

# Introduction



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On 9 December 2020, the International Association of Universities (IAU) celebrated the 70th anniversary of the historic signing of the IAU Constitution. The IAU was called into life when UNESCO and its Member States brought together universities of the world to jointly draft the founding text, signed on 9 December 1950, in Conference, in Nice, France. By doing so, they officialised the creation of an Association with a unique global mandate. The text of the Constitution opens with the following words, which still mark the work of IAU:

*“Conscious of their high responsibility as guardians of the intellectual life;  
Conscious of the fundamental principles for which every university should stand,  
namely: the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the  
search for truth may lead; the tolerance of divergent opinion and freedom from  
political interference;*

*Conscious of their obligation as social institutions to promote, through teaching  
and research, the principles of freedom and justice, of human dignity and  
solidarity; to develop mutually material and moral aid on an international level;*

*The universities of the world, through their representatives assembled in conference  
at Nice, hereby decide to create an international association of universities.” (IAU  
1950)*

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Back then, the IAU was the only association of its kind, scope and mandate and this is still the case today seventy years later, acting as the global voice of higher education around the world.

The world has changed significantly since the creation of the IAU and the higher education landscape has evolved as never before. The idea of a university referred to in the foundational statements cited above is one that has been passed down over centuries; it is an idea that has remained remarkably stable over time. Indeed, the university, in its corporate structure and mission, is one of the very few institutions in global history that has survived the passing of time despite profound political, economic, and cultural transformations—not least during the seventy years of IAU's existence. What the essays in this book show is that the mission of the university, to research, teach and serve society, has proven to be simultaneously resilient and adaptable. Universities are shown to be drivers, mediators, and critical observers of change at the same time. It is this shared understanding of *university* that all the contributions in this book have in common. But there are social, political, economic and technological challenges on the horizon that question the idea of higher education as we know it. For instance, the onslaught of rapid technological advances in AI and delivery, the pace of which has been hitherto unknown, is having an immense impact on research, teaching and collaboration. Given the growing influence of tech and commodification of higher education, it is being asked whether the university is still the most suitable institution to provide the skills and competences the labour market requires. In epistemic terms, universities are confronted with expanding scepticism, which, in conjunction with increasingly populist and nationalist policies, tries to cast doubt on the validity and relevance of academic values and higher education as trusted places of knowledge and research. In social and moral terms, the university is being challenged along questions of equity, equality and access and urged to more clearly engage in shaping just and sustainable societies. Some wonder if the future university still requires a physical locus given that many of the crucial higher education activities are shifting to a virtual space with global access. These and many more are questions universities will have to find answers to.

While retaining their core institutional form, universities have always been astonishingly agile and receptive to change when it mattered, not least demonstrated by the speed and scale with which universities across all faculties have responded to the current pandemic. This has brought forth a new appreciation of the role of universities in society on which to build.

For seventy years now, the IAU has accompanied processes of change by providing a platform, a meeting point, by acting as an instigator and facilitator of debate; debates that indeed try to address the great issues of our time and define and shape the role of higher education in relation to them.

One of the key tasks of the IAU has been to monitor the gradual expansion of the higher education landscape. In 1950, the IAU published the very first 'Universities of the World' which listed 620 universities and higher education institutions. The list

later became known as the ‘International Handbook of Universities’ (1959–2020).<sup>1</sup> Since 2014, the data of the Handbook has become the basis of the IAU-UNESCO online portal: World Higher Education Database (WHED).<sup>2</sup> The WHED now contains data on around 20,000 universities and other higher education institutions in 196 countries and territories—and the list is growing—which testifies to the fact that higher education is still a growing field on the global scale.

Over time, the number of IAU Members has remained stable, while the Members listed, and countries represented, have changed. Many who attended the Nice Conference in 1950 and added their signatures to the text of the Constitution are still Member today, and many other universities have joined. The membership has been enriched with new categories of membership since the late 1990s, namely Organisational, Affiliate, and Associate categories, with the latter contributing their expertise to our programme and thematic work.<sup>3</sup> In creating these categories, IAU wished to become more inclusive and to contribute to the development of quality in higher education globally.<sup>4</sup>

The IAU Members, universities and other higher education institutions, organisations and associates, and the affiliates devote quality time and effort to the life and work of the Association, in line with its mission and vision,<sup>5</sup> and promote the values we foster and help address its strategic goals. It is thanks to the efforts and commitments of thought leaders from around the world that the Association is able to serve the global higher education community today and to do so in the future.

The IAU is global and reaches out way beyond its membership to stakeholders active in higher education, including governments. Its connection with national representatives and international and multilateral organisations is important and manifests itself through its constructive contributions to various UN organisations, in particular to UNESCO, the World Bank, OECD and the Council of Europe.

Today, the IAU works on issues and topics that were also important seventy years ago: *fair and equitable internationalisation of higher education, strong globally engaged leadership, value-based higher education*. To these, the IAU has added the priority areas of work on *higher education and research for sustainable development*, and *digital transformation of higher education*.<sup>6</sup> The first one since the early 1990s and the second not much later. All priority areas of work are of key importance today and even more so in the context of the current COVID-19 crisis, bearing so heavily

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<sup>1</sup> 2020 saw the twenty-ninth and last publication of the IHU by Palgrave Macmillan. It is published in a set of 10 volumes and includes 20,000 higher education institutions in 196 countries and territories.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the World Higher Education Database: [www.whed.net](http://www.whed.net).

<sup>3</sup> Finally, and in order to ensure better inclusiveness of voices, IAU also developed an ‘Observer status’ which can be granted to public or private not-for-profit degree-conferring higher education institutions, which do not yet meet the eligibility criteria for membership of three cohorts of students in the first instance.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on IAU Membership: <https://www.iau-aiu.net/Members>.

<sup>5</sup> For further information on IAU mission and vision, please see: [www.iau-aiu.net/Vision-Mission](http://www.iau-aiu.net/Vision-Mission)

<sup>6</sup> For further information on IAU strategic plan and work on the key priority themes please go to the website: [www.iau-aiu.net](http://www.iau-aiu.net).

on society and education on an unprecedented scale. Within months, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing problems and made even more vivid the fault lines of the higher education landscape. It seems that this crisis is forcing all of us to look even more closely at the issue of *Relevance and Value of Higher Education*—the very theme selected by the IAU Board for the IAU 16th General Conference. This is not necessarily ‘new’ as can be seen from the many IAU Conferences and themes that have marked the life of the IAU over the many years of its existence, yet each time these questions are raised within a specific context; it requires particular attention especially today when our societies are being reinvented at such a phenomenal pace: after all, higher education is one of the key stakeholders to building the kind of society we want (Harkavy et al. 2020).

## 1 The Idea of the Book

With the Members and Deputy Board Members of the IAU Board—29 esteemed higher education leaders from 27 countries and all five continents—we chose to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Association in a special way.

Indeed, what better opportunity to mark this milestone than to publish a collection of essays that point to the various challenges and opportunities, that highlight accomplishments and future potential of higher education and cooperation, essays that revisit the past, analyse the present, and look into the future. We were very pleased to see the enthusiasm with which this Open Call was met. Given the breadth of the themes discussed, it would be impossible to provide a synopsis of the keen observations, analyses, argumentations, reflections and joyful accounts of times gone by gathered in this book. What is noticeable are clusters of arguments that we wish to touch upon without any pretensions of being exhaustive.

This book includes reflections on global cooperation; human rights; academic values including ethics and integrity; globalisation and HE; associations as drivers of change; the opportunities and limits of internationalisation; local and international mission of universities; knowledge governance; HE and sustainable development; the civic role of universities; HE as a public good in various national and international contexts; international mobility and cooperation: the role of quality assurance and recognition; the internationalised student experience; epistemic scepticism / phobia and public trust; aspects of leadership; de-colonialism and equity; digitalisation and online learning; community engagement; teaching quality; political role of university leadership; the heuristic limits and impact of rankings; lifelong learning and universities; questions of social equality, diversity and inclusion; future models of online institutions; HE forging and ensuring democracy; access, social justice and responsibility.

## 2 Outline of the Book

Eighty-one authors from thirty-two countries, forty-seven universities, and sixteen organisations have contributed 64 chapters to this book.<sup>7</sup> They all accepted the challenge to reflect on higher education's past, present and future, to share views on specific topics close to their own work and to think about the roles and contributions an association like the IAU has had over time and will have in the future.

The essays were arranged according to the themes of the following sections:

Part I—"70 years of Higher Education Cooperation and Advocacy" features a set of nine papers providing perspectives on the IAU by past and present IAU Board Members, past and present Presidents of the Association, friends of the Association, and Stefania Giannini, the Assistant Director General for Education to UNESCO. This part looks back on IAU's history, its mission and significant activities over time, as well as the current global context informing its quest to promote academic partnerships and solidarity on a global scale. The contributions reflect on how IAU has critically engaged with themes in higher education over the last seventy years and how they have helped shape the agenda to bring about change.

Part II—"Facilitating International Cooperation" offers a series of ten papers written by university leaders from India, UK, US, Mexico, Russia and Finland, and from Associations like EAIE, NAFSA and UArctic which provide for different perspectives on the transformation of the internationalisation of higher education and the contribution of higher education to international cooperation.

Part III—"Coding the Values" debates the values upon which higher education was, is and will have to be built to provide for a democratic and inclusive society. The nine papers published present the work of the Magna Charta, look at the political and economic aspects of what values are under review in Germany, the US, Switzerland, and what role quality assurance and the recognition mechanism for qualifications play in fostering value-based higher education.

Part IV—"The Changing Landscape" explores various aspects of the transformation of higher education over time. This section received most attention, and 17 papers analyse the changing landscape across the globe from India to The Netherlands, Brazil, Uganda, South Africa, Lithuania, Russia, Japan, Malaysia, UK, Italy, Bangladesh, Ireland and Chile.

Part V—"The Promise of Higher Education" UIL, UDUAL, HETL and colleagues from Côte d'Ivoire, Germany, South Africa, Canada, USA, Israel and Thailand reflect on the role of higher education, its ideals and shortfalls and what it must do to stay true to its promise to help shape our societies.

In the concluding chapter, Part VI—"Opening up—the Future of Higher Education" authors focus on future scenarios of higher education in Costa Rica, Malaysia, the

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<sup>7</sup> The views expressed are those of the authors.

Arab World, Spain and Mexico. Finally, the World Bank and OECD call on the reader to envision a different kind of higher education and how it contributes to the transformation of our societies. The closing remarks are given to the Council of Europe who reflects on future roles for the IAU.

### 3 To Conclude

As editors, we enjoyed interacting with the authors and conceptualising this book, and we would like to thank all for their valuable contributions, insights, their patience and commitment on the road to completion. This book would not have been possible if not for the vision and work of the founders of the IAU and builds on those who have worked at the IAU over the last seventy years.

We wish to give special thanks to Trine Jensen, Nicholas Poulton, Amanda Sudic and Samantha Grillo for their valuable assistance in shaping this book. Special thanks also go to the Board Members for their support to this initiative.

The IAU is very grateful to Remus Pricopie, Vice-President of the IAU and Rector of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA, Romania), for making this publication possible. He seconded Diana Iancu to the IAU for this beautiful initiative and provided generous support towards the publication of the book. It was wonderful to team up with Diana throughout the process.

As much as it needs to be noted that this book is not on COVID-19, the crisis has had a significant impact also on the development and creation of this publication. Indeed, COVID-19 has heavily impacted the life of universities and other higher education institutions as well as all associations and organisations we are working with.<sup>8</sup> Given the current context, it is not surprising that many papers also take on board the various challenges of COVID-19 for the present and future of higher education. The pandemic also impacted on the book in so far as it has generated delays and made it impossible for some authors to submit. They will have other opportunities to contribute to IAU work in the future.

At the IAU, we will be sure to benefit from the insights and suggestions made in these papers for the future work of the IAU, particularly when planning the future of the Association, when developing future IAU strategic plans and when organising future Conferences and other events.

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<sup>8</sup> The IAU did much to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on higher education: through a series of global surveys and web-pages, as well as through the IAU webinar series on The Future of Higher Education: past Present and Future. All are available online in 2020–2021: <https://iau-aiu.net/COVID-19-Higher-Education-challenges-and-responses>.

## References

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**Hilligje van't Land** serves the global higher education community as Secretary General of the International Association of Universities (IAU). She fosters the key role of higher education in societal transformation, supervises the overall implementation of the Association's strategic plans on internationalization, value based leadership, the digital transformation and sustainable development. She positioned IAU as partner in UNESCO work on Education for sustainable development and in the *UNESCO Futures of Education initiative*; and higher education as a key stakeholder to reach the *UN Agenda 2030 - Transforming our world* goals. Dr. van't Land strongly believes in the importance of international cooperation and intercultural understanding. She represents IAU in various working groups and expert committees including at the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the UN. Hilligje van't Land holds a PhD in comparative francophone literature, speaks six languages and publishes on higher education issues of relevance locally and globally.

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