Book Review

Knight, J. & Woldegiorgis, E.T. (eds.) 2017. *Regionalization of African higher education – Progress and prospects.* African higher education: Development and perspectives Volume 3. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

This volume is part of a series, *African higher education: Development and perspectives*, which provides a welcome platform for scholarly publication on issues of particular relevance and interest to higher education in Africa. As stated on the back cover of the publication, 'fundamentally, the book asks the question whether higher regionalisation in Africa is more rhetoric than reality'. A first step towards addressing this question is to define key terms and concepts, such as 'regionalization', 'integration', and 'harmonization', which are often used interchangeably by policy makers and academics alike, resulting in confusion and miscommunication. The authors of this volume adopt Jane Knight's definition of regionalisation as 'the process of building closer collaboration and alignment among higher education actors and systems with a defined area or framework called a region'. Jane Knight (2017: 13-16) further offers a very useful mapping of four types of 'regionalization terms', ranging from:

- 'cooperation', 'collaboration' and 'partnership', which are used to describe voluntary or loose relationships between different players;
- 'co-ordination', 'coherence' and 'alignment', which point to an element of organisation;
- 'harmonization' and 'convergence' to denote stronger and more strategic links between players; and lastly to
- 'integration', 'community', 'interdependence', and 'common area', which refer to, formalised relationships involving regional level agreements (such as that envisaged in the European higher education space or area).

Jane Knight, as author of the opening chapter, 'The concept and process of higher education regionalization', cautions against viewing regionalisation of higher education as a linear process along a continuum from cooperation to integration as the goals and objectives of regionalisation strategies will vary across different regions. Instead, she invites the reader to approach the mapping through a musical metaphor:

> The collaboration and partnership group can be likened to an informal jazz concert where musicians gather to play the same composition with individual interpretations while the harmon sation and integration end can be compared to a professional orchestral performance where different musicians are playing the same musical composition under a single conductor and common interpretation of the music. (Knight, 2017: 14)

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The authors' analysis of the various facets of the regional sation of higher education in Africa is further located within a conceptual framework, the 'Functional, Organizational and Political Approaches (FOPA) model of regionalization', which, in turn, supports coherence across the chapters.

The chapters are organised into three main sections. The first section opens with a comprehensive introduction to the concept of higher education regionalisation using the FOPA model; provides a historical (post 1960s) and political perspective to regionalisation and its precursors; discusses the impact of Africanisation, internationalisation and regionalisation on shaping the identity of universities in Africa; and proposes a typology of five different models of higher education regional collaboration.

The second section of the book addresses issues that support and give effect to regionalisation, such as quality assurance; the mobility of staff, students, academic programmes and education providers; the mutual recognition of qualifications; regional qualifications frameworks; and research centres and networks etc. There is also a chapter, entitled 'Student competencies and curriculum', co-authored by Pablo Beneitone and Ahmed El-Goharyon, which focuses on the adaptation of the Tuning Approach, which has its roots in the Bologna process, to the African context. The Tuning process aims to identify common reference points for curricula based on agreed competences and degree level descriptors, which, in turn, can foster greater comparability of academic programmes and support the mutual recognition of qualifications. A Tuning pilot project was initiated involving 60 universities from across the Continent and looked at identifying learning outcomes in 5 fields of study and this has been extended to include more universities and study areas. Besides some of the concrete outcomes of the Tuning Africa initiative, such as the identification of 18 generic competencies assessed to be important for all graduates, the initiative has been important in bringing together academics from universities across the Continent to identify common reference points as a starting point for collaboration with an eye to the long-term goal of mutual recognition of qualifications.

The last section comprises two chapters; the chapter by Emnet Tadesse Woldegiorgis, entitled The Influence of the Bologna Process, explores the African (AU) Union Strategy for the Harmonisation of Higher Education and in particular, drawing comparisons with the European Union's (EU) Bologna process. It is noteworthy that the African Union has elected to use the term harmonisation to describe its regionalisation agenda for higher education, which has the ambition of harmonising higher education across the Continent through, amongst others, the mutual recognition of qualifications, academic mobility, and improving the quality and relevance of academic programmes. The chapter examines the AU strategy in relation to the EU processes but recognises the very different contexts, stages and levels of implementation.

The last chapter takes the reader back to the question of whether the regionalisation of higher education in Africa is rhetoric or reality. The editors, Emnet Tadesse Woldegiorgis and Jane Knight, reflect on the progress made and, importantly, identify the key challenges and constraints to realising the AU's vision for the harmonisation of higher education in Africa, not least being the continued dependency on external agencies/governments for policy advice, funding, and the management of key initiatives, such as mobility programmes

and Tuning Africa. In the assessment of the editors, the African higher education regionalisation project currently lies between cooperation and coordination with harmonisation and ultimately integration being the eventual goal.

The book offers insights to both scholars and policy makers. It provides a comprehensive and highly accessible introduction to an area that has the potential to contribute to the strengthening of national and Pan African higher education systems.

Reviewed by

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