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Co-operative University: An Antidote to Academic Capitalism?

Jan Myers

This paper looks at the idea of the co-operative university in the UK. It considers the current higher education environment and the challenges and opportunities offered by the Higher Education and Research Act, 2017. In doing so the paper considers the university as a public good, academic capitalism and entrepreneurship as well as issues of ownership, control, participation and what questions these issues raise for realising one or more co-operative universities. It acknowledges the developments and challenges thus far, particularly on the eve of the centenary anniversary of UK's Co-operative College and considers the nature and form that might concern the future development of co-operative universities from past experience and current need.

Introduction

The idea of university education as a 'public good' has been replaced by the notion that a degree is a private personal investment in one's individual career and future income returns. This pecuniary vision has served to justify the replacement of student grants with loans, massive tuition fee increases, growing student debt, a sustained assault on the arts and humanities, a preoccupation with generating alternative income streams, and the rise of a new managerial class who see the university as a business to be run on authoritarian corporate lines (Interview with Cris Shore, ASAA/NZ, 2018).

Shore's comments, above, said in the context of the publication of the edited edition, *Death of the public university: Uncertain futures for higher education in the knowledge economy* (Wright & Shore, 2017), mirror the assertion that the "historical legacy of the university as a vital public good no longer fits into a revamped discourse of progress" (Giroux, 2011, p. 147). Moreover, Giroux contends that "memories of the university as a citadel of democratic learning have been replaced by a university eager to define itself largely in economic terms" (2011, p. 147). Even more damning is Giroux's conclusion that:

... institutions and modes of thinking that embrace public values, democratic modes of critique, and a commitment to social justice and social responsibility are ... viewed as dangerous threats to a market society that considers itself synonymous with democracy (Giroux, 2011, p. 151).

Moreover, Giroux (2011) sets the challenge that "... reclaiming higher education as a public good means ... [examining] those larger political, economic, and cultural forces that undermine all vestiges of solidarity" (p. 151). Enter 'The Co-operative University'. Or rather, if this is to be the enduring context and future of higher education, can a co-operative university flourish in this environment?

In his opening paragraphs in *Essentials of Co-operative Education*, George Jacob Holyoake (1898) asks the question, "For what does anyone want to join a co-operative society?" and the same could be asked about a co-operative university. Similarly, more recently, Barr (2006) queries whether contemporary universities — public, private, or co-operative — are too wrapped up in discipline and specialist silos, market forces, and professionalised zones of activities where the "agenda for education is set outside universities" (p. 236), to challenge the status quo. It is not the intention to rehearse here the arguments that have accompanied what many see as the increasing corporatisation of the university sector and the marketised massification of higher education (see, inter alia, Bailey and Freedman's 2011 collection of essays on 'the assault on universities'), although the continuous changes that the sector has been subjected to raises questions about the meaning and purpose of education, per se. In this respect, this paper takes as its backdrop the relationship between universities and society, it considers the changing state of 'modern' universities and the window of opportunity brought about by the

combination of events, people and resources that might give rise to increased co-operative forms of education and learning.

Just as the Thatcher government inadvertently provided the entrepreneurial opportunity to set up co-operatives, 'alternative businesses', and supported paid employment in voluntary organisations (Addy & Scott, 1988; Murray, 2018) via the Manpower Services Commission and Enterprise Allowance Scheme, albeit with 'mixed blessings' (Taylor, 2011, p. 38), the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act (see www.legislation.gov.uk) may offer a similar policy window (Kingdon, 2010, 2014) for a co-operative university. What is also of interest is what kind of 'co-operative university', for example: could it be the equivalent of the extension college offering professional development; co-operatively owned as an alternative working environment to 'mainstream' universities; a private/public enterprise offering education for co-operators; a critical pedagogic approach to collective and social learning; or a combination of one or more?

In order to explore some of these issues this article first revisits the idea of the university. This raises possible debate on education and universities as a public good and what has been seen as the increasing encroachment of 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). The paper touches on the possibilities of a return to universities as a public good through the development of co-operative practice in relation to ownership and governance, relative autonomy, and curriculum development; the idea of a co-operative university.

The Idea of the University

In the past we could speak of the university in capitalist society, hemmed in by all sorts of constraints but still a self-governing knowledge workshop, designed to enhance the public good. It could be conceived of as a 'subject' with its own agency or an 'object' manipulated by outside forces but, at its best, its internal structure was as close to a large-scale socialist co-operative as you'll find under capitalism. Today, however, we must conceive of the university as a set of social relations embedded in the wider society. More and more it is a capitalist university whose very structure mimics a capitalist corporation (Burawoy, 2018, p. 84).

Burawoy (2017) discusses the problem of viability of alternative institutions in relation to supply-driven (promotion of a better world) and demand driven motivations (a move away from existing institutions seen to limit individual freedoms). While he favours the latter in emphasising the problems of regulation and commodification, he acknowledges that the idea of university is a "battleground for competing real utopias" (p. 140). This can be partly seen in his review of the postmodern university, where Strohl (2006) revisited the debates between F. R. Leavis and C. P. Snow (1959-62) on the social role of the university in Britain. On the one hand, Strohl presents Leavis' liberal humanist approach to the value of higher education and knowledge in and of itself "to produce reflective, responsible citizens free from political, military, bureaucratic or market demands in a modern industrial society" (2006, p. 134). On the other hand, the postmodern or instrumentalist view sees the university as "service provider and knowledge producer, for the socio-economic benefit of the individual and society" (Strohl, 2006, p. 135). The first lends itself to criticism of becoming ideologically exclusive and elitist creating "preferential circuits of solidarity" (Le Doeuff cited by Barr, 2006, p. 236). The latter, Strohl (2006) argues, while trying to remedy the exclusivity of higher education and supporting opening up and opening out of education, has also opened a way to increase utilitarian higher education policy and practice; public good through scientific and technological progress. Instead of offering a remedy, Strohl (2006) suggests the fears voiced by Leavis and others in response to Snow's vision of the future may be realised through market-based policy that "masks cultural favouritism and elitism rather than erasing it ... [thus] increasing dependence of educational institutions on the vagaries and desires of capitalist industry" (p. 141).

Taking a Bourdieusian standpoint, Rowlands (2018) suggests that within the university field there are further tensions between academic capital — seen here as managerial governance — and collegial or intellectual capital. The former takes precedence in the search for value for

money which Collyer, who also looks to Bourdieu in his explication of academic capitalism, refers to as “market capitalism” (2015, p. 325). The latter, with its focus on teaching and research and those that carry out these roles as arbiters of the academic and wider goals of universities, is more akin to traditional collegial governance centred on the professor. Likewise, this is the legitimate and symbolic power described by Bourdieu (1988) based on scientific achievement, and the academic power of control of resources, which in reproducing the “professorial body” (Collyer, 2015, p. 326) contributes to a collegial governance. Further, Collyer (2015) suggests that while intellectual capital has shown some resilience in an increasing marketised and centralised environment, control over academic resources, including recruitment, has been less steadfast. In either case — ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’, there is a prevailing critique in relation to elitism, inequalities, and exclusionary actions both in relation to student accessibility and outcomes, and junior and female academics (Rowlands, 2018), highlighting structural and systemic constraints. While Bourdieu’s study focuses on the particular context of Paris in 1967 and looks at institutional and discipline hierarchy as well as professorial power, there are inferences that we might draw when considering the status differentiation of UK universities with regard to the institutional effect of neoliberalism (see for example, Boliver, 2015). In turn, there are opportunities and challenges related to in-country differences between existing institutions and for new entrants to the field.

Academic Capitalism and the ‘New’ Economy

In their initial use of the term “academic capitalism”, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) define capitalism as “an economic system in which allocation decisions are driven by market forces ... [whereby] faculty and professional staff expend their human capital stocks increasingly in competitive situations” (p. 18). Within this shift the authors recognise a move from curiosity-driven research to more targeted and commercial research, which resonates with earlier discussion of ‘two cultures’. In turn, there have been changes in employment and security for academic and professional staff within universities; increased casualisation of contracts, differentiated career tracks, and increased influence of employers and private-sector managers in university governance and agenda setting (Jessop, 2017). While the output of academic labour (usually focused on undergraduate education) has always been, to varying extents, the provision of skilled employees and contribution to regional and national economic prosperity, it is more than the sum of employment patterns and earning power of graduates of particular institutions (Collini, 2015, p. 29; Mendoza, 2012). Yet, academic capitalism can be played out differently in different disciplines as well as different institutions therefore the notion of academic capitalism can be seen as context-related and situational (Collyer, 2015). Thus, the everyday practices of those working in universities in different units and disciplines have to be considered (not all have been ‘affected’ in the same ways), and Collyer’s concern is in what ways do academics and university staff contribute to and reproduce, the structures and relations of the ‘new economy’. Equally in what ways do they subvert or resist.

If we know some of the reasons behind why academics adopt or resist market behaviours or become involved or co-opted into these new behaviours and organisational arrangements, then this could support the development of new ways of working. There are echoes of Slaughter and Leslie’s (1997) focus on the 1980s as a turning point (in the UK) with acceleration of universities towards marketisation. Moreover, they see this as marking a break in the implicit contract between universities and society with increasing funding via partnerships between the triple helix components: academia-industry-government (p. 12, 15). Here too the “economic function of the university is increasingly institutionalised” (Leydesdorff & Etzkowitz, 1996, p. 282). It is in this site — where knowledge (and its outputs) have become a “commodity bought and sold like the other implements and labours of production” (Braverman, 1998 [1974], p. 114), that “also enables examination of the tensions within the university system for control over the conditions of work [and] the production and dissemination of expert knowledge” (Collyer, 2015, p. 318).

In 2001, Slaughter and Leslie and later Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) revisited their concept of “academic capitalism” in the continued shift from largely non-profit and state funded institutions with relative autonomy from the state, to a point where work structures, processes and stakeholder expectations are increasingly shaped by the market. In England and Wales, the Westminster government made concerted efforts to make universities more efficient, effective, and economic — the three Es of new public management and neoliberal policy. This shift is encapsulated in concepts of entrepreneurial universities, students as consumers (Competition and Markets Authority, 2015), increased internationalisation, increased benchmarking alongside decreased government support, and increased tuition fees and student loans (with, some would say, a concomitant downward shift in the value of a degree) (Wright & Shore, 2017). In this “new economy” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), universities vie with each other to market their offerings and promises for their target audiences (viz. achieve great things; taking on tomorrow; making the impossible possible; shaping your future; creating; succeeding; thriving; inspiring ...). Additionally, some universities are using specific consumer classification frameworks (e.g. Acorn — www.acorn.caci.co.uk) and reaching out to potential students from POLAR regions (low density areas of entry/participation to higher education — **Participation Of Local AREas** — HEFCE, 2014). At the same time, universities are seen as instrumental in producing both knowledge (innovation) and human capital (talent) for an expanded and globalised economy (Wright, 2017).

Commenting on senior management roles within universities in this *Journal*, Boden, Ciancanelli and Wright (2012) point to the shift and increased direction of academic activity towards “competitive engagement with the so-called knowledge economy” (p. 16). Reputation (and income generation) rests on assessments of performance — in the UK these evaluations include the teaching excellence and research excellence frameworks as well as national student satisfaction surveys where “academics are constantly being told ... what ‘the university’ expects of them, as if they were somehow peripheral or subordinate to ‘the university’” (Wright & Shore, 2017, p. 8). Amsler and Shore (2017) place this expectation and “restructuring and redescribing academic work” within the frame of responsabilisation (p. 124), which they describe as a combination of individual empowerment and responsibility and institutional monitoring and control; a condition that they see replicated across different universities’ academic leadership frameworks and profiles and enacted through scientific management forms of production.

The Entrepreneurial University and the Academic Capitalist

Within the framework of academic capitalism and ‘forward looking’, entrepreneurial universities (Guerrero et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2018), sits the ‘academic entrepreneur’ (Miller et al., 2018). The job of the academic entrepreneur is to win research funding and contract research funds linked to technology commercialisation and tech/knowledge transfer activities (Miller et al., 2018) and/or university spin-off companies (Shane, 2004). Based on their systematic literature review of the changing role of academics in this regard, Miller et al. (2018) draw a distinction between academic entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial academics. The latter, they suggest, engage “with commercial partners in a range of collaborative and less formal modes of engagement” (p. 12). Both definitions, however, still maintain a narrow focus on collaboration with commercial partners and technology transfer which, in turn, reflect continued economic and industry focus of universities’ third-mission activities and third-stream income. Given the shift towards universities demonstrating greater impact in the communities they serve (public value) and “to make a wider contribution to society” (Siegel & Wright, 2015, p. 11), then it may be time to re-think these definitions.

While third stream activities in universities have made reference to social as well as economic development, the majority of academic literature and government/funder focus has been on economic development and entrepreneurial activities and impact (viz. Guerrero et al., 2015; Pilbeam, 2006; Watson & Hall, 2015). Even with the evolution of quadruple and quintuple helices where the former includes civil society as a key driver to more democratic innovation,

often third sector and public services are seen as beneficiaries or user stakeholders, albeit in some instances integrated into innovation systems more geared more to public interest (Carayannis et al., 2018; Carayannis & Campbell, 2009).

The concept of the entrepreneurial university needs also to be considered in relation to internal management and viability. It purportedly reflects institutional agility in responding to (and anticipating) its own changing context and environmental demands, which Clark (2001, p. 11) sees as “the entrepreneurial response”. Furthermore, this pathway to entrepreneurial character then becomes a “way to reinvent collegiality and university autonomy and ... to enhance university achievement” (Clark, 2001, p. 18), particularly in fragmented and increasingly atomised institutions; “a counter-narrative to all the accounts that depict universities as helpless victims of irresistible external demands ... [and] liken the university to a business” (Clark, 2001, p. 21). This standpoint questions the individualistic culture of universities and suggests that an entrepreneurial culture promises more openness, including, for example “mutually supportive and informal relations between individual, department and centre” (Davies, 2001, p. 26), and nods to the need to take into account a multi-stakeholder approach to sustainability and durability. While this points to a virtuous development to which many might subscribe, a primary purpose linked to economic sustainability limits focus towards market-driven innovation and away from broader social and environmental purpose-driven innovation (Muff, 2017). This narrow view prompts, as suggested by Slaughter and Rhoades (2009), universities and the people who populate them to initiate as well as respond to and resist academic capitalism. Furthermore, Rowlands suggests that the academic voice and the input of “practising academics to decisions about and that affect teaching and research practice is essential” (2018, p. 1834).

While the focus of the academic capitalist and academic entrepreneur discourse has mainly been on academics, there is a student dimension to entrepreneurial activities in universities through the development of enterprise incubators and hubs and student start-up businesses. While this has been mainly for-profit enterprise there have been increasing examples of more social change ventures (McClure, 2016), including social enterprise and co-operative start-ups. This focus on students as (potential) entrepreneurs has seen the development of entrepreneurship teaching where “participation with university staff, and innovative pedagogical support are essential features” (Zollo et al., 2017, p. 271). Critical pedagogical approaches will be returned to later, but despite the growth in postgraduate cohorts and professional development (lifelong learning), there is continuing need to focus not only on 18-21 as a category of student but also learner-earners, work-based learners, returners to education, distance learners, and co-learners. These are not necessarily new types of learner but perhaps are given greater prominence in a more competitive market environment, requiring rethinking of curriculum developments and pressure for shorter/accelerated degree programmes, flexible delivery, and routes to credentialing (Nunan, 2005; Pollard et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 2009).

Any ‘attack’ on and transformation of universities has not been sudden (Amsler, 2011) and despite resistance, (see, for example, the archive website of The University for Strategic Optimism, available online, but inactive since 2013-14: <https://universityforstrategicoptimism.wordpress.com>), it is unlikely that the current trajectory of universities will be fully reversed (Freedman, 2011). Even so, there are other routes which “lie in alternatives to current patterns of neo-liberal development”, for example: democratisation and the reinvigoration of higher education as a public good, and sustainable contributions to local, regional and national communities and economies (Rhoades et al., 2004, p. 326). Indeed, rather than the 3Es, Gray (2017) suggests that equality, democracy and sustainability might be alternative hallmarks of, and antidote to, increasing fragmentation, managerialism, and privatisation witnessed across higher education sectors. Additionally, rather than academic capitalism as a *fait accompli*, Hoffman (2011, p. 451) sees potential in “opening up new conceptual vocabularies ... for novel alternatives not driven by a profit motive”, including community development, social justice programmes, and civic engagement. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, how different approaches are remodelled and reworked on the ground, also opens possibilities for continued reworking in the future, which, in turn, may contribute to “alternative, more progressive higher education

systems” (Canaan & Shumar, 2008, p. 23). Part of this alternative landscape are trusts, co-operatives, and mutuals.

A Return to Universities as a Public Good

There are a number of problematics when thinking about universities and what goes on within higher education — teaching, production of learning materials, research outputs — as constituting a public good. The public-private dichotomy does not fit well particularly with UK universities where many are private entities — education charities, albeit exempt from registration and oversight by the Charity Commission, and many with trading arms. Part of their purpose, however, is in providing education for public benefit, now under the guidance and regulation of the Office for Students, which came into being in 2018 — “so named to visibly put students at the heart of the market and ensure that it functions for the students” (Boyd, n.d., para 5).

Similarly, the either/or distinction of education as a public good that comes with universal entitlement (a right) or a private good (a privilege) leading to individual economic return that should be paid for on that basis, is equally complex (McCowan, 2012). McCowan (2012) looks to Tomaševski’s work on human rights in education as a gauge to consider the fulfilment of rights to education. Tomaševski (2001, pp. 12–13) presents a conceptual framework of rights to, in and through education that correspond to government obligations to make education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable (4-A schema). The schema allows for non-state providers of, in this case, school-age education funded by governments. Accessibility, in relation to post-compulsory education is linked more to a substituting ‘A’ - affordability — and Tomaševski (2005) makes the distinction between education-as-a-right and education-as-a-traded-service (and by implication parental investment). More recently, the Incheon declaration in relation to the UN sustainable development goals (SDG 4) provides further impetus to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2016).

Fair and open access to continuing education is seen as both a right (not an obligation) and a privilege. In this respect, McCowan (2012) argues that as well as the intrinsic value of education as a public good (as opposed to a pathway to something else — economic gain, career and livelihoods), there are additional aspects to public interest with regard to “access of local communities to services provided, or access of society as a whole to the knowledge developed” (p. 124). In addition, McCowan places universities in a range of options as locations for post-18 education including workplaces, trade unions, and social movements. In this context, Collini (2012, p. 4) suggests it is no longer useful to be ‘purist’ in using the term ‘university’; moreover, there is a need for judicious claims regarding universities’ contribution to public and social good. Instead there is a need to be “realistic about the complex and contested nature of frequently identified benefits, including social mobility” (Collini, 2015, p. 29).

In 2017, the European Council called higher education institutions, students, member states and the Commission to co-develop and establish the “universities of the future” (www.ec.europa.eu/education); 20 ‘European Universities’ by 2024 (programme call launched in 2018; pilot alliances to be announced in 2019). The expressed aim of the cross-Europe alliances is, *inter alia*, to adopt a challenge-based approach in which students, academics, and external partners will co-operate in interdisciplinary teams to tackle “the biggest issues facing Europe today”, for example linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, climate change, regional development, transition economies, and digital economies. Rather than a focus on the more instrumental and technocratic aspects of higher education and universities’ management of mass education, this appears to be a shift or rebalancing towards Holyoake’s ideals and a concern for “the development and growth of individuals capable of leading fulfilling and responsible lives and who have a reflexive grasp of what is in the best interests of themselves, their families, their communities and their society” (Taylor et al., 2002, p. 161 cited in Strohl, 2006, p. 134); a cosmopolitan entity (Strohl, 2006) with a proactive social role (Strohl, 2006);

constructed and dynamic with an approach to learning as ongoing reconstruction and re-organisation of experience (Addams, 2017[1910]; 2017[1930]; Dewey 2015[1939]). Much of this also echoes Freire's conceptualisation of conscientisation and praxis (1972, 1995). Additionally, it returns us to the realisation of 'real utopias' which, in Burawoy's deliberation, includes the tension between and interdependence of:

... first, a community of critical discourse that transcends disciplinary boundaries and sustains the idea of a discursive community critical of the university but also of the society within which it is embedded, and second, a deliberative democracy that roots the university in civil society and engages directly in a conversation with its surrounding publics about the direction of society (Burawoy, 2017, p. 141).

In the same year — 2017 — the UK Government enacted the Higher Education and Research Act (the Act, see www.legislation.gov.uk). Perhaps not in the same vein as the European call, the general focus, in the name of promoting greater quality, choice and opportunities for students (Office for Students, 2018), is to encourage competition in the higher education (HE) sector, to promote widening participation and equality of opportunity, and to ensure value for money. In addition, it set out guidance on protecting academic freedom and “the institutional autonomy of English higher education providers” (Higher Education and Research Act 2017 — Chapter 29, 2017, p. 1), and in encouraging further breadth in the type of HE provider. The role of the regulator — the Office for Students (OfS) — in implementing Government strategy is, as with previous public services, to reform and drive innovation, and includes further benchmarking through the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and to ensure that the TEF and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) are mutually enforcing — thereby focusing on excellence in teaching, postgraduate experience, and research. If a university education is to be partly justified by dual offerings of a gateway to superior career opportunities for students, and for government and funders to enable a cost-effective supply of skilled graduates and “research that contributes to economic growth” (MacIntyre, 2009, p. 350), then there needs also to be room for critical universities pedagogies that “educate citizens and professionals who can tackle injustices and social problems” (McLean, 2006, p 39).

Within both the Act and regulatory framework is emphasis on outcomes; leaving providers free to determine what outcomes and by what methods and approaches they can achieve their mission/strategy. The faster route for registration also means that the opportunity exists for potential providers with no or little previous experience of HE provision to meet the eligibility criteria and risk assessment, albeit with some limitations around degree awarding powers in some instances as part of a probationary period which also links to when an organisation is eligible to call itself a university college or university (see Office for Students, 2018 for ongoing conditions of registration). This ‘any qualified provider’ approach has been a feature of healthcare reform aimed at increasing choice, personalisation of services, and diversifying the range of providers, with mixed results. On the one hand, the policy discourse suggests a push to improve quality of services, on the other the focus on cost has, in some instances (in relation to healthcare) led to a felt erosion of professional values, deskilling and, reduction in quality (Walumbe et al., 2016).

The Idea of the Co-operative University

Specifically, we endorse alternative models for a modern university committed to academic and philosophical, not just economic, autonomy, a university responsible to collective decision-making, committed to creating and disseminating publicly responsive and socially useful research and teaching, and motivated by an educational philosophy whose objectives are social empowerment, progressive knowledge creation, and the ongoing critique of received ideas (Amsler & Shore, 2017, p. 135).

While the discussion above is not exhaustive, it goes some way to an overview of some of the discourse and contested areas of academic practice and the tensions facing existing and newcomer higher education institutions and universities. Amsler and Shore (2017, above) point to both economic independence and autonomy as well as internal democratic management

arrangements and socially purposeful and critical pedagogic curricula that could contribute to alternative forms of 'modern' and future universities. Picking up an earlier point, acknowledging a broader and more open system of higher education (rather than universities, per se) includes an appreciation of the development, range and impact of continuing education and extension movements, including free libraries, workers' education associations, mechanics institutes and university settlements (Thody, 2014). Many of these, such as the UK's Co-operative College (established 1919), predate polytechnics, new civic colleges and universities. Speaking before the College was formally set up, W. R. Rae (1909, cited by Woodin, 2017, p. 4) — the then chair of the Co-operative Union educational committee — stated in his inaugural address:

What we want and seek to obtain [of the education system] is a co-operative journey that will end in a co-operative university ... So long as the State does not provide it, we must do, as we have in the past, the best we can to provide it ourselves.

O'Hearn and Grubačić (2016) draw on both Polanyi's articulation of double movement and Kropotkin arguing that "people who face bad government and institutions of social regulation strive to produce alternative institutions of mutual aid and autonomy" (p. 162). Furthermore, Goodwin (2018) argues that seeing Polyani's double movement as a dialectical process — the interconnection of commodification and decommodification — allows for both defensive and offensive actions. In this way, we can seek to protect or acknowledge the sociability and collegiality of the university space while also seeking to create or adapt new organisational models. For example, after Leicester University decided to close its extramural extension college in 2013 evoking public protest, Vaughan College was reconstituted as Leicester Vaughan College (LVC) in 2017. LVC retains some of its original values with regard to adult education (and its relations with the co-operative society) as an independent HE college registered as a community benefit society (see <https://vaughan.coop>).

The discussion around the idea and purpose of co-operative education, education for co-operators and co-operative universities is not new although as Winn (2015) points out there has been an upsurge in recent interest, not least with a special issue of this *Journal* (2011). He provides a useful overview of discourse around "routes to co-operative higher education" and identifies three key themes: conversion, dissolution, creation (p. 41) — see Table 1 below.

In the main, the Table focuses on UK based provision or where there are key European or other examples. It is by no means exhaustive and additional international and country-specific examples of co-operative business education programmes and research centres can be found on the International Co-operative Alliance website (see: <https://www.ica.coop/en/co-operative-research-centres-research-organisations-and-educational-institutions>).

In addition to the three categories identified by Winn (2015), we can add a fourth — consortia or networked development or a co-operative diaspora consisting of individual academics focusing on social economy and co-operatives in their institutions with links external to their universities with regard to developing learning and research materials and opportunities. In the case of the Finnish example, this is more formal in terms of a network of universities and similar to the hub and spoke model suggested by Cardiff Institute of Co-operative Studies in a 2011 survey discussion document on developing a co-operative university. Commenting as part of the consultation and in relation to the report, *Co-operation in the Age of Google* (Murray, 2010), Scott Cato (cited in Ridley-Duff, 2011) comments:

While it is true that co-operatives are a significant portion of the UK economy, researchers and academics into co-operative studies are a tiny minority of the country's academic community and are fairly widely spread ... sector studies and practitioners have benefited from a dispersed and networked provision of research and education (pp. 9-10).

Table 1: Examples of higher and further education co-operative/social economy education offers

Routes to co-operative HE	Description	Practice examples and theoretical concepts usually associated with each
Conversion	Constitute existing universities on co-operative values and principles	<p>Templates for use — existing models and/or governance structures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mondragón University • John Lewis Partnership (employee trust model) • Co-operative academies • Co-operative College (extension/registered charity) • Ashridge — particularly The Ashridge Centre for Business and Sustainability (charity) — although merged with Hult International Business School in 2015
Dissolution	Constitute co-operatives at the level of the department, research group, and curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core and optional module in diverse universities (Northumbria — undergraduate & Business Clinic; York St John; Open University; Leicester; York; et al.) • Specialist programmes (e.g. University College Cork; Saint Mary's University, Nova Scotia; Sheffield Hallam; et al.) • Research centres and networks (Glasgow Caledonian; Liverpool John Moores; Oxford; Cardiff Metropolitan; et al.)
Creation	Build new co-operative experiments in higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transforming student-teacher relationships — Students as producers/co-producers (structure and curriculum design — University of Lincoln) • Mondragón University • Free University, Brighton • Feral Art School, Hull • Social Science Centres (Manchester, Lincoln) • Leicester Vaughan College • Ragged University • Tent City University • Worker co-operatives • Multi-stakeholder co-operatives
Consortia/ Network model	Linking individuals in universities, and universities in co-ordinated network to offer programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-operative Studies Network, Finland — established 2005, a network of ten universities coordinated by the Ruralia Institute of the University of Helsinki. E-learning courses (offered in English and Finnish) at bachelors, masters and postgraduate studies.

Scott Cato cites the University of Victoria, BC acting as a co-ordinating hub for a Canadian wide research project to facilitate collaborations across regions with outputs such as tele-learning sessions, case studies, papers and e-books, studentships and scholarships, as well as the New University Co-operative (solidarity co-operative in Tatamagouche, NS), and co-operative research network possibilities in Scotland. Thus, making use of “existing expertise and commitment” (p. 9) and, perhaps, in the spirit of some aspects of platform co-operativism using technology enhanced virtual learning and pop-up professional learning networks, which would correspond with an ‘age of Google’? Or, academic commons?

Inspiration on co-operative education has also been taken in regard to the growth and development of co-operatives schools — over 800 at their height (Woodin, 2018) — and academies. While there was great hope and still is for the co-operative model, there are lessons to be learned here given that several have been through ‘special measures’, closure and conversion. Woodin also makes the point that it is difficult to see how universities can be fully owned and controlled by members without being fully private organisations.

A co-operative university has to do more than fit into an existing system and improve access, participation, and success, it needs to reflect the language, culture and ideals of co-operativism. This also means bringing a theory of co-operation — linking theory and practice

and transforming intention (co-operative values and principles) into practice and outcomes; a co-operative praxis. This points to more than consideration of structure, governance, and ownership to also include a critical pedagogical approach to education for co-operators. This could be in Freire's (1995; 1972) approach to conscientisation and transformative action; Ostrom's (1996) active engagement of students in their own education; or we could delve back to Dewey and Addams view of education as not only transformative but emancipatory. Or something akin to the student as producer (Neary 2012; 2016; Neary & Winn, 2009; Winn, 2015), or co-producer (McCulloch, 2009). The ideal of a student as producer as contra to academic capitalism looks to (re)create the university as a new form of social institution (Neary, 2012; 2016). A focus is on "addressing the dysfunctional relationship between teacher and students" and "between research and teaching" (Winn, 2015, p. 49). In part, the focus here is on the process and means of how (and to a certain extent what) knowledge is produced. In this space, knowledge created is seen as appropriate to the needs of humanity rather than the market and the production of students for waged labour (Winn, 2015), and encourages research-engaged teaching and active learning. As such, there is recognition of the agency of learners in creating and sustaining learning in action.

Realising the Co-operative University

I borrow here from Cook's (2013) consultancy report for the UK Co-operative College that marked the start of the UK Co-operative College's journey towards becoming a co-operative university. 2019 marks a centenary year for the College. In 1996, the *Journal* had a special theme celebrating the UK Co-operative College (then based at Stanford Hall, Loughborough) and to contemplate its future. There were several articles reflecting on the period 1946-1996. An article by R. L. Marshall (1996) for example, marks the shift from a focus on domestic management development to international development and recounted that the relationships with Nottingham and Loughborough universities were strong attractors for students. Marshall also comments that Nottingham's Diploma in Political, Economic, and Social Studies was a more appealing offer than 'Co-operative Studies'. Towards the end of this period, courses offered were more problem-led in relation to management issues. Overall though, the aim included a commitment to an "open intellectual community" to encourage open discussion, critical reflection and personal development. In a sister article in the same volume, Burch (1996) notes the prominent role played by the College in developing vocational qualifications. He describes the development in the early 1980s of a "second-chance education for those involved in community and voluntary organisations" — a Diploma in Policy Studies. This was accompanied by the introduction of a Certificate in Management Studies. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the international side of the College's work continued to be at the forefront, with fly-out staff to Nigeria, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia. A consortium of Retail Teaching Companies (Houlton & Thomas, 1990), developed by the College, provided home study packs and retail briefings for Japanese managers (in collaboration with Cornell University, USA). This was also a turbulent time for the College as it struggled with issues around structure, relationships, funding, governance, managing the Hall, and the legal status of the College. Its longevity and upcoming celebration is perhaps a sign of its strength. A further strength is that its celebrations and challenges have been well-documented, not least in this *Journal*, and it has a good deal of history and good will on which to draw as it charts its way to university status.

We have seen that a university does not need a physical space to exist. However, it will need to consider its membership and governance structures especially in relation to ownership and control — lessons from the Co-operative College's governance struggles, co-operative schools, and worker co-operatives come to mind, as well as the felt disenfranchisement of many academics in higher education. Keeping it different under current legislation, trends towards benchmarking and teaching and research assessment frameworks are further challenges, together with issues of open access and autonomy (the latter another issue from the College's past experience). Much attention is focused on reclaiming and reinventing public universities (Levin & Greenwood, 2018), yet (re-)creating a participatory and democratic institution raises

questions about what is possible should a co-operative university be established within the current UK higher education system and the limits and limitations of the regulatory frameworks, however good the intention. Is it possible to be viable and sustainable in the long-term and operate independently from the state — free to enable ‘social ownership’? (Amsler, 2017, p. 20).

As Amsler (2017) suggests social ownership requires attention to pedagogy and curricula and its means of production. A “focus on co-operation connects to a critique of alienation and alienating educational or pedagogical practices” (Hall, 2014). Again, from the Co-operative College’s own experience, the preference for mainstream credentialing over co-operative studies holds lessons for curriculum content and development, as well as student attraction and tuition fees particularly given the current development of degree apprenticeships and the employer levy which affects larger co-operative and social economy employers. Will co-operatives support such a venture/ventures? On the other hand, the Finnish collaborative network of universities’ (Co-op Network Studies) success in providing courses focused on the co-operative sector and social economy provides a useful case study. Here courses are offered online with teaching closely connected to research and practice through links with business and the co-operative sector. There is also an enabling framework through the Flexible Studies Agreement which allows undergraduate and postgraduate students from other Finnish universities to complete a module or individual course and to support special fields (<https://confluence.csc.fi/display/JOO/JOOPAS>). Even so, the question remains: For what does anyone want to join a co-operative university? What options are possible? Cook (2016) provides four vignettes of hypothetical co-operative universities: “the ‘founded’ university; the ‘converted’ university; the ‘grown-from-scratch’ university, and a mixed-economy development of a national co-operative university architecture” (para 3); Owen University, Borchester Metropolitan University, London free College, and Co-operative University (UK) and Wilson Co-operative Technical University College — food for thought: see <https://coopuni.wordpress.com/2016/11/20/vignettes-of-cooperative-universities>.

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