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Abstract: Understanding enabling and constraining causal powers for research and innovation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC): the case of the South African higher education

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of research and innovation within the changing higher education context in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, using South Africa as a case study. The paper analyses discourses that contribute as enabling and constraining environments for research and innovation. Margaret Archer's (1995, 1996) social realist theory and stratified construct of structure, culture and agency are employed to make sense of the various emerging transformation discourses exerting causal powers that enable or constrain research and innovation. This paper aims at investigating the interplay between the structural (funding models, frameworks, strategies, programmes, systems, etc.), cultural (ideas, knowledge, values, beliefs, ideologies and theories, etc.) and agential setups/milieus (key agents- both primary and corporate) to better understand the urgency awarded to research and innovation. The research process entails analysing selected policies, documents, research and innovation models, strategies and examples as well as the literature on higher education in South Africa.

The following discourses will be critiqued: the national and international policy; the effects of globalisation and neo-liberal movement; the death of collegiality and birth of managerialism in higher education; changing academic work and the emergence of new identities and roles; pressures for academics to undertake research with a socio-economic emancipatory and innovatory flair rather than research for its own sake.

Understanding these positions might assist countries such as Lesotho to locate their agency in the global and local contexts and to understand their roles in creating ideal conditions and identifying corporate agents who must develop and strengthen research development and innovation. Developing countries with limited resources should, however, not try to reinvent what already exists, but should rather engage in an informed borrowing of key aspects (models, frameworks and examples) that would thrive in their own context. It must be cautioned, however, that no system of the world can exist as an end in itself, without deficits and flaws.

Key words: Innovative Funding frameworks, changing higher education, structure, culture, agency.

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