

Towards the Collaborative University

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Abstract

This work positions itself among recent contributions to the being of a university. Its original contribution lies in its juxtaposition of traditional and ultra-modern themes and possibilities of the university. Setting out to search for not only what the university was, and is, I also seek to open for conceptual explorations of what the university might become. Some may contest that the pondering upon the premises and doings of the university has not ceased since the 1810 founding of the Humboldt University in Berlin (e.g. Newman, [1851] 1976; Jaspers, [1946] 1965; Scott, 1993). Aspects of what might be may already be seen in current, experimental practices. In the following, these will be illustrated, and augmented, by use of lessons from tourism education and research. The endeavour ultimately aims to help identify positive options for how the university can be re-imagined to attain its full potential in the world (Barnett, 2011, 2013).

As such, this work is an optimistic and critical undertaking. New imaginations for the development of the university are needed to avoid blind reproduction, to fully seize its possibilities, and to meet its responsibilities in the creation of desirable futures. The latter suggest that the university has responsibilities not only to itself, but to its students and staff, to other institutions, to industry, to society, to the state, to other nations, and over time. It also gives way for creative conceptualisations of the university as a space for receiving and

contributing to critical knowledge about the past and present; a space for transformation of the self and a space to engage in future world-making.

I draw on Heidegger's notion of being, which at all times is a matter of "being-possible" ([1927] 1998: 183). The being of the university hereby becomes a matter of becoming, of changes, and of unfolding potentials. Uncovering the ideals and ideas of the university, albeit in a broad-brush sense, gives way to creative and ethical space to imagine other possibilities for the university. It is an ethical space based on the university being and doing good in and of the world, rather than an ivory tower set apart from the world. Becoming and moving forwards are open-ended but not without direction. The university has possibilities and limitations in it, and responsibilities. These responsibilities cannot be fully captured by a persistent quest for truthful knowledge, dialogue, and criticism, and the university thinking itself into the future.

Universities are under pressure and transformation in Denmark and Europe, as in many other parts of the world. Universities are increasingly challenged to be accountable, to reform, or modernise practices and perform at multiple levels, which are combined with new forms of governance. Tied to central government for much of their finance, universities compete in a struggle for reduced public funding. Underlying these changes is a deeper transformation from the elite to the mass university. Without suggesting a linear evolution of developments, during the 1960s an exponential expansion of higher education could be identified in Europe and across the Western world. Reflecting wider socio-economic trends of the post-World War II era in Europe, and inspired from American universities, the exponential development of universities is unprecedented.

Thus, the being of the university has faced a basic change "from an elite system of higher education largely confined within national boundaries, to a mass higher education system in a global business" (Ramsden, 1998: 13). Emerging as some of the notable deviations from the ideals and ideas of the Humboldt University, the connotation of the Disciplined University is intended to capture the being of the modern university. Its being is characterised by the disciplining practices of the mass university by the state, and the self-disciplining of academics internalising, and striving to meet external criteria of assessment and management. Summarised as the internationalisation of universities, and often promoted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU), such functionalist view of the university rests on a tendency to understand the university in terms of its value to society. Offering a general perspective, the drive to evaluate

the usefulness of the Disciplined University is based on the impact on the wealth-generating capacity in society. Logically and morally it may be difficult to challenge the proposition that universities, as high-cost structures in society embracing and concentrating most of the intellectual and scientific resources of a nation, should be made maximally relevant to the practical problems of societal development (Coleman, 1986).

These claims should be critically approached to avoid a disproportionate influence and unsophisticated understanding of the university (Barnett, 2011, 2013). First, the transformation of self-governing universities into semi-public service institutions for higher education and research reduces the overall idea of the university to its direct contribution to national (and European) competitiveness.

These processes and changes to the traditional university have led to deeper reflections about, and nostalgic longing for, the value of classical ideals and ideas of the university, which the very call for reforms and modernisation seeks to change. Even so, the current mandate for change by reference to the maintenance of traditional ideals and ideas poses a paradox. It beckons inquiry into what the status of the classical university ideals and ideas were and what they currently are, especially if the principles for which the university have stood are to be sustained.

This framing poses a three-part question: first, what are the original ideals and ideas concerning the university, second, does anything remain of these in the modern university, and third, how can the ideals and ideas of the university be expanded in the twenty-first century? Herein lays the line of inquiry of the present work. It can be misread as a purely speculative endeavour with little or no care for reality. Rather, this research offers philosophical, conceptual, and empirical discussion of ideals, ideas, and realities to provide a deeper understanding of what a university was, what it currently is, and is not. Indicating the significance of the imagination, the contours of the Collaborative University will be outlined as a response to the current limitations at, and of, the Disciplined University.

Moreover, lessons from tourism education and research are deployed in the form of empirical case studies to illustrate collaborative practices across a range of dimensions, including with other institutions, industry, the state, internationally, and over time. By being tested against reality, exposing contemporary cases of collaborative university practices, the proposition for future developments in the form of the Collaborative University widens conceptions of the possibilities ahead, and also attains a higher degree of feasibility. Indicating the ideals and ideas of the Collaborative University, the empirical positioning furthermore serves to ensure that the philosophical considerations are not out of touch with the world but that an in touch

with the world is established. They help provide a corrective against potentially harmful imaginations of the university, by indicating not only the power of the imagination, but assuming a position of intellectual responsibility for actual and future practice.

Transforming the university into an engaged, collaborative institution where academics and students pursue an unrelenting examination of knowledge, and its uses, I propose to reclaim the aims and freedom of the university as a centre for a higher order knowledge development, and for collaboration with, and for society.

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