



Universiteit Utrecht

The Landscape of Higher Education

in 2020 and beyond - two levels of change

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The Landscape of Higher Education

in 2020 and beyond: two levels of change

1. The large-scale changes in society
2. The disruptive nature of (technological) change
3. A new role for the university?

An aerial photograph of a dense urban skyline, likely Hong Kong, showing numerous high-rise buildings and a prominent forested hillside on the right. The image is in black and white, with a semi-transparent dark box overlaid at the bottom containing white text.

The large-scale changes in
society



1

Universities have a history of 800 years

What are universities for? (paper LERU, Boulton and Lucas, 2008 - just prior to the monetary crisis of 2008-2011):

“A university is a place...whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge...in which the intellect may safely range and speculate. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward...discoveries perfected and verified...and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge.” (Newman: The idea of a university, 1852)



1

The deepening social divide

But the Humboldtian “elite” university disappeared already after World War II: since 1960-1970 mass-education resulted in explosive growth of universities.

At the end of 1980'ies governments were no longer able to follow the growth financially - from then on growth meant less funding per student, increasing tuition fees and privatisation.



1

The deepening social divide

Dramatic growth of number of students reflects successful emancipation of lower/middle class. Participation changed from about 5% to 40% in OECD countries (Netherlands) - growth is stalling now (see Hesa report UK regarding growth HE).

At the same time, and ironically, HE contributes significantly to the *growing divide* between have's and have-not's. A society with about 50% highly educated (and the remainder not), is *not sustainable* given division of welfare and opportunities on the labour market.



1

The deepening social divide

High tuition fees and privatization of HE are instrumental in shaping this divided society ('zipcode is more important than talent'). But even more important than financial barriers are the cultural ones: Dutch report shows that groups increasingly function within their respective "bubbles" (Dutch Inspection 2018, "The state of education").

Deepening social divide in many countries might even affect the political stability, the least inclusive countries (with the highest tuition fees) are running the greatest risk.



1

Increasing protectionism and the post-truth society

But there is more: since the financial crisis of 2008–2011, the world has entered a new era defined by sharp contrasts and increasing protectionism.

This issue is further exacerbated by worldwide political instability and migrant flows, creating the substrate of populism and the so-called '*fact-free*' or '*post-truth*' society.

The elite position of the academic world will increasingly meet with criticism – see yellow vest protest in France, and latest statements of populists in Italy and the Netherlands.



1

Increasing protectionism and the post-truth society

The present separation between the large political blocks, and the increasing protectionism, is bound to have a major impact on the academic world, as well as on the extent to which knowledge and talent can be shared internationally.

For example, foreign students are essential to the viability of universities in the USA, UK and Australia - the flows of these students will certainly be affected. A “business-model” based on international students is no longer viable.



1

Summary

The landscape surrounding the university has changed profoundly, but HE reacts slowly: it is business as usual, in spite of the serious possibility of “over-education” in a strongly changing labour market, and a deepening social divide.

The university is losing support in society and is not believed to deliver.

The businessmodel of many universities in which student-growth guarantees income, will not work due to aging (resulting in less students) and decreasing flows from Asia. The classic reflex of universities to ask for more money (either from students or from government) is a dead-end street and leads to a *crisis of credibility*.



The disruptive nature of
(technological) change



2

Global trends

Trend 1: War for talent is on!

The *economic balance of power* will in future determine the distribution of talent to a considerable extent; the effects of this development are already visible, particularly in the US but also in Europe.

The *flow of talent and knowledge* is increasingly tipping towards Asia, particularly when it comes to offering facilities/infrastructure in the medical and technical sciences.



2

Global trends

Trend 2: Urbanisation will thrive

Global knowledge hubs will increasingly be formed, particularly in megacities. Asia will clearly benefit from the combination of megacities (= talent and innovation pool) and economic strength. Europe is at a great disadvantage in this respect.

The Greater London Area is a good example of a such a knowledge hub (but effect of Brexit...?). The Randstad could have a role to play if the Netherlands and Flanders focused more on creating such infrastructures – the knowledge ecosystem is not sufficiently differentiated at present.



2

Global trends

Trend 3: Personalised education will be norm

The demand for customised education is growing extremely rapidly, particularly in the US and to a lesser extent in Europe. Asia is currently experiencing the lowest demand. This trend is leading to so-called '*unbundling*' and is further stimulating private initiatives.

Digital education plays a major role herein: *lifelong learning* is rapidly gaining ground. The labour market demands T-shaped professionals. There is an ever-increasing need for interdisciplinarity.



2

Global trends

Trend 4: Social impact will be key

Growing confrontation with major social issues will dictate the university's knowledge agenda. This is particularly true in Europe and the US, less so in Asia.

Growing importance of the issue of 'impact' versus 'economic value/valorisation', and of universities being 'knowledge-driven' versus 'wisdom-driven'.



2

How to prepare for the future?

Knowledge will be *omnipresent*: it will no longer be about the acquisition of knowledge but about *managing knowledge*. Education will therefore need to shift from transferring knowledge to using knowledge, asking the right questions and encouraging creativity.

It is not necessarily about preparing students for specific jobs, but providing them with the skills that they can use as career change with the times.

It will be necessary to create *well-structured educational models* which tie in with this development, above and beyond in digital education.



2

How to prepare for the future?

Research will take place in an increasingly flexible way within an interdisciplinary context, and will focus more and more on resolving major social issues; this shift increasingly requires *T-shaped professionals*.

The ability to ask questions and think critically are important conditions for adapting to labour demands in future. The labour market will demand broad, flexible deployment in an often interdisciplinary context.

Employability will be an issue.



2

How to prepare for the future?

Personalised learning, unbundling and lifelong learning will lead to a totally different university: less 'physical', more network-based, and belonging to a larger (regional) knowledge infrastructure.

The importance of full curricula and degree certificates will decrease, *step-by-step certification in combination with continuing education* will increase in importance.



Utrecht University

A new role for the university?



The university in transition

Given all the changes, universities are faced with difficult choices: the present system is, for many reasons, **NOT** sustainable.

Moreover, some things are moving rapidly (digitisation, artificial intelligence) – that means that universities need to respond rapidly as well.



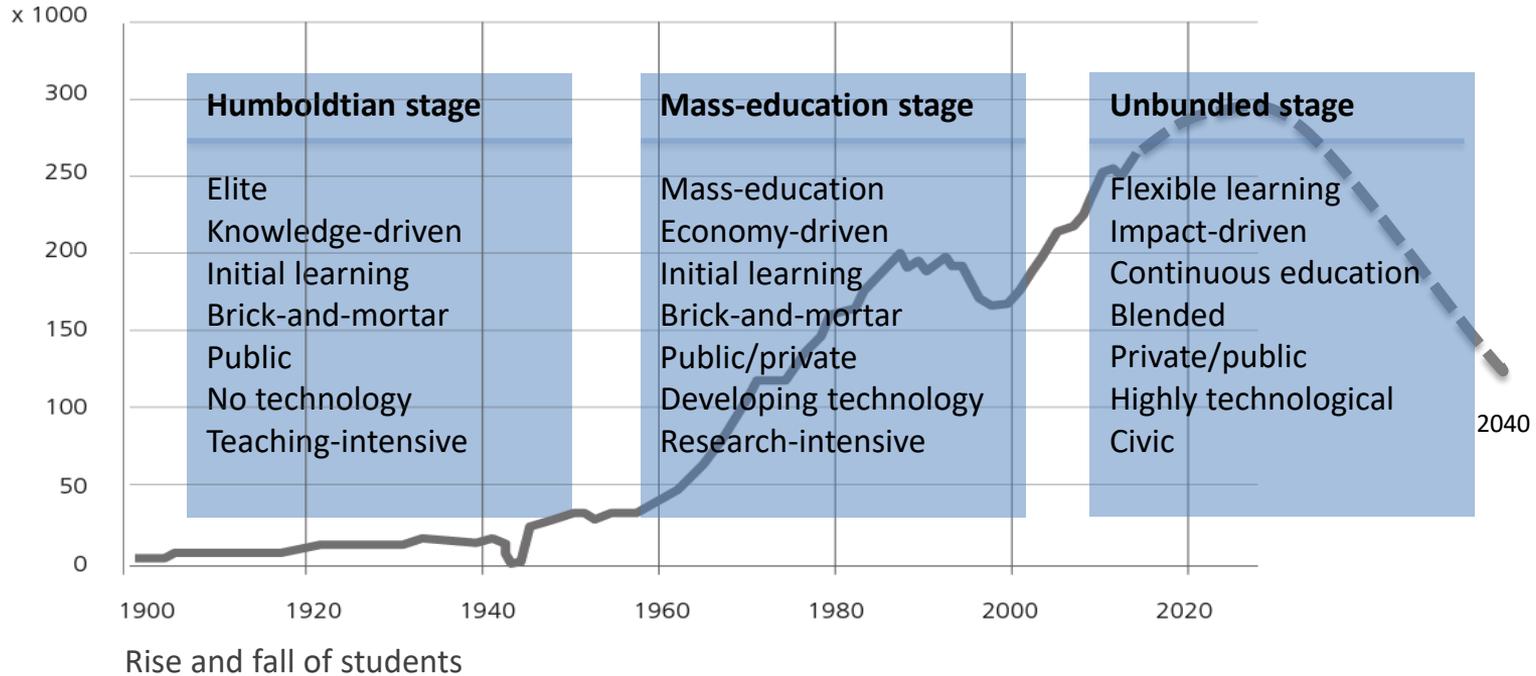
The transition to another type of
university

Are education systems capable of turning themselves
upside down to meet tomorrow's challenges?





The transition to another type of university





The engaged university

The future belongs to the *civic or engaged university*.

Quality of teaching is essential; we need to realize that we are educating the leaders of the future. Students should be trained to be responsible citizens. Research should be inspirational and a catalyst to society.

Output should not be measured in only economic terms: impact is key to the reputation of a university. The notion of 'wisdom' (knowledge becomes wisdom when it actually enriches people's lives) is important. Rankings provide adverse and perverse incentives for making choices in research.



The engaged university

The university needs to take a central role in society through offering:

- Flexible learning
- Continuing Education

Whereas *qualifications* are central in the present-day university, *competencies/skills* will be more important in the future, the more since the foundation skills of higher educated are now decreasing (Survey of Adult Skills: PIAAC, 2012, 2016)



Quality assurance

How to avoid crisis of credibility? Increasingly, employers and societal stakeholders (politics!) distrust the university, because they don't deliver the competencies demanded on the labour market.

At present, universities focus too much on qualifications, and not enough on integration of learning during active participation in the labor process (skills/competencies).

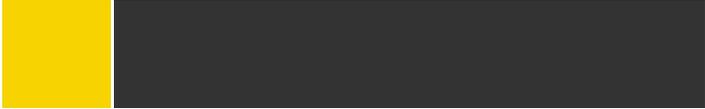
Moreover, rather large portion of skills we now teach are easy to automate; there should be more focus on non-routine interpersonal and analytic skills.



Quality assurance: questions for the future

Some questions in the context of quality assurance:

- How to change with increasing flexibility in HE from qualification-based to competency-based admission? How to assess levels of skills versus qualifications?
- How to ensure quality when education changes from full curricula leading to degrees, into continuous education with stacking of micro-credentials?
- How to ensure quality with increasing impact of digital education?



Thank you!

Slides without referencing are based on:

G.J. van der Zwaan, 2017: Higher education in 2040. Amsterdam University Press, 255 pp.

-----, 2018: The story of the Cambridge taxi driver and the future of the university. In: L.E. Weber and H. Newby (eds.), The future of the university in a polarizing world, 205-215.

-----, 2019 in press: The transformative power of the university: higher education's role in a sustainable future.



Comments on the key-note of Bert van der Zwaan

Anne Flierman,
Chairman Board NVAO

April 25th 2019

A challenge for universities?

OR?

- A challenge for traditional universities and their programmes
- How about younger institutions and university colleges?
- Rethink the idea of traditional universities
- Institutions for qualification will still be necessary

The new Graduate

- Personalization or massification
- T-Shaped professional requires firm disciplinary knowledge
- Qualification required
 - by students
 - by employers (MSE) and clients
 - by society, taxpayers

QA in future

- We will still have institutions
- QA to focus on:
 - new methods of education and delivery, other missions of institutions, qualifications given
- QA will need:
 - new methods beyond peer review
 - big data as a source of information

** Remember the perspective of the world outside*



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