

Call for Papers***New Models of the university: innovative structures, adaptive responses, and strategic behavior***

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To the main topic

As universities worldwide face unprecedented challenges and transformations — from technological disruptions to shifting societal expectations and the role of internationalization — it is important to critically assess the role, structure, and purpose of higher education institutions. This special issue of *ZFHE* invites contributions that explore the evolving models of HEIs and the different ways they change and/or adapt to rapidly changing environments.

The concept of universities as social institutions has long been the subject of scholarly inquiry, from classical theories by Humboldt and Newman that emphasize the university's role in fostering intellectual growth, to more contemporary perspectives that view universities as dynamic actors in global knowledge economies (Gumport, Slaughter, etc.). Recent theoretical frameworks have shifted focus toward the university's ability to adapt and transform in response to external pressures, including global competition and internationalization, digitalization, and shifts in public policy and funding models (Leišytė et al., 2023).

This special issue seeks to provide a critical analysis of the new models of HEIs and how the institution is affected internally. Contributions can engage with insights from organization theory to better understand how universities adapt to and shape their changing environments. Organization theory offers valuable frameworks for examining the structures, behaviors, and strategies of universities as complex organizations. Relevant theoretical perspectives may include institutional theory, resource dependence theory, contingency theory, learning approaches, or strategic management, and organizational capabilities (Maassen & Olsen, 2008; Argyris & Schön, 1978; Kleimann, 2023; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Mintzberg, 1983; Fumasoli & Huisman, 2013; Dee & Leišytė, 2016; Siegel & Leih, 2018; Toma, 2010).

Building on the seminal work of Astley and Van de Ven (1983), the tension between deterministic and voluntaristic views of organizational adaptation, and the role of agency in shaping organizational change can be part of the analysis. Models of adaptation can focus on the role of funding, digitalization, impact, diversity and inclusion, autonomy and academic freedom, quality assurance and accreditation policies and practices on universities' missions, decision-making processes, and structures. We believe that HEIs are suffering from mission overload and drift with an increased competitive environment, structural reforms and prestige economy. This can manifest itself in different ways at different types of HEIs, depending on world class or regional focus, research or teaching orientation, standing in the rankings, public or private ownership.

Drawing on the above organizational perspectives, this special issue aims to foster a deeper understanding of how HEIs can evolve structurally and culturally to remain relevant and resilient amidst change. We encourage authors to apply these perspectives to empirical studies,

case studies, and theoretical discussions on the transformation of higher education institutions.

This special issue aims to bring together theoretical and empirical insights on how universities can develop new models that respond to the demands of the 21st century. We welcome submissions that critically analyze, theorize, and propose innovative approaches to university adaptation, addressing questions such as:

- How are HEIs adapting their business model to meet the needs of a more diverse and global demands of stakeholders?
- What role do emerging technologies, such as AI and digital learning platforms, play in shaping the future of higher education institutions?
- In what ways can universities balance the pressures of marketization with their traditional missions of research, teaching, and public service?
- How do societal changes, such as demographic shifts, economic pressures, and environmental challenges, influence the strategies of higher education institutions?
- What are the implications of new university models for academic governance, faculty roles, and institutional leadership?
- To what extent do universities with different ownership differ and to what extent could a mutual exchange of their experiences be beneficial?
- How can universities serve as agents of social change and resilience in times of crisis, such as global pandemics or political unrest?

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Guidelines regarding the journal

The ZFHE is a peer-reviewed online journal that publishes scientific contributions of practical relevance concerning current higher education development issues. The focus is on didactical, structural, and cultural developments in teaching and learning. Topics that are innovative and still regarded as open in respect of their design options are preferred.

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Submission information

German or English contributions may be submitted in two possible formats:

Research contributions should meet the following criteria. The paper:

- addresses a systemic question in transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary or subject-specific contexts;
- has a research gap as its starting point;
- is extensively embedded in current scholarly discourse;
- has a robust methodological approach;
- includes reflection on the author's own work;
- explains the research methodology;
- employs a method that is suitable for answering the research question;
- presents the scientific discourse in a reflective manner;
- makes a clearly recognizable contribution to answering the research question or to the research discussion;
- consistently follows relevant citation rules (APA style, current edition);
- comprises between 20,000 and 33,000 characters (with spaces, including cover page, bibliography and author information).

Research-driven development contributions should meet the following criteria. The paper:

- features a higher education development perspective with a sound research base;
- discusses and differentiates a systemic problem in teaching development;
- is an academically grounded "institutional research" contribution;
- is supported by a literature review;
- meaningfully addresses the interaction between science and praxis and/or the link between the two poles of "research and development"
- consistently follows pertinent citation rules (APA style, current edition);
- comprises between 20,000 and 33,000 characters (with spaces, including cover page, bibliography and author information).

Development contributions should meet the following criteria. The paper:

- deals with a concrete problem in higher education development in the (author's) higher education institution;
- addresses a practical need;
- is embedded in the scientific discussion and literature (without claiming to provide an overview of the literature);
- offers suggestions for teaching and university development, with recommendations for action (if applicable);
- offers a systematic and transparent discussion (e.g. no incomprehensible references to specifics or details in a field of practice);
- elaborates on generalisable aspects relevant to theoretical development;
- addresses considerations related to the transfer to practice;
- mentions possibilities for further research;
- consistently follows relevant citation rules (APA style, current edition);
- comprises between 20,000 and 33,000 characters (with spaces, including cover page, bibliography and author information).

Submission and review schedule

June 6, 2025 – Submission deadline for complete articles: Please upload your contribution(s) to the ZFHE journal system (<https://www.zfhe.at>) in the corresponding section (research contributions, research-driven development contributions, development contributions) of ZFHE 20/4 issue in anonymous format. To do so, you must first register as an author in the system.

September, 2025 – Feedback/Reviews: Research contributions, research-driven development contributions, development contributions (see below).

October 31, 2025 – Revision deadline: Where necessary, contributions may be revised according to feedback and recommendations from the reviews.

December 2025 – Online publication: In December 2025, the finalized contributions are published under <https://www.zfhe.at> and also made available in print.

Review Process

All submitted contributions will be examined in a double-blind peer review process to guarantee scientific quality. The editors of the current issue propose the reviewers for the respective theme and allocate individual contributions to the reviewers; they also determine which contributions will be accepted. The selection of reviewers and the review process for each thematic issue are always supervised by a member of the editorial board.

Formatting and submission

In order to save valuable time with the formatting of the contributions, we kindly ask that all authors work with the template from the beginning. The template can be downloaded from the ZFHE website under the following links:

https://www.zfhe.at/userupload/ZFHE_TEMPLATE_20-4.docx

Since we must be able to edit the texts, they must be submitted unlocked/unprotected in in Microsoft Word (.doc), Office Open XML (.docx), Open Document Text (.odt) or Plain Text (.txt) format. Please do not submit any PDF files! Submissions in the “Scientific Contribution” and “Workshop Report” categories must first be made in anonymous format in order to guarantee the double-blind review process. Please remove all references to the author(s) of the document (including in the document properties!). Upon a positive review result, this information will be re-inserted.

Questions?

If you have any questions regarding the content of the issue, please contact Tatiana Fumasoli (t.fumasoli@ucl.ac.uk), René Krempkow (rene.krempkow@HTW-Berlin.de), Liudvika Leisyte (liudvika.leisyte@tu-dortmund.de), Barbara Sporn (barbara.schachermayer-sporn@wu.ac.at). For technical and organizational questions, please contact Elisabeth Stadler (office@zfhe.at).

We look forward to your submissions!

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