

HIGHER EDUCATION IN 2040

A Global Approach

The logo for the publisher AUP, consisting of the letters 'A', 'U', and 'P' stacked vertically in a bold, sans-serif font. To the left of the text is a black rectangular shape with a white, sawtooth-like edge.

A
U
P

Bert van der Zwaan

Higher Education in 2040

Higher Education in 2040

A Global Approach

Bert van der Zwaan

AUP

The publication of this book is made possible by a grant from Utrecht University.

Also published in Dutch: Bert van der Zwaan, *Haalt de universiteit 2040? Een Europees perspecties op wereldwijde kansen en bedreigingen*
(ISBN 978 94 6298 415 8)

Translation: Vivien Collingwood

Photo back cover: Arnaud Mooij

Cover design: Wat ontwerpers

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 450 9

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 516 3 (pdf)

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 517 0 (ePub)

NUR 740



Creative Commons License CC BY NC ND

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0>)

© G.J. van der Zwaan, 2017

Some rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, any part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise).

Preface

The university is one of the oldest institutions in the world. After eight hundred years, it is still going strong where many other institutions have foundered. The university even appears to be flourishing: in the Netherlands for instance, as elsewhere, student numbers continue to rise, the research enjoys a good reputation and Dutch universities' results are impressive – certainly if one takes the size of the country into consideration.

Nevertheless, these are turbulent times. There is criticism from all sides: criticism of the mass nature of education, the focus on efficiency and research output, the lack of collaboration with industry, and the relatively meagre attention that universities are said to pay to societal problems. And that is just criticism from the outside world. Within the university community, the voices of lecturers and students can also be heard. They are often critical of administrators, 'who have transformed the university into a factory'.

As well as criticisms of the current situation, there are also challenges for the future. Information technology is leading to rapid changes in teaching and research. Across the world, it seems that university teaching is gradually being privatized and governments are no longer automatically funding research. The labour market is set to change fundamentally, and with this, education for students. What is more, the world faces major problems when it comes to distributing dwindling supplies of food, energy, water and raw materials across a growing global population. This, too, means that the university faces new questions and, no doubt, new responsibilities.

How is the university tackling the existing problems and how is it preparing for the future? Where will the pressures

and opportunities lie in the coming 25 years? Or, to put it differently: how can the university best survive? In this collection of essays, I search for answers to these questions. Owing to its form, the book became a kaleidoscopic exploration rather than a systematic study. Many of the essays are based on blogs, columns and speeches that were originally written from a global perspective. The emphasis has shifted slightly in this collection, in that I make comparisons between Europe on the one hand and North America and Asia on the other. I do not consider other parts of the world, because comparing these three continents already proved complex enough. In practice, the emphasis of the essays is not on the whole of Europe, which proved impossible, but on Western Europe and England, whilst for Asia, I focus on China, Hong Kong and Singapore. When it comes to North America, I discuss a relatively large number of problems affecting the US. Here and there, I sharpen the focus a little by referring to the current debate in the Netherlands. In some respects, this differs from the discourse unfolding at the European level. It is striking here that student activism is throwing the issues the university is struggling with into much starker relief than elsewhere. I attempt to explain this difference, among other things, with reference to the specific agreements that the universities made with the Dutch government.

Although I have attempted to present a balanced discussion of all aspects of the university system, there is somewhat more of an emphasis on research universities. The various international comprehensive universities are easy to compare, whereas the other parts of the system of higher education differ greatly from one country to the next. In the Netherlands, for example, there is a clear separation between the research-intensive university on

the one hand and the ‘applied university’ or ‘polytechnic’ on the other, while in other countries these are all part of the same system. As a result, while they are all referred to as universities, there are significant differences in quality, which makes it virtually impossible to effectively compare them with one another.

This book is divided into three parts. The first is the most descriptive, the two successive ones are of a more opinion-based character. In the first part, I attempt to trace the origins of the problems with which the university is grappling. On the different continents these are admittedly different problems, but we nevertheless find surprising similarities, too. It is useful to return, time and again, to the origins of today’s problems, because analysing them often reveals solutions. The short, essay-like character of the analysis in this book brings a risk, however: it makes it easy for critics to point to lacunae or other explanations than offered here. This is a risk I am willing to take, particularly because the first part is also meant to offer an overview for the reader who lacks a ready knowledge of the developments within the university in recent decades; an overview that may prove helpful when reading later chapters. The different sections can also stand alone, however, and the essays can be read in a random order. To allow for this, the reader must forgive some repetition here and there.

The first part provides a conceptual framework – a springboard, as it were – for the two successive parts. In these, I state my opinions freely in an attempt to discover where the university is headed in future, whilst remaining aware that for each of the continents or even the individual countries discussed, one could add a lot of additional information that would transform the black-and-white sketch offered here

into a watercolour. More than nuance, however, there is a need for a broad debate: a debate in which society and the university look one another squarely in the eye to discuss the question of what would be desirable in future, not only for the university, but also for society. We are seeing far too little of this, partly because there is such mutual distrust between the universities and the policy world and politics. I therefore wanted this book to contribute to broadening and advancing the debate. That is why I opted for short and relatively accessible essays, rather than an in-depth study, which would have run the risk of being accessible only to experts.

The chosen structure of short essays allows for accessibility and freedom of thinking. As remarked earlier, I allowed some repetition here and there so that it would be easier to read the chapters on an individual basis. However, the loose structure also requires a bit more brainwork from the reader, because rather than having a single, tight line of argument, varying perspectives are presented. This is the case, for instance, for the conceptual framework that was used. In the first part in particular, there is a strong emphasis on explaining the university and its modern problems with reference to the historical context. Already in that part, however, as well as in the second and third parts, many of the developments could be explained from an economic perspective. The debate between what is known as 'historical institutionalism' on the one hand, and 'resource dependency theory' on the other, which stresses the economic framework as the motor driving the developments within the university, has the potential to create confusion. But exploring this in more depth would have been to the detriment of the relatively short and opinion-based character of the essays.

Something similar applies to the extensive literature that exists on the differences and similarities between the continental European and Anglo-Saxon universities. In order to describe all of these nuances in detail, it would have been necessary to employ an extensive system of footnotes and concepts. In this book, these have been provided only in part. I have referred to sources for further information when necessary, but this, too, is limited to an emphasis on the main outlines. This is also the case more generally: almost everywhere, I have opted for a very limited selection of sources, mainly to keep the book readable, whilst nevertheless helping the reader on their way should more information be desired.

This collection of essays is the product of the short four-month sabbatical that I enjoyed between May and August 2015. During that period, I talked with many colleagues from around the world; it is impossible to acknowledge them all separately. Many of them were fellow rectors or university administrators, but I also spoke to interested parties from government, the private sector and NGOs. I am extremely grateful for the generous way in which they were prepared to share their knowledge with me.

It was in Spain that I first summarized and organized all of the data that I had collected during my sabbatical. In Miranda de Castañar, Govert Dibbets and Yvonne Arends offered their hospitality and allowed me to work completely undisturbed. Richard de Waard, Reinout van Brakel and Marijk van der Wende helped me to find the statistical data I needed. Annemieke Hekking provided secretarial support with finding data and checking references. Kurt Deketelaere, Peter Vale and Marijk van der Wende made special contributions in the form of long discussions, but also by providing material and numerous new insights and,

last but not least, helping to organize discussions. Frank Miedema, Hans de Jonge, Esther Stiekema and Sietzke Vermeulen provided extremely helpful criticism on parts of the manuscript at an early stage; Marijk van der Wende, Kurt Deketelaere and Melanie Peters commented on the first full draft. Naturally, any errors that remain are my responsibility alone.

The sabbatical proved to be a wonderful time for my partner Wilma Wessels and myself, due to all the travelling together and the time abroad. During the whole period, we were able to do much more together than we normally can, given the busy lives that we both lead. We also talked at length about the content of this book. For both these reasons, this book is for her.

Utrecht, January 2017

Table of contents

Preface	5
Introduction: a sinking ship?	13

Part 1 Ancient problems and modern dilemmas

1. The idea of a university	19
2. A history of secularization and democratization	31
3. Grappling with change	45
4. Rising costs, selection and governments in retreat	55
5. On size, bureaucracy and distrust	67
6. The successes and failures of the entrepreneurial university	77
7. Under the spell of production and quality	91

Part 2 The key factors in the coming decades

8. The key trends	105
9. The economy determines the future	115
10. Urbanization and global knowledge hubs in 2040	125

11. Information technology as a disruptive force	135
12. Digital or campus teaching?	141
13. The labour market and lifelong learning	149
14. The civic university	157

Part 3 Contours of the university of the future

15. <i>Quid durat?</i>	167
16. The need for legitimization	175
17. Old and new core values	185
18. The government and the higher education system of the future	195
19. The global university and the knowledge ecosystem of the future	205
20. How will the comprehensive research university survive?	215
21. The curriculum of the future	227
Conclusion: the transition to 2040	239
Bibliography	247

Introduction: a sinking ship?

In this collection of essays, I start by exploring the factors that led to the modern university systems with which we are familiar around the world. These different systems are experiencing different problems – which means there will often be different solutions. This also means, though, that the solutions that work in one country will not necessarily work in another. All too often in the Netherlands, for example, attempts are made to solve problems by imitating American or English universities, even though the nature of the Dutch system might make this impossible. In the second part, I identify the major challenges that the universities are facing as a result of societal changes. These can also differ by continent, or even by country. In the third part, over a number of essays, I consider the question of how universities will respond to the pressure emanating from these changing social circumstances: new threats will emerge in the coming 25 years, but also great opportunities.

Will the university make it to 2040? Many solutions have already been proposed for the problems that the university currently faces.^{1,2} These solutions are often relatively abstract, however, and it is unclear whether they will work in the current system. The question we should be asking is: which key do we need to press in order to achieve real solutions? A further question is also relevant here: does it

1 Barnett, R., 2011: *Being a University*, Routledge, 188 pp. Wide-ranging study on the core values and objectives of the university.

2 Elkana, Y. & H. Klöpfer, 2012: *Die Universität im 21. Jahrhundert. Für eine neue Einheit von Lehre, Forschung und Gesellschaft*, Edition Körber-Stiftung. Overview of the objectives of the modern university, mainly written from a continental European perspective, including many examples from educational practice.

actually help if we press the keys – does the university itself determine what happens? – or is the university simply a product of societal processes? The first part of this collection focuses mainly on processes within the university, and is thus concerned with the keys that the university could press in order to achieve a better balance where necessary. The second part looks in more depth at the factors lying beyond the university that will have a major impact in the coming 25 years.

It is my aim, with this collection of essays, to gradually build the impression that whilst the university is by no means a sinking ship, as some have claimed, it needs to make a clear about-turn in order to survive. Almost every aspect of its existence will be transformed. Teaching will change radically, but above all, the students who follow its educational programmes will change. No longer will a degree be the ultimate objective, but made-to-measure courses that give a good grounding for a career in a fundamentally different labour market. No longer will there be research that is mostly disciplinary, but research that is carried out in the exceptionally dynamic world of big data and changing collaborations, including digital partnerships. No longer will there be a university where financing is the leading factor, but one where contributing to the world beyond forms a leitmotif for its actions. It is troubling that the debate both with and within the universities tends to be about budget cuts or the government's vision, when it should in fact be about how we should approach the major changes that are inevitably coming. As a result, the university often lacks a broadly shared set of values with which we could tackle the problems of today and tomorrow.

In contrast to all these concerns and problems is the fact that the university is actually the most hopeful community

that has ever existed, filled with young people who are looking to the future, and clever souls who are opening up new scientific horizons; a community that has shown for the last eight hundred years that it has the resilience to survive.