One World, Many Knowledges

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Introduction: why this book, and what is it about?
Tor Halvorsen and Peter Vale

This book builds on the Southern African–Nordic Centre (SANORD) conference, held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, in December 2009, on the theme 'Inclusion and Exclusion in Higher Education'. Its contents, however, do not simply replicate the proceedings of that event. Instead, although the bulk of the chapters were delivered as papers at the conference, one of the chapters derives from an earlier SANORD conference and others, including those written by Stanly Ridge and the two co-editors, were written especially for this book. This collection thus stands apart from, and gestures towards, the themes raised at the 2009 event.

Unsurprisingly, given its title, this book considers the value of academic co-operation – a notion that has been at the heart of conversations about higher education since the early 1990s. What is its purpose? Why is it necessary? What form should it take? And, central to the theme of the Grahamstown gathering, who benefits, and why?

These questions cannot be answered until it is understood that academic co-operation encompasses an array of interlinked networks that run from the minor to the meso. These criss-cross the modern university system in a bewildering number of ways: from the open exchange of ideas and knowledge; to the sharing of research results; frank discussions about research challenges; and (to pinpoint an increasingly threatened feature of university life) the creation of cross-regional academic communities, characterised by open dialogue about the challenges posed by the notion of the global 'knowledge society'. In other words, the contributors to this book are interested in the strategies that universities, in the North and the South, have adopted to deal with the time–space compression – to use David Harvey's helpful term – represented by the interconnected world that has been loosely (and recklessly) described as globalised.

Hovering in the background, during the three days of the 2009 conference as well as during the process of compiling this volume, is the question of whether a 'global template' for the management of both higher education

and national research organisations emerged after the Cold War. And, if it did, must institutions slavishly follow its high-flown language or risk falling further and further behind in relation to its regime of 'excellence' and ubiquitous university ranking system? It is, therefore, not wholly surprising that these issues arise within the book, too.

The theme of how the global discourse of higher education and research is influenced by the concept of competitiveness appears again and again throughout these chapters. Competitiveness is said to be essential to the economic and social health of nations (and indeed the world), but are there alternatives that can achieve a better, more ethically inclined world than the supposedly endless growth required to feed the market? Are there other ways of recruiting students are to higher education? Can new governance systems be linked to the will of academics, rather than planners, as they work together across regions to shape alternative forms of knowledge? Will, for instance, alternative curricula produce different outcomes? Can these change our understandings of the challenges of growing global poverty? How can universities reach society beyond the formalised and increasingly institutionalised 'corporate social responsibility' model which, because it is copied from the business world, is preoccupied with the bottom line rather than with the emancipatory role of knowledge? Of course these, and many other questions, are captured within the idea of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion', the theme around which SANORD had convened its conference.

The book is organised into four sections, which we have called Background; the Dilemmas of Change; Inclusion and Exclusion; and Critical Perspectives.

Background

Veteran academic, and administrator of the University of the Western Cape, Stanley Ridge was central to the creation of SANORD. His lively chapter covers this story in unambiguous terms: SANORD was the product of a meeting of minds between old friends and their commitment to institutionalise their friendship anew. The network's goals are clearly discussed, and the personalities, including Ridge, who gave it shape are brought to life.

Danish academic, Anne Sørensen, takes the story forward by positioning SANORD within a series of debates on the role of higher education in development. This empirically rich chapter places the issue of SANORD membership within the framework of a loose cost-benefit analysis, and Sørensen uses this to report on recommendations made during her research into ways forward for SANORD.

Dilemmas of change

Nordic higher-education specialist, Risto Rinne, positions the post-Cold War changes in universities against the changes that took place during in the 1960s and 1970s. But his real purpose is to use the cumulative idea of change in higher education to report on the condition of higher education in Finland. Here, the university is caught between the professional responsibilities of academics and the meta-narratives of globalisation, which determine particular forms of control; it is an uncomfortable fit.

Rhodes University's Saleem Badat, policy-maker and university administrator, provides an account of the double whammy that South African universities have faced since the ending of apartheid. In a major key, he discusses the imperative of transformation in line with the country's constitution and shows how race, the issue that has dogged the country for so long, is intertwined with higher education. His minor key is provided by the concepts that drive global change.

Inclusion and exclusion

Musicologist, Bernard Bleibinger, highlights one of the many dilemmas raised by South Africa's transformation and by the utilitarian-inclined forces of globalisation. What is the role of music, and the arts in general, in education and society? Bleibinger's piece is a powerful plea for a new kind of 'struggle' – a struggle to free the mind from the prejudice of commodification. The reach of music, as his and his colleagues' experiences at the University of Fort Hare show, has the potential to fill the space between the local and the global, to offer skills and blur boundaries.

It is often said that migration has made the world what it is: Gabriel Tati, a statistician from the University of the Western Cape, uses his training to report on the findings of a study on students from other African countries who migrate to South Africa to further their education. Understandably, the reasons for coming are many and varied, integration is challenging and the decision as to whether to stay on or return home is often painful.

The University of the Witwatersrand is one of the few universities in the world that caters for deaf students. Lucas Magongwa points out that in terms of South Africa's 1996 Constitution, discrimination against the deaf cannot be tolerated and should be no hindrance to learning. Recording the experiences of 12 Deaf students at the university, he reveals that these students are strongly competitive, even if their social participation is low. But old issues, such as the resources required to provide interpreters and suitably trained tutors, continue to present major obstacles to their progress.

Tradition and modernity run through descriptions of southern Africa's troubled history: it is also the theme of a compelling paper on the management of the region's archaeological heritage by Zimbabwean and Mozambican scholars, Albino Jopela, Ancila Nhamo and Seke Katsamudanga. Their collaboration provides a fine example of the kinds of relationships that SANORD aims to foster, and why they matter, while revealing the complexities of preserving heritage within a complex triangular relationship – state, traditional authority, community – across a region which, effectively, has no boundaries.

But money matters, too, both in southern Africa and elsewhere and, to the concern of many, it may be the metaphor that matters most at this stage of the region's development. Two South Africans, economist, Peter le Roux, and higher-education specialist, Mignonne Breier, have this on their minds in the final chapter of this section. Driven by political (and even security) concerns, rather than by market interests, Le Roux and Breier suggest reasons for the poor performance of black students in South Africa: the wretched schooling system, the decline in government expenditure on higher education, inefficient planning in the sector, and the lack of sufficient incentives. They then propose changes to university funding formulas that have the potential to introduce far-reaching transformations in the South African context.

Critical perspectives

The three chapters in the final section open towards, if not fully embrace, what JJ Williams (in his February 2012 contribution to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, entitled 'Deconstructing Academe') has called, 'critical university studies'. All three chapters deliver a critical perspective on the issues of higher education, its globalisation, its transformation in southern Africa, and the challenges these pose to networks like SANORD.

Anne Bang and Tore Sætersdal gesture towards the earlier chapter by Jopela, Nhamo and Katsamudanga, asking, what is the place of Africa's cultural heritage today? Using a Mozambican case study, they point West, East, and North, and their canvas seems wider than the southern African region. The argument they make is, however, clear and unambiguous: preserving the past secures the future, and higher education and sustainable research have a responsibility, whatever the funding regime and current organisational fashions, to preserve it.

Tor Halvorsen, co-editor of this volume, explores how shifting priorities have changed the way that higher education and research have been organised since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The disciplining of the sector was seen to be essential and governments were persuaded to do this by a series of discourses

and tools developed and advanced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Thus, knowledge became a commodity and the professoriate was brought to heel by various regimes of control. Halvorsen considers the role of SANORD in this context.

Halvorsen's co-editor, Peter Vale, suggests that the meta-narrative of globalisation is anchored in what he calls 'weasel words' – words emptied of real meaning. He uses this to suggest that the word, 'innovation', which is central to the lexicon of university reform at a global level, has become a cipher for the neo-liberal economics that has so deeply divided the world between rich and poor. Since we live in such a little-known world, Vale argues, imagination, rather than weasel words such as innovation, should guide the work of organisations such as SANORD.

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