

How should universities care for the future?

Universities promote themselves to students, to funders and to society as playing a distinctive role in anticipating, shaping and caring for the future. Universities are described variously as ‘crucibles’ for forming the future (Rhodes, 2001), as addressing the ‘grand challenges’ of the 21st century, and as preparing students for the future. As such the self-image and the social identity of the university can be understood as fundamentally anticipatory – imagining, making and acting upon the future. That such a self-image exists is not surprising; universities have since medieval times, sought to claim a distinctive role in producing knowledge about the future (Burrow & Wei, 2000), the Enlightenment was characterised by the production of western science as a unique tool for producing human progress (Dussel, 1993; Wellmon, 2015; Facer & Wei, 2019), while more recently, the call to develop a Science of Anticipation makes a case for the distinctive contribution of universities in the development of foresight (Poli, 2018). Assumptions about the anticipatory capacity of universities, therefore, are lodged firmly in their institutional narratives.

And yet, such claims are increasingly difficult to sustain when we consider the relationship between universities and one of the fundamental failures of contemporary anticipation: namely, the significant warming of the climate, and its consequent material, social and ecological disasters. Indeed, while academics have been one of many important groups producing knowledge of ecological damage and climate science, the university as an institution stands accused of complicity in the production of climate change (Wright, 2018; Slaughter, 2012); of acting ‘ecocidally’ (Ainley, 2008); of failing to act to address the most basic sustainability challenges on campuses (Soini et al., 2018); of producing students who are more likely to harm the planet than to protect it (Bonnett, 2013); of developing academic identities that are premised upon internationalisation, travel and exploitation of resources (Tannock, 2010); of sustaining a colonial hierarchy of knowledge that obscures and denigrates the forms of knowledge necessary to developing sustainable modes of life (Pashby and Andreotti, 2016)); and of maintaining disciplinary forms of knowledge that obscure and prevent engagement with the complexity of the entangled social, ecological, political and material phenomenon of climate change.

This curated session seeks to name and explore the tensions that constitute the contemporary university and its anticipatory capacity specifically in relation to climate change and to ask what form the university might need to take if it is, in fact, to be capable of caring for the future. In so doing, it addresses two of the core conference themes: caring for the future and anticipatory learning.

This interdisciplinary session will comprise a series of six short papers from speakers who draw on backgrounds in philosophy, communication, sustainable development, education, urban studies, computer science, cultural studies and physics and who work in fields ranging from futures studies and sustainable development to education and philosophy. Following these interventions, we will open up a creative discussion, mediated by arts practice, with the wider community of Anticipation Conference delegates. This activity will begin to explore what form a university capable of caring for the future might take. The session will draw on diverse theoretical and empirical resources, but will be particularly informed by the

possibility of the university as a site for convening publics around matters of concern (Latour, 2004) (Simons and Masschelein, 2009) and matters of care (de la Bellacasa, 2011).

Drawing on empirical and theoretical studies, the papers will explore a set of key tensions in the development of the anticipatory capacity of the university, specifically in relation to its capacity to care for the future:

The politics of knowledge: how can the university build knowledge of and for the future in partnership with other knowledge communities, including those who have previously been disavowed by western science? How might disciplines and knowledge hierarchies need to evolve and adapt, or be radically disrupted, to enable appropriate knowledge and action in relation to the complex futures promised by climate change? How can universities come to reflect, in what they do, the complex nature of anticipation as on one hand related to what might be expected and prepared for now, and on the other as committed to keeping the future open for the unexpected and the new, as an intrinsic component of future-oriented knowledge that resists the colonization of the future in the name of human flourishing?

The public roles of the university: some universities are beginning to innovate in anticipatory public pedagogy and public research that positions the university, its staff and students, as social actors in and alongside communities, working to support the development of 'everyday futures' and to engage in challenge-led activities. Such a role brings advocates of these activities into tension with those who would see the university as an autonomous site of intellectual production. How do these practices change the anticipatory capabilities of the university? What new collaboration arenas for anticipation can and should be forged between universities and publics? What new institutional structures are adequate to addressing emerging futures?

The intergenerational contract: the last six months have seen a growth in student movements, sit-ins and strikes with the 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg a highly visible critique of the failure of older generations to anticipate and address global warming. At the same time, younger climate activists are increasingly reporting burn-out, anxiety and the absence of elders to support them in their struggle. In a context in which youth mistrusts age, and established wisdom is seen as having failed, how will and should the intergenerational relationships of the university evolve?

Stewardship and invention: universities are torn between their role as stewards of the past and their potential to invent and create new futures. The narrative of 'progress' that has constituted the university since the enlightenment and which is premised upon a linear temporality may now be in question. Drawing on the Adrinka symbol of Sankofa, we will ask how the university's engagement with the heritage of the past might support imagination and care for the future, how might a synchronous and how might a multi-layered conception of temporality better support the university in its anticipatory practice?

Speakers include:

Keri Facer (session convenor) Zennström Chair in Climate Change Leadership at the University of Uppsala and chair of the Anticipation 2017 conference. Professor John Holmberg, Chalmers University and UNESCO chair in education for sustainable

development. Dr Celine Granjou, sociologist of the environment, University of Grenoble. Professor Johan Siebers, Middlesex University, philosopher and communications theorist and vice-president of the Ernst-Bloch-Gesellschaft, Ludwigshafen. Susanna Barrineau, Project coordinator for the Swedish International Centre for Education for Sustainable Development. Laila Mandy, Climate Change Leadership Project Leader.

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