

GOVERNING UNIVERSITIES IN POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES

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Higher education institutions are deemed pivotal tools for driving science-based social and economic transformations in their respective countries and the global society. These institutions are inherently complex, comprising various components, with governance standing out as a crucial element significantly influencing the effective operation of universities. Recognizing the paramount importance of governance in higher education, Peter D. Eckel's book, *Governing Universities in Post-Soviet Countries* (2023), offers comprehensive and valuable insights into the governance systems of higher education institutions across fifteen independent states, which were at one point in history part of the same system of government of USSR. These countries were mandated to align their universities with the economic, political, and philosophical objectives of the former controlling power. Said differently, the approach toward university systems varies between market-driven, democratic nations and those within centrally planned economies or autocratic regimes. Despite being integrated into the global academic sphere, and influenced by increasing neoliberal trends, the actions, support mechanisms, and particularly, the governance methods of universities are significantly shaped by their local contexts. The emphasis of this book is thus the crucial impact of local environments on what universities engage in, how they receive support, and the specific modes of governance they adopt. The book consists of 21 chapters organized into four parts. This review aims to provide a general highlight of the ideas presented in the book.

The first part of that book entails two chapters. Contributed by Peter D. Eckel, the opening chapter of this book serves as a crucial cornerstone, setting the stage for the comprehensive exploration that follows. It intricately delves into the intricate and ever-evolving landscape of university governance, emphasizing its pivotal role in steering the trajectory and accomplishments of an academic institution. This chapter illuminates the dynamic nature of university governance,

highlighting its multifaceted elements and how they collectively contribute to the prosperity and efficacy of a university. It underscores the significance of effective governance structures and strategies, illustrating their direct correlation to the overall success, growth, and adaptability of the academic institution within the constantly changing educational landscape. The following chapter emphasizes the importance of comprehending the Soviet context and its enduring influence on the current state of higher education in these post-Soviet nations. The chapter highlights the significance of recognizing the historical legacy of the Soviet Union in shaping the current state of higher education in post-Soviet countries. Zumrad Kataeva, the author of this chapter, underlines that by understanding this legacy, one can better grasp the complexities of institutional structures, identities, and the potential pathways for the future development of higher education in these nations.

The second part of the book (chapters 3-17) extensively explores the individual country profiles of all the fifteen nations that were once part of the Soviet Union. These case profiles are meticulously arranged in alphabetical order and follow a consistent structure. Each case thoroughly examines the national context, which significantly influences and shapes higher education and its system of governance within that particular country. It delves into the intricate framework and composition of the higher education sector in each nation, shedding light on the various factors that play a pivotal role in university governance. Moreover, within each profile, the contributors included a section that intricately details the governing structure of the universities within that country. This section provides a comprehensive overview of how these academic institutions are governed, outlining the key organizational aspects, decision-making processes, and the overall administrative setup that dictates the functioning of universities in the respective nation.

Part three of the book (chapters 18 through 20) constitutes invaluable information, which offers the contributors insightful analyses across three chapters. The authors of chapter 18, Peter D. Eckel and Darkhan Bilyalov, significantly examined both the distinctions and commonalities in approaches to university governance among the post-soviet states. The authors meticulously identified and delineated four distinct emergent models observable across the fifteen countries: state-extended, academic-focused, internal/external stakeholder, and external civic. The following Chapters 19 and 20 represent an exploration into the concept of appropriateness as a proxy for effectiveness, employing two distinct yet interconnected frameworks that are deeply embedded within specific contextual relevance. Chapter 19 meticulously applies the Fukuyama model of governance, precisely scrutinizing levels of autonomy and governmental quality within university systems. Meanwhile, Chapter 20 complements this perspective by employing a different evaluative lens, examining the intertwined dynamics of autonomy and competition within the university landscape. Together, these chapters offer a comprehensive and multi-faceted assessment of the intricate interplay between governance models and their effectiveness in diverse contexts.

In the concluding section of Chapter 21, the book brings together the accumulated insights garnered from detailed descriptions and diverse analyses to provide a coherent understanding of the various findings and their elucidating implications. This segment delves into the exploration of emerging governance models

and how they might effectively tackle four prevalent dilemmas of governance. The chapter serves as a culmination of the book's exploratory journey, synthesizing the diverse perspectives and empirical evidence gathered throughout the preceding chapters. It strives to present a comprehensive picture of the evolving governance paradigms and their potential to address critical challenges within the realm of governance.

The book possesses several strengths. One of its notable attributes is its capacity to provide valuable, well-organized, and comprehensive information about the governance system of higher education in the post-Soviet region. This wealth of information is expected to enhance the knowledge and understanding of individuals within the higher education community in these states and beyond. Another commendable aspect of the book is its detailed and specific description of the higher education context concerning university governance for the fifteen individual country profiles. Additionally, it offers analyses of the similarities and differences in the higher education governance of these countries. Moreover, the book may empower its readers, both in general and those actively engaged in higher education, to gain insight into the significant role of historical and overall national context in shaping the nature and structure of governance in higher education institutions. Furthermore, the inclusion of various contributors and authors brings diverse perspectives to the table, enriching the content and providing readers with a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Despite its strengths, the book exhibits some limitations. One potential drawback is its predominant focus on governance structures and strategies, which may result in a limited exploration of other crucial aspects of higher education, including teaching methodologies, research practices, and student experiences. Another limitation lies in the book's narrow scope, as it overlooks the contemporary global educational context where the internationalization of higher education stands out as a critical feature of 21st-century learning. The interconnectedness of every country's education system with the rest of the world is a significant factor in higher education governance that the book fails to adequately recognize. Furthermore, the personal political views and ideologies of the contributors may introduce a potential bias in their interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of the governance systems in post-Soviet states. Lastly, while the book provides a comprehensive analysis of governance models, it falls short in offering explicit and practical solutions for addressing the governance challenges encountered by higher education institutions in the fifteen post-Soviet countries.

Taken together, I believe the book could serve as a valuable resource for enhancing the knowledge and understanding of readers regarding the governance systems in higher education institutions of post-Soviet states. Therefore, I strongly recommend the book for individuals involved in higher education in general, and particularly for those interested in the higher education system of the post-Soviet region.