



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES – CRITICAL FUTURES

Working Paper 38:

**European Universities –
Critical Futures. Report of
Keystone Conference**

Edited by Susan Wright and Matej Zitnansky

Working Papers on University
Reform

Danish School of Education, Aarhus

**CENTRE FOR
HIGHER
EDUCATION
FUTURES**

May 2023

Working Papers on University Reform

Series Editor: Susan Wright

This working papers series is published by the Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF) at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. The series brings together work in progress in Denmark and among an international network of scholars involved in research on universities and higher education. The current paper results from the keystone conference for the project, ‘European Universities – Critical Futures’, funded by the Danish Research Council. The project addressed the question: What are the future roles of universities in creating social and regional integration in Europe, in a shifting global context? To do this, eight working groups formed with members from across Europe, each fostering a learning community between early stage and more senior researchers, with the aims of generating new research agendas and highlighting their policy implications. These working groups covered Gender and Precarity in Academia, Alternative Conditions for Knowledge Creation, Trust Beyond Metrics, Higher Education Access for Underrepresented Groups, Changing Dynamics Between Administrators and Academics in European Universities, Refugee Access to Higher Education, and Alternative Internationalisms. In addition, teams in eight countries researched the effects of the Covid19 pandemic on the future of higher education.

Other papers in this working paper series are derived from previous projects and activities:

- ‘Practicing Integrity’, funded by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science.
- ‘Universities in the Knowledge Economy’ (UNIKE) an EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN project, with 6 European partners and 30 associated partners in the Asia-Pacific Rim.
- ‘University Reform, Globalisation and Europeanisation’ (URGE), an EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie IRSES knowledge-exchange project between Aarhus University, Auckland University, New Zealand and Bristol University, UK.
- ‘New Management, New Identities, Danish University Reform in and International Perspective’, funded by the Danish Research Council.

CHEF was established in January 2017 and has 148 members in Denmark and internationally and collaborates with similar ‘sister’ research centres on higher education around the world. CHEF has three focus areas: The role and positioning of universities and higher education; Universities’ organisation and inner life; and Building alternative futures for higher education. CHEF not only conducts research but facilitates dialogue between researchers and the policy community about the changing mandate and practices of higher education.

Further information on CHEF and registration for free membership is available at <https://dpu.au.dk/forskning/forskningsprogrammer/chef> To come on a visit, offer a seminar or publish in the working paper series please contact CHEF’s Co-directors, Professor Susan Wright suwr@edu.au.dk or Søren Smedegaard Bengtsen at ssbe@edu.au.dk at Danish School of Education (DPU), Aarhus University.

**European Universities – Critical Futures.
Report of Keystone Conference**

Edited by
Susan Wright and Matej Zitnansky

**Aarhus University
Danish School of Education
Campus Emdrup
Tuborgvej 164, 2400 København NV
Denmark**

Title: European Universities – Critical Futures. Report of Keystone Conference

Editors: Susan Wright and Matej Zitnansky

Published by: CHEF, Danish School of Education, Aarhus University

Place of Publication: Copenhagen

© 2023, the editors and report authors

1st Edition

ISBN: 978-87-7684-467-7

Contents

Conference Timetable	6
Introduction	7
Refugees' access to higher education.....	8
Trust beyond metrics in European higher education	9
Changing relations between faculty, administrative staff, and management	10
Pandemic Study	11
Gender inequality and precarity: Making the case for change.....	15
Academic Freedom and Alternative Conditions of Knowledge Production	17
How to develop new dialogues between researchers and leaders and policy practitioners?	20
Alternative Internationalisms and the Omnicrisis	23
Plenary	26

Conference Timetable

	13 Dec		14 Dec		15 Dec
9.00-10.00	Introduction to each other and to the project*	9.00-10.20	Pandemic study*	9.00-10.45	Research Freedom: Alternative conditions for knowledge production*
10.00-11.45	Refugees' Access to Higher education*	10.20-10.45-	Coffee/Tea Break	10.45-11.15	Coffee/Tea Break
11.45-12.30	Lunch and Coffee/Tea	10.45-12.30	Pandemic study*	11.15-12.45	How to develop new dialogues between researchers and leaders and policy practitioners?*
12.30-14.15	Trust beyond metrics in European higher education	12.30-13.30	Lunch	12.45-13.30	Lunch
14.15-14.45	Coffee/Tea Break	13.30-15.15	Gender inequality and precarity: Making the case for change*	13.30-15.15	Alternative internationalisms and the Omnicrisis*
14.45-16.30	Changing relations between faculty, administrative staff and management*	15.15-16.00	Coffee/Tea Break	15.15-15.30	Coffee/Tea Break
16.30-18.00	Networking	16.00	Meeting on publications for the pandemic study teams	15.30-16.30	Plenary
19:00-21.00	Dinner	19.00-21.00	Dinner		

* These sessions were open for online participation via Microsoft Teams (in colour)

Introduction



‘European Universities – Critical Futures’ is a network project funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark (Danmarks Frie Forskningsfond) from 2019-2023. The project’s central question is ‘What are the future roles of universities in creating social and regional integration in Europe, in a shifting global context?’

In this hybrid-format conference, state-of-the-art video conferencing technology was used for a smooth communication between in-person and online participants. 43 senior academics and early-stage researchers from 15 European countries participated in the conference physically in Copenhagen, and nearly 70 people from 22 countries worldwide attended various sessions online.



As the conference was held when pandemic restrictions had just been lifted, we required participants to have a valid negative COVID-19 test result for each day, protective face masks were worn throughout, and participants sat a recommended distance apart.

The conference was based on the work of the project’s six working groups and an international comparative study of the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on European higher education. As the network is motivated to turn its studies into action, many sessions invited an external commentator, and one session focused on how to develop a dialogue between critical researchers and university leaders or members of the policy community. The content and outcomes of each

session are briefly summarised in this report.

[PARTICIPANTS PERFORMING COVID-19 SELF-TESTING](#)

Refugees' access to higher education

Monday 13 Dec 2021, 10.00-11.45

Working group organisers: Prem Kumar Rajaram, Associate Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Central European University, Hungary; Gaële Goastellec, Professor at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, head of the Laboratory Capitalism, Culture and Society (LACCUS) and the Politics and Organizations of Higher Education research unit at the Observatory Science, Policy and Society (OSPS); and Marie-Agnès Détourbe, Lecturer in English Studies at the Institut National des Sciences Appliquées (INSA) in Toulouse.

Report by: Katarína Rozvadská



Over the 2020-21 academic year, the working group organised a webinar series aiming to open a space for students, practitioners, and researchers to engage in issues related to the inclusion of students with refugee backgrounds into higher education structures.

Discussions helped to understand the dynamics involved – not only the obstacles, but also the

opportunities in widening access from multiple perspectives. Building on these discussions, the working group organised a roundtable to explore further questions of recognition and validation of knowledge, accessibility of programmes, questions of pedagogy and how historical, political, and social aspects of European universities come into play.

Two students with refugee backgrounds, **Kutaiba Alhussein** and **Akileo Mangeni** (in the photo) explained from first-hand experience how difficult navigating the system of higher education can be. Issues with access include a lack of information on how to apply (e.g. how to write a CV, letter of motivation, etc). There is also a shortage of comprehensive preparatory programs, and holistic support. Scholarships for refugees tend to aim at exceptional students, and there is a severe lack of support for mobility. Often, foreign degrees are not recognised, so students have to repeat a program of study. Even if degrees are recognized, additional, costly exams might be needed.

Henriette Stoeber, a policy analyst at European University Association, pointed out that some universities claim they help these groups, and often this means students from legal departments

offer legal help to refugee students. Diversity and inclusion feature highly in university rhetoric and agendas, but instruction design and classroom experience do not always reflect this. Finally, universities cannot legally collect data on students' background due to data protection laws, which makes it hard to follow refugee students' progress.

Trust beyond metrics in European higher education

Monday 13 December 12.30-14.15

Working group organisers: Krystian Szadkowski, Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy a researcher at the Scholarly Communication Research Group, Adam Mickiewicz University; Tim Seidenschur, Senior Researcher at the International Centre for Higher Education (INCHER) University of Kassel; and Jakub Krzeski, Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences of Nicolaus Copernicus University and researcher at the Scholarly Communication Research Group, Adam Mickiewicz University.

Report by: Rasmus Harsbo

Since the 1970's, metrics have been increasingly used as a basis for accountability. It is believed that metrics are necessary for external actors to have trust in universities and their management. **Krystian Szadkowski**, **Tim Seidenschur** and **Jakub Krzeski** have been conceptualising new modes of accountability by looking at three cases that present alternatives.



The first case was Ghent University in Belgium. In 2018, the rector announced that the university would step out of the rat race of ranking universities, departments, and people. Instead, the university developed an alternative evaluation model based on the actual impact of research. It is not a revolutionary alternative and does not go completely beyond metrics, but it expands the scope of evaluation.

The second case was the Co-operative College, UK. This project aimed to develop a new type of university based on social justice, co-operative values, and principles which work for the mutual benefit of all. The university faced some fundamental challenges regarding how to legitimise itself while going beyond metrics and how to develop alternative internal evaluation procedures.

The third case was the Center for Higher Education Development (CHE) in Germany. A not-for-profit organisation that publishes rankings based on student evaluations. A number of

associations stepped out of the ranking, criticising the CHE rankings for not being comprehensive enough.

Jelena Brankovic, a researcher from Bielefeld University who focuses on ranking and comparison in higher education, commented on the presentation, aiming to problematize the notion of trust itself. While some dynamics appear to be about trust, they are often actually about something else. Rankings gain importance because everyone knows that everyone else is considering them to be important. Brankovic argued that the attitude towards metrics in academia is quasi-religious: a relationship of faith, which, unlike trust, does not imply experience and evidence. The missionaries of this church are not external to the academic community; they are academics themselves and heretics end up being excommunicated from the community.

The session concluded with group work to analyse how institutional strategies have adapted to metrics-driven academia, and to generate ideas alternative to metrics.

Changing relations between faculty, administrative staff, and management

Monday 13 Dec, 14.45-16.30

Working group organiser: Pusa Nastase, Senior Program Manager at the Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education and Visiting Lecturer at the Department of Public Policy, Central European University, Hungary.

Report by: Franciszek Krawczyk

During this session, three case studies, each from a different European country, highlighted the ways university reforms had strained relations between university administration and faculty.

Pusa Nastase's presentation was called 'The introduction of an Enterprise Resource Planning system (ERP) in a university and its impact on the relation between faculty, staff and university leaders'. The main goal of introducing ERP was raising productivity. However, the implementation process ended up increasing the workload of faculty and staff instead. It appears that the designers failed to account for higher education institutions' complexity while developing the product. Failing to involve the system's future users in decision-making was another miscalculation.

Sonja Trifuljesko, Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Helsinki, presented 'Reforms and dynamics of sociality at the University of Helsinki'. This paper concerned a top-down process of 'gutting and restructuring' the university, which included introducing new

multidisciplinary study programs. She used her personal experience as a teaching assistant to reflect upon the informational chaos and the stress involved, as the early career researchers were left with responsibility for developing a new programme without clear guidance. The discussion highlighted how cutting all previous social ties and creating new structures through the top-down creation of education programs facilitated the exploitation of academics.

Ole Wæver, Professor of International Relations at the Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen, presented 'Leadership and steering of Danish Universities', which concerned a higher education law introduced in Denmark in 2003. The speaker stressed that the political climate made it difficult to criticize current neoliberal university reforms and there was a lack of studies and indicators to inform public debate about how Danish science was harmed by the reform. However, studies do show that one in four researchers do not trust their leaders, top researchers are leaving Denmark, and academic freedom is diminishing. His main recommendations for the future were an evaluation of the university law, increase of university autonomy, and greater job stability.

The session ended with comments from **Gergely Kováts**, Associate Professor at Corvinus University of Budapest, who pointed out the need to distinguish between university autonomy and academic freedom. The latter does not have to imply the former. The discussion also highlighted that important decisions about changes at universities should not be made by senior administrators alone but rather should involve the university community.

Pandemic Study

Tuesday 14 Dec 9.00-10.20 and 10.45-12.15

Organisers of the session: Amélia Veiga, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at the University of Porto, and a member of the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES) in Portugal, and Tim Seidenschnur, a postdoctoral researcher at the International Centre for Higher Education (INCHER), University of Kassel, Germany.

Report by: Szendrei-Pál Eszter and Barbora Nekardová

The Pandemic Study started two years ago and was organised through online meetings due to the COVID-19 situation. Members of the research teams met for the first time at this conference.



Research teams from eight countries participated in the project. A working group created a participatory process involving all the teams to identify key issues and develop a shared interview schedule. The schedule focused on three issues, with more sub-issues: 1) the sustainability of the higher education sector, 2) the purposes of higher education in society, and 3) the changing organisation of the university.

Each research team selected at least two institutions for their country's case studies, and held at least ten interviews, in addition to analysing documents. More than 100 interviews were held in total. The country studies were presented in alphabetical order.

1. Denmark

The members of the research team were **Susan Wright**, Professor of Educational Anthropology, Circle U Chair and Co-director of the Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF) at the Danish School of Education (DPU), **Mille Idehen**, Research Assistant at CHEF, and **Rasmus Harsbo**, PhD student at DPU. They investigated two cases with eight interviews in the first case and ten in the second case. The result of these interviews showed similarities between the two cases: for example, there was trust in central and top management during the lock downs.

Regarding sustainability, national policy had seriously de-internationalized the sector and reduced English-medium education before the pandemic. Towards the end of the pandemic, a new policy asked universities to reduce up to 10% of their student places or move their educational provision out of the cities. Regarding the purposes of higher education institutions in society, on the one hand, researchers in relevant sciences were admired as pandemic heroes, but, on the other hand, the academic community experienced contempt and political attacks on academic integrity. Regarding the functioning of higher education institutions, in both cases, there was trust in the leadership's handling of COVID-19 regulations. The fast and successful transition to online learning involved teaching staff in a steep learning curve. Working from home was most difficult for those who lived alone, had young children, or were in the early stages of their career. Introverted students participated more during online classes, and students used more online materials during their studies. However, interviewees could not imagine a university without walls in Denmark.

2. Finland

The study was presented by **Melina Aarnikoivu**, Postdoctoral Researcher in the Higher

Education Studies (HIEST) team at the University of Jyväskylä. Regarding sustainability in the higher education sector, funding priorities remained unchanged and some additional funding was allocated. As for the role of universities in society, there was criticism about the usefulness of research. However, teachers were highly valued. Within universities, the digital transition was smooth, as there was already expertise in digital learning, but the pace of academic and administrative work was not sustainable. Female scholars and international students faced problems, but introverted students enjoyed staying at home. In the future, there would be an increased focus on well-being.

3. France

The study on France was reported by **Dorota Dakowska**, Professor at the Department of Political Science, Sciences Po Aix. During the pandemic, the distinction between research and teaching universities did not make sense. Distant learning was very chaotic, and it took months to stabilise teaching practices. However, the system remained stable overall. The study identified increased workloads for academics, teachers, staff and students. Gender inequality was not visible among staff but was important for students. The main difficulties were following online courses, isolation, mental health, and poor quality internet connections.

4. Germany

Tim Seidenschur, Senior Researcher at the International Centre for Higher Education (INCHER), reported on the German study. Across the sector, higher education institutions experienced continuity in funding. The main differences were in how different institutions introduced new teaching techniques and distance and online education increased workloads for students and teachers. As for the role of universities in society, pre-existing trends were amplified. Regarding the functioning of higher education institutions, for academics, working from home was more efficient, but it was fatiguing to work alone. Financial issues and mental health problems were also important.

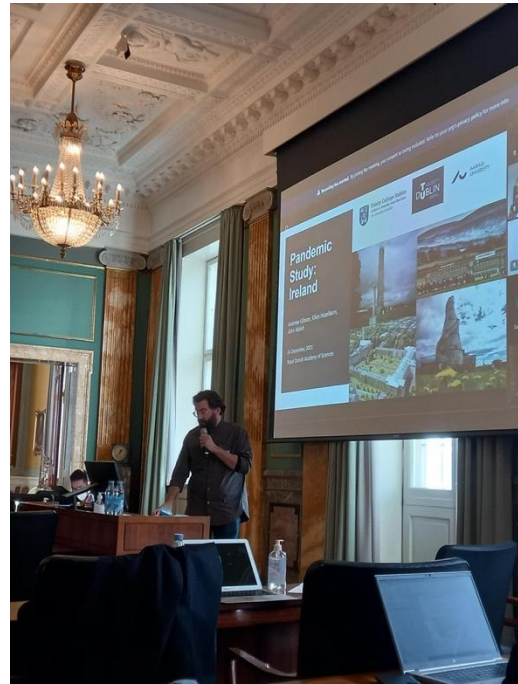
5. Hungary

This study was presented by **Zsuzsanna Géring**, Director at the Future of Higher Education Research Centre, Budapest Business School and **Pusa Nastase**, Senior Program Manager at the Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education, Central European University. Three universities were chosen as case studies (Budapest Business School, Central European University, and Corvinus University of Budapest) and 42 interviews were conducted including top managers, middle managers, administrative staff, academics and students. Additional data included university surveys and Hungarian Rectors' Conference documents. Regarding the sustainability of higher education systems, during the pandemic rules and regulation were imposed top-down, but bottom-up initiatives sprouted up as well. There were no fundamental changes in funding issues or the international context, although internationalisation is high in the agenda. Inequalities of age and chronic illnesses became an important issue. As for the purposes of higher education institutions in society, there was a general turn towards pedagogy and the pandemic demonstrated the need for pedagogical centres. It also became obvious that higher education is not imaginable in a fully online manner, although a complete return to offline operations is not likely either, and there will be a shift toward some hybrid teaching. In

terms of the working of higher education institutions, an instant switch to online education showed the importance of available resources (e.g. staff in Centres for Teaching and Learning and IT staff) and highlighted faculty's ability to adapt and their interest in the possibilities on the long run offered by online education. Also, the duty to care for students, and especially for international students, became clearly vital. The pandemic revealed a mismatch between the expressed importance of international students and their actual treatment and the difficulties connected with isolation.

6. Ireland

The Irish study was presented by **Andrew Gibson**, then Post Doc Researcher at DPU, Aarhus University and **Ellen Hazelkorn**, Professor Emerita, Technological University Dublin. A large public research university (5 interviews) and a large public university of applied sciences (5 interviews) were involved in this research. The issue of sustainability focused on policy and funding. During this period, a new ministry was established with responsibility for higher education and the pandemic also led to thinking about the purpose of internationalisation. Regarding inequalities in higher education, it was shown that the COVID-19 situation was challenging for PhD students and hard for women in science. In relation to the social purpose of higher education institutions, science and scientists had significance



impact in media discussions during the pandemic but researchers should have more support in how to communicate publicly. Students' expectations about higher education were changing and a fully online mode was not desirable. On the issue of how universities functioned during the pandemic, there were some concerns that policy makers could cut some funding with online education. Students increased their power in this period in terms of governance and got far more involved but a conversation about measurement, quantifying and evaluating was lacking.

7. Portugal

Amélia Veiga, Assistant Professor at the University of Porto presented this study in which 13 interviews were conducted. The study found that the sustainability of the higher education system was not at risk and institutional priorities were agreed to secure education and to guarantee that all students had access to digital education. The internalisation of research was not affected since alternative ways were developed to hold online meetings. On the other hand, the decrease of public funds and general complaints about insufficient funding were a prior condition that differentiated the effects of the pandemic on the higher education system and institutions. The virtual mobility of students and academics apparently gained new momentum. The pandemic worsened the conditions of worker-students. On the role of universities in society, the role of education was at stake when it came to how society discussed the role of universities and polytechnics. Fears related to the quality of emergency remote learning, and

social justice regarding students' assessment gained some visibility in the society (polytechnic). On the workings of the higher education institutions, changes were mainly focused on educational and governance issues, but it was too soon to assess how permanent they would be.

8. England

Que Anh Dang, Assistant Professor at the Centre Global Learning, Coventry University and **Miguel Antonio Lim**, Senior Lecturer in Education and International Development, University of Manchester presented this study. Three universities had been chosen as case studies and 18 interviews were conducted online via Teams and ZOOM. On sustainability, the focus was on financial sustainability and, related to that, sustainable internationalization, as fee income is important for institutional economies. Surprisingly, at a national level the recruitment of international students did not decrease during the pandemic. However, on a sectoral and institutional level there were rapid responses to the pandemic with regard to international activities.

Chris Newfield, Director of Research at the Independent Social Research Foundation in London and formerly Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara provided a commentary on the studies. In his view, these pandemic studies indicated what kinds of areas are opening up and might affect universities over the next 10 years. He predicted that the financial aspect could turn worse. The pandemic had left a legacy of questions about international students and mobility. Would it be possible in the post-pandemic era to generate more cooperation in educational activities – not competition? Are we really knowledge society? Should knowledge lead over other activities and social roles of the university?

Gender inequality and precarity: Making the case for change

Tuesday 14 Dec, 13.30-15.15

Working group organisers: Charlotte Morris, Senior Lecturer in Education and Sociology at Portsmouth university and Lotta Snickare, Researcher at Oslo University and the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm.

Report by: Mark Dawson

This session took the form of mini-presentations. Dr **Sevil Sümer** from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and the University of Bergen talked about 'Non-Citizenship and precarity in academia' on systemic, organisational and interactional levels. The percentage of those working in Academic who are non-citizens has been increasing. This

pattern can be seen across Europe and is apparent even in countries that enjoy strong labour laws and stable funding climates such as Norway.

Dr **Filomena Parada** representing Eurodoc, shared the findings of a Eurodoc Postdoc Survey. ‘Gendered trends in the career plans and work-life balance of postdocs working in Europe’. This large-scale survey was conducted pre-pandemic and approximately 75% of early career researchers anticipated that it would be difficult to achieve their career goals, although men were more confident of their prospects.



Dr **Katalin Tardos** (International Business School, Hungary) and **Veronika Paksi** (Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence) presented their study of precarity among Hungarian female PhD Students with teaching responsibilities in Engineering. They showed that precarity for Hungarian women working in higher education was the highest in the EU. Women are far more likely to be in short-term and lower-salaried positions – frequently on a part-time basis.

In a rousing piece titled ‘Gendering academic freedom’, **Aysuda Kölemen** from Bard College Berlin noted that there is a surplus of PhD students competing for a limited number of ‘secure’ places in academia. Despite an enduring myth of ‘meritocracy’, the bulk of the least valued work is completed by a majority who toil under precarious conditions. The path to career progression and job security is blocked by financial, cultural and structural barriers that often affect women more than men. Academic ‘freedom’ proves to be elusive for many aspiring female researchers.

Dr **Marie Sautier** from the University of Lausanne presented ‘Gendering of precarity’. Using the notion of academic citizenship, she reinforced the point that PhD-supply currently exceeded the ability of the sector to provide stable career pathways. She described how women are more likely to be in probationary positions. In male-dominated subject areas that also offer more career potential in the private sector, men have more options for secure and well-paid jobs. Sometimes motherhood is still viewed as incompatible with an ‘ideal’ academic career trajectory and many departmental positions of power continue to recruit largely in their own (older, white male) image.

In ‘Illegitimate academics’, **Barbara Read** from Glasgow University gave voice to early-career researchers who often seem to struggle with imposter syndrome. Staff fretted that signifiers of impermanence might delegitimise their authenticity as members of faculty. Staff varied in their openness towards students regarding their impermanent status and many shared concerns about how this reflected on themselves, their departments and the university.

These mini-presentations were followed by groupwork about what needs to be done. Practical suggestions included: child-friendly working policy (Creches, flexible working, etc), dedicated careers/early-researcher support resources, and stronger engagement with policy-makers.

This was a fertile and highly engaging session that highlighted the rich diversity and strength of multiple perspectives from across Europe with regard to Gender Inequality and Precarity and it shed light on some of the challenges that unite academics. The session was a timely reminder, particularly for those working in challenging higher education environments where political winds can be harsh and the funding sparse, of the value of international collaboration and open-minded group working.

Academic Freedom and Alternative Conditions of Knowledge Production

Wednesday 15 Dec, 9.00-10.45

Working group organisers: Eva Hartmann, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education, Cambridge University, Sue Wright, Professor of Educational Anthropology, Circle U Chair and Co-director of the Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF) at the Danish School of Education (DPU), and Amélia Veiga, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at the University of Porto, and researcher at the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Portugal.

Report by: Hatice Nuriler and Dara Melnyk

Eva Hartmann's introduction offered an overview of the issues raised in the working groups' webinar series on conditions of knowledge creation. The webinars had identified three significant areas: first, the marketization of higher education which was undermining academic communities, their self-organisation, and scientific ethos. This ran counter to a sense of common ownership of goods and a commitment of science to serve society. The second issue was the market concentration in academic publishing. At that webinar, David Mills from Oxford University, had shown that five big publishers dominate the market and limit society's access to research outcomes. Vivian Berghahn had exemplified an alternative model, developed between Berghahn Publishing and Libraria, the librarians' organisation, which did not involve authors' fees and yet opened scholarly communication freely to the world. The third issue, the digitalisation of higher education, was a source of both progress and problems of assetization. At that workshop, Janja Komljenovic (Lancaster University) had explained how access to data is now being sold to customers and providers alike. With EdTech companies' headquarters mainly in the US and China, this is shifting the trajectories of power.

All of these issues raised questions about academic freedom, the focus of this session. Cases

from four European countries identified the range of issues at stake in different contexts. Astrid Söderbergh Widding (President of Stockholm University) speaking on behalf of the Magna Charta Observatory, provided a commentary.

Academic Freedom in Portugal

Amelia Veiga (Assistant Professor at the University of Porto) used the metaphor of the ‘silent spring’ to depict the decline of academic freedom on Portugal. The image comes from Rachel Carson’s book, written in the 1960s, which discussed how agriculture changed gradually and discreetly until there were no birds left to sing in spring. Similarly, scholars in the Portuguese higher education system are unaware of academic freedom quietly fading. The forces that are changing the relationship academic freedom and institutional autonomy and reducing the latter are the consolidation of the ‘evaluative state’ and market regulation mechanisms. Among the specific processes are directives such as national research evaluation frameworks, and pressures to obtain external funding. The meaning of academic freedom, informed by this context, goes beyond the Humboldtian model, and can be viewed not only as an individual right, but as a duty for the whole collective endeavour of higher education institutions. Academic freedom’s ‘silent spring’ may eventually lead to inability to hold scientific debates.

The Common Good Academic Freedom in Poland

Jakub Krzeski, Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences of Nicolaus Copernicus University and **Krzystian Szadzowski**, Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Adam Mickiewicz University gave a brief outline of developments in Poland and developed a particularising theory of academic freedom. Poland’s ‘academic freedom package’ policy initiative, introduced in 2020, contained a number of aspects, which caused criticism from the academic community, not least because it mixed academic freedom with freedom of expression. By looking for an alternative to binary oppositions between the two concepts, the researchers proposed de-universalising the idea of academic freedom and speaking in much more particularised terms about academic freedom in relation to the socio-political realities of a specific context. They argued this would offer a more nuanced picture of the interplay between an external power (be it a state or market forces) and the academic community.

Threats to the Academic Freedom in the UK

Cris Shore, Professor of Social Anthropology at Goldsmiths College London, argued that academic freedom, being essentially the freedom to question received wisdom, should be recognized as a backbone of democracy. But in the UK, there is pervasive anxiety in academia, connected to the fear of being vilified for holding a particular view. The usual culprits are external forces, such as marketisation and managerialism, with their focus on performance indicators. But there are also threats from within: in particular, practices of no-platforming and silencing. He used the case study of Kathleen Stock, a professor from Sussex University, who was accused of making students feel unsafe due to her views, expressed in a scholarly book, as an illustration. The debate was not about whether Stock was right or wrong, but rather about whether she should have been allowed to express her ideas. While academics can collectively stand up to external pressure, it is surprisingly difficult to stand up to students. Shore suggested

that external and internal threats are inherently connected: it is the managerial definition of student safety that has allowed emotional comfort to be prioritised over scholarly debate and, consequently, has led to the erosion of free speech on campus. Yet the growth in the number of managers and professional staff and the casualisation of the workforce are justified by the goal of improving the student experience. Shore concluded that threats to academic freedom in anglophone countries are unlike the 'silent spring' in Portugal: they are visible and clear-cut, 'a perfect storm', in his words.

Research freedom in Denmark

Susan Wright, Professor at DPU, Aarhus University, points out that, in Denmark, only the concept of research freedom exists. This is the freedom to choose research topics, as long as they aligned with the university's strategy, and freedom to select research methods, combined with the statutory obligation to disseminate the results. In the absence of a concept of academic freedom, it is unclear, for example, whether a scholar can criticise their institution or colleagues, and, as in Portugal, teaching freedom is constrained by quality assurance frameworks. Chief among the current problems with research freedom is lack of protection against political interference.

The 2003 University Law 'set universities free' in the sense that they became responsible for negotiating their own relations with all the interests in 'surrounding society'. From industry and NGOs, to government, all could make demands on the university's research and educational resources and universities had to protect themselves, their own research freedom and ethics. She detailed examples of vested interests intervening in research results and attacks by politicians who named research groups and individuals, including PhD students, in parliament and in the media, accusing them of doing 'pseudo research' or 'activism' on gender, diversity, culture, sexuality etc. Disregarding the asymmetric power relations, they claimed academics should be able to stand up to the criticism. Research showed academics felt inhibited from discussing research results in public and that research freedom was threatened.

Promising ways forward

A commentary on the presentations was provided by Professor **Astrid Söderbergh Widding**, President of Stockholm University, Vice-President of Magna Charta Observatory, and Council Member of the European Universities Association. She showed how, at different times, academic freedom has been supported and opposed. The Magna Carta Universitatum from 1988 highlights, celebrates, and encourages the protection of academic freedom as fundamental value. A new edition of the charter (2020) was informed by a large consultation and responded to modern demands and concerns. Nothing has been subtracted from the text; however, the responsibility of universities towards their local and global societies has been emphasised.

As a possible way forward, she stressed that academic freedom is not only an academic, but also a societal value. The Swedish government recognised this recently by including academic freedom, not just research freedom, in the Higher Education Act - albeit subordinated to a public service ethos. While official documents support academic freedom, the task of upholding it still lies on higher education's shoulders. She cited the University Without Walls

report by the European University Association, in which the authors talk about pressures universities are under and suggested that the various partners should engage in the conversation about open universities, firmly rooted in their values, and yet functioning in the interest of societies. The Living Values initiative by the Magna Charta Observatory has become a toolbox for higher education institutions to prepare them for dealing with both external and internal threats.

How to develop new dialogues between researchers and leaders and policy practitioners?

Wednesday 15 Dec, 11.15-12.45

Panel debate organised by: Susan Wright, Professor of Educational Anthropology, Danish School of Education (DPU), Aarhus University.

Report by: Dara Melnyk and Anna Bille

The panellists were Ellen Hazelkorn, Professor Emerita at the Technological University Dublin, Pavel Zgaga, Professor Emeritus at Ljubljana University, and former Minister of Education of Slovenia, Thomas Jørgensen, Director for Policy Coordination and Foresight at the European Universities Association, Lina Christensen, Senior EU adviser at the Central Denmark EU Office, Brussels, Ivana Didak, Senior Policy Officer at the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, and Bjørn Stensaker, the Vice-Rector for Education at the University of Oslo

Sue Wright started by asking: *Why do researchers have difficulty in developing a fruitful dialogue with policymakers?*

Pavel Zgaga, reflecting upon his experience with both scholarship and policymaking, outlined a typology of relationships between researchers and policymakers. In the first type, both sides 'have problems with one another'. In the second type only researchers have problems with policymakers and in the third, policymakers have problems with researchers. In the fourth type, both sides work successfully with each other. Much depends on the political framework: in enlightened absolutism, a researcher has more opportunities for productive dialogue with policymakers than in a populist and illiberal democracy. In Slovenia, enlightened absolutism began in 1986, and it was 'a brilliant period' when it was possible to speak and to influence decision-making in the country.

For cooperation, first, it is important for scholars and policymakers to be aware that the other party is committed to their own discourse, be it academic or political, and each is building a reputation and career within a sphere of power. Second, both groups should understand and

appreciate their differences. Finally, it pays to remember that politics is the art of the possible (here, Wright pondered on how researchers can find out what politicians think is possible). Differences between researchers and policymakers cannot always be overcome. Today, one of the most serious problems is the decline of confidence in science, as well as in liberal democracy.

As someone whose work spanned university governance, research, and consultancy, **Ellen Hazelkorn** mentioned tensions between governments' concerns with impact and funding and academics' proliferation of critiques. She pointed out that managerialism is often criticised by scholars with no experience in management. She shared that the experience of working with a policymaker as a colleague had been helpful and her overall message was: 'Don't just say what policy makers want to hear, and don't just be critical; reinterpret and be flexible and create a space where we can have a conversation together.'

Thomas Jørgensen defined his role as a lobbyist: finding out what is happening, what would be beneficial, and how to make that happen. Drawing on his current work as well as his past as a researcher, he pointed out that research must have a 'hook' to catch decision-makers' interest. Researchers have to ask themselves how they can relate their research to something that policy makers already are interested in. The researcher must have one or two clear messages to keep the argument succinct and the research should move the general perception. He emphasised that researchers should have a dissemination plan, using social media to reach out. This will enhance the chance of successful conversations with policy makers, but not necessarily the possibility of influencing policy directly. He concluded by warning that researchers cannot influence policy directly; they need to partner up with professional lobbyists. "But once you've done all of that", he said, "you are basically there. There is no ill will on the other side."

Ivana Didak began by explaining the Guild's role, which is trying to enhance the voice of universities in Brussels. She said that universities should play a larger role in shaping science and technology policy. To reach policy makers, researchers need to invest more time in engaging with the public so as to bring them into scientific conversations. Researchers can make most impact if they engage with the earliest stages of making a policy, and this might also yield a better relationship with policy makers in the long term. Once policymakers are reached, they appreciate quality input.

Bjørn Stensaker explained that researchers and policymakers operated with different logics: while researchers focus on identifying problems, policymakers focus on identifying solutions. The schism is wider in some countries and narrower in others. The ability of researchers to reach policymakers depends on whether the capacity has been developed in their discipline or university. Such capacity can be intentionally built up. Policy makers and researchers also differ in scope: politics is broad in scope, but academia encourages specialisation. Researchers should develop a broader scope and draw on more comparative and collaborative international research. Developments such as the Guild are positive because they enable researchers to widen their scope and to make impact through social media.

The second question **Wright** asked the panellists was of a more practical nature: *What should be done within the “European Universities: Critical Futures” project to bring research to the attention of policy makers? How should the working groups go about it?*

Pavel Zgaga suggested that translating academic knowledge for a wider audience is one of the key tasks for a researcher. He had five recommendations. First, researchers should formulate how and why their research was important for solving practical problems in society. Second, academic activism should occupy its own place among other activities, as it could be the bridge between the academic and policy-making discourses. Third, researchers should make use of academic freedom and share their arguments with the public. Fourth, research teams need a public relations officer in their midst. Fifth, researchers should try to communicate with wider audiences, whether in social media, with NGOs, political parties or the general public.

Ellen Hazelkorn compared writing for policymakers with designing something for someone else or working for a client. This means understanding ‘the client’s’ constraints. The three big issues that constrain or concern most governments are governance at the system and the institutional level; finance; and quality (Stensaker later added efficiency to this list). She emphasised that it is important to write clearly, reducing solutions to steps. Think about the best way to present material: civic officers are time-constrained and are not always experts in a particular field. It is a good idea to look at macro trends, as long term as up to 2040 and 2050. That would be a good way to understand what was coming down the road. Meeting policy makers’ needs at a particular time and understanding their perception of the issues can lead to new thinking.

Thomas Jørgensen encouraged the working groups to think where they could make a real difference. He said it was crucial for researchers to have a clear intent and to come up with a plan for acting on it. Every working group must be in sync with the policymaking process, otherwise it would be difficult to find an open door. He added that capital of any kind – social capital or cultural capital – was needed. It is worth mapping the relevant players with the capital they have (think tanks, lobbying groups, etc.). Finally, he stressed again that the division of labour between researchers and organisations such as EUA and the Guild is beneficial: researchers should reach out to the public and outsource lobbying, if possible, to lobbyists. He added, ‘Don’t climb a mountain if you’re not a mountaineer’. It is the job of professionals (journalists and lobbyists) to communicate and mediate between universities and policy makers. Jørgensen strongly believed that researchers can influence the general perception by engaging in public discussion before decisions are made, but they cannot influence policy making specifically.

Ivana Didak said that mediators, like the Guild, sometimes struggle to engage researchers in a certain debate because it does not relate to their particular interests at the time. Mediators work on translating ‘EU jargon’ to inform academia about developments: the EU policy might influence national debates later, or vice versa. Didak recommended, as a practical approach, offering a solution to something policy makers can instantly use (putting it in a framework they can understand, as discussed earlier). She explained that the Guild offers academics the

potential to access policy makers directly, as well as the opportunity to become members of advisory and expert groups at EU level. Distinctiveness and allies are things academics should look for.

Bjørn Stensaker added that while there is accelerating rotation among policymakers, the bureaucracy tends to remain stable. Developing a long-term relationship with the bureaucracy could be more beneficial at times than talking to policymakers. He highlighted four issues with which policy makers are often concerned: the system's effectiveness; efficient use of the resources available; relevance; and quality. If academics can find a way to relate to some of these issues in their research, it is a good start when it comes to having a voice in policy making. If academics want to use their expertise, they should also be open to invitations from expert groups, think tanks and committees – these can provide knowledge and influence and lead to further research.

Alternative Internationalisms and the Omnicrisis

Wednesday 15 Dec, 13.30-15.15

Working group organisers: Andrew Gibson, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Aarhus University, and Taina Saarinen, a Research Professor at the University of Jyväskylä.

Report by: Tugay Durak



This working group had held a series of events on rethinking internationalization from alternative perspectives, unpacking internationalisms in different contexts, linking the discussions of internationalisms to higher education policies, and discussing alternative histories and alternative futures of higher education. In this session, five presentations were followed by a panel discussion.

Su-Ming Khoo from the School of Political Science and Sociology, NUI Galway outlined the omnicrisis faced by internationalisation. The current pandemic is a crisis of physical and social health, social inequalities, science, information, media and democracy. The pandemic revealed some university systems' over-reliance on international students, especially Chinese students, and brought recognition of the hidden social, personal and ecological costs of mobility. Student mobility might return, but internationalisation at home has gained popularity and incidents in some Anglo-Saxon cities meant international students were seeking alternative destinations.

‘Alternative internationalisation’ as a framework brings shifting geographies of internationalisation and predominant imaginaries of centre and periphery into a different questioning frame. It problematises asymmetries in power and knowledge relationships. From perspectives in East or Central Asia, the frame includes the role of an active state, or from places under occupation like Palestine, crises of human displacement.

Anna Lohse, PhD Candidate in Educational Governance at the Hertie School and **Mark Dawson**, Director of Digital Education and a Senior Teaching Fellow at Lancaster University Management School, held a presentation on Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and virtual mobility. Dawson explained how COIL engages students from different higher education institutions on a learning activity that academics have designed to foster international perspectives not available at home. Lohse described COIL activities in Germany funded by DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) either for a specific course or a whole programme, including double degree master’s programmes. COIL’s potential is to encourage students to think outside of their usual context and foster plural perspectives without travel restrictions.

Franciszek Krawczyk, a Ph.D. Candidate at the Doctoral School of Adam Mickiewicz University, related the idea of unequal exchange between developed and developing countries to publishing. Scholars from top universities publish more in top-ranked journals thanks to their vast resources, which puts less-prestigious institutions at a disadvantage in scholarly publishing. He argued that when judging the quality of academic journals operating in less-developed regions, the point of unequal exchange should be taken into account.

Natalya Steane, PhD Candidate in a dual degree programme at Aarhus and Coventry Universities analysed how Uzbekistan had become a transnational education hub. After independence, only a small segment of the society enrolled in higher education and participation had not widened much since. But in 2015, government officials decided to turn Uzbekistan into a transnational education hub, using the advantages of their location in central Asia, multiculturalism, and relatively affordable life. From 2018 to 2021, the number of foreign universities or branch campuses in Uzbekistan grew from seven to nineteen. However, these only come from a handful of countries, notably Russia, Korea, and India. Steane argued that the benefits to Uzbekistan include foreign academics paying more attention to the critical thinking abilities of Uzbek students. Students at branch campuses also have flexibility in selecting courses, whereas local universities can only offer fixed programs.

Vesna Holubek, a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Education and Culture at Tampere University, described a project between Finnish and Palestinian academics to create hybridised (pedagogical) perspectives. Finnish academics organized a six-month training for Palestinian academics in the Gaza strip on student engagement, student-centred learning, and digital learning environments. Then, they conducted a study to identify what kinds of forces influence Palestinian university teachers’ educational practices. Five discourses were identified: differences in teaching hard versus soft sciences; conventional, more didactic, teaching methods in comparison to participatory student-centred teaching and learning; improving

education; responding to societal needs, whilst also operating in the social, cultural, religious context referring to Islamic values; and the political-economic circumstances of the daily situation in the Gaza Strip, where border crossing is limited, people live under occupation and constant bombing, and the constant tensions of daily life affect how Palestinian academics teach. Holubek concluded by asking: ‘How can we create these kinds of internationalisation spaces for exchange, transformation and hybridization and that get away from the imposition of discourses resonating with hierarchising polarities such as exporter and importer; provider and receiver; developed and developing countries; global north and global south; centre and periphery?’

The panellists who discussed these papers were Roger Chao, Head of Education, Youth and Sports at ASEAN and Raul Coterio, Team Leader at the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning and Manager of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

Roger Chao discussed internationalisation and its relation to learning. He saw the internationalisation of higher education as embedded in higher education systems, which are embedded in the foundations of society, including globalisation and regionalisation. He argued that ‘If we're talking about alternative internationalisation, we need to rethink higher education per se. We need to consider how we look at the process of learning and the process of credentialing’.

Raul Coterio pointed out how the pandemic has altered the higher education landscape and offered a chance to reconsider widening participation and non-traditional learners in higher education. The rise of online and distance learning gave impetus for institutions to develop more open and lifelong learning for anyone at any age, with more flexible accommodation of work commitments or family responsibilities. More flexibility in teaching modes, accreditation of online courses including MOOCs, micro-credentials, alternative credit systems should be considered seriously. Online education means students can also learn across borders and counter the massive imbalance in countries receiving and sending talent between the north and south of the globe. It can function as an equalizer between different knowledge systems by integrating perspectives and thinking from the global south, indigenous knowledge and social minorities who can participate online. Still, the opportunities of online learning are not reachable by everyone as millions of people have no internet connection.

Plenary

Wednesday 15 December, 15.30-16.30



The conference ended with a plenary discussion, attended by 30 people. The plenary agenda had four items:

Networking. We discussed how to consolidate the networks created by this project, and especially opportunities for PhDs and early-stage researchers to gain skills and experience and fully participate in establishing future research agendas for the critical role of universities in Europe.

Future activities. The working groups presented plans for their future activities. This included publishing the results of their work and engaging in dialogue with relevant members of the policy community.

Dialogue with policy community. To facilitate this, it was agreed to make a detailed account of the conference session on ‘How to develop new dialogues between researchers, leaders and policy practitioners?’ (in this conference report) so that working groups could consider how to draw on the panellists’ ideas and suggestions in their work. It was also agreed to hold a ‘dialogue’ conference in Brussels.

Publication and dissemination. We reviewed the working groups’ plans for publishing the results of their work on the project’s website, CHEF’s working paper series, special issues of journals, including LATISS, and books, including in Berghahn’s series, ‘*Higher Education in Critical Perspective: Practices and Policies*’.

Finally, an enormous vote of thanks was given to Matej Zitnansky for his perfect organising of this hybrid conference and especially the smooth way he integrated participation by those in the conference room with those on the wall.

A full note of the plenary discussion can be found here: <https://projects.au.dk/european-universities-critical-futures/events/keystone-conference-december-2021>

Working Papers on University Reform

1. Setting Universities Free? The background to the self-ownership of Danish Universities, Jakob Williams Ørberg, July 2006.
2. Trust in Universities - Parliamentary debates on the 2003 university law, Jakob Williams Ørberg, October 2006.
3. Histories of RUC - Roskilde University Centre, Else Hansen, November 2006.
4. An Insight into the Ideas Surrounding the 2003 University Law - Development contracts and management reforms, Peter Brink Andersen, November 2006.
5. Who Speaks for the University? - Legislative frameworks for Danish university leadership 1970-2003, Jakob Williams Ørberg, May 2007
6. 'After Neoliberalism'? - The reform of New Zealand's university system, Cris Shore, June 2007
7. Women in Academia - Women's career paths in the social sciences, in the context of Lund University and Swedish higher education, Susan Wright, October 2007
8. Will market-based ventures substitute for government funding? - Theorising university financial management, Penny Ciancanelli, May 2008
9. Measurements and Distortions – A Review of the British System of Research Assessment, Susan Wright, May 2008
10. Becoming and Being: University reform, biography and the everyday practice of sociologists, Nicola Spurling, June 2009
11. Polishing the Family Silver. Discussions at Roskilde University Center in Advance of the 2003 University Law, Nathalia Brichet, August 2009
12. Forandringsprocesser i akademien. En empirisk undersøgelse af medarbejder- perspektiver på en fusionsproces i anledning af universitetsfusionerne, Gertrud Lynges Esbensen, September 2009
13. Recent Higher Education Reforms in Vietnam: The Role of the World Bank, Que Ahn Dang, October 2009
14. The organization of the university, Hans Siggaard Jensen, April 2010
15. Collegialism, Democracy and University Governance – The Case of Denmark, Hans Siggaard Jensen, June 2010
16. Follow the Money, Rebecca Boden and Susan Wright, October 2010
17. Researching Academic Agency in the Cultural Production of Indigenous Ideology in New Zealand Universities, Elizabeth Rata, April 2011
18. University: The European Particularity, Stavros Moutsios, February 2012
19. Academic Autonomy and The Bologna Process, Stavros Moutsios, February 2012
20. Globalisation and Regionalisation in Higher Education: Toward a New Conceptual Framework, Susan Robertson, Roger Dale, Stavros Moutsios, Gritt Nielsen, Cris Shore and Susan Wright, February 2012
21. Methodologies for Studying University Reform and Globalization: Combining Ethnography and Political Economy, Cris Shore and Miri Davidson (et al.), March 2013
22. European Coordination and Globalisation - Summative Working Paper for URGE Work Package 3, Roger Dale, March 2014
23. Shooting Arrows – Disruptions, Intersections and Tracing Lines in Gender Research, Kirsten Locke, April 2014

24. Research Assessment Systems and their Impacts on Academic Work in New Zealand, the UK and Denmark - Summative Working Paper for URGE Work Package 5
Susan Wright, Bruce Curtis, Lisa Lucas and Susan Robertson, April 2014
25. The mobile academic - A survey of mobility among Marie Skłodowska-Curie doctoral fellows, Lisbeth Kristine Walakira and Susan Wright, May 2017
26. Translating 'research integrity' into policy and practice – HEI leaders as political and academic mediators. Lise Degn, October 2017
27. Mapping the Integrity Landscape: Organisations, Policies, Concepts. Rachel Douglas-Jones and Susan Wright, October 2017
28. Higher Education and Brexit: Current European Perspectives. Edited by Aline Courtois. Foreword by Simon Marginson, Marijk van der Wende and Susan Wright, February 2018
29. Final Report of the Project 'Practicing Integrity'. Susan Wright (PI), Lise Degn, Laura Louise Sarauw, Rachel Douglas-Jones, Jakob Williams Ørberg, October 2019.
30. (De)constructing the 'scientist with integrity': A case study of research integrity training for PhD fellows in the medical sciences. Laura Louise Sarauw and Simone Mejding Poulsen January 2020
31. Repositioning China in the Global Education Hierarchy: Sino-Foreign Educational Partnerships in the Belt and Road Initiative. Jie Gao, March 2020
32. What Works for Underrepresented Groups? Identifying Effective Measures for Enhancing Access to Higher Education in Europe. Simona Torotcoi, Delia Gologan and Anastasia Kuryshva, June 2020
33. Drivers for Internationalization of Georgian Higher Education. Pusa Nastase, July 2020
34. De-internationalising Danish Higher Education: Re-framing the Discussion. Susan Wright and Matej Zitnansky, May 2021
35. European Science and Higher Education Policies: Visions and Critical Assessments. Susan Wright, May 2021
36. The Societal Entanglements of Doctoral Education: The development of a research framework for a critical analysis of the societal impact of the humanities PhD. Søren S.E. Bengtsen, Ronald Barnett, Barbara Grant, Lynn McAlpine, Gina Wisker & Susan Wright, June 2021
37. The Role of European Universities in an Age of Pandemic. Edited by Amélia Veiga and Tim Seidenschnur, January 2023