

What Has Changed and What Remains? Institutional Shifts in Nordic Higher Education in the 2000s

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Higher education institutions (HEIs) change as they adapt to a set of important global trends; demographic, technological, political and socio-cultural. Starting in the early 2000s, the salience of the knowledge economy paradigm designated HEIs as one of the primary engines of economic growth and innovation. System and institutional level responses to these changes occurred both nationally, in the form of new legal requirements and policy instruments (e.g. funding and evaluation regimes), and internationally, in the form of emulated best practices, university rankings, and other benchmarks that are considered to be conducive to fostering efficiency, quality, accountability and responsiveness to a multiplicity of stakeholders. These changes have also affected the Nordic countries and their respective higher education systems. Within policy as well as in some academic circles the concept of change itself is valued and perceived in a hyper-positive manner, which seems to marginalize alternative views and devalue existing modes of organization.

At the level of individual HEIs, there has been a shift from the traditional model based on academic, collegial governance towards a more professional and managerial orientation. Structurally, a strategic emphasis has been put on the concentration of resources, e.g. through mergers and centres of excellence, to obtain strategic advantages in competing for talent, funding and prestige. At the micro level, academic career models are now subjected to increasing competitive pressures. Academics are increasingly subjected to (peer-review and managerial) evaluations as regards their teaching and research performance and other extraneous obligations. Such instrumental pressures often clash with academics' notions of what the university is and for whom, affecting their intrinsic motivations, loyalties, and professional identities.

In the Nordic countries, the legacy of higher education is closely connected with the welfare state. Under expanding instrumentalization and commodification of the public sphere these ties as well as the ideas of the civic university and welfare itself have undergone major transformations. Profound institutional shifts in Nordic higher education have occurred in the 2000s (last two decades). That being said, there is also evidence of resilience amongst national systems and HEIs, where change and continuity co-exist in complex and dynamic ways.

Building on the workshop titled *Changes in democratic spaces – Institutional shifts in Nordic Higher Education in the 2000s*, held in August 2021 at the Nordic Political Science Association (NoPSA) conference, this call for papers invites all contributions that focus on different aspects pertaining to institutional change and/or continuity in Nordic higher education, with a privileged focus on key drivers, motivations, and consequences (intended and unintended alike). We welcome manuscripts that address institutional changes and/or continuity in the ways HEIs (meso level) and academics (micro level) operate (with case examples from the field of Nordics), against the backdrop of shifts in societal expectations and government policy.

Relevant questions include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. What are the stated rationales or logics for driving institutional changes either at the level of national policy or at the level of individual HEIs?
2. How do the enacted changes affect different academic communities, and what impact have these had in the roles, motivations and/or identities of individual academics and the academic profession as a whole?
3. What types of outcomes (short vs. long term; positive vs. negative; intended vs. unintended) can be observed either at the system level (macro), or within HEIs (meso) and/or academic units/groups?
4. How do the institutional changes in the Nordics compare to similar processes elsewhere in Europe and what (policy/managerial) lessons can be learnt?
5. To what extent do new and old institutional features coexist, and what types of tensions and dilemmas do they generate, and how do local actors (managers vs. academics) cope with these?
6. What traditional modes of organization should be protected, re-evaluated, or even brought back into institutional life in order to reconstruct meaning and purpose in Nordic higher education?
7. How do HEIs respond to reform and change? How do HEIs of different types vary in their responses?

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Deadline for submission to special issue: April 1st, 2022.

Submit your manuscript in accordance with the SJPA author guidelines, see sjpa.gu.se, mark your submission “SI_What changes and what remains”.

Questions/Information

For additional information regarding the special issue, please contact the corresponding editor at romulo.m.pinheiro@uia.no