



Organization Studies
Special Issue Call for Papers

Higher Education and Research as Contested Terrain: How and Why Organizing Matters

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Contested Terrain

Higher education and research are in a state of flux, and various forms of organizing is central to the transformations. Traditional universities face a number of challenges including the growth of digitalization, learning platforms, AI and big data, especially following the pandemic; new forms of control and surveillance of employees; complex modes and mixes of governance and funding; debates about what counts as academic credentials and ‘useful’ knowledge; emergent forms of power, etc. New knowledge production and dissemination actors in both the public and private sectors play expanded roles. What counts as knowledge and who count as knowledge producers is increasingly debated, even as the “knowledge society” is celebrated as foundational to national and even global well-being. Responding to these challenges, fields of higher education undergo processes of fragmentation and re-concentration, often displaying coping innovations but also reaffirming institutional missions. The extensiveness and intensity of these similar challenges vary across the world. Perhaps not surprisingly we can find both similarities and differences in how universities and scholarly communities cope with these challenges.

This Special Issue seeks to emphasize the role of organizing to shed light on these far-reaching transformations in higher education and research. We call for contributions focused on the higher education and research sector that include universities but also other knowledge producing, disseminating, influencing and regulating organizations. Studies of the organizing of higher education and research help us understand the conditions under which many of us work and live. Through these studies we build on an earlier phase in the formation of organization theory where studies of universities formed the foundation of influential organizational frameworks. Indeed, the question of how higher education and research is organized has long been an important source of inspiration in our discipline, to the extent that Krücken, Mishra, and Seidenschmur (2021, p. 4) claim that “theoretical concepts like ‘bureaucratic organizations’ (Blau, 1973), ‘organizational saga’ (Clark, 1972), ‘organized

anarchies' (Cohen, March & Olsen 1972), 'professional bureaucracies' (Mintzberg, 1979), 'resource dependency' (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) or 'loosely coupled systems' (Weick, 1976) shaped the entire field of organization studies." This early research combined theory from organization studies with scholars' own experiences of being active members of the university. The in-depth knowledge of researchers' own settings has contributed to new perspectives about organizations more generally, but also raised important questions about universities as organized entities. With this tradition in mind, we find that there is still much to do and to learn when it comes to drawing scholarly lessons from recent changes of universities and higher education and research.

Even if the higher education and research sector is shaped by a number of different organizations and relations among these, no doubt universities are key locations for knowledge definition, production and diffusion. Since they were first established more than a millennium ago, we have witnessed a remarkable rise of universities worldwide (Frank & Meyer, 2020). Yet, they have been subject to repeated and fundamental transformations in their operations, societal role and organizational design, including how they are governed and by whom. Their purpose and mission in society has been constantly questioned by both its supporters and detractors (Newman, 1899/1996; Goodman, 1962). Indeed, the discourse of 'crisis' is perhaps the prime constant during university development in the past century, which has been especially pronounced during neoliberalization from the 1970s onwards (Newfield, 2018; Fleming, 2021). At the same time, universities are still recognized everywhere and the main idea of a university remains surprisingly robust and generalized despite these shifts. In this sense, universities are among the most durable organizations we know today.

Decisive tensions are defining the character of modern universities. While it is difficult to imagine the end of universities, their traditional *modus operandi* has been significantly challenged from both state and non-state actors (Cloete et al., 2023). The future of academic freedom (and knowledge for knowledge's sake), for example, remains uncertain given the current emphasis on industrial and societal relevance and impact (Rhodes, 2017). The worldwide expansion of universities intersects with geopolitical changes and results in challenges and tensions of universities throughout the world. Time frames of research are radically diminishing with new metrics closely monitoring academic activity (Lorenz, 2012; McCabe, 2023). Concerns have been raised whether the transformed university landscape provides space for critical research (Bristow, Robinson, & Ratle, 2017).

The advent of managerialism has been especially salient among these changes. What was dubbed 'New Public Management', which later matured into various public and network governance systems with strident evaluation cultures, mandated universities to behave like private corporations, with an emphasis on revenue, efficiency and transparency (Marginson, 2006; Ramirez, 2010; Sahlin, 2014; Hüther & Krücken, 2018). This challenged the long-standing agreement that universities ought to be governed as a 'collegium of peers' (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2023). Top-down management hierarchies – akin to those that characterize large private enterprises – radically displaced previous co-governance modes (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007; Alvesson, 2014; Knights & Clarke, 2014). As a result, non-academic leadership positions have dramatically expanded, with an increased emphasis on performance metrics and 'outputs' at the organizational level (Kallio, Kallio, Tienari, & Hyvönen, 2015; Musselin, 2018). A growing body of 'critical university studies' has outlined the major dysfunctions generated by the so-called managerial university, including mental health problems associated with precarity and student debt, diminishing academic autonomy and the rise of punitive technocratic systems of control (e.g., Gill, 2010; Collini, 2012;

Childress, 2019). These shifting and overlapping governance modes also impact on the fields of higher education and research, such as patterns of collaboration and competition, power relations and core organizational forms.

Institutional approaches to universities present new insights into the logics of change and maintenance under these increasingly difficult conditions (Crace, Gehman, & Lounsbury, 2023; Quattrone, 2023). This also raises questions about the degree to which those globalized templates of excellence and reforms have truly transformed the organizations and relations in the higher education and research sector (Krücken, Kosmützky, & Torka, 2007; Jungblut, Maltais, Ness, & Rexe, 2023). Further, new technologies and the expanded uses of digital tools, AI and AR are drastically changing universities and higher education and teaching more broadly. The use of such technologies intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic. The rise and diffusion of digital tools and virtual learning spaces raises the fundamental question: what is the future of the university as a distinctive place for teaching and learning? How do these technologies restructure work, routines and decision-making? Do they transform what we think of and teach as knowledge?

More than a century ago, Max Weber (1919/1958) directed attention to the consequences for the development of science of ways in which academic work was structured and conducted. What about the situation today? To what extent is academic work still a vocation, and does it matter? How do scholars understand their role as researchers and teachers? This relates to questions of different kinds of knowledge in universities. Over time, the humanities and social science fields have been put under much pressure, while technological and medical disciplines are strengthened. We also find strong emphasis, not least among policy makers, on interdisciplinary research.

The transformation of higher education and research both follows from and promotes various university reforms. With the introduction of new funding schemes and new metrics, university relations have formed into market relations (Wedlin, 2011), with revised forms of competition between universities as well as individual scholars (Kosmützky & Krücken, 2023). Universities increasingly operate in ecosystems that include other knowledge producing organizations with who they share some similarities but also some differences regarding aims, governance, and other organizational characteristics. University based research and education is expected to directly contribute to societal development. This is not least evident as universities engage in global challenges and set up specific events and programs to contribute with solutions to societal problems. Some of these efforts involve collaborations with other knowledge producing organizations (Powell, Koput, & Simith-Doerr, 1996; Powell, White, Koput, & Owen-Smith, 2005). Previous research has focused more on universities rather than the multifarious organizations that make up the higher education and research sector as a whole. Studies of this broader landscape of higher education and research can provide new insights into the path dependence of university operations, roles of universities in society and power as well as market relations in and around universities. They can also address questions around how similar or different universities are from other knowledge producing organizations. Are universities unique kinds of organizations?

Organizing matters

While these broader shifts raise fundamental questions about the essential purpose and practices of universities, we are interested in how these transformations have triggered a

variety of new organizational forms. Indeed, *organizing matters*, but often in unforeseen and indirect ways. This brings us to the purpose of this Special Issue. It seeks to showcase original papers that focus on the organizing in higher education and research and its various institutions. The higher education and research sector has undergone dramatic – and often very unpopular and contested – transformations in recent times. The organizing of universities goes hand in hand with the reordering of higher education and research, following from technological changes, the entrance of new actors, power shifts, new patterns of collaboration and competition and with changed roles of credentials and knowledge in society. Our guiding question is thus: how and why does organizing matter when it comes to understanding higher education and research today?

Potential Research Topics

We welcome papers from a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches that enhance our understanding of the organization and transformation of higher education and research. We especially welcome international contributions and papers using comparisons across time and space, and theoretical and methodological contributions. Potential contributions include, but are not restricted to, the following themes:

a) Organizational forms, governance and power in fields of higher education and research.

- Historical approaches to universities as organizational forms.
- The organization and governance of contemporary universities, including recent reforms and their consequences in terms of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and scholarly work.
- Universities and alternative organizational forms (e.g., co-governance, participatory budgeting, non-managerial governance structures, etc.).
- University competition and collaboration with other knowledge producing organizations.
- Power in contemporary higher education and research.
- Consequences of various managerial modes organizing for the role of universities in higher education and research.
- Neoliberalism and the academic labor process in the contemporary universities.
- Universities as sites of organizational conflict and resistance.
- Students as customers and the role of commercialization in higher education and universities.
- Organizational cultures of collegiality in higher education and research.
- Universities as bureaucratic rituals – the role of administration, paperwork and the growing influence of management structures.
- The financialization of higher education and research.

b) Societal changes and their effects on higher education, universities and research.

- Studies of university fields.
- International comparative perspectives on institutional logics in higher education and research.
- The changing role of universities in transformed economic and political landscapes.
- Fields of higher education and research and the ‘impact agenda’ as organizational principles.
- Gender and diversity in and around universities and their organizational consequences.

- Organizational perspectives on the fate of the Humanities in contemporary higher education and research.

c) Academic work.

- New digital technologies and their consequences for knowledge and the role of teaching and research in society.
- The organizational implications of EdTech and AI (including new developments like ChatGPT) in contemporary higher education and research.
- How is the orientation of academics changing? How do scholars understand their role as researchers and teachers? And how are young scientists prepared to take on their tasks? How is the role of junior scientists understood?

d) Misc.

- However, we are also interested in submissions that are more broadly based on methodological and theoretical reflections on organization theories that build on studies of our own scholarly settings.

Submitting your paper

Please submit your manuscript through the journal's online submission system (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgstudies>). You will need to create a user account if you do not already have one, and you must select the appropriate Special Issue at the "Manuscript Type" option. The Special Issue Editors handle all manuscripts following the journal's policies and procedures; they expect authors to follow the journal's submission guidelines (<https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/OSS>). You can submit your manuscript for this Special Issue between June 1 and June 15, 2024. Contact Sophia Tzagaraki, Managing Editor of Organization Studies, for administrative support and general queries at sofficer@gmail.com.

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