



Inter-disciplinary Political Studies

<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/idps>

ISSN: 2039-8573 (electronic version)

IdPS, Issue 3(1) 2017: 241-244

DOI: 10.1285/i20398573v3n1p241

Published in December 11, 2017

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BOOK REVIEWS

Academic Identities in Higher Education: The Changing European Landscape, edited by Linda Evans and Jon Nixon. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, pp. 276.

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The shifting boundaries between the state, the market, and institutions of higher education (Henkel 2007) have displaced the university from its ‘free-floating’ position in society, with implications for the exercise of academic practice that used to be centered on collegiality and scholarship (Nixon 2008). This edited book provides a complex, layered, and plural perspective, reflecting on the changes, ‘ambivalences and aspirations of academic identity’ (p. 24) in times of radical transformation and crisis in Europe.

The assembled essays based on self-reflective narratives of academic identities, which are interlinked with academic profession and academic practice, explicate the trajectories, formations and re-formations of academic identity under the pressure of global competition and the internationalization of higher education. The contributors to this edited volume, whose own academic trajectories and identity formations belong to different hierarchies, institutional settings, and places, delineate implicit theoretical constructs that reveal the paradoxes of internationalization and standardization of higher education, despite the apparent absence of theory in this volume, as Nixon explains (p. 16). The book, structured in

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three parts, aims to capture the particular processes of changes in the higher education sector that mingle with and affect academic identity. Nixon, using the notion of 'modularity' (Gellner 1994) to characterize academic identity, argues that 'academic identity is a bricolage, an assemblage, a pragmatic accommodation to contingent events' (p. 10).

The first part, titled 'Frameworks and Perspectives', articulates and describes the processes that take place within the institutions of higher education in the European context. Niilo Kauppi, positioned at the intersection of the French national educational system and globalized academia, shows the unintended consequences of standardization, which can be observed in 'a weakening of the national systems through a bifurcation into first- and second-class institutions inside national systems' (p. 42). Long-standing values, such as academic autonomy, collegiality, and freethinking, seem to be fractured due to existing porous institutional legacies and traditions. Kauppi suggests that what is required to respond to the contradictory transformations is 'a more politically organized academe' (p. 44).

Finnish scholars Tero Erkkilä and Ossi Piironen observe 'ideational shifts in the higher educational policy, and discuss their implications for academic identity' (p. 47). The dual processes that characterize these changes include the autonomization of institutions of higher education and the individualization of scholarship. One wonders how the distinctive academic and institutional traditions are effaced, as the authors claim. A sweeping erasure of academic legacies might not be called for. Rather, what might take place is a process of local and international realignments among academics towards a 'global research community' (p. 60). The European tradition of higher education that had affected Australia, according to Terri Seddon, is now being reframed. Seddon, emphasizing the changing spatial dimension of education, introduces the concept of 'educational spaces' (p. 74). For

quite some time, educational spaces have been nationally bounded. According to Seddon, being an academic demands that one navigate ‘a polyglot boundary zone’ (p. 65) if one wants to make knowledge claims in the context of ‘[a] repositioned twenty-first-century public education within global human capital supply chains’ (pp. 74–75).

The second part, titled ‘Academic Trajectories’, comprises five chapters that inform the reader about the vulnerability and fragmentation of the academic identity in the current ‘academic condition’, to borrow a term coined by Kauppi. Nicole Reget Colet addresses the effects of the Bologna reforms in Switzerland that require scholars ‘to adopt dual identities – as researchers and teachers’ (p. 89). Štefan Beňuš provides a narrative of his academic identity in Slovakia from an insider/outsider position. Liana Beattie traces her trajectory from Soviet Georgia to the United Kingdom as a scholar of education. Both Beňuš and Beattie, having experienced a communist past, have become supportive of the neoliberal reforms. Eva M. Brodin, reflecting on the academic condition in Sweden, ‘depicts the vulnerability of today’s academic identity formation through the lens of [her] personal perspective’ (p. 116) and warns that ‘academic entrepreneurship is on its way towards obliterating scholarship and hence itself’ (p. 122). In her chapter, Linda Evans explicates the role of academic traditions, such as the Russell group institutions, as not hampered by global competition.

The third part, ‘Formations and Reformations’, discusses the interaction of diverse institutional settings with academic practice. Romuald Normand’s chapter delineates the intrinsic linkage between academic autonomy and ideological position-taking as an effect of institutional culture in France, limiting multiple academic identities. Oili-Helena Ylijoki and Jani Ursin’s chapter on the formations and reformations in the Finnish educational system ‘seek[s] to illustrate how differently the

apparently same changes in higher education are interpreted, resulting in dramatically distinct academic identities' (p. 189). Both Darlinda Moreira, Susana Henriques, and Luísa Aires's chapter on Lisbon Open University and Antigoni Papadimitriou's chapter on Greece reveal the difficulty of transforming academic identities tied to the nation-state and social prestige. Carol O'Byrne's thoughtful piece on the formation of academic identities at the Irish Institute of Technology shows the role of re-alignments and collectivities.

Altogether, this insightful book presents the actual importance and space of possible re-formations of academic identity, as acknowledged by Evans in her conclusion. The path to further research, building upon these reflections on the academic condition, is still open.

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