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Opportunities and Barriers to Further Growth in Higher
Education Participation Jongbloed, Ben W.A and
Vossensteyn, Hans (eds.), 2015**

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Book Review

Access and Expansion Post-Massification: Opportunities and Barriers to Further Growth in Higher Education Participation

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Most of us will be familiar with the concept of the journey from an elite to a mass and then a universal system of Higher Education, first introduced by Martin Trow in 1973. Taken as a whole this book suggests that HE systems worldwide are now moving beyond mass participation and into a universal phase with participation rates of 50% or more now common among developed and developing nations. The theme of the book, as its subtitle suggests, is to explore what is different about post-massification in relation to both opportunities and barriers there may be for further growth. The book asks what international policy lessons, about quality, value for money and public spending restraints (especially in the wake of 2008 crash) can be drawn on.

The structure of this edited collection explores various facets of policy relating to the higher education access and expansion. Part I focuses on Institutional Diversity, Part II on System Strategy and Transparency, Part III on Student Financing and Equity Policies and Part IV on New Modes of Delivery. However, the focus on the conceptual work in sections one and two leaves the latter half of the book feeling relatively thinner and less coherent. This part of the book includes a consideration of part-time study (Callender, Chapter 9) and the accreditation of prior learning (Pires, Chapter 10). It also includes Vossensteyn and Jongbloed's concluding chapter '*Doing More Less*'. This is particularly disappointing as it offers only underwhelming and technocratic solutions which suggest that MOOCs, funded by Individual Learning Accounts, will be the vehicle of affordable universal access.

In contrast, the book starts well with a magisterial policy overview from Gareth Parry (*Access, Equity and Participation of Disadvantaged Groups*). Parry sets these frequently rehearsed discussions in context by considering the role of HE in further education settings as the third pillar of provision, along with universities and polytechnics. Parry identifies three key policy questions which frame the rest of the book.

Firstly, Parry asks whether expansion reduces or increases inequality of access. In other words, he explores whether education systems themselves can equalise opportunity. He suggests that differentiation (of types of institution, modes of learning and so on) can be seen as a way of democratising access as long as transfer is possible between these different kinds of equally valued HE. But not if the system closes off those opportunities to move from one type of provision to another, when entry qualification routes and institutional prestige are so disconnected as in overtly hierarchical systems like England.

Secondly, Parry considers universal access as a concept. The Trow model of elite/mass/universal (Trow 1973) was based on what was happening in the USA, specifically in California under the Master Plan of 1960 (subject of an excellent if dispiriting Chapter 5 by Kinne-Clawson and Zumeta). The Master Plan was a planned system designed to enable elite and mass higher education to co-exist in separate sectors, though in real life systems are usually messier. For

example, the Trow model of expansion was not based on the kind of student-led demand that is being replicated across the world; it exemplified the era of planning, not the era of the market. The progression from elite to universal is often presented as a deterministic description of how we got to where we are, neatly wrapped and context-free. However, Trow's model actually envisaged universal access as being a stage (then long into an unimaginable future) when the HE system educated the whole of society in order to maximise its efficiency in the face of technological change and international competition. In contrast, the elite and mass stages are both reliant on arguments of meritocracy to justify rationed HE preserved for those most able or deserving of it, sorted by money or grades. In the massifying phase (when between 20% and 40% of the relevant age group participate) rationing (by grades and restricted numbers) had to be augmented with compensatory offers of a different kind of HE for those unable to access the most prestigious HE but who were nevertheless required to engage in parts of systems responding to employment demands. The step-change to universalism is a qualitative difference, not just a quantitative difference, though expansion necessarily has affordability consequences.

Thirdly, Parry considers interventions to foster the transparency of admissions processes. Even with universal access there will be an elite of highly selective institutions, so how do institutions identify those best suited to that kind of HE without inequitable processes that just reward the 'old school tie'? The key question here is whether we can have open access *and* selectivity. It is notable that many European states that traditionally had open access (places for all that have a school leaving certificate) are now trying to encourage selectivity so they can get some institutions into the global 'top 100' e.g. the German *Exzellenzinitiative*. Parry notes some alternative pathways, including South American countries that have fixed quotas to achieve representative access.

Many of these themes are explored in the ensuing chapters. Kanwar's chapter on *Government Policies as Responses to Increased Demand for HE: Experiences from the Asian Private and Public Sectors* (Chapter 3) and Antonowicz's *Digital Players in an Analogue World: HE in Poland in the Post-Massification Era* (Chapter 4) offer two distinct takes on expansion. They illustrate once again how different starting points can shape the approach. In the case of East and South East Asian countries the key is the need to exemplify the ethos of maximal social utility (traced by Kanwar back to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*), while in the Polish case the need for post-communist states to belatedly join the global economy in the 1990s acts as an important factor. In both cases, expansion had to occur in the context of relatively small and impoverished public sectors that were unable to expand; in different ways and for different reasons, the private sector emerged to take up the slack. This kind of differential development from different starting points is familiar to political economists (Gerschenkron 1962).

The need to protect established elite institutions from the downsides of expansion becomes a recurring theme of the later chapters in this book, which on the whole focuses more on the 'barriers' to further growth than the 'opportunities'. In Chapter 5 Kinne-Clawson and Zumeta describe the California Master Plan in such terms: the logic was to address the huge rise in demand from the first post-war 'boomer' generation. It consisted of managed three tier system with the University of California at the apex, educating only the top 15% of high school leavers (by SAT scores) and holding the monopoly on doctoral study and degrees leading to the upper professions (such as law and medicine). Below this, the system of California State Colleges only enrolled from the top third of the distribution of SAT scores and was barred from teaching above Masters level. Lastly, and designed to keep the 'remedial work' away from the UC, were the Junior Colleges (later known as Community Colleges) to 'mop up' the rest.

From here the book takes a steadily depressing turn for anyone seeking reassurance that access can be expanded further. Hazelkorn's Chapter 6 on *The Effects of Ranking on Student Choice and*

Institutional Selection produces empirical evidence from her study of senior policymakers in global selective institutions. Driven by the move towards universal access, elite institutions are obliged to be ever more selective in their admissions policies in order to reinforce differentiation from the rest of their domestic sector. This is, of course, fuelled by the existence of ranking systems; which encourage institutions to chase the prestige status of becoming a 'World Class University' as measured by proliferating global ranking systems. (There are currently ten such systems). As is the case in the UK, some 60 countries have their own system rankings to replicate this hierarchisation and create systems of vertical differentiation. Becoming part of the global elite is not just virtue-signalling or prestige-polishing: the selectivity of an institution is now becoming a metric of judgement by global employers and by national governments. Hazelkorn notes that the Danish and Dutch immigration systems have begun to favour visa applications only from those who have studied at highly selective institutions.

More encouragement for the prospects of widening access at undergraduate level is provided by Chapter 8. Finnie, Mueller and Sweetman's *The Cultural Determinants of Access to Post-Secondary (Higher) Education in Canada* is based on empirical findings from a longitudinal study which found that cultural factors were a stronger determinant of propensity to participate in HE than the level of family income or tuition fees. Cultural factors included here were the amount and level of outreach interventions, the extent to which their parents/carers and their wider communities were engaged with the idea of young people accessing higher education- also found to be important was early involvement with outreach interventions.

Overall, this is very good collection of well written chapters by experts in the field of access in the context of the post-massification phase. Despite the emphasis of some authors on protecting quality, it also offers research-informed encouragement for those who believe that the goal of widening access and participation is still worthwhile in the universal phase.

References

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