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The Role of the University in Society

The New Normal

We have been warned that global risks are escalating and there is no going back. This was the general consensus to questions posed by the Times Higher Education webinar panel: 'Has Covid-19 changed universities forever?', and 'What new iterations of the university might emerge from the rubble?'.[1] The 'new normal' is the latest moniker for the state of higher education: one that reflects universities grappling with the seismic shifts to core operations and structures of universities affected by the COVID-19 crisis. More broadly within this twenty-first-century context, the identity and purpose of the university—like society itself—is in a state of systemic flux, crisis and change. As Isaac Kamola writes, 'It is important to remember that all universities are always already multiple, with many histories, and many crises'.[2]

The isolation and pain that is being felt across universities is both a reality and metaphor for universities and the higher education sector writ large. COVID-19 is just one of many crises and calamities re-shaping the ideal of 'the University' and real universities on the ground. The closure of university campuses across the world to staff and students

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in lock-down has forced core activities such as learning and teaching, research and engagement, management and administration to increasingly take place in a hybrid mode or online. This is underpinned by a dispersed and largely invisible web of highly unequal private spaces, from the crowded kitchen tables of casual tutors to the palatial home offices of university executives. Meanwhile, the precariousness of the university funding model and over-reliance of many institutions on international student enrolments have re-opened important questions about the contemporary role of the university. The critical question is how the crises faced-by universities relate to longer standing critiques of them.

Among the many tensions and fault lines in contemporary universities intensified by the pandemic, three stand out.

First, the *emphasis on using universities to drive economic growth and development* as a route to recovery has amplified the contested role of universities as a tool in the state's economic toolkit and the shaping of universities as corporations providing research and educational services for a fee. Pandemic-induced job losses in some universities have illuminated the widening gap between executive salaries and large property portfolios on the one hand, and increasingly precarious and vulnerable staff and students on the other hand. Meanwhile, although some governments have responded with generous funding injections to higher education, in other contexts the challenges of increasing numbers of students and staff-student teaching ratios, and the concomitant reduction of public funding per student over the lifetime of the study course, is pushing universities further on their quest for new income sources and resources—and thus towards wealthy industry partners, for-profit operating models and an economic framing of higher education.

Second, pandemic experiences highlight *the linkages and blurred boundaries between universities, and between universities and the rest of society*. In some cases, this has seen universities pulling together and advocating as a coalition, whilst in others it has heightened competition between them. All universities are juggling the dynamic effects of the pandemic and its repercussions on their local context *and* on the far-flung sites and usually international flows of students, staff and resources that they often rely on. Together these geographic relations illuminate the physical forms and embeddedness of universities in multiple places. This has reinforced

the inescapable connections between universities and domestic environments, with the unequal effects of home schooling and domestic care responsibilities on different staff and students, for instance, highlighting the pervasive nature of gender inequalities in the societies that universities are part of.[3]

Third, the pandemic has reinforced growing concern within universities about the *deepening global challenges facing humanity and the planet*. With mounting evidence that the world's current trajectory is unsustainable, it is increasingly clear that universities cannot externalise the costs and risks of existing ways of doing things or downplay such issues as irrelevant, insignificant or merely interesting topics for discussion. It is telling that more and more universities, disciplines, higher education networks and student groups are joining others in declaring a climate emergency, calling for urgent climate action, and even progressing such action within their own institutions and organisations. This includes eighty-seven universities that collectively committed to climate action as part of their involvement in the SDG Accord—a voluntary agreement that represents 'the university and college sector's collective response to the global goals'.[4]

A major challenge for climate action in the sector is the fact that most sustainability initiatives within universities (which climate change is still somewhat erroneously framed as) end up as side-lined in separate units, strategies and policies, unable to influence the core business decisions or culture of the institution, and are thus severely limited in ambition and effectiveness. As Claudia Zwar and Simon Lancaster (2020) write about the UK situation:

> Universities are natural leaders in combating climate change and the flurry of recent environmental targets is overdue. But there is a real risk that without placing sustainability in a broader way of thinking about success in higher education, these climate strategies create more hot air.[5]

Fortunately, there seems to be a growing desire to genuinely make all aspects of higher education 'climate compatible' by placing greenhouse gas emissions reduction and climate change adaptation at the heart of strategic decision-making in the sector. One of the results is that usually

implicit models of success, such as conservative notions of research excellence and conventional economic growth (discussed above), are coming under scrutiny. In particular, climate change has exposed some of the costs, risks and myths of the sector's global mobility ideal, including the assumption that frequent travel fosters personal success.[6] Rising awareness of the highly polluting, risky and often unnecessary nature of long-distance international travel means that its disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic can be less easily dismissed as unforeseeable or framed as a problem we need to simply bounce back from. Instead, there is an appetite for rethinking some of the fundamentals of the global higher education sector and revisiting the purpose and role of universities.

Given this context, how will universities engage with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)t as a transformational vision for achieving social equity and environmental sustainability over the coming decade? Universities have the opportunity and capacity to lead on SDG innovation across their four primary functions of research, education, external leadership, and operations and governance, and many have started trying to do so. But it is unclear if action to date is driving fundamental change or remains a side project or broad ambition. The SDGs demand many things from higher education beyond business-as-usual.

In Chap. 2, we outlined how the idea of development and its roots in modernity and colonialism are central to both the Sustainable Development Goals and the higher education sector. This chapter builds on this to position the SDG agenda as part of a shift in expectations about the role of the university. As illustrated schematically in Fig. 3.1, universities are increasingly understood not as ivory towers, oddities or innocents, but as deeply embedded and engaged with the world, including the crises, disruptions and unwanted changes that characterise them.

Moving beyond the nationalistic and individualistic competitor mindset, the SDGs encourage universities to heed the global call to action. As the world turns with the pace of new economies and technologies, and grapples with the challenges of intergenerational equity and justice, a global pandemic and planetary tipping points, the university is emblematic of humanity's quest for survival. The recent COVID-19 crisis is the symptom and not the root cause of the modern university in crisis: the

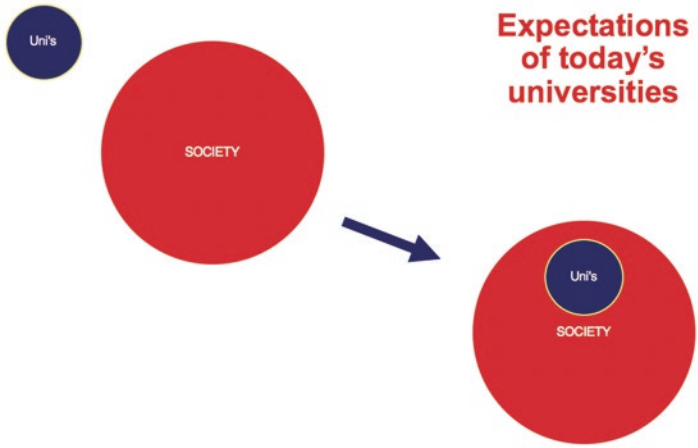

Fig. 3.1 Embedded and engaged—expectations of twenty-first-century universities (Source: Authors)

catalytic moment reinforcing the need for wider systemic and transformative change reflected in the SDGs.

The Idea of the University

Within the twenty-first-century context, 'is it possible to come forward with an idea of the university, that has a measure of feasibility, anchored in the real world and expressive of some hope and a measure of optimism?'.[7] This is how Ronald Barnett introduces his utopian vision of 'the Ecological University'. To rescue the university from impotence and defeatism, he argues, we must reconceive the university and its place in the world and the earth anew. We will return to the idea of the Ecological University later in the chapter, but first explore some of the ambitions and criticisms that have shaped the contemporary higher eductaion sector paradox whereby, 'the university is most needed at a moment when it is most in peril'.[8]

In 1852 'the idea of the university', according to John Henry Newman, was of a community of thinkers engaged in a broad liberal education. For Newman, writing over 150 years ago, the university was a place where:

> students could come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge, for the communication and circulation of thought, where inquiry is pushed forward, discoveries verified and perfected, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge creating a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes.[9]

Newman's vision has since been critiqued for being both elitist and anti-utilitarian in nature, in contrast to the vocational skills or professional accreditation that many universities now emphasise to serve specific (i.e. far more narrow) external purposes.[10] However Newman's ideas of a broad liberal education are being revisited during the COVID-19 crisis. Fostering a 'community of thinkers' in which students learn 'to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyse'[11] in order to better address the uncertain future seems more important than ever. As Sophia Deboick wrote in *The Guardian* more than a decade ago, Newman's ideas speak to 'the soul' of the university, 'reminding us that the university has a greater role than just doling out qualifications—that of shaping the whole individual'. She continues: 'Newman's thought may usefully guide us as crucial decisions are made about the future of our universities'.[12]

The liberal notion of holistic education advocated by Newman built on earlier work by Prussian philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt. His idea of the modern university influenced nineteenth-century European and later the elite American universities such as Harvard and Stanford. The Humboldtian Model was embedded in the enlightenment ideals of developing the autonomous individual *and* world citizen whereby 'knowledge is power, and education is liberty'. This included a focus on building learning and knowledge through the integration of arts and science with research; allowing students the freedom to choose their own studies; organisational independence within a system of state-based funding; and an emphasis on intellectual freedom. Critical thinking skills

were key to Humbolt's vision of the university: 'to inquire and to create—these are the grand centres around which all human pursuits revolve'.[13]

In the twentieth century this vision of universities designed to educate a small, exclusive group of scholars destined for the civil service, traditional profession or the Academy, was remoulded to open up universities to a much larger proportion of the population with a consequently greater variety of student characteristics, needs and ambitions. For this and other reasons, the university sector broadly shifted from the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself towards more utilitarian ends. Associated with this shift were more specialised and professionalised roles within universities, greater cross-institutional competition nationally and internationally; corporate dependence and sponsorship; more standardised curriculums and efforts to provide students with practical 'employable' skills and competences.[14]

Interest in the 'role' of universities in society reflects the rise of a functionalist reading of the world in which society is a system divided into sectors and groups that each play a unique part. Still prominent today, this view of universities not only specifically encourages them to become more *useful* to society (better fitted to the whole), but fundamentally disputes the idea that universities are independent entities, free to choose what they become (e.g. on the basis of an essentialist truth or defining ideal or philosophy). Instead, a functionalist lens emphasises the relationship between universities and the world and underlines the influence of external drivers. From this perspective, the form and shape of universities is less a response to academic or educational choices (e.g. about the nature and role of pedagogy, curriculum and research) and more a reflection of contemporary culture and structures.

Through this lens, the increasing focus of universities on managerialism, efficiency and competition over the last century reflects changes in the broader environment. Even Humboldt's Enlightenment-era University of Berlin model with its strong emphasis on academic freedom, and academic purpose was located *inside,* not outside, the existing ideology and class structure system.[15]

Sociologist Joseph Ben-David argues that it was not 'the idea of the university' put forward by German philosophers such as Kant and Hegel that shaped Humboldtian universities as sites of secular learning, but rather tensions in society at the time that oscillated between innovation and rigidity. The upshot is that 'the status and the freedom of the university, seemingly so well established and secure, were as a matter of fact precarious'.[16] The same holds true now, as universities remain contested and precarious entities—perhaps even more so.

Marketisation, globalisation and massification have created shifts in both the real and perceived contributions of the role of the university. The limitations of the neoliberal university and its over emphasis on 'sponsorism' and corporatisation aligned with commercial interests have given birth to *Critical University Studies*. In the last few decades growing critiques of academic capitalism reflect increasing levels of frustration and anger around what is being 'lost, jettisoned, damaged or destroyed' within higher education.[17] This includes a marked shift away from a public model of higher education towards a privatised model that has raised serious questions about academic labour and student debt, among other issues of precarity and vulnerability in the face of instituional reform and restructure. The negative impact on academic work, student learning and the nature of institutional politics are particular points of contention within an increasingly audit-oriented culture, that too often prioritises management by metrics over the quality of student and staff experiences.

In higher education policy, pedagogy and practice in a climate of growth, this manifests as velocity over quality; project not process led planning; circumscribed community involvement as consumers/stakeholders not students or citizens; sections of higher education moving into shady wings beyond scrutiny (commercial in confidence provisions of public-private partnerships); and dubious and possibly self-serving strategic policy and planning processes and techniques especially in the area of growth modelling and budget forecasts that go to the core of the increasingly privatised model of university financing.[18]

In *A Fractured Profession*, David Johnson argues this emphasis on growth and profit in higher education is fundamentally re-shaping the

purpose and contribution of the university. In particular the commercialisation of knowledge which creates a conflicting role for academics in serving the 'advancement of knowledge toward particular—and financial—ends'.[19] Similarly, Christopher Newfield highlights in *The Great Mistake: How we wrecked public universities and how we can fix them,* that the current business model for universities to improve growth and market-efficiencies has led to what he describes as 'a death spiral' for higher education. This includes a national student debt crisis, lower educational quality and an overreach of property investment and facilities.[20] Whilst in *Public Universities, Managerialism and the Value of Higher Education*, Rob Watts points to what he calls 'market-crazed governance' which has led to a situation where,

> not only the normal teacher-student relationship is inverted, academic professional autonomy is eroded, and many students are short-changed, but where universities are becoming places whose leaders are no longer prepared to tell the truth, and too few academics are prepared to insist they do.[21]

This 'new normal' is more than a crisis of universities, it is a crisis of government and society (in a Foucauldian sense)[22] which creates significant challenges, but also the space for alternative 'governmentalities'. Susan Hyatt and colleagues highlight that the close relationships that have been forged between higher education and privatised and corporate interests have been accompanied by 'new forms of governance, [that] produce new subject-positions among faculty and students and enable new approaches to teaching, curricula, research, and everyday practices'.[23] Thus, while growth remains the touchstone in higher education, there are shifting coalitions and communities of practice in higher education emerging which subvert the dominance of any one economic or political agenda—although largely still operating within the institutional and political status quo.

To better understand the progressive role of the university in society requires a critical focus on how higher education helps to shape and govern the world and vice versa. This includes the capacity to contest, alter and adapt the dominant practices and tools that have been

fashioned to date—which in universities are proving to be as resilient as they are broken.

The Resilience Machine

Universities are remarkably resilient despite the many challenges they face. The capacity of the university to endure as one of society's longest standing institutions is for many a testament to its value, significance and importance.[24] Unlike most governments or private companies, the university has not just withstood centuries of changing circumstances, including severe disruptions, but also grown meteorically in global size, scope and scale during that time.[25] No longer the realm of the elite, attendance at university is now accessible for many in the community. The university is by all appearances a success story in modern history, culture and society—a resilience machine?

Jim Bohland, Simin Davoudi and Jennifer Lawrence use the term 'resilience machine' to describe the vast assemblage of policies, practices and projects around the world that are responding to myriad contemporary crises with 'resilience' initiatives[26] which, like Harvey Molotoch's urban growth machine,[27] tend to collectively and invisibly reproduce dominant political and economic systems. In particular they focus on how the concept of resilience is located within and often co-opted by, a set of dominant neoliberal mentalities. Within this context, the dependencies, relationships and underlying motivations of the groups and organisations involved strongly shape what is done in the name of resilience. More specifically, the urban growth machine analogy they use underlines how urban resilience initiatives are frequently used to exploit the economic potential of developments, manipulate the system to maximise growth and profit while convincing the public that upward growth models are important—nay necessary—for long-term security, jobs and prospects (i.e. resilience).

Universities are often among the key institutions enrolled in urban growth machines and associated resilience initiatives in different contexts, including as partners in their local regions. Universities can be seen as the *targets* of growth and resilience logics, often with the two in

tandem. Reading universities as themselves examples of growth/resilience machines brings to the fore the pervasive drive within higher education to exploit the economic potential of knowledge generation and the concommitant role of credentialisation.

This also highlights continual efforts to maximise growth and profit out of *all* activities and assets including the financialisation of buildings and outsourcing of core services, as well as the normalisation of these agendas internally and externally with university staff, students and other 'stakeholders'. Given universities' knowledge creation, education and public engagement roles, and associated capacity for authoritative dissemination and normalisation of select discourses, they are well placed to advance a teleological 'desire for growth' within society. It is a discourse many then seek to profit from by positioning themselves as a vital passage point for others' individual and organisational success.

It is important to recognise that universities and cities do not have to be, and are not all, like this. Similarly, resilience, like the SDGs, does not have to be associated with perpetual growth and neoliberalism. The concept of resilience is highly ambiguous—merely a way of capturing a certain relationship to and mode of change. Depending on 'resilience for whom, what, when, where and why', it can strengthen precious elements of the world or entrench predatory ones. A major reason the world is facing such a crisis of unsustainability is that too many of the things that need to change (e.g. fossil-fuel driven car cultures, capitalist greed) are proving highly resilient, while the resilience of things that we desperately need to preserve (e.g. natural ecosystems, social systems of care) are being systematically eroded.[28]

Resilience therefore is not inherently desirable, but malleable and value-neutral: equally capable of being put to regressive *and* progressive agendas. If an entity (such as a university in the midst of COVID-19) simply adopts the goal of 'being resilient' without reflection and in the absence of other guiding principles, ethics or values, it is unlikely to change current conditions. As a result, it is likely to not only be poorly positioned to respond well to the next disturbance, but it is squandering an important opportunity for progressive real-world impact. As Bohland and colleagues note, rather than just depoliticised 'calls for more resilience' we need to inquire 'into the logics that have created the demand [for resilience] in the first place'.[29]

Although the current 'resilience machine' in cities and the universities they harness may be largely driven by the growth machine, there is the potential to use resilience building efforts to foster critique, experimentation and learning alongside—and in resistance to—an emphasis on economic resilience rhetoric.[30] This involves exploring different ways to (re)-imagine what a more just, equitable and democratic world might look like. It also involves recognising the ecological and physical context of universities. Actual 'resilience science' is about the resilience dynamics of social-ecological systems at interlinked scales, including the planet. It is partly thanks to resilience science that the unsustainability of current trajectories is now apparent.

Significantly, what is meant by resilience in this context is not the same as the dominant notion of 'bounce back' that stems from engineering. In resilience science and related ecological fields, resilience refers to the capacity to 'bounce-forward' through re-organisation and adaptation.[31] When the entity in question incorporates the social dimension, resilience often depends on social learning and citizen engagement. In contrast to the boundedness of entities assumed in engineering modes of resilience, ecological and evolutionary modes of resilience also emphasise the relative openness of targets for resilience, such as 'communities'.[32]

When applied to universities, this sort of resilience lens calls into view their multifaceted context and dynamism. In so doing it resonates with what Ron Barnett calls the 'ecological university' which we highlighted at the start of the chapter—one positioned within, conscious of, and caring towards, seven 'ecosystems' including the natural environment, but also knowledge, social institutions, persons, the economy, learning and culture. To be ecological, universities need to not just *sustain* themselves or acknowledge they are *from the world*—but be *for the world*—to help it change for the better. To achieve this, many universities, and the higher education sector in general, needs to question how they themselves might need to change. As he explains:

> To pick up just one ecosystem, the knowledge ecology, its sustainability [as in persistence] is not at issue. Rather, the issue is one of its ever-fuller flourishing: does it exhibit a due diversity with, say, non-scientific forms of thought being accorded legitimacy? Is there an ever-greater circulation of ideas in a polity? Is there a continuing creativity in those ideas? Do the

> dominant knowledge frameworks include those of peoples across the world, including the South (Connell, 2007) and indigenous traditions (de Sousa Santos, 2016)? Does the knowledge in a society reach out so as to form ever-wider publics? Is there a healthy degree of continuing scepticism, debate and even rivalry, with groups pitted against each other in critical dialogue? If the answer to questions such as these is 'yes', then we are not in the presence of a knowledge ecology that is being sustained, but rather one that is being strengthened and developed.

Such an ecology is the sort that an 'ecological university' needs to help generate. In other words, Barnett's notion of ecology is aligned with ecological and evolutionary resilience, rather than the engineering or bounce back resilience that is instead what he expresses as 'sustainability'.

The take home message here is that we in the higher education sector need to be careful about what is sustained and what is changed. This is especially the case given the highly mixed character of universities, full of desirable and undesirable elements. As Barnett continues, even if an ecosystem (e.g. a knowledge ecosystem) that a university is part of is flourishing, we cannot take for granted that the presence of the university and its attendant networks such as academic publishers are wholly helpful in generating the positive outcome, and are not in fact a hindrance in at least some ways.

To return to the resilience of the university as an institution, the highly mixed character of its contemporary form—'the modern university'—means that its resilience is a double-edged sword. Resilience thinking and action *can* be mobilised for positive institutional and societal change (e.g. reducing the precarity of casualised workers across sectors), but can equally be put to use to perpetuate political and economic power and the status quo. However, this requires that the *de-politicisation* of ideas around resilience must therefore be countered by the *re-politicisation* of resilience and re-imagined as a more transformative and regenerative agenda. The hope for a more sustainable future.

We argue that the 'resilience machine' that is sustaining the university as an institution must be brought to light and examined through critical questions about the values and impact of the university. Such questions include:

- What is the university seeking to make resilient, from what and how? What types of resilience are being pursued and why?
- What values are inscribed and prescribed in universities in the name of resilience? What social and political effects are resilience initiatives encouraging and why? What role is self-interest playing?
- What creative and critical potential exists in alternative resilience discourses, policies and practices? How might we imagine it?[33]

Whether the future higher education enterprise proves to be a tool for economic expansion or a space that supports social equity and planetary justice depends on which elements of the modern university, including which values and goals, prove to be most resilient. As indicated above, this is not just a matter of choice for universities—they are strongly shaped by their external context as well. Shifting community expectations about what higher education can and should be are therefore of crucial importance.

Universities of Utopia/Dystopia

The 500th anniversary of Thomas More's novel *Utopia* in 2016 sparked a surge of questions about the ideal university as opposed to the idea of the university (although the two can converge). Moore's notion of Utopia translates as 'non-place' and/or 'good place'. It describes a desired future place or way of being. In *Utopia* the desired place was a fair society, as More described, 'I can perceave nothing but a certein conspiracy if rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of commonwealth'.[34] This has resonance with the discussions above around the neoliberal agenda driving universities as 'resilience machines'. As Terry Eagleton argues, 'one of Utopia's most striking aspects is its contemporaneity—the way in which the greedy, unscrupulous and useless are just as much in evidence now as in 1516'.[35]

These satirical themes are also reflected in the Australian comedy television series 'Utopia' (Dreamland) which follows the fortunes of a newly set up government agency focused on the delivery of major projects.[36] In microscopic detail the series sends up the collision between grandiose plans,

political self-interest and self-promotion, institutional white elephant projects, bureaucratic bungling and the mundanity of everyday activities. Some have argued that the same tragi-comical combination of self-importance and incompetence characterises modern universities. Mark Gatenby, for example, describes the contemporary university as characterised by 'burdens of meddling, managerialism, bureaucracy and consumerism'. Significantly he asks: if higher education is becoming a corrupted, capitalist artefact, how can we live well with the universities of the future?[37]

Perhaps the aspect of universities most likely to determine how close the actual university is to the ideal is how it is funded. The public university model, which has been the dominant mode of higher education since World War Two and much of the twentieth century, has historically been funded largely by the state and student tuition fees. More recently in many countries around the globe, governments have cut back funding for universities, forcing the higher education sector to become more entrepreneurial by finding other ways to make up the funding shortfall through a business approach. This includes increasing domestic and international student numbers and raising tuition fees, philanthropy, grants and contracts, endowment, property ownership and development, and income-generating investment portfolios.[38] As the American Academy of Arts and Sciences puts it:

> As state appropriations for higher education diminish, public universities increasingly rely on other sources to advance their mission and maintain the quality of education and training they provide: tuition, philanthropy, auxiliary services, grants and contracts, and endowment and investment income. The extent to which individual public research universities rely on diverse sources of funding varies greatly by location, demographics of students served, state aid programs, and relationships with regional business and industry. Some institutions fare better than others due to generous state funding, robust philanthropic enterprises, or lucrative partnerships with local corporations.[39]

Each approach to generating alternative income has its pros and cons. Some universities, for example, are building new research centre partnerships with private sponsors with the concomitant aims of generating

funds for the university and increasing opportunities for real-world engagement and impact. However, such initiatives can often benefit only a portion of staff and can generate relationships and goals that are misaligned with other university objectives. Other universities are trying to reach a wider domestic and international market using online programmes, courses and certifications delivered and undertaken at a fraction of the cost of face-to-face teaching, but raising questions about the quality of the educational experience, as we discuss further in Chap. 6.

Many universities have increased their proportion of full fee-paying international students to increase funding revenue and develop a more diverse, global student body. However, as the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, an (over)-reliance on international students can exacerbate the economic precarity of universities if it is disrupted or lost to competition or complacency. Taking on responsibility for large numbers of international students also means guaranteeing them appropriate levels of support and care. If this, rather than the flow of students, breaks down, universities are no less at risk, with complaints that the international student trade industry is simply viewed by universities as a 'cash cow' sullying institutions' reputations and risking a serious breach of public confidence and trust in the whole sector.[40]

Overall, in the competitive global education market, individual universities compete for income on an increasingly uneven playing field constrained by socio-spatial and economic factors such as size, reputation, postcode and location, history and accumulated debt, access to industry partners, and the state and maintenance costs of existing and future requirements for university infrastructure. Different funding choices are available to, and variably effect, different types of universities. Across the board, many have been pushed to become more 'entrepreneurial' in their internal operations. Many have taken aggressive measures to reduce operational costs by cutting faculty and staff positions, reducing tenure to contract or casual positions, eliminating or streamlining course offerings, outsourcing core services and operations and instigating performance metrics focused on success in external funding, in efforts to increase institutional accountability and efficiencies.

At the same time, there is growing pressure on universities to better justify their societal role and public support in the face of societies 'grand

challenge' such as the need for action on climate change and the SDGs. The new dominance of an economic logic at work in both the strategic and operational levels of universities is generating increasing concern that the university has become almost unrecognisable to its older ideal. As Simon Marginson puts it in his personal reflections on the relationship between higher education and the common good,

> I have been compelled by the questionable foundations, gaps and internal tensions in the standard thinking about higher education and its social and economic roles … the faith that the installation of competitive markets into higher education will lead to better quality and greater responsiveness to the needs of students would be touching in its naivety if it wasn't also so destructive. The inability of economics to adjust for the particular character of social production in the higher education sector … continues to do much damage.[41]

Such damage includes environmental damage. It is increasingly clear that existing approaches to universities are not adequately meeting societal and planetary needs. Nor are they meeting societal expectations or building public trust. If academic institutions are to secure their future, they need to demonstrate a genuine commitment and capacity to work with others to achieve the transformational changes needed. As Barnett argues in *The Ecological University* this is a feasible utopia: one which recognises that the university is 'a story without an end' and that 'new opportunities may be opening up for universities to engage in, and even enlarge, the public realm by forging new relationships with the world/earth'.[42] Part of this challenge—and opportunity—is to re-imagine the nature of the relationship between the SDGs and higher education as part of a broader social contract focused on a sustainable future.

Seeking the Good University

As visions of alternative universes, utopian thinking offers a device for simultaneously disrupting or unsettling the complacency of the present, as a way of projecting the hopes and dreams that drive action in different

future-oriented directions. The early thinking around the notion of utopia is linked to Plato's Republic and Laws which hold that the ultimate end of the system is to bring about the greatest possible happiness in the city. The idea of 'the collective good' dominates all aspects of Plato's utopian communitarian world and is synonymous with quality and truth.[43]

In her book '*The Good University—What Universities actually do and why it's time for a radical change*', feminist sociologist Raewyn Connell makes the case that whilst fragments of the good university already exist, choices must be made as to what types of higher education futures are desirable. 'There are better futures we can choose for universities by collective choice, not the individual decision of a market consumer.'[44] The good university and good university systems should be collective and cooperative, operating at the level of society: 'it has to be made and remade, daily and from generation to generation to make the commitment and struggle worthwhile'.[45] To this end, Connell outlines five principles for a 'Good University':

- *Democratic*—develops a democratic culture, operates in a democratic way, and serves a democratic purpose for society.
- *Engaged*—is fully present for society, responsive to societal needs at the local and global scale.
- *Truthful*—in detailing university operations and in how it presents itself to fulfil its purpose to serve society.
- *Creative*—by embracing the dynamism of knowledge formation and educational processes, expanding, devising, imagining, patterning and linking the different forms.
- *Sustainable*—the capacity to flourish over time, creating conditions of renewal and resilience in the face of disruption, change and political pressure, and responsible use of resources, similar to the imagined relation between Ron Barnett's ecological university and the natural environment.

Like the question of university resilience, the quest for the good university raises a number of critical questions—Good for whom? Good when? Good for what? Who gets to decide what is good or even good

enough? Sceptics and critics point to the chimerical quality of utopian vision, which is dependent on ideology, culture, politics and perspective. The version a given university supports will depend on what the institution seeks to see flourish at a given point in time, reflecting its history and contemporary context. No blueprints for a good university exist, and even if they did, they would not guarantee outcomes. As Ash Amin notes, 'The concept of good does not track unmodified across space and time'.[46]

Contemporary contestations over the 'idea of the university' are made manifest through a series of unresolved and relational tensions. These play out on a spectrum across the different university models, sectors and roles. Education policy historian Robert Anderson argues that key tensions include those between: the goals of teaching and research; academic autonomy and corporate accountability; scholarly learning for its own sake and the achievement of qualifications and skills; transmitting established knowledge and challenging the status quo; the connection of universities to the state and private sector and the need to maintain critical distance; the reproduction of existing power structures and renewal from below through resistance and/or social mobility; commitment to an international community and a national identity; and serving the economy whilst addressing transformative individual and societal change.[47] Raewyn Connell highlights:

> There's an angry, sometimes anguished debate inside universities. Critics speak of outdated pedagogy, exploitation of young staff, distorted and even faked research, outrageous fees, outrageous pay for top managers, corporate rip-offs, corruption, sexism, racism and mickey-mouse degrees … there is criticism from outside the university too … contemptuous of university educated 'elites' and university-based science.[48]

Given this bi-directional critique, Connell argues that we need to rethink and debate the fundamentals of what universities do. Her version of a good university is one driven by social good rather than profit—but for others it may involve wealth accumulation and elite prestige. Still others may prioritise a decolonised university that is respectful, inclusive and fair, while global access and technological sophistication may represent

the 'good university' for some. The answer may be a combination of these or some other vision altogether. Importantly, a key question is are universities 'good enough'—not for what the world wants, but for what the world needs?

Good Enough Universities?

Are our universities good enough to face the twenty-first-century challenges? How would we know? The contemporary university is no longer cloistered away in the tower of academe but inescapably embedded in the world. Universities are committed to a mission that underpins their purpose and function in society as centres of new knowledge, understanding, skills and experience, through research, learning and teaching, leadership, outreach and service to society. As proponents of progress, choice, debate and engagement, universities help 'set the pace for humanity' in the key areas of society, culture, economics and the environment.

But the role of higher education 'will not trigger the development of a more egalitarian society on its own'.[49] Being out in the world, universities have many masters: national governments are one, but also local and regional/state governments, industry partners and other private funders, and not-for-profits, as well as local and broader community. Combined with internal masters such as discipline-specific peer-reviewers, associations, publishers, and of course students armed with evaluations, universities' capacity to initiate progressive and meaningful change is shaped by many groups. Thus:

> assumptions about higher education being able to independently and single-handedly effect the betterment of society (in tackling inequality or in stimulating innovation of the economy) are proven to be strongly exaggerated. Rather, higher education can be one of the critical factors—a tool—affecting these processes, but whether it will be used for this purpose remains a question of political choice.[50]

Universities cannot affect change on their own, but they can be effective when working with others. Moreover, their role is not just one among

many, but a special one. Whatever their size, shape, scale or funding model, universities have a unique capacity to cultivate and share ideas, methods and frameworks for the betterment of society. They can act as agents of change in multiple ways, such as by creating 'critical space' and engaging in 'dialogue, debate, and development of proposals and programs for social change, with the ultimate objective of engagement in the public sphere', and by designing and making improved artefacts for use in the world.[51]

The 'idea of the modern university' is a complex entanglement of what Hannah Arendt described in 'The Human Condition' as the two images of human activity.[52] The first is *Animal laboran* whom she critiques as becoming so absorbed in their tasks that they get lost in the act of making and doing such that work becomes an end into itself. The second is *Homo faber* who she favourably notes is focused on critical thinking, judgement and making a life in common. Whilst *Animal laboran* is fixated on the question of 'how', *Homo faber* asks 'why'. For Arendt, society is afflicted with an overly active desire to 'do' without considering for what purpose. Thoughtfulness-in-action, she argues, is the critical and necessary human response to the world, especially during dark times.

Arendt's thesis is that history has shown that the capacity of humans to build, make, do, manage, organise, invent or innovate is not in itself enough. Her faith was in critical speech, action, politics and reflection—uniquely human capacities that she believed will save humanity from itself. A life without critical reflective speech and action, she argued, 'is literally dead to the world'. She refers to a quote by physicist Robert Oppenheimer who invented the atomic bomb: 'you see something that is technically sweet, and you go ahead and do it, and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your success'.[53]

Richard Sennett, a former student of Arendt, similarly advocates for critical thought but argues that Arendt over-emphasised the divide between 'doing' and 'thinking'. Rather than choosing between them, he argued, we must always ask 'why' as well as 'how'. To understand *Homo faber's* role, he suggests:

> we have to conceive of the dignity of labour differently. … *Homo faber* acquires honour by practicing in a way whose terms are modest and this

> ethic of making modestly implies in turn a certain relationship with how we dwell and who we are.[54]

Sennett stresses that his emphasis on the dignity of labour—on *Animal laborans*—is not to be confused with a romantic endorsement of craft-building in and of itself. There is nothing inevitably ethical about craft-building, he argued. The craftsperson's desire for quality, for example, can still pose a danger if obsession with the task deforms the work itself and allows it to become morally ambiguous.[55] Or the craftsperson's vision can get lost, as Ash Amin describes of modern cities, and by extension our city universities:

> as shadowlands: anonymous, homogenous and lacking character and identity; endless unhealthy, tiring, overwhelming, confusing, alienating; with little connectivity or potency as demos—the populace of a democracy as a political unit.[56]

For Sennett, what we ultimately need is an integration of *Animal laborans* and *Homo faber* in the form of active citizenship—an approach to being and doing that seeks to find expression in the world through thinking and feeling, action and reflection, problem solving and problem finding as a co-constituted rhythm, not separate activities.

For universities, active citizenship means not getting lost in the business of doing and surviving and making, nor offering mere reflection and judgement. It is about active but critical engagement with the world all universities are part of. Today an unavoidable consequence of such engagement is awareness of the many problems the world is facing—including those covered by the SDGs. Only by working with others to tackle these problems in insightful and practical ways can a university be considered 'good enough' for the contemporary context.

The Urgent Need for Maintenance, Repair and Regeneration

Besides a proliferation of problems, the contemporary context that universities need to respond to is characterised by a need for deeper ambition. Not only minimal solutions or short-term preventative action is needed but so too is repair, regeneration and maintenance. Sustainable development today needs to involve not only the minimisation of negatives such as pollution or illness, but the active generation of positives such as ecosystem health and human wellbeing in order to redress the immense amount of damage already done, improve the capacity to cope with future stresses, and protect what we value and care about into the future.

Ash Amin offers four registers of a care-ethic that begin to point to what such sustainable development requires: repair, relatedness, rights and re-enchantment. We can use these registers to help progress our understanding of what the Good University might look like. Through a focus on a politics of *Repair* the good university commits to accessible and affordable infrastructure expressed through practices of care and solidarity. The emphasis on *Relatedness* orients the good university towards an ethos that is socially and environmentally just with a strong obligation 'towards the insider and the outsider' regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, age or ability. Amin's focus on *Rights* is the citizen's right to the university for the many, not just the few and the creation of an 'open' civic culture that works democratically with difference and disagreement. The final register is a politics of *Re-enchantment* through a focus on civic-mindedness as a counterpoint to commodification and homogenisation on the one hand, and disinterested and disengaged individualism on the other.[57]

Many of the grand challenges we currently face stem from poor maintenance of the systems we have created or rely on. Doing things cheaply is a natural outcome of the short-term focus that characterises commodification, capitalism and political cycles—and this extends to the functioning of universities. As Jason Moore and Raj Patel argue in their book *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, '*Cheap* is the opposite of a bargain—*cheapening* is a set of strategies to control a wider web of life'.[58] We are all now paying the price of not maintaining healthy landscapes,

waterways and cultural and social relationships. One of the fundamental changes required is to re-value the care work that maintenance and reproduction rely on, as Amin indicates and feminist scholars have long argued, given the way that the symbolic and demographic feminisation of care is entwined with its social and economic devaluation.

As Moore and Patel discuss, one of the things that has been cheapened by capitalism is care itself, even as the commodification of care has made it financially expensive for many to receive. The drivers and consequences of this are evident in the university system where production is valued over re-production (maintaining the enabling conditions) within research activities and in the status attributed to research over teaching. They are also evident within the SDG agenda, which includes both implicit calls for care work—care of people, communities, institutions, settlements, ecosystems and the climate—and endorsement of economic growth and development.

Beyond maintenance, the degraded and endangered state of the world demands serious investment in repair and regeneration. Valuing repair work and associated objectives such as retrofitting are key to curbing excessive consumption and production of the sort that SDG 8 demands we rethink. They are also key to redressing the environmental injustices that continually generate harm and constrain positive developments in cheapened landscapes and communities around the world. The profitability of the extractive industries, for example, continues to rely on their ability to walk away from damage—leaving behind what Val Plumwood referred to as 'shadow places'.[59] Making visible these injustices and the pressing need for repair and restoration has to be part of the mandate of sustainable development in the Anthropocene.

Beyond repair and restoration, regeneration is also needed. Like many others increasingly grasping the positive potential of this idea, we understand regeneration to mean more than a neutralisation of negatives or a minimalist attitude of compliance. Regeneration is about nurturing new life and potential itself. It is about reclaiming the development ideal of a better possible world and helping cultivate it in a genuine, care-full, life-affirming way, one that is necessarily experimental and courageous in facing up to failures and trying again—living and working with the trouble of our times.

The End of the University as We Know It?

Alternatives to the dominant model of neoliberalised universities exist, and they offer insights into what a re-imagined university sector may look like. One approach is 'civic universities' that reframe cities as inherently dynamic public places full of potential, active learning and innovation, making universities just one node among many. This blurring of the boundary between the university and civil society is not just about a greater extension of the university out into society—as the idea of adding on public engagement to universities as a peripheral 'Third Mission' alongside Research and Learning and Teaching suggests. Rather, it is about using the university as a common, as a platform for civil society to co-produce place and common goods. John Goddard characterises civic universities as anchor institutions, which are 'not just in the place but of the place'. He offers seven characteristics that distinguish the civic university:

1. It is actively engaged with the wider world as well as the local community of the place in which it is located.
2. It takes a holistic approach to engagement, seeing it as institution-wide activity and not confined to specific individuals or teams.
3. It has a strong sense of place— it recognises the extent to which its location helps to form its unique identity as an institution.
4. It has a sense of purpose— understanding not just what it is good at, but what it is good for.
5. It is willing to invest in order to have impact beyond the academy.
6. It is transparent and accountable to its stakeholders and the wider public.
7. It uses innovative methodologies and team building in its engagement activities with the world at large.[60]

All of these characteristics are ones that could foster genuine engagement with the SDG agenda and facilitate its effective localisation. In contrast to an approach that cordons SDG work off into certain courses, projects or outreach initiatives, or eschews practical action, the civic university represents the sort of approach to higher education that the

pressing challenges of the SDGs demand. Not all universities can become *locally* oriented civic universities per se, given the diversity of contexts in which they exist. Nor is it necessary, given that the SDGs still require a strong international, national and regional orientation and level of cooperation, and that 'community' today has many forms including distanced virtual ones.[61] But the ethos of the civic university holds lessons for all universities, in particular its commitment to engagement, purpose and impact (Fig. 3.2).

A second thought-provoking alternative to the dominant model of universities is the 'free university', which directly addresses and reframes neoliberal modes of development in higher education. The vision of 'free universities as commons' builds on a rich tradition of feminist, anti-racist and working-class struggles in the development of postcapitalist imaginaries in academia.[62] As Esra Erdem describes, this is about universities as 'grassroots spaces created by a community for the sharing of knowledge in which knowledge and ideas can be freely shared among equals'. In such institutions, 'space is not given: it has to be established and occupied'.[63] Erdem highlights four key principles/themes inspired by the community

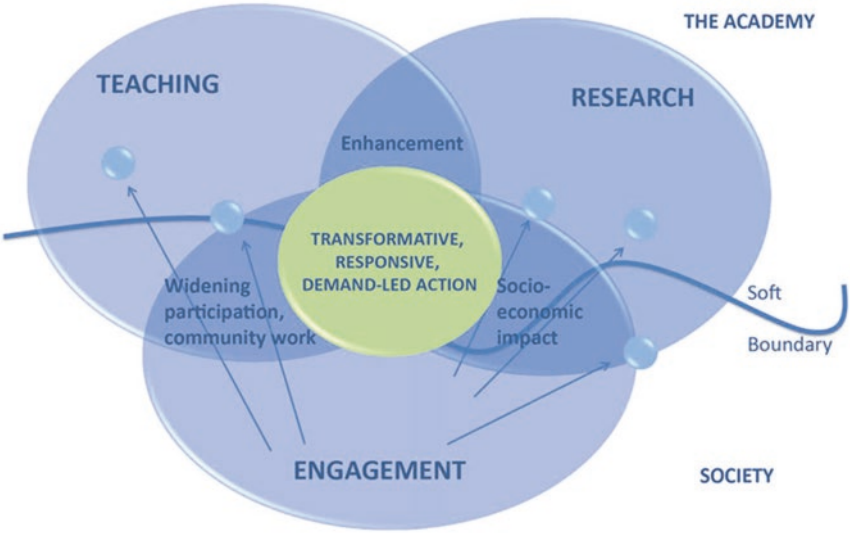

Fig. 3.2 The civic university. (From Goddard 2018, p. 263)

economies agenda for fundamentally re-imagining the academy as community commons:

- *Access*: The principle that higher education should be socially inclusive and foster the sharing of knowledge and specifically targeting restrictions in three key areas: university admission criteria; tuition fees; and intellectual property rights including the sharing and access to knowledge. This involves making resources available to the community and re-shaping spaces of learning to include community settings such as parks, libraries, churches, trade union halls, community centres, cafés, bookstores, galleries. Access also involves reducing economic barriers to higher education and challenging universities as banks of commodified knowledge or 'teaching factories',[64] committing instead to inclusive, collaborative learning.[65]
- *Commoning practices:* Grounded in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, commoning practices are the social labour undertaken by a community to produce and sustain collective resources. In universities, this is about acknowledging the diversity of community experiences and knowledges and the multiplicity of skills involved in everyday work (including that involved in administrative, coordinating and logistical work). It is about acknowledging the potential for collective labour to not simply replicate the existing hierarchies of mainstream academia (e.g. gender, academic rank etc.) but to consciously create commons and solidarity.[66]
- *Collective self-management:* The emphasis here is on processes of collective decision-making that critique hierarchical university structures and enable more participatory forms of decision-making. Informality, autonomy and responsibility for the academic commons are key shared characteristics across diverse decision-making practices.[67]
- *Community*: This final principle is about the development of alternative power and knowledge relations that help rebuild a sense of community as part of an academic commons. Community-building through the free university includes nurturing a sense of learning, belonging and commitment, 'being-in-common'.[68] This includes values and ethical principles such as equality, reciprocity, trust, localness, social justice and freedom, where the latter is understood as the right

> to partake in education and a shift from market exchange to gift economies in higher education.[69]

There are many international examples of the 'free university' in practice including *Universidad de la Tierra* (Unitierra) in Mexico for Indigenous and poor urban communities,[70] the *People's Free University* in Canada,[71] the *Universidad Trashumante* in Argentina, the *Social Science Centre* in the UK and *Solidarity Academies* in Turkey[72] to name a few. Whilst diverse in context, ambitions and practice their shared agenda as part of the free university movement is a profound resistance to, and critique of, the neoliberal development model of higher education (e.g. the commodification of education, the re-organisation of the labour process, the enclosure of knowledge and the financialisation of student debt).[73] Collectively they demonstrate alternatives to how learning and teaching can be organised around the principles of commons,

> shared by a community of users/producers, who also define the modes of use and production, distribution and circulation of these resources through democratic and horizontal forms of governance.[74]

In addition to the civic university and free university models there is a range of other alternative forms, which collectively call into question the naturalisation of the dominant modern university model. For example, in *The Good University*, Raewyn Connell highlights practical examples of alternative university manifestos that offer principles, pedagogies and processes for transformative change.[75] The *Slow University,* for example, seeks to subvert the corporatisation culture and 'speed-up' of universities in the quest for efficiency.[76] As part of the diverse slow movement (e.g. slow food), the Slow University seeks to advance alternative/unorthodox approaches that enable community-based initiatives, sustainability and social equity in the face of 'fast capitalism'. The slow movement is an alternative development narrative deployed through a diverse coalition of actors. In contrast to the mainstream development agenda characterised by homogenisation, standardisation, corporatisation, insensitivity to local history and culture, and conditions of inequity, the slow agenda is

characterised by grassroots activity, sensitivity to local history/culture and specific attention to issues of sustainability and equity.[77]

Others are turning to alternative modes of development to re-imagine a form of higher education that pushes 'beyond the limitations of the paradigm of modernity and the neoliberal ideology that commits us inescapably to economic growth at the expense of the environment'.[78] As Eleanor Brown and Tristan McCowan argue:

> If we are committed to the idea of sustainability, which has not been well served by these ideologies and agendas, we might want to consider what 'sustainable development' looks like from worldviews with a quite different ontology from the European modernity upon which our development discourse has been based.[79]

They highlight *Buen vivir* in the Latin American context and *Ubuntu* in the African context as rich Indigenous worldviews with explicit lessons for modern higher education. Drawing on such insights, they offer broad principles for an education model designed to cultivate the conditions for a sustainable future:

- *Epistemological pluralism*: acknowledging and transiting between different forms of knowing.
- *Porosity of boundaries:* non-rigid classification of the educational space, education professionals and disciplines.
- *Holism of learning*: bringing together of the manual, practical, technical, abstract, aesthetic and spiritual.
- *Cooperativism*: avoidance of competition-based education and the consequent progressive filtering out of students from level to level.
- *Compassion and nonviolence*: recognition of the importance of peace in all aspects of life, including nonviolent communication.
- *Collectivism*: learning collectively within a web of relationships between people and with the non-human world.
- *Meaningful livelihoods*: a link with enriching forms of work (rather than alienating employability).
- *Living the present*: education as a state of being, not aimed at the exchange value of qualifications.[80]

The *Campaign for a Global Curriculum of Social Solidarity Economy* for example promotes the construction of 'another possible education and economy' through connections between social actors and social movements. An educational initiative developed by a collective of organisations in the international Education and Social and Solidarity Economy Network (REESS), the campaign calls for a Global Curriculum of Social Solidarity Economy, by which it means:

> the plans of studies, educational proposals, knowledge, epistemologies, methodologies, science and practice of formal education non-formal and informal, developed around the world, in schools, universities, social movements, cooperatives, trade unions, associations, indigenous peasant communities and Afro-descendants, while building a just, sustainable not capitalist economy.[81]

Significantly, the REESS campaign is explicit about the value of engaging with the SDGs as an ambitious and transformative change-based agenda, and about the value of its alternative solidarity economy to the SDGs. As the Network puts it:

> The basis for the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals … stimulates criticism of the current model of predatory economy and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption but also promotes and strengthens actions that represent alternatives to that model. At the same time, inclusive, equitable and quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities will actually exist if we strengthen the idea that another economy is possible.[82]

Many more alternative, progressive approaches to universities already exist or are emerging, suggesting that more people may be committed to the idea and ideal of the university than its specific, dominant modern form. The existence of such alternatives is an important reminder to look beyond the often uninspiring and concerning characteristics of today's universities to remember and reimagine what they can be. When we do so, it is more apparent than ever that universities are vital to progressing the SDG agenda (as a diverse range of organisations in their own right

and as enablers of others) and the SDGs are vital to reshaping universities.

In their best light, the SDGs offer more than a topic for research or teaching or a competitive global indicator for the higher education sector. They can offer sustenance in everyday struggles and opportunities to subvert established processes, and a lens through which to analyse, critique, adapt and improve the myriad development processes universities are enmeshed in. For such institutions, this requires not simply mapping existing SDGs capabilities, but committing and delivering ethical SDG-informed innovation at all scales and building the SDGs into their ethos and institutional architecture.

The Age of Reciprocity and Change

As we have pointed out, universities are not isolated ivory towers, floating free from the rest of the world. They are of the world, as their remaking as corporations over the last fifty years illustrates. For better or worse, they are being constantly reshaped by the world and, for better or worse, they are continually shaping the world in ways that far exceed laborious efforts at 'engagement'. The phrase 'for better or worse' is the key. It begs the question: will those in the diverse communities that constitute and influence universities strive to the institutions and their outcomes with care, or will they act as if the mutual shaping is not happening and accept the consequences?

We believe the reciprocal relationship between the SDGs and universities can help chart a careful path between the dead ends of disconnection and false connection. Disconnection is about perpetuating the myth of the ivory tower by presuming they are unchangeable, untouchable or innocent. As Isaac Kamola argues,

> Despite being located within vast overdetermined social relationships, those students, scholars, and administrators inhabiting the world of higher education often imagine universities as extra-worldly spaces from which to orbit—and gaze down upon—the world below. In claiming to simply reflect upon the world, seeing it as it actually is, the university often fades

> from the foreground, cropped out of the imaginary. In this process, colleges and universities increasingly are perceived as ivory towers located above and outside the world.[83]

This conception of universities as 'extra-worldly' 'ivory towers' is of course far from new, and in some senses is almost as old as the idea of the university itself. But it is one that is increasingly hard to sustain. As Kamola continues,

> In reality, however, there is no outside from which to view the world as a single thing, global or otherwise. A university is not a capsule floating outside the world's orbit. As such, academic knowledge is never merely a snapshot of the world outside itself.[84]

Many feminist, Indigenous and postcolonial scholars have criticised the idea that knowledge can emerge from a 'view from nowhere' and that universities can deny their position within and obligations to engage with 'the real world'. John Brennan and Allen Cochrane similarly argue that the idea of universities as universal and place-less 'is no longer a helpful starting point'.[85] It is now recognised and expected that universities are 'of the world' and part of society, albeit still a special part.

Just how universities are imagined to be of the world, though, varies widely, as the discussion throughout this chapter illustrates. One of the risks is that universities seek to establish strong connections 'with the world' but that such connections are *false*, either in the sense of not grasping essential realities of the world such as the severity of climate change, or not being genuine connections and being, for example, for show only. Arguably the dominant style of the connected, 'worldly' university today is one that maintains a focus on the global/universal scale but focuses only on aspects of it, namely the global economy, city networks and elite institutions. The ideal is of a 'world class university' that combines claims to extra-worldly universal knowledge and research excellence on the one hand, with claims to global economic, urban and institutional connectedness on the other. The world class university is imagined as a privileged node in global circulations of resources, people and knowledge, not shut off from the world but confidently leading it from on high.

Many modern universities are also or instead emplaced within more specific innovation systems, districts, precincts, clusters and other 'triple helix' initiatives to help drive economic development from the city scale to the globe. This now-dominant Americanised model of the university 'blurs the boundaries between public/private, and non-profit/for-profit' and 'emphasises university entrepreneurship and university–industry partnerships'. In doing so, 'notions of higher education as a producer of public goods and a cultural project are marginalised'.[86] As Simon Marginson concludes:

> There is no reciprocity here. The University is accountable to capital, but capital is not accountable to the University or subordinated to its logics of teaching/learning and knowledge exchange.[87]

The worldliness of this capitalist university is not one in which the university reaches out into the world, as much as one in which capitalism reaches into it. Although the related knowledge economy discourse 'talks of universities' potential to transform societies', it 'may be limiting this potential if one values societal transformation in all its diverse, non-economistic dimensions'.[88]

It is in the context of these various versions of the global university—the place-less universal university of old, the elitist 'world class university' and the capitalist university of innovation systems, that the global orientation of the SDGs is situated. Some critics within universities reject the SDGs because its global character is seen to perpetuate the hubris and harms of the global university. However, the disconnection and false connections that characterise the typical global university are not the sort the SDGs encourage or require. Instead, they press universities to acknowledge in a far more holistic and clear-eyed way the world and planet that all institutions are part of, and to work in more genuine and effective ways to shape it for the better of all.

As we have outlined, a key theme of this book is that universities are not just enablers of change in the SDG agenda but also important *targets for* the sorts of changes it calls for particularly given that universities' diverse functions and responsibilities have far-reaching implications for the success of the SDG agenda. If the SDGs are simply a perpetuation of

a smooth, unreflective global imaginary of the sort colonialists, capitalists and universities have long encouraged, it is difficult to argue that it is what the world needs. Although there is clearly a risk of this, we believe that the SDG agenda presents the opportunity to challenge this image of the world and the image of universities as conveniently disconnected from or hopelessly compromised within it. Like alternative forms of universities, the SDGs help underline that the world, including the planet, is far more-than-economic and is instead saturated with life, diversity, meaning and inhuman forces.

For universities to perform their unique function as enablers of change, they need to embrace their role as targets for change and ensure they are role modelling the sort of approaches and impacts they want to engender. The SDGs push us to consider the global scale, but it is not the disembodied space of the ivory tower myth or the ruthless machine of the global economy. Rather the SDGs provide an opportunity to simultaneously address some of the harms of a neoliberal mindset that pits individuals against individuals, departments against departments, universities against universities, nations against nations, and human growth and development against the ecological health and sustainability of earths' planetary boundaries.

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