

## Chapter 1

# Universities must help shape the post-Covid-19 world

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### INTRODUCTION

“The world will never be the same again”. This is perhaps the least hazardous prediction one can make about the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. This crisis will surely change all societal institutions. The precise nature of that change is, at this time, unknowable.

The safe prediction that the world will change leaves open the form and direction this change will take. But it cannot and should not be left unguided, subject to the whims of those seeking to re-establish old systems of power, oppression and inequity. We contend that higher education must play a major role in helping to shape the post-Covid-19 world and must do so by reshaping higher education itself. In this chapter we highlight developments which provide a foundation for that task.

The post-Covid-19 world must be based on the values we cherish: democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as social justice, inclusion and equity. Higher education can add momentum by renewing our commitment to academic freedom, institutional autonomy and engagement by students, faculty and staff, and by re-emphasising the role of higher education institutions as societal actors for the public good.

### SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

We witnessed elements of this as the Covid-19 crisis began to unfold. Higher education institutions, particularly academic medical centres, as well as individual staff and students, in many instances responded with extraordinary dedication and resolve, providing desperately needed health care and research, helping assure the safety of their students and staff, supporting local businesses, donating medical equipment, teaching their students and engaging with their communities remotely.

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10. A first and considerably shorter version of this article was published in *University World News*, 19 April 2020; see [www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200413152542750](http://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200413152542750), accessed 29 July 2020.

Higher education's role in developing skilled and dedicated doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers and other professionals has never been more important. We have seen medical scientists rapidly repurpose their labs better to understand the virus and engineers repurpose design and production facilities to supply much-needed personal protective equipment. And we have seen almost unprecedented levels of collaboration and sharing of intelligence in a globally connected race to develop vaccines. In Europe, we have also seen efforts to make the best use of the talents and resources of refugees who could not fully document their qualifications, notably through the Council of Europe's European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and its use to enable refugees with health-related qualifications to work under the supervision of duly licensed health professionals (Council of Europe 2020). This civic spirit, this social solidarity, needs to extend beyond the Covid-19 crisis and become higher education's defining characteristic.

Echoing the Council of Europe, we contend that there are four purposes of higher education:

- ▶ preparation for sustainable employment;
- ▶ preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- ▶ personal development;
- ▶ the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base. (Council of Europe 2007: para. 5; see also Bergan 2005).

Current events, however, have led us to reconceptualise these purposes as part of a larger goal: developing and maintaining sustainable democratic communities and societies, characterised by participation, co-operation and a commitment to the public good. Specifically, this involves educating students for democratic citizenship, developing a culture of democracy (Council of Europe 2018) and creating knowledge to advance the human condition.

The need for democracy will be greater in the aftermath of the crisis. We already see attempts by some government leaders to use the crisis to gather more powers into their own hands, in some cases without time limits. We hear claims that authoritarian systems are better placed to deal with emergencies while forgetting that the tendencies of authoritarian leaders and regimes to hide inconvenient truths helped make Covid-19 a pandemic. We see concerns about rising nationalism and populism (Lichfield 2020), the risk of new forms of autarchy and challenges to international solidarity, as possible outcomes of the crisis, all of which risk casting our democracies as casualties.

## **SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY**

Higher education can and must ensure we take a different course. As participants underlined at a Global Forum that we organised through an international partnership in June 2019:

Education, including higher education, is responsible for advancing and disseminating knowledge and developing ethical and able citizens. It therefore plays an essential role in modern democratic societies. Education is key to

developing, maintaining and sustaining a culture of democracy without which democratic laws, institutions and elections cannot function in practice. (Global Forum 2019: paragraph 1)

Higher education institutions, particularly research universities, are among the pre-eminent institutions in societies throughout the world. They are sources of new ideas and discoveries, including technological advances, are hosts of cultural and artistic centres that foster creativity and are local, national and global economic engines. Most importantly, they teach the teachers and the teachers' teachers, across all subjects, thereby helping to shape the entire schooling and educational systems at all levels (Bok 1990; Harper 1905; Harkavy 2006).

Just as we see higher education as shaping the schooling and education systems, we see these systems as shaping the very nature of society itself. We recall the words of the Chilean sociologist Eugenio Tironi (2005) to the effect that, to decide what kind of education we need, we first have to decide what kind of society we want.

Higher education must engage in debates both on the future of society and on the future of education. Democratic education, particularly democratic higher education, is a prerequisite for a fair, inclusive and sustainable democratic society. The Covid-19 crisis will broaden our view of sustainability; it will make sustainability an even more urgent concern. We therefore think it essential that the ideal of the democratic civic university actively engaged with the life and problems of its community and society become the definitive model of higher education in the post-Covid-19 world. Certainly, positive steps have been taken over the past decades in this direction, but they have not been nearly sufficient and other models of higher education remain dominant.

## **EDUCATION FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD**

The neoliberal "entrepreneurial university" is a model that has gained increasing currency and power throughout the world, contributing to increasingly savage inequalities and a diminished sense of public purpose. Education for profit, not virtue; students as consumers, not producers of knowledge; academics as individual superstars, not members of a community of scholars – all of these developments reflect the commercialisation of higher education, which contributes to an overemphasis on institutional competition for wealth and status and has a devastating impact on the values and ambitions of students (Bok 2003). When institutions prioritise commercialisation, their behaviour legitimises and reinforces the pursuit of economic self-interest by students and amplifies the widespread sense that they are in college or university exclusively to gain career-related skills and credentials for their personal benefit. Student idealism and civic engagement are strongly diminished when students see their universities abandon academic values and scholarly pursuits to function as if they were competitive, profit-making corporations. Commercialism and the development of the entrepreneurial university foster an environment in which higher education is seen as a private benefit, not a public good (Benson et al. 2017).

However, returning to a more traditional model, in which the university is detached from society, does not provide an effective counter to the neoliberal university. On the contrary, its internal, disciplinary focus and emphasis on elite education works

against core democratic goals such as diversity, inclusion and equity. The quality and relevance of higher education also need to be measured by the extent to which it offers possibilities to all students in accordance with their talents and aspirations.

Our argument, simply put, is that to create a better post-Covid-19 world requires democratic civic universities dedicated to producing knowledge and educating ethical, empathetic students for just and sustainable democratic societies. It requires higher education to fulfil its four major purposes, as outlined above.

A democratic civic university would infuse democracy across all aspects of the institutions.

From a European perspective, seeing students as members of the academic community is established public policy as expressed by ministers responsible for higher education in 2001: "They [ministers] supported the idea that higher education should be considered a public good and is and will remain a public responsibility (regulations etc.), and that students are full members of the higher education community" (Bologna Process 2001).

Participatory democracy and a culture of democracy, not just democracy as defined by voting or a system of government, would be primary goals of a democratic civic university. The US educator and philosopher John Dewey defined democracy as "a way of life" (Dewey 1939/1993: 229) in which all citizens actively participate in all the communal, societal, educational and institutional decisions that significantly shape their lives (Benson, Harkavy and Puckett 2007). In line with that goal [democracy as a way of life], members of a democratic civic university would treat community members as ends in themselves rather than as means to an end.<sup>11</sup> The relationship itself and the welfare of the various partners would be the pre-eminent value, not simply developing a specified programme or completing a research project.

The democratic purpose of higher education has been increasingly recognised across the world. For example, at the previously mentioned Global Forum held in June 2019 in Strasbourg on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Future of Democracy, participants from 41 countries across Europe, North America, Latin America, Australia, Asia and the Middle East adopted a Declaration, which stated:

Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are essential to furthering the quality of learning, teaching, and research, including artistic creative practice – quality understood as observing and developing the standards of academic disciplines and also quality as the contribution of higher education to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Higher education must demonstrate openness, transparency, responsiveness and accountability as well as the will and ability to work with and contribute to the communities in which colleges and universities reside. (Global Forum 2019: paragraph 2)

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11. This approach resonates with Kant's second categorical imperative: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end" (Kant, 1785/1993: 30).

We strongly believe that working with and contributing to their local communities is essential if colleges and universities are to function as responsible democratic institutions that effectively teach their students citizenship and civic engagement through what they do in practice. We also believe, with the Global Declaration, that fulfilling their democratic purpose means that universities need to work with their local communities, demonstrating “openness, transparency, responsiveness and accountability” (ibid.).

## GLOBAL CO-OPERATION

For over 20 years, a transatlantic and now global co-operation has been working to realise the democratic purpose and promise of higher education. Given the transnational impacts of Covid-19 on higher education, communities and societies, we must strengthen that co-operation as a means to develop and sustain democratic schooling, universities, communities and societies. The co-operation involves the Council of Europe, the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy (IC), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the International Association of Universities (IAU).

The Council of Europe, established in 1949, defends human rights, democracy and the rule of law, develops continent-wide agreements to standardise member countries’ social and legal practices, and promotes awareness of a European identity across cultures based on shared values. It comprises 47 member countries, and its Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE)<sup>12</sup> includes another three countries that are also signatories to the European Cultural Convention (Council of Europe 1954). This treaty provides the framework for the Council of Europe’s work in education policy and practice.

The IC was created in 1999 to work with the Council of Europe. The purpose of the IC is to advance the contributions of institutions of higher education to democratic development on campus, in local communities and in the wider society. It is composed of the United States (represented by a Steering Committee from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Council on Education, Anchors Institutions Task Force, Association of American Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, Democracy Commitment and NASPA-Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education); Australia (represented by Engagement Australia); the United Kingdom (represented by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement); Ireland (represented by Campus Engage Ireland); South Africa (represented by Universities South Africa); and the Magna Charta Observatory based in Italy.

In spring 2018, the OAS joined the co-operation between the IC and the Council of Europe. The OAS, established in 1948, brings together all 35 independent states of the Americas to promote solidarity, collaboration and sovereignty, based on its main pillars of democracy, human rights, security and development.

In autumn 2019, the IAU joined the co-operation mentioned above. Created under the auspices of UNESCO in 1950, the IAU represents universities and other higher

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12. See [www.coe.int/en/web/education/cdppe](http://www.coe.int/en/web/education/cdppe), accessed 29 July 2020.

education institutions, organisations and affiliates across 130 countries. The IAU acts as the global voice of higher education and its organisations to UNESCO, advocating and advancing a dynamic leadership role for higher education in society. Articulating the fundamental values and principles that underpin education and the pursuit, dissemination and application of knowledge,<sup>13</sup> the Association advocates the development of higher education policies and practices that respect diverse perspectives. In addition, it promotes social responsibility and contributes to the development of a sustainable future.<sup>14</sup>

This global co-operation undertakes cross-national research projects, joint meetings and the sharing of best practices as part of its efforts to advance higher education's contribution to building democratic societies. The collaboration between IC and the Council of Europe first launched a cross-national research project on Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Responsibility. Beginning in 1999, a team of European and US researchers assessed the activities of institutions of higher education that supported democratic values and practices and that helped to disseminate those activities, and 14 European and 15 US universities completed the pilot study, whose US component was funded by the National Science Foundation (Harkavy, Hodges and Weeks forthcoming). The Council of Europe published the research findings in *The university as res publica: higher education governance, student participation and the university as a site of citizenship* (Bergan, 2004).

The co-operation has hosted six global forums, and the Council of Europe has published five monographs on the conference themes (see Huber and Harkavy 2008; Bergan and Damian 2010; Bergan, Harkavy and van't Land 2012; Bergan, Gallagher and Harkavy 2016; Bergan and Harkavy 2018; Bergan, Gallagher and Harkavy 2020). Additional partners were involved in planning the conferences, among them the European Wergeland Centre, the European Students' Union, the University of Oslo, Queen's University Belfast, the Australian Catholic University and LUMSA University (Harkavy, Hodges and Weeks forthcoming; Harkavy forthcoming).

## **FURTHERING THE DEMOCRATIC MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The next Global Forum, which will be held in 2021 or 2022 subject to the development of the Covid-19 pandemic, will focus on the democratic mission of higher education in the light of sustainable development. While not being a conference on the implications of Covid-19, of which there will presumably be many over the next few years, the Global Forum will of necessity incorporate the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as of the social justice movements – most notably Black Lives Matter, which originated in the United States but which also had repercussions in other countries.

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13. See <https://iau-aiu.net/Vision-Mission>, accessed 29 July 2020.

14. See [www.iau-aiu.net/](http://www.iau-aiu.net/), accessed 29 July 2020. The IAU maintains and develops the IAU-UNESCO World Higher Education Database, by which it reaches out to 20 000 higher education institutions around the world.

The Global Forum will seek to address questions such as:

- ▶ What values and commitments must underpin higher education and its appeal to public authorities for support?
- ▶ How does academia redesign its work in democratic collaboration with others, within and beyond its campus?
- ▶ What deeper or new relationships need to be built with the local communities of which higher education is a part, especially those most affected by the pandemic and its aftermath?
- ▶ What new institutional practices help sustain and engage the most at-risk students, while ensuring that all students are also educated to be ethical, empathetic, engaged democratic citizens?
- ▶ How can universities work together locally, nationally and globally to co-operatively respond to the complex multifaceted issues arising from the pandemic?

The 2021 Global Forum will aim to spark an intellectual and democratic movement to reimagine how democratic civic universities can co-create more just, equitable, inclusive, sustainable democratic societies with local and global partners. It will consider how higher education can best fulfil its mission to prepare students for democratic citizenship and develop a culture of democracy in them in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Global Forum will also look beyond campuses to reimagine how the higher education community and its members can work as actors of democracy in broader society. The commitment to democracy must be developed in individual members of the academic community but also in the community as a whole. Democracy cannot be developed through theoretical learning alone; it must also be practised as part of the day-to-day life of the institution. The principles of democracy remain but the way in which they are put into practice may need to be re-examined, both during and in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The higher education community has a responsibility to prevent the current Covid-19 crisis from developing into a deepening and pervasive crisis of democracy. This responsibility is also incumbent on public authorities as well as the broader civil society. While public health was for obvious reasons the immediate priority when the Covid-19 crisis emerged,<sup>15</sup> and will remain essential in its aftermath, education should be no less a societal priority in the years to come. Both public health and the public responsibility for education will be crucial to the health of our democratic societies. Uniquely, higher education needs to contribute to both.

It is therefore essential for our future that academics, students and their representatives, university administrators, government officials, public authorities and community partners work together locally, nationally and globally to create democratic civic universities dedicated to developing fair, decent, just, equitable, inclusive, sustainable democratic societies. We are committed to contributing to this development by strengthening our co-operation and sharpening our focus during the pandemic and beyond.

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15. For a timeline and updated overview of the development of the pandemic, see [www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen](http://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen), accessed 29 July 2020.

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