. Small garden project in the VCC*) This gives some impression of the way in which distrust between generations was shared in one of the initiatives created by the students in the VCC.

The dialogue between generations at the university, as well as in society, hasn't yet occurred. The distance is retained by the hidden tensions and mutual accusations of both sides being still mired in ignorance and irresponsibility.

## **6.2. Learning to Be Engaged**

Having described in previous chapters my personal experience of alienation and some of the theoretical arguments about both its problems and its potential to aid professional development, I want to turn here, in this part of my self-reflective analysis to the usefulness of reflexivity. My thesis here is that in order to use the potential that alienation can offer to an individual and to his organisation, it is necessary to enter the role of reflective learner and to try to overcome the bad effects of alienation.

### **6.2.1. Significant Moments and the Turn to Reflexivity**

Schabracq and Cooper (2003) describe as objects of alienation such things as physical environment, other people, norms and values, one's own activities. This kind of classification led me to questions like: "What I am actually alienated from?" and, of course, "What I am still emotionally and behaviourally engaged with?". What helped me, initially, to answer these questions was my participation in a role enquiry group as part of my PhD programme in the Centre for Psycho-Social Studies at UWE.



This kind of small group is designed for a reflective exploration of the personal experience of the role of researcher. Each participant in the group is given time in which to present an issue, difficulty or problem that he is experiencing in the process of his research. After that, the group reflects on the presented material and gives feedback to the presenter. In the final part of the group reflection, the presenter discusses his colleagues' feedback and its usefulness in providing new or alternative understandings of the situation that might facilitate further research activities.

In one of the sessions, I presented my experience of feeling alienated from the organisation in which I work and which I aimed to explore and transform. In terms of Ghaye's (2010) understanding of participatory and appreciative reflexive learning, there were three 'significant moments' that stimulated my reflexivity on the issue and started a process of restructuring my professional identity.

According to Ghaye, the meaning of a "significant moment" is related to a part of an individual's personal experience that they perceive as crucial i.e. as very important for his life, his success and prosperity. It is subjective by nature and could be related not only to the negative events in a person's life but also to positive ones. What I am presenting here as significant moments are the reflections given to me by my colleagues from the group. I value them as important for me because of their potential to provoke a deeper understanding of the situation and to create opportunities for a more active and constructive relationship to it.

Later on I decided to present this piece of my personal experience concerning the alienation to a group of PhD students and to a group of participants in OPUS international conference (Mateeva, 2010) in order to learn more from other people's experience. These two initiatives could also be seen as part of the same transformative effort that started with those initial significant moments.

The significant moments for me were related to three reflections that I received from the three of my colleagues in the group. They helped me to overcome my feeling of 'being stuck' and to initiate a long process of rethinking and an active reconstruction of my personal professional identity.

The first reflection related to the validation of my strong feelings of betrayal by the organisation, of painful, traumatic, and catastrophic events. First of all, the existence of this group provided me with the opportunity to speak openly about my feelings of anger, disappointment and insecurity. Through my colleagues' reflections, I was able, also, to realise how strong and deep these feelings were and how much they reduced my ability to look for alternatives. Even more, the reflections offered me a positive perspective on the situation as an opportunity to become immersed in the dynamics of the organisation and my role in it as a researcher and change agent.

My feelings of alienation were discussed as something that is "normal" and even helpful in situations of organisational crisis. This alternative point of view helped me to start overcoming the experience of shame about being disloyal to my organisation, of being weak and not going forward etc., ideas that belong to traditional thinking in Bulgarian organisational or group culture. This way, my sense of loss was validated and an alternative view emerged about the new opportunities that the loss had provided for me. Such a change in thinking about losses gives more authority and order to an individual who is faced with a traumatic situation.

The second reflection challenged my feelings of powerlessness. This significant moment concerned an appreciative statement that, despite my strong negative feelings there had been very positive emotions too in my explanation of the story and that these feelings related to my strong sense of having a mission. This statement helped me to see the complexity of my engagement with the organisation and the contradictory feelings and experiences that I encountered as a result of performing more than one role in the organisation (lecturer, researcher, programme coordinator, change agent). The role of change agent was seen by my colleagues as something higher and consolidating in relation to the other roles. It was because of the clear mission (clear values and meaning) attached to this role that it couldn't be easily undermined by the loss of work place or other roles. After this explanation it became easier for me to see my internal resources, which were helping me to survive in such an insecure and humiliating situation, and which enable me to authorise myself to continue following my mission and values. It became a good start for broadening my professional identity and for pro-actively searching for alternatives.

What actually happened was that the source from which my professional identity was built shifted from identification with the organisation to identification with my values, professional interests and calling. This shift helped me not to leave this organisation but instead to stay there and to focus on activities that supported my role of change agent with a personal and professional mission. At the same time I was able to see my position in the broader professional community and my commitment to that profession. This reflection also had the power to bring back my feeling of having meaning in my work and helped me to be more receptive emotionally to other colleagues' situations.

The third reflection was given by a colleague who shared his feelings of alienation from the university as a result of a) a lack of recognition by his organisation of his new professional developments and interests, and b) a lack of opportunity to combine his academic work with the work of community change agent without being involved in a conflict of loyalty. This experience of “angry shaking” in and between different roles and identities resonated with my sense of chaos. The reflective group was a good space in which to stop and think about this transitional period as a normal stage, full of contradictions and lacking clear logic, and to develop a reparative agenda that gave direction and order to my activities.

### **6.2.2. Changes that These Reflections Provoked**

These three reflections helped me to understand, accept and overcome, in a constructive way, the three senses that I explained earlier in this analysis. First of all, using the notion of containment (Bion, 1994), the group served as a container of my anxiety about the loss of professional identity that I had experienced. Instead of being blamed for my emotional withdrawal from the organisation this alternative space normalised my experience and allowed a conversation to be opened up about the contradictory feelings that this crisis situation had provoked.

As Hoggett (2001) emphasises there are “limitations to our own reflexivity”:

It suggests that our capacity to be a reflexive agent is often constrained by the difficulties we have in facing our own fears and anxieties. (p.42)

But, perhaps more controversially, reflexivity often requires courage and people may lack the courage to think certain things about themselves or others. Fear of our own impulses, particularly our aggressive feelings towards others, an inability to face our own ambivalence towards those who depend upon us or fear of having ideas or feelings

that threaten our own sense of individual or group identity, these and other anxieties may be powerful inhibitors of thought, the incidence of which will vary according to one's biography and one's gender, etc. (ibid., p.49)

Therefore reflection in a group can be helpful in situations of very traumatic experiences because it can overcome defensive thinking, whereas an individual reflecting alone might remain blind to some aspects of his thinking. Group reflection, then, can facilitate a better learning process.

And, whilst we may not be able to bring ourselves to a reflexive awareness of such things, our colleagues and children may have much less difficulty in identifying such things in us. (ibid, p.42)

In my case containment from the group allowed the thinking and learning process to occur that facilitated the later transformation of my professional identity.

Secondly, the positive perspective on the state of alienation that was provided by the group reduced the internal and external pressure to be active prior to redefining the personal meaning of the action. It became clear that a) commitment to an organisation is not total but functions in a cyclical way; b) alienation is part of this process of a constant balancing between one's individual and group identity; c) alienation is helpful in enabling the individual and the organisation to reconsider their ideas about themselves in relation to new realities.

An appreciation of the passive voice may also enable us to develop a more nuanced and gendered account of the stressful and disempowering environments that many welfare subjects experience, where individuals are surrounded by real demands and real constraints which cannot simply be turned into resources. (ibid, 45)

For me it meant that understanding my passivity was important part of my personal development and this of the organisation. I started to value it and not to experience guilt about it. This understanding helped me to become more assertive and independent in my negotiations with the organisation. In other words I was enabled to refuse to stay in the family culture of the organisation in the cases when it produced dependency.

In the same time it was possible for me to enter the depressive position and to accept the alienation as a "normal" phase of the organisational life – mine personally and that of my

colleagues. As a result of this my ambitions to quickly and perfectly change my organisation decreased and I accepted the “imperfectness” of the situation.

Thirdly, the splitting that helps an individual to overcome painful feelings of loss, creates an identity of a totally vulnerable and incompetent professional in a situation of absolute chaos over which he has no control. In my case the group helped me to overcome this partial view about myself by showing me the other, stronger or more resilient part of myself. This revived my strong feeling of being a person with values, mission and a clear view about her personal development; the reflexive group helped me to authorise myself to follow my mission in spite of how bad the circumstances were and to see more resources in reality than before.

In order to enhance human flourishing, we may have to shift reflective practices away from those that are concerned with ‘problems’, rather more, and towards practices that are more strengths-based. One practical way to achieve this is to focus on making conversations of positive regard those which place an emphasis on active and constructive dialogue, where you (and others) take time to identify good and successful experiences and events and put what you learn from such conversations to good use. This is not the frivolous activity that some seem to think it is! Such a conversation unfurls where these good events that you disclose, are actively and constructively responded to, by other people. This way of conversing is a real opportunity to build more positive and more productive relationships. (Ghaye, p.3)

Finally, the group offered me a new understanding of the situation, helping me to distinguish between exactly what I wanted to withdraw from, and why, and what in my organisation and in my professional life I wanted to stay attached to. This kind of clarification helped me to focus not on what was lost, or might be, but on what I had and I could broaden and develop further (Ghaye, 2010). The process of empowerment that started in the group helped me to reorder my view about a) my personal professional identity; b) my relationship with the organisation and my role in it i.e. to reorder it. As a result of this I became more creative and active.

I don’t want to give the impression, listing all of these effects, that they are a magic product of only one session in an inquiry group. The group reflexivity was just the starting point that began a long, and actually never-ending, process of rethinking and adjusting my fantasies in a changing reality.

### **6.2.3. The Reflective Group as a Transitional Space in the Organisation**

Using Winnicott's concept of "transitional space" we can see the reflexive inquiry group as an alternative to the spaces that remain in the organisation to which an individual belongs. The space that such a group creates can facilitate the transformation of the individual's painful feelings into positive action and personal authorisation. The potential of the group to become an alternative space for one's positive projections and fantasies is very valuable when a process of identity rebuilding occurs.

If one aspect of identity transformation appears to require mourning, a second aspect appears to require imagination. ... For Winnicott, the illusion of coherent self is just this, an imaginative construction necessary for our going on being. For Winnicott, illusions – including group illusions – are the play materials of the mind and the foundations of culture. Illusions inhabit what he calls 'transitional space' 'the third part of the life of a human being . . . an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute' (p. 2). (Hoggett et al., 2006, p.701).

In as much as the immediate organisational or social environment didn't offer me any reflexive spaces within which to think about and to find meaning, the role inquiry group took on this function. It was this alternative group of professionals to which I belonged, albeit temporarily, and this alternative identification with a similar organisation – a university (UWE), team of professionals (CPSS and PhD group) – that I could use as a transitional object for rethinking and broadening my professional identity. This alternative group was experienced partly as real and partly as an idealised object. But the support given to me was real and it was a necessary positive experience in my professional life that revived some hope in me. Through this group and this organisation I was able to realise that I actually belong to a much broader professional community that can inspire and challenge me to go forward.

Using the material from my personal professional experience I aimed to demonstrate the capacity of reflective learning in a role inquiry group to provoke a positive process of reconstruction of the professional self and renewed engagement with work activities. My personal experience illustrated the way in which group reflection on an individual's professional role can affect his:

- a) personal experience of threat to, and loss of, professional identity;
- b) capacity to reconstruct and broaden this identity;
- c) ability to develop new meaning in the role of an agent of change;

- d) power to act constructively in the reality of personal professional life, organisation and society.

The role of the inquiry group was seen here as a useful ‘transitional space’ in times of crisis which helps the professional to:

- a) contain the anxiety evoked by his changing identity;
- b) develop a more autonomous relationship within the organisation;
- c) gain alternative sources of authority in his role of organisational change agent.

As a result, traumatic feelings of loss are validated and a sense of personal mission is recovered to give new meaning and to broaden the professional identity. Further, an empowering space for solidarity and support is created that, in turn, develops creativity and restores renewed engagement with the organisation.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Discussion of the Research Findings**

Three main types of relationships were the subject of this study, explored in the context of an organisational transformation in a university setting which aimed to liberalise the educational environment, shifting it to a space for the development of socially engaged citizens. During the process of implementation of four specific interventions, the dynamics of the relationships on individual, group, organisational and social levels were explored, in order to identify the main obstacles in the emotional and structural side of the university when applying its social mission.

The first type of relationship analysed concerned the development of horizontal relationships of collaboration between the departments on the task of the creation of a liberal model of education through the establishment of the LAP. The analysis showed that the hypothesis for successful implementation of the project for change, to begin in one small part of the system and then move to total system transformation, was disproven. The failure of this strategy of organisational change can be explained by the presence of a specific culture of relations between participants in the university that doesn't presuppose or encourage partnership and support between departments.

One of the reasons for this lies in the way in which the establishment and initial development of the departments occurred during the first decade of the university's creation in the 1990s. The vision for the university, then, was of a whole constituted from comparatively independent business units. So, management was focused mainly on departmental sustainability and promotion in the insecure conditions of a period of economic and political transition in the country, and attacks from other state universities. This created a culture of individualism, closeness, and orientation towards profit in the relationship between departments. Such a culture was initially supported by the top management seeing it as fitting with the new global efforts for the development of entrepreneurial spirit in higher education.



Later attempts of top management to consolidate the university around the task of university mission and vision formation in the first years of the new century had a short term effect. The efforts of different groups at the university to transfer negotiated values and aims to concrete projects for organisational transformation were chaotic, partial and uncoordinated. Therefore, the project for the LAP started in an environment of distorted by private interests principles of free choice and active participation of the students in the educational process. To this kind of stagnation and corruption of the work task, top management responded with 'punitive measures' bringing back the centralised model of management, in order to provide for organisational coherence and common standards of work.

The very nature of the task of social engagement and collaboration also created anxieties because of lack of knowledge in the participants and lack of direct experience with liberal kinds of relations. Such a transformation at the university also required transformation of the participants' professional identities and habits.

The anxieties created by such changes led to the development of psychotic defences, using splitting and projective identification in relationships between the departments. As a result of this the LAP was marginalized and alone in retaining the changes on the university level. Through a series of projective identifications on the LAP staff and students, its experimental character was canceled. LAP was interpreted as enjoying illegitimate privileges others did not have. The LAP came to represent injustice and administrative methods were used to destroy and equalise it to the regular practices.

This kind of marginalisation of the efforts for liberalisation and the subsequent confirmation of the status quo was a collusive process. The top management preferred the position of a neutral observer and evaluator to that of an author of the project for change. The participants in the LAP defended themselves from the pressure of external attacks from the other departments and the insecure and cold position of the management by forming close and rigid relationships which rendered impossible the sharing and the public debate of achievements from this experiment.

Some of the defences against the liberalisation of educational relationships were embodied in the very structure of the LAP project. Following the characteristics of the work group

(Bion, 1961) it became obvious that there were no clearly defined roles and tasks for all participants at the university in relation to the work task for liberalisation of university relations; the boundaries between the implementation group and the other groups at the university remained strong; information about the progress of this experiment was given only to the managerial level; there were no clear time boundaries to the project. These kinds of structural defences facilitated the process of an erosion of the meaning of these change and led to the further destruction of the programme, despite successful results achieved with its students and despite high public prestige.

The predominant feeling found in all groups of participants in the first initiative was one of being isolated, excluded, unrecognised and unvalued. The source of these feelings was found in what Hinshelwood (2001) described as an immature resolution of the Oedipal situation in the organisation. This is the lack of a capacity to stay in the 'third position', the "capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view" (Britton, 1989, p.87) , in a way that keeps one still related to the task and still ready to collaborate and support the people directly involved with the task. Interpreting the 'third position' as one of exclusion and annihilation, people in the organisation consolidated their feelings of envy and anger creating a regime of group functioning in fight-flight basic assumption.

What makes members so vulnerable to such a position is the anxiety of not knowing in a culture traditionally dominated by an understanding of the teacher's role as a total expert. The new social transformations after 1989 challenged the validity of such a belief, leaving teachers alone in their encounter with new social phenomena to which they had not the knowledge and skills to respond. Such a traumatic threat to teachers' professional identity and the external social pressure for rapid change had several consequences. From my experience in the implementation of the VCC in the LAP, it became obvious that a lack of firsthand experience with the new models of education led to the literal implementation of the western model of service learning in a rigid and controlling way. It was constructed in a form that, instead of serving the developmental needs of the students, was used to ensure the ability of the implementation team to control the process and to avoid the insecurity of not knowing.

Another source of distrust and painful feelings of exclusion in organisational relationships had to do with attitudes which were historically formed in the totalitarian culture of civic relations during socialism towards any public initiative or participation. I have explored the official as well as the hidden mechanisms through which feelings of fear and distrust were foisted upon informal community relations for the purpose of total control over human minds and choices.

The product of such systemic effort was what I called “a discredited community in the mind”. Early in this study I discovered the lack of one important dimension in people’s thinking in Bulgaria concerning social life. This was the dimension that is usually called “community” or “collective” relations. Both the state with its structures as well as the individual with his or her close circle of relatives and friends were present in people’s narratives. But this was not the case with the sense of community. During the study I found that as a result of a long-term exposure to violent and abusive collective relations representations of all phenomena related to common, collective, social activities in the mind were invested with feelings of distrust, fear and uncertainty. Thus this side of human relations was deeply discredited as it was not possible to create any trustful relationship on this social territory. All spaces of collective initiatives in the reality of people’s lives were avoided or neglected (as illustrated in envious, false or passive social behaviour; dirty and destroyed public spaces etc.). This lack of coherent representation of trustful collective relations in the mind as a result of a long experience of social abuse and annihilation of people’s bodies but also people’s minds I called “discredited community in the mind”. This psycho-social phenomenon has tremendously affected the way in which people in Bulgaria can develop their capacities to behave as independent agents, relate to each other in groups and organisations and interpret the notion of democracy and social engagement. This model was further transferred to organisational relationships.

Another important discovery of this study was that after the changes, previously repressed individuality was freed and prioritized as a social value referring to the capitalistic ideal of individual success in competition with others. This kind of social focus, one that during the transition period in Bulgaria prioritised individual rights and opportunities in combination with the still existing thinking of the “collective” as controlled and ruled by the state, further fueled neglect or abuse of any form of common social initiatives. So, it was

difficult during this time to develop authentic civil initiatives or local NGOs in order to create the bases for citizens' active social engagement.

A third reason for the immature resolution of the Oedipal situation in organisational relations derived from the way, during the data analysis, in which members co-constructed leadership and followership roles in the process of change. Thus, the second type of relationship explored in this study concerned power distribution or vertical relations in the organisation. The experience with some of the newly formed, (during the 1990s), civic organisations in the VCC intervention (See Chapter 1, Section 1.3.3.), as well as the implementation of an overall project for a moral shift in the university culture through the implementation of care ethics (See Chapter 1, Section 1.3.4.), led to the identification of a stable culture of power relations, organised around ideas of salvation and dependence on a charismatic leader.

This version of leadership, rife in the Bulgarian NGO sector, was developed in a defensive way, splitting it to either an over-idealised one, acquiring messianic qualities, or an over-demonised one, described through the qualities of a mafia boss who holds the lives and the destinies of all members of the group in his hands.

The version of followership was organised as totally incompetent and dependent on leader's power and competence. The role of the follower was either that of a blind adherent whose capacity for thinking, participation and authorship is totally denied, or one of a victim of an all-powerful leader.

This collusive co-creation and connection between these two versions of the roles in the process of change created a culture of 'amoral familism' (Banfield & Fasano, 1958) in the university. Thus, clear boundaries of roles, procedures and negotiations were blurred and transferred into the elusive family-like relationships based not on rules and autonomous partnership, but rather on emotional obedience and loyalty to the group.

Such a rigid and hierarchically organised culture didn't allow for the expression of difference, critical thinking or learning from experience. It was developed in order to keep alive the illusion of the organisation as an island of salvation in the nasty sea of change.

This kind of partial thinking about reality was nourished by different false ideologies and group rituals that kept the group together.

However, this kind of relationship didn't bring development at the university. Rather, through the creation of illusions of grandiosity, it destroyed the meaning of leadership as a container of group anxieties that would allow for fears to be worked through and symbolised, giving them meaning and reflecting on them. I chose to call such an interpretation of leadership 'traumatic', as it is invested with feelings of destruction and envy and for followers it is experienced in terms of being unrecognised, disregarded and excluded. Thus in each hierarchical situation this traumatic experience is enacted in a way that both leaders and followers, managers and staff members perceive themselves as victims of trauma.

Such traumatic experience in the organisation usually evokes in members feelings of alienation from the organisation and withdrawal from the work task. In a process of self-reflection on my personal experience of alienation I explored the dimensions of this experience. One important conclusion to which I came during this exploration was that alienation could be regarded as a negative experience for both individual and organisation but also as an opportunity to develop more realistic relations with the organization and to broaden individual's professional identity. Another important finding was that the creation of opportunities inside or outside of organisation for reflection on professional's personal experience in the workplace can support a process of re-engagement with the work task in a more authentic and creative way. Therefore alienation was seen in this study more as an opportunity rather than a threat to both person and organisation.

Later on, after discovering the co-constructed notion of leadership as traumatic social relation, I started to search for the reasons for such traumatic experience in the leadership role, looking at the process of formation of the early relationship with what I called 'the authority of knowledge'. The third aspect of the relationships in the university explored in this study was focused, therefore, on the process of learning seen as constantly mediated by another person.

The early process of learning about the world usually occurs through the mediation of another person, another mind (the mother or another key figure in child's personal

development) who is emotionally invested with trust by the learner and thus could be seen in this learning situation in a role of an “authority of knowledge”. This, mediated by third figure learning relationship with the world, affects the later models through which a person creates his or her relationship with knowledge and his or her personal style of learning about the world. This kind of early organisation of the learning relationship is very important, as the process of change is always a process of learning from experience.

On this first experience with the key other, learning relations are built which could be characterized as trustful and mutually developing i.e. “productive learning relations”. In such a relationship, the authority of knowledge and the learner are in a situation of respectful dependency and mutual learning from each other and both can relate to the knowledge in a creative way.

However if the predominant feelings shared between both parties in the learning relations are of fear, insecurity and distrust, a cycle of “traumatic learning relationships” is created. Then the learner becomes totally dependent on the knowledge acquired by the authority of knowledge and both participants in the learning process become engaged in a power game in which fear and alienation from knowledge occurs in a way that decreases their mutual capacities for thinking and being creative when learning about the world.

The experience with the fourth intervention on tutoring demonstrated that, in the situation of uncertainty about their professional identities as authorities of knowledge and under the pressure for change of their identities, the teachers, as well as the leaders of change, lost their capacity to function as containers of the anxieties of their students or their followers in the process of learning from their own experience.

The anxiety from threats to their professional identities created in them a need for being contained, in order to pass through the difficulties and painful feelings aroused during the process of change. The absence at the university of an environment sensitive to such needs in the teachers and the inability to validate and work through these experiences, led in some cases to alienation of members from the organisation and its work.

The conclusion was reached that, in addition to the politics of equality, the university had to develop also politics of difference (Frazer, 1995) through which the individual needs of

the members be recognised and their specific contributions to the realization of the task be acknowledged (Bion, 1961).

If such a culture is not present, the relationship of learning and thinking is transformed into a relationship of violence, misrecognition and control over knowledge. A version of knowledge and reality is created in a paranoid way in which an independent and creative stance on knowledge and the real world is seen as unimportant or even dangerous, as it could destroy the connection with the authority and even the authority itself.

Despite existing strong process of resistance to change, there were several sources of hope for positive development identified in the study. On the individual level of self-reflexivity in my relationships with the organisation and my feelings of alienation it became obvious that through reflecting on this experience, emotional withdrawal from the organisation could be overcome. The alienation itself was seen also as an opportunity to bring a more realistic differentiation of one's personal, professional identity from the organisation with which one identifies. Or, using the distinctions made by Arendt about the relationship of the individual to his workplace and his role, alienation helps to shift from labour to action. Thus, the creation of spaces for reflection on one's personal relationships with the organisation can broaden professional identity, allowing for more flexible, empowered and creative relationship with the real world.

Another source of change was found in the identification and encouragement of what is defined as 'transformative leadership'. This recognises the individual needs of members, as well as the hidden dynamics of organisational emotions, and is able to open them up for direct discussion and exploration, rather than trying to control them, offering ready-made expert decisions. The creation of such transitional spaces in which illusions can be developed in terms of Winnicott's playing with reality (1985), supports the identification of both a) dominating unconscious fears that block the capacity of the individual or the group to think and resolve issues and b) internal sources of resilience and strength that empower people to overcome their fears.

There is another source of hope which concerns generational differences: after twenty years of changes there is a young generation who grew up after socialism, not having life-long experience with totalitarian models of relationship. The young people from this generation

have had the opportunity to travel and to get direct experience of different types of more or less democratic relations and practices. Such experience empowers them to become more critical, autonomous and creative. Rapidly developing communication technologies further enforce opportunities for sharing ideas and knowledge in an informal and uncontrolled way. Data from the research supports the idea that such informal leaders have their potential to become transformative leaders.

I, personally, make an effort to stay in touch as much as possible with what Lawrence (1995) defined as a tragic relationship with reality. For me, it means on the one hand, making constant efforts to recognise the complexity of the situation and to transform my feelings of disappointment and distrust into positive and collaborative relations or forms of work where ever and with whom ever possible. On the other hand, I also try to support those colleagues, friends, students or clients who make efforts to create more humane relationships with others.

Even though the findings of this study are developed as relevant for the local context -in relation to a situation of social transition from socialism to capitalism and from authoritarian to democratic social relations - many of the conclusions and ideas developed here could be applied to similar situations in other contexts too. I am speaking here of ideas such as a) the discredited community in the mind, b) co-constructed traumatic leadership, c) the positive effects of person's alienation from the organisation, and d) models of productive and traumatic learning relations.



## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to explore the basic dynamics that occurred on the individual as well as on the group and organisational level when a conscious effort has been made to implement specific steps for the transformation of university culture to more a liberal one. Four specific interventions were studied over a six year period, using the method of action research. As a result of this systematic exploration, it became possible to change some of the practices during their implementation, as happened, for instance, with the VCC. Using the potential of a psycho-social approach and the specific methods of reflection, self-exploration, role analysis and organisational and group dynamic exploration, it became possible to capture some of the basic patterns through which anxieties from the pressure for change on individual professional identities, and the usual structures and roles through which they were performed in the university setting, were handled. An effort was made to draw connections between the dynamics that were present on a national, and even European and international level, as a result of the economic and political transition of the country, and how they were enacted, or further enforced, by internal organisational resistance to change. The historically formed authoritarian culture of public relations was also included as an important factor in the creation of a specific set of beliefs about the character of the relationship in the public sphere, between citizens and formal authorities of power.

The nature of the findings allows for further exploration of the issues and questions posed in this study. In the rapidly changing and profit oriented society, which is also globalising and more and more concerned about the quality of life and nature, the topics of social participation and new social roles of higher education institutions are open for further exploration.

Concerning research methodology, I initiated this study with a question of whether it is possible to perform action research in a non-participatory culture. What I have learned from my research endeavor is that it is difficult, but it is worth making this effort, as through research that is based on the value of dialogue and inclusion, spaces can be created

for overcoming stagnation and developing knowledge, even on a small scale and with only some of the participants.

Nevertheless, some challenges and issues in relation to the inclusion of all voices still remains a problem in this study as general feelings of distrust, disappointment and fear of being neglected or excluded affected the data collecting and data sharing process. This gap concerns the exploration of the role of the authorities. My study is based mainly on my own experience and that of the participants in the interventions and does not include the direct views of top management. It still remains difficult to publicly share some of the findings from this study, as it would not lead to authentic discussion and learning.

There are three ways in which I plan to overcome the weaknesses in the study. The first one will be to use different events to make the audience, including top management, familiar with the methods of experiential learning, and the basic concepts on which new understanding can be achieved, about the role of the emotions in understanding and learning about organisations. The second is to continue with my efforts to create spaces for dialogue and reflection in which all voices can be present, and where authentic learning can occur. Thirdly, I will support the efforts of those of my colleagues who also try to promote more liberal relationships in the area of education, social services, political decision making etc.

Personally, this research can be seen as a transitional object, helping me to develop professionally and to learn more about the topics of this study from my personal experience. One metaphor of my journey of scientific exploration can be found in the story of my suitcase, which I bought especially for my travelling to UWE for the PhD workshops and supervisions. This new suitcase was big and solid, one produced by one of the famous and high quality brands. What it symbolised was my high expectations of my study to receive a) security and trust in tackling a lack of understanding of the issues that I have faced in my work and b) all the answers and all the knowledge that I missed in order to handle these issues. An incident occurred with this suitcase, right in the first trip, that was also symbolic of the relationship of distrust between citizens and governmental authorities in my country. When the plane landed at Heathrow airport, one third of the passengers on my flight, including me, found that their luggage was missing. Half an hour later, we received information from the airport administration that one of the Bulgarian ministers

had travelled in the plane, bringing some special load with him. So, the Bulgarian aircraft company decided to remove one third of the luggage and to send it on another flight. No one informed us about this decision. I felt ashamed and angry, as this incident confirmed the problem that I planned to explore, of the feelings of distrust between citizens and state. But the incident helped me to start reflecting on my expectations from the other university and the study. It became obvious that in order to learn I need to lose my security and control over reality and to try to just experience things, and to look for new tools for learning and resolving problems. In the beginning, I, and the two other Bulgarian men with whom I studied in the same PhD programme and who were my colleagues in the institute, used the suitcase to transport the many books that we bought for our studies. But later on I decided to change this suitcase for a smaller and not so solid one. What I learned from the suitcase story and from my journey during this research was to value the small steps of success and to believe that even in very severe and desperate circumstances there are always opportunities to use and people to support you. So, no matter how severe our internal fears and external obstacles are, there always exist containers that can help one to learn and continue in a positive and constructive way.

## Notes

- [1] Russian-Turkish liberation war.
- [2] Red Army entrance in the country and establishment of socialist government in Bulgaria.
- [3] The number of the years of independence actually could be count lower because of the few years of Russian temporary government in Bulgaria after 1878 and the later liberation of the South part of the country in 1885.
- [4] This is one of the famous slogans used in the official public vocabulary during the socialism in Bulgaria.
- [5] In the planned economy of socialism there were stable and predefined pathways in citizen's professional career. So, after finishing his/her higher education graduation the 23-25 years old person was allowed when choosing academic career to develop PhD and to become assistant professor during the next 10 years or to his/her 33 years of age. It was impossible to choose such career later on.
- [6] Character from the Richard Wright's novel *Native son* (1940) which demonstrates how different social circumstances could shape one's moral choices.

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## Appendix 1

Appendix 1 presents the official version of the project used for the implementation of third intervention in this study:

### **Programme for Stimulation of Enterprise and Care at the University**

#### **Initial thesis:**

The entrepreneurially oriented university keeps constant its relations with the environment in which it exists. The university makes it possible through:

- showing active interest and recognizing the problems that are of first priority of its community in each crucial moment of its development;
- exploring the nature of the existed problems in the society and looking for opportunities to resolve them;
- declaring clear ethical position on the problems and offering vision for their change;
- looking for followers with which to defend this change on the public policy and practice level;
- participating actively in the implementation of change that brings society further in its development;
- transforming its experience from the relation with its environment into academic knowledge that integrates in its educational and developmental tasks.

Such kind of definition of the entrepreneurial organisation follows the classical view of Josef Shumpeter about the entrepreneurship as 'creative destruction' that does not just destroys the status quo but does it in a way that opens way for new opportunities and supports the development of its members. The entrepreneurial activity is creative because it makes new connections and relation where they didn't exist before. In the same time the entrepreneurial activity has to destroy partially the existed environment in order to open place for its renewal. This way, through his business projects, the entrepreneur realises the developmental and transformational function for the society. This key role entrusts him with special responsibility and confronts him with ethical dilemmas no matter if he is aware of it or not.

Such view opposes the traditional understanding of entrepreneurship as only business activity directed to personal prosperity independent from its effect on the society. The entrepreneurship in modern democratic societies is expected to not only to create economic prosperity but also to endorse certain values. Such kind of entrepreneurship presumes an ability to act from an ethically informed position, to develop relationships with different communities and individuals and to see his personal growth as part of the societal growth.

This definition of the entrepreneurship supposes new culture of public relationships between the individuals as concerned and entrepreneurial citizens and professionals. The history of decades of living in totalitarian conditions limited the opportunities for development of such kind of relationships. Neither Bulgarian family, nor institutions with the task to form the young generation of Bulgareans share such values.

With its clearly declared civic mission New Bulgarian University (NBU) has the capacity to engage with the overcoming of this deficit of entrepreneurship and such a way to invest in the future generations of Bulgarian people.

Current initiative offers a package of interrelated activities that will contribute to the implementation of NBU mission in its part concerning the formation of entrepreneurial individuals.

**Main points in the initiative:**

This initiative consists of 4 components:

- I. Development of the internal environment of the NBU in direction to make connection (integration) between concern/care and entrepreneurship.
- II. Transfer of the culture of concern and entrepreneurship in other environments out of the university.
- III. Integration of this experience of the university with the external environments into the work tasks of the NBU.
- IV. Transformation of the culture of concern and entrepreneurship into collective public action. (*See Scheme 1. Logical frame of the programme*)

**Component 1: Development of the internal environment of the NBU in direction to make connection (integration) between concern/care and entrepreneurship.**

In order to actively collaborate with the society in relation to the pressing social problems the university representatives in the person of its students, teachers, administrators and managers have to implement these new relationships as part of the university culture.

The abilities a) to recognise the particular individual as a person who possesses his own specific qualities, interests, needs or problems and b) to develop with him relationships based on concern and respect – these are the two basic reasons of the ethics of care. The introduction of this kind of ethics in the relational culture in NBU together with the existed yet ethics of justice will help to overcome the characteristic view of the socialist university on the unifying role of education. The first component of this initiative will provide special environment and new roles through which different groups in the university to learn to practice such kind of values. Along with this they will have systematic scientific knowledge about the business relations and about their natural or human side.

**Project 1: Tutoring in NBU**

Tutorship is the first project through which an individualized relationship between the learner and the adult will be introduced in an informal university environment. It embodies the liberal idea of the formative function of education and its objectives are personalities that relate to the knowledge and the authorities of this knowledge in a free and competent way.

Through tutoring students will receive a) respect and recognition as separate personalities with valuable qualities and interests, b) relationship with an authority of academic knowledge who serves not only as a model of certain professional but also as an academic person who knows the ways and tools to orient in and develop scientific knowledge, c) support and consultation in case of difficulties to perform educational tasks.

Through tutoring teachers, administrators and managers will exercise in a legitimate and integrated in the university culture way their natural capacity to relate individually and to support the development of their students. Such kind of management of the relations will help with the limitation of the phenomena of favourableness and abuse from the both sides.

*Duration: 3 years*

### **Project 2: Mental health programme of NBU**

The introduction of new culture of relations in the university puts to the test the habitual experience of the students acquired from their families and school environment. The clash between the acquired to this moment culture and the culture of the relations in NBU, to which they are invited to affiliate, inevitably will provoke in many of them strong feelings of confusion and anxiety about their personal identities and values.

The proposed mental health programme represents one way in which the university can increase its internal organisational sensitivity to this kind of emotional difficulties of the part of its members. The programme will offer to NBU students and teachers mental health information through which in an informed and competent way they will be able to understand and manage their personal feelings and behaviours and this of the other people. Such kind of skills is basic for the development of concern to the others and of tolerance to the difference. The programme offers also psychological help to people with mental health problems that need specific external support in order to be able to continue with their education and to increase their quality of life. This way NBU will develop the culture of support for the most vulnerable of its members following the ethics of giving equal opportunities for all students to learn and succeed. *Duration: 19 months*

### **Project 3: Reflective practice in education**

The entrepreneurial organisation is by definition learning organisation. Learning organisation develops and sustains culture that encourages learning and development on the individual and organisational level. The organisation creates occasions for learning placing its member in challenging intellectual and professional situations and in the same time provides an environment that stimulates their development and allows creative decisions to these challenges to arouse. The opportunity to reflex on the professional experience is a key element of this environment.

The third project for the development of culture of entrepreneurship and concern in the university environment has an aim to introduce the care for the professional staff of NBU. In their roles of teachers and administrators this staff frequently experience specific needs and problems arising from these roles. The project of reflexive practices in teaching offers to its teachers an area in which together with other their colleagues they will have the opportunity to explore and develop their professional skills.

The aim of this project is to approve the learning from personal experience in a group and to develop the culture of continuing education in organisation as part of the culture of entrepreneurship and concern. *Duration: 2 years*

### **Component 2: Transfer of the culture of concern and entrepreneurship in other environments out of the university**

One way in which NBU can participate in the community life is to transfer the approbated new university culture of relations to other key environments. Because the focus is on the young people this initiative chooses to introduce the new kind of relations in 3 main types of institutions performing formative function in relation to them: an orphanage, a secondary school, and child protection departments. In each of these institutions children experience problems that prevent their adequate personal development. Engaging with these 3 contexts of child personal development NBU can in collaboration with their management introduce such culture of relations that transforms the destructive behaviours into activities that lead to positive personal and social change. For those children of the 3 institutions that need

specialized mental health care NBU will be able to provide support through its mental health programme.

This initiative touches important and usually not poorly publicly discussed problems of the Bulgarian society. Through this project NBU will enter the role of entrepreneurial and engaged participants in the society that uses its potential for the purposes of concrete social change.

**Project 4: Introduction of case work approach in the care of the Home for children devoid of parents' care "St. Ivan Rilsky", Sofia.**

The introduction of programme for individual case work in this home makes an accent on the importance of the formative role of the environment that recognises the person and encourages him to develop his abilities in a best possible way in spite of unlucky events and the fail of the close environment right in the first steps of his life. The aim of this approach is to protect the children from the risk to enter the traditional tracks of crime and abuse. *Duration: 2 years*

**Project 5: Bullying prevention in school**

The violence in the school is a problem that dooms huge number of children in the Bulgarian schools to insecure life. It disturbs their ability to think of themselves as people which world is not ruled by the principle of the power but by the principle of the solidarity. The work of NBU with 2 secondary schools (National school for ancient languages and cultures in Sofia and Secondary school for natural sciences and mathematics in Sliven) for the implementation of an integral approach to overcome the violence and to introduce the ethics of care in the classroom and out of classroom relations in the Bulgarian schools will be a concrete response to such kind of challenge. *Duration: 1 year*

**Project 6: Specialization in child psychological development**

**Part 1: Provision of good quality protection and support to children and adolescence at risk**

Other particularly vulnerable group of children that has to be recognised and supported is of those that suffer from injustice due to the environment in which they live or due to mental health problems. These are the children at risk as a priority of the Child protection departments under the Agency for social support. NBU can choose to invest in a project to work with the departments because of the lack there of professionals educated to work with these problems. In collaboration with the management and the staff of these departments an exploration of their difficulties and needs of education and consultation will be done and adequate programmes for the work with children and their families will be developed. *Duration: 18 months*

**Component 3: Integration of this experience of the university with the external environments into the work tasks of the NBU**

The main work task of the university is to form and educate young Bulgarian intelligence. The overall gathered experience of the practical projects and developed collaborations with other institutions, groups and individuals the learning university transforms in a new knowledge and includes it back in the teaching of students.

This initiative offers similar opportunity through projects which aim is the development of professionals and citizens of good quality able to meet the needs and challenges of the society in the current moment.

**Project 7: Development of civic participation culture in NBU students**

The task for the formation of socially engaged personalities will be realised in a project for the development of civic participation culture in the NBU students. It will allow for the integration in the university educational priorities of the task for the development of the role of active and democratic citizen. It is planned that students will practice care for people in vulnerable situation in the institutions with which NBU works collaboratively and to integrate in a learning context the accumulated personal experience and values along with their participation. It is also planned to affiliate the teachers and administrators of the university preparing them as student' consultants. This activity will help the teachers themselves to connect the knowledge that they teach with considerable social problems, to offer debate on them in a yearly liberal workshop in on the university level. In this workshop students and teachers together in a team could discuss and present publicly their points of view, their research and applied projects on important social problems. This project gives an opportunity to make connection between personal professional interest and motivation for development with socially important purposes. This way the entrepreneurship and concern can go together – process which NBU according to its mission appreciates and encourages. *Duration: 3 years*

**Project 8: Bachelor programme on clinical social work**

Since the key professionals who will offer care to the children at risk and the vulnerable people with whom NBU will engage are social workers this project tends to integrate the experience of the work with them in a bachelor programme for offering professional care of good quality and based on the international standards and best practices. *Duration: 3 years*

**Project 9: Doctoral programme on school management**

The challenges that will exist in the process of implementation of new culture of relations that NBU chooses to follow and introduces through projects in the school environment need new type of school management too in order to be met. This type of management recognises the necessity that education has to develop autonomy, concern and creativity in students to change the surrounding environment.

Integrating its experience from the work with the 2 secondary schools NBU now can offer opportunity through this project for the support of the young school managers that identify themselves with the reform in the secondary education system and are ready to explore and integrate the accumulated experience in a scientific and practical effort developing personal academic project for change in their school. *Duration: 3 years*

**Project 6: Part 2: Specialization on child psychological development**

This activity is part of the mentioned above *Project 6: Specialization in child psychological development, Part 1: Provision of good quality protection and support to children and adolescence at risk*. As a result of the practical and research work on the first part specialization for work with children and adolescents at risk will be developed. It will follow the standards of care and the modern knowledge and technologies contextualized to the current policy, legislation and practice in Bulgaria. Using this specialization the professionals working with children at risk will be able to broaden their skills in the process of their professional realization and with the support of the resources of NBU will implement the new technologies of care in their work. *Duration: See Part 1 of the project.*

#### **Component 4:**

#### **Transformation of the culture of concern and entrepreneurship into collective public action**

NBU has interest in collaboration with other institutions and organisations in the areas care and business to make publicly vocal its civic position on important social themes and to inform the society about its achievements – scientific, educational, and practical. The first project in this component will offer the opportunity for the university to participate in a public initiative that will approve its achievements in the area of care. The second one aims to establish direct relation between the NBU and the business in a way that gives an opportunity to the university to develop skills in its administrative staff to operate with the EU funds and programmes and more effectively and to combine these specific knowledge and skills with the typical for the business innovative approach.

#### **Project 10: Academy for civic development**

The academy will be established between different stakeholders as institutions, groups and individuals that share clear vision and engage in concrete common steps towards social change.

The academy will function through annual conferences with the aim to inform the society about its civic position and its vision for the development in certain social area. The additional aim is to evaluate and reward initiatives and projects realised in accordance to its position and to offer place for debate of important social questions.

NBU is engaged in the academy to prepare and consult certain civic projects and initiatives of higher and secondary school students and other people that choose to work on the given by the academy social theme for the year. NBU is also engaged to participate in the elaboration and moderation of the annual conference events. Through a member of its Board of trustees NBU will be represented in the academy board and the Commission for nominations. *Duration: 1 year*

#### **Project 11: Platform for collaboration between NBU and the business**

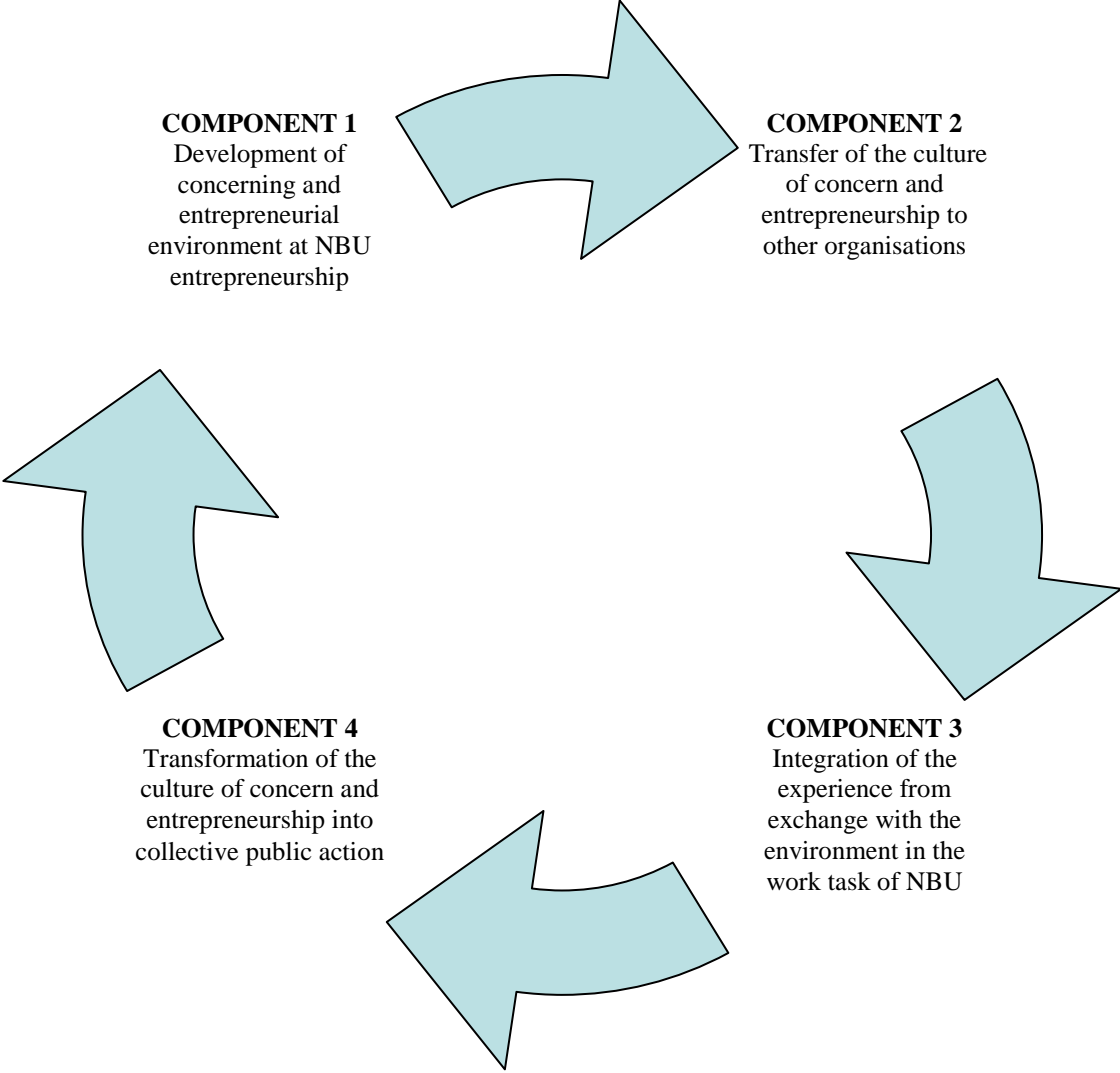
The aim of this project is to explore the existed opportunities for stable collaboration between the representatives of the business and NBU.

Many of the EU programmes encourage and expect such collaborations. Our experience up to now (the collaboration with Bulgarian Business Network and DICON Company) shows that the use of European structural funds needs the development of specific competences in the area of formal procedures and rules and in the area of new ideas offered through them.

In the same time we discovered that NBU loses much time and organisational energy when particular departments and interdepartmental teams take alone the effort to prepare and apply for these funds using the administration of NBU.

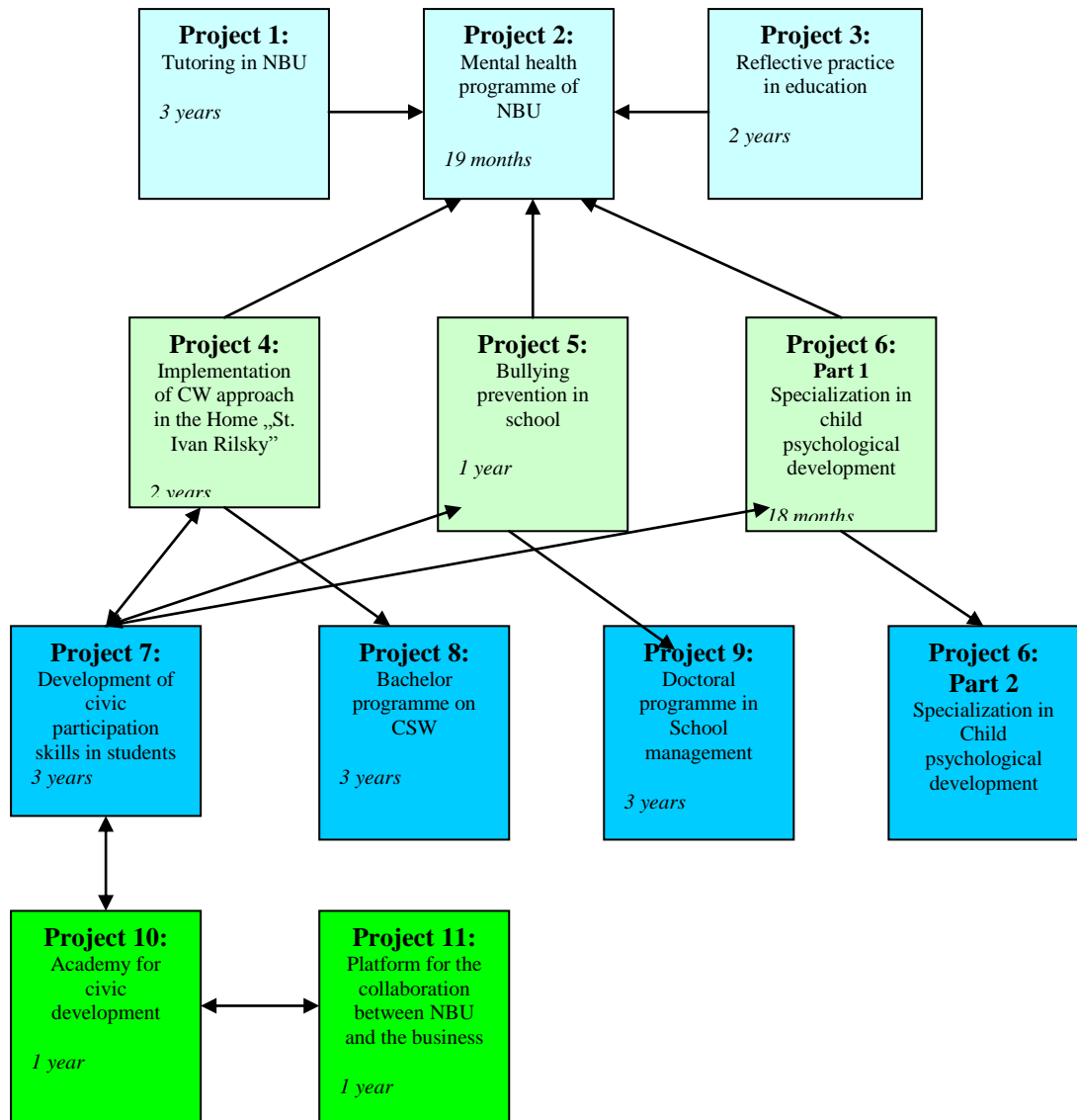
The idea of the project is to explore the existed opportunities and to make an evaluation of the expenditures related to the creation of operative structure with the task to prepare the project documentation for the EU funds initiated by the NBU structures. *Duration: 1 year*

**Scheme 1: Logical frame of the programme**





**Scheme 2: Interaction between the projects in the programme**



## Appendix 2

Here a piece of reflective diary is offered describing part of the process during second intervention.

### **Tensions in the VCC Development Team**

These tensions led to further difficulties in the team work. All members felt helpless and disappointed, as the activities did not occur in the planned way. These kinds of feelings were enacted in the relationship between R. and D. when facilitating the student's reflective group. The dissatisfaction that students experienced in relation to the programme and the course work has been transformed into attacks against the weaker member of the facilitating couple D..

Twice during the course R. made the decision to leave D. to run the students' group alone, without discussing this with her and with the other team members. D. felt abandoned and unsure as to what to do with the students. R's behaviour was interpreted by the students as withdrawal, and they felt abandoned to a very difficult task. They expressed their anger loudly, attacking D. The students succeeded in dealing with her part of their disagreement with the many tasks that they had in this course. However this conflict in the class was not discussed in the team and remained hidden from myself and M. As a result of this, the team was not able to make sense of the students' position, to learn from it and to respond adequately to it.

The tension silently increased. Nevertheless, the students didn't express their anger in front of R. For her part D. was angry with me and R. because we involved her in the role of alone receiving the students' attacks. But in the same way as the students she was afraid to discuss this situation openly and to oppose R.'s decisions. In a reflexive diary I noted during this period that I had noticed some tension between R. and D. that had to be discussed and that information was missing as to what exactly had happened in the reflective group. There were not many protocols from the group, and during team meetings the work with the students was presented briefly and rather generally.

My feeling is that the communication between them is not very good and D. is not clear about how to participate in the class. D. has mentioned that she doesn't know how many students are in the group. I have to discuss with R. the way in which he involves her in the work, if he discusses the process with her and how she participates.  
(Reflective diary)

The conflict in the reflective group became obvious when R. decided for the second time to be absent from class and informed D. the day before. Initially, she agreed with him, but next morning she has got later. The students got angry again and complained to the programme director that R. hadn't done his work well. The director then called me and this was the way I was informed about the two incidents in the course.

This provided the occasion for me to arrange a meeting in order to clear up the situation. D. was very angry. During the conversation she accepted the role of a student, identifying with the students in the group and left her role of their consultant and member of our team. It looked like D. actually expressed all team members' helplessness in leading the students through course tasks. She said: "I just want to get away from this project, to run away. I

have realised that the resources I expected to be available are not so.” When I asked her why she didn’t tell me about the conflict and ask for help, she responded that she thought that this was something that only two of them were responsible for and she had not been eager to impose her problems on me. It seemed that for her it was unthinkable to discuss her difficulties with me, as she regards me and R. as a whole, as “the teachers” and this way unconsciously projects her feelings of anger and distrust, developed in her relations with R., towards me too. At the same time, accepting the student’s role helps D. to express her refusal to endorse the type of authority demonstrated by R. that she described as rough, sarcastic and sanctioning.

It seems also that for his part, R. expresses his helplessness in changing the situation in the group by withdrawing physically and going to other tasks. This is the same passive-aggressive behaviour demonstrated this time as neglecting working with the students in response to the students’ own neglect of his work. During the team meeting, R. expressed his disagreement with the position of the programme director, which was that he had left D., being an unauthorized and unqualified person, to run the course alone, and the director’s position that this way D. would be able to learn how to run groups.

At the end of the discussion, I suggested that the issues with the students be discussed during the next meeting with them and their positions be heard. I suggested also that I would be present at the meeting too. This appeased D. and all agreed to this plan.

Before the meeting with the students, R. informed me that he would not be present in the class. D. wasn’t informed again and refused to replace him. So I took the responsibility of running this meeting.

During the meeting, the students succeeded in explaining their worries about the course. It became clear that one major source of anxiety was the difference between the principles on which this course was built, in comparison to others, and the challenges to the students’ learning habits that arose from this difference. The discussion revealed some major worries that these students had, concerning their disenchantment with the lack of care from the programme and the university administration. I facilitated the discussion of these tensions and their transformation in more constructive solutions.

One conclusion could be made from this issue: some of the team kept silence about some of the conflicts related to course implementation. This behaviour again prevents the opportunity to learn and to adequately react to the real difficulties. The thinking of the team was seriously disturbed. As a team leader I felt chronically and totally isolated from two of the most important parts of the work: a) the reflective work with the students and b) the relationship between two of the team members.

Perhaps the initial decision of differentiating between the management and the teaching in the course didn’t bring more effectiveness to it, but serves rather to silence the unspoken power tensions between myself and R. Actually, the official protest of the students and the interference of the administrative director overcomes leadership isolation from the process and recalls it to an active position. After that, I was able to facilitate the connections between all groups and participants in the course, in order that each position to be heard.

### **Appendix 3**

This piece of reflective diary includes description of the process of negotiations with the NGOs as part of second intervention.

#### **Tensions in the Relationships with the NGOs**

The second tense situation regarded the relations between the students and NGOs. Most of the students were anxious to get in touch with them because they associated the NGOs with an attitude of rejection, downgrading, humiliation, formality, and ignorance. This bent towards meeting NGOs, due to their previous experience outside and inside the university, made some of the students postpone, for a pretty long time, their encounters with the organisation's authorities. Their experience with two of the organisations, we had agreed with, to a great extent, confirmed those dispositions, rather than overcame them, as we had expected.

In the above described second organisation, the students were well accepted, and were provided with documents to get familiar with its work. They were so inspired that they developed several ideas about personal contributions to its activities. Unfortunately, the organisation was so preoccupied with its project activities that it postponed the discussion of their proposals, and eventually students stopped making attempts to meet its representatives, and cancelled their work on that project.

It was at the first meeting that a conflict emerged in the third organisation, between its members and the students. The students came back rather worried and frustrated. It seemed that because of their anxiety, due to their meeting with authorities, and due to the concern the very HIV/AIDS issue arises, students had asked a lot of questions and had questioned some of the working practices. The leadership had not managed to get their anxiety under control, had regarded their attacks personally, and had responded to their behaviour through verbal sanctioning. Both parties left the meeting disappointed with each other. The students did not wish to visit the organisation any more. In a separate meeting with them I offered to discuss some of their views, and concerns, and the nature of their fears they had projected upon the organisation, and the prejudices they had about such diseases. The debate seemed very useful and they decided to table some of the issues for a discussion in the group. Nevertheless, the relation with the organisation was cancelled.

To make the things clear with this organisation, I invited its leader to a private conversation to give an assessment of the first meeting. To my surprise, he did not mention anything about his conflict with the students. His comments about them were positive. He did not display the anger the students had described, and expressed his firm belief that they would take advantage of what they had learned in the future. When I described the feelings and experience the students had shared with me, he stated in an extremely well-considered way that it was the result of their unawareness and fear of the disease.

At the team meeting I shared my experience of the conversation with the organisation leader, and then R. announced that in an informal conversation with him the leader had expressed his anger with the two students, who, according to him, had behaved impudently and disregardingly towards the suffering of such people. The anger had been projected on R., and he thought the motivation of the people becoming part of the course and the

programme had to be studied very carefully. The fact that one of the project's NGOs leaders' experiences had been kept hidden from the course leadership was rather indicative of the way in which the authentic experiences of discontent and misunderstanding, which were part of encountering unlikeness and the new practices we were experimenting, turned out to be a serious challenge to learning the model we were implementing. They were distorting and depreciating significant aspects of the tension, which had to be well considered. They were breaking the trust between the participants, and were establishing the opportunity for maintaining a double agenda – a formal one, which was, seemingly, successful, and an informal one, which was authentic. R.'s triangulation by the NGO leader was a covered attack against my leadership and the task it was symbolizing - the formation of active citizens.

The conclusions drawn from that second case, are, first, that it is a great challenge for students to meet on their own with public power authorities, and to reach agreements over their projects. Some of the anxiety can be transformed into aggressive and disregarding behaviour; NGOs have to be ready to bear this. What needs to be worked on is the student's pre-disposition towards the problem they choose to tackle, no matter how primitive and incompetent they might be. One of the ways to accomplish this is for them to be provided with time before getting familiar with the knowledge about the problem they would like to take work out, and to discuss it in academic environment, before starting their work on the project in practice. At this preparatory stage, the possible predispositions students may have towards the problem have to be analyzed, and discussed in the group, by proposing various moral versions and knowledge, and after that probe them in practice. In the next version of the course this became a significant part of the seminar activity, and a reflection diary was brought in. Students wrote in it either the changes in, or the confirmations of, their predispositions they had started their ideas with.

The second conclusion was that the organisations, themselves, were not ready to take students seriously. This was probably due to the anxiety they felt with the idea of strangers storming in on their work, and the questioning of some of their practices, which, for the hard survival regime, most NGOs in Bulgaria were functioning at that time. The leaders were rather sensitive towards any type of doubt over their activity, since to them, those were long-held personal causes, and, on the social level, their contribution was disregarded, neglected and depreciated. At the beginning of the development of the civil sector in Bulgaria, in a period of high poverty and unemployment, the public view of the NGOs was that they misappropriated funds to secure their own survival, rather than improved growing social inequality. This idea hindered the creating of their public credibility, and it was fostered additionally by real facts, over abuse.

Due to this, these organisations, and similarly the students, responded with passive aggression to each doubt over their activity that would arise. To them, my leadership on this project was a symbol of both the university and BIHR, to which these leaders were used to feeling, in a way, dependent and awestruck. They expected to collaborate on future projects with us, and that state of dependence made them hide their negative feelings and experience, doubts and disagreement with the model of work proposed by us. It became clear that because of the formal authority both R. and I had in the institution, we were representing the story of our former cooperative relations we had had with the leaders, and we were relying on trust. Instead of this helping us, it was handicapping the building up of an authentic and equal space for project participation and study.

## Appendix 4

Here is the description of an interview conducted with a student in the VCC.

### Interview with Student T.

**First I would like to ask you to briefly introduce yourself: how old are you, where are you from, what have you studied, what are you interested in...**

My name is T., 20 years old, I graduated from the “Miguel de Cervantes” Spanish language high school in Sofia and at the moment I am a second-year college student at New Bulgarian University, in the programme Artes Liberales, which, unfortunately is closing soon and I will have to continue with something else. I will continue my studies with two bachelor programmes – one of which is anthropology, and the other – Spanish philology.

**This is your final decision already?**

Yes, this is already a final decision. What do I do? My interests are in the social sphere. I am very communicative and I love interacting with people; I am engaged in various social projects and my work is also social: on the one hand, I am a tourist guide and a mountain guide of Spanish tourists in Bulgaria and on the other – a teacher of Spanish and English in the remaining part of the year. What else should I tell about myself?

**You mentioned about projects. Could you tell a little bit more about that? What kind of projects are these? In what sphere?**

Since about when I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I began actively taking part in different projects. The first one in which I participated was bilingual. It was called “Don Quixote – that’s me”, and it had literary purpose. After that, I was in the “Interact” club of the Spanish high school. I organized two charity exhibitions, the purpose of which was to gather resources for the integration in society of people with disabilities. I was working in cooperation with the Sofia municipality daycare centre for integration of disabled people. After that, at the university, I continued with a project called “Spirit of Art” which was my idea. It lasts for a week, during which different workshops are organized – by students for students. The idea is to find people with equal interests and professionals to meet with non-professionals on the background of art. I think that up to this moment these are the more significant things that I’ve worked on. Currently, I am the leader of a project to the “Mladej” foundation. The aim of this project is the creation of a website for foreigners where descriptions of different routes and tracks of the Bulgarian mountains would be uploaded, thus attracting a greater interest from the foreign tourists towards Bulgaria.

**You look like not just a guide, but also as a leader of many initiatives. Have you thought of yourself as such person?**

Well, it is more like I am the initiator of many initiatives, but I don’t consider myself a leader. True, when I have to take up the position of a leader, I do, and I think that I carry it out successfully, but my experience at the Student senate of NBU shows that I don’t possess all the necessary qualities for the good leadership position particularly in this organisation. Maybe in some other kind of organisation I would cope better, but I am not sure that leadership is the thing that appeals to me most.

**You talk about failure. What do you mean with that?**

I have in mind the fact that I am quite emotional and I take many of the problems personally: I can’t sleep, I can’t think of anything else when I have a particular problem

and to some extent I lack the boldness in communicating with others, which is necessary for a serious leadership position: not only organizing a particular project but also being constantly in the position of the leader.

**What does boldness mean to you? You say you lack it.**

I've just been observing the current and former leaders. They are people with great self-esteem, profound knowledge of the structure of the particular organisation, of the exact way in which the procedure of realization of the given projects goes, and when they have something to say to someone, they do it directly, even if this has to be criticism. And I am another type of person – I'd like to slide over the question a bit in order not to hurt someone, because I've suffered from such things – from direct criticism – and now I'm trying not to level criticism in such a way. That's why I think that I wouldn't make a good leader for the particular organisation of the Student senate, because I will waste a lot of time in foreword before leveling the concrete criticism, and time is an important factor.

**That is to say, you recommend the already established kind of leadership as good leadership, don't you?**

I think it is good leadership indeed, although it already is quite blurred between several people and, unfortunately, can't be concentrated in one person which inevitably leads to splitting into different flanks, sub-groups etc. which go against each other and the work suffers from all this, it is left behind. But I hope that with mutual efforts we will somehow succeed to bridge over this, too.

**You don't recommend emotional leaders. This is what I get.**

This is not good for the leaders themselves because emotional leaders completely identify themselves with the project, with their task, and quite often leave their personal life behind, which, as I know from personal experience, shouldn't be done and it's very painful.

**Now, would you like to tell us more about the project that you chose to make in the course "Voluntary work in the community"?**

Yes, of course. The project that I chose to make was made up very quickly because this is an idea that had existed in my head for a long time. I decided to make a garden in the space behind the block where I live, which is actually a part of a big building with a shape of "II" in which there is a huge wide but desolate space. During my childhood I had observed how it was made into a bigger dunghill. So it was high time I did something, after all I had some experience and a concept about what exactly had to be done. I decided to make a garden and my original idea was very big – I wanted to find funding and I wanted the place to be dug, a children's playground to be built, with benches, electricity to be installed, probably even some water section in the form of fountains or the like, all of which of course meant a lot of finances. Besides, in order for the project to happen in this way, I had to receive the approval of the Municipality and to know that these lands are municipal. So the most difficult part of my project was mainly the work with the Municipality, in order for me to receive information about whose property the lands were. I was told many times "Come again some other time", "Come again in the reception hours", "I can't spare the time for you now, I'm busy" by different officials from different departments of the Municipality. Finally, after about two months I found out that the plot I was striving at is divided into 5 parts, two of which (very big) at the moment were being claimed back by their former owners – the people who owned them before the communist period and who had logically claimed them back after 1989. So these two plots at the moment are "no man's land" – they are neither property of the Municipality, nor their former owners'. That's why the advice I

got from the Municipality was “You can make a garden but don’t invest too much resources as it isn’t clear who will ever win the cases (this might be in 5-10 years’ time) and what kind of plan will there be for the particular place”. Consequently, my idea had to be re-formulated from a grandiose to a smaller one, but I appreciate my initial strife as I believe that if people always aim low, they will accomplish even smaller things, but if they aim higher, there always be something bigger than the initial aim after they’ve drawn the line and subtracted all the disappointments and obstacles.

So this is how we had to reformulate the idea which remained entirely on a “local level” – my colleague with whom we were working on the project and I decided to organize the people living in the blocks and make a team that would work together and first clean the place from all the garbage – even not the whole place but only the area that could under the particular conditions be used as a garden – to cut the branches of the trees that have grown too much, to remove the small trees that grew everywhere, to mow the grass and level it up where possible, to use the natural bumps as places to grow flowers, to remove the sweep away the huge part that is asphalted under the surface. So we’ve decided that after doing all that, if people are interested and are inspired by the idea, together we can knock up benches and put them there. The benches generally are a problem as because of the “II” form of the block, there is echo, but we decided not to take responsibility for their setting and knock up benches if the initiative comes from the block’s inhabitants; thus, if there are any conflicts we can wash our hands of that, which is rude to a certain extent but on the other hand we won’t be facing the negative feelings from the neighbours who are against the benches. The campaign will be launched these days, on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> June at 10:00 am. It will start on those two days and will continue as long as we have the strength and motivation to work and I hope that we’ll succeed and achieve significant results.

**There are many different experiences in the course of this project. If you have to outline the process in terms of feelings and emotions, how would you start?**

I’m starting with a great motivation, because that’s a project I have been thinking about for two or three years now. Then, especially when it concerns community projects, the motivation transforms into irritation from all the protraction and delay, which, according to me are unnecessary. In Bulgaria, when one thinks about a municipality, this association of protraction and delay inevitably comes to his mind – it’s all negative feelings. Generally, it seems that in the mind of the Bulgarian, or at least in the minds of the people I’ve communicated with on municipality matters, there is one and the same thought “I’m going there and I know that they will put all kinds of obstacles on my way to realise my idea.”

**To what extent were these expectations of yours justified?**

Actually, in the beginning things started quite well. A lot of things happened in just a day – we met with the deputy mayor of Liulin, who is responsible for the architectural matters, he referred us to the Cadastre department, where they showed us some plans of the lands, after that they showed us plans of former owners and referred us on the same day to the Legal department. Thereafter we fought with them ... for how long... for about a month or two. That is to say, in the beginning everything went quite well, I was even surprised and told myself “Wow, what’s going on here? It can’t be real, they are actually cooperating!” and then it all started like: “Well, there is only one colleague who can check that and she is off sick. Come again (for example) on Thursday. » I am going there again on Thursday, ask again and the colleague in question says «I came back yesterday, I don’t know anything about that», I explain to her and tell her «So you know now» - «All right, come again next week, on Thursday», I am going on Thursday and the guard says «It’s not reception hours



now, you cannot come in», I'm calling, explaining again... «I know nothing about that, what's that project?» «Again, I'm telling you so that you know» «Well, come again in the reception hours on Thursday!». I am going in the reception hours on Thursday, «Well, the colleague mentioned something, she said she had left your documents next to the cactus, but there's nothing there! » Then I gave her my copy and she asked me about the incoming number of my enquiry. I explained to her that I don't have such, as they had sent me from department to department and haven't given me an incoming number. Fortunately, she didn't make me go for an incoming number, which, I suppose, would have delayed the procedure more. She promised me that she would call later the same day as she had to announce some competition before that, and she didn't call me for a week. So I went there again to bother her, she was in a hurry for some very important meeting... It was all a sequence of events and at last she obviously remembered my face, because the last time when I went to her, she said: "Aaaa, we'll have a look at it now!" and all that protraction that lasted for at least a month and a half turned to be something that would have taken literally 5 minutes to do the work that she was supposed to. She sat, turned on the computer, filled in several numbers and the particular properties' cases appeared. Then I understood that the issues are not on municipality level and things changed. I was utterly disappointed and extremely depressed. I said to myself "Terrible! There's no point of me to continue fighting when the whole idea is failing. There's nothing that could be done! That's awful! » I was in some kind of depression but the good thing was that the colleague with whom I worked on the project was in an extremely positive disposition and when I told her how matters stood, she suggested to look for another place but I categorically declined and explained to her that this meant dragging along again to the Municipality to find whether the new place is municipal or not. I told her: «Look, we'll do it here; it will just happen within some more moderate boundaries. »

**Did she keep you to the project? Did she make you go on when you wanted to quit? What made you not give up ultimately?**

I knew that I wouldn't give up because generally I don't give up when I get down to something. Especially in this case – so many people heard that such thing is about to happen and got excited about the idea. When I start something, I never go back, because this means disappointing so many people. I either don't start it, or when I do, as the Bulgarian proverb says "dance the dance till the end". So I just knew that this is some kind of an emotional gap from which I had to escape and she helped me to do so more quickly, to pull myself together and tell myself: «It's not that frightening». Later, when we examined the plot more thoroughly, we found out that actually it was extremely nice, even nicer than it had been in my memories from childhood and there could be done something really good with it, no matter that it wouldn't be on the whole terrain and regardless the fact that it wouldn't be done professionally, with the help of machines and with new soil and so on.

**So, ultimately, how do you feel about that project?**

I'm a bit nervous as I'm not sure how many people will gather...but actually, no matter how many of them come, I will be there along with a few other young people and this is absolutely enough for me because we have the energy and will to work. I don't know how many adults will appear because we put announcements in the block which were quite aggressive in content, but we decided that the people who really think and who won't be offended will accept them with a smile, and the others who don't just don't deserve our attention. We pasted these announcements on the walls and in no more than a week they were already torn out which irritated me a lot and I decided that I would paste them again

and this won't stop me. Then I printed the announcements at home but gave up pasting them because I told myself that people are obviously offended and there's no point in fanning the fire and the hate in those who easily lose their temper and can't understand that this is not aimed directly at them.

**What do you think had offended them?**

The announcement began in this way: "If you want to throw your garbage out of the window, begin with yourself". And as many people do it but don't want to admit it, when you tell them directly that they are garbage is a huge offence to them. And this must have offended them, naturally. And also there are a lot of people who don't do that but they are inclined to get offended from the fact that someone would think that there's garbage being thrown behind the block. But it's a fact – you go behind the block and see heaps of garbage. So people really do it. If it's not you, then it's someone else, but he deserves those words.

Ultimately, I didn't paste the announcements again, as I decided that these announcements were by definition not meant to urge many people. I knew when I wrote them that almost no one would pay attention to them and they wouldn't stir anybody's enthusiasm, so I would have to rely on personal contacts with people from the block to realise the initiative.

**Why did you write them then? What did you want to say with them?**

It's crystal clear that the aggressive tone comes from young people. I wanted to show that there are young people who are enterprising in this block and we won't bear the ignorance to the plots surrounding the clock, that despite others' opinion –whether there should or shouldn't be a garden there – we will do anything necessary to turn this place into a better one for living around.

I also wanted to show that this thing will be accomplished, The main task of these announcements wasn't to attract people, even the contrary, we relied entirely on personal contact, we were trying to meet with the younger boys and girls from the block, we were explaining to them personally about the initiative in question, we were inviting them to participate and reminding them that they had promised to join us.

**So how were the things with invitations going? Were there problems with that?**

There weren't any with the inviting. Generally, when a few people gather around the block who clearly are not part of a family and stop for a talk, there usually comes a third one, and a fourth one... So that's how we met some teenagers and I was telling them about the idea. They were "for" it, around them stopped a man with a dog who said "Neighbour, count me in, too".

**You didn't meet with resistance, that's what I meant.**

Well, I communicated mainly with young people, that's why I didn't meet with resistance. From the side of the adults I had communicated mainly with the secretary of the block, who expressed a complete support of the idea. She is "for" all positive ideas. But I haven't communicated with other adults.

**Probably you expect that they would scold you or...? What do you expect?**

Yes, I expect that I would be reproached by them in some way because they've got used to seeing us – the people who will be working in this garden – as the little children from the block because until recently we played in front of it. And suddenly we become aggressive,

we nearly offend them with our announcements, we do some things by our decision. I guess they would feel offended by the fact that we haven't asked for their opinion – not because of anything else – they hardly have something against the initiative itself, or they have, but I don't believe it's something serious. They'll just feel that they've lost their authority to us and they'll realise that we're already mature people – we can make decisions on our own and be active – we don't need a parent's permission, it's not necessary for us to be able to participate in such campaigns.

**You're already taking over the power in the block...**

Absolutely.

**Because you said you have a colleague with whom you're working – how did that happen? You started the project on your own...**

I began on my own and during a lecture while sharing our ideas she was there, she didn't have an idea of her own yet but she got quite enthusiastic, mostly because she also lives in a district of Liulin and she's a witness of all the problems that exist there; probably they exist everywhere else, too, but they are very clearly expressed in Liulin because of its great area. She said "This idea appeals to me extremely and if you don't mind I'd like to help you." Of course, I didn't mind, as I was in a period in which I felt quite suffocated by all these things I had to do. I needed a "shoulder". She came in the exact moment and joined in the work quite well.

**Did you have any worries about the way you would work together?**

No, none. We have communicated a little with this colleague but from the few conversations we've had in the first year I'm quite clear about the fact that she's a similar type of person to me, we are both deeply spiritual, always searching for the same things, we have a lot of common interests and views about the way things should happen. So I wasn't worried at all. I was in a little doubt about the extent to which she would be active in this process because she is quite busy with her work, she can't attend lectures regularly but ultimately this wasn't an obstacle for us to reach the stage we are at the moment.

**With what did your presence help you and what would it all have been without her?**

It's natural that we didn't view things in an entirely identical way. She had her little ideas, which she began developing at the very beginning. She wanted to connect with an organisation that restores such places; she wanted to publish a topic in the forum of bgmama, to reach our target group, to put it this way, to connect with the people who are interested the most in the realization of such projects. So I didn't stop her in any way, because that wasn't something contrary to my aim, quite the contrary, it added more to it in a very natural way – it's natural when two people join to think on the same thing, other different ideas to appear, because everybody has his own point of view about how the project could be improved. She went through the phases that I also went through on her own – in the beginning, she was very enthusiastic, then she began feeling disappointed. The good thing is that the same phases didn't occur to us at the same time. At the moment when I was desperate, she wasn't in such mood and this was really excellent because she helped me to overcome this moment. The same was when she despaired, when I took her to see the place, I had already experienced this moment. It was very interesting, because she obviously had had her own ideas about the way this place looks like.

**What did she say?**

Well, she said nothing; she just stood there with her jaw dropping and couldn't say anything for some time. She was walking in circles and sighing heavily "But... it isn't... the way I imagined it..." But she pulled herself together quite fast and I told her: "Don't worry, it still can be worked" and she immediately started: "Yes, sure, look here we can make..." So I highly appreciate her participation despite the fact that we haven't communicated quite intensively and if she hadn't joined, I suspect that things would just go more slowly. As I already said, I wouldn't have given up my idea but it would have been accomplished with greater difficulty and I would have needed other people to help me overcome the depression. I would have certainly found them, at least in the person of my parents because they support me a lot. It's quite interesting that they are not socially active like me. Even when I was little and there were these cleaning gatherings they would hide themselves at home and tell me "Don't move a lot because they can understand there's someone at home". This of course was due to the fact that they worked in shifts and were quite tired – not because of a lack of wish to do it. But in some way I my mind there is the non-active civic example from them.

**These are the Lenin Sabbaths, do you know about them? Probably it was this they opposed.**

I haven't heard about that but I'm talking mostly about the democratic times, and a kind of cleaning in order for all of us to feel good around the block. But I began opposing my parents since I was little, I wanted to go out and clean, „Stay here! Why are you going to dig in the garbage of others! We don't throw our on the street”, to which I answered with „It doesn't matter, it has to be clean for all of us, doesn't it!”. I have no idea where this instinct of opposition came from, but I had it. And I already feel independent enough to become an initiator of initiatives which they wouldn't; even think of realizing.

**But now they did support you. Why? What did you tell them?**

Generally, they support me in everything. I told them: "We'll make a garden at the back of the block." and my mother as usual laughed „You are so confident in everything”, and I asked her „Fine, how many times so far have I promised you that I would do something and I haven't?" and she said „None". She knows that but she finds the confidence with which I say some things to her funny. But I believe that one should act this way.

**Fine. Do you have brothers or sisters?**

No, I don't.

**And what do your parents think about you? And about the fact that you do so many things – and now a garden as well. Are they glad about that or they're thinking "This is our daughter's next foolery in row"? How do they react? What does your father think?**

My father... Well, we see each other quite rarely at home, because, as I already mentioned, they work in shifts...

**What do they work?**

At the moment my father works as a support in a balneological centre in Bankia, and my mother is a cleaning lady at a big office. So they work in shifts and sometimes it happens that we don't see my mother for a week because when she is on a second shift she comes home at 23h when I am already asleep, I go out at 6-7 in the morning and she's sleeping then. So we don't see each other for 5 days and Saturdays and Sundays I'm going in the mountains and we don't see each other again. My parents are often joking that they have to

put a photo of me somewhere, in a place they pass by often in order not to forget my face. But there's quite rarely reproach in this joke, they support my activity because they know that it's important in this level of my development and if I'm not active now, there's no other time that I could be so active. I could hardly allow myself to be so active when I have a family and give birth to children... ☺ So they are happy that all kinds of ideas come to my mind and I am never afraid to realise them no matter how crazy they might sound at first.

**To whom do they sound crazy? Do they sound crazy to anyone?**

They sound grandiose to... my mother and my father. They sound a bit...For example, before I enter NBU, I told them "Now look, I've chosen this university, it is private, expensive and will cost a lot of money, but don't worry. You won't have to give money, I will enter with a scholarship!". They laughed and said:"Goodness, you're so self-confident!", and I explained „No, really, I will do everything I can to enter with a scholarship. If I don't enter with a scholarship I will work my fingers to the bone in the summer, but you won't pay for my university. It's high time you stopped paying for anything!". And I really entered with a scholarship and they were extremely happy. They told me: „Ha! You really did it!"

**Probably your parents' absence has taught you from a very young age to be independent, to rely on yourself, to take your own decisions... Is that right?**

Probably it's like that, yes. While I was little I was either home alone or to my grandmother and grandfathers', in a village. My grandmother, even when I was very little, used to constantly give me some tasks, fill my day with all sorts of things: "Do the dishes, bring firewood, feed the hens. I haven't sat still there, which is a good thing, I appreciate it a lot. I've never felt bad because of the fact that she constantly told me to do things. And at home, since we've been having a TV set, I've been extremely independent because before that I had to constantly bore my parents when I wake up Saturdays and Sundays because I had nothing to do. And later, I would get up, turn the TV on, make myself a sandwich and no one interested me.

**You sort your things.**

Yes, absolutely.

**Now, let's finish with the story of the project and pass to this part that gives sense to the whole. To you, personally, what was the point of that whole exercise? Did it have a point at all? What did it give you, to you personally – in terms of learning, a new experience?**

According to me, every project that one occupies himself with always brings him some benefit. Very often my colleagues think that it has only wasted their time. And that's a pity for them, because even in the negative things that you get from some kind of experience there is something positive – afterwards you always know that next time you shouldn't do like that. To me, the particular project, practically, made me more seriously confront with the Municipality for the first time. I saw what was happening there and how things were. I realised that the Municipality didn't care about a lot of things and if you're lucky you might just pass unnoticed and make something big, as it would have happened if the lands were municipal. On the whole, I would have had their blessing to do as I please. Unfortunately, things didn't turn this way but I think disappointment is a part of every project. There's no project in which things run so smoothly that there are no disappointments. That was mainly the practical benefit. After that, to some extent we got acquainted with the structure of the home council and how these people react.

To me personally, in terms of experience this brought me another organized project, more mistakes and consequently more occasions to learn which I think is always a plus. And if I have to make another garden someday I will know everything about how things happen, to whom I have to turn and how the process will have to go. That's the risk with first projects – the first couple of times one always shoots in the dark – and if he succeeds, it's great; if not – he has to remember the direction in which he mustn't shoot at next time and not to do it in order not to waste time.

**What did you learn about this kind of problem with gardens in Bulgaria after engaging with it? What did you think 2 years ago when you had thought about this problem and what do you think now? How did your way of thinking, your point of view about that changed? Why is this a problem in Bulgaria? Who has to solve it?**

Generally, in Bulgaria, we're not used to appreciating our lawns. Foreigners come and say "Goodness, it's so green!" but we've got used to nature – we see it all the time – and we're quite critical in this aspect, we always lack greenery, which according to me is good, because we strive towards better because of that. In a big city like Sofia, this lack is felt even more, especially in the spaces between the blocks. What I could understand during this project is that these spaces are very important to the social life going in the blocks, for the upbringing of the children – inevitable part of the day of a child is a walk in some garden and it is quite natural in some way – there it can meet with other children, to experience its first attempts towards socialization, to create its first friendships. The lack of such garden makes people much more reticent. When we were little, we didn't have such garden but the parking in front of the block was much less „inhabited” by automobiles than it is today. We used to play football and all kinds of other games, which at the moment can't be observed because if children go outside they could easily be hit by a car at every moment and that's why most children in our block are loners, staying at home and not having where to use up their energy which, by definition, should be used up in playing. That's why these spaces are extremely important for the bringing up of the younger generation and a huge problem in Bulgaria is the fact that nobody realises that. Everyone thinks that all this is some kind of luxury – to be green in front of the block, everyone wants it because it's very "cool". But it's not like that – people want it because it is a natural need which arises in their day. For example, the elderly people who have already retired and have nothing to do, need to communicate with others and it would be most natural for this to happen on such green gardens.

**Whose responsibility is that?**

Oh, everybody's. That's not just a responsibility of the state – it's a responsibility of the citizens themselves – there has to be initiative, people should be convinced they need this, to state it in some public way in order to be able to do something on the topic.

**Some would say that this is municipal property and the Municipality is actually obliged to care for these plots...**

Well yes, it is, but the Municipality quite often doesn't have the necessary resources or it has too many problems to cope with and that's why there should be a civil initiative – people should show that they also are ready to participate because without any effort everything is quite easy. It's a different thing when you participate; you identify yourself with your work, with this bench, with this pine tree, with the way it's been cut, because you're done it yourself. Then the view is quite different, the way in which this garden will be treated is another – it will be saved for a much longer period of time and...

**You will feel that it's something yours...**

Absolutely. According to me this is an important part of those type of projects – there doesn't have to be someone from the outside to do it for you, people living nearby should be engaged, too – either through the opening of places of work to them or through voluntary work.

**The aim of the course was trying out the role of an active citizen, at the moment, in this country – in the place where we are – as students in the university. What do you think about this role now? Is there any point in trying to teach people to be active citizens and can this happen through the course we're making for the students?**

I think its sense is profound because the civil activity in Bulgaria has been suppressed for quite a lot of time. I don't think it's a secret to anyone how things stood in communist times...

**What did you know about that?**

My parents told me that everything used to come from the above – you carry out direct orders and, how should I put it, you don't have space for creative work. Everything should be done strictly, the way it has been planned; you can't go outside the frames of the party's ideology. Somehow, they haven't established in themselves the sense of such activity, or at least I don't notice such strong activity in my parents' generation. We are the children of democracy, which, although distorted in Bulgaria, is already there, but we are also children of our parents – i.e we have been brought up according the way in which they have built the picture of the world. And naturally they don't "teach" us civic initiative, because they lack it. There is a need to have vivid examples of such civil society activity - examples of people who really get results - this also is very important. And secondly, I think the idea of creating such a course is very good because everyday problems are being examined on a more academic level. The atmosphere that is created between the colleagues can also provoke a lot of activity.

**What do you mean?**

I mean that when you sit and discuss with colleagues some kind of problems that you've spot in society and they tell you „Yes, we've seen that, too, and yes, your idea is very good”, you receive a feedback for everything you've been thinking about. They could tell you that your idea is too broad and you should be more down-to-earth in what you're thinking about. Or it could be the opposite – they could tell you that your idea is small so you could further develop it in some way. There's communication, you can receive different, “outside” points of view. And all that happens on a more academic level where people are not ill-natured the way they could be if you mention about your idea.

**If you have to recommend something for this course that you think would be more appropriate or that should change, what would it be?**

To demand more of the students taking part of the voluntary work, because a great part of the colleagues approached the problem on the surface. They chose. In my view, the easier ways and hardly succeeded to act like citizens. They chose some not such ailing problems and the way in which they developed their projects seems superficial. They definitely found some easier way...

**Do you have an explanation why is that? Why part of the young people choose to behave this way?**

They lack any kind of feeling of a civil duty, they are extremely negative and depressed from the situation in Bulgaria. A great part of young Bulgarians believe that in Bulgaria nothing can change and there's no point in making efforts for anything – either because they're disappointed from personal experience or from the experience of some relatives, etc. This makes me angry a lot because it is the easiest thing to say that nothing can change, it's more difficult to try to change something on your own and see that, though you don't make profound changes, such can still be observed. And people should realise that little by little the big changes occur as well. You can't expect from your first civil activity to achieve great results – there's no way to do this, you should start with something little, to achieve a small result, then something bigger and to transmit your experience in order to climb this ladder of initiative gradually. At the beginning you'll have smaller ideas, not that serious, then they'll become broader and in the end you'll be able to actually change something that is of importance for all Bulgarians, for example.

**Probably the role of an active citizen – the person who, like you, wants to be a leader – will face these kind of people quite often.**

Yes, all the time, but they should be ignored sometimes because they can be “unhealthy” for the active citizen. When he communicates only with such people he begins asking himself the question whether he hadn't begun fighting with windmills, whether he should give up, too. From this point of view, if they are many, they have to be ignored – totally, completely: “Yes, I'm a dreamer, you're right!” and you continue being active in what you've began doing. When they're fewer according to me it's good when one listens to them because they often give a more objective view of things – true, many people are extreme in their negativism but there are some who, either because of their experience or by pure chance, quite often succeed in bringing the great dreamers down to earth, thinking that they will change everything on earth as if with a magic stick and prove them wrong. In no case should negativism be in such doses that it holds us back, to stop us, to forbid activity – it's the contrary, to it has to be the “necessary evil” that motivates more and in the right direction.

**Do you think that this university, from the way you experience it in your role as a student, gives such opportunities for one to be successful not only as a professional or a student during the lectures but also to as an active citizen? Are there such spaces in the university as a community?**

Yes, there is such space in the Student Senate and the Student Parliament. One of their major activities is to being active.

**Do they succeed to do that in a good way? Where do they succeed and where they don't?**

They succeed in being active. The good way comes with experience and with time, i.e. at the beginning they're not “active in a good way”... My feeling is that with every following project there is something more to win, a greater effort is being made, things happen in a better way because the particular people have learned to be better organizers and leaders.

**And what about the university community? To what extent this organisation is being seen, heard, understood, accepted?**

It's being seen, heard and accepted by the administration but most of the students don't learn for the group's activity from their colleagues, which to a certain extent is a problem of the Student Senate and the Student Parliament because they have to make their activities known; but on the other hand, it's a problem of the mass of students who are extensively



ignoring everything active happening in the university. A huge part of the colleagues just come here to go to the lecture, collect certain amount of information, then go out and leave.

**They obviously are quite practical and pragmatic – following some aim of their own.**

Yes, unfortunately, yes.

**Why “unfortunately”?**

Because they are unable to take from their environment all the plus-es that it could give them.

**I see. Thank you so much for this interview.**

You're welcome.

## Appendix 5

Appendix 5 shows the way in which one of the projects in the VCC was conducted and described by the students. Material is visualised using Picture 1 at the end of this appendix.

### Small Garden Project in the VCC

T. and N. are students in VCC who lead the Small garden project. Here they presented to the group their experience from its implementation in one of Sofia neighborhoods.

T.: In fact, the aim of our project was to cross the barrier of indifference and to stop complaining ‘How bad is my life?’

N.: We want to overcome the carelessness. If all of the residents of this block of flats turned their hands to clean the place everything would be done in only 3 hours. For us, it took two days and we worked all day long. We took a break only for two hours in the middle of the day when it was very outside. And we cleaned up a lot.

T.: Relates the reaction of her hairdresser when she told her about the project. The hairdresser said: “Well, then do it.” T. presents this reaction as an example of the way in which most of the people saying this show an approval of their decision, but actually don’t care and it would never cross their mind to join this enterprise.

When the team of the project starts to clean the area around the block of flats a lot of interesting situations and reactions of the people around them arise.

#### **Situation 1: The suspicious old man**

When the young people started their work an old man went out on his balcony and started shouting at them: “I saw you, I saw you! I will call the police.” He behaved suspiciously, aggressively and made threats against them. Tania tried to explain to him that they weren’t cleaning the place in order to use it for car parking but just to remove the garbage, to make the place green and beautiful.

The old man responded that he didn’t believe that they would do what they were saying and that he was sure that they would use it for private purposes.

Later on, the old man came to the place where the group was working, accompanied by another man. He pointed out at the area around one of the trees that was cleared, saying that they had trimmed the bushes and everything and had broken the branches of the tree.

However the other man supported them, saying that they had done something very good and started to convince the old man that everything was OK.

The old man reacted to this by saying that he didn’t agree with the existence of any gardens here because they would attract a lot of loitering. They would make a lot of noise and would destroy his quietude. After that he went back threatening to call the police and to check in the municipality whether they had permission to do this.

Both girls tried to explain things to him again but he didn't listen to them. They felt angry and helpless. They felt disappointed that their good intentions had been interpreted in such a way.

The other man calmed them down, saying that the old man was a crank so they didn't have to pay attention to him.

**Situation 2: The young lady with the dog**

During the first day of work a young lady from the block passed by the group, not saying anything and not asking them what they were doing. She was walking her dog. She had noticed the cleaned area around the big tree, and brought her dog there. The dog relieved himself there and she got out of the place and didn't clean it. The members of the group got angry. They felt disappointed that people not only disregarded their efforts, but even mocked them. This behaviour made them uncertain about the future of the place. They started to have doubts whether this place could be kept clean in the future by their neighbors. This event questioned the very essence of their efforts. According to T. this young lady knew the place very well and how it looked before. She passed through it every day. But at that moment she didn't seem thankful or even obliged to keep it clean.

**Situation 3: The owner of the coffee shop in front of the block**

Part of the territory between the blocks was occupied by a small building with a coffee shop and a small green enclosed garden. The owner lives in the same block.

During the first day of cleaning it became evident that the amount of rubbish was greater and heavier than had been expected. Cutting instruments and transport were needed too. So, the group went to the coffee shop owner and asked him for such things.

When telling him about the project, he explained them that for his small garden he brought special peat for the flowers and now he raises small hedgehogs. They got there from the big garden. The men gave them his mini-bus for the transportation of the rubbish. He told them: "I support your initiative. It is very good that you have decided to do this. I could help you with this work, but my apartment is situated in the opposite site of the block and I have no view of this garden." The people in the group were surprised by such an opinion, as two of them had come to help from other neighborhoods. But still, they were thankful to him for the instruments and the transport.

**Situation 4: The old lady**

During the first day an old lady passed by and asked them what they were doing there. Then she congratulated them on their initiative. They were elated. "There are normal people in this block too."

**Situation 5: The boy with a car**

During the second day of cleaning, a car stopped nearby. The young driver got out of the car and started to wash it carefully and to polish it, not paying attention to the group.

An old man passing by them made comments that it was good that they were cleaning the place but he was afraid that the cleaned parts of the garden would be quickly occupied for parking.

**Type of the rubbish collected during the cleaning:**

- ampullas of morphine;
- domestic scraps;
- building refuse – from the time when the block was built.

A big heap of concrete pieces with a road sign of ‘undergoing repair’ on the top; a pit full of small pieces of glass and iron cables. All this was covered by grass, bushes and even trees and gave the impression of a natural hill. When the group started to clean this place, it was discovered that there was no soil there but only concrete. As for the removal of these concrete blocks, they will need a digger and a lorry: the members of the group decided that it would be better to bring more soil and to arrange a garden there.

**Picture 1**



## Appendix 6

This picture is an example of the reflexive work of a student in the VCC on her community project.

**Picture 2. Student's Experience of the Process of Social Change Implementation in the VCC.**



## Appendix 7

Description of an interview conducted with a student in the VCC.

### Interview with Student A.

Interviewer: In the beginning I want to ask you to present yourself, your name, how old are you, where you come from.

A: My name is A. and I am 22 years old, I am from Plovdiv, born there, living and developing there.

I: How did you choose to come to study in Sofia?

A: I chose to study here because of the opportunities and because of the university, of course.

I: What did you study in Plovdiv?

A: In Plovdiv I finished private middle school with languages – English and German. It is quite different from what I am studying here. Because of the bad conditions in the Plovdiv University I decided to come here.

I: Well. What are your interests now? You chose Programme “Artes Liberales”. Why did you choose it?

A: Well, as a whole, my initial idea about the Artes was slightly unclear and vague but what I certainly understood is that the programme guides students in their further development, their wishes, that it supports their wishes – what they want to study, what they want to do. So as a normal not well oriented young man I considered that this programme could probably help me.

I: Good. Now you are at the end of your second and last year in this programme and you have to make your further professional choice. What your interests are now? What direction you want to go to?

A: In relation to my interests or professionally?

I: Professionally.

A: Professionally, unfortunately I was engrossed by my family, by my family business and at least up to now and probably during the first years of my professional development I will work there, I will support it and orient in it. Full devotion to this idea.

I: Could you explain in more detail the family business with which your family is engaged?

A: It is automobile repair business, for all types of cars. It is not very typical for the programme and for my study here but you know as a man I like cars and everything related to them.

I: And what your responsibilities are, what are you doing there?

A: What I am doing now is to learn more about the activities of the company and in the same time to help as much as I can – to buy spares, to meet with clients, to take in orders, and also to support the administrative activities of my father as much as I can.

I: Do you want to develop there, in this area? It seems to me that you have other interests too and that the university opens opportunities also for their development.

A: Well, the university as a whole, according to me, has to support fully my administrative activities – management, economics, organisation, management development, such kind of activities, at least, as I said, at this moment. One other interest of mine is related to “mass communications”, everything related to this area. If we speak about my interests, there are many of them as it is usual for a young person like me. They are very different. What I am engaged with at this moment and will continue to do probably in some future time is part of these big interests that I have. Others are movies, for instance. I am fond of it but more as a spectator not as ... it is maybe closer to the critique more or less. Communications, in each form as I can easily say, because I am quite frank and open person and I like to communicate with various people. The traveling too. This is perhaps one of the most favorite pursuits of mine, sightseeing in different countries. Not only in Bulgaria and the sights in Bulgaria, but also to see foreign cultures, states, architecture and everything related to them. And unfortunately I can't say, I want to but I still can't say how my life will continue in the future but if we think about some initial plane than this is the thing that is established at the moment.

I: Before the interview you said that you are just coming from the meeting of the programme Artes Liberales and that it concerned your further developments as students here. And you said that you personally are not very happy with the meeting.

A: Unfortunately it became clear that, no matter how much I wanted it, that the orientation itself in what you want to study here and in what professional development to choose is something private, personal for each of us and we have to make this decisions. No matter what the specialty is, the final decision is always yours. It is true that the programme is constructed very well. It includes many areas of knowledge, even lots of topics so to say, that can guide you. But this has its risk too. It could guide you but it could also split and confuse you even more. For instance, I am such kind of person - I decided during the programme to choose as different as possible courses with the purpose to cover the broadest possible areas of knowledge. Not to study them but to become familiar with them. But even after that unfortunately I wasn't able to develop clear idea about myself and more concretely about my further study. What this programme actually helped me with was to choose the area of management. But unfortunately I couldn't say what specialty exactly I will study. I have also some interests in communications. There are there some modules appropriate to me too. We will see. Anyway I will try and ...

I: you will decide. You have some more time to do this.

A: Yes, I have and I hope that I will be able to find something that really will satisfy me in the future.

I: Good. Let's start now with your project in the service learning course that you have developed with your colleagues of course. Have you had some similar experience with such kind of projects, initiatives, whatever activities like this before?

A: If we speak about the community work from the point of view of donation and activities like this, yes, I have. Since my school age. Each year I and my classmates have organized donations. In the first two or three years we donated cloths and food to an orphanage. After that we chose to help a hospital for children with cancer. We organized there also something like fashion-show with the purpose to collect money for the medications of those children.

I: Good. Why you decided to engage with this? You were the initiators, weren't you?

A: We organized it independently. As a whole our idea was stimulated and supported by our principal. She was engaged with donation to this hospital too. We engaged with her idea but in other form and we developed this idea further according to our areas of interest. I don't know, may be the fear, God save us, the fear that something like this could happen to you too, the empathy toward them, their appearance, mostly the appearance of the children in the hospital, very easy they succeed to motivate you to help them and ... also to make you start thinking, and to wake up your sympathy so to say. I don't know, may be the idea itself to help someone else who, to help without being paid, to help someone who doesn't even expects it. Probably this was the essential thing that stimulated me for this activity.

I: What do you think now about the project that you have performed than? Was it successful, satisfying?

A: Well, during our participation in it I could say that ... of course it couldn't be successful in hundred percents. Unfortunately we are speaking about financial resources that were impossible to collect fully in any way there. The money was for medicines that children have to take daily. They were very expensive and very difficult for supply so it was difficult to collect money for them. But I can say that to the degree to which we could than afford it – financially and organisationally - and taking into account our age too, we were minor than, I can say that we succeeded. In certain degree. It was about 60% successful. We really succeeded to help even a little bit. If each person begins to do something small as we did, I think that there will not be a problem for this center to survive.

I: And you succeeded to raise followers too.

A: Yes, we did and initially, as each child in the school, we enlisted our parents for the cause, and after that some other organisations too. They also helped us with minimal resources but still they helped and took some initiative. I can say now that there are everywhere people that want to help.

I: Does this activity continue after you?

A: Yes, it does. Each year, for more than 6 years. We were the first who started this initiative, than we included students from lower classes and handed them down the initiative.



I: Good. Why did you choose this course in the LA programme?

A: Well, I had several criteria when choosing this course. The basic one was that the idea of voluntary work is something that I appreciate very much. The free help itself. That you can deliver it through such kind of course or initiative. I generally speaking like to help people. Perhaps it was the main thing that has guided my choice. It was interesting to me to be part of such course, of such activity and even of such ideas. And because there were many ideas that we discussed with the colleagues it was good that I had the right to choose where and how to participate.

I: Tell me more about the idea of your project and what does happen with it.

A: The final purpose of the project was to adopt a kind of bird threatened with extinction. There is a centre in Stara Zagora with aim to help, raise, and let such kind of rare birds out. The idea initially belonged to one of our colleagues Lidia. She has had its decision to adopt a bird long before the start of this course. And she succeeded to stir my enthusiasm very actively. Speaking about me personally, I chose this project because I like animals. In all my life I was always surrounded by animals and I know how they can help you, even mentally. So I am always ready to help animals. With the risk that it would sound you roughly I could say that it's much easier to me to help animals than people. Of course, I do not speak about people in need. But generally speaking my love to the animals is enormous. No matter what kind of animals they are I am always ready to help them and this inspired me most in this project. The other thing was my interest to the organisation and its work. Speaking about the development of our project I can say that activities were performed according to the plan. Several colleagues were attracted and then we organized meeting to plan steps and responsibilities. Then we went there and adopted a bird giving money for food and medicines. This was the purpose of our project and I can say with proud that we succeeded.

I: Your group in this project was big. How did you succeed to meet and work together?

A: First of all, we got together gradually. It took a month to make our colleagues familiar with the idea because of the absence of some of them in the class. And probably each of us needed some time to make sense of the idea. And to raise his faith in the project and in the possibility of its real implementation. In the beginning the idea was too obscure and unclear. There was a problem for some of the colleagues to travel for example 200km from Sofia. It took time but at the end surprisingly a lot of people were brought together. Actually around 30% of the people in the course. It was really good.

I: You included also a student from other programme at the university (*Art Department of cinema and drama*) that was interested in such topic too. (*The student was engaged to make documentary about the Centre and its activities and such a way to spread out its mission. The idea was also to give this documentary to the centre for its information campaigns.*)

A: Yes, we included him actually to help us. Of course, he was interested in the project too but we asked him to help us.

I: Was someone of you in the role of a leader? Or, was there a core group that organized things?

A: Well ...

I: How did you divide the tasks between each other?

A: In the beginning it was Lidia, the initiator of the project. But I think that later on all of us succeeded to participate actively. The tasks were redistributed again. Each had his task but in the same time no one was overburdened or engaged more than the others. It was the big advantage and it is surprising that it happened in this way. Of course later in the project there were some colleagues that dropped out from it. But it was not because they did not like the idea but because they were very busy with some other activities. All the rest participated very actively.

I: Let's go further to the more analytic, reflective part of the interview. What does this project actually give to you? Is there any new knowledge that one can learn when engaging directly with the problem? What have you personally learnt about the problem, about the situation of the rare birds in Bulgaria? I am asking you this because during the conversation in the class you were very excited when talking about the cruelty and the neglect with which people treat these birds.

A: Yes, one can easily learn here in more detail about this part of the Bulgarian people, one can learn how cruel could they be and to what degree they don't care. This is the right word – they don't care. The birds in the center, they are all threatened with extinction. They are present in all kinds of books. The opportunity to learn that they are in danger is very easy, very accessible. But despite of this people just are not interested to know. Because they have nothing to do with them. Perhaps they can show some interest if you are able to provoke their curiosity. In the same time in Bulgaria there are hundreds of thousands hunters. And I couldn't imagine that when being a hunter of birds you don't to know what you are shooting at. It is just madly for me. First of all it is not serious, it is irresponsible, sadistic and ... words like this.

I: Does the law play an important role in this case? Have you learnt more about the related legislation? What are the sanctions against such behaviour?

A: What I succeeded to learn is that the law prohibits shooting at such kind of birds. Unfortunately, as happens with each law in Bulgaria, this law is neglected in many different ways. Not speaking about the corruption. This is another topic that is for sure present here too. According to this law people could even go to jail but everything is hushed up. Total contempt. People don't take it seriously. They argue that there are other, more serious problems than this.

I: Who has to take responsibility for this problem, whose task is it to control the things?

A: First of all according to me each of the citizens is responsible. And more concretely the hunters. How to explain it? The main idea, the main purpose of the hunters according to me has to be to save these animals. Because they are rare, they are beautiful and because of the privilege that such kind of animals could be met in Bulgaria. And it is really mad if such kinds of animals disappear from the world. I think that it is just stupid. There is also National Forestry with its departments in all regions of Bulgaria, in all big towns, in each municipality that is responsible for everything related to care and protection of these animals. They are responsible by law, but...

I: What else have you learnt about this problem during your participation in the project?

A: It is very difficult to help. That was what I have learnt. Firstly, because of the serious lack of interest in people and because of the lack of information about the problem. Secondly, if we speak concretely about Bulgaria, because of the lack of payment for the personnel. The work for this organisation is voluntary. There is no professional development there too. And this stops the majority of Bulgarians and just ... There always has to be some benefit for yourself. Such activity has never been accepted from a spiritual point of view or as satisfaction from the well done work. Always we have to have financial satisfaction but it doesn't exist in this case. From my point of view this is the biggest difficulty. Of course, the equipment of the center is also a problem. For instance, it is difficult to raise these kinds of birds in an appropriate way. They need a lot of space to fly.

I: If we think about the active citizen as a new role that we have to master gradually, because the situation in Bulgaria was different before, do you think that now it is important to develop it? And what have you actually learnt from your several months experience with it?

A: There is tremendous need of active citizens in Bulgaria. What I think is that the efforts that each one of us has to make in order to become socially active are actually minimal. As far as we speak about the concrete project there are many ways in which one can be of help to this project, to the organisation, and to the participants in it. The active citizen in Bulgaria according to me can participate everywhere. He has the opportunity to participate everywhere. It is not so difficult in order to give up from it. Each of us could be active citizen as minimum towards his surroundings. For instance, he can do that by cleaning the garbage from the streets. According to my understanding even such person could be thought as active citizen. Pragmatically speaking we have to help ourselves; there is no other that could help us. I think that it became clear enough that the state doesn't help us – ordinary citizens. And really if the people stir up a little bit and understand that they can help themselves this will bring change to a tremendous amount of things.

I: But what is the obstacle to stir up?

A: People's hibernation. (*He is laughing*) I can't ... (*He is laughing*)

I: Did you ever think about the reasons why there is no much people thinking like you? Because one can say 'I want to develop professionally now. There is a crisis and I have to survive somehow in it and my family is of biggest priority to me now. I couldn't care for anything else now'.

A: It is very easy to say 'I can't do this'. It is very easy to reconcile to the situation; it is very easy to stay and only complain. In my opinion these are the main reasons why Bulgarian rests in so passive position. But yet each person has to take even minimal effort. If you actually imagine the opportunity to sit in a pub and start complaining about you problems and compare it to the opportunity to hold your life in your hands and start fighting with the problems, the first one is really easier to do. More or less we are a nation that speaks lot and acts less. If we speak about certain stereotype imposed in the course of time than this could be another reason why things continue nowadays in the same way. And also current changes that require efforts from all of us but not so much control from

the state structures are perhaps an important factor too. Each one who lived in socialism knows that no matter what he does there is always a person on the top who will appoint him somewhere or will help him somehow. Actually he knows that it is not necessary to take so serious or big efforts for his personal prosperity because there is always an easy alternative there. The bad thing is that nowadays such alternatives became less available. You have to work hard for yourself now. And I think that when it comes to the pinch people will do this. But now we have to wait and to see... (*ironically*). Because at the moment it is difficult to meet someone that grasps his problems but not just complains of them. For instance, it is difficult to meet person who declares that he hates dirty streets and in the same time does clean the area around the entrance of his house or the rubbish around his place. So it is much more difficult for such kind of person to do something for such serious problems if they don't touch his satisfaction or personal interest. The project with the birds is just like this. Rare or not these birds don't touch you personally. In order to help a stranger or an animal in our case, in order to engage yourself you have to be able to experience some sympathy towards these birds, to love animals or perhaps to have some kind of 'civic instinct'.

I: Where could such 'instinct' develop? Who has to teach you or teaches you?

A: I think that the most appropriate place is the primary and secondary school. And, of course, the family. But the problem now is that in most of the families in Bulgaria such an instinct is not present in the parents too. So if we think strategically the most appropriate alternative is the secondary school. This is the time when each person becomes aware of his role of citizen, starts to think about himself as a part of one big system and understands that everything is related to everyone. And I think that if we have to learn this and to develop it this is the secondary school that is the most appropriate alternative for this.

I: Since it seems that the civic role is very important for you ...

A: Extremely important, yes.

I: ... do you think that the university can have some role in such task? Is it able in this stage of personal development of the young person to support such purpose as you mentioned above?

A: Yes. Definitely the university could help in this process. But it would rather help with its further development and orientation than in its initiation. The university and the people there are more or less grown up yet. Although not fully developed, although still studying still they are old enough, they are major and they have yet stable personalities, ideas and ... and ...

I: And values.

A: And values, of course. Exactly. And the university would rather help to orient in what area to implement these ideas and values or in what direction to develop them further than to begin developing them yet.

I: But how to relate to those people that has no such kind of values like you?

A: Those people who think that ...

I: That they don't feel such need to participate. That think that this is not your problem but problem of someone else.

A: (*He is laughing*)

I: Do you know such kind of people, students? Do you have colleagues of yours that think in this way?

A: Yes, I know many of them. In Bulgaria it is not difficult to know people like them. (*He is laughing*) Very common phenomenon.

I: How do you relate to them?

A: To such kind of people? I think that the easiest thing to do as a first step could be to show them the problems. To show them, to open their eyes. To open their eyes about for instance how dirty are the streets in Sofia. And how children have no place to play indeed. And how such birds, speaking about the project, are under fire, are killed, are stuffed, are exterminated day by day and in what degree such birds disappear. I don't know but perhaps each person when telling him about this kind of birds he is informed about them enough yet in order to understand what the problem is. He just doesn't recognise how serious this problem is. And if we can in some way show them this seriousness and even if we can show them how this concerns each of them personally, it could warm them up. More or less. The very idea to include such projects as part of their lives, as an important part of their lives, could be the most appropriate way to convince them that they also have role and participation in this process.

I: What do you think about the course that you passed through? In what way it was helpful to you? What could be done in addition in order to refine it?

A: This course is extremely helpful for the implementation of your personal ideas, projects and connects you with other people that have similar to yours views and projects. This course can really help you to develop this 'instinct' and these values and to find followers. It helps you even with your personal interests in a form of projects. Unfortunately the course is still in an initial stage of its development and has to be developed further. For instance, if there is an additional course or this course is two, three or even more semesters long than it could give you more time to engage in a big group of people with common ideas and will be twice more useful than now. If we have had one more semester for our project we will be able to engage further much more people with its development. And to show to other people that are not part of this course how minimal are the efforts that we needed in order to perform it and how much it helps to so many other people, animals, areas and so on and so forth. And I think that the course is amazing. Amazing in terms of really being able to open your eyes. It really helps you to start thinking about things that doesn't concern you personally, that you could never meet in your everyday life, that you even could not be informed about. But in the same time this course helps you to really understand the very idea, the very idea of helping people, organisations, areas, animals that really doesn't concern you in any way. So, if the course could develop further it could be many times more helpful according to me. And it could help to all specialties in the university because now it is related to the students in the Liberal Arts programme. I am

speaking here about each of the ordinary citizens despite of their professional engagement, despite of their subject of study if they are students.

I: I understand. In some universities the activities like this are organized in special centers where students are offered concrete social projects or where they could implement their own projects. In our discussion in the class you suggested that such projects be funded and students also receive academic credits for their work too.

A: Yes. Of course as usual personal interest helps. It will help more people to engage. Concretely in Bulgaria people always will look for their personal interest. And for the students credits are one good personal interest. It is minimal but I am sure it will help. As for the development of this course as an independent center or programme I think that this would be great. It is great also because there are people that want to fully engage with such work. For instance, I can proudly say that I personally could not engage with such work constantly. Since I have other interests and values. Nevertheless there are enough people that are interested in it and are eager to be part of it. I think that it could be great to inform them about the existence of such programme or project.

I: What do you mean when saying that you have other values in order to engage fully with such helping activities? Please, explain it to me.

A: Well, I am a person that when engaging with something engages fully. But I am attracted also by my other developments, professional developments. And they don't fit very well with projects with bigger scope.

I: I understand.

A: What I am telling is that I could be more suitable for short-term projects or for projects that won't require my total dedication. Just my professional development is directed more or less to a different area and if we don't speak about active citizens but of fully engaged people – for instance, in ecology or in social work – who help other people, I couldn't engage in such a degree for a longer time.

I: One of the tensions between active citizen's role and professional role concerns the degree to which one can make balance between them – to be socially active when in the same time following his professional career. Some people argue that they want to develop now professionally and have no time for anything else to do. It takes time.

A: Yes, undoubtedly there could be such conflict but it will concern big projects that require person's total dedication. However when we speak about the active citizen as a normal citizen than he can do something small with the purpose to help others and I don't think that the lack of time is good enough excuse for such people. What I saw, being myself in the role of an active citizen in this project, was that I had no difficulty to combine these activities with my other interests. The time and the effort that I have invested in this project don't compromise my professional development at all.

I: You are very emotional when speaking about the things that have happened during the course. What does this project change in you personally? Is there something new that you have discovered about yourself?

A: Yes, I discovered that I devote very small amount of my time to the others, to the other people's problems. Of course, the excessive engagement, if we speak about emotional engagement, is also a problem. It will upset you. Emotionally. In relation to the finances and the resources I usually allocate too much for myself instead for the support of cause like this in the project. The satisfaction at the end of such kind of projects is tremendous. The joy, even very personal and internal, is really very big. And it, I think, couldn't be replaced with the material luxury that you can experience if investing your time and money in it. What I have learnt about myself is that such kind of things really gives pleasure to me; that I am indeed ready to help with pleasure and that I have to participate much more in such kind of initiatives.

I: Where this readiness to help others comes from? Could be seen there any connection with your family? Your parents, your relatives, what is their attitude towards your position?

A: I have taken a bit from bought of them. My mother is very compassionate person, very sensitive one. She can be easily touched by such initiatives. Perhaps during the years of my growth she has been able to hand down to me part of her engagement with the world. She taught me to be compassionate and to care about other people not only about myself. And my father showed me that the too great engagement with such kind of activities could become harmful to you. He taught me to distinguish between what is my personal problem and what is problem of the others and to find the boundary between them.

I: What is the danger if you couldn't find it?

A: According to me the danger is enormous. Enormous from the point of view that there are people that easily devolve their problems on you and they clutch at you in such a way that you couldn't even get a breath. I of course don't mean here the conscious abuse of your concern but the unconscious one. If you couldn't meet their expectations they can get upset or become negative towards you. This is what I mean by 'not being engaged too much with them'.

I: Or to know in what way to engage with them.

A: Or to know the appropriate way to help them when in the same time not leaving them with unrealistic expectations.

I: Or making them dependent on you for a long time.

A: Yes, exactly. I am speaking exactly about such kind of dependency and my fears for it.

I: The university could be thought as a small community. Can we say that this community raises such culture of care about the other and promotes activities like this between students or it is more individualistically oriented?

A: Well, I would make distinction here between the particular programmes. The existence of such culture depends on them. There are programmes, courses and modules here that are ready to support problem solving in groups and consolidation of the efforts of different colleagues towards a common aim. In the same time there are activities in the university that require individual achievements. So it is fifty-fifty. It is possible for the university to teach you, to guide you in such consolidation of efforts and people. For instance, it could

help you to understand that no matter what does one person looks like he can have the same attitudes and views like yours. Or it could consolidate people with different economic status in a way that will not make them feel uncomfortable. So yes, the role of the university in such kind of things is extremely big.

I: Does what you describe now really happen?

A: Absolutely.

I: What is your experience with it?

A: My experience shows that it happens. During the two years of my study in the university I have made friendships and have related in different projects, exams, course works and etc. to people that frankly speaking I would never even stop and talk with.

I: I understand.

A: May be because of my first impression or because of their appearance, of the different social circles and groups that we belong to. So, personally speaking the university helped me to meet people very divers from me.

I: And probably to change your opinion towards them.

A: Yes. Absolutely. To change my opinion, my view of life. It helped me, it helped me a lot. That would be enough if you receive even only this from the university. I think that 40% of the success of the university is due to the social contacts that you create here. And for the students and for the people who decided to go to the university the development of social contacts has to be one of their main aims. This consolidation of different programmes and exchange between programmes and courses is really something very good. It is big success in the policy of New Bulgarian (*University*).

I: Good. Do you want to say something more on this topic that is important for you?

A: What I can only add is that the project that I engaged with showed me in what degree the Bulgarian has no commitment to the civic activities as a whole. And also the course, the colleagues, and the people that I worked with in the project helped me to understand that people are not aware, don't understand how easy it is to help to many people. That's what I needed to add and that get stuck in my mind. My negative experience was confirmed.

I: Thank you very much.

A: You are welcome.

THE END



### Appendix 8: Time Table of Interventions:

Year: / Intervention:	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Intervention 1:</b> Liberal Arts Program												
<b>Intervention 2:</b> Volunteering in the community course												
<b>Intervention 3:</b> Entrepr. & Caring Univ. Program												
<b>Intervention 4:</b> Students Tutoring Project												
Current Research Study												
<b>Related events:</b>	NBU mission and vision development		Salzburg Seminar		Access of BG in EU	Crisis in BIHR	Admin. reform in NBU	World econ. crisis				Tutoring introd. in NBU Strategy