Privatizing the Public University

Key Trends, Countertrends and Alternatives

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Since the 1980s, public universities have undergone a seemingly unending series of reforms designed to make them more responsive both to markets and to government priorities. Initially, the aim behind these reforms was to render universities more economic, efficient and effective. However, by the 1990s, prompted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 1998) and other international agencies, many national governments adopted the idea that the future lay in a 'global knowledge economy'. To these ends, they implemented policies to repurpose higher education as the engine for producing the knowledge, skills and graduates to generate the intellectual property and innovative products that would make their countries more globally competitive. These reforms were premised on neoliberal ideas about turning universities into autonomous and entrepreneurial 'knowledge organizations' by promoting competition, opening them up to private investors, making educational services contribute to economic competitiveness, and enabling individuals to maximize their skills in global labour markets. These policy narratives position universities as static entities within an all-encompassing market economy, but alternatively, the university can be seen as a dynamic and fluid set of relations within a wider 'ecology' of diverse interests and organizations (Hansen this volume; Wright 2016). The boundaries of the university are constantly being renegotiated as its core values and distinctive purpose rub up against those predatory market forces, or what Slaughter and Leslie (1997) term 'academic capitalism'. Under pressure to produce 'excellence', quality research and innovative teaching, improve world rankings, forge business links and attract elite, fee-paying students, many universities struggle to maintain their traditional mandate to be 'inclusive', foster social cohesion, improve social mobility and

challenge received wisdom – let alone improve the poor records on gender, diversity and equality.

This book examines how public universities engage with these dilemmas and the implications for the future of the public university as an ideal and set of institutional practices. The book has arisen from a four-year programme of knowledge exchange between three research groups in Europe and the Asia Pacific, which focused on the future of public universities in contexts of globalization and regionalization.[1] The groups were based in the U.K. and Denmark, chosen as European countries whose public universities have quite different histories and current reform policies, and New Zealand, as a country at the forefront of developing 'entrepreneurial' public universities, and with networks to other university researchers in Australia and Asia. Through a series of six workshops, four conferences and over thirty individual exchange visits, the project developed an extended discussion between the three groups of researchers. This enabled us to generate a new approach and methodology for analysing the challenges facing public universities. As a result, this book asks:

- How are higher education institutions being reconfigured as 'entrepreneurial' and as 'knowledge' organizations, and with what effects?
- In what ways are new management systems and governance regimes transforming the culture of academia?
- How are universities responding to these often contradictory policy agendas?
- How are national and international reforms impacting on the social purposes of the university and its relationship to society?
- What possibilities are there for challenging current trends and developing alternative university futures?

Mapping the Major Trends

Nowhere are the above trends more evident than in the English-speaking universities, particularly in the U.K., Australia and New Zealand. These countries have been a laboratory for testing out a new model of the neoliberal entrepreneurial university. At least seven key features characterize these reforms.

1. State Disinvestment in Universities – or Risk-free Profits for Private Providers?

The first feature is a progressive withdrawal of government support for higher education. In the U.K., for example, the Dearing Report (1997) showed that during the previous twenty years, a period of massive university expansion, state funding per student had declined by 40 percent. While Tony Blair's New Labour government of 1997 proclaimed 'education, education, education' as its key priority, it did so by introducing cost-sharing, in the form of student tuition fees, as a way to reduce the annual deficit in the funding of university teaching. In 2010, the British Conservative–Liberal government under David Cameron went even further by removing all state funding for teaching except in the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). Instead, students were now to pay fees of £9,000 per annum (a three-fold increase) for which state-funded loans were made available. From the government's perspective, the genius of this shifting of state funding from teaching to loans was that private for-profit education providers could now access taxpayers' money – and this transfer of funds was further justified ideologically as providing competition and creating a 'level playing field' between public and private education providers.

Other countries have also decided to withdraw state funding for higher education. For example, in September 2015, Japan's education minister Hakobyan Shimomura wrote to all of the country's eighty-six national universities calling on them to 'take active steps to abolish [social science and humanities] organizations or to convert them to serve areas that better meet society's needs' (Grove 2015b). These measures echo the wider global trend set by advocates of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School's brand of neoliberal economics. In the 1980s, the 'Chicago boys' carried out their most radical experiments in Chile, removing the state's direct grants to universities, funding teaching only through students' tuition fees, and making government loans available to students so that they could pay those fees (Bekhradnia 2015). In the United States, the same policies have been adopted. For example, in California between 1984 and 2004, state spending per capita on higher education declined by 12 percent. Significantly, in the same period per capita spending on prisons increased by 126 percent (Newfield 2008: 266). Between the 1970s and 1990s there was a 400 percent increase in charges in tuition, room and board in U.S. universities and tuition costs have grown at about ten times the rate of family income (ibid.). What these instances highlight is not just the state's retreat from direct

funding of higher education but also a calculated initiative to enable private companies to capture and profit from tax-funded student loans.

2. New Regimes for Promoting Competitiveness

A second major trend that has reshaped higher education has been the creation of funding and assessment regimes designed to increase productivity and competition between universities, both nationally and globally. What began in the 1980s as an exercise to assure the 'quality' of research in British universities had morphed, by the end of the 1990s, into ever-more invasive systems for ranking institutions, disciplines, departments, and even individuals. The results were used to allocate funds to those institutions that performed best in what has become a fetishistic quest for ever-higher ratings and 'world class' status, or what Hazelkorn (2008: 209) has termed the 'rankings arms-race'. Where some rankings are focused on research performance (such as the U.K.'s Research Excellence Framework, the Excellence in Research for Australia, and New Zealand's Performance Based Research Framework), others rank whole institutions (the Shanghai Jiao Tong Index, the QS and THE World University Rankings). Significantly, these ranking systems have especially negative impacts on minority groups and women (see Blackmore, Curtis, Grant and Lucas, this volume). This obsession with auditing and measuring performance also includes systems for evaluating teaching quality, surveying student satisfaction and measuring student engagement.[2] Even though vice chancellors and university managers ridicule ranking methodologies, they have learned to their cost to take them extremely seriously, as the financial viability of a university increasingly hinges on the reputational effects of these measures of performance (Sauder and Espeland 2009; Wright 2012).

3. Rise of Audit Culture: Performance and Output Measures

Third, running alongside the growth of these ranking systems has been the proliferation of performance and output measurements and indicators designed to foster transparency, efficiency and 'value for money'. This is part of a wider phenomenon called 'audit culture' and its growing presence throughout the public and private sectors, including higher education (Shore and Wright 2015; Strathern 2000). Driven by financial imperatives and the rhetoric of 'value for money' – and justified by a political discourse about the virtues of transparency and accountability – these technologies have been particularly instrumental

in promoting the logics of risk management, financialization and managerialism (see Dale, and Lewis and Shore, this volume). In Denmark, time has become a key metric and instrument for the efficient throughput of students and the accountability of institutions, but as Nielsen and Sarauw (this volume) show, these measures affect the very nature of education. Audits do not simply or passively measure performance; they actively reshape the institutions into which they are introduced (Power 1997; Shore and Wright 2015). When a measurement becomes a target, institutional environments are restructured so that they focus their resources and activities primarily on what 'counts' to funders and governors rather than on their wider professional ethics and societal goals (see Kohn and Shore, this volume).

4. Administrative Bloat, Academic Decline

The fourth key development during this period has been the extraordinary growth in the number and status of university managers and administrators. For the first time in history, as figures from the U.K.'s Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show, support staff now outnumber academic staff at 71 percent of higher education institutions (Jump 2015). In Denmark, there has been an equally large increase in the number of administrators and the increased percentage of annual expenditure on administrators in just five years alone was equivalent to 746 new lectureships (Wright and Boden 2010). The figures from the U.S. are even more dramatic. Federal figures for the period 1987 to 2011/2012 show that the number of college and university administrators and professional employees has more than doubled in the last twenty-five years; an increase of 517,636 people – or an average of eight-seven new administrators every working day (Marcus 2014). The recruitment of administrators has far outpaced the growth in the number of faculty – or even students. Meanwhile, universities claim to be struggling with budget crises that force them to reduce permanent academic posts, and the temporarily employed teaching assistants – the 'precariat' – have undergone a massive increase in numbers.

This astonishing increase in management and administration is partly due to the pressures universities now face to produce data and statistics for harvesting by the ranking industries. Universities themselves often attribute the growth of their administrative and technical units to the enormous rise in government regulations. As the President of the American Association of University Administrators recently explained, 'there are "thousands" of regulations governing the distribution of

financial aid alone' and every university that is accredited probably has at least one person dedicated to that. However, the proliferation of administrators and managers has also been fuelled by the universities themselves, as they have taken on new functions and pursued new income streams. This is particularly evident in the U.S.:

> Since 1987, universities have also started or expanded departments devoted to marketing, diversity, disability, sustainability, security, environmental health, recruiting, technology and fundraising, and added new majors and graduate and athletics programs, satellite campuses, and conference centers (Marcus 2014).

These trends are captured with exceptional clarity in Benjamin Ginsberg's book, *The Fall of the Faculty* (2011a). Ginsberg's thesis is that the new professional managers 'make administration their life's work', to the detriment of the universities' core functions. They have little or no faculty experience and promoting teaching and research is less important than expanding their own administrative domains: 'under their supervision, the means have become the end' (ibid.: 2). Every year, writes Ginsberg:

> hosts of administrators and staffers are added to college and university payrolls, even as schools claim to be battling budget crises that are forcing them to reduce the size of their full-time faculties. As a result, universities are filled with armies of functionaries—vice presidents, associate vice presidents, assistant vice presidents, provosts, associate provosts, vice provosts, assistant provosts, deans, deanlets, deanlings, each commanding staffers and assistants—who, more and more, direct the operations of every school. Backed by their administrative legions, university presidents and other senior administrators have been able, at most schools, to dispense with faculty involvement in campus management and, thereby to reduce the faculty's influence in university affairs (Ginsberg 2011a: 2).

One of the weaknesses in these statistics is that they fail to distinguish between administrative staff who support the teaching and research and those who do not. Support staff are crucial to enabling academics to carry out effective research, teaching and scholarship – the traditional mission of the university. Likewise, universities need managers who support academics in fulfilling these key functions of the university, but the statistics are rarely sufficiently refined to make these distinctions. Interestingly, many universities have dropped the term 'support staff' in favour of terms like 'senior administrators' and

'professional staff'. This move reflects the way that many university managers now see their role – which is no longer to provide support for academics but, rather, to manage them as 'human capital' and a resource. From the perspective of many university managers and human resources (HR) departments, academics are increasingly portrayed as a reluctant, unruly and undisciplined workforce that needs to be incentivized or cajoled to meet management's targeted outputs and performance indicators.

5. Institutional Capture: the Power of the 'Administeriat'

The budgetary reallocation from academic to administrative salaries is linked to a fifth major trend: the rise of the 'administeriat' as a new governing class and the corresponding shift in power relations within the university. Whereas in the past the main cleavage in universities was between the arts and the sciences, or what C.P. Snow (1956) famously termed 'the two cultures', today the main division is between academics and managers. Collini (2013) attributes this shift in power to the way all university activities are now reduced to a common managerial metric. As he puts it, the 'terms that suit [managers'] activities are the terms that have triumphed'. Scholars now spend increasing amounts of their working day accounting for their activities in the 'misleading' and 'alienating' language and categories of managers. This 'squeezing out' of the true use-value of scholarly labour accounts for the 'pervasive sense of malaise, stress and disenchantment within British universities' (Collini 2013).

Professor of Critical Management Studies Rebecca Boden compares the way that university managers expand their increasingly onerous regulations to the way that 'cuckoos lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, and how the young cuckoos then evict the nest-builders' offspring' (cited in Havergal 2015). This cuckoo-in-the-nest metaphor might seem somewhat overblown, but it highlights the important fact that managers and administrators have usurped power in what were formerly more collegial, self-governing institutions. Yet many of these managers would not succeed as professionals in industry. Levin and Greenwood (2016) argue that, if universities were indeed business corporations, they would soon collapse, as their work organization currently violates nearly every one of the practices that characterize successful and dynamic high-tech areas and service industries. It is a short step from here to managers' appropriation of the identity of the university, with managers increasingly claiming not only to speak for the

university but to be the university (Ørberg 2007; Readings 1996; Shore and Taitz 2010). Today, rather than being treated as core members of a professional community, academics are constantly being told by managers and senior administrators what 'the university' expects of them, as if they were somehow peripheral or subordinate to 'the university'.

6. New Income Streams and the Rise of the 'Entrepreneurial University'

Faced with diminishing state funding and year-on-year cuts to national budgets for higher education, universities have been compelled to seek alternative income streams. This has entailed fostering more lucrative and entrepreneurial partnerships with industry; conducting commissioned research for businesses and government; partnering up with venture capitalists; commercializing the university's intellectual property through patents and licences; developing campus spin-out (and spin-in) companies; engaging proactively in city development programmes; and maximizing university assets including real estate, halls of residence, conference facilities and industrial parks. Equally important has been the raising of student tuition fees and the relentless drive to recruit more high-fee-paying international students. This project has given rise to the moniker 'export education', a sector of the economy and foreign-currency earner of growing importance to many countries. For example, in Canada, expenditures of international education students (tuition, accommodation, living costs and so on) infused $6.5 billion into the Canadian economy, surpassing exports of coniferous lumber (CAN$5.1 billion) and coal (CAN$6.1 billion) and gave employment to 83,00 Canadians (Roslyn Kunin and Associates, Inc 2009). Similarly, 'educational services' has become one of Australia's leading export industries such that, by 2008, it had become Australia's third-largest generator of export earnings with over AU$12.6 billion (Olds 2008). Along with Australia and Canada, the U.S.A., U.K. and New Zealand dominate the trade in international students (OECD 2011; chart 3.3) and the global demand for international student places is estimated to rise to 5.8 million by 2020 (Bohm et al. 2004).

The relentless pursuit of these new income streams has had a transformative effect on universities. Almost two decades ago Marginson and Considine (2000) coined the term the 'enterprise university' to describe the model in which:

> the economic and academic dimensions are both subordinated to something else. Money is a key objective, but it is also the means to a

more fundamental mission: to advance the prestige and competitive-
ness of the university as an end in itself (ibid. 2000: 5).

However, it would be misleading to suggest that all these changes are
simply a consequence of the pressures that governments have placed
on universities to refashion themselves as pseudo-business corpora-
tions. Some of the more entrepreneurially hawkish university rectors,
vice chancellors and presidents have enthusiastically welcomed these
changes. Many have benefitted from the enormous executive salaries
that have become the norm for university 'CEOs', and they undoubt-
edly enjoy their vaulted status and the opportunities this provides to
mingle with world leaders at prestigious summits and receptions, air-
port VIP lounges and gala fundraising events. For example, the *Times
Higher Education* annual review of vice chancellors' pay shows that
average salary and benefits for university vice chancellors in the U.K.
rose by between £8,397 and £240,794 in 2013–2014. This constituted
a 3.6 percent rise, whereas in the same period, other university staff
received an increase of only 1 per cent (Grove 2015a). A study by econ-
omists Bachan and Reilly (2015), from Brighton Business School, found
that in the past two decades, vice chancellors have seen their salaries
soar by an eye-watering 59 percent (Henry 2015), but concluded that
these increases could not be justified in terms of their university's per-
formance criteria, such as widening participation or bringing in income
such as grants for teaching and research and capital funding. Rather,
the study found that the presence of other high-paid administrative
staff was pushing up vice chancellors' pay. Both the U.K.'s House of
Commons' Public Accounts Committee and the former Minister for
Business and Employment, Vince Cable, have condemned this 'sub-
stantial upward drift' of salaries among vice chancellors. However, this
annual ritual of chastisement has little perceivable impact.

7. Higher Education as Private Investment Versus Public Good

The seventh major trend is recasting university education as a private
and positional investment rather than a public good. The idea that
gained prominence in the post-war era was that higher education was
a public investment that benefits the economy and society as well
as contributing to personal growth and social mobility (Morgan this
volume). In the 1990s, this idea – and the Keynesian model that sus-
tained it – was displaced by the Chicago School's economic doctrine
and the notion that individuals, not the state, should take responsibility

for repeatedly investing in their education and skills in order to sustain and improve their position in a fast-changing competitive and global labour market. This is what the OECD termed 'new human capital theory' (Henry et al. 2001), an idea that came to dominate government thinking about growth and investment. However, several recent studies challenge the premises upon which this model is based (Ashton, Lauder and Brown 2011; Wright and Ørberg this volume).

Arising from this new way of conceptualizing higher education as a private individual good and the reduction of government funding for the sector, has been the replacement of student grants with loans. This has been coupled with a massive hike in student fees – or what is euphemistically called 'cost-sharing' by ministers and World Bank experts. There are several bizarre paradoxes in this way of financing higher education. First, as McGettigan (2013) shows, government funding of student loans to pay fees is likely to cost the taxpayer more than the previous system of funding universities directly for their teaching. Second, as Vernon (2010) points out, most students and their families can only afford to pay for the costs of their higher education through the kinds of debt-financing that governments across the world now condemn as reckless and inappropriate for themselves. Third, whereas the scale of national debt in many countries has become so severe that it has required emergency austerity measures to combat, the level of household debt is even more perilously high, peaking to 110 percent of GDP in 2009 in the U.K. (Jones 2013). This was before the government transferred even more of the costs of higher education to families and tripled university fees. These policies are justified on the grounds that degree-holders gain a lifetime premium in earning: hence the catchphrase 'learn to earn'. In New Zealand, however, which has the seventh-highest university fees among developed countries, the OECD survey found that the value of a university degree in terms of earning power is the lowest in the world. The net value of a New Zealand tertiary education for a man is just $63,000 over his working life (compared with $395,000 in the U.S.). For a woman, it is even lower: $38,000 over her working life (Edmunds 2012). As Brown and Hesketh (2004) also show for the U.S., graduates' imagined future incomes are largely illusory. Yet students and parents are encouraged to take out what is effectively a 'subprime loan', in the gamble that it will eventually pay off by enhancing their future job prospects and earning power: it is a 'hedge against their future security' (Vernon 2008). In other words, higher education is now being modelled on the same types of financial speculation that produced the 2010 global financial crisis.

The Death of the Public University?

Do the seven trends outlined above spell the end of the public university? From the earliest beginnings of these developments, there has been an extensive literature foretelling the demise of the university. According to historians Sheldon Rothblatt and Bjorn Wittrock (1993: 1), the university is the second-longest unbroken institution in Western civilization, after the Catholic Church. Today, however, the university – or what John Henry Newman termed the 'idea of a university' – does indeed look broken. Or is this an unduly pessimistic conclusion? Jean-Francoise Lyotard set the agenda with his provocative book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Noting the collapse of the university's traditional authority in producing legitimate knowledge, he wrote:

> The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no long 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?' In the context of the mercantilization of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to: 'Is it saleable?' And in the context of power-growth: 'Is it efficient?' (Lyotard 1994: 51).

Following this line of reasoning, Bill Readings' book *The University in Ruins* (1996), noted both the decline of the university as the cultural arm of nation building and the administrators' eclipse of the scholar-teacher as the central figure in the university story. As he gloomily argued, the grand narrative of the university 'centred on the production of a liberal reasoning subject is no longer readily available to us (1996: 9). If, for Readings, the university was in a state of 'ruin', for David Mills, writing in 2003, it is locked in a state of permanent 'scaffolding'; an ongoing and ambiguous project of both maintenance and repair, construction and demolition. Thus 'crumbling bastions of social and intellectual elitism' are combined 'with shiny new campuses espousing lifelong access to 24/7 education for all' (Mills 2003). These contradictory trends have both positive and negative dimensions for universities and the project of higher education. On the one hand, access to universities has been massively increased and technological innovations, including Mass Open Online Courses (MOOCs), have allowed more distance learning. But on the other hand, universities and their staff have been subjected to an almost continuous process of reforms and restructurings designed both to recast higher education institutions as

transnational business corporations and to open up the sector to more private-sector involvement.

The complaint often voiced by academics is that universities – like hospitals, libraries and other local community services – are undergoing a process of 'death by a thousand cuts'. But chronic underfunding of public institutions also reflects a wider and arguably more purposeful political agenda that aims to fundamentally transform the public sector. One of the greatest threats to the university today lies in the 'unbundling' of its various research, teaching and degree-awarding functions into separate, profit-making activities that can then be outsourced and privatized. This agenda is articulated clearly in the recent report entitled 'An Avalanche is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead' (Barber et al. 2013), published by the London-based think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research. Its principal authors are Sir Michael Barber, Chief Education Advisor for Pearson PLC (a British-owned multinational education provider and publisher) and two of Pearson's executive directors. The report's central argument, captured in its 'avalanche' metaphor, is that the current system of higher education is untenable and will be swept away unless bold and radical steps are taken:

> The next 50 years could see a golden age for higher education, but only if all the players in the system, from students to governments, seize the initiative and act ambitiously. If not, an avalanche of change will sweep the system away. Deep, radical and urgent transformation is required in higher education. The biggest risk is that as a result of complacency, caution or anxiety the pace of change is too slow and the nature of change is too incremental. The models of higher education that marched triumphantly across the globe in the second half of the 20th century are broken (Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi 2013: 5).

A series of forces that lie 'under the surface' threatens to transform the landscape of higher education. These include: a changing world economy in which the centre of gravity is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific region; a global economy still struggling to recover from the trauma of the global financial crash of 2007–2008; and the escalating costs of higher education, which are vastly outstripping inflation and household income. These are coupled with the declining value of a degree and a technological shift that makes information ubiquitous. Universities no longer hold a monopoly over knowledge production and distribution and face growing competition from the emergence of new universities and from 'entirely new models of university' that Pearson itself has

been spearheading to exploit the new environment of globalization and the digital revolution (ibid. 2013: 9–21).

The Barber report is part of a growing literature which seeks to 'remake the university' as an altogether different kind of institution (see Bokor 2012). Epochal and prophetic in tone and often claiming to be diagnostic and neutral, this literature proposes solutions that are anything but impartial or disinterested. Pearson, for example, makes no secret of its ambition to acquire a larger share of the higher education market and the rents that can be captured from its various activities. In 2015, Pearson sold off its major publishing interests to restructure the company around for-profit educational provision both in England and worldwide. Pearson also has a primary listing on the London Stock Exchange and a secondary listing on the New York Stock Exchange. Writing in the preface to the Barber reports, former president of Harvard University Lawrence Summers underscores its central ambition when he writes that in this new 'phase of competitive intensity', all of the university's core functions can be 'unbundled and increasingly supplied, perhaps better, by providers that are not universities at all' (Barber 2013: 1). As John Morgan (this volume) shows, higher education has long been – and continues to be – a site of ideological struggle between competing interests and their vision of society.

Towards the Privatization of English Universities

In England, these processes have been taken to an extreme. Events since the Conservative–Liberal coalition took office in 2010 suggest a tipping point may have been reached in the transformation of the public university. Research by the legal firm Eversheds (2009) revealed that no legislation was needed for public universities to be transferred to the private for-profit sector, either by a management buyout or by outside interests buying-in (Wright 2015). London Metropolitan University was an early contender. It advertised a tender worth £74 million over five years for a partner who would create a for-profit 'special services vehicle' to deliver all the university's functions and services – everything except academic teaching and the Vice Chancellor's powers. Such 'special services vehicles' are a way for private investors to buy into the university's activities. This plan was only stymied because civil servants found major administrative failings, and the resulting fines and repayments pushed the university close to bankruptcy. But this 'special services vehicle' model

has been implemented by other universities, including Falmouth and Exeter, where a private company runs not only catering, estate maintenance and services on the two campuses, but also its entire academic support services (libraries, IT, academic skills and disability support services) (University and College Union 2013).

London Metropolitan's near-bankruptcy opened the possibility of a second method of privatization; a 'fire sale' of a university and its prized degree-awarding powers, to one of the many U.S. for profit education providers that had been seeking entry into the market (Wright 2015). Privatization was only avoided thanks to the successful actions of its new Vice Chancellor. However, one university with a charter and degree-awarding powers has been transferred to the for-profit sector. In 2006, the Department of Business, Innovation and Science rushed through approval to give the College of Law in London degree-awarding powers and university status. This was just in time for its sale to finance company Montagu Private Equity. To maintain that university's charitable (tax-favourable) status and provide bursaries for students, the institution divided itself into a for-profit company with all the education and training activities, and an educational foundation. Montagu Private Equity made a leveraged buyout of the university: £177 million of the £200 million purchase price was borrowed and then put on the university's balance sheet, making it responsible for paying the debt and interest from its cash flow. A few years later, Montagu announced it was selling the university's buildings, in what was a clear case of asset stripping. The legal firm Eversheds recommended that other public universities follow this model and either sell stakes in their institution or be sold outright to financiers. As the University of Law example shows, such investors' prime interest is the short-term extraction of profit and liquidization of assets, rather the long-term future of higher education. Indeed, in June 2015, Montagu sold the University of Law to Aaron Etingen, founder and chief executive officer of Global University Systems (GUS), which owns a network of for-profit colleges worldwide (Morgan 2015).

The Etingen family is in the forefront of a third model for privatizing English higher education. This relies on access to the state-funded loans for student tuition fees. From 2010, private colleges were authorized to provide two-year, subdegree level courses, which made their students eligible to access student loans up to £6,000 per annum. The number of such courses rose from 157 in 2009–2010 to 403 in 2011–2012 and the cost of loans for students at private colleges rose from £30 million in 2010 to £1 billion in 2014. The Etingen family's Global University

Systems owns two such colleges. St Patrick's International College was too small in 2011–2012 to register for student loans. However, a year later it had 4,000 students delivering an income of £11 million in publicly funded loans. Its other college, the London School of Business and Finance (LSBF) had 1,354 students on publicly backed loans. To get international students LSBF made a financial arrangement with Glyndwr University in Wales (which had acquired university status in 2008, and three other English universities. Glyndwr sponsored its students' immigration visas and the LSBF provided the teaching and collected tuition fees. However, a Home Office investigation of visa fraud found 230 students sponsored by Glyndwr had invalid results, resulting in the suspension of the English-language testing company it had used. Tax records revealed that 290 foreign students at LSBF had been working instead of studying. It also found that 57 private colleges and several universities that had set up branch offices in London were misusing their licenses to sponsor students. An ensuing fraud investigation resulted in 63 colleges subsequently losing their designation and thus their students' access to loans. Government then gave Pearson the task of finding new institutions for the students affected by the de-designation of their courses – even though it was Pearson that had validated one quarter of these subdegree courses in the first place (Morgan 2014a and b).

Another key player is the private equity fund Sovereign Capital, whose cofounder John Nash (a former chairman of the British Venture Capital Association and cofounder of a charity sponsoring the development of privatized academies), advised the government on public sector reform. In 2013, he was appointed Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for Schools and elevated to a peerage as Baron Nash in the House of Lords. Sovereign Capital bought Greenwich School of Management in 2011, expanding its operation from 496 students to 3,366 students in 2012–2013, and growing its income from government-backed student loans to £11 million. The main qualifications for students at these two-year colleges were the Edexcel exam board – which is owned by Pearson. Building on income from these exam fees, Pearson set up its own college and then added a third year, which was recognized for degrees by Royal Holloway, London University. Without passing any legislation, public higher education in England is thus being stealthily privatized – either through taxpayer-funded risk-free capitalism or by asset stripping – as global capital seeks out new sources of revenue and investment (Wright 2015).

Challenges to Privatization

The explosive growth of private universities in the United States is based on a similar model of the private capture of publicly funded student loans. According to recent Federal figures, for-profit colleges enrolled only 12 percent of the country's students, but they accounted for almost half of all student loan defaults in 2013 (Gillespie 2015). The University of Phoenix has arguably the most rapacious and notorious business model. Owned by the Apollo Education Group, Phoenix was the United States' largest for-profit university. Its business model involved strenuous selling to socially disadvantaged and underqualified people eager to gain a degree to improve their life chances. A scathing 2004 U.S. Department of Education investigation castigated its 'high pressure sales culture' that rewarded recruiters who 'put most arses in classes' (Hotson 2011). Despite such criticism, Phoenix continued these practices. Having paid their fees and started classes, many students were unable to cope and dropped out, thereby acquiring a lifelong student debt rather than a qualification. Between 2008 and 2010, for example, 60.5 percent of Phoenix's students dropped out and, in 2008, 20.8 percent had defaulted on their loans (United States Senate Committee 2012: 285). To keep wages down, an astonishing 96 percent of faculty were part-time (ibid: 290) and their contracts were not confirmed until the dropout period was over. A course at Phoenix cost $24,500 compared to $4,087 for an equivalent course at a community college (U.S. Senate 2012: 281). In 2009, Phoenix spent only $892 on each student', whereas $2,225 went on marketing and recruitment and $2,535 profit was made (ibid: 289); this allowed $8.6 million remuneration for founder and chairman John Sperling – a sum thirteen times greater than the salary of the president of the University of Arizona (2012: 279).

Phoenix has been a focus of continuous criticism. For example, a U.S. federal jury in 2008 found Apollo guilty of 'knowingly and recklessly' misleading investors and instructed the group to pay shareholders $280 in reparations (Hotson 2011). A U.S. accreditation body later put the university on probation because the Apollo Group had given Phoenix insufficient autonomy to 'assure the university's integrity', 'exercise its fiduciary responsibilities' and 'fulfil its mission' (*Times Higher Education* 2013). The damning conclusion of the U.S. Senate report was that 'Apollo had prioritized financial success over student success' (2012: 292).

By 2015, with private providers unable to shake off such criticisms, President Obama announced an initiative to make community

colleges, their main competitor, free of charge for the first two years (Executive Office of the President 2015; Smith 2015). Even before the America's College Promise Act was passed, eleven states had proposed similar legislative initiatives, thus torpedoing the business model of the for-profit providers. Phoenix's recruitment swiftly fell from 460,000 students in 2010 to 213,000 by 2015, and Apollo Education Group's revenues fell from $5 billion in 2010 to around $2.7 billion (Gillespie 2015). The path towards privatization, it seems, is not without bumps and upheavals.

The move to privatize higher education is not universal either. In Europe, Norway has enshrined free higher education in law. In Germany, after the Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 2005 that moderate fees were permissible, seven of Germany's ten federal states (*Länder)* introduced tuition fees in 2006–2007. Yet within one electoral cycle, this seemingly inevitable and inexorable change has been overturned – largely as a result of student demonstrations supported by voters' ensuring that those politicians who favoured the policy lost office. Now the *Länder* have passed legislation banning tuition fees (Hotson 2014).

In Chile, once 'the canary in the privatisation coalmine' (González 2013), a process is now underway to bring higher education back under public control. During the 1980s and 1990s, Chile's military government introduced the by-now familiar neoliberal formula of opening the sector to private, for-profit providers, differentiating and ranking institutions, and transferring the cost of state-financed institutions to students (Brunner 1993). In 2011, students took to the streets to demonstrate against increasing tuition fees and high interest rates on loans as well as the highly segmented and underfunded system that the free market had produced. Students and school children sustained their protests for over a year. As a result, thorough reforms of the whole education system from universities to preschools became one of the key promises of a new government, which vowed a 'paradigm shift' to overturn the Chicago-inspired neoliberal reforms. Two of the student leaders were elected as members of parliament and one of them helped lead the parliamentary committee charged with devising Chile's new system of public education, while dissatisfied students, taking to the streets, have continued to keep up the pressure for free quality education (Mackenzie 2014).

These developments – and the increasing level of dissatisfaction with neoliberal 'solutions' to the financial challenges facing universities – suggest that 'reports of the university's death have been greatly

exaggerated'. However, if the public university has proved resilient to the more extreme predations of global capitalism (at least in some countries), it also appears increasingly vulnerable. For some authors, the 'death of the university' is a misleading aphorism, as the public university cannot be allowed to die; rather, it must continue to operate in order to keep generating income for its new stakeholders and owners. Dislocated, dismembered and progressively unbundled, the public university today exists in a state of chronic fragility, servitude and uncertainty that has left it if not 'dead', then permanently moribund and drained of autonomy and agency. This argument has been extensively developed in Andrew Whelan, Ruth Walker and Christopher Moore's (2013) recent book, *Zombies in the Academy: Living Death in Higher Education*. In what is a humorous yet also serious study, the authors use 'zombification' (or 'zombiedom') as a powerful metaphor for thinking about the changing conditions of university life. In the corporatized university environment shaped by narrowly defined metrics, instrumental research, and mind-numbing standardization, the language of zombie culture seems particularly appropriate: the universities have been overrun by a plague of managerialism and a virulent and seemingly unstoppable strain of 'administrivia' (Blackmore this volume). Academics operate under a kind of siege mentality that echoes the 'fall-behind-and-get-eaten' trope of the classical zombie movie.

Rethinking University Futures: Alternatives Models

Despite the many critiques of the demise of the public university and its privatization, there have been relatively few attempts to posit serious alternatives to the current neoliberal policy agenda and its seemingly inevitable trajectory (but see Robertson this volume). In countries where neoliberal rhetorics about choice and affordability have become doxic, even many students and parents have come to accept student loans and lifelong debt as an unavoidable fact of life. However, as McGettigan (2013) shows, the direction of English university reform represents a dangerous gamble with the national economy, a valued institution and, more importantly, the hopes and futures of younger generations. Yet this need not be the case. Gray (this volume) offers an alternative vision for organizing higher education based on benchmarks of equality, democracy and sustainability. There are numerous alternative ways to conceptualize and organize the university, from cooperatives, trusts and mutuals, to free universities and MOOCs. While some of these draw inspiration from Gibson-Graham's (2006)

vision of a 'post-capitalist' future, not all of these alternatives require radical change to existing institutions.

One of the oldest cooperative universities is Mondragon in northern Spain, which started in 1997. While Mondragon arose from a highly particular regional cooperative movement, it nevertheless highlights some of the general features of what distinguishes a cooperative university (Wright, Greenwood and Boden 2011). These include: a flat rather than hierarchical structure in which each faculty is a cooperative nested within a wider university cooperative, with a small central administration of only six full-time employees; each employee is also a partner, who invests some of their income in the institution. Every employee is part of decision-making each year on how to distribute any surplus or deficit: should they increase their salaries or invest in new programmes to develop the university, and so on? This creates a very different engagement with the institution from that of the top-down, steered self-management of the 'responsibilized' neoliberal subject. In Britain, a network of academics is formulating ideas for a cooperative university drawing on that country's long-standing cooperative movement. At Lincoln University, the Social Science Centre is developing a model for a cooperative university, including a pedagogical framework, business plan, constitutional rules and a model for creating a federation of cooperative universities (Neary and Wynn 2015). The Manchester-based Cooperative College's commissioned report on 'Realising the Cooperative University' concluded that existing universities could be made into cooperatives without major changes to existing rules, although a wide 'cultural gulf' needs to be crossed for that to happen (Cook 2013). Even the U.K. Cabinet Office is now exploring how public sector employees can turn their activities into spin-offs organized as mutuals. However, its £10 million fund seems more designed to further unbundle and privatize public institutions along the lines criticized above, while appropriating the positive cache surrounding the term 'mutual'.

The trust university model, in this respect, is perhaps more robust than the cooperative model as cooperatives can easily be 'de-mutualized' – as witnessed in the realization of U.K. building societies' assets and their conversion into banks during the 1990s. This model is inspired by the U.K.'s highly successful commercial retail business, the John Lewis Partnership, with over 87,000 employees. 'Trust' has three meanings. First, a nonrevocable trust is a legal form of ownership which makes the assets inalienable (so it cannot be privatized, asset stripped or de-mutualized). Second, trust between management

and workers is fostered through a clearly defined purpose and shared structures of governance. In the case of John Lewis, the goals of the organization do not mention making a profit; rather, the ultimate purpose is 'the happiness of all its members through their worthwhile and satisfying employment in a successful business' (John Lewis Partnership 2015). All employees are beneficiaries ('partners') of the trust and, via a substantial and formalized system of representative democracy, the employees are directly responsible for the success of the institution. Restraints on pay differentials between the highest- and lowest-paid employees prevent managers from rewarding themselves excessive salaries and appropriating the wealth of the organization. Unlike privatized businesses, trusts and cooperatives do not squander their organization's surpluses in the form of executive bonuses or shareholder dividends. Third, trust entails a different kind of social contract with the surrounding society, one that recognizes the public service role and responsibilities of academics (Boden, Ciancanelli and Wright 2012). Tremewan (this volume) provides an example of how universities could be much more proactive in fulfilling their social responsibilities by using their research to address points of conflict and build trust between countries.

Another alternative to the corporate business model are 'free universities'. These universities have sprung up at different times and places – including the University of California, Berkeley in the 1960s and more recently in Europe, Australia and North America – both in opposition to conventional institutions and forms of education and with an impetus to experiment with radical new modes of learning. Notable examples include the 'Really Open University' (Sturm and Turner, this volume), and the Ragged Universities in Glasgow and Manchester, which define themselves as being not about certificates, CVs or making money but about 'valuing knowledgeable people, exploring what is possible and creating something' using free knowledge exchange. Their venues include pubs, cafes, museums, libraries and other public spaces. Similarly, the 'IF Project' in London treats the capital as a 'giant lecture hall', collating free resources and events, and adding the best online lectures from internationally acclaimed academics. It targets nongraduates from eighteen to thirty, enlisting academics to contribute 'shards' of their time to lecturing, tutoring or mentoring its humanities foundation course. In some respects, this resembles the University of the Third Age (U3A), but free universities usually have a more political agenda and experiment with pedagogies that seek to 'prefigure' the creation of a better (post-capitalist) world (Thompsett, forthcoming).

At present, these alternative higher education projects that attempt to make education free and open for everyone are small, disparate and precariously funded. While they exist outside of the university and have freed themselves from the blight of entrepreneurialism, managerialism and administrative bloat, they are often dependent on input from salaried academics. They are also no substitute for a properly funded public university system. However, they do illustrate some of the advantages of an education system freed from commercial imperatives: they inspire enthusiasm, are run collaboratively, are able to engage in creative, participatory teaching and learning, and are unencumbered by concerns about performance indicators and profit. In this respect, they highlight a fourth possible meaning of the word 'trust': a commitment to, and confidence in, higher education as a vehicle for creating a better future for all. As our examples illustrate, the for-profit and overmanaged corporatized public universities are typically 'low-trust' organizations characterized by a corrosive pessimism and exhausted progressive impulses. Perhaps all four meanings of the term 'trust' are needed to revive the public university: it may not be dead, but it cannot be allowed to continue in its zombified state.

Conclusion

In identifying current trends and challenges facing the public university, this introduction has already made reference to the chapters in the four sections that follow. The first section explores how the mission of the public university has been redefined in Europe and Australasia. Starting with a historical account and then focusing on contemporary developments, this section shows how the very meaning and boundaries of the public university are in the process of change. The second section analyses how the policy priorities for public universities generate new subject positions for academics and students, and four ethnographic studies show how these offer some people new opportunities and benefits for research and teaching while, for others, these changes are deeply contested. The third section explores the tasks of managing the competitive, entrepreneurial, efficient and flexible public university as an ever-increasing multitude of 'risks' become measurable and costed. University managers are faced with navigating their institutions' reputation, rankings and research performance and ensuring ethics procedures protect against any possible legal challenge. This section explores how these management instruments have developed in different countries, and how academics have engaged with these

changes to their work and sense of professionalism. The final section brings together a growing number of initiatives to revive the public university, not by harking back to a golden-age-that-never-was, but by looking forwards to alternative visions for the role, organization and core research, teaching and public service activities of the university. As the concluding chapter argues, the challenge is to imagine and create alternative futures for universities whose purposes and outcomes are geared towards more societal rather than economic ends. Together, these chapters engage with global trends and discourses about university reform. They develop new ways of combining large-scale analysis of the political economy of universities in different regions with detailed local and ethnographic insights into the way that managers, academics and students engage with and contest these processes of change. These ethnographies show how academics and students not only have occasional success in resisting measures that they consider herald the death of the public university, but are also developing their own visions for what the public university of the future might look like.

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Notes

1. The project, called URGE (University Reform, Globalization and Regionalization) was funded by the EU FP7 Marie Curie IRSES action, project number 247565, 2010–2014. The records of the URGE project and the URGE working papers are available at http://edu.au.dk/forskning/projekter/afsluttede-projekter/urge/
2. A notable countermeasure is the EU's 'U-Multirank' system which was specifically designed not to produce an overall ranking: instead, students choose their own criteria for finding the university that best meets their expectations.

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