Realising the Ecological University: A Feasible Utopia

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This talk

- University 4.0 – focus of this summer school
- My job – neither to urge the concept
- Nor to offer strategies towards its realisation
- But:

       (a) to sketch the context - of higher education in the C21

       (b) to identify some considerations/ issues in front of institutions

       (c) to sketch some ideas of my own

       (d) to place University 4.0 in that light

       (e) and so provide a kind of template of ideas/ issues to provide a framework with which to come at what is in store in rest of summer school.

Seven preliminary questions

- Alliance of '4.0' and university – external &/or internal?
- A disruptor technology but what is being disrupted?
- Is there agreement on meaning of 4.0 or is it a metaphor, a large net?
- Is it a means or an end? (***The BIG question***.) & if a means, to what end?
- If the '4.0 university', does that imply a stage model of the university?
- And if so, is it preordained or does the university have other options?
- Are all parts of the university implicated in this movement
        - all disciplines, R+T, and management and governance?

(Rhetorical questions – hover in background.)

[*By the way, **has** the university changed much over the last 900 years? Yes, but still the medieval university is still with us in large part – geological layers*.]

The week's news

- '*Is the Haldane Principle obsolete?'* – end of university autonomy?
- *Brexit* and its impact on scientific cooperation across Europe – cooperation in a competitive world?
- Announcement of a conference in Jan 2020 at KU Leuven on '**post-truth**'
- Story on '*Living Values*' project – challenging univs to think about their values.
- Story about the emergence of '*science diplomacy*' – cross-national dialogue

&

- The ageing society – learning thro the lifespan
- The problem with measles
- Cathedral of Notre-Dame – and cathedral thinking.

8 global challenges

1   Loss of autonomy, at a deep level
2   'Post-truth' world – and skepticism towards academic knowledge
3   Critical thinking imperilled – both generally and (even) in the university
4   Instabilities – digital age; 4.0
5   Loss of trust - & legitimacy - in the university
6   An ever insecure funding base
7   Climate change & ecological degradation
8   Serving the public good – amid metrics, rankings and competition.

  NB: *Many/ most of the challenges in the world are not technological but are matters of being, of living and of the possibilities for the future.*

Value-free zone?

- Global forces
  - Technological revolution (T 'fix') – the digital age
- Undermining the value-base of universities
- Not yet value-free
- University still wishes to live by human & social values
- So universities left to determine their own value-base
- But icing on the cake
- Value horizon imposed
- Measurement, technicality, STEM, impact …

Identity problem

- No longer clear what a university is for
  - No universal set of purposes
- Differences – not just across nations & institutions but also disciplines
- Problem-solvers or problem-makers
  - NZ: 'critical conscience of society' [NZ]
- Suppliers of 'cognitive capital' – ie economic value played up
  - Passing away of the 'liberal'/ Kantian university of reason
- From narrow inward calling to a narrow external calling
- ***Just what might it be a 'university' in the C21 (cf 'the idea of the university')***

Undue laments

- Much gnashing of teeth in the university
  - 'The university in ruins'
- But the university has been complicit
- Has undermined itself
- Its knowledge activities have lost their legitimacy
- But also turned in on itself
- Hence the epithet 'ivory tower'.

An inevitable remainer

- The university is always less than it can be
  - Less than the sum of its parts
- Always short of its possibilities
- The concept – now imagined – opens a gap
- Always a beyond
- A double remainder
- - between 'reality' and idea
- - between 'reality' and possibilities in the future

Feasible utopias

- Identifying possibilities
- Not neutral
- But value-laden
- Utopian – probably will not be reached
- But not out of reach
- Already instances embryonically visible
- Empirical warrant

Some imaginings of the university

- The therapeutic university
- The liquid university [Bauman]
- The civic university [Brink]
- The pragmatic university
- The comprehensive university
- The university as fool [Kavanagh]
- The wise university [Maxwell]
- The virtuous university (Nixon)
- The theatrical university [Parker]
- The critical university
- The porous university
(& 'The 4.0 university'?)

Tests of adequacy

- Range (theory/ ideas/ practice/ policy)
- Depth (structures/ experience/ ideas)
- Feasibility (power/ organization)
- Ethics (flourishing – human/ organizational/ societal/ global wellbeing)
- Continuing possibilities/ emergent properties

Severe tests, but they will extend imaginative ideas
         - and help to provide a legitimation of the imagination
         - supplying potency and efficaciousness to the imagination

Towards the Ecological University

- The Idea of the ecological

- (Guattari's 3 ecosystems)

- Ecosystems of the university – 8
  - Knowledge
  - Society
  - Politics
  - Economy
  - Learning
  - Identity
  - Culture
  - Natural environment

Being an Ecological University

- The ecological university (EU) takes its embeddedness – actual/ potential – seriously
- The EU has a care towards its total environment – namely, the world itself
- So the EU acts in collective interests – 'that, in the short term, don't profit anyone, but in the long term are the conduits of an … enrichment for the whole of humanity. It is the whole future of fundamental research and artistic production that is in question here.' (Guattari, p65)
- They reach out to the world, if only in their aspirations
- But NB: each university its own ecological footprint – or ecological niche
- Its own possibilities

The coming of the ecological university

- Prompts towards the ecological university:

- *Global*
- The ecological challenge – of global warming
- Global terrorism and crime
- Energy crises
- Global diseases and hunger

- *National*
- Social disorder
- Poverty and alienation
- The other claims us, whether we like it or not
- We are compelled to take account of 'strangers' and offer 'hospitality'

NB: UK – agenda of 'public engagement' opening to universities.

Possibilities
(which vary in range and depth and ethical aspects)

- Developing a strategy of 'public engagement'
- Putting academic work on-line;
- Holding public lectures – and putting podcasts on-line
- Working with local/ regional communities in addressing social issues
- Working with groups/ communities in the developing world
- Offer pro bono advice
- Producing materials for public consumption
- Its research tackling issues of wide concern
- Its academics becoming public intellectuals – communicating to public*s* ; enhancing the public sphere
- Teaching: putting each class in contact with a like class in another country and develop a trans-national/ trans-cultural learning space – students as 'global citizens'
- Promoting inter-connectedness in its staff members (NB U of Durham)
- A university of wisdom
- United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals

Deep ecology – the EU and the knowledge ecology

- Collaboration with the community (Keri Facer)
- Produces:
  - Two-way dialogue between the university and communities
  - Inter-disciplinarity
  - But includes the practical/ pragmatic knowledges of the community
  - Empathy
  - Creativity and imagination in new forms of knowledge
  - Shifts the university into a new space – society+university entangled
  - Produces a futures orientation
  - A 'public' university – in public; in a public space
  - A new accountability
- NB: does not abandon critique. eg 'The public philosopher'; TCD – the long room.

Testing the idea of the EU

- **Range (theory/ ideas/ practice/ policy)**
  - *EU has extensive range*
- **Depth (structures/ experience/ ideas)**

  - EU is sensitive to the deep structures of the world, and to complexity in experience and ideas; it is not a trivial idea. It can live among the antagonisms of the university.
- **Feasibility (power/ organization)**
  - *EU is open to imaginative practical realisation, even with and even through existing power structures*
- **Ethics (flourishing – human/ organizational/ societal/ global)**
- *EU has a strong ethical component, being concerned with 'the other', individual/ social, local/ global, organic/ inorganic*
- **Continuing possibilities/ emergent properties**
- *EU can go on being revisited, reimagined, developed. It can unfold in time and space; indeed, it can open new spaces.*

By the way – what's to become of the university library?

- Will the library empty itself of its books and journals?
- (A Yale library has reduced from 150,000 to 40,000 books.)
- (La Trobe University, Australia)
- The end of reading?
- A collection of learning spaces
- Fundamental changes in criticality – or a loss of criticality?
- But new possibilities for the library – connect with the public (sphere)?

And 4.0?

- Technological changes can ***make possible*** the ecological university
- More, can offer new possibilities
  - (a) help the university to realize anew its values
  - (b) and in ways that enable it to reach out to the world
- Technology on tap, not on top, eg
  - The library
  - The public sphere
  - The digital classroom
  - The epistemological university
  - The global university
- ***Being in the right frame of mind*** – values; imagination; collective courage

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Conclusion: the responsible university

- Being a university in the C21 – or 'for' the C21?
- Striving for what?
- A language of responsibility – to the whole world
- (strife, climate change and ecological degradation, massive world problems, with no definite solution, only perplexity)
- The university is now born again
- Critical to the world – literally, for the survival of the world
- Technology cannot be the answer but it can provide some of the means to realize the university's values anew
- We need imagination in discerning possibilities for the univ
- And courage and unflagging energies to re-create the univ.

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