

Towards a Multiversity? Universities between Global Trends and National Traditions

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Universities are currently undergoing profound changes, and this on a worldwide scale. In order to delineate the common characteristics of the heterogeneous, at times even contradictory transformations, a variety of labels are in circulation, from “the post-modern university” (Smith/Webster 1997) to “the enterprise university” (Marginson/Considine 2000). The former term, however, is too broad, while the latter term is too narrow to grasp the many-sided changes taking place in universities. Therefore, we have chosen to use the term “multiversity”, which was originally coined in 1963. In a groundbreaking contribution to a more general understanding of universities, the former president of the University of California (UC), Clark Kerr, developed this concept.¹ Seeking to describe the reality of his university, which was marked by strong internal differentiation and heterogeneity, Kerr argued that its outstanding feature was its diversity. In this way, in the second half of the 20th century, the “multiversity” came to challenge the “idea of the university” as classically developed by Wilhelm von Humboldt and Cardinal Newman in the 19th century.

1 As provost of the UC Berkeley between 1952 and 1958 and president of the entire UC system between 1958 and 1967, Kerr was also a pioneer with regard to the implementation of a management approach towards his university (see Soo/Carson 2004). In doing so, he was well aware of the organizational and institutional specificities of research universities, which differ markedly from the context of a business corporation. Currently, one can witness a global trend towards universities as managed organizations (see Musselin, this volume; Krücken/Meier 2006). For this debate, Kerr’s early insights are still of great importance.

While Kerr's insights were limited to the regional and national embeddedness of the American research university, we assume that there is a worldwide trend towards the multiversity being shaped by globalizing trends in higher education that are transforming national systems and individual university organizations alike. At first sight, the parallel with Kerr may seem odd. After all, the global embeddedness of universities could be seen as leading towards standardization instead of pluralization. However, transnational trends and role models do not diffuse in a vacuum. Instead, they take place in specific national and organizational settings. This process of locally adapting transnational trends – aptly labeled “glocalization” by Robertson 1995 – leads to creative deviations and incomplete adaptations. From this perspective, the “either/or” choice in traditional research on diffusion processes – the idea that innovations coming from outside are either adopted or not – is not a viable model in our case. Universities are best understood as historical, time-dependent systems that are strongly embedded in their own national and organizational histories. The “new multiversity” emerges because universities all over the world devise diverse solutions in the face of global trends that may appear standard, but that are never standardized in their effects, as they are adapted, incorporated or resisted by universities that are ultimately rooted in particular times and places.

In our book we seek to outline the contours of the “new multiversity” in three parts: first, by setting forth some theoretical approaches for understanding the contemporary university, its trajectories and main characteristics; second, by emphasizing the role state regulation and new forms of governance play in the current transformation process; and third, by examining university-industry relations, particularly the idea that the university is being partially commodified through more intensive ties with industry.

Part I: Universities in Modern Society. Towards a General Understanding

The papers in the first part focus on building a more general understanding of the role and specificity of universities in modern society. The bird's eye view taken by these papers differs strongly from our day-to-day experiences in academia, and in this, the papers are highly important contributions to a broader theoretical understanding of academia. Currently, both professors and students typically experience competitive pressures as a series of increasing, usually disagreeable personal pressures, for example, work overload and a shortage of resources. Insofar as

they emphasize increasingly difficult work and study conditions, such personal and short-term observations tend to be interpreted as implying that the university is in difficulty, even in a crisis. Yet, the theoretical contributions in this section remind us that the university is anything but a failure, particularly when compared with other institutions. Arguably, universities are more than ever central institutions of modern society. Historically, they have out-competed other formats of post-secondary education, and they tend to shape more and more occupations and careers. But why is this so? And does the university provide a distinctive organizational format within which teaching and research can evolve?

The chapters by David Frank and John Meyer and John Meyer and Evan Schofer offer a macro-sociological approach to explaining why the university institution, despite all its shortcomings and the frequent criticisms directed at it, is a long-term success story. The main point in the chapter by Frank and Meyer is that the university is a cultural model that enables the transformation of local into universal knowledge. In contrast to what is often assumed, the worldwide expansion of higher education and related transformations in universities are not a result of the need for specialized, highly skilled labor in an ever more differentiated society. Instead, global norms of universalism and empowered individualism are the driving-forces behind the historically unprecedented expansion of universities, especially rising university enrolment. Using comparative qualitative data, in particular, the course catalogues of Harvard University and the University of Tokyo from the 19th century until 2000, Frank and Meyer illustrate that an ever-growing number of subjects can be studied by an increasingly large university student body. Students, understood as empowered individuals, are seen as active participants in the study of the social and physical world. Moreover, as society increasingly focuses on the potential and worth of every individual, the expansion of the university student body is both concomitant with and an expression of universalizing norms fostering the basic human right to have access to higher education.

The subsequent chapter by Meyer and Schofer follows up on this argument by providing statistical evidence for the global expansion of universities. The authors first present data on the dramatic world-wide increase in higher education enrolment, especially since the 1960s. As this increase is not limited to specific continents or countries but is a phenomenon taking place on a global scale, the standard explanation that links this trend to the socio-economic demands of a knowledge society falls short. In particular, developing countries have experienced unprecedented growth in the numbers of universities as well as in the numbers of students attending them to the same extent as the economi-

cally developed ones have. Thus, the authors maintain that the expansion of higher education is embedded in a global, standardized model of the state. Educational systems are seen as playing a special role in fostering national development, as well as the related goals of economic growth and progress. The perceived societal benefits of higher education have acquired a myth-like quality. This has particular implications for European universities and state policies, of which the traditions of controlled and constrained access to tertiary education have increasingly come under pressure.

Both chapters provide explanations and evidence concerning the status of the university as a central societal institution. But, as the subsequent chapter in this section by Christine Musselin goes on to argue, universities are not only institutions which are granted legitimacy and resources from their social environments. Universities are also organizations with structures and processes that historically differ markedly from those of other organizations. While in many organizational analyses state bureaucracies and business firms were depicted as integrated and tightly coupled systems, universities were typically described as loosely coupled systems. This organizational specificity has increasingly come under pressure as universities are more often seen as “normal organizations” to which organizational solutions from other organizational contexts, especially business, and general concepts like New Public Management may be applied. Though these efforts may be fruitful at times, according to Musselin, universities are still specific organizations. This is due to the characteristics of their core tasks – research and teaching – which are inherently uncertain activities, and which can hardly be standardized. As the tasks in other organizations move towards a less predictable and clear-cut structure universities may serve as a model for other organizational contexts, though currently the university is mainly seen at the receiving end of the transfer of organizational concepts.

Part II: The Governance of Universities. Between State Regulations and Transnational Policy-Making

The second part of our book addresses the changing relationship between national and transnational policy-making in the field of higher education. Clearly demarcated national styles and systems, which have historically strongly shaped this field, are increasingly being put under pressure from a variety of sources. These sources include: the Bologna process in Europe, formally charged with the harmonization of European

higher education systems; mutual observation and imitation processes among universities and policy-makers world wide, fostering the spread of formally if not always substantively similar institutional forms seen as successful; transnational organizations like the OECD and the World Bank, whose recommendations shape national economic and educational programs and priorities; the emergence of new actors like transnational accreditation and evaluation agencies, that legitimize certain national university forms and practices and delegitimize others. Universities are increasingly subject to transnational trends and pressures, both formal and informal, from a variety of actors.

Yet, although it is clear that universities are increasingly subject to transnational pressures, it is just as obvious that this is not the whole story. The common formula of the “retreat of the state” (Strange 1996) fails to grasp the complexity of the different levels of policy-making and their interactions. The ever-growing importance of transnational trends and agencies can only be fully understood against the backdrop of specific national systems that persist and continue to matter. In other words, there are clear limits to convergence. In addition, higher education governance rarely approximates a simple zero sum game structure, where gains on one side equal losses on the other. Transnational higher education forms and practices do not simply expand at the expense of national systems. Instead, one can witness a dialectics unfolding, in which an increase in transnational agenda-setting and rule-making often reinforces national characteristics and policy-making. Thus, at the same time that national policy-makers feel obliged to react to perceived shortcomings made visible by international comparisons, transnational actors typically address the nation-state as the legitimate actor in higher education reform. Paradoxically, the discourse and actions of transnational actors may reinforce the claims of the state to be the only agent capable of – and legitimately responsible for – reforming university systems that are still conceived of largely, if not exclusively, in national terms. The four chapters in this section of the book all deal with the complex regulative structures in higher education, in which national and transnational policy-making levels as well as governmental and non-governmental actors increasingly interact, and in doing so, shape the future of the field.

According to the chapter by Henno Theisens and Jürgen Enders, transnational trends in higher education are not only shaped by different political systems, but also by the distinct configuration of policy networks in each country. These policy networks differ with regard to the specific policy field. Therefore, in order to explain national policy changes in the field of higher education, both levels have to be taken into account. The authors demonstrate the analytical value of their

framework by discussing policy changes in England and the Netherlands concerning funding policies, quality systems, the regulation of new study programs, and policies to stimulate university-industry relations. Though the overall direction of the changes in these areas, which started in the early 1980s, is rather similar, the pace of change and the impact on national systems differ strongly. In a majoritarian political system like England one can witness rapid policy changes, while in a consensus-oriented system like the Netherlands slow, but steady changes are more typical.

Pepka Boyadijeva presents Bulgaria as a highly interesting case for the analysis of the interplay between transnational and national forces. As a post-communist country, higher education in Bulgaria is undergoing much more drastic transformations than in any Western country. Though Boyadijeva's intellectual starting-point is the "new institutionalism" in organizational analysis and its emphasis on isomorphic tendencies, her empirical focus on the national and organizational uptake of transnational role models and formal structures show strong heterogeneity. These cases include the shift from specialized schools to a more comprehensive university model, the establishment of a private higher education sector, and Europeanization efforts like the introduction of Bachelor/Master programs and degrees, and the establishment of a formal quality assurance system. Due to national and organizational path-dependencies, which have to be carefully analyzed, however, these transformations only appear to be homogenizing at first glance. According to Boyadijeva, even in a country which is so open to external influences, like Bulgaria, do historical trajectories and related institutions, both formal and informal, prevail.

Barbara Kehm follows up on the discussion of transnational trends and national traditions by examining the shifting contexts and contents of doctoral education in Europe. In addition, she also refers to recent developments in the United States. For national policy-makers in many European countries, the Bologna process offers the framework for redirecting the way doctoral education is pursued. Instead of the traditional master-apprentice-model geared towards the reproduction of academic disciplines and the related teaching and research staff, closer links between academia and society are being sought. This common trend in the twelve European countries observed first implies a stronger formal structuration through the setting up of graduate schools and programs, including a clearer definition of the rights and responsibilities of students, professors and universities. Secondly, a broader agenda is being strived for within these programs which is no longer exclusively directed at the pursuit of disinterested and purely disciplinary research, but which

encompasses interdisciplinary exchange and the acquisition of managerial skills as well as an openness towards other societal sectors, especially industry. As Kehm points out, however, these two general trends are not leading to homogeneity, as a huge variety both between and within different countries can be observed.

In the final chapter of this part Tina Hedmo, Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson and Linda Wedlin discuss a phenomenon which goes beyond the strong national traditions pointed out in the previous three chapters: the emergence of a global and thoroughly post-national organizational field, in which the subject under scrutiny – management education – is structured and regulated. The structuration and regulation of the field is being pushed forward by transnational rankings and accreditation systems, which exert strong pressure on it to conform. In the field of management education, business schools follow global trendsetters and try to act accordingly in order to be recognized as legitimate actors in the field. A core component of this externally granted legitimacy lies in providing an MBA program. Additional aspects of an educational field, which is shaped by rankings and accreditations instead of state regulations, are the importance of media attention and professional organizations, and the strong stratification of the field, in which a well-defined “top league” serves as a role model and benchmark for others. In the end, the authors discuss whether management education displays characteristics which make it a rather unique case or whether it is a forerunner for the overall future development of universities.

Part III: University-Industry Relations. Historical Legacies and New Forms

Closer interactions between universities and industry seem to be an observable pattern in very different university systems. As universities are more often seen as part of an overall national innovation system, numerous theoretical, empirical and normative questions are emerging concerning the status of universities as relevant sites of knowledge-production and also concerning the kind of knowledge that universities can and should produce. The intense scholarly and political debates on the subject are unlikely to produce any definitive answers. Yet, at the descriptive level, there is a broad consensus that there is an increase in the organizational and institutional shaping of the interactions between the university and industry. Historically, there is a long, if nationally and institutionally variable, tradition of personal contacts between university professors and industrial firms. But, the worldwide trend towards: a) dis-

tinctive political agendas and programs encouraging greater interaction between university and industry; b) the establishment of differentiated and specialized organizational structures designed to bridge the gap between universities and industry; and c) the active, self-conscious involvement of the university as a whole in establishing institutional relations with industry, seem to be of more recent origins. Currently, and in very different national systems, university-industry ties are becoming increasingly close. Moreover, such ties are being made explicit, as universities seek to formalize and rationalize their interactions with industry. Ultimately, however, the formalization and rationalization of university-industry ties is reaching its limits. Cooperation relies on personal ties, and cooperation partners are carriers of implicit knowledge that can hardly be codified. The following chapters give examples of historical traditions and recent trends in interactions between universities and industry.

Kenneth Bertrams puts the current debate on university-industry relations into a broader historical context. Against this backdrop, one can see that both in European countries and the United States collaborations between university professors and industry can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th century. Most of these cooperations were triggered by entrepreneurial academic scientists and came into being with both the advent of the modern research university and the institutionalization of research in industry. There was, however, no continuous growth of university-industry relations during the period between 1945 and the 1980s, which was characterized by strong research funding for universities by the state. The contemporary promotion of direct links between universities and industry, therefore, is neither entirely new nor does it simply draw on historically entrenched formats as we can witness stronger organizational linkages, which are not limited to the initiative of entrepreneurial scientists.

Frank Meier and Andre Müller follow up on the comparative historical perspective taken by Bertrams by analyzing discourses on science and technology transfer in Germany and the United States from the 1950s to the present. Though the development took place in national contexts, which diverge strongly with regard to their historical legacies, surprisingly similar models of technology transfer could be detected. From the early emphasis on information and documentation to the more recent network model of technology transfer, in which the boundaries between academia and industry are becoming blurred, the trajectories of the discourse follow rather similar patterns. The general development analyzed by Meier and Müller is not interpreted as a linear model of scientific progress. Instead, the discursive shifts are discussed within the

broader framework of societal rationalization, which provides meaning and common belief structures for highly uncertain processes.

Rachel Levy discusses the role of Ph.D. students in the transmission of knowledge between academia and industry by presenting some survey data on public-private partnerships in French Ph.D. education. Since the early 1980s doctoral students have had the opportunity to conduct their Ph.D. research, with financial support from the state, partly in public research institutes and partly in firms. The formal frame within which these activities take place is known as Cifre, which stands for *Convention industrielle de formation par la recherche*. Traditionally, Cifre Ph.Ds were nearly exclusively in the natural sciences, but more recently Ph.D. students in the social sciences and humanities have also become involved in the Cifre system. Levy focuses on the latter, which is of particular interest as these disciplines are usually seen as the losers of the current university developments, in which linkages to industry are more and more a prerequisite for both public and private research funding. Following her research, Cifre Ph.D. students are an important means of strengthening already existing ties between research institutes and firms. They are of particular importance with regard to the mutual adaptation of work methods in both sectors, and are effectively facilitating the access of young researchers to the non-academic labor market.

The chapter by Elaine Coburn provides a macrosociological account of the current emphasis on the direct transfer of knowledge and technology between universities and industry, which is analyzed in the two preceding chapters. Based on the content analysis of a report commissioned by the Canadian government, in which policies for promoting the commercialization of university research are outlined, Coburn applies both insights from a political economy approach and the neo-institutional world polity approach as developed by John Meyer and his colleagues (see chapters 1 and 2 of this volume). While from a political economy, “neo-Marxist” perspective, the strive for commercialization has to be seen within the context of a broader, neo-liberal transformation of society, an institutional, “neo-Weberian” interpretation of one and the same document stresses the underlying rationalization processes. Coburn’s analysis shows the strengths of both approaches in coming to terms with a single case, but warns that these strengths are at the same time problematic as they might too easily construct evidence for macrosociological claims which do not take alternative explanations into consideration.

Following the eleven analyses presented, it becomes clear that universities have to be seen as being both shaped by global trends and national traditions. As a consequence of global and heterogeneous challenges,

neither a consistent philosophy nor consistent practices seem to be in sight. As the chapters in our volume show, the “multiversity” is a thriving and rapidly adapting institution. Kerr’s appraisal of his university – “Inconsistent internally as an institution, it is consistently productive” (Kerr 1963: 45) – is therefore also an appropriate conclusion to the analyses presented here. Following an organizational perspective, it is not surprising that the university can deal with and even integrate a variety of heterogeneous, and at times even conflicting, demands and purposes (i.e., science, education, politics, economy). But we need more empirical research on the effects such multiple orientations of a “multiversity” have on the core professional activities (research and teaching) themselves.

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