BOOK REVIEW


Reviewed by Balqees Rashid ALMandhari

The book “Socially Responsible Higher Education,” edited by Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon, offers an in-depth exploration of the critical role higher education institutions play in societal engagement and responsibility. Published in 2021 by Brill Sense, this seminal first edition meticulously examines how educational institutions can extend their influence beyond traditional academic boundaries to contribute to broader societal objectives. Spanning 305 pages, the book is made available in various formats to cater for diverse reader preferences. The hardback version (ISBN 9789004445826) is priced at an average of $152, the paperback version (ISBN 9789004435759) at around $7, and the e-book version (ISBN 9789004459076) offers digital convenience. This strategic availability in multiple formats is instrumental in ensuring that the book’s vital discourse reaches a broad audience, facilitating widespread engagement with the significant themes it addresses.

The book scrutinizes the pivotal role that higher education institutions play in championing social responsibility and fostering knowledge democracy globally. It describes how universities evolve beyond their conventional roles to proactively address global challenges, emphasising inclusivity, equity, and sustainable development in academia.

Offering a rich tapestry of international perspectives, it highlights a paradigm shift toward a more engaged, accountable, and community-focused approach to higher education, resonating with initiatives like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Through an enlightening collection of essays and case studies, the book highlights the imperative for higher education to evolve and innovate, creating environments that nurture a diversity of knowledge while catalysing significant social transformation. Positioned at the nexus of higher education and social responsibility, this book makes a substantial contribution to the ongoing discourse on the transformative potential of universities for societal development and change. It fills a crucial void in the academic literature by presenting a multifaceted, global examination of how higher education can interact with and positively impact societal needs. As such, it is an invaluable resource for academics, researchers, policymakers, and educators in higher education who are passionate about integrating social responsibility within university frameworks. Additionally,

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it serves as an insightful guide for university administrators and students who are eager to comprehend and implement socially responsible practices within higher education settings.

The book is divided into four distinct parts with a total of 23 chapters, each examining a unique aspect of the interplay between higher education and societal engagement. Part 1, titled “Higher Education and Civic Space for Learning,” comprises six chapters, each exploring the role of higher education in fostering social responsibility. The overarching theme centers on universities’ potential to act as civic spaces that drive societal progress, champion inclusivity, and tackle both local and global challenges. For instance, Chapter one discusses efforts in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay to bring marginalized groups into higher education, showcasing universities’ capacity to nurture democratic values. In Chapter two, the focus shifts to South Africa, where integrating Gandhian principles and Ubuntu into higher education is proposed to align educational pursuits with the public good. Furthermore, Chapter’s three examination of Nepal’s higher education system reveals a misalignment with local socio-economic needs, underscoring the imperative for educational systems to be contextually relevant and community focused. Collectively, these chapters underscore the vital role that higher education institutions must play in advancing a just and equitable society.

Part 2, known as “Curricula: Decolonised and Local,” focuses on the pivotal theme of curriculum development. Across five chapters, this segment explores the decolonization of higher education curricula shedding light on local and community-based learning paradigms. It accentuates the significance of education beyond the conventional classroom setting, community involvement in the arts, and the embrace of varied perspectives and competencies. This section features chapters like “Education Outside the Classroom: Social Commitment in University Education,” highlighting the importance of extending learning beyond traditional settings to engage with community issues directly. Another chapter, “Higher Education and the Unique Gifts of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities,” showcases the potential of inclusive education to harness the diverse talents of all community members. This part reinforces the idea that a responsive and responsible curriculum is integral to nurturing a socially engaged citizenry.

In Part 3, “Teaching: Engaged Action” transitions to the micro-dynamics within higher education, focusing on teaching methodologies that embody social responsibility. For instance, the chapter “Social Responsibility and Legal Education in India” examines how legal education can instill a sense of duty towards societal betterment among students. Another chapter, “Service Learning at the Instituto Professional of Chile,” explores how service learning integrates academic learning with community service, illustrating teaching’s potential as a vehicle for broader social change.

Part 4, “Partnerships: Renegotiating Knowledge and Society,” comprises seven chapters that address the synergistic collaborations between higher education institutions and their broader communities. This final section explores knowledge democracy, community engagement, support for marginalized groups, and a critique of traditional academic evaluation systems, offering a rich discourse on the interconnectedness of education and society. It includes chapters like “Preventing University Student Radicalisation,” which addresses the university’s role in fostering a safe and inclusive environment that counters radicalization. Another chapter, “Support for Prospective Refugee Students in Germany,” highlights how universities can be pivotal in providing support structures for marginalized groups, thereby reinforcing the interconnectedness of education and societal well-being.
The book’s exploration of socially responsible higher education is a meticulously crafted tapestry, interweaving theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and real-world applications to foster a rich and comprehensive discourse. This approach sheds light on the intricate ways higher education can catalyse societal change, highlighting its capacity to address challenges on both global and local scales. By integrating diverse theoretical frameworks, like Bourdieu’s notion of habitus and Gandhi’s educational philosophy, the book equips readers with a profound lens to examine the synergy between higher education and social responsibility. These frameworks are not merely academic tools; they lay the groundwork for a deeper exploration and understanding of the subject matter. The book articulates themes such as the democratization of knowledge, the critique of traditional metrics and rankings in academia, and the promotion of equity and inclusion. Several innovative and crucial areas that broaden the discourse on the role of higher education in society are covered. For instance, the chapter “Service Learning at the Instituto Professional of Chile” explores how service learning can be integrated into higher technical and professional education, offering students hands-on experience while contributing to their communities. This model aligns well with the needs of readers seeking practical ways to embed social responsibility into educational curricula and illustrates how institutions can foster civic-mindedness and community engagement among students.

One of the book’s notable chapters, “Education Outside the Classroom: Social Commitment in University Education,” discusses the importance of extending education beyond traditional classroom settings. It emphasizes experiential learning, community engagement, and the role of universities in addressing societal challenges. This chapter meets the needs of readers interested in innovative educational models and how these can contribute to social responsibility and community development.

Another compelling chapter, “Higher Education and the Unique Gifts of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities,” explores the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in higher education. It challenges the traditional notions of academic ability and argues for a more inclusive approach that recognizes diverse forms of intelligence and contribution. This discussion is particularly valuable for readers focused on inclusivity and diversity in education, offering insights into how universities can be more welcoming and supportive of all learners. On the other hand, the chapter “Tagore, Social Responsibility, and Higher Education in India” provides a fascinating exploration of Rabindranath Tagore’s educational philosophy and its relevance to contemporary higher education. It explores Tagore’s vision of education as a means to cultivate moral values, social consciousness, and a sense of responsibility among students. This historical and philosophical perspective can be incredibly enriching for readers interested in the intersections of education, philosophy, and social ethics.

These themes underscore the book’s commitment to reimagining higher education’s role in society. However, the review chooses to focus specifically on the chapters ‘Why Are Our Rankings So White?’ and ‘Saying ‘No’ to Rankings and Metrics: Scholarly Communication and Knowledge Democracy’ due to their critical examination of academic rankings. These chapters engage with the contentious issue of ranking systems in academia, a topic that has ignited significant debate within educational circles globally. The first chapter rigorously examines the racial and geographic biases embedded in university rankings, while the second critically assesses the core validity and ethical ramifications of prevalent academic metrics. Their unified focus on dissecting ranking methodologies and their repercussions for equity and diversity in higher education forms a robust basis for a collective critique, aligning them with pressing
concerns in the contemporary educational milieu and encouraging introspection on the ways these systems mirror and influence academic values. The chapters critically examine the prevailing ranking and metric systems in academia, highlighting how these frameworks not only perpetuate disparities but also fail to accurately reflect the diversity and quality of scholarly work. The first chapter provides a detailed analysis of how current ranking systems reinforce cultural whiteness and favour institutions in the Global North, thereby contributing to global academic disparities. Conversely, the subsequent chapter presents a compelling critique of the impact factor and similar metrics within academic publishing, proposing a polycentric, multilingual model as a more inclusive and representative alternative to evaluate academic merit and success.

While the arguments in both chapters are presented with clarity, they would benefit from a stronger connection between the identified issues and the proposed solutions. The current evidence effectively supports their claims, yet the incorporation of additional empirical examples and case studies would not only enrich the arguments but also offer a more concrete foundation for their critiques. Furthermore, a more comprehensive engagement with potential counterarguments would enhance the discourse, providing a well-rounded perspective on the topics discussed. The two chapters demonstrate solid logic and reasoning, yet there are opportunities to fortify this by more closely aligning the evidence with the conclusions drawn. The advocacy for a polycentric approach in academic publishing is particularly noteworthy for its originality, introducing fresh perspectives into the academic debate. However, the chapters would gain depth by engaging more extensively with a range of literature on alternative ranking and evaluation methodologies.

The narrative is conveyed with clarity and accessibility, effectively articulating complex concepts. Nonetheless, integrating practical examples of how the proposed reforms might be implemented would provide clearer guidance for application in the academic community. The arguments presented resonate strongly, shedding light on significant issues within academic evaluation systems and inviting readers to consider the underlying values and objectives. Although the proposals are persuasive, a more detailed exploration of their practical implementation and potential impact would enhance the chapters’ contribution to the academic discourse.

In its essence, the book masterfully merges insights from various disciplines, presenting a holistic and interconnected perspective on socially responsible higher education. It traverses numerous dimensions, from curriculum design to community partnerships, showing how alterations in one area can influence others, advocating for a more integrated approach. While grounding its arguments in established theories, the book encourages a push beyond conventional boundaries by incorporating contemporary frameworks and empirical research, which lends tangible substance to the theoretical discussions. However, while the empirical research bolsters the book’s arguments, a more critical examination of these methodologies could ensure they accurately reflect the complex landscape of social responsibility in education.

The inclusion of practical case studies is a testament to the book’s strength, yet a broader representation could enrich the discourse, ensuring diverse global contexts are considered. Although the book provides an in-depth analysis, its dense academic language and complex concepts may pose accessibility challenges for lay readers or those new to the topic. Moreover, while the book is rich in theoretical insights, it could offer more pragmatic guidance for the implementation of the discussed strategies, especially in resource-constrained environments. Despite these limitations, the book’s comprehensive approach and the invitation to a meaningful
dialogue on higher education’s evolution remain invaluable, making it a significant resource for educators, administrators, policymakers, and students.

In conclusion, “Socially Responsible Higher Education” expertly outlines the crucial role higher education institutions can play in fostering societal advancement and well-being. Through a careful assortment of topics and profound analyses, the book emerges as an indispensible asset for stakeholders passionate about the transformative potential of education and its capacity to forge a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

The book’s significant contribution lies in its introduction of novel perspectives and detailed case studies drawn from a spectrum of global contexts, thereby amplifying the discourse on the societal responsibilities of higher education. It presents an extensive repository of varied methodologies and actionable strategies, positioning itself as an essential guide for educators, administrators, and policymakers keen on embedding a socially responsible ethos within educational frameworks. Beyond its theoretical explorations, the book excels in demonstrating how these concepts can be pragmatically implemented, offering a beacon for institutions worldwide to navigate the complexities of societal engagement and contribute meaningfully to the global good.