

# HUISMAN, Jeroen; TIGHT, Malcolm. *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research*. Volume 3, 2017.

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## Reading the book

Because I have learned a lot from reading the two previous books in this collection, organized by the Professors Malcon Tight and Huisman (Tight & Huisman, 2015, 2016), I also decided to read Volume 3 of *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research* (2017) and write this review, which I hope will be useful both for the novice and experienced researchers Higher Education Researchers and for those who are interested in studies that integrate theory and methodology, in several geographical spaces and interdisciplinary spaces.

To simplify the reading and also to facilitate decision, about choosing the sequence of reading that each potential reader will read the book, I make a small table with the main themes inside those 14 chapters (see Table 1).

As I usually do, after consulting the index of the book, I chose to begin reading by the chapter that caught my attention because of my interest in topics that are located at the intersection of the areas of Knowledge Management and Institutional Level. From Canada (Ottawa), Victoria Díaz, Pierre Mercier and Celine Pinsent present a conceptual framework validation make by a group of institutional research experts (2017). Starting from Institutional Research definition of Joe Saupe as a “research conducted within an institution of higher education to provide information which supports institutional planning, policy formation and decision making” (1981, p. 1), the authors incorporate diverse dimensions of institutional research with competencies dimensions at different sectors by a transversal approach. From previously studied dimensions of institutional research they look at the institution’s organizational sectors (e.g., academic, human resources, financial management, external relations, research),

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the functions for which information is used (e.g., operations, strategic management, quality assurance), and the resources supporting IR (e.g., technology, funding, quality of information).

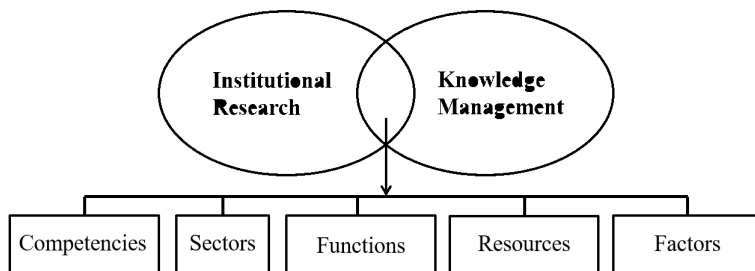
TABLE 1- MAIN ISSUES

Main issue	Cap1 Barnat	Cap2 Broucker	Cap3 Kleimann	Cap4 Carvalho	Cap5 Barnhardt	Cap6 Dumay	Cap7 Pinheiro	Cap8 Lindén	Cap9 Diaz	Cap10 Rikap	Cap11 Dooney	Cap12. Birkholz	Cap13 Friedensen	Cap14 Richardson
Mixed-Methods Research	X													
New Public Management Vs Role of Higher Education		X												
Analytical Framework (Evaluation)			X											
Academic Profession				X										
Framework of Wise Action					X									
Literature Review						X								
Adaptive Resilient Organization							X							
Curriculum Theory								X						
KM Conceptual Framework									X					
Assessment tool									X					
Validation of Framework									X					
Taxonomy of Market University										X				
Virtual Ethnography											X			
Network Paradigm												X		
Disability													X	
Informal Learning														X

SOURCE: Isabel Pinho (2019).

The framework innovates by specifying what competencies are required to carry out Institutional Research activities (e.g., designing reports, analyzing and compiling information, communicating) and how to assign a level of development to each competency. The Figure 1 provides my visual interpretation of this framework.

FIGURE 1 – CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH



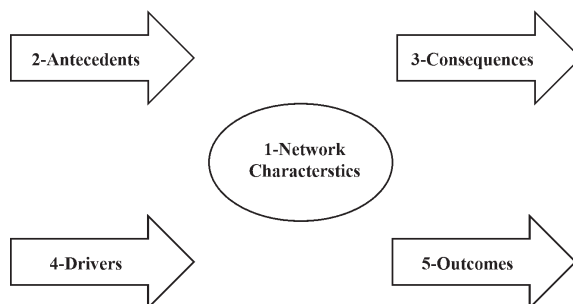
SOURCE: Isabel Pinho (2019), build based on Díaz *et al.* (2017)

The framework formulation was validated in Chile and it can be used as a tool for assess one institution or used to compare an institution to a peer group, compare groups of institutions at the regional, national, or international levels.

Next, I read a chapter that focus on network paradigm, an emergent theme on Higher Education Research and also a topic of my research interest. This chapter is an example of integration of theory and method. Julie M. Birkholz, from Ghent University (Belgium) and Robin Shields, from University of Beth (UK) provide some literature examples of the use of network paradigm in Higher Education Research (2017).

Starting for considering the network paradigm as a way to analyze relational phenomena and also as a method to organize knowledge in higher education research, the authors analyze some studies and make some theoretical contributions. In order to build a Theoretical Network framework they organize the variables on main categories: 1) Network Characteristics; 2) Antecedents; 3) Consequences; 4) Drivers and 5) Outcomes (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 – CHAPTER 12 –THEORETICAL NETWORK FRAMEWORK



SOURCE: Isabel Pinho (2019) build based on Julie M. Birkholz and Robin Shields (2017)

Next I read all the rest of the chapters and group them into two main groups: chapters focus on theories and chapters focus on methods.

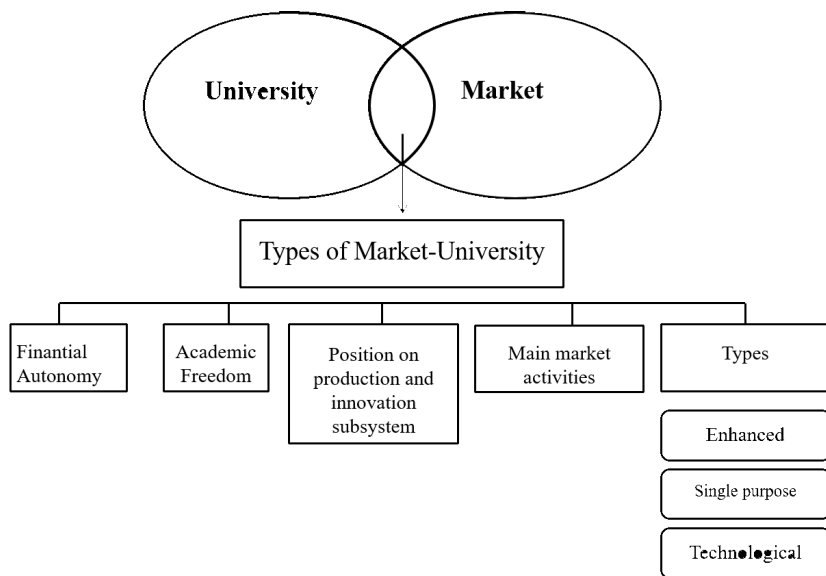
## **Chapters focus on Theories**

From Norway and Czech Republic, Rômulo Pinheiro and Mitchell Young (2017) comes an alternative conception of universities and the higher education systems with a perspective of understanding of the ways in which such institutions and systems adapt and maintain themselves over time. Conceptually, they start from complex systems theory to perform an empirical analysis on developments across the European continent in the light of recent efforts to modernize university systems in the complex context of rising competition and pressures toward vertical and horizontal differentiation. In order to answer the question— What a university is and how it evolves over time?— the authors contrast two models of the university – strategic versus resilient – and critically reflect on the implications their differences have for the development of systems and universities and future research work in the area.

From Argentina, Cecilia Rikap performed an exploratory study to understand university's recent changes related to whole production and innovation subsystems (Rikap, 2017).

All Universities seek for financial autonomy in order to guarantee academic and research freedom. Observing the main market activities performed by universities she create a typology of Market-University, with three types: Simple Purpose, the Technological and the Enhanced University (see Figure 3).

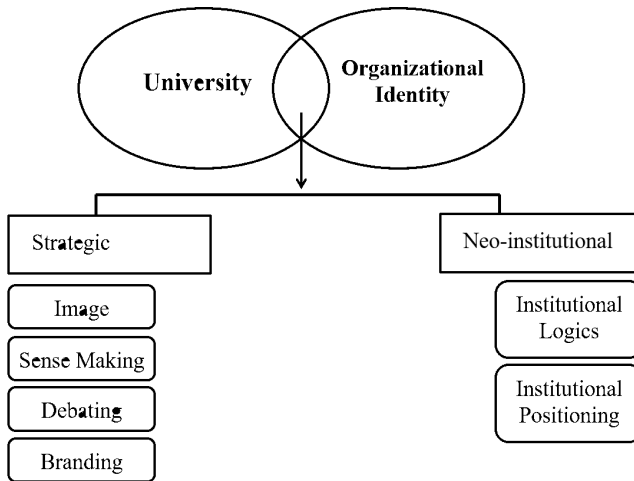
FIGURE 3 – TYPES OF MARKET-UNIVERSITY



SOURCE: Isabel Pinho (2019) build based on Cecilia Rikap (2017)

From Belgium (Louvain) Xavier Dumay, Hugues Draclants, Aubépine Dahan perform a literature review about Organizational Identity of Universities (2017). They start from the need of understanding the current changes of the university by the lens of Organizational approach. Follow Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz (2002), the authors define organizational identity as “a process of dialogue and comparison between external images of the organization and its internal culture” Universities Dumay *et al.* (2017, p. 4). They provide a clear methodology. Considering the objective of the review they choose searching on Scopus (1972-2014) and they define selection criteria. They use six categories to classified the articles (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4 – ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY OF UNIVERSITIES CATEGORIZATION



SOURCE: Isabel Pinho (2019) build based on Dumay *et al.* (2017)

From Finland and UK, Jyri Lindén, Johanna Annala and Kelly Coate focus on the role and the importance of curriculum theories in higher education (research and practice) (2017). Starting from considering that “curriculum theories have lost their primary object-what is learned and how it is learned”) (2017, p. 138).

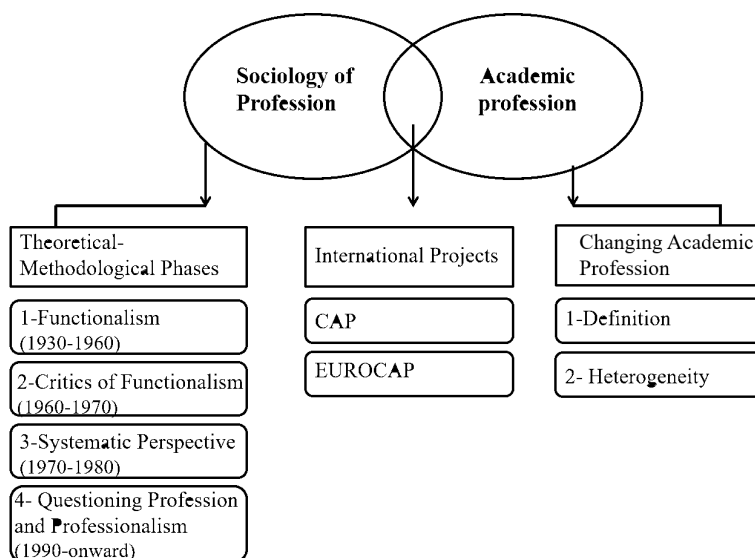
The authors give us an historical and the conceptual roots of curriculum theory approaches and they argues that the dispute and the separation between normative and critical roles of curriculum theories are useful to overcome in today’s competency-based and outcome-focused context of higher education

From Germany, Bernd Kleimann and Maren Klawitter developed a theoretical framework which can be used to systematically analyze various evaluation-based decision-making procedures (2017). Starting by the concept of the university as a formal organization they formulated the question: how organizational structures generally affect decision-making procedures?

From Universidade de Aveiro in Portugal, Teresa Carvalho reflected on theories in the field of sociology of professions and the contributions the empirical results to the theoretical framework development (2017). She choose academic profession as an object of study and analyse two international projects about changes in the academic profession with comparative approach: “The Changing

Academic Profession” (CAP) and “Academic Profession in Europe: Responses to Societal Challenges” (EUROAC). The Sociology of Profession dominated the theoretical developments of the study of professions and professional groups. To simplify it is possible considered four theoretical-methodological phases: 1) Functionalism and Symbolic Interactionism (from 1930 until 1960); 2) Critics of Functionalism (1960-1970); 3) Systemic perspective (1970-1980); 4) Questioning Professions and Professionalism, from 1990 until today, that the speed of change and neo-liberal influences in organizations and institutions have a strong impact (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5 – ACADEMIC PROFESSION FROM SOCIOLOGY OF PROFESSION THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE



SOURCE: Isabel Pinho (2019) build based on Teresa Carvalho (2017)

From Belgium Bruno Broucker, Kurt De Wit and Jef C. Verhoeven discuss the implications of New Public Management (NPM) and of alternative theories on the higher education sector (2017). They organized the debate around three clusters of theoretical approaches: (1) cannot always be distinguished easily, (2) entail a risk of normativity due to the position of higher education in society, and (3) demonstrate that higher education policy and research are in need of a multi-theoretical approach that is able to put higher education back into its social, political, and economic context. By formulating research questions on

the role of higher education and on the impact of former reforms, it is suggested that policy and research look further than the current concepts and theoretical approaches to build a new agenda for future.

Cassie L. Barnhardt and Carson W. Phillips, from USA, start by the research question:” upon what basis might it be possible to imagine a reality where universities as organizations can progress, grow, or develop in a parallel manner to the ways that individual students develop into socially responsible and wise beings?” (2017). They defend the use of individual student development theories can lead one to greater competence for wise and socially responsible interactions and engagement in society. There is a need for alignment between these individual processes with the organizational scholarship focus on enhance their organizational capacities for wise and socially responsible conduct (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6 – SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



SOURCE: Isabel Pinho (2019) build based Barnhardt and Phillips on (2017)

Also from USA, Rachel E. Friedensen and Ezekiel Kimball, focus on the Disability; they considered that concept is a “multivalent, fluid concept that encompasses a broad set of phenomena that shape the experiences of individuals as they interact with others; social systems and processes; and legal structures. A disability identity also encompasses a range of different diagnoses and levels of visibility, which serve to influence whether others perceive a person to have a disability” (2017, p. 227). Because there is no single theoretical framework that can account for the multivalent nature of disability they choose use the concept of theoretical borderlands. They look at disability identity with several dimensions (medical, legal, diagnostic, environmental, social, and cultural dimensions).



## **Chapters focus on methods**

From Germany, Miriam Barnat, Elke Bosse and Caroline Trautwein (2017) begin by defending the benefits of mixed-methods research use in complex fields, such as higher education. But they believe that beyond this methodological discourse there is a need to bridge the gap between general procedures guides and meta-inferences. They focus on theoretical framework as the relevant link that informed the selection of research methods and also drives the integration of methods used and findings, through meta-inferences process.

To illustrate the potential of mixed methods research for studies in higher education they present a research project, on the transition to higher education. This project drives by a theoretical framework for mixed –methods study on transition to higher education, with regard to the interplay of the individual student and the institutional context, that. The use of this framework illustrate the guiding role of theory by: 1) integrating different theoretical perspectives on transition (from individual student and the institutional context); 2) informing the selection of the research methods, and 3) defining the nexus of the two strands that constitute the mixed-methods design, guiding the process of creating meta-inferences.

From Seton Hall University in USA, Michael Dooney and Eunyoung Kim on virtual ethnography, an embryonic methodology in higher education research (2017). Some important issues are related, about logistical and ethical aspects, associated with it in the context of a research project that examined the interactions between a group of newly admitted students at a private university that use data of a university-operated Facebook group.

## **Final considerations**

It has been a pleasure to read this book and it will certainly be a resource for the development of my research in Higher Education. As I think to re-read I made the following table with the collection of the main keywords and their location (Table 2).

I hope this review can be a motivating factor for your reading in an individualized way and in line with your interests. It seems to me that the various examples of integration of theory and methodology can help to draw future multidisciplinary studies as well as can make this field of research more solid.

TABLE 2 - KEYWORDS

	Cap1 Barnat	Cap2 Broucker	Cap3 Kleimann	Cap4 Carvalho	Cap5 Barnhardt	Cap6 Dumay	Cap7 Pinheiro	Cap8 Lindén	Cap9 Diaz	Cap10 Rikap	Cap11 Dooney	Cap12. Birkholz	Cap13 Friedensen	Cap14 Richardson
<b>Keyword</b>														
Academic freedom										X				
Academic profession				X										
Adaptive organizations							X							
Appointment procedures for professorship			X											
Approaches to learning														X
Assessment								X						
Bernstein							X							
CAP Project				X										
Capital enterprise									X					
College admissions											X			
Commodification									X					
Complexity							X							
Crip theory													X	
Crisis								X						
Critical approach								X						
Curriculum								X						
Decision-making in universities			X											
Disability													X	
Diversification				X										
EUROAC Project				X										
Evaluation procedures			X											
Flexible governance		X												
Fragmentation				X										
Higher education	X						X	X				X		
Higher education marketing											X			
Higher education policy												X		
Higher education reform		X												
Higher education studies				X										
Identity development													X	

(Continue)



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