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Academic development and public leadership: a tale of three cities

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The ground I'll cover - and my approach

Key issue

- A role for academic development?
- A new role?
- A role now appearing?

Key concepts:

- Academic development
- Public good
- Transdisciplinarity
- Leadership
- Ecology
- The Earth

Outline

- For the last 800 years, higher education has inhabited *two cities*
- Of the intellect ('scholarship') and of work ('academic capital')
 - Their balance has changed, and now the world of work claims supremacy
- Academic development bestrides these two cities
- However, a *third city* can be glimpsed, just in the making
- Of the 'public good', of 'ecology' and 'sustainability' & of 'wellbeing'
 - ***A city of the Earth***
- Implication: A massive new set of roles opens here for Academic Devlpt.
- **Q:** Can ac development help in leading this migration to this new city?
- **A:** Yes, BUT ac devpt has to be completely rethought and re-positioned.

The old city is itself in ferment

- The old city: At one time, the city of scholarship
- From that shell, a new city of science and technology has emerged
- STEM - BUT note: all is in motion
 - STEM has now morphed into STEMM
 - changing all the time (important here)
- bio knowledges – medicine, bio-engineering, digitization, biopower – underway well before the current crisis.

The old city within the new

- Like the old medieval part of a European city
- The old city – the city of scholarship – is still to be seen
- Books, writing of books, libraries with books,
- the care for texts, the interpretation of texts, and the crafting of texts
- Just a museum for tourists?
- Does it have any/ much part to play in academic development?

The city of academic capital

- Alongside the city of knowledge as such
- City of work has arisen
- Knowledge and academic life is only valuable so far as it is put to work
- The university seeks to maximise the use value *and* the exchange value of knowledge
 - Knowledge has to *perform* and the knower too
- Status, employment, networks, impact in the 'real' world – all await
- And this city has invaded the city of the intellect; a Trojan horse.

A note about academic capitalism

- For the past 30+ years, the academic world has been putting its knowledges to work
- And so has been born 'academic capitalism'
- Knowledge has a use value; and a money-making value at that
- But note that this is but a reflection of the wider world
- - of 'Cognitive capitalism'; of 'knowledge capitalism' (Boutang; Peters)
 - Now morphing already into algorithmic capitalism or digital capitalism

The digital university

- The character of the university reflects the wider world
- And so the digitised university
- In all of its functions – teaching, research, administration, outreach
- NB: learning analytics
- Now, in this university, if it cannot be digitised, it has no value.

A world in motion

- A world that is
- Interconnected
- In motion
- Indeterminate
- Uncertain
- Risk-laden
- Contingency
- - and the university is caught up in this world

The entangled university

- This is a university that is now entangled in the world
- Plays out across the territories of major ecosystems
- The world is interconnected
- And so has entrapped (?) the university in its ecosystems
- Eight ecosystems that matter:
 - *Knowledge, learning, social institutions, culture, economy, the individual, the polity, the natural environment*
 - The university is entangled in these 8 ecosystems
 - And they in it.

The pandemic – is instructive

- *From pangolins to pharmaceutical corporations;*
- *From health systems to geo-politics;*
- *From transport systems to a mutating virus*
- *Genomic sequencing to vaccination resistance*
- The world is totally interconnected (a ‘flat ontology’)
 - *(We shd have learnt all of this in the 1960s – ecological crisis.)*
- **BUT:**
 - 1 Entanglement cuts both ways
 - 2 Knowledge is affected by the world *and* can affect the world
(Problem: *we are privileging certain kinds of knowledge*)

eg, inequalities, racism, public understanding, place of women
ie, response is not one of ‘sustainability’ but of improvement

The (global) city of interconnections

- If the world is interconnected, then so too should be our knowing efforts
- Our epistemologies should match the way the world is – its ontology
- Talk of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity - with us for 50+ yrs
- *(TD is esp attracting attention – talk of TD ontologies (Gibbs etc))*
- *NB: This is a crucial matter for academic development*
 - *We could just dwell on this matter!*
 - *(Does Ac Develpt not celebrate the disciplines as such ...?)*

The city of public good

- The world is interconnected and is facing huge challenges
 - So – it is said – that higher education should concern itself with the public good.
 - Extremely difficult matter: public good; p goods; p realm; p sphere; ‘the’ p good ...
 - *In what way public?*
 - *Who counts in this public?*
 - All the entities in the world are of concern to this city
 - Natural and non-natural; organic and non-organic;
 - In this city, the public includes the rhinos and the glaciers
- 13 (Otherwise who speaks for them?)

Academic development for the public good

- This is not just a 3rd city
- But a different kind of city – a new territorialisation of academic devl'pment
 - The old city was bound up in itself
 - The new city was/is bound up in the world – but instrumentally so
- But this city:
 - Understands itself to be interconnected with the world
 - And sees inherent worth in the world
 - It is sensitive to social and epistemic justice but even more ...
 - It hears the terms 'Anthropocene', 'Ecocene' and 'Posthumanism' – although it is a bit wary of them!

Publics not public

- Not – a la Habermas – a single public sphere
- But now, esp in a digital age, many and proliferating publics
- The students are ahead of us ...
- & publics also in the university
- In pedagogy
- In its debates
- In its interconnections with the wider world

The university as a public space

- The mood of our age is one of action
 - - and preferably action that leads to economic development and profit
 - And the university has come to play its part.
 - As a result, we have almost lost the idea of the university as a place of collective reasoning – a space of reasoning
 - So the public realm has to be created *within* the university
 - the university as a set of public spaces and its members as citizens.
 - Requires the orchestration of debate - ‘deliberative communication’ (Englund)
 - So debate is crucial – but who is to lead the debate *in univs* **about** *univs*?
- 46 Don't ac developers have a role to play?

Leadership in academic development

- ‘Academic development’
- – the develpt of academics &/OR the develpt of the univ/ academic world?
- The role – like the universe – is in motion, is expanding
- Now to assist the university to think about itself
- ***A university for the whole Earth***
 - Requires leadership – at all levels
 - Establishing fora to enable the university to be reflexive
 - To imagine new futures/ new responsibilities for itself
 - Academic developers to lead ‘up’ not only ‘across’
 - To find a way of speaking constructively to senior managers
 - Diplomatically to lead the leaders.

Conclusions

- The moment has come fundamentally to rethink ac devept.
- The world of the university has expanded
- The world is now understood to be even more complex
- The university has to be a university of, for and from the Earth
- So ac devlpt has to change, expand
- The responsibility arises as to whether ac devlpt should now include a leadership function, for/ within the university.
- This is far from easy
- But, I fear, that that's how matters are ...



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