

Planning – Leadership in the Age of Supercomplexity?

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Outline

Part 1

- HE landscape & HE trends
- From research to neoliberal to ???
- Education needs in 21st century

Part 2

- Planning education characteristics
- Proposition: Educational model(s) - fit for 21st Century



Letters

Employers should contribute to universities

French university presidents have begun the new academic year with a plea to the government to act to reverse universities' worsening financial situation.

theconversation.com

The world is in crisis – what role should our universities play?

Published: March 27, 2025 3:31pm GMT

Many far right leaders are hostile towards universities and student protests. (Unsplash/Nathan Dumlao)



It's hard not to categorize our present global moment as a crisis. And just when we think things can't get worse — they do.

[Universities/academics] need to become leaders ... "by pointing the way forward. ... routinely move others away from their comfort zones, as they move themselves from their own. It is in this ... sense that universities [can] provide a "climate of innovation" which merits continued state support." (Fuller, S, 2024 theconversation.com)

Why students think university isn't good value for money

Two thirds (66 per cent) of undergraduates think that the standard of education and the wages graduates earn are not enough to warrant the cost

It has sparked an identity crisis in UK universities

June 2016

The Guardian

Are universities having an identity crisis?

November 2019

TIMES HIGHER

Solving Higher Education's Identity Crisis

October 2020

Forbes

To be or not to be a university: Australia's identity crisis

February 2023

TIMES HIGHER

Universities in the age of supercomplexity?

Complexity

- state of having many parts and being difficult to understand or find answer to
- In the case of HE – universities are caught amidst globalization, audit requirements and QS rankings, fulfilling national agendas, being economically self-sufficient; its internal organization (faculties/colleges), research – teaching link; management versus academics etc.

Super complexity

- Frameworks are in dispute
- Scholars and institutions **no longer have a clear sense of identity** or responsibility
- Creates a situation where institutions can be challenged and their existence become contested.



Complexity vs Supercomplexity

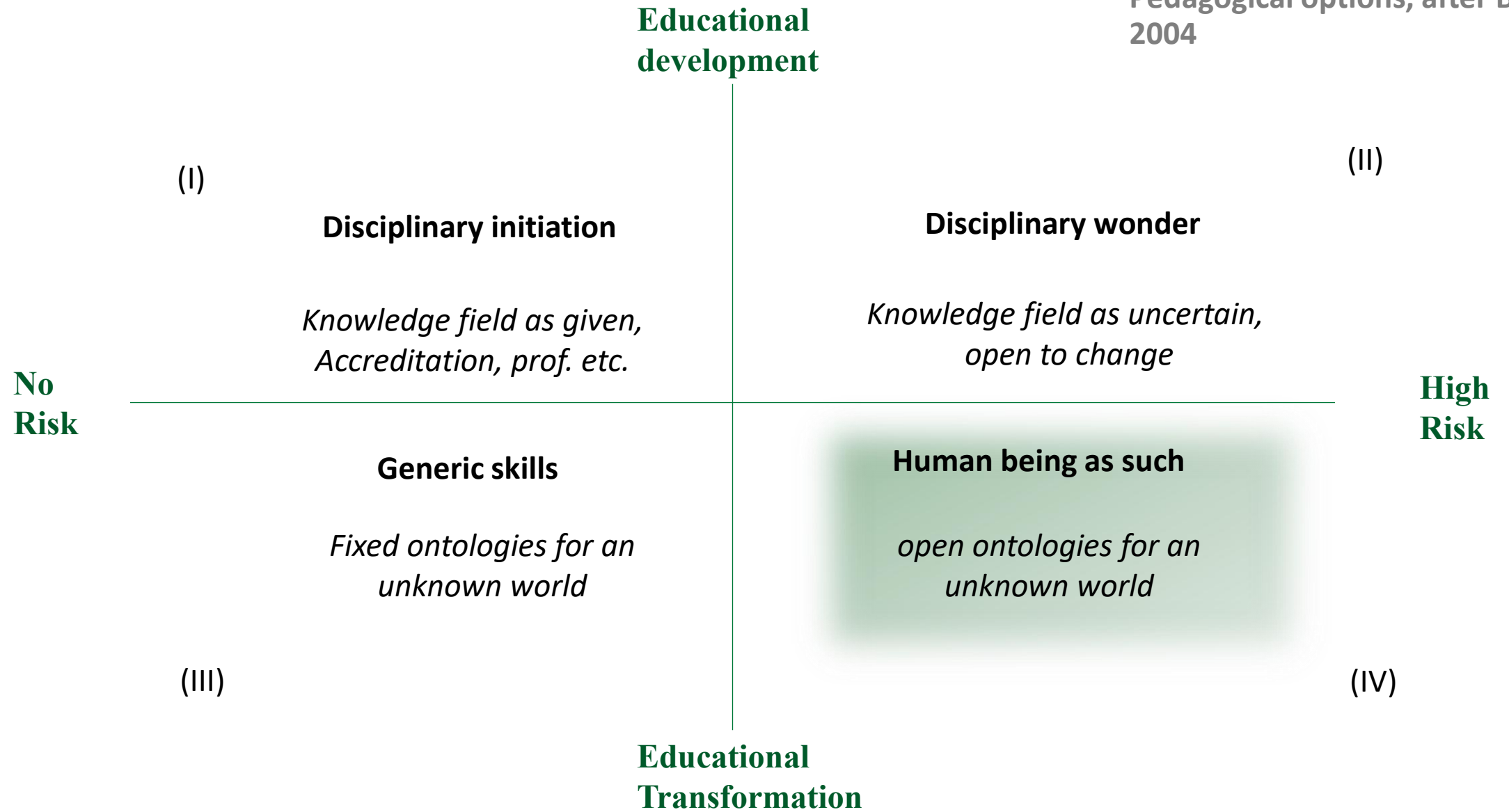
- Both concepts exist: but are profoundly different
- **Complexity** is a matter of systems, structures, and their interwoven dynamics (feedback loops etc) > thereby producing systems overload
- Given more time and more resources, challenges of complexity could be reduced
- With **Supercomplexity** – resources will not be able to resolve the issues – it's a matter of values and choices between the many options; akin to **“wicked problems”** (Rittel & Webber, 1973)
- So, the challenge becomes how to ‘live’ within this state

What pedagogy ‘for’ a supercomplex world

What pedagogy for a fragile, changing, risky, liquid, uncertain world?

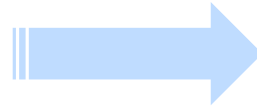
- Shift from knowledge to skills
- Skills (generic/transferable) skills seem to offer some enduring value
- Learning (how) to learn; critical thinking
- Is this sufficient to deal with
 - Uncertainty from unpredictability of urban systems, environmental responses, multiple divergent evidence, scholarly communication
 - Personal uncertainties, i.e. a sense of inadequacy, anxiety, finding a place in a multi-cultural, global world ?





- Neither understanding (knowledge) or acting (skills) are sufficient – what is required is a “will to go on” / (Barnett, 2004) [and learn]

Part 1



Part 2

- Universities in identity crises
- Lack of trust
- Curricula/pedagogies insufficient
- Students looking for alternatives



- **Leadership of and by planning** towards post-modern, critical learning
- educating leaders for a sustainable world
- Offering value to communities/society – developing trust



Insights from Planning discipline?

- Discipline's experience with identity issues
 - *"if planning is everything, maybe it's nothing"* (Wildavsky, 1973)
- Discussions on its distinctiveness as disciplines/or field
 - *"remains weakly defined"* (Birch, APA, 1980) *planning an art or a science?* -
 - *Is planning an academic discipline; its evolution* (Reade, 1983; Davoudi, 2015; Davoudi and Pendlebury 2010)
- Repeated attempts at defining the purpose and value (added) of planning
 - *Klosterman's "Arguments for and against planning"* (TPR 1985)
 - *RTPI's reports 2014- present on how good planning creates economic gain, sustainability;* <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/policy-and-research/practice-and-research/the-value-of-planning/>



Insights from Planning.... Cont'd.

Experiences in working collaboratively/differently

- Interdisciplinarity
- Limits of rational planning > Communicative turn, participation and **working with different stakeholders/working with communities**
- Decolonial aspects of planning/power relations, pluralism and acknowledging the value of different knowledges

Experiences with **doing/enacting change > being transformative**

- Sustainability/climate change adaptation of cities
- **Moving outside the comfort zone** (post-growth/degrowth agendas/shrinking cities)
- Muddling through and incremental improvements
- Utopia/imaginary > **innovation**

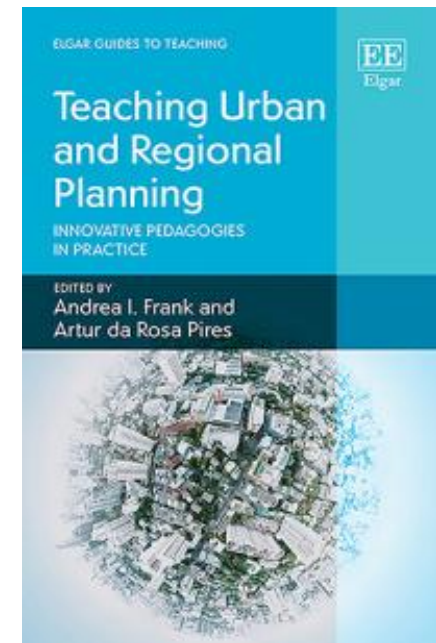
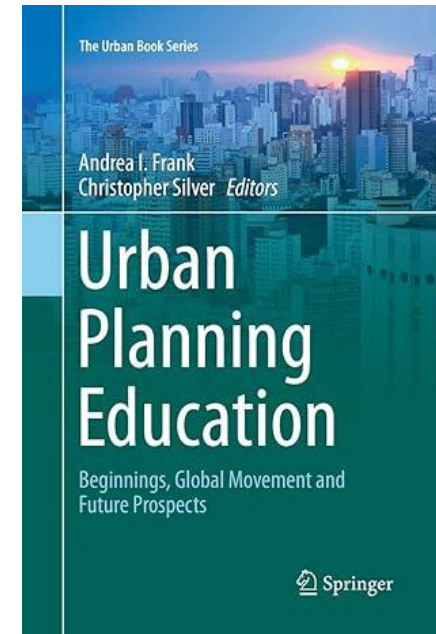


Pedagogy for a supercomplex world?

- Projects, studios, workshops in which learners get confronted with real problems, situations in neighbourhoods, the city, the region are often part of this
- Community-based projects and life-projects with external stakeholder introduce students to stakeholders and messiness of day-to-day practice
- Such pedagogy
 - Pushes boundaries, is engaged with society, risky, (time and resource extensive)
 - Relevant and valued by students
 - (trans-)formative
 - Non-neutral, messy ... a “rehearsal” for practice (K. Maloney 2025)



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4 – year Project: “Sustainable urban development through transformative uses of Green Infrastructure”



Jan 2016

- Narrow subject focus/limited scale and geographic coverage; GI for Water management” (3 sites, 6 facilitators, 60+ students, 12+ staff)
- In Depok/South Jakarta area



LESSONS/ACHIEVEMENTS

- Organisers need to discuss expectations/assumptions!
- Integration of design & policy approaches
- Some interest by local gov't (but impact unclear); limited public data availability/access issues...

Jan 2017

- Wider focus: air pollution, health, water management
- (3 sites, 20 students, 7+ staff)
- Depok/S Jakarta/field trip to Red Cross projects in more rural areas



LESSONS/ACHIEVEMENTS

- Learning about impacts of water and air pollution on health
- Community-led actions and Citizen science
- GI has VERY different meanings

Jan 2018 & 2019

- 2018 Eco-city development.....
- Multi-scale and multi-topics (water/sanitation/health/ scale/air pollution/open spaces, waste and more)
- 6 sites/areas, 82 students/facilitators, 10+ staff,



LESSONS/ACHIEVEMENTS

- Things change in unexpected ways...
- Growing number of UI faculty and gov't levels involvement
- Success breeds interest in future collaborations, research grants
- Additional University joins
- Opportunities to upscale to certificate program/embed institutionally

Reflections

IJWS Learning experience

- 3 different models of institutions/teaching philosophies/planning paradigms
- High level of risk & uncertainty
- Challenging with unfamiliar situations & tasks
- True co-learning of educators and students and communities

Curricula for ESD

Foster Transformational competencies (through)

- Critical thinking and reflection
- Systems thinking
- Participatory learning (group, student led, experiential, with local communities/stakeholders)
- Collaborative learning (e.g. guest speakers, multidisciplinary)
- Creative development of future scenarios

Curricula for an unknown future/a world of incessant unpredictability

- Demanding > resilience
- Contrasting insights > openness
- Commitment > self-discipline
- 'space' > authenticity/integrity (*Barnett 2009*)

Reflections cont'd.

Inst. Capacity building

- Networked universities, links with society and societal actors;
- Focus on pressing issues – interacting with communities
- Research and teaching intertwined....
- interdisciplinarity
- Sustainable approach (i.e. continues beyond initial funding period)

+ Learning Experience



New way of being, learning, working > a different **'university'**
that is self-enriching, but also improving the world.

Evolving models

Humboldtian University	Autonomous individual/world citizenship (not job focused!)
Research university	Knowledge/ academic freedom (ivory tower)/ authenticity, <i>in-itself</i>
Entrepreneurial (corporate) University	Performative/competitive, impact oriented, profitability and costing, produces graduates for the job market <i>for-itself</i>
Multiversity? Liquid/ Therapeutical....	Universities supporting/organizing processes of learning? ... doing different things; not offering education?
Ecological University	Networked across society performs responsibly for the interests of the world, <i>for-others</i>



Leadership



Planning schools / departments can offer leadership

- innovative co-learning, knowledge coproduction and pedagogy
- interdisciplinary
- transformative action
- developing confident individuals willing to act
- FOR society, communities

By example, then they can offer new **model's** for universities to organize themselves, interact with others in the world.

Is it time to make a contribution to “My imaginary University”?

A series of creative podcasts describing individual’s fictional institutions

<https://wonderfulhighered.com/2024/12/12/my-imaginary-university-two-years-of-creativity/>



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S1 Ep9. Episode 9: We Just Can't Get Enough of Rustbelt U

My Imaginary University • [SUBSCRIBE](#)



0:00



35:09 1x ...

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