



## Higher education in Germany – recent developments in an international perspective

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will appeal to a wide audience of academics, policy-makers and administrators; I expect many will take up the invitation.

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**Higher education in Germany – recent developments in an international perspective,**  
by Otto Hüther and Georg Krücken, Cham, Springer Nature, 2018, 263 pp., 41  
illustrations, €89.99 | £79.00 (Hardcover), ISBN: 978-3-319-61479-3

With their new book *Higher Education in Germany—Recent Developments in an International Perspective*<sup>1</sup> Otto Hüther and Georg Krücken contribute in myriad ways ‘to describe and analyse recent developments in the quantitative and structural configuration of the German system, its governance and organisation structures, the social composition of groups at higher education institutions and the related aspect of equality of opportunity for an international audience’ (p. 2). They successfully highlight the most important advances, which they present very comprehensively, yet their aim is not to synthesise *all* developments in Germany’s higher education landscape, or to put them into an international comparative perspective, an impossible task for one volume. Thus, in eight chapters, they present the most significant developments in German higher education at macro (system), meso (governance, organisations) and micro (individual actors) levels since the mid-1990s. Each chapter focuses on the key question whether the system has undergone incremental or rather radical change.

Hüther and Krücken begin with a brief, very helpful introduction to key facts of Germany’s higher education system. Their main argument is that the national system and its embedded organisations have undergone a comprehensive reform process over the past several decades. The book provides both an introduction to recent developments and presents particularly important contextual conditions to an international audience. Simultaneously, it serves as an informative reference book for scholars already familiar with the German system. Their second chapter discusses general societal developments as a fundamental trigger for reforms in teaching, research, financing, staffing, and governance structures. The authors argue that contemporary reforms in Germany can also be understood by focusing on the latest wave of international reforms. Historically interested readers may well wish for further details of Germany’s long-term establishment of higher education to better contextualise more recent developments at the heart of this book. Chapter three describes not only the higher education’s quantitative expansion but also its significant growth in research-capacity.

The authors highlight the importance of careful handling and critical reflection of standardised indicators from the Federal Statistical Office and the OECD to measure such recent developments in organisations, especially regarding students and staff. The authors discuss the distinction of private versus public authority in higher education in comparison to the systems in the US, England, and the Netherlands, for example. The importance of the impact of the systematic underfunding of Germany’s higher education system is well-presented, including an international comparison and detailed examination of the revenues and expenditures in the tertiary sector over time. The authors underscore that Germany’s higher education

system is fundamentally state funded, nevertheless, competitively acquired third-party funding has become extremely important for research. The following chapter introduces the government structures and their institutional developments.

Hüther and Krücken portray two helpful typologies of governance regimes in higher education institutions as analytic tools to investigate their mechanisms: The 'Coordination Triangle' and the 'Governance Equaliser'. Next, in a theory-driven chapter, the authors address the question whether German higher education organisations develop towards the concept of a 'complete organisation' or whether such development is hindered. They pay attention to a more general neo-institutional approach to describe German higher education institutions as organisations, followed by a discussion of specific organisation theories. This theoretical framing represents a highly valuable contribution to a generally poorly theorised body of literature. Chapter six structurally examines the micro level and presents empirical findings about important actors (and groups of actors) in Germany's higher education system. The book focuses on the early decisions of students from university entrance to graduation, then it traces the phase from the doctoral phase to a possible appointment as a full professor. The authors conclude with a short paragraph on the conditions with which administrative staff deal within higher education institutions. They spotlight the challenges and possible reasons for drop-out before finalising their exams, graduates' transitions into the labour market as well as the multiple uncertainties that young researchers face due to the system structures and its selection processes. Before the authors summarise their reflections on recent developments of the German higher education system in international perspective, they devote a chapter to equality of opportunity at tertiary level—for students, academic, and administrative staff. Applying concepts of gender and social background, the book shows clearly the high social selectivity that has been a persistent challenge, not only in Germany's higher education and science landscape.

Otto Hüther and Georg Krücken mainly argue in their book that Germany's higher education system has faced countless changes over the past 20 years. Beyond useful synthesis, their key contribution is to theoretically frame these recent developments, showing that the reforms of German higher education are embedded in transnational developments, albeit strongly related to national traditions and structures. This leads to rather gradual instead of radical change.

Especially for scholars working in comparative education, comparisons with other higher education systems provide important insights based on similarities or differences made possible by this comprehensive overview of Germany's system. For an international audience, the availability of an up-to-date reference book written in English is of great importance and also supports easily accessible data on different levels of analysis. For example, the highlighted Excellence Initiative or the attempt to implement New Public Management governance structures in the German system are thus observable and may then be compared with other higher education systems. Nevertheless, the binary structure of universities and universities of applied sciences and in addition a very strong extra-university research sector serves as an interesting point of reference for higher education researchers worldwide. Since the authors express that most of the presented developments of reforms and changes cannot be understood entirely yet, the book further encourages researchers to continuously observe not only the German system but also changes in other countries.

## Note

1. Based on their 2016 book (in German) entitled *Hochschulen. Fragestellungen, Ergebnisse und Perspektiven der sozialwissenschaftlichen Hochschulforschung*, Otto Hüther and Georg Krücken have updated, expanded, and revised their volume to address an international audience, highlighting most recent developments in higher education in Germany.

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**Higher Education and the Common Good**, edited by Simon Marginson, MUP Academic, Melbourne, 2016, 300 pp., \$49.99 (paperback), ISBN: 9780522871098

Higher education has become a key site of contestation in the contemporary moment as struggles play out between aspirations for open, inter-connected political and economic relationships, and needs for boundaries and closures, often expressed through national and cultural identities. Disputes centre on academic freedom, governance, funding, conditions of work and study and the diversity of institutional form. They play out through complex inter-connections and alliances, not all of which run through familiar networks. Many insights for understanding these difficult processes are to be gathered from this important book, which sketches conceptually, and with some empirical detail, some of the conditions that frame these critical engagements. The book, Marginson affirms, is concerned to situate more broadly and generatively in the social imagination of the common good, two ambiguously linked institutional formations – expanding higher education systems and the ambitious activities of research universities.

The book is organised into three sections, each of which takes these concerns down different paths of exploration. The first section, entitled *Historical sociology of higher education* presents a conceptual engagement with ideas of the public and common good emerging from reflections on higher education systems in China, the United States and France taking the account on through a review of Nordic, German and some English-speaking countries. Other introductory background material in this section charts the growth in enrolment rates in higher education around the world drawing out different political economic formations that have framed this. The final introductory chapter sets up some of the features of inequality associated with what is termed Anglo-American higher education, but is in fact primarily an account of a selected number of English-speaking countries. Part two does further conceptual work on the notions of public good and common good drawing out some of the limits of capitalist markets in education and some of the perversities of rankings as market driven information systems. Part three looks at the question of diversity and inequality with one chapter on Australia illustrating some of the key facets of the argument,

The analysis Marginson makes thus draws widely and informatively on discussions of higher education in China, France, Russia, Finland, Anglo-American higher education inequality and the case of Australia. He considers how histories of these systems position institutions in relation to the production of public goods and what the interplay of this process with the idea of common good entails. The reviews of particular systems and kinds of institutions are nested in a theorisation of public and private goods in higher education, a disquisition on public goods and public good, and consideration of positional goods, stratified systems and the notion of the common good.

This is a dazzling set of theoretical resources, set against some detailed empirical disentangling of features of inequities in higher education and the way the rankings operate. But in all the astute framing of the problem, there is a limited space given to synthesis, trying to build a