

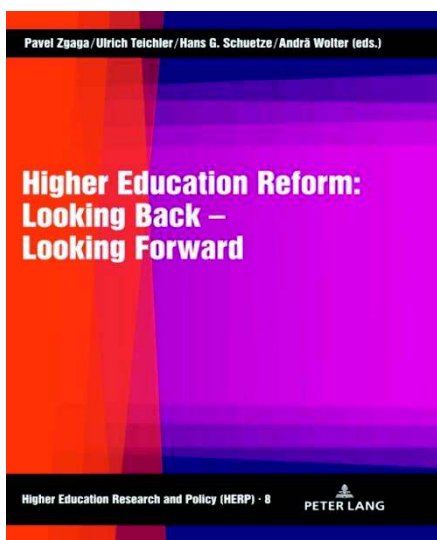
BOOK REVIEW

**PAVEL ZGAGA / ULRICH TEICHLER / HANS G. SCHUETZE / ANDRÄ WOLTER
(Editors) HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM: LOOKING BACK – LOOKING
FORWARD**

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Reviewed work:

Higher Education Reform: Looking Back – Looking Forward

Pavel Zgaga, Ulrich Teichler, Hans
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Dealing with a current topic of worldwide interest – after its first publication in 2015 – *Higher Education Reform: Looking Back – Looking Forward* has come in 2019 to a second revised edition by Peter Lang Publishing House. The four editors: P. Zgaga, professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of Ljubljana, U. Teichler, professor at the International Centre for Higher Education Research at the University of Kassel, Germany, H. G. Schuetze, professor emeritus of Higher Education at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada and Andrä Wolter, professor for Higher Education Research at Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany, gathered beside their own views, experiences and conclusions, the research results and ideas of an international group of professionals participating in workshops upon higher education reform in the period 2003-2015, into the present collective volume offering both retrospection and a prospective view.

The book is divided into 5 sections comprising 18 chapters preceded by the editors' introductory essay about *Reforming Higher Education for a Changing World*. Speaking about the historical and social changes academic environment has been going through, they notice the worldwide marketisation of higher education, the

governance of educational institutions based on cost-benefit calculations which turned students from 'learners' into 'customers'. The topics dealt with on the pages of this monograph are: learning and teaching in higher education; financing and quality assurance; change in governance; mass education vs. equity and equality in higher education; internationalisation and academic mobility; lifelong learning and higher education and others.

Parallel to the massification of higher education other worldwide trends can be noted, such as the need for completing public funds by additional private funds of different sources, as state investments in this sector proved not to be as rentable as hoped for, the 'transnationalisation' of higher education by the Bologna Process, or the internationalisation by increasing academic mobility promoted by the European Commission.

The first part of the monograph, section A, consists of three essays concerned with the context reforms have taken place in and the directions they are going into.

In his study Ulrich Teichler contemplates about different scenarios of higher education "convinced that researchers have to be even more active than actors and other experts in deliberating possible future of higher education." (p. 31) and foresee potential problems in this field. In this sense he analyses different research projects like that of Martin Trow in the 70s of the past century, the projects called 'Higher Education Forward Look' in 2005 or 'Higher Education to 2030', coordinated by OECD in 2008-2009 and the Bologna Process with its aim of creating a 'European Higher Education Area' by 2010. By doing so, he points out several scenarios regarding the future of higher education: 'continuity of trends', 'the glass is half empty and half full', 'changing fashions' or 'completely new', to list only a few of them, and that of graduates of the tertiary educational process in the age when supply continuously exceeds demand. His concern is not only for quantitative issues (number of enrolled students and graduates), but also for structural ones like the fashionable terms of present days: employability of graduates, internationalisation of educational institutions and organisational topics referring to governance, decision-making and assessment of teaching and research respectively. Going through the possible scenarios and dealing with the questions they might raise, the conclusions are rather pessimistic: "the current preoccupation with ranks at the top suggests that higher education is afraid of a knowledge society in terms of a 'highly educated society' (Teichler, 1991), (...) striving for excellence and serving almost everybody." (p. 47)

In the second study Peter Scott looks for answers to the dilemma, if the turn of mass into market higher education systems represents a transition or rather a paradigm shift, "a false dawn"? According to him two possible scenarios emerge from the present state of affairs: going on with higher education in the way and direction it was set on by mass higher education, or a total rupture with all the norms and practices it has initiated. Analysing the history and impact of mass higher education, it becomes obvious that it "has not delivered the social justice it was once imagined it could" (p. 55), as the rate of socially unprivileged classes to that of the upper stratum hasn't changed considerably. To the negative connotation of mass higher education contribute aspects like growing unaffordability for state systems, the dilemma regarding decrease in academic standards and the discrepancy between educational output and the demands of the labour market. The questions for Scott are: does market higher education, evolved mainly as a

result of 'the neo-liberal turn' (the transition from 'welfare' to 'market state' and consequently the introduction of universal standard level of taxation instead of different tax thresholds) on one hand and the natural socially, culturally, technologically conditioned transition of mass higher education on the other, represent a better alternative and will it last or there will be a return to mass higher education? The author's conclusion is:

As a result, while for neo-liberal enthusiasts, 'market' higher education is likely to prove to be a false dawn, a disappointment, for the majority it may be prove (sic!) to be less a decisive paradigm shift than another stage in the evolutionary development of modern higher education systems. (p. 67)

The concluding essay of section A signed by Pavel Zgaga deals with higher education reforms in Southeast Europe, especially in the Western Balkans minding both global trends and local variations and offering introspection to the historical, socio-political, religious and economic conditioning of higher education system and institutions in this region. His findings are based on a survey conducted at sixteen universities in eight countries of the respective region. Generally three waves of reforms can be identified in the analysed post-communist countries, the first one being characterised mostly by a high level of freedom in terms of control and quality assurance, as he calls it "(...) the mushrooming of non-accredited private higher education institutions" (p. 74). The second wave of reforms occurred in the legislation under the auspices of the common European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Process, but in many cases it didn't lead to profound changes in the system, admittedly quite impossible overnight. The third wave brought a whole series of often contradictory decisions and laws adopted only for the sake of showing some change to previous governmental regulations. Private education institutions and tuition fees appeared, being regulated in different countries of the studied region in different ways. Even the number of public institutions and students increased and the variety of languages of study was enlarged. However, privatisation in the domain of education is seen with distrust and skepticism, as not resulting from market trends but being politically induced, in more countries of the research "The private sector did not bring investment to higher education, these institutions have been established on the principle 'take the money and run'" (p. 82) - is the opinion of one interviewee in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 2012 conducted CEPS survey.

Coming back upon the question formulated in the title of the study *How to Gain Global Connectivity While Retaining Respect for Local Variations?*, the attempt to achieve unity in European education by fostering diversity of different regions seems to be the only solution.

Section B comprising four contributions and an introductory note by Hans G. Schuetze deals with reforming higher education and trends in it in Europe and Asia respectively. According to Marek Kwiek, the author of the first essay, *Reforming European Universities: The Welfare State as a Missing Context*, reforms in higher education should be interpreted in the context of the reform of the welfare state (reform of pension and health care systems, as well) and in line with it. Otherwise:

The myth of exceptionalism of higher education among other public sector institutions and of its immunity to global public-sector reform trends increases the chances that higher education will be reformed mostly from the outside rather than mostly from the inside. (p. 101)

The conclusion is that public sectors, registering a harsh competition for subsidies among one another, need worldwide more and more private sources of funding, the state offering to these actors wider autonomy in exchange.

Shinichi Yamamoto analyses in his study, entitled *Higher Education reform: Why Did It Start and Has It Ended? An Analysis of the Japanese Case*, the causes – of socio-political and demographic nature – leading to higher education reform in Japan and the stages of it. Throughout its history, dating back to the end of the 19th century, Japanese tertiary education has undergone more waves of reforms, arriving at the beginning of the 21st century to the reforms still in process induced by the decrease in student number and change in preferences. He lists a few of these reforms, like the introduction of periodical evaluation at least every seven years, turning all national universities into independent legal corporations having some more autonomy but less public funding, improving quality of teaching by achieving supplementary funds called competitive fund, underlining the drawback of this continuous reforming in the impossibility to implement a stable and sustainable educational policy.

Truly meaningful reforms of the Japanese higher education system should be conceived with longer and broader views and perspectives than are presently popular. (p. 141)

In the next study, signed by W. James Jacob and John N. Hawkins, the authors identify the following five trends in Chinese higher education as sources for opportunities and challenges in the future: structural reforms, finance, continuing educational programmes, mobility and, respectively, quality assurance and assessment. Regarding structural reforms two main issues are presented, namely changing the gao kao (national entrance examination) and the independence and governance of higher education institutions. Continuous and lifelong learning serves in China professional aims and contributes to the country's economic growth. In the authors' opinion in the field of internationalisation and mobility Chinese need to keep balance not to lose the specific character of Chinese education and the same is valid for the relation between internal and external evaluation and quality assurance.

In the next essay, Andrä Wolter is interested in finding out if massification of higher education has led to diversity of the group of students in Europe. After some preliminary considerations regarding the terminology used – diversity/heterogeneity – he analyses the structure of student body regarding gender, age, the proportion of part-time studies, non-traditional way of access to higher education, educational and social background as a European average compared to data related to Germany, to draw the conclusion that there is no correlation between expansion and the representation of diverse social groups in higher education. "There is no automatism between massification and heterogeneity – neither (sic!) in Germany nor in other European countries." (p. 178)

Having the same structure as the previous section (three studies accompanied by an introductory note by one of the authors of the essays), part C is dedicated to the issue of academic freedom. Based on the Humboldtian ideas and giving voice to his worries about the present and the future of academic freedom, Rolf von Lüde, the author of the initiating study, tries first to define the essence of it, as it is formulated in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2002):

(...) the freedom of teachers and students to teach, study and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure. Its basic elements include the freedom of teachers to inquire into any subject that evokes their intellectual concern; to present their findings to their students, colleagues and others; to publish their data and conclusions without control or censorship; and to teach in the manner they consider professionally appropriate. For students, the basic elements include the freedom to study subjects that concern them and to form conclusions for themselves and express their opinions. (p. 197)

Economisation and 'marketisation' of higher education leading to a 'New Managerialism' jeopardise academic freedom and are contradictory to the Humboldtian idea of non-utilitarianism of universities, the author concludes. While von Lüde's concern has been of German universities, Rosalind M. O. Prichard offers in her essay insight into English higher education system being less keen on academic freedom – as it is not protected by a written constitution – and more enthusiastic about marketisation of the academic environment, and William Bruneau militates for academic freedom in North American universities. By analysing "the recent history of attack-and defence" (p. 232) of academic freedom, Bruneau also considers managerialism to present a peril for it. Still the resonance of the study is optimistic:

Waves of this kind [managerialist ones - n. a.] have come and gone in the past century (...). Behind them is a still larger contrary wave, the growing force of the teaching-learning-research-minded university, working openly and accountably in an open society. (...) That is why one can and should speak of academic freedom ... in post-managerial times. (p. 245-246)

The essays of section D have a view upon the American continent analysing the private higher education sector in Mexico, the USA and Canada. Besides a set of common characteristics, it definitely shows differences in extension and image in the public opinion in the three countries. After summing up the topics of the different studies, Germán Álvarez Mendiola makes, first in co-authorship with Mitzi Danae Morales Montes and in the next essay with Wietse de Vries, his own contribution to the chapter by presenting trends in private higher education and the evaluation system applied in Mexico. Surprisingly there are not the same quality standards imposed on the public and private education sector, consequently private academic institutions offer a quite low quality instruction given by poorly qualified teachers mainly to high costs. Still they are facing an increasing demand for enrolment. On the other hand the newly created assessment rules and procedures for the public higher education sector based on financial incentives

have led to a “whole new culture of proof and accountability” (p. 283), as professors have to prove their merits and advance in teaching and above all research by diplomas signed by different officials. In spite of all these there is no evidence for better teaching methods resulting in a higher graduation rate of students or higher international ranking of Mexican academic institutions with respect to research and its outcomes.

US and Canadian higher education policies are analysed in the next study signed by Hans G. Schuetze underlining the main difference between the two countries, namely the large extension of for-profit private higher education institutions in the US and the marginal position of the whole private education sector in Canada.

Section E includes five essays and an introductory note by Andrä Wolter concerning lifelong learning and its relation to higher education, as in some countries this makes part of higher education strategies, whereas in other parts of the world it is meant to take place outside academia.

The author of the first study, Ulrich Teichler, offers introspection into the evolution of a so called quaternary education and lifelong learning in higher education since the 1970s labeled as ‘adult education’, ‘continuing (professional) education’, ‘recurrent education’, ‘further education’, ‘lifelong education’, concluding that expectations towards these new concepts were once more much higher than the actual development.

Anna Spexard analyses in the next study lifelong learning policies issued by the European Commission, the Council of the E.U. and based on them by higher education institutions and their implementation in Europe. In concordance with the directives of the E.U. and of the ministries of education, academic institutions are in charge of facilitating lifelong learning at higher educational level by recognising previous learning even if not having happened within institutional frameworks and creating alternative learning paths. Analysing the European situation, it can be generally stated that policies and strategies regarding lifelong learning, like widening student participation from different socio-economic, national, racial etc. groups, flexibilisation of educational programmes, alternative ways of access to higher education exist in the whole European Higher Education Area, but their practical implementation is far from being complete.

The next study, signed by Maria Slowey, deals with one aspect of LLL (lifelong learning) and widening participation, namely the age of potential candidates introducing the notion ‘age friendly university’. According to research results, without intervention at institutional, national and international level, the intergenerational educational gap remains constant, when not even increases, due to higher participation rates of younger people in tertiary education, their increased likeliness to continue their education some time later and the growth in life expectancy and consequently in the number of elder people. Such an example for intervention at institutional level is the pilot programme of Dublin City University in creating an Age Friendly University where one of the leading principles is what one could label as good practice, namely an intergenerational learning programme, where different generations can learn from and offer support to one another.

In the next study, Andrä Wolter analyses the possibilities of opening up higher education for new target groups in Germany aiming to find out reasons for its delay and for the reluctance of higher education institutions in realising it. Under the umbrella term lifelong learners he identifies groups like: second chance learners –

most of them not admitted to higher education in the traditional way – , equity groups – socially disadvantaged people – , deferrers – not continuing with higher education directly upon leaving school – , recurrent students coming back to higher education for a second degree, returners taking up their studies again, refreshers seeking to update their skills and learners in later life comprising mainly retired persons interested in non-credit educational programmes.

His recommendation for the evolution of continuing education refer to the “formats and provisions of initial higher education” which “should be more conducive to the specific expectations and demands of lifelong learners with a particular educational and professional biography before taking up studies” (p. 410) and point out to even lifting the traditional differentiation between initial and continuing higher education.

The topic of the last study in this collective volume is massive open online courses (MOOCs) and their rapid growth in the academic area. In spite of being a very up-to-date notion and probably a largely known acronym, still it would have needed extending upon even in the title (MOOCs: Unbundling in Higher Education) to assure overall understanding. By catching up the idea of Anant Agarwal, the founder of the first online academia, Maureen W. McClure presents MOOCs as a means for total flexibilisation and cost optimisation of higher education.

Today, why is it that every student has to learn in college when they are 18 (sic!)? Why four years? How about unbundling time? Imagine that a student comes into college having done their (sic!) first year of college as MOOCs and online – possible even for free... They spend two years on campus, and then rather than spending the fourth year on campus, they go outside, get a job and become continuous learners for the rest of their lives (...) (Agarwal, 2015 after McClure, p. 426),

but warns at the same time of possible traps, as well, by concluding “What a great investment in the security needed for generational succession. Proceed with caution.” (p. 428)

Going through the whole book, there are some content-based and form-related conclusions to be drawn: higher education and its institutions face to a great extent, in spite of cultural, geographical, socio-political differences all over the world, the same problems, and, furthermore, *Higher Education Reform: Looking Back – Looking Forward*, being a collection of mainly theoretical studies, is not a book for a public looking for practical solutions or a series of best practices.

As regarding formal aspects, a proofreading or review process would have been of great help to avoid typing errors: “which explains the reasons for the *continous* changes of the for-profit sector.” (p. 306), “Third, we note an *ancreasing* use of the term ‘open” (p. 337), misformulations, grammar issues: “what does their role *means* for the impact on the character of teaching, (...)” (p. 46), lack of accuracy: “It is not surprising that the Kosovo Accreditation (sic!) Agency (KAA) was one of the first countries in the region (...)” (p. 84), the use of colloquial language: “KAA also joined the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, but was recently kicked out (...)” (p. 91), or being incomprehensible: “The quality assurance issue of how much should be directed by the MOE as compared with external, nongovernmental agencies remains an important debate topic” (p. 152) – MOE staying probably for the Ministry of Education, just to mention a few of the shortcomings, and thus to reinforce the overall prestige of the publication.