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**Abstract**

Martin Trow was among the most influential scholar in Higher Education studies in the second half of the 20th century. He is best known for his conceptualisation of the development of Higher Education into three stages – elite, mass and universal systems. This article considers, first, his intellectual method and the underpinning theory (or lack of it); secondly, the extent to which his ideas, generated in the exceptional environment of post-war America were, and are, relevant to different national contexts and in the very different environment of the 21st century; thirdly, the strengths and weaknesses of Trow's conceptualisation of three stages of Higher Education development; and, finally the new lines of research suggested by an overall assessment of his work. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)