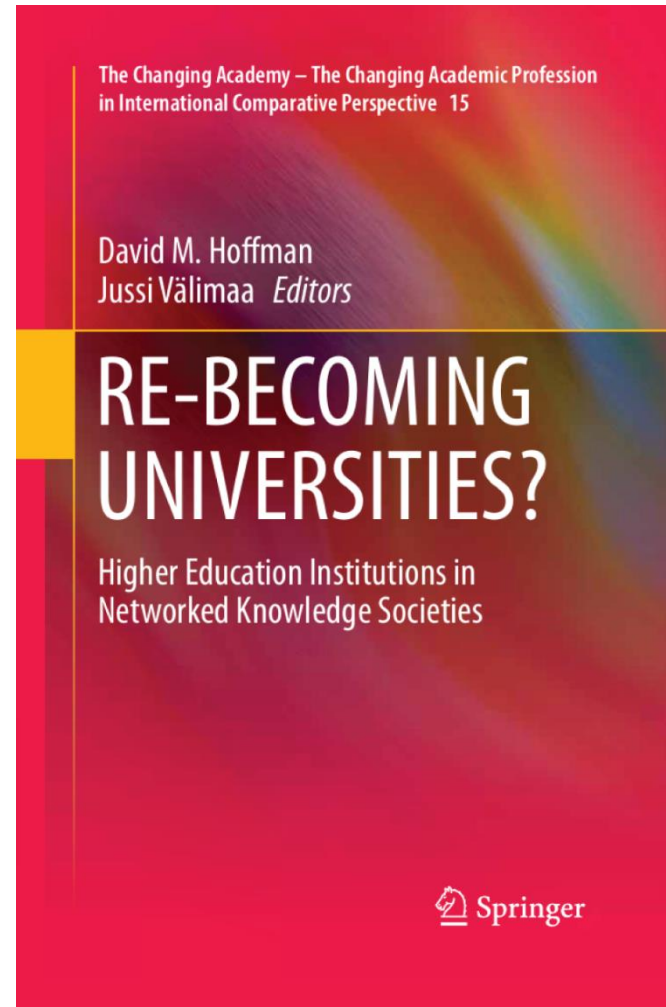


Higher Education in the Networked Knowledge Society: Challenges for Impact Evaluation of Quality Management

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Key challenges

- ❏ **How to explain the different ways HEIs are connected with their societies?**
- ❏ **How can Quality Assurance help to serve the needs of HEIs and society?**



HEIs, traditionally

- **Elite HE:** reproduction of social structures, **no need for quality assurance**
- **Mass HE:** production of qualified labor force, expansion of societal expectations (social mobility, productivity & innovations), increasing institutional hierarchies => need to check that the resources are used efficiently & goals for HE are achieved ⇔ **quality assurance**

Contemporary situation (1): Social selection & stratification

- **High Participation Systems** of higher education (HPS) (Marginson 2016)
- More than 50 nations have exceeded 50% participation rate, a global phenomenon
- Yet, **social inequalities** in access to higher education persist: elite HEIs getting stronger, low-status HEIs becoming overcrowded, institutional hierarchies (stratification) getting steeper

Unless...

- ▣ **State interferes:** Nordic (Continental) HE vs. Anglo-American market-driven HE
- ▣ One of the potential instruments for state interference & institutional development (& academic drift) is **Quality Assurance**

=> How it works? => Impact evaluations

Contemporary situation (2): drivers of social changes ↔ HE

- The **use of knowledge** is increasing in all spheres of society (industry, business, NGOs, state machinery, families, individuals ...)
- Traditional hierarchies are challenged by **networks & networking**
- Information technology (**ICT**) has the potential to create new social spaces & support (emerging) social movements

How to explain contemporary societies –in relation to HE & QA?

- **Social changes;** three families of explanations:
 - 1) **Knowledge-focused** (Knowledge society (Stehr) & Knowledge economy (Hayek... Becker))
 - 2) **ICT-focused** (information society, networked mobile society)
 - 3) **Network-focused** (ANT (Latour), Rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari), Communication Power (Castells))



Main problems with these (sociological) families of theories

- ❖ **Knowledge Society** does not take seriously enough the means of communication (ICT) & emerging new social forms (networks)
- ❖ **Mobile Network Society & Information society** emphasize ICT too much as a source of change
- ❖ **Network theories** do not pay enough attention to the contents of communication (knowledge)

=> Networked Knowledge Societies

- Contemporary societies: **neither** knowledge societies **nor** network societies but **both** describe elements of social realities ↔ **social change & HE:**
 - 1) **CONTENT:** The production & need & use of knowledge
 - 2) **MEDIUM:** Information technology (ICT)
 - 3) **SOCIAL FORM:** Networking as the social form of communication & knowledge production

CONTENT / **Knowledge**

- ❏ **The content of information and communication** is important matter in itself
- ❏ **Knowledge needs to be taken seriously as the core element** in contemporary societies
- ❏ The quantity and quality of the needs for most up-dated knowledge is a new phenomenon -> **research and HEIs are crucially important**

MEDIUM / Information Technology

- ❏ ICT has helped to re-define the categories of **time & space** ⇔ identity, social forms, society
- ❏ However, **institutions & social structures continue to frame** social choice & communication choice
- ❏ **HEIs** may act as important **nodes of knowledge networks** because of their **intellectual & material resources**

SOCIAL FORM / **Network**

- **Networking** as the social form of knowledge production based on social relationships
- Networks are **the most efficient way** to organize multiple & flexible academic, business and social partnership relations
- **New forms of knowledge production: knowledge is produced in networks** of partnerships & cooperation with academics (universities) + actors outside HEIs

How to combine HEIs & networks theoretically?

- ❖ **Formal hierarchical organizations have not disappeared** ⇔ challenged by networks => organisations & networks are co-existing, cooperating social forms in need of each other
- ❖ the tensions between global, national and local makes universities essential in NKS
- ❖ **A useful metaphor: rhizomes (logic) + tree-like organizations (structure)**

Trees and Rhizomes?

Academic networks as rhizomes?

Universities as trees?

Fin



Photos: Jussi Välimaa

Empirical realities...

- ❖ **Multiple & increasing expectations** on HEIs from: 1) **civic society** (public debate, NGOs, local communities), 2) **state organisations** (ministries, laws & regulations), 3) **industry & business** (innovations, labour force)
- ❖ **Inside HEIs: actors** (academics, students, managers), **processes** (teaching, learning, management, QA), **functions** (research, teaching, management, socialization)

Universtasis as way forward?

- **Universitas + stasis** (balance, greek)
- **CHALLENGE**: how to find **a dynamic balance** between different stakeholders' conflicting needs & expectations, institutional processes, academic work, & traditions of disciplines?
- **Universtasis is a space and a place, a process and a structure** where societal needs & expectations meet **academic networks** supported by **institutional infrastructure & hierarchies**

Challenges for QA in NKS?

Quality Assurance:

- 1) **serve different needs** (recognise them in each national / local / institutional context)
- 2) **be open** concerning its goals, purposes & processes
- 3) **be open** to use a variety of evaluation / assessment instruments
- 4) **be explicit** with the use of the evaluation outcomes (see Stensaker & Leiber 2016)

Actor-network analysis as a challenge for impact evaluations?

- Main challenge: HEIs are networked & hierarchical places (complex organizations)
=> From reconstructions of (causal) **social mechanisms** into **actor-network-analyses**: 1) "follow the actors"; 2) pay attention to human & non-human actors; 3) take chance & context seriously; 4) leave "network causality" behind => pay attention to QA processes crossing organisation(al levels), networks, hierarchies

Thank you!



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