

Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Pratt, J. (Ed). (2004). *The 'Accreditation Model': Policy Transfer in Higher Education in Austria and Britain*. UK: Symposium Books. ISBN: 1 873927 74 6 (Full details not yet available.)

Reviewed by Joy Mighty, Queen's University.

This book describes the radical changes that occurred with the introduction of the 1993 *Fachhochschul Study Act* (FHStG) that established a *Fachhochschul* sector in Austria's higher education system. The law allowed institutions, other than universities, to offer degree-level programs, thereby breaking the monopoly of the university sector as the sole provider of higher education. It also established the *Fachhochschulrat*, an independent and autonomous non-governmental agency, to approve courses and maintain quality for the new non-university sector. This accreditation agency was modeled on the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), the validating body that awarded degrees and other qualifications in the non-university, polytechnic system in the United Kingdom. It marked a significant departure from the traditional Austrian approach to both higher education and centralized political control. Ironically, the adoption of the British accreditation model in Austria occurred at the same time that the model was being abolished in Britain. The book, therefore, examines the successful adoption of the accreditation model in Austria as a case of policy transfer from one jurisdiction to another.

The book is edited by John Pratt, who has extensively researched the polytechnic experiment in Britain, and who was a member of the external team of experts from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which conducted a review of the Austrian higher education system and supported both deregulation and the accreditation model. Pratt, therefore, brings an insider's perspective to the reforms described in the book. In Chapter One, he provides a synopsis of both the *Fachhochschul* policy and the accreditation model, and raises important questions about the implications of the Austrian case of policy transfer, not just for higher education but for public administration in general. For example, to what extent does the political culture affect the choice of the policy transferred?

In Chapter Two, Pratt provides a historical analysis of the British model, from the early 1960s with the introduction of the binary policy that established polytechnics as an integral non-university sector in the higher education landscape, to 1992 when new legislation permitted them to use the designation of university and unified the funding and quality control mechanisms for the whole of higher education. The detailed history of the British accreditation model, and in particular, the CNAA, allows readers to perceive it as a complex and constantly changing system developed for a completely different context than the Austrian higher education system into which it was eventually imported. The history of the CNAA also allows readers to analyze the benefits and disadvantages of the British accreditation model. On the one hand, the quality assurance processes of the CNAA facilitated educational innovation and growth that helped the polytechnics and other institutions to move beyond their subordination to the university sector and achieve autonomy and degree-granting status in 1992. On the other hand, the CNAA experience cautions against narrow, prescriptive, and bureaucratic approaches that constrain institutions' ability to be innovative. Ultimately, the evolution of the CNAA's roles and functions, from validation of individual courses to accreditation of institutions, suggests that over time such accrediting agencies must adapt their *modus operandi* to fit changes in their environments. The study of the policy transfer of the British accreditation model to the Austrian context explores whether these lessons from the CNAA experience have been learned.

In the third and fourth chapters, Hans Pechar traces the history of the non-university educational sector in Austria from 1969 to 1994. Chapter Three describes the evolution from a sector of advanced vocational education at the upper secondary level to the successful introduction of a non-university sector, the *Fachhochschul*, at the post-secondary level. It explains the initial resistance against diversification of the system and the subsequent expansion, without diversification. Public funding was unable to keep up with the pace of expansion, and the government's priority of fiscal consolidation, along with increased public dissatisfaction, and tensions between the education and government sectors eventually paved the way for changes. Most importantly, Austria's desire to join the European Union raised serious questions about the compatibility of its educational system with those of other European nations, most of whom already had a non-university sector at the post-secondary level. A comparative OECD study about the development of the non-university sector in EU countries further contributed to a more favourable climate for the establishment of the *Fachhochschul*. In Chapter Four, Pechar explains the political process by which the accreditation model that had fewer experts supporting it became the model of choice, when questions arose about the form the new non-university sector should take.

In Chapters Five and Six, Thomas Pfeffer chronicles the development of the *Fachhochschul*-sector and explains how the *Fachhochschulrat* worked. In its First Development Plan for the new sector, the Federal Government established a mixed funding model in which it contributed 90% of the normative costs of running *Fachhochschul* programs, with the providing institutions contributing the rest. Since the government funds were provided as lump sums for 4 to 5 year contracts in contrast to the annual allocations for universities, the providing institutions had considerable entrepreneurial freedom. The funding model encouraged small-scale initiatives and new organizational forms so that by 2003, the number of institutions offering *Fachhochschul*-courses was the same as the number of universities, although the total number of students enrolled in the *Fachhochschul*-sector was much smaller. The goal of the Second Development Plan, introduced in 1999, was to expand enrolment.

While there were other reforms taking place, for example, the University Organization Act in 1993 and the University Study Act in 1997, in Pfeffer's view, the *Fachhochschul*-sector has had an enormous impact on higher education in Austria. It rapidly deregulated the system and influenced universities to be more self-critical, innovative, and responsive. As Professor Dr. Sigurd Höllinger, the administrator responsible for higher education in Austria, said of the university sector: "The speed of deregulation has increased. And it is easier to perform deregulation given the example of the *Fachhochschul*-sector. It is now possible to convince the rectors' conference to replace the old German system by the Anglo-Saxon system. It has led to a tremendous change of culture in the university system" (p. 91). Höllinger was referring to the 1999 law that allowed universities to adopt the British model of Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degrees instead of the two-stage degree structure of Magister/Doktor based on the German model. Another law passed in 2002 also allowed the *Fachhochschul*-sector to follow the British model, with the exception of doctorate degrees that remain the prerogative of the universities. The example of the *Fachhochschul*-sector also influenced the introduction of a new law for the accreditation of private universities and established an accreditation agency similar to the *Fachhochschulrat*. The significant impact of the *Fachhochschul*-sector made Höllinger speculate about the unification of the entire higher education system: "In 5-10 years, I could imagine one board for the *Fachhochschul*-sector, the private universities, and the state universities alike. This is possible and would include an end to the binary system" (p. 93). If this speculation were realized, it would represent a further policy transfer from the British who abolished the binary system in 1992, just as Austria was adopting it.

Chapters 7 and 8 analyze the changes in the Austrian higher education system in terms of the key variables suggested by the policy transfer literature: what, who, why, when, and how. The Austrian case is described as an example of "inspiration." "For, what was transferred was not so much an idea as an ideal" (p. 112). Instead of an exact copy, "the British polytechnic policy and the CNAA were used as an intellectual (and political) stimulus to develop a novel policy and institution" (p. 112). The key actors

were top-ranking civil servants who, dissatisfied with the status quo, were eager to change the nature of policy making and administration in higher education. The persuasive tactics that they used succeeded because there was already a changing climate toward the development of a civil society. In the final analysis, there is no single theory that accounts for the Austrian experience. Instead, the successful policy transfer can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the robustness of institutions.

The individual chapters in this book are very well written, each providing vivid historical details of the change process it describes. Paradoxically however, this commendable feature detracts from the book's integration and coherence as there is much repetition, particularly across the earlier chapters, in the narration of the historical process of developing the Austrian system. Although the book's stated focus is the accreditation model, this key concept is not defined until mid-way through the book (on page 70), and a full analysis of the policy transfer does not occur until the last two chapters. Despite these shortcomings, the book provides an interesting history of two similar yet different systems of higher education, and the unique ways in which one was inspired by and modelled on the other. It would therefore be of interest to scholars of public policy, as well as to educational administrators and historians.



Mazón, P. M. (2003). *Gender and the Modern Research University: The Admission of Women to German Higher Education, 1865-1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pages: 297. Price: \$65.00 USD (cloth).

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Mazón's study delineates the path taken by women to gain access to German universities during the fifty-year period prior to World War I. She explores the reasons why it was nearly impossible to envision the concept of a female student in nineteenth-century Germany, traces the debate initiated by the women's movement that eventually enabled