

The Dynamics of Change in Higher Education

HIGHER EDUCATION DYNAMICS

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Svein Kyvik

The Dynamics of Change in Higher Education

Expansion and Contraction
in an Organisational Field

 Springer

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Preface

In most Western European countries, higher education has to an increasing extent been developing outside universities, partly through the establishment of new institutions, and partly through the upgrading of professional and vocational schools into higher education colleges. The main trend in countries with a binary system has been that student numbers have increased more in the college sector than in the university sector. Yet, there is a shortage of in-depth studies on the changes that have taken place in this part of the educational system, and on the processes that have driven this development. The aim of this book is to improve our understanding of these processes, through developing concepts and theoretical perspectives which might offer new insights of complex phenomena.

This book is based upon a large number of studies on college education in Norway and in other Western European countries. I have studied change processes in this field over a period stretching back to the late 1970s (Kyvik 1981), and this book synthesises my former publications, as well as updates the development until August 2008, and presents new analyses based on my gradual attainment of deeper insight into the processes that have taken place.

While doing a major evaluation of nearly all aspects of a comprehensive reform of college education in Norway in the last part of the 1990s (Kyvik 1999, 2002a), I felt a need to relate governmental policies and system changes to international trends. I therefore undertook an analysis of structural changes of higher education systems in Western Europe with an emphasis on the college sector as a basis for the analysis of change in the Norwegian system. That analysis was later updated and published as a contribution to the literature on the transformation of higher education systems (Kyvik 2004).

While preparing that study, it struck me that most Western European countries seemed to have gone through more or less similar phases, and that many of the same change processes had taken place, although at different times and in different ways. How could these more or less parallel transformation processes be explained? A comparative study encompassing a large number of countries and a large number of change processes over a period of more than 40 years would have been beyond my capacity. Another way of undertaking such an analysis, however, would be to study the transformation of a single national system in order to enlighten the driving forces behind international trends.

The idea for this book was conceived by Peter Maassen, the editor of this book series, who was convinced that an analysis of the transformation of a single national system would also have much to offer in an international context. The writing of the book has been enabled by a sabbatical from my regular duties at NIFU STEP in Oslo. Research stays at two centres for higher education studies: CSET, the Department of Educational Research, University of Lancaster, Autumn 2003, and CIRSIS, Centre for Study and Research on Higher Education Systems, University of Pavia, Spring, 2005, put me in the position to start working on the book.

The intellectual inspiration for my theoretical and analytical approaches draws upon the work of a large number of scholars, but some have been more important than others. Scholarly contributions by Burton R. Clark (1983), Ulrich Teichler (1988), and Peter Scott (1995) on higher education systems, by Guy Neave (1979) on academic drift, and by Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell (1983) on organisational fields have each in their special way contributed to the formation of my own thinking and analysis of the dynamics of change in higher education.

I would like to thank Ian Dobson, Per Hetland, Peter Maassen, Ingvild Marheim Larsen, and Bjørn Stensaker for helpful comments on a previous version of this book, and Arnaud Allanic, Jón Torfi Jónasson, and John G. Taylor for valuable assistance in the preparation of individual chapters.

Finally, I would like to thank NIFU STEP (Norwegian Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education) for giving me the opportunity to pursue my research interests, and the Research Council of Norway for economic support.

Oslo, August 2008

Svein Kyvik

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Introduction

This book deals with the development and transformation of the part of the educational system that, in the absence of better concepts, alternatively has been called ‘the non-university higher education sector’, ‘the polytechnic sector’, and ‘the college sector’. The aim is to analyse the dynamics of change in this sector by using Norway as a national case for in-depth analyses, while at the same time comparing it with parallel developments in Western Europe. Many of the changes that have taken place in the various countries are more or less similar, and a detailed account and analysis of the development in Norway may lead to a better understanding of the mechanisms behind these processes also in other countries.

This introductory part of the book has two chapters – one which describes the major changes, and one which presents a theoretical framework aimed at explaining the change processes.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the stepwise transformation of higher education systems in Western Europe – from university-dominated systems via dual systems to binary systems as the major model – and to unified systems in a few countries. These changes have undoubtedly affected the organisation of higher education outside the universities the most. This part of the education system, which in this book will be named ‘the college sector’, has been exposed to comprehensive reorganisation processes and large curriculum changes in the various study programmes.

In Chapter 2, a theoretical and analytical framework aimed at improving our understanding of the various change processes is developed. Structural, cultural, and interest-group explanations are used as complementary approaches. The college sector is viewed as an organisational field constituted by a hierarchy of levels each with their organisations and individual actors.