

Higher Education in Russia by Yaroslav Kuzminov and Maria Yudkevich, foreword by Philip G. Altbach, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022, 389 pp., USD 59,95 (paperback), USD 59,95 (e-book), <https://www.press.jhu.edu/books/title/11841/higher-education-russia>, ISBN 9781421444147

‘Higher Education in Russia’ is the first English-language monograph on higher education in the largest country in the world, covering the period from the first universities established in the Russian Empire under the reign of Peter the Great up to 2021. The authors, Yaroslav Kuzminov and Maria Yudkevich, draw on huge empirical datasets, including their own research, as well as an enormous number of sources in Russian, English and other languages to create a comprehensive encyclopedia on higher education in Russia. In addition to their scholarly careers, both authors were until recently involved in the leadership of the Higher School of Economics, one of the leading universities in Russia: Yaroslav Kuzminov served as rector there for almost three decades (1992–2021), while Maria Yudkevich was a vice-rector for research (2011–2022). This combination of both the scholarly and the organizational leadership perspectives make this volume truly unique.

The book is divided into nine chapters, each devoted to specific topic and/or set of stakeholders involved in higher education, such as *students* (chapter 5, ‘Through School to University’), *faculty* (chapter 6, ‘The Academic Profession’), *research* (chapter 7, ‘Research at Russian Universities: The Story of Separation and Reunion’), *administration* (chapter 8, ‘Organizational Logic: From Processes to Projects’) and *international cooperation* (chapter 9, ‘Internationalization’), focusing not only on the *present day* (more explicitly chapter 3, ‘The Contemporary Landscape’, and chapter 4, ‘Governance and Resources’), but also on the *past* (chapter 1, ‘Historical Background’, and chapter 2, ‘The Soviet Era and the First Post-Soviet Decade’).

As Philip Altbach highlights in his foreword, this volume ‘is the first comprehensive analysis of a country that has played a significant but hitherto largely unrecognized role’ in the Eastern bloc during the Cold War and in the so-called ‘Third World’ and as a model that was exported to China, Vietnam and other countries. The Russian case is also of interest to a broader readership, beyond the Russian context. The Russian higher education system, as probably no other academic system in the world, is facing all the current trends and challenges in the higher education sector, including heightened competition between educational institutions at various levels, private higher education, internationalization, growing bureaucracy within academic institutions, restriction of academic freedom, inequalities in access and massification to the point of universalisation. It is very instructive to get to know if these topics are addressed by various involved stakeholders, how they are manageable and at what cost.

The Russian case should also be useful for those scholars, educators, politicians and other decision makers who are

- calling for funding universities according to the number of students – this principle has a long history in Russia, dating back to the Soviet past, and includes ‘admission quotas for state-funded positions (who, where, and how many specialists of a certain domain or specialty would be trained)’ (p. 122), it is logical to some extent and ensures budgets of universities, but might force higher education institutions to depend on enrolling and keeping an exact number of students regardless of their academic performance;
- suggesting a more equitable secondary school education – this might decrease inequality in access to higher education, but it can only be done with external support: ‘Russian parents are world leaders in terms of the time they spend helping their children with their homework’ (p. 145); ‘over 70% of parents supervise homework on a daily basis’ (p. 150); this is often not because Russian parents are more careful, but because it is hardly possible for a school student to manage their studies alone;
- implementing more higher education programs that are typically in the realm of vocational education and training – technology and progress will require appropriate changes in order to prepare young people for new challenges, but it might lead to a loss of prestige and popularity in secondary vocational education as a possible career track; moreover ‘many young people [in Russia] enter vocational schools (colleges) not because they plan to get a job, but because they want to enter a HEI using a simpler route’ (p. 72).

The Russian case might also be instructive for readers who are responsible for global rankings. Russia’s experience in these competitions, which includes expending adding English articles to national-language journals to increase readership and raise the number of citations, offering flexible contracts to attract international faculty and researchers and marketing more aggressively to recruit international students, might be applicable for other countries and institutions working on their positioning in the rankings (pp. 283–284). Kuzminov and Yudkevich, however, warn against an excessive obsession with rankings, comparing it ironically with the fashion industry, which ‘establishes the standards of beauty’ (p. 282): ‘a university tries to represent itself in the manner of a typical successful university as perceived by society at large. This is usually done superficially rather than through any substantive changes’ (p. 284). Both scholars also share their concerns that some Russian universities ‘modify their behavior’ by ‘working for the sake of specific indicators’ (p. 261) with all possible means.

Time is crucial for conducting almost any research on Russia, as everything is changing very rapidly. As the authors argue, ‘when you are reading this book, its contents are already becoming obsolete’ (p. XXV). Indeed, it is painful to witness all the recent changes Russian higher education is

undergoing as the Russian government has decided to push for hard power on the international arena. Many achievements in the realm of higher education have been compromised in the face of the country's withdrawal from the Bologna process, the loss of many international cooperation and, more importantly, the loss of trust, just a few developments. International universities that are now hosting many students and scholars from Russia can learn about the peculiarities of their educational system from Kuzminov and Yudkevich. The entire book – almost 400 pages – explains the institutional context of Russian higher education, including the system in which Russian universities work, their lack of autonomy and their dependency on their government – all very important considerations for those who are developing sanctions against Russian academia and who are calling for more protests on the part of the Russian students, faculty and staff.

Elena Denisova-Schmidt

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of St.Gallen (SHSS-HSG), Switzerland and the Center for International Higher Education, Boston College, USA

elena.denisova-schmidt@unisg.ch

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8234-4437>