Chapter 1
Introduction to the Book and the Comparative Study

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1.1   Changing Societal Contexts

The world, socially, economically and geopolitically was very different in the spring term of 2008, as we were finalizing the Forward Look research project (see Brennan et al. 2008) and planning the research project that would later be called *Change in Networks, Higher Education and Knowledge Societies* (CINHEKS). In 2008, the USA was the strongest economic power followed by Japan and the EU. Emerging economies like Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa provided an alternative perspective for imagining an emerging, multipolar planet. However, many in higher education appeared to be following ideological assumptions that seemed to be guiding higher education systems around the world, as opposed to considering viable alternatives. While there were important exceptions and critical voices (Currie and Newson 1998; Marginson 2007), higher education systems and institutions around the world seemed busy uncritically adopting and legislating what Kauppinen would later term *transnational academic capitalism* (Kauppinen 2012). The irony of this, in retrospect, is that the global economic meltdown of 2008/2009 rested on what turned out to be a vulnerable set of assumptions based on neoliberal ideology. These, in turn, manifested in the wholesale enthusiastic adoption of new public management practices supported by the OECD's modernization agenda (Kallo 2009) that were based on private sector global corporate culture, yet embraced by higher education (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Slaughter and Cantwell 2012). A further irony is that even amidst the global economic crisis, higher education actors in several countries continued to push through measures designed

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to imitate ideals embedded in the higher education systems in the very economies that spawned the global economic crisis of 2008.

The CINHEKS study was conceived and planned as the economic meltdown blossomed and rapidly impacted the global market – and the study itself. The study was carried out during the crisis, amidst powerful knock-on effects, many of which were acutely felt by our team (See Chap. 3). Further, the geopolitical reality of multi-polarity has shifted significantly in a fairly short period of time which has seen the ascendance of several of the strongest emerging countries, while other regions of the world underwent changes that were unforeseen by many of us in 2008, like the Arab Spring. Together with the unfolding crisis in Ukraine, as this book goes to our publishers, ground-breaking social movements in these regions underscore how important information and communication technologies (ICT) including social media, networks and the contents of information are for the organization and actions of political movements. This potent combination: ICT, networks and knowledge is discussed in more detail in Chap. 2.

While larger world events were directly related to several very real challenges the CINHEKS team faced, they also provided an interesting time for a study of this nature. This is because when the world seems to be shifting beneath one's feet and profound uncertainty has been forced on the very people and institutions in the business of interpreting and explaining the social world (the university), as fundamental continuities and discontinuities in complex systems are far from clear. Instead, normative oversimplifications and binary ways of thinking – The Global North/South; East/West, obscure more than they reveal when focusing on the way in which global higher education is changing within and between networked knowledge societies. The CINHEKS study and our team's problematization of the normative *stasis* linked to higher education, calls into question fundamental relationships about higher education and society. In part, the continuities and discontinuities within the countries in which CINHEKS operated were easier to see because the larger continuities and discontinuities continually forced us to both *reflect* on the implications of our studies within the scope of CINHEKS, and also *project* what the implications of our analysis might mean outside the geographical scope of CINHEKS.

In recent decades, economic challenges have focused more attention on the innovative potential within regions with creative, cutting edge higher education, which have developed sustained capacity for innovation and the economic dynamism connected to this. In this socio-economic context, well-supported by theories of knowledge societies and knowledge economies, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly been seen as central institutions, vital to the futures of societies. What underpins this view is the role that HEIs play in the production of new knowledge which is, in turn, seen as the most important single factor explaining economic growth and creating societies of the future (see Chap. 2).

However, the role of HEIs in societies is complex and even paradoxical in a sense that HEIs are often given less resources, from the very nations and regions which expect to benefit, in order to produce a more highly qualified labor force and a steady stream of innovations (see Bleiklie and Byrkjeflot 2002).

In addition to the fact that all contemporary higher education institutions exist in a globalized world, the digitalization of industrial production, societal life and the production of knowledge together with environmental challenges all have a potential to fundamentally alter life as we have known it, during the industrial and post-industrial eras. Simultaneously, new social formations and forms, especially networks, have challenged traditional hierarchical structures of societies and industrial production and altered the very nature of innovation, as it plays out in the countries in which the CINHEKS team operated.

These processes of change seem to be taking place in a world where the speed of change is accelerating continuously. And these changes are especially interesting for universities and (other HEIs), historically speaking, in which past, present and future continuously interact with each other, on a daily basis. This is because universities are both one of the most ancient social institutions and organizations in the Western world (Kerr 1963) but simultaneously tightly connected with the transformation of future societies through their research and teaching/learning functions and through their innovative capacities. Because of this unique status, understanding the connections and networks within and between universities and societies is, therefore, crucially important for understanding the nature of society itself.

The intellectual goal of this book is to better understand how higher education institutions are linked with and connected to not only each other, but within and between networked knowledge societies. The analysis of networks within higher education is a formidable challenge, because we were not only aiming at a rapidly evolving target, but we were also executing our analysis from a quickly shifting academic base, continuously informed by new intellectual, social and industrial landscapes.

1.2 The CINHEKS Study

In order to pursue our admittedly ambitious goal, we designed and executed a complex international comparative study. The comparative point of departure, while challenging is ultimately necessary in topics like this, mainly because it spotlights unquestioned assumptions as to the roles and goals of higher education, within highly situated national contexts. In other words, within domestic contexts, 'the way higher education works' involves assumptions that are seldom questioned, unless or until another national context, with entirely different assumptions, are encountered. While this seems like stating the obvious, comparative researchers from Clark's time (1983) till today (See Kosmützky and Nokkala 2014), still fail to appreciate the profound extent of these differences and their implications.

CINHEKS was carried out across six countries: Finland, Germany, Portugal, The United Kingdom and The United States of America and later joined by the Russian Federation (see Chaps. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11). Despite the fact that nation

states continue to be an important context for all HEIs, we did not want to treat the nation state as a taken-for-granted analytical category, because of the known challenges linked to methodological nationalism (Shahjahan and Kezar 2013) we anticipated. Therefore, our comparisons of institutional cases, across and within national contexts, while based on a common point of departure, the HEI profile (See Chaps. 3 and 5) and linked by a common interview protocol, were developed along distinct lines, determined by CINHEKS teams in the field (See Chaps. 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11). In this sense, the HEI profile and interview protocol were both developed and used in a highly iterative manner, with the hopes of illuminating significant continuities and discontinuities *across* the scope of CINHEKS, but also useful to highlight features unique to *particular* focal settings. As is detailed in Chaps. 3 and 5, focusing our teams on similar social phenomena turned out to be a challenging intellectual exercise. In other words, we quickly abandoned the search for simple lexical equivalence (position or organizational units with similar names) as the basis for establishing focus, but rather focused on functional and conceptual equivalence, that illuminates to similar phenomena or activity (See Merton 1968; Teichler 2014; Välimaa and Nokkala 2014).

Empirically and methodologically, the CINHEKS design is exploratory in nature, combining several distinct modes of inquiry and aims at opening up a new vista of comparative analytical generalization and theory building.

1.3   The Themes of the Book

The intellectual goal and research challenge for this book is to understand how higher education institutions are linked with, connected to and related within contemporary societies. Unlike many books on comparative higher education all these aspects are discussed methodologically and theoretically to some extent, in every chapter instead of just in the theory chapter (Chap. 2) or in the design and methodology chapter (Chap. 3). This is because the CINHEKS research design challenged each research team to reflect on empirical social realities, within an overarching, interconnected framework, but also encouraged our teams to draw on the intellectual approaches which best serve the analysis of those highly situated realities. This said, the CINHEKS study is most powerful, when read, as a whole, unlike many comparative studies, which are more like anthologies of stand-alone chapters. The connections and interrelatedness of the chapters are explained in Chap. 3.

We assumed theoretically and also noted empirically during the research project that the social dynamics of higher education systems and institutions vary greatly, despite the fact that each national system of higher education and institution also had outwardly similar elements (see also Välimaa and Nokkala 2014). The final aim of this comparative research project is to explain these complex social phenomena both theoretically and empirically as they are seen in and from different theoretical perspectives and cultural contexts.

In order to better understand the similarities and differences between national contexts, we recognized the need, from the outset in CINHEKS, to understand the policy contexts in which HEIs exist. Because of this, we took a critical look at the political discourses on Knowledge Society in the countries included in the study (see Chap. 4).

The knowledge society refers to the sociological theory which aims to explain the most crucial social phenomena that currently explains contemporary societies, together with a number of other sociological and economic theories. Our theoretical chapter (Chap. 2) focuses on the analysis of three families of explanations: *the knowledge society*, *information society* and *network society*, which all are needed to better understand the nature of contemporary change in societies, even though each of them purports to provide a comprehensive explanation in and of itself. For this reason we assert their interrelationship is better served by the analytical synthesis we developed during the CINHEKS study: *Networked Knowledge Society*.

1.3.1 Why Finland, Germany, Portugal, Russia, The United Kingdom, Russian Federation and United States of America?

The selection of countries included in an international comparative research project is often based on good and bad academic reasons. In the case of CINHEKS, our initial point of departure was geography. In Europe this meant countries in the North (Finland), South (Portugal), West (UK and Germany) and the East (Russia). In addition, we took in to account the size and differentiated socioeconomic structure that included both large countries (Russia, the USA, Germany and the UK) and small countries (Finland and Portugal); nation states (Finland, Portugal) and federal states (Germany, The Russian Federation and The USA). These types of selection criteria bear in mind that the social dynamics of higher education depend both on the geographical location, the size and the political structure of the state (see Välimaa and Nokkala 2014). In addition, in order to develop a more substantively and empirically generate meaningful comparison, we choose to seek out countries in regions outside of Europe, one of which worked out, the USA and one, in Asia which did not (See Chap. 3).

However, we do not live in perfect world. As academics we are strongly influenced by political and economic matters and we needed to make pragmatic adjustments during CINHEKS. In this regard, we also selected an important nation state in Eastern Europe, whose Ministry of Education ended up preventing their participation (See Chap. 3). Fortunately, Eastern Europe is now represented by the Russian Federation, which we were fortunate to include in the CINHEKS study close to the end of the research project. In addition, the impact of the 2008/2009 economic crisis, led to the closing of one of the institutes in which one of the CINHEKS team was operating, specifically the Center for Higher Education and

Information (CHERI), Open University, UK, which was responsible for the coordination of the CINHEKS institutional case studies and profiles (See Chap. 5). This made the life of our British colleagues much more difficult than what any of us anticipated in the beginning of the project. These matters are discussed in detail, in Chap. 3, because our team, as a whole, benefitted a great deal from opening up discussion on the nature of international comparative studies in the field of higher education research. We are confident that open, analytical and frank discussion on these matters is a good starting point for improving the quality of international comparative studies in our research field.

On a practical note, one of the consequences of our international comparative approach is an acknowledgement of the reality that English is written in a number of different ways. In this book we follow a modified version related to the APA style guide. However, each chapter is written using English (US or UK), according to the preference of the author(s).

1.3.2   On the Contents of the Chapters

The book consists of three parts. Following this chapter, we continue with our section on THEORY, DESIGN AND CONTEXT, which lays the analytical foundation for the rest of the book. In Chap. 2, Jussi Välimaa, Vassiliki Papatsiba and David Hoffman discuss different ways contemporary societies are explained and advance a new theoretical perspective: *The Networked Knowledge Society*. In Chap. 3, 'CINHEKS research design: Taking Stock and Moving Forward', David Hoffman and Hugo Horta open up a critical perspective to international comparative studies, using the CINHEKS-project as the empirically-grounded starting point for their reflections. In Chap. 4, Terhi Nokkala discusses knowledge society discourses in the context of higher education policy, in a comparative international setting. The title of this chapter is 'National stories, convergent trends and divergent paths: discursive constructions of Higher Education and Knowledge Society – nexus in higher education policy texts of five knowledge societies.'

The second part of the book, WITHIN AND BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, focuses on analysing data gathered through a sequential series of qualitative, quantitative and relational modes of inquiry. This part of the book is opened by a cross-case comparative study of HEI profiles and case studies written by John Brennan, Vassiliki Papatsiba, Sofia Sousa and David Hoffman, in Chap. 5. This comparative analysis is followed by a series of focused case studies, framed within the perspective of national systems of higher education. The aim of these nationally-contextualized case studies is to highlight genuinely unique features within national settings, as well as significant features across cases while avoiding the trap of overreliance on the nation state as a taken-for-granted analytical category or point of departure. All national-based case studies were conducted in two different types of HEIs. One global-facing, the other with a local or regional orientation. The rationale for focusing on two different HEI types is related to

international policy discourses which emphasize the importance and need to create
'World Class' universities, while at the same time incorporating an ever-increasing
list of tasks and responsibilities with respect to global, national and local needs.
These policy goals and expectations are transnational and feed into strengthening
existing and emergent status hierarchies within and across national systems of
higher education. All kinds of higher education league tables are increasingly
used to strengthen this trend. For these reasons we decided to analyze if there are
in fact key differences, in empirical terms, between HEIs with different orienta-
tions, with respect to our topic.

The nationally-focused studies are opened with the focus on Portugal. Hugo
Horta and Brigida Blasi analyze 'Why public policies fostering knowledge net-
works in academia matter?' Their Chap. 6 is followed by the case of the Russian
Federation, by Anna Smolentseva: 'Transformations in the knowledge transmission
of Russian universities: social vs. economic instrumentalism' (Chap. 7). Both of
these chapters emphasize the tension between policy framing and the significance
of traditions and historical legacies for understanding contemporary higher educa-
tion. In Chap. 8 Brenda Little, Andrea Abbas and Mala Singh conduct a sociolog-
ical analysis of values, based on the work of the Bernstein. They problematize and
interrogate 'Changing practices, changing values? A Bernsteinian analysis of
knowledge production and knowledge exchange in two UK universities'. In
Chap. 9, Anna Kosmützky and Amy Ewen analyse two higher education institu-
tions in the German context of higher education. The authors problematize the
tensions and limitations brought about by thinking too strictly in terms of 'global,
national and local' focal points. 'Global, national and local? The competitive
horizons heuristic and multilevel spatial ties of universities' are fresh, empirically
grounded conceptual-level analysis that both respects the normative realities of
substantive framing encountered by all higher education researchers, yet demon-
strates, it is possible to move beyond ill-suited substantive framing, in conceptual
terms. In Chap. 10, David Hoffman, Terhi Nokkala and Jussi Välimaa focus their
analysis on a rapidly globalizing Finnish higher education system. Continuing to
use the competitive horizons heuristic, they problematize the stratification of higher
education in countries previously characterized by a lack of stratification. Building
on insights from Chap. 5, they extend the cross-case analysis of the HEI profiles
and case studies and introduce the conceptualization of *universtasis* as a normative
conceptual problematization which illuminates empirical potentials, actualities and
key policy choices. In Chap. 11, Aurelia Kollasch, Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, Blanca
Torres-Olave and Gary Rhoades focus on: 'Exploring social network ties of
U.S. academics'. The authors illuminate the nature of the structural realities illu-
minated by employee status, institutional type, discipline, and geography. Their
case study work is elaborated by an exploration of the way in which social network
analysis (SNA) opens up a novel mode of inquiry underutilized in international
comparative studies of higher education.

The last chapter of this section changes methodological approach. In Chap. 12,
Blanca Torres-Olave, Hugo Horta, Aurelia Kollasch, Jenny Lee and Gary Rhoades

have two foci in their study. They begin with a methodological narrative, which they use to problematize the nature of an international comparative study, from the perspective of a single project team. Their illuminating narrative is followed by the comparative social network analysis of academics' networks in four countries (Finland, Portugal, UK and US) that combined a conventional survey, focused on attribute data with the relational approach of SNA.

The last part of the book consists of COMPARATIVE FINDINGS from the empirical, methodological and theoretical perspectives opened up within the chapters of the book. The editors, Jussi Välimaa and David Hoffman, together with the other team leaders who originally conceived of the CINHEKS research project, John Brennan, Gary Rhoades and Ulrich Teichler, aim at an overarching view of the central theoretical, conceptual, methodological and empirical outcomes of the CINHEKS study. They also outline the implications of theses outcomes and new avenues for future research in higher education.

1.4   Re-becoming Universities?

The title of the book "Re-Becoming Universities?" aims to illuminate an analytically problematized, empirically-grounded perspective on the nature of changing relationship and roles of universities (and other HEIs) in contemporary societies. The title draws on an essay on the notion of Rhizome by Deleuze and Guattari (2004) who discuss, metaphorically, the relationship between 'tree-like' traditional organizations (like universities) and the logic of networks which operate on a distinctly different set of logics (see Chap. 2). In this sense, the rhizome is an a-centered, nonhierarchical social entity that operates by *variation, expansion, conquest, capture, off-shoots ... all manner of "becomings"* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004).

If we think of universities as trees, rooted in their local environments, and networks of scholars as rhizomes, we can imagine that formal organizations and networks are interconnected and may need each other, in a symbiotic sense. *Re-Becoming University* suggests that contemporary universities, conceptually, empirically and normatively can be imagined as *perfect nodes* within networked knowledge societies. The conceptual problematization of *universtasis*, introduced in Chap. 10, illuminates a conceptual set of coordinates or 'space' in which a unique set of capacities, continuities and potentials intersect at a nexus of traditions, innovation and social networks. It is within this space where organizational form, notions of hierarchy, global circuits of knowledge and local need are mediated, in continuous, dynamic flux. How this complexity can be theorized, approached and analyzed within networked knowledge societies is the central intellectual challenge of this book.

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