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1. THE UNIVERSITY AS A CRITICAL INSTITUTION?
AN INTRODUCTION

The notion of the university as a critical institution is far from new but the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have provided many profound challenges for higher education institutions, both in Europe and beyond, from the growth of a globalised context and massification of their undergraduate education cohorts (Altbach, 2015) and dealing with diversity and social inequality (Smith, 2009; Eggins, 2017; Deem, 2018), through audits of their research and teaching and league tables/rankings (Cheng, 2009; Shore & Wright, 2015), to funding regimes (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2016), the changing meaning of the 'public good' (Marginson, 2016), academic capitalism (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004), new managerialism (Deem & Hillyard et al., 2007), student consumerism (Budd, 2016) and student employability (Rooney & Rawlinson, 2016). Whether universities can survive as critical organisations in the current time is an open question, as digitalisation challenges the monopoly of knowledge, MOOCS question the necessity of university campuses and would-be students in countries where higher education fees are high start to consider more carefully whether they really want or need a degree. Universities are also affected by contemporary concerns such as what happens to higher education in war-zones and the impact of migration, anti-migrant ideologies, political populism, the post-truth era and the rejection of 'experts'. A great variety of authors have written critiques of the changing nature of the university from Lyotard in the 1980s (Lyotard, 1984) to Collini in the 2000s (Collini, 2012) but that is somewhat different from encouraging criticality within universities among both students and staff and thinking about the organisational nature of contemporary universities and whether there are alternatives to the forms, governance and management we have now.

In the call for papers for the 2016 CHER Conference, this was our opening gambit on the university as a critical institution:

> The capacity of higher education to contribute to society, policy, economy and cultural formation depends above all on its capacity to sustain open and critical thought; to relentlessly scrutinise society, the natural world and the human/ nature interface using a range of different lenses; to continually develop and explore alternative ways of thinking and social organization; and to prepare graduates with capacities in critical thought and reconstructive practices. If the gift of Europe to the world is that of the university centred on critical thought and imagination, that gift can never be taken for granted. Nurturing

the conditions for open critical thinking and autonomous discussion and communication are part the permanent remit of higher education institutions. In a more instrumental period, with rapidly growing obligations of and pressures on higher education, the vision of the university as a critical institution needs to be renewed—just as it has been periodically renewed throughout its history.

The chapters in this volume are a selection of those presented at the Conference in Cambridge in September 2016. We have tried to choose a variety of papers illustrative of the main strands from the much larger number of papers given at the original event, some offering overviews of a number of different HE systems, others focused on developments in a particular context and system but all in some way related to the notion of the critical (or in some cases uncritical) university. Each paper concerns itself either with some aspect of a broad research-informed critique of universities, takes a critical perspective on some aspect of current practice in higher education institutions or system or explores the potential for the future of universities as organisations. The chapters will be of interest not only to academics and students studying higher education themes but also to HE leaders, managers and policy makers.

There are four papers in the first section on 'The Contemporary University: Governance and Organisational Futures', the first one a theoretical and philosophical overview of how universities might be organized in a different way to the current neo-liberal and managerialist model, the second a detailed analysis of staff responses to different varieties and dimensions of managerial narratives and discourses in Portuguese universities, the third a comparison of the different recent paths of universities in the Ukraine and Poland in respect of management and governance and finally a comparison of academic freedom in one Italian and one Singaporean university in very contrasting situations. The opening paper in the first section, based on a plenary address given at the conference by Susan Wright, asks a provocative and extremely critical question about what is happening to higher education in the Anthropocene, an epoch in which humans largely shape the planet, in conjunction with what Wright calls the Capitalocene (a reference to the huge extent to which capitalism now defines what happens in the world). She enquires as to whether it is possible to conceptualise a more liveable university than those we have today, driven as the latter are by key features such as 'world class universities', entrepreneurial universities, marketised university systems and competition states, where universities are given a special role to support and trigger knowledge-economy competitiveness. Wright notes how universities are now positioned alongside businesses and industries and other organisations, conceptualized as an externalized economy. She wonders if an alternative conception of universities as an ecology could offer some plausible and original alternatives to the current position of higher education institutions by disrupting existing power relations and supply chains and putting academics back in the institutional driving seat. This, she observes, has already happened with some powerful Danish professor 'project barons' who determine for themselves how they

run their research activities. It might also involve encouraging those who work or study in public higher education institutions to be both critically reflexive *and* willing to act politically on changing the organizational, cultural, social and political basis of higher education. This could include protests and other what she calls 'system disturbances' which question the current way in which particular universities are organized and run. Wright mentions that the Marie Curie International Training Network Universities in the Knowledge Economy (UNIKE) she directed, has produced, first in Auckland, then in Copenhagen, a declaration of six principles of the organization of public universities [Public Good, Social Responsibility, Academic Freedom, Educational Autonomy, University Independence and Humane Workplace] which have already been discussed at various European and international gatherings. It is intimated that the declaration could form the basis of a new ecology for higher education, thus providing a form of liveable university that could be along co-operative or Trust-type lines whereby all staff and students would have a genuine financial and organizational stake in their institution and the university could not be sold to a private venture capitalist. This would transform the organizational basis of universities and also offer an escape from managerialism (the dominance of management), neo-liberalism (the rise of markets) and 'boardism', the emphasis on external stakeholders having a say in how universities are run (Veiga & Magalhães et al., 2015).

The other papers in this first section on 'Governance and Organisational Futures' explore through a critical lens what is happening to governance, or to related concerns such as academic freedom, in individual countries. Magalhães, Veiga and Videira note that New Public Management in European universities often exists alongside other governance narratives and practices such as 'new governance' and 'networked governance'. They explore, using a 2014–2015 on-line survey of staff, including managers, administrators and academics, in all Portuguese higher education institutions (both public and private), respondents' views on governance and management held in those organisations after the 2007 reforms to HE governance in Portugal. These reforms have encouraged a shift away from academic collegiality towards a greater emphasis on strong rectorates and deans, a private-sector type of Human Resource Management, managerialism and 'boardism', which is where outside people from business are brought in to oversee institutional governance, with matching rhetorics (Veiga & Magalhães et al., 2015). Government narratives about managerialism, it is suggested, may have reinforced institutional autonomy in Portugal by drawing on and interacting with both networked governance and collegial governance in order to invest in and fix the meanings of core concepts of governance and management. The authors note that their respondents had experienced a range of forms of managerialism and governance narratives, on a continuum from hard to soft managerialism. The authors argue that the influence of managerialism does not happen with the same intensity in different governance dimensions, such as management hierarchies, how academic work and outputs are managed, strategic goal setting and the relative strength of competitiveness versus collaboration. Hard

managerialism emphasizes managerial skills and sharp hierarchies, objectives linked to measurable outputs and performance indicators, commodification of activities and competition within and outside the institution, whereas soft managerialism, by contrast, puts much more emphasis on distributed leadership and interpersonal networks, the relationship of organizational goals to organizational mission statements, collaboration and cooperation, and uses negotiation and persuasion and seeks to empower staff. The findings of the study showed that non-academic staff working in higher education for less than 8 years, as well as those high up the institutional decision-making hierarchy, were more likely to perceive a growing influence of external stakeholders on governing bodies but regarded this as soft managerialism. Whilst those new to academic work tended to take managerialism for granted, staff who had worked in academe for longer periods saw the creeping influence of hard managerialism. In the public universities and amongst teaching staff, there was a greater perception of the influence of hard managerialism than amongst administrators and those who worked in private universities.

Hladchenko, Antonowitch and de Boer's chapter documents and compares some of the recent changes in university governance in two former Communist regimes, Poland and the Ukraine. The two systems are compared using the public sector governance equalizer model (de Boer & Enders et al., 2006) utilizing the five dimensions, viz state regulation, stakeholder guidance, academic self-governance, managerial-self- governance, and competition. Whilst Poland joined the EU in 2004, the Ukraine experienced two revolutions (2004 and 2013–2014) as well as retaining some of the power hierarchies of the former Communist regime. After 1990, Poland initially gave universities a high degree of freedom but in 2010 the government tried to regain its steering role. University leaders were initially administrator-academics and whilst rectors' roles have changed, they and deans are still elected by and accountable to their peers, but with their powers limited by central regulations. Since 2005 the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools has had a legal monopoly in representing HE institutions at the national policy level. Competition has developed for students between public and private institutions, and also for research funding. The influence of the EU and the Bologna process on Poland's HE system is very evident. In the Ukraine, the inherited division between teaching-oriented higher education institutions and research-only institutions has remained in place. State regulation of higher education is still strong but weakened through the development of a private higher education sector after 1991. Public universities now also charge fees. A National Agency of Quality Assurance of Higher Education (established in 2015) was rocked by a series of scandals about allegations of plagiarism by candidates seeking election to it, which did not aid its legitimacy amongst universities. Steps have been taken to extend financial autonomy to public universities, though student fees can only be used for academic salaries or improving teaching not for research purposes. There is little emphasis on competitive research funding. The lack of a common HE framework in the Ukraine and the absence of broader international practice is very evident. The authors conclude that both countries have come

somewhat closer to New Public Management with less state regulation, more stakeholder guidance, more managerial self-governance and increased competition for students and/or for research funding but both systems, it is claimed, still remain less embedded in NPM than is the case for management and governance regimes in most European countries, with state regulation still substantial, as well as limited stakeholder guidance and academic self-governance (the latter particularly so in Poland). Also in both systems, academics who are openly critical of their higher education system still appear to make themselves vulnerable to attack or dismissal.

Finally in this section, Westa examines the contested and complex phenomenon of academic freedom, which has close links to criticality and institutional autonomy and which is a hot topic in many countries now like China and Turkey, where politicians have attempted to significantly limit academic freedom of speech and political activity. The author develops her arguments in the context of two very different higher education systems, Italy and Singapore. In Italy, academic freedom is a constitutional right. But there have been some recent reforms to Italian higher education in 2010 (the Gelmini Reforms) which on the one hand have given universities more autonomy in financial and material ways but on the other hand have restricted how many faculties are allowed and how many particular types of appointments may be made and for how long. Italian universities are also increasingly dependent on external evaluation of both teaching and research, which can hinder academic freedom in relation to research topics and even teaching. Academic freedom is not a constitutional right in Singapore (even though a general freedom of speech exists for citizens of the country, in practice this is restricted when security concerns arise) and regulations and laws relating to academics make no mention of the term. Westa notes a history of informal bans about academics mentioning certain topics connected to religion, local corruption, governmental policies and politics etc in their teaching. The research focusses on two institutions, the university of Bologna (formed in 1088) and the National University of Singapore, formed as a medical school in 1908 in Malaysia and becoming a full university in 1962 on Singapore's independence. As part of her research, Westa conducted a series of interviews with academics in both universities in relation to academic freedom. She found some similarities of views in both countries, with both sets of respondents seeing connections between academic freedom and responsibility for students and society and in addition many observing that not all academics took the latter seriously. Interviewees from both countries mentioned the stress connected with the requirement to publish their research outputs (which could be interpreted as limiting freedom to publish when they wished and on a topic of their own choice) but even in Singapore there seemed some signs that academic freedom in other respects was opening up.

In Section 2 on 'Widening Participation, Curricular Innovation and Research Policy', there are three papers which focus on critiquing the practice of elite UK universities dealing with widening participation, the growth of student centred liberal arts degree programmes in private universities in Germany and how two Portuguese polytechnics are responding to current government policy on research

activity by academics. The first chapter by Boliver, Gorard and Siddiqui critiques, underpinned by a considerable amount of quantitative evidence, some of the limitations of English universities' responses to the current government policy requirement to widen participation to universities by students from disadvantaged households and/or first generation university applicants. Like Wright's opening piece in Section 1, this paper is based on a plenary address originally given in Cambridge by Boliver. The authors examine what universities in England have done to date to encourage non-traditional and disadvantaged household students to apply to universities, particularly to what have become known as 'selective' universities which have many more applicants than places (mostly but not exclusively members of the elite Russell mission Group), as contrasted with 'recruiting' universities that have more places than applicants. Efforts to date have largely consisted of two main strategies. One is trying to improve the pre-application attainments of would-be applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds, by devices such as summer schools, workshops, and even universities taking over the running of secondary schools in less well-off areas. The second strategy has been to endeavor to raise the aspirations of potential applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds, though the authors suggest that the aspirations of those who want to attend university may already be quite high. Experiments using contextualized admissions data which give information about the number of pupils going to university and socio-economic data about the typical pupil background have led some research- intensive universities to lower the entry grades for students from under resourced schools in areas of economic deprivation but in the case of Bristol University, which did this in the mid-2000s, it led to a backlash from angry private-school head-teachers. The authors suggest that considerably lower grade offers could be made to students from disadvantaged schools and areas but with the proviso that even this is not enough, as universities also have to give greater support, including changing their pedagogies, to such students when they are actually studying at university. It is perhaps the latter which elite universities may resist the most. But as the authors note, accepting students from disadvantaged backgrounds with lower grades is not in itself enough to ensure that those students succeed in their degree studies. Perhaps the message here is that elite institutions are insufficiently self-critical of their own attempts to widen participation and unwilling to change traditional pedagogic modes aimed at elite students. There would also be a cost factor to the university to provide the necessary support.

   Kontowski and Kretz offer a very different focus on critical higher education institutions, examining a form of student-centred or progressive higher education in the shape of the liberal arts degree, which offers students considerable latitude and scope compared to many conventional and constrained bachelors degree programmes in much of mainland Europe (unlike the US where liberal arts universities are well established but perhaps on the basis of a somewhat different model). The authors chose to explore how a small number of private fee-paying higher education institutions in Germany have experimented with liberalizing the curriculum at first degree level, thus allowing students a greater choice of both what

and how they study. Following such a path in a country with free comprehensive university programmes (but mostly mono-disciplinary) easily available almost everywhere is not straightforward and as the authors show, each of the three universities they investigated experienced crises of various kinds, particularly financial crises (since there is no tax relief regime for philanthropy in Germany comparable to that found in the USA for example) but also challenges to leadership as well as to the stability and continuity of the institutions concerned. The three institutions tend to emphasise teaching rather than research, though one of the case study institutions did attract some strong researchers. The authors point out that the advantages of these institutions lies in their small size and flexibility, factors that lend themselves to educational experimentation and offer an alternative to the now increasingly dominant neo-liberal institutions in which most European students find themselves studying. There is also an emphasis on non-vocational degrees. Highly structured programmes, the authors contend, merely reinforce existing inequalities and do not challenge social injustice in the same way as less structured degrees (Nussbaum, 1998). The preceding Boliver/Gorard/Siddiqui paper showed how elite universities in England tend to reproduce rather than challenge social inequalities. The full integration of egalitarian academic learning with no strong student/ teacher demarcation on campus-based communities can encourage student self-organization and help democratize university bureaucracies, though the importance of charismatic leaders in the case-study universities somewhat challenges this idea. However, even where financial help is made available at private liberal arts universities in Germany for students from lower income households (not easy given that all three institutions experienced financial difficulties including having to shed staff), it is difficult to see how this could become a mass model for higher education. But there is clearly much here for more conventional institutions to learn from and indeed liberal arts degrees are also now beginning to appear in public institutions outside North America.

Finally in section 2, Hasanefendic, Patricio and de Bakker examine how two different Portuguese polytechnics have responded to twenty-first century government policies in Portugal which require polytechnics to pursue applied rather than pure or 'blue skies' research, as well as teaching vocational education programmes or those that attend to the needs of society. Both attempt to differentiate their ethos significantly from that of the public universities. The authors argue that much research on universities and other higher education institutions tends to emphasise the cumulative effects of external policy drivers on organizational cultures and practices both within and across different countries, assuming that this induces a sense of similarity rather than difference in organizational responses and cultures. Furthermore, some interpretations of institutional theory, it is suggested, have focused our attention on how isomorphic many universities in different parts of the world have become (though often while theories do suggest this, the empirical evidence for identifying isomorphism is thin). By contrast, in this chapter the authors concentrate on how the two institutions studied have responded very differently

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to a uniform policy aimed at all polytechnics in a single higher education system, with actors using policy ambiguities, staff biographies and different institutional ambitions to move in different directions in the two institutions. The paper draws on views and responses from a wide range of actors including teaching staff, Deans, Programme Directors and the Presidents of the two polytechnics chosen for the study (we are not told whether the two institutions were selected because they were known to be different or whether that was accidental). The fieldwork included participant observation, interviews, documentary analysis and information drawn from websites. As the authors point out, many academic staff in both institutions themselves studied in Portuguese universities, not polytechnics and a good number of them can see no reason why their teaching and research should be any different from the place where they studied. Furthermore, some academics pointed out that they are required to publish research outputs at the same time as being told to collaborate with industry which does not often permit publicly available outputs as a research outcome. Additionally, nationally accredited Masters Programmes via the Portuguese higher education quality agency A3ES require academic staff to have a doctoral degree *and* research outputs. One institution wanted to be just like a university and so followed a course of action leading in this direction (a Wannabe approach), whereas the other aimed for a hybrid status mid-way between a university and a polytechnic (the Hybridizer approach), partly due to geographical location and a desire to serve the local community and its industry, whilst continuing to publish conventional scientific outputs. Both polytechnics emerge as critical institutions that are carefully considering their possible future path-dependency and exploiting policy inconsistencies to their own benefit.

In Section 3, on 'Higher Education Policies and Practices on Teaching Quality and Excellence and the Student Experience', there are four papers which cover quality assessment issues, different aspects of the student experience and how best to nurture and develop teaching excellence. Manatos, Rosa and Sarrico's chapter examines the effects on institutions and the views of internal stakeholders, including students and both academic and administrative staff in Portuguese universities after Portugal set up a new Higher Education Quality Agency, A3ES, in 2007. A3ES is a private foundation that validates teaching programmes in universities and audits institutional quality systems. Existing literature shows that university staff in general but particularly academics tend to distinguish between the development of quality assurance systems and actual improvements in quality, focusing more on their concerns and views about the processes put in place rather than considering how these are related to changes to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The literature also shows that academics are less favourably disposed towards quality assurance than are administrators and other staff who are not directly engaged in teaching. Academics have also been reported as regarding the idea of quality assurance as contradictory to academic cultures and values. The research study involved case studies of three different universities that were the first higher educational institutions in Portugal to establish internal quality management systems.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with different stakeholder groups – students, academics and administrators in three academic fields: Engineering, Language and Literature, and Education, including both those closely involved with quality assurance and those less involved. Those staff closely involved with quality assurance tended to have more positive views about the processes and their links to improving quality, whilst those academics less involved were often the most resistant and some saw QA mechanisms as being more about controlling academic staff than the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Staff resisters claimed they could detect no positive effects of QA procedures. Some student respondents were also very critical and did not understand the purpose of surveys linked to QA, as well as being somewhat cynical that universities would act upon the results of these surveys. A number of students also said not everyone could be bothered filling in these forms. The researchers suggest more staff development needs to be done and more work with students too, explaining why quality assurance is necessary and what it tries to achieve, thus ensuring that a higher proportion of academics are engaged in QA processes and so that students come to see themselves as critical but vital partners in the QA processes rather than sceptical and passive bystanders.

Horntvedt and Carm's work relates to both student experience and internationalization and particularly to what degree of intercultural competence and related criticality is acquired as a result of students going on international exchanges. The research they conducted was based in Norway in a single higher education institution that has a tradition of sending bachelors degree students to other countries in the global south as part of their programme. Most undertook a project whilst abroad. The researchers compared the views and attitudes of young students on full-time professional training programmes such as healthcare, social work and teaching with adults studying part-time to be teachers based on their previous occupations in which they all held vocational diplomas. International exchanges are in theory intended to give students experience of living and studying in another country and to develop their understanding of a different and unfamiliar culture, as well as learning to relate to people whose way of life is different from theirs, although some researchers question whether just going abroad is sufficient, as some exchangers may remain isolated from people in the country concerned and just stay with people from their own culture (de Wit, 2013). As part of the study, the researchers analysed dissertations and projects written as part of the exchange process to see how they discussed intercultural competence and also interviewed a sample of students from both groups before, during and after the exchange visits. The findings were perhaps somewhat surprising in that, of the responses to the exchanges, two groups exhibited either direct racism or zenophobia (dislike of people from other countries). A third group wanted to be assimilated in the new culture as quickly as possible and a fourth group did show real signs of both appreciating and trying to understand the new culture and relating it to their own culture and were beginning to develop intercultural competence. The only other difference was that the part-time adult students presented themselves abroad in relation to their previous occupation, not

the one they were training for, whereas younger students wanted to connect their current training to the context they were in on exchange.

Anzivino and Rostan's paper also focuses on an aspect of the university student experience, this time using a study based in a research-intensive university in Italy, but in this case the lens is on another aspect of extra-curricular activity, not exchange visits as in Horntvedt and Carm's chapter but other outside-class events and activities which involve interaction with other students and university staff. The authors are not just interested in the activity *per se* but in the extent to which such non-curriculum activities affect the study career of individuals during their degree programme (do they finish on time or delay their studies?) and the level of academic achievement attained. The paper is an example of the critical university at work, as one of the authors is also a University Vice Rector for Student Affairs: using his management work to shape research is a strategy that he has consciously adopted (Deem, 2016). Previous research shows some positive effects arising from out of class activity but much of the context is in Anglo-Saxon countries and there is some uncertainty as to the effects on things like degree study regularity and attainment level. A large sample of undergraduate and postgraduate students at Pavia University were surveyed during the 2014–2015 academic year on their outside class activities and the responses linked to a range of information about their academic attainment and study lifecycle as well as to their individual characteristics as derived from the survey and institutional data. 2,186 students returned the survey, a response rate of 32.3%. Pavia has a system of halls of residence which also act as college-like organisations for those who obtain good grades but a high percentage of those not living in halls commute to the university from outside the city. The survey found some positive results connected to study regularity including studying together with peers, intense involvement in leisure activities and interaction with academic staff. Interaction with staff outside of formal classes is also linked to getting good grades, though interaction with other students outside of class isn't. So far as individual characteristics are concerned, being under 25, having a lot of family cultural capital, studying certain subjects, attending a second cycle course, passing from first to second year and staying in Pavia during term all favour studying with peers, taking part in leisure activities and interaction with Faculty members, though over 25s have the highest levels of interaction with Faculty. Some policy implications are suggested at the end of the paper. The chapter is a good example of how in a senior management role it is possible to take a critical lens to what is happening on your own doorstep.

Finally in this section, Kottman's chapter explores the idea of Centres of Excellence and their role in improving teaching in higher education institutions. This is a different kind of being critical, because it relates to the capacity of teachers in higher education to become involved in reflection upon and development of their own teaching, which as previous research on leading teaching demonstrates, is a complex task (Gibbs & Knapper et al., 2009). In the chapter, Kottman describes a study which compares a central Teaching unit based in a comprehensive German

university and largely paid for by institutional funding but having one externally funded project, with what is effectively a teachers network funded by a national initiative and based in a very small specialist music college in Norway. The intention of the study was to examine the effects of both Centres on teachers' engagement with pedagogic and curricular practice, as well as to explore the micro-cultures surrounding teaching in each institution. It is probably no surprise that it was the teachers' network with its own staffing and project money, which seemed to have the greatest chance of making HE teachers develop a critical approach to their own teaching, because it was a collaborative entity, not a remote unit but also something localized and contextualized. In that setting, teachers can feel confident to share things, a finding replicated by researchers looking at different kinds of collaborative micro teaching cultures (Mårtensson & Roxå, 2016). The large central unit in the German university is largely disregarded by the majority of experienced teachers in the institution because it is not linked to any particular disciplinary schools or faculties, and does not seek out academics to invite them to take an active part (there are no incentives to do project work). Though it is run by those who are also teachers, perhaps teaching other teachers is not always seen as equivalent to teaching students. During interviews it became clear that in the German university there was little sharing of teaching practice: learning more about teaching for more experienced staff was a question of trial and error and there was little interest in or knowledge of the institution's learning and teaching strategy. In the small Norwegian teachers' network, in contrast, there were incentives to do projects, there was no real staff hierarchy, and the micro-culture was supportive of thinking about teaching (in effect becoming self-critical).

We hope that the volume will have something to help all our readers reflect on the 21st century concept of the university as a critical institution. If universities stop being a space where different views may be aired and if they are no longer able to encourage their staff and students to think and act critically, then the era of the university would truly be over.

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