

Taylor, Miles; Pellew, Jill (Hrsg.): *Utopian Universities. A Global History of the New Campuses of the 1960s*. London: Bloomsbury 2020. ISBN: 9781350138636; 424 S.

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This volume, edited by Jill Pellew and Miles Taylor, focuses on the rise of a particular type of academic institute during the 1960s. Owing to a massive expansion of public investment in higher education, over 200 new universities were established across the globe in a relatively brief period. These new campuses reflected the hope that higher education would play a key role in building more modern, social, and equal societies. The contributors to this collection delve into the ideologies, aspirations, and practices that underpinned this new generation of university campuses. The editors have used the term „Utopian university“ to categorize and characterize these new sites of higher education. There are a number of reasons for this: these universities were founded on bold schemes, ground-breaking new plans for community living, new kinds of curricula and pedagogies, and they experimented with new forms of administration. But these schools approached the thin line that separates utopia from dystopia, as shown by the worldwide 1968 student protest that marked the end of a decade of optimism.

The book is divided into two parts. The first thirteen chapters are devoted to nine new campuses established in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland in the 1960s – the so-called plate glass universities. The first chapter, written by William White, looks at the material side of the Utopian universities and compares their architectural style with the style of the previous generation of British institutes. The chapter by Miles Taylor examines the developments of Keele University and highlights its aspiration to educate citizens – teachers, social workers and civil servants – for the new British welfare state. Jon Agar dwells on the teaching and research of the sciences in seven universities built during the 1960s and shows how interdisciplinarity was the hallmark of these universities' diverse experiments with curricula

and research programs. Other chapters provide accounts of the establishment of specific research groups and centers. For example, the chapter by Carolyn Steedman looks at the making of the illustrious Warwick Center for Social History, which was built around the social historian Edward Thompson. These and other chapters convincingly reveal the experimental mood that inspired the creation of these „Utopian“ places, explore to what extent this phenomenon formed a coherent and unified movement, and address the legacy of these projects over the longer term, namely how they helped to open higher education to a wider audience in the context of building the British welfare state.

The second part of the book seeks to place the British experience in a wider comparative framework. Over seven chapters, the reader is given case-studies on universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, India, France, and Germany. Christopher Newfield's chapter is based on an interview with the illustrious Clark Kerr, who played a key role as an administrator in reforming the University of California and wrote one of the most influential books on the modern university.¹ Hannah Forsyth's chapter deals with Australia and describes how six progressive universities were established in relatively undeveloped suburban sites to target a new type of students and to offer an alternative to the conservative and elitist institutions that dominated the educational landscape during the late 1950s. In describing the aftermath she points to the educational reforms in the 1970s and the rise of neoliberal policy paradigms that increasingly turned the universities into governmental tools for economic management.

Also rewarding is the short chapter by Miles Taylor that looks at the initiatives to constitute Utopian universities in the wider territory of the British Commonwealth during the 1950s and 1960s, which often involved not only British but also American, French, and sometimes Soviet funding. His account touches on a pressing question, namely the mutually constitutive relationship of universities and the societies they are embedded in.

¹ Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1963.

He describes how during the process of decolonization the British aspired to create „regional“ or „transnational“ instead of national campuses in Africa and the West-Caribbean, with a strong emphasis on academic freedom and independence from the state. Taylor shows how these projects were eventually taken over by increasingly self-conscious local elites who demanded more nationally-oriented universities. This case eloquently reveals the ambiguity that lie between the universal or transnational pretensions of modern educational projects and the national interests through which they are constituted.

Despite the variety of approaches and topics that are addressed, the editors have succeeded in producing a coherent volume that speaks to a wide base of scholarship. Their introduction identifies several themes that run like threads through the twenty chapters, including: problems associated with curriculum development, styles of administration and management, funding, and the relationship between universities and the state. Especially illuminating is the book's focus on the relationship between the material and subjective dimensions in the constitution of Utopian universities. The type of institutes discussed in this book can be recognized from a long distance for their eye-catching modernist campus designs, often designed by world-famous modernist architects. Without relying on dense theoretical language, the contributors subtly cut through the obsolete analytical dichotomy between the material and subjective/ideological, an issue that, in the field of sociology of knowledge, has attracted considerable attention.² Several chapters contain detailed descriptions that show convincingly how radical pedagogical ideas were translated into new types of campus buildings and how particular ways of organizing student housing had profound effects on community and identity formation.

This volume makes an important contribution by attempting to offer a transnational approach to the study of universities. Universities form a dense network of institutes that transcend national and regional boundaries. Contemporary discourses are dominated by the issue of the internationalization of higher education. However, historical scholarship

has remained remarkably national in its outlook.³ University histories are notorious for their inward-looking analyses and narrow vision. By taking a transnational, comparative approach to a development that transcended national boundaries, this edited volume certainly breaks with this legacy. But it also exposes it to criticism. The volume's ambition is to provide a „global history of the new campuses“. From the perspective of global history, though, there is remarkably little focus on cross-border networks, interactions and flows of ideas, or on the people who underpinned the emergence these campuses. The narratives in the book suggest a rather spontaneous convergence of practices and discourses that buttressed the rise of these particular kinds of educational institutes. Recent historical and sociological research has emphasized the significant roles played by multilateral or philanthropical organizations in shaping discourses and diffusing educational ideas beyond national borders.⁴ Such considerations are surprisingly absent in the volume. It must also be noted that with thirteen out of twenty chapters being built around cases in the United Kingdom, the orientation of the book remains firmly rooted in the British experience. Unintentionally, the volume communicates a centroperepheral thinking that might look natural to readers in the Anglophone world, but which is in fact problematic.

The major strength of the book is that it emphasizes a type of institute that, in historical writing on higher education, has often been

² For an account of the role of buildings in relation to knowledge production, see: Thomas Gieryn, *What Buildings Do*, in: *Theory and Society* 31 (2002), no. 1, pp. 35–74.

³ For a good recent overview of the state of the art on transnational perspectives in the history of education, see: Eckhardt Fuchs / Eugenia Roldán Vera (eds.), *The Transnational in the History of Education: Concepts and Perspectives*, Cham 2019.

⁴ Scholarship on contemporary higher educational developments frequently uses the work of Manuel Castells as a point of reference: Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Chichester, West Sussex 1996. Also, Foucauldian perspectives, especially centering around the notion of governmentality, are commonly used in the sociological perspectives on the role of multilateral organizations in promoting ideas and models for higher education.

eclipsed by more prestigious and historically-loaded precursors such as the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. By focusing on the new campuses of the 1960s, and seeking to explain how higher education has evolved into the mass phenomenon that it has become today, this book addresses a significant gap. For its analysis of British educational developments and how these developments fit in the broader context of higher education reform in Europe and the Commonwealth, this volume is highly recommended to anyone interested in educational development and its politics.

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