

Comparative Higher Education Politics: Policymaking in North America and Western Europe

Hans G. Schuetze

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BOOK REVIEW

COMPARATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION POLITICS: POLICYMAKING IN NORTH AMERICA AND WESTERN EUROPE

REVIEWED BY

HANS G. SCHUETZE
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Jungblut, Jens, Maltais, Martin, Ness, Eric C., & Rexe, Deanna (Eds.). *Comparative Higher Education Politics: Policymaking in North America and Western Europe*. Springer Nature. Price: USD 129.00.

The rationale for this publication is, according to the editors, a lack of scholarship of comparative Higher Education: “As societies face an increasing amount of grand challenges, such as climate change or global health crises, that are perceived to depend on policy solutions stemming from higher education, universities are more and more faced with the expectation to provide such solutions to other policy areas” (p.2). Yet, “... at the same time, there is a lack of comparative scholarship studying the politics of higher education policy on both sides of the Atlantic” (p.1). This sounds a bit exaggerated, as many Higher Education programs, both in North America and in the West European countries, offer courses or seminars on comparative and international Higher Education. There are also academic societies and professional associations, both international and national, such as the Society for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) or the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) that have Divisions or Special Interest Groups on comparative Higher Education. Some of these have their own publications, for example the *Journal for Comparative and International Higher Education* (JCIHE). Besides these international societies there are nation-

al societies of comparative education of which Higher Education researchers and students are an important part.

Nonetheless, this publication is timely and very welcome, as it looks systematically at some central issues and themes from a triple vantage point: American, Canadian and Western European. Five issues are explored that represent fundamental aspects of policymaking for Higher Education: the politics of Higher Education governance reform and of Higher Education finance, the framing of Higher Education policy, intermediary organizations and interest groups in Higher Education policy, and policy transfer and diffusion. All of these themes are addressed from the perspective of each of the three jurisdictions as well as in a comparative way. The structure of the book is clear and helpful: Each of the five parts (focused on the five overall themes) has four chapters, one each on the three jurisdictions and a final, comparative one.

As the US and Canada are federal countries with differences in the way Higher Education is organized and financed, the selection of particular states or provinces is of importance. For the US, the focus is on states the Higher Edu-

cation systems of which are not very well known abroad (Georgia, Nevada) compared with the larger systems such as the Universities of California and Florida or the Ivy League institutions of the east. As for Canada, the book provides more of a balanced picture, with data and examples from Quebec, Ontario and western Canada.

Somewhat more problematic in this respect is Western Europe: The European Union comprises presently (after Britain's Brexit) 27 countries which have, in spite of increasing harmonization as a result of the "Bologna Process," different traditions and structures of their respective Higher Education systems. The book's focus is on Higher Education politics in Norway, the UK, the Netherlands and Germany, or rather the largest of the German Länder, North Rhine Westphalia, while France (with a unique system of *Grandes Écoles* besides the universities) is not mentioned. Also, the countries of southern Europe—Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy (with the Italian city Bologna as historically the home of the first modern university and the original model for all other European, and, later, all North American universities)—are not included. While this is regrettable yet understandable, the book's title should probably be more precise by calling the region "North-Western Europe."

The first editor, Jens Jungblut, is from the University of Oslo, Norway, a major centre of comparative education research. His co-editors are Eric Ness (from the University of Georgia, USA) and, from Canada, Deanna Rexe (from Simon Fraser University, British Columbia) and Martin Maltais (from the Université du Québec à Rimouski). Authors writing about Canada include Higher Education experts from various institutions (l'Université du Québec, the University of Toronto, York University, and the University of British Columbia) so that the communalities and differences within the "Canadian system" are well explained. This is less true with regard to the overall systems of the US and Western Europe.

The structure of the book is helpful: Each of the themes is analyzed from the particular perspective of one of the three jurisdictions, and

a concluding chapter provides a comparative view of the particular theme. While this makes occasionally for a bit of repetition, it is also helpful to see the various systems in the context of the five central themes mentioned above.

Overall, this volume is well worth reading, not just for researchers and students of comparative Higher Education but also for all interested in how universities, one of the oldest institutions of the Western world, are continuing to change in order to be able to work on the big issues of the world as defined by the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.