

## KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES<sup>1</sup>

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Kwiek's *Knowledge production in European Universities* hits the academic bookshelves in the midst of what is regarded as a protracted crisis in higher education worldwide. The upsurge of resistance to never-ending neoliberal "reforms" could be observed on almost all continents in the past decade (perhaps except for African higher education, which has been subjected to the effects of structural adjustment policies since the 1980s) and has not been limited to higher education exclusively. But while studies of higher education institutions have a long-standing disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary tradition in the UK, USA, Australia and some European countries, in the Central and Eastern Europe region (CEE) (widely defined) scholarly occupation with these issues has been critically lacking. The book under review here aims to bridge this latent divide in the scholarship with a comprehensive view of academic enterprise in Europe, while focusing on the processes of establishing the entrepreneurial university in CEE.

This extensive book is divided into two main parts. Almost the first two-thirds of the book introduce the readers to the author's conceptual framework and the political economy of higher education (HE). The second part refers to and discusses the results of European-wide research projects on entrepreneurialism at several European universities. In the second part Kwiek relies on a number of international research projects in which he took part in 2004–2013 and it is the results of these projects that provide readers with important insights into the changing nature of private and public HE institutions in CEE.

The first four chapters comprising the first part of the book provide us with a dense overview of the complex changes occurring in academic enterprise over the past decades. Kwiek focuses on the indispensability of a new social contract between state, society and HE drawn up after the demise of the real-socialist state in CEE, in particular, and the general introduction of new public management. The new social contract determines the nature of higher education as well—will it be considered a public or a private good? Kwiek points

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<sup>1</sup> Marek Kwiek *Knowledge production in European universities: States, markets, and academic entrepreneurialism*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013, 486 pages.

to several crucial issues that need to be studied in detail. First of all there is the changing character of the academic profession—especially the teaching/research divide, which is pushing for a research focus in internationally competitive universities while at the same time requiring excellence in teaching to satisfy the growing demands of HE “customers”. There is recognition of the growing tendency to frame academics as a labor force which the university (unfortunately) cannot do without and to whom less leverage is granted in terms of university governance (p. 72). According to Kwiek, the vision of an entrepreneurial and competitive HE cannot be attained with the currently demoralized academic labor force: “Overburdened, overworked, (relatively) underpaid and frustrated academics will not be able to make European universities in general strong and attractive” (p. 85).

Another cardinal issue Kwiek’s book addresses (in the second and third chapters in particular) is the role of the welfare state in shaping HE. While its role has been extensively discussed in various other fields, the author contends that not enough attention has been devoted to it with regard to HE. Although the globalization process is disentangling HE from its national framing and the role of universities in the national unit, the background role of the diminishing welfare state still needs to be considered. Kwiek identifies competition between different sectors of the welfare state—health care, pension systems and education—for limited financial resources and concludes that until now education has been falling short (and provides some interesting figures, see p. 161). Education, health care and care for the elderly are often viewed as bottomless consumers of state resources. Kwiek instead suggests that HE should be seen as a social investment capable of producing knowledge (p. 156) rather than as a competitive commodity. Since the social investment is not to be made from within the confines of public funding, instead private funding and a “third wave of privatization” (p. 166) are to come in place. (Interestingly, Kwiek highlights obvious contradictions in the World Bank’s approach toward the state/market relationship on the one hand and the Bank’s approach towards HE, which viewed it as in need of public sector investment (see p. 170).

One of the book’s main contributions is its section on the postcommunist social model in HE in CEE introduced in the third chapter. Kwiek identifies two incentives used in the privatization of HE in CEE in the past—the ideological failure of the foregoing HE model and the lack of public expenditure on HE. He then differentiates between two types of HE privatization: external (with the emergence of new universities and other degree-granting institutions) and internal (fee paying courses offered at public institutions) (p. 183). Applying this framework in detail might also prove useful in describing changes in HE in CEE countries that have not been studied over the past two decades.

There are many challenges that the CEE HE sector will have to face in the coming years. One of the most pressing is the demographic decline in student enrollment all too familiar to a range of university administrators and state officials. According to the author this will require a profound transformation in the mindset of HE “reformers”.

Empirical findings indicate that the entrepreneurial model of university advocated—partly and with particular reservations—in the book requires slight (although not large) financial restrictions for the entrepreneurial university to succeed (p. 269). Risks need to be taken to fulfill the financial needs; however, the risk approach of academic entrepreneurialism often opens up the gap between risk-taking managerial cores and more horizontally organized academics. The gap is to be reduced in particular ways which will

also have to take into account the role of academic autonomy and collegiality. Empirical studies by Kwiek, and other research teams on whose results he relies, on negotiations over academic and managerial values and over resource allocation are an important contribution to the book's argument about the complexities of academic entrepreneurialism in CEE. While the role of strong leadership is highlighted, the necessity of spreading the values of entrepreneurialism across HE institutions is emphasized too.

The author—perhaps surprisingly for some—states that academic entrepreneurialism has found its proper use in public rather than private institutions (pp. 298-299). The revenues of predominantly teaching-focused private HE institutions are dependent on student fees and are not diversified. In public institutions in CEE, entrepreneurialism has been readily introduced into the “soft sciences”, such as social science and the humanities, which required reform in the post-1989 era.

In the opening pages of the book the author proclaims his intention to cross the ossified disciplinary divisions in HE scholarship and instead offer a “theoretically-driven and empirically-driven” approach “substantially different from both educational policy areas and practice-related areas” (p. 16, note 1). The methodological approach followed, however, results in a number of contradictions. Several of the heavy neoliberal concepts are not analyzed at all and their normative effectiveness in HE is left unquestioned. This weakness concerns for instance the ad hoc and rather productive character of university rankings systems in particular and the audit culture in general.<sup>2</sup> The concept of the entrepreneurial university and its moral economy is not contested either; it remains in place as an intersectional concept or a boundary object that might (and will) serve the interests of a range of HE stakeholders—universities, the state, international policy actors, and European Union institutions. On the one hand, this is a legitimate position. On the other hand, the position is not considered in comparison with other concurrent projects in HE that are advocated by various actors in HE, mainly by students and academics protesting against the neoliberal management and shaping of HE. Those protesting neoliberal changes in HE are barely visible nor are other parts of the “university” as the author envisages it. Were their grievances to be addressed in the book, the content would have to change considerably. Nonetheless, I wanted to draw attention to these omissions and normative underpinnings in Kwiek's project.

It is virtually impossible to do justice to such a large book as *Knowledge production in European universities*. The book's contribution rests in its regional focus on Central and Eastern Europe and its comparative reflection, which is solidly supported by a coherent conceptual and normative framework of academic entrepreneurialism. Administrators and higher education scholars alike may benefit greatly from its thorough theorizations, especially on the role of education in a welfare state, and from the case studies highlighting the privatization process in HE and its impact on academic cultures.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the proposal to introduce university rankings that would make transparent the attractiveness of universities in terms of academics' employment prospects on page 85.

## **References:**

Kwiek, Marek (2013). *Knowledge production in European universities: States, markets, and academic entrepreneurialism*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.