



Rosalind M. O. Pritchard, Matthias Klump & Ulrich Teichler (Eds.) (2015): Diversity and Excellence in Higher Education. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Hungarian Educational Research Journal
2017, Vol. 7(2) 209–212
© The Author(s) 2017
<http://herj.lib.unideb.hu>
Debrecen University Press



DOI:10.14413/HERJ/7/2/13

Jozef Hvorecky⁴⁶

The reviewed book is a collection of thirteen selected contributions at the conference Higher Education: Diversity and Excellence for Society held as the 2014 Annual Forum of EAIR (European Higher Education Society) by the University of Duisburg-Essen. Its subtitle *Can the Challenges be Reconciled?* points to the key controversy – the diversity and excellence often contradict each other and can hardly be combined without difficulties.

The book consists of Preface, Editors' letter and 13 chapters. The preface discusses the conference, its development and the history of its venue. Compare to it, Editors' letter could easily mixed up with a conference contribution because it identifies and describes the current state of higher education worldwide as a consequence of its outbreak during the 20th century. In its beginning, the universities served for "elite higher education" addressing less than 15% of population. Then, the idea of "mass higher education" advanced and in the most developed countries it has reached 40%. Today, the concept of "universal higher education" raises with the presumed proportion of students over 50%. As a result, the traditional university system has been destabilized in three ways:

1. A drift from "academic" status of graduates to more civic one.
2. Shorter, less formal study programs appear as a reflection to knowledge society.
3. More youth from underprivileged groups enrolls.

Thirteen chapters discuss ways how these changes affect university lives. They share the leitmotiv is the universities can be studied as other organizations" – the idea many academicians still view as a heresy.

Peter Scott in *Markets and Managerialism* analyses what benefits could applications of managerial concepts bring to the higher education. He identifies four relevant ways in which markets and managerialism act: greater institutional autonomy, cost-sharing (e.g. via tuition), growing prominence of rankings, entrepreneurial view to universities. They

⁴⁶ School of Management, Bratislava (Slovakia), jhvorecky@vsm.sk

lead to higher flexibility in controlling the universities but not necessarily to higher quality of education and research. The author criticize “brand wars” – the fights between universities resulting into their isolation because the shared outcomes also contribute to higher ranking of the competitors. At the same time, he calls for diversification through the inclusion of less socially advantaged groups and age groups different from fresh high-school graduates and through the addition of more vocational and applied subjects. The paper ends with a conclusion that it is misleading to treat elite universities and mass higher institutions as linear opposites; they should rather be complements.

Scott’s paper is a good introduction to all remaining, more subject-specific papers. Four next ones expand his ideas by pointing to various aspects of the “university as a subject of external management”. Christiane Gaehtgens in *Does Size Matter? The example of the “Excellence Initiative” and its Impact on Smaller Universities in Germany* describes an initiative introduced by German federal and states governments in order to raise “institutional excellence” of smaller (meaning not the largest and not the smallest) universities in the country. To do so, they invested 4.6 million € during 10 years (2008 - 2017). The initiative started in 2006 on a presumption that more than two or three in Germany can climb among the best 50 World universities. One can hardly decide about the initiative’s outcomes. In the 2006 “Shanghai” ranking, first three German university were 51st, 54th and 66th with total of 40 in the whole ranking. In the 2016 ranking list, the best two share the 47th position; the third one is 51th and the total dropped down to 38. One can only hypothesize whether the gap between the best ones and the rest remained the same or is growing. In any case, the initiative’s outcomes are not convincing. They rather demonstrate that just holding the positions it very expensive.

Göran Melin in *University Merger Processes* studies the university expansion from another perspective. His described method of growth considers their growth is a result of a merger and shows four case studies done in Sweden between 2002 and 2014. The work done before and after the merger, staff and student attitudes, the position of the government, local and regional stakeholders, results and effect of the mergers, main challenges and success factors are identified. Three mergers were success, one produced mixed results. Melin shows that the positive outcomes require the staff and student involvement as they reduce their frustration and minimize tensions between the partners. In general, the less time is spent to the merger preparation, the longer time will be needed for the removal of bad feelings.

Carol Frances in her paper *The Dangerous Role of Economists in Shaping American Higher Education Policy* points to dangers to which “too economical” views can lead:

- High tuition generates a nation of debtors.
- The debt burden contributes to income inequality because those who do not need to borrow have a better starting position after their graduation.
- The differences reflect the race and ethnicity demography.

- For-profit institutions of higher education are often driven by their profit than educational values.

That's why Frances recommends European universities not to follow the American educational aspects in all directions and rather to look to any way of their financing.

Ashley Macrander solves in her paper *Spatial Injustice in South Africa*. She describes historical roots of different access of various race and ethnic groups and shows that the end of the apartheid has not meant the end of other forms of separation – now based on other factors. Her evidence is abundant and convincing.

Luís Carvalho studies the Portuguese students' preferences in Merit and Student Selection. He analyses the academicians' point of view to massification. His result shows that universities promote distorted (too) meritocratic selection without considering candidates' potential and should end up into a reform of admission process.

Ray Franke in his *Why the Status Quo Isn't good enough* solves a similar problem – universal access does not lead to an increase of educational attainment nor a decrease of societal inequality. Franke proposes a new conceptual model. Based on extensive data shows that obtaining a baccalaureate degree becomes a necessity for personal advancement and upward (societal) mobility and that current institutional practices contribute to existing inequities. He calls for finding "multiple avenues to reduce persistent gaps" i.e. broader diversity of universities.

Higher education as a way to decreasing societal inequities appears also in Tony Strike's *Improving Access to Postgraduate Study in England*. Only about 25% of graduated Bachelors promotes to Master programs – very small number compared to the continental countries like Germany or Italy. The author shows that a portion of the problem is caused by a low information of students and recommends higher engagement of benefactors and employers in its solution.

Pepka Boyadjieva and Petya Ilieva-Trichkova in their *Institutional Diversity and Graduate Employability* turn their attention to a relationship between the Bologna process and graduates' employability. An additional value of their results comes from the fact that they show the situation in a post-communist country including extremely low salaries of fresh graduates as well as disappearing differences between quality of traditional public universities and relatively new private ones.

The changing societal role of universities must also be reflected in its internal structures. Faive authors – Barbara Ehrenstorfer, Stefanie Sterrer, Silke Freymann, Regina Aichinger and Martina Gaisch – analyze the function of middle managers, in particular department heads in this process. As its title *Multi-tasking Talents? Roles and Competencies of Middle-level Manager-academics at Two Austrian Higher Education Institutions* indicates they have studied their roles at a research-oriented university and a university of applied sciences. They showed that they substantially differ due to

different atmosphere: very competitive at the former one, and more professionally and task oriented at the latter one.

Ton Kallenberg addresses the same group in *Academic Middle Managers Shaping the Landscape between Policy and Practice*. His question is: Do they contribute to the university strategy and how? He concludes that they have a lot of tacit knowledge allowing them to influence the landscape between policy of the university and its educational practice. They do it by accomplishing four roles: Guard (of duties completion), Guide (of his/her team), Diplomat (forming visions), and Constructor (of vision goals).

The educational systems in post-communist countries are in need of transformation. Likely the most complex has been accomplished in Romania. Norbert Sabic interviewed several experts and presents their opinions on it in *Governance through Transparency Tools*. He shows that the massification combined with rewards for research excellence leads to “fake research universities” because excellence in teaching was not nearly rewarding as improving research input. The quality of teaching declined even in good traditional universities. In fact, the desired effect is still far away and the transformation requires a further correction to get out of the “national grid of classes and ranks.”

René Krempkow studies a comparable problem in *Can Performance-Based Funding Enhance Diversity in Higher Education Institutions?* He is interested in finding ranking criteria which might facilitate it because “performance-based rankings mostly rate research success higher than the completion of teaching tasks”. He presents a model that could, if applied, also express added value to students, i.e. the difference between their expected and gained knowledge. As Krempkow underlines, improved quality and the enhancement of competences are key objectives of the Bologna process.

All by all, the book is a high-quality information source for everyone interested in the University Management and I highly recommend its reading.