European Universities: Critical Futures

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Purpose and problem statement

Danish minister of higher education and science, Søren Pind, announced in March 2018 that the looming Brexit had sent Denmark looking for new allies in negotiating the forthcoming European research programme. The United Kingdom was a traditional ally of Denmark with its emphasis on 'excellence' rather than European integration as the main driver for European research investment. Like other European countries, Denmark is trying to maintain its strategic interests in a disrupted European higher education landscape. At the same time, the global context for which the 'Europe of Knowledge' was designed is rapidly shifting, with doubts about the much-heralded global knowledge economy, the rise of China and decline of USA as university powers.

The project's focal question is: **What are the future roles of universities in creating social and regional integration in Europe, in a shifting global context?** To address this, a network of senior and early stage researchers will include members of 17 higher education research centres in Denmark and across Europe. They will share existing knowledge, develop new research and hold PhD training events to rethink the role of European universities in a situation of political, social and geopolitical upheaval. The objectives are to reshape the research agenda on European university research and generate ideas for engaging with national and European policy makers on future higher education and research strategies.

The network will investigate the university as a 'critical' institution in two senses. First, universities' unique responsibility to act as 'critic and conscience of society' depends on fostering academics' and graduates' capacity to 'sustain open and critical thought', relentlessly scrutinize society and explore alternative ways of thinking and organizing (Deem and Eggins 2017: 3). Second, universities are critical for European development, in terms of social and political integration, and in providing an institutional framework through which Europe acts in the world. In order to create new scientific concepts and methods for understanding and developing universities' social, political and strategic roles, in the midst of radically transforming European and global contexts, the network explores its focal question in three sub-themes:

1. The roles of universities in social and political integration.
2. The roles of universities in European integration.
3. European universities in a shifting global context.

Theoretical foundation

Heralded as 'Europe's gift to the world' (ibid), universities centred on autonomous knowledge production have been critical to the formation of cohesive national cultures and the development of

the European project of 'ever-closer union'. However, the assumptions and strategies underpinning universities are challenged by the disruption to agendas for social and regional integration and geopolitical order. New concepts and more nuanced analyses are needed to take account of the 'shattered ontology' of present day universities and higher education policy and to formulate alternatives. The network will do this by bringing together research and scholarship to rethink each of the above issues, their bodies of literature, concepts, and associated policies.

1. Roles of universities in social and political integration (social mobility, refugees, democracy)
The EU's Lisbon strategy made universities central to the 'Europe of Knowledge' and the volume of higher education and research activities expanded whilst universities were 'modernised' into more coherent or corporatised organisations more instrumentally responsive to industry's needs and more easily accountable to political aims (Wright and Oerberg 2015; Slaughter and Leslie 1999, Bok 2003; cf. Clark 1998). Research suggests that this responsiveness, especially where output-oriented steering mechanisms are tied to political aims and market performance, has limited universities' broader societal engagement and critical public purpose (Shore and Wright 2015, 2017; Wright 2017; Naidoo 2015, Marginson 2018). In 2017, when the Central European University was attacked for being outside Hungarian government control, and when the refugee crisis and votes for populist and xenophobic parties send alarm bells ringing, universities were called upon to develop a renewed social contract devoted to creating a citizenry of critical thinkers and fostering integrated and democratic societies through inclusiveness and social mobility (UNESCO 2015:17; Wende 2017). These social purposes have not disappeared, but haveh to varying degrees been removed from universities' core strategic aims. Research suggests that re-establishing universities' wider public orientations may not be easy with the current leadership and management structure (Levin & Greenwood 2016). One of the network's workshops and PhD training events will draw together existing research and formulate new projects to reconceptualise universities' public purpose and deepen their societal engagement.

2 Roles of universities in European integration (global knowledge economy, ERA, EHEA).
The UK's Brexit vote has disrupted the ideas and mechanisms for universities to foster European integration. The EU's Lisbon strategy (working though ERA, EHEA and the Bologna Process) made universities central to the creation of a 'Europe of Knowledge' capable of competing with other world regions in a supposedly fast-approaching global knowledge economy. But this economy is increasingly questioned and the globalisation it fostered is seen as divisive rather than bringing benefits to everyone. European countries are now considering 'differential' integration. No longer are all adopting the same measures; Denmark, for example, openly talks about strong integration into the European research framework while limiting inward mobility of European students. A second workshop and PhD course will question whether the organisation of higher education in

Europe is experiencing a major paradigm shift towards 'differential integration' accompanied by continual negotiations over the overall project and each nation's involvement in it. How does Europe's shift from a coherent actor in a global knowledge economy into a disintegrating or only partially integrating landscape shape universities' strategies and outlooks?

3. *European universities in a shifting global context*

The third theme explores how these internal challenges to the role of universities in European integration are taking place in a shifting global context. Notably, neo-protectionists in the USA and China's increasing global ambitions embed universities in a complicated dynamic of global science diplomacy rather than an open market place for knowledge. Flows of internationally mobile students are already reflecting these geopolitical shifts, with a decline of 907,251 international students in the U.S. and 428,724 in the UK, of whom 32% and 20% respectively were Chinese (UNESCO 2017). Europe looks to China for talent to meet its high skills shortage and a growing range of cooperation agreements between European and Chinese universities have been integrated into the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD). The theme will explore how Europe positions itself in a world characterised by competing global strategies, including China's New Silk Road, One Belt One Road and other South-South linkages, rather than an ever-expanding global market modelled on European and North American systems. What roles are European universities to play in negotiating global flows of knowledge and people, influencing new paradigms for global standardisation and coordination of higher education and research, or building cohesive global futures?

Approach

New work on the three focal themes of the network is emerging piecemeal across Europe and needs consolidation into a collective research agenda. The network will involve both established and early stage researchers and benefit from working intensively together in innovative workshop formats to translate research results into activity. The project will bring together Danish and European research in anthropology, education, philosophy, history of ideas, policy analysis, policy

and organisation studies, statistical analysis, law, and political science. Occasionally, the network may produce its own material through the coordination of parallel studies across the participants. A 2017 survey of consequences of Brexit for European universities initiated by network member CGHE with CHEF as a central contributor, will serve as inspiration (Courtois 2018).

Event and Work Plan

A kick-off conference will involve all members in sharing existing knowledge across the three themes and refining the research agenda and plans for network activities. The network's three research themes will be organised as three work packages (WP), each with joint (senior and early stage) WP leaders who are also members of the management group. In coordination with the PI, each WP will plan a three-day event that combines a workshop, open to all participants in the network, with a PhD course. A final conference will bring together the work of the three WPs for discussion amongst researchers and policy makers. The full management group will meet each semester to plan activities, meetings, publications, policy briefings etc for the year ahead.

Throughout the project, the work based in the five events will be expanded by building a virtual community around the network. Topics for further exploration by specialist working groups will be explored through online conferences and meetings. Building on existing communication channels and resources at the participating centres and led by CHEF at AU, the network's activities will be continuously promoted along with relevant ongoing research at the participating centres.

Revised Work Plan
The Corona pandemic led to revisions to the workplan:

2019	2020	2021	2020
Jan Project starts	All year - Working group meetings	All year - Working group meetings	Publications
Mar Kick-off conference	Dec WP2 Workshop/PhD course	June WP3 Workshop/PhD course	Working groups follow up dialogue with policy makers arising from final conference
Aug WP1Workshop/PhD course		Dec Final conference	Dec Project ends
Working groups formed and organizing their own meetings			

Practical framework for the implementation of the project

The network will be managed by Susan Wright (Director of CHEF) and the network's steering group includes Dr Amélia Veiga, CIIE and CIPES, Porto University, Dr Tim

Seidenschnur, INCHER, Kassel University, Dr Krystian Szadkowski, University of Poznan, Professor Emerita Ellen Hazelkorn, Technological University Dublin, Dr Andrew Gibson, Trinity College Dublin, and Dr Jie Gao, DPU Aarhus University. This management group includes early career researchers as well as providing a strong basis for the network's expansion across European higher education research and in national and regional policy making circuits. Seventeen European higher education research centres have already agreed to join the network.

Publication, dissemination and impact

If the ground is shaking under the European project for universities, this network responds to the scholarly and policy challenge through research collaboration. It will uniquely network a diversity of research centres across Europe to develop a new research agenda and larger (EU) research applications on the critical roles of universities in a changing world. Proposing an EU-COST network will be given serious consideration. Through its workshops and PhD-training events, a network among early career researchers will be created to develop their own agendas and research leadership capacities and give them access to the foremost researchers and research environments in their field.

The network will foster academic publications throughout its project period. Working papers will be co-published in the CHEF series and those of several other research centres. Network members have editorial responsibilities in leading higher education research journals and book series and this capacity will be utilized to promote individual and co-authored publications. At least four collectively authored scholarly commentaries based on each of the workshops and one edited book bringing together work from across the network will be published.

The network also intends to turn its critical studies into action. The strong links among the network's members to national ministries, rectors' associations, the European Universities Association and international agencies (OECD, UNESCO, EU, Council of Europe) will facilitate impactful exchanges between network activities, public debates and policy circuits. Each meeting will produce a policy brief to solidify these exchanges. The final conference will bring together researchers and policy makers from across Europe to discuss and consolidate the network's scholarly work and highlight its practical implications. The high level of academic dissemination, policy engagement and online communication will lead to strong awareness of the network in targeted audiences and position Danish research at the leading edge in European research on universities.

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