

Book Reviews

A History of the University in Europe. Volume IV: Universities Since 1945.

Edited by Walter Rüegg.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

THE UNIVERSITY—AN INSTITUTION that brings together teachers and students for advanced professional studies and research—is a medieval European invention, with its origins in Italy and France, with further refinement in the United Kingdom and Germany and, most recently, in the United States. What is extraordinary is the way the basic themes of the medieval institution are carried into our own era, a period of enormous growth, transformation, and globalization. We have retained the idea of a special institution for teaching and advanced research, we have degrees of bachelor, master, and doctor, we have faculties and deans, we still put on strange gowns and unusual hats to graduate our students, and our preferred mode of instruction is still (astonishingly) the lecture, even if it is now transmitted over the Internet. A few medieval subjects are still with us (arts, law, medicine), but the subjects of our modern era (business, science, engineering, technology) now form new cores for university, even though they are installed within the old medieval framework.

There have been university-like institutions in different times and cultures, but none has had the hardiness of the medieval European model. Businesses come and go, governments rise and fall, but few universities ever disappear. The continuity deserves a broad and wide-ranging discussion, which is found in *A History of the University in Europe*. This four-volume project begins with 1) the Middle Ages, moves to 2) the Reformation up to the end of the eighteenth century, then to 3) the rise of the scientific research university in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fourth volume, here under review, covers a mere 50 years, from 1945 to 1995, the era of the university's greatest social impact.

During the post-World War II period European universities increased vastly in size and influence, and because of the greater size and a shifting mission, underwent remarkable internal changes. The number of universities in some countries doubled and the number of students quadrupled. Though by 1945 women students were already a sizeable

presence in total enrolments, they now became a more representative part of the professoriate. The research function of universities grew, though in some jurisdictions, like France, the faculties split off into separately named entities, unlike the U.S. multiversity. The vocational function (present from the very beginning) took on a range and specificity never before seen. And as the universities were increasingly seen as advantageous in the economic development of their countries and regions, the state poured money into them.

To the North American reader, the parallels with our own growth and transformation are fascinating. Indeed, one of the things I missed in this discussion, though alluded to in Rüegg's introductory essay, was a considered discussion of the substantial impact of the American university on the global conception of a research university (Jonathan Cole's popular 2010 account of *The Great American University* gives an idea of what might be considered).

This fourth volume in *A History of the University in Europe* follows the same structure as the earlier volumes. It begins with i) "themes and patterns" and in succeeding parts look at ii) university structure, iii) the students (admission process, programs, social activism, and subsequent careers), and iv) knowledge areas including social sciences, mathematics, and so on. In the earlier volumes this organization is relatively successful and one can see why there is value in consistency. But there is an interesting feature of volume 4 not to be found in the earlier volumes—the authors were there for what happened. Instead of history, I felt I was getting reports. Analysis works well in the earlier volumes, but I found the fourth volume was less successful in this regard: there is little high-level narrative in which the various bits and pieces of these reports are properly synthesized.

The need for a synthesis was most apparent in the third section on students. This section is an account of the extraordinary changes that occurred leading up to and after the events of 1968, with the rise and fall of the international student movement.

A.H. Halsey begins with analysis of extensive data on admissions, and argues that there is the beginning period a massification of the student body that was already well underway in the United States. The driver is vocational training, seen by both students and the state to provide a revived professional work force. The author's principal example is the United Kingdom where the main shift is seen in an extraordinary rise in female participation and in the repurposing of the polytechnics. The shift in demographics is significant and lays the scene for restless student cohorts.

Sheldon Rothblatt's lively chapter presents "Curriculum, Students, Education." At the beginning of his period there is a stable university structure and, by the end, issues of student engagement, mobility, changes in degree requirements (driven by research and vocational changes, such as the single doctorate) have been caught up in the "whirligig of change":

At the end of the century, the European university found itself in unprecedented circumstances. It was no longer even a "university," only a link in a chain of differentiated institutions paradoxically both interdependent and incompatible ... only a synonym for "higher education." The complexity of the higher-education curriculum in the 1990s was no less than the complexity of the modern nation itself. The result was, depending upon one's point of view, a tower of Babel destined to collapse upon itself or an intellectual world of extraordinary ferment and creativity, containing learning possibilities hitherto undreamt of in the history of the European university. (274)

This insitutional ferment had been affected by the student movement, sketched in considerable detail, right across Europe, by Louis Vos in "Student Movements and Political Activism." One feels, on reading this encyclopedic account of radical student organizations in France, West Germany, and a host of others, that the story is too complex for a short even-handed treatment. What is however of real note in this account is how quickly the student movement rose and subsided (in Vos's view, the end of the radical movement began as early as the mid-1970s, when "students no longer saw themselves as a group but rather as individuals who spent their formative years in a certain social environment").

The final chapter in the section on students is Ulrich Teichler's "Graduation and Careers." He presents the participation rates, which more than doubled during the 1945 to 1995 period. By 1992 some countries had a large cohort of university-educated men and women (Netherlands at the top with 20.2%) and others much lower (e.g., Italy at 6.4%). The main driver in Europe was jobs. The funding was provided initially on the basis of the economic promise, but by the 1970s, when the universities had begun to fulfil that promise, the funding continued, no longer to create a system but rather to maintain it.

These four sections really add up to a piecemeal approach to a single question—what happened to students between 1945 and 1995? I am not sure that splitting this issue into four parts was the best way to go. Each of

the authors has brought a different approach and different set of data to the question. And as one reads these partial and separate accounts, one longs for the big picture, hinted at in Rothblatt's account. Employment really is tied up with curriculum, the curriculum in turn with the student movement, the student movement with funding, and shifting government attitudes are a tie to the student movement (as current and future voters, of more relevance than the professoriate), and so on. As more of the university-educated entered into the work life and political life, this too was bound to have an impact. There is social change that in turn affects the situation of the universities. The essays in themselves are full of data and opinion. But Halsey sticks with admissions, Vos with the student movement, and Teichler with employment issues, and only Rothblatt looks over the fence. Despite the attempt to keep everything separated and logical, the reader's sense that "everything connects" is constantly there. A stronger synthesis is needed. It is odd, also, to have the Finkenstaedt's essay on "Teachers" in a different section of the book—this topic too is related as much to the changes in student life as to the rise of research.

The problem of synthesis also applies to the final long section on the various disciplines. The final 200 pages of the book are focused on various areas of study. These chapters are brief histories of developments of the disciplines within the university framework. They are generally written by experts and administrators in each field. While this approach has authority because each essay has come from someone who actually lived the history, we don't have a very clear historiographical framework for the discussion. How is each discipline "situated" within the academy? How has the post-1945 university encouraged research and how has research had to travel outside the university (to research institutes or to industry)? And how has all this emphasis on research in each disciplinary area had an impact on the teaching function of the university? This section also, surprisingly, left out any discussion of the humanities, the core of the old university. The omission (surprising considering that the editor of the volume is an accomplished scholar in the history of the humanities as well as a distinguished sociologist) tells us more about the new European university than any of the essays presented in this section.

The essay I found the most revelatory was Geoffrey Lockwood's on "Management and Resources." It is a focused account of the rise of a whole new area of the university, the multi-purposed administration. The author

shows how the administrative function grew from a hopelessly antiquated and under-resourced function to a professional service that allowed the universities to survive as autonomous, self-managing institutions. This is at the same time that the state (which still contributed about 70% of the operating funds across Europe) instituted much more complex reporting requirements; the present-day UK research audit is a classic instance of an externally imposed burden. The university was always involved in land management and in internal security (there have always been bursars and beadles), but risk management, complex accounting, competing budgets for scores of departments and divisions, and strategic planning have all made management a central to the modern university. In this essay, one gets a strong sense of the burgeoning complexity of the modern European university, and how external environment had an impact on internal functions. To help us along, the author contrasts the typical day of a manager in 1945 and 1995—two very different worlds, two worlds familiar to Lockwood himself either from living accounts or personal experience.

This volume of *A History of the University in Europe* does provide a useful overview. But it struggles with its origins. The book itself is as much a symptom of the change it describes as it is an account of it. It strives for an official, non-partisan, objective status, yet it arises out of a particular political project. The four-volume project was undertaken in 1983 as a project of the Standing Conference of Rectors and Vice-Chancellors of the European Universities, who were soon after (with the European education ministers) to embark on the Bologna process. Bologna, as it's familiarly called, is a structured plan to provide unified pan-European standards to higher education, and is now well on in its implementation, though not without difficulties. The *History* can be seen as part of this project of European standardization. As Andris Barblan says in his Epilogue, the idea of the work was also to give to academics currently working in universities an awareness of the "underlying forces shaping their own activities" (550), and it is clear that these "forces" are to be understood as specifically "European."

The project seems to have worked well in the first three volumes. These give a highly synthetic account of the broad historiographical research into the history of the university. The work was mostly done by historians, working with materials from other historians or using data the writers have themselves developed. Even if one disagrees with the conclusions of particular authors or approaches, there is a lot of interesting material pulled together.

And during the millennium covered by the three volumes, there really was a “European university” even though there was no “Europe” in the modern sense. The university was a distinctive transnational institution. Indeed the presence of universities with all their shared practices to be found in all the different states may be said to have, over time, encouraged greater political coherence and mutual recognition leading to a united Europe.

When we arrive at this fourth volume, however, the history recedes, and reporting takes over. This is a history of the present. Yet, even though the contributors lived through the things they discuss, the accounts they provide are flatter than the historical accounts provided in earlier volumes. The need for objective and balanced reporting, not historical analysis, seems to take over. What we need is a more synthetic approach, showing how specific aspects of the university connect with other aspects including social change, and also how they connect to the *longue durée* of the university. I have profound respect for the editor and the authors, some of whom are real leaders in their fields, but I feel this collection does not, on the whole, provide exciting history or good social analysis.

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