

Changing European Academics: A Comparative Study of Social Stratification, Work Patterns and Research Productivity

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Changing European Academics delivers important insights and awareness on the current situations of higher education and academic stratification of the European countries. This book plays a critical role as a reference point for researchers, academics, scientists and even policymakers to understand the impact of the new higher education reform in Europe and the various types of academic stratification which are happening under the waves of the reformation. This book points out the insightful development of the current higher education massification, globalisation and marketisation.

The theme of social stratification in science is the thread that weaves the chapters and the patches of different topics, such as academic performance, reward, power and age together. These topics present the full picture of “what does it mean to be an academic”, allowing the readers to explore at the micro level, the attitude, beliefs and value system of a European academic or even academic as a whole. Using cross-national data sets, the book examined and analysed the challenging research topics which was hard to explore in the past, such as the comparison of work patterns and the research performance rewards of academics from different nations. The readers, especially readers who are academics themselves, are taken on a journey of realisation of their role as an academic in this sharply stratified academic environment.

The organisation of Changing European Academics allows the reader to easily explore different topics on the current situations of European academics. The book is divided into six chapters with six different focusses on the theme of social stratification in science: academic performance stratification, academic salary stratification, academic power stratification, international research stratification, academic role stratification and academic age stratification. The orderliness of the book adheres to an insightful and well-structured academic publication. The chapters create structural dialogues on social stratification which is less likely to be discussed in the previous literature of the field, as Kwiek argues in his chapters, and stimulates conversations and even debates the validity of traditionally believed value system on higher education and academic research.

For instance, opening with the discussion on academic performance stratification, the author points out how in the situation of science and academic research, the performance closely aligns to the recognition of one’s work and how this recognition is then linked to the resources available for further research and affects performance for the next research. It explores the situation in which a small number of high-performing academics, which are most of the time those experienced, senior (Chapter 6), top earning (Chapter 2) and with greater government



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influence on academic decision (Chapters 3 and 5), controls the value system of science and how they are rewarded with “disproportionately large share of rewards and the resources” (Kwiek, 2018, p. 220). The author, however, also challenges the reader with the findings which these high-performing top earners in the selected European countries actually spend more time on their work and even on administrative work and services than traditionally expected which is based on the findings of the past research which is done mainly at the national level.

Changing European Academics challenges the traditional academic assumption that the number of publications being an essential indicator decides the success of an academic. It also challenges the actual value of being an elite top performer through the sharply graded reward system and the legitimacy of the increasing competition for the limited space on top in this area of higher education massification. This idea of re-defining the traditional norms and value systems somehow echoes the social construction of identity and value which shared understandings of both identity and value may be fluid in certain situation (Jenkins, 2014) and in this case identity and certain value can be redefined through the group of new academics and through the reformation of higher education of this current era. Using his unique perspective on such system, Kwiek leads the readers to dissect academic stratification with a different yet felicitous point of view. The author also presents a board analysis on types of academic research and discussed how some types of research tend to receive more attention than the others, such as the research with large data set tend to be placed with more value by scholars than those with a smaller scale. Changing European Academics offers an objective view of the concept of being an academic and illustrates the various situations of how stratification happens in the fields of science.

The author supplies an in-depth analysis of the large cross-national data sets and each chapter is filled with great quantitative evidence and analytical arguments. The author also includes a chapter of qualitative research in the book. This arrangement gives a “fresh set of mind” to the reader after being engaged with the dominating quantitative-based research in the previous chapters of the book. This arrangement somehow also smartly points out that the challenge where qualitative research methods are less likely to be included in large-scale or international research which, therefore, indicates that it is less valued in the stratified academic world. Yet, this qualitative chapter points out the importance and richness of such methods and how qualitative data sets are crucial for understanding the attitude and value system of a group of people from its very own discourse. This arrangement allows the readers to think not only about the content of the book but the fact that this very book is also a piece of publication that is in the loop of academic performance stratification.

Changing European Academics is a collection of the most up-to-date and significant information on the current situation of European academics. The book’s use of cross-countries data and the sharp analytical argument helps to make the phenomenon of academic stratification being re-examined, reflected upon, discussed and reimaged. The enthusiasm for the topic from the author can be easily identified throughout the book. Overall, this is a book with great academic value. It is even possible to suggest it being a stepping stone for the research field of higher education. Thus, this book is highly recommended not only to the academics who are of the field but to all academic, policymakers, students and anyone who is interested in understanding “what does it means to be an academic”.

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