

# Universities in the knowledge society: The nexus of national systems of innovation and higher education

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[See table of contents](#)

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# BOOK REVIEW

## UNIVERSITIES IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY: THE NEXUS OF NATIONAL SYSTEMS OF INNOVATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

REVIEWED BY

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Aarrevarra, T., Finkelstein, M., Jones, G. A., & Jung, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Universities in the Knowledge Society: The Nexus of National Systems of Innovation and Higher Education*. Springer. Pages: 434 (hardcover or electronic).

*Universities in the Knowledge Society* is the first in a series of volumes that will disseminate the results of a global survey on the academic profession, broken down and analyzed at national levels. The scope of this research project is extensive, as the survey was deployed across 22 higher education systems and extends the earlier work of similar studies (Altbach & Boyer, 1996; Arimoto et al., 2013). A central question explored by this comparative approach is how changing understandings of the role of higher education systems in innovation agendas are reflected in the academic profession. This study is well placed to contribute to the ongoing discussions in the literature regarding the rise of sessional appointments, new public management, and corporatization of higher education institutions by broadening our view beyond a single jurisdiction.

Though the academic profession survey was administered globally, this book is primarily comprised of individual chapters by local authors in each of the countries focused on in this volume. This approach gives the reader a deeper and more contextual understanding of the specific characteristics of each education system. Although the overall volume is quite large, this case study approach also makes the work more accessible, as a reader can focus on countries or regions of interest. It is unfortunate that the volume contains only a single African example, but otherwise there is a very diverse set of cases presented. Each country chapter explores the central theme of the roles of government, industry, and higher education in the knowledge economy.

Although picking out individual chapters to build an un-

derstanding of local contexts is valuable, the volume when read as a whole develops larger themes pertaining to the nature of research productivity, how it is measured, and policy levers used in different jurisdictions to encourage collaboration and development. Some common themes include how “massification brings stratification” (Panova & Yudkevich, p. 189) and universities being conceived as “one-stop shops for the entire [knowledge economy] value chain” (Geschwing & Lundborg, p. 304) yet often failing at the last step of the chain: spurring innovation. Interestingly, we see counter examples of successful innovation programs in geographic neighbours. For example, the Japan chapter by Arimoto, Daizen, and Huang notes that a Darwinian approach to institutional funding has negatively influenced the research productivity of the nation, and further recommends that “the national policy of higher education should be transformed from a state orientation to a student orientation” (p. 132). Yet, Jung and Lee note that in South Korea a state-directed and top-down approach to an innovation agenda has been seen as successful.

Many chapters are very candid in exploring the challenges facing academic professionals and note the gaps between government aspirations and measurable outcomes. For example, when discussing Uganda’s higher education system, Bisano, Langa, and Ndibuza find that “at this point, Uganda’s higher education sector appears tasked beyond its capacity to guide socio-economic transformation” (p. 79). Across jurisdictions, the relationship between societal demands for measurable innovation outcomes and the oftentimes negative effect of performance-based approaches on the quality

of academic life are explored. Accountability is often desired at a system level, yet there still exists a recognition that the Humboldtian model of education and research thrives when academic freedom is fully supported.

As a Canadian reader, I appreciated deeper insight into other higher education systems. In particular, reading about the post-colonial experiences of other countries as well as the unique approach of post-Soviet states helped broaden my own understanding of higher education beyond Canada, where we often focus on Oxbridge, Scottish, and American models. For students in the field, this book could provide a useful starting point for those unfamiliar with other regions. Each chapter, focused on a single country, provides not only an overview of the history of the education system but also a rich bibliography for further reading. Much as Jones' previous collaboration with Austin in *Governance of Higher Education* (2016) offered a useful overview and embarkation for those beginning in the field of governance, this volume could support those unfamiliar with specific regional contexts and more interested in the intersection of the knowledge economy and higher education.

As an introduction to the APIKS (Academic Professionals in the Knowledge-Based Society) tool, this volume is successful. The central themes of the research program are brought forward and the necessary context for each country is provided. I look forward to future volumes in which additional analysis will be presented. As a start in this direction, some authors in this volume began to go beyond a description of their site and preliminary results and speak to the policy implications of the work. There are opportunities as well to ask deeper questions about the reconceptualization of higher education institutions as active participants in market-relevant research. The broader tenets of globalization are implicitly bound to both the methodology and results of this research program, and I look forward to more focused treatment of the topics in future volumes. The case study of Turkey's system by Calikoglu et al., for example, noted that improvements in key metrics and research outputs alone were deemed insufficient. The Turkish state views research and innovation as the means to transform and elevate Turkey's economy, and further expects that its education systems will be improving not just on an absolute, but also on a comparative basis with other jurisdictions.

In a broad-based study such as this, it is worth challenging the notion that all nations seek to become the top research producer in the world. A competitive global approach may create winners and losers or, as Luo and Shen noted in the China chapter, short-term measurements could be put

in place that in fact undermine long-term goals. The authors and editors of this work remain balanced throughout and generally refrain from making judgements about these phenomena, preferring instead to simply describe them in detail. It is left to the reader, future volumes, and other researchers to pick up on these results and use them to inform policy and future direction in this fast-changing space.

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