

# Neoliberalism, Economism and Higher Education

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## FOREWORD

This book originated from a series of talks conducted by its editor during the last five years. These conversations were precipitated by an intellectual desire to understand and explain a number of complex, overlapping or otherwise closely related tendencies, often worrisome, of our present (post)modern culture, tendencies often included under the label of globalisation. Some fifty distinguished and internationally renowned social thinkers and experts whose writings I happened to know well were invited to share their insights into some of the most persistent and dangerous cultural problems of our times. Sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, urbanists, architects, ecologists and educators were asked to comment on some of the questions posed by the present editor. Most of them agreed and the outcome was several dozens of exchanges first published by Lithuania's leading cultural monthly journal *Kulturos barai*, (by way of adhering to a wise maxim, *think globally, act locally*). While conducting this series of talks, however, I had a feeling that despite the remarkably deep interest the readers of a Lithuanian cultural media might have, these conversations deserved to reach a wider, international, audience because of their topicality. Originally conducted in English, they were waiting to be mediated further. On the other hand, the form of conversations was seen as an advantage, allowing the individuals involved to transgress the boundaries of a standard academic essay focused on one particular issue. As a result, a collection of some twenty—three conversations was published in 2017 under the title *Rethinking Modernism and the Built Environment*, and is here followed by a companion volume focused on higher education and its connections with the dominating discourses of current economics and the surprisingly aggressive and often winning politics of neoliberalism.

This volume attempts to inquire into the discourse of economism and neoliberalism as well as their “avatars”—the cult of efficiency, competition, ranking, etc., and how this discourse shapes the present reality of higher education in a variety of seemingly distant contexts with different histories. Though I would perhaps tend to agree with one of my conversation partners that the present course in higher education might be irreversible, I still maintain a modest yet enduring belief in the power of reasoning and rational critique. Moreover, the current economic regime