

BOOK REVIEW

Kwiek, M. (2019). *Changing European Academics. A Comparative Study of Social Stratification, Work Patterns and Research Productivity* London. New York: Routledge Books (SRHE Series 5)

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Empirical higher education research in Europe began after the 1968 student uprisings, along with empirical youth research. In the 1970s, the main issues were higher education systems as well as national reforms in higher education. In the 1980s, so-called “institutional research” began in Europe, following the example of the United States. New academic associations have emerged and started to organise new types of research activities (e.g. Consortium of Higher Educational Researchers, CHER). Organizations where researchers and higher education administrators could meet also appeared (e.g. European Association of Institutional Research, EAIR). Since the Magna Charta Universitatum (1988), higher education research has expanded and become widespread in Europe. Buffer organizations (e.g. Association of European Universities, CRE; European University Association, EUA) have also appeared since the Bologna Process (1988). All these contributed to the creation of the “European higher education area” as well as the “European research area”. Today’s higher education research in Europe is already much more advanced than it was in the 1960s when such research began. Nevertheless, there is still a lot to fulfil and for several reasons.

One reason is that research until now has focused primarily on education reforms and education policies, the dominant processes of European higher education as a whole. The second reason is that research activities were not basic, but rather applied research endeavours, like the preparation of higher education accreditations, the underpinning and monitoring of the Bologna Process, the establishment of the European credit transfer system (ECTS), or the bringing of higher education closer to the economy. Meanwhile, student advocacy associations and councils of leaders at various levels of higher education have been formed; but we still know little about the instructors. Thirdly, much remains to be done because the research results so far become soon obsolete. Economic and social transformations in Europe have accelerated since the 1990s. Over the last two decades, the European Union has emerged as a political entity, the economy has globalized, and higher education has become more widespread worldwide. In this rapidly changing world, it was no longer possible to build solely on the achievements of higher education researchers two decades ago.

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Marek Kwiek and his research team are the first to conduct a large-sample empirical study among those working in European higher education. They surveyed more than 17,000 academics with a questionnaire (the number of the evaluable questionnaire that they received back) and conducted almost 500 semi-structured interviews with those academics. They studied universities in 11 European countries (Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom). The present monograph was made from the analysis of the data and opinions thus collected.

Those they interviewed were just 'the tip of the iceberg'. They did not focus on all university employees, but on the most important ones, as Kwiek puts it, the academics. The team did not address the other two groups of the university staff – administrators (who like to call themselves managers) and technical staffs. This situation determined the message of the book. Marek Kwiek's analysis is not about European higher education in general, but in detail about the academic profession.

The academic profession as a career is particularly distinct from the career choice of young researchers working in the fields of economics or administration. While the latter do applied research, scientific professionals are mainly engaged in basic research. From this follows, according to Kwiek (who refers to Merton), the norms of the academic profession. The four norms are: universalism, scepticism, disinterestedness, and communalism. 'Universalism' means that in scientific work, particularities such as age, gender, race, religion, or political affiliation do not matter. 'Scepticism' means that academics have to be constantly sceptical not only of the results of others but primarily of their results. This scepticism raises further research questions the answers for which develop the building of the world of science and knowledge. 'Disinterestedness' is meant that academics should not be driven by everyday interests – money, prestige, power – but by the interests of the academic community. This rule precludes the use and sale of science products, scientific knowledge, for their purposes outside the academic community. 'Communalism' means the free flow of research results, scientific knowledge. The results of scientific research should be freely available to members of the community. Otherwise, they would not be able to build knowledge of the academic community.

'Knowledge', the result of scientific studies is embodied in publications. Publications are, therefore, key issues in the academic profession. They create the border between the academic community and the 'outside world'. Publishing is an activity in which conflicts between the academic world and the economy and society emerge.

One conflict is the sponsorship of science. Modern science is not like the traditional one in which the norms of the academic community developed (and of which Merton built up his theory). Science today costs big money, and even more (not the academics, but the research infrastructure costs a lot). Research funding connects the world of academics to the worlds of market interests and public demands; success is measured by market performance, not private publications, and so on. As market norms gradually penetrate the closed world of academics, so loosen the norms (such as 'communalism') that previously defined the academic profession.

The other conflict emerges between the closed world of the academic profession and the public world of the modern democracies. In modern democracies where various groups all compete and strive for victory and profit, the public does not tolerate the 'ivory tower', the seclusion of the academic profession. The public puts pressure on science, expresses its interests, wants to have a say in the application of results, wish to understand, criticise and control the scientific results. This clashes with the academic norms of scientific scepticism and



disinterestedness. The public seeks the utility of a scientific result; while the academic community values the novelty of the results, irrespectively of their public use and practical applicability.

The third conflict unfolds between the world of Academia and the world of politics. Politicians are competing for power, and they want to use also 'scientific knowledge' for their fights. This tension pulls the academic profession into the political (and related, like economic) power struggles. Academics have been kept away from these struggles so far with the catchword that science had its norms. As politicians have gradually ascended in modern history and gained more power step by step, the world of science begun to subject to the world of politics.

When the world of academics and the world of the 'outside world' meet, it results in conflicts inside of the Academia too. The academic community has never been united but it is torn today from specific fractures. Disciplines fracture them, and so do various cultures in which the academics conduct research. The places (universities, colleges, research institutes, laboratories, libraries, editorial offices) where the academic community lives and works vary; so do the historical traditions, based on which a national research system has been established and operates.

All these differences affect the European academic profession. The impact is multiplied by the changes that have taken place in higher education in the last two decades – and in the world around it (globalization, mass, marketization). These are all essential aspects if we want to understand the transformation of the academic profession in Europe. However, according to Kwiek, they are not enough to understand the profession. We need to see the entire transformation of higher education.

We have not seen this so far because we did not have a picture of the transformation of higher education in Europe. The actors of higher education – thus, above all, academics – were known primarily from research conducted within a national framework, based on national perspectives, and national statistics. These research, however, are difficult to interpret in a European perspective or compare the local studies at an international level. National research only showed mosaics of what academics did in a national context, how scientists lived and worked in one or another higher education system. Only local studies were available to understand how the academic profession is affected, for example, by the formation and expansion of the 'third mission' of local universities, and how local universities fit into the 'innovation ecosystem' of their regions. It is the first time, Kwiek emphasizes, that we can get a detailed picture of these transformations at the micro-level of individual academics in Europe.

Despite the overall transformations that are going on in Europe today, the essential change taking place in the academic community is still stratification. Of course, the academic community has always been stratified. However, its stratification is changing, as a result of the challenges of the modern age. These challenges are scientific achievements, income changes, the transformation of university governance, the development of and cooperation with international networks, different interpretations of the roles of generations, or the impact of generational change on the scientific community.

Four types of academics have emerged in the European community as a result of those changes: top research performers, top earners, internationalists, and academics under 40. The stratification process affects them differently. Chapter 1 of the book (performance stratification) is about inequality in knowledge production. Chapter 2 (salary stratification) presents the correlations and contradictions of productivity and income. Chapter 3 (power stratification) is



about the dramatic transformation that accompanies the emergence of managerialism (disintegration of collegiality). Chapter 4 (international research stratification) presents the impact of international research networks on the scientific community. Chapter 5 (role stratification) introduces the change in the ratio of teaching to research. Finally, Chapter 6 (age stratification) show the consequences of generational change. (This chapter is the only one that is not/not only based on quantitative data but a qualitative analysis of about 500 interviews taken.)

We conduct higher education research in Europe as we have learned it from the English speaking world, Kwiek points out. It is unfortunate because we see European reality through American glasses. Nevertheless, it is fortunate too, since it helps to compare European research results with those of Americans. We know from these comparisons that European academics are more traditional than their American colleagues ('academic capitalists' – though the change has begun here as well. With the rapid change in higher education and the radical transformation of the world around it, stratification has deepened and become increasingly controversial also in the European academic community. The key actors in European universities – especially in research universities – are still the academics. But they are already in competition with other stakeholders who push them slowly back from the forefront.

What will tomorrow bring? As Kwiek puts it in the introduction of his book (pp. 20):

"In academic profession studies, as in any other social research, there are some known knowns and some known unknowns; however, there are also some unknown unknowns of which we are conceptually unaware. This makes social research, including international comparative academic profession studies, extremely exciting and exceedingly rewarding."

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