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Civic, Global, Ecological: Towards a Collaborative Mission for the University

Professor Ronald Barnett

Author-Reviewed and Revised Transcript

Reviewed and revised by Professor Ronald Barnett

Final editorial preparation by the Educational Research Foundation

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Editorial Note

This transcript was initially prepared in accordance with the ERF Minimal Editing Policy, with editorial intervention limited to correcting transcription errors, improving readability and standardising formatting while preserving the speaker's meaning, structure and spoken style. Professor Ronald Barnett subsequently reviewed the complete transcript and made clarifications, revisions, additions and paragraph-level changes in order to express more fully the meaning and intention of the lecture. These authorial revisions have been incorporated into the present edition. The Educational Research Foundation then undertook final editorial preparation, correcting residual errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation, and resolving a small number of terminological, factual and textual inconsistencies arising from the revision process, while preserving Professor Barnett's substantive revisions and intellectual intent. The present text is therefore published as an Author-Reviewed and Revised Transcript.

Introduction

On 27 June 2026, Professor Ronald Barnett, Emeritus Professor of Higher Education at University College London (UCL), delivered the keynote address at the 93rd Annual Conference of the Japan Society of Management held at Chuo University, Tokyo.

Entitled “Civic, Global, Ecological: Towards a Collaborative Mission for the University”, the lecture explores one of the central questions facing universities in the twenty-first century: ‘How can higher education institutions respond simultaneously to civic responsibilities, global pressures and ecological challenges without losing their intellectual integrity or social purpose?’

Building on his influential concept of the Ecological University, Professor Barnett argues that universities now inhabit multiple external territories, each entangled with wider ecosystems and characterised by its own values, expectations and forms of engagement. These territories are in tension with, and may at times be antagonistic towards, one another. Rather than seeking to eliminate these differences and tensions, he proposes that universities develop a new ethos capable of living with difference—an ethos grounded in dialogue, openness and intellectual responsibility.

The lecture concludes with a discussion of university leadership, suggesting that leadership should create spaces in which different perspectives can be expressed and understood, while management retains responsibility for making decisions in situations of uncertainty and complexity. The subsequent discussion (Q&A) further develops these themes through an exchange on tensions, antagonisms, recognition, leadership and institutional decision-making.

Following Professor Barnett's review and revision of the complete transcript, the Educational Research Foundation undertook final editorial preparation to ensure grammatical, terminological and textual consistency while preserving his substantive revisions and intellectual intent.

The Educational Research Foundation is deeply grateful to Professor Barnett for his generous permission to prepare this edited transcript. The editorial process has provided an exceptional opportunity to engage closely with his ideas, and we hope that this publication will make his lecture accessible to a wider international audience while faithfully preserving the character and substance of the original presentation.

Moderator's Introduction

Good morning, everyone.

My name is MOON Jaeho. I am from Tokoha University, Japan, and I am the moderator of this session.

As a special feature of today's conference, we are very pleased to welcome a special lecturer, joining us online from London.

Japan is currently facing a typhoon. Despite the typhoon, we sincerely hope that today's lecture will proceed safely and successfully.

It is a great honour and privilege for us to welcome Professor Ronald Barnett to our conference today.

Let me introduce Professor Barnett for the benefit of our audience.

Professor Ronald Barnett is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education, University College London (UCL) and is internationally recognised as one of the world's leading scholars in higher education and the philosophy of higher education.

For more than fifty-five years, he has been at the forefront of research on the philosophy, purpose, and future of higher education, making a profound contribution to the field.

He is the author of more than forty books and over one hundred and fifty academic articles. Professor Barnett is also widely known for introducing influential concepts such as supercomplexity and the ecological university, offering new perspectives on the role and mission of the university in the twenty-first century.

His scholarship has had a truly global impact. He has delivered more than one hundred and fifty keynote speeches in over forty countries and has received numerous international awards, including the Distinguished Scholar Award from the European Association for Institutional Research.

We are truly honoured to have Professor Barnett with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in giving a warm welcome to Professor Ronald Barnett.

Professor Barnett, the floor is yours.

Editor's Note

The following is an Author-Reviewed and Revised Transcript of Professor Ronald Barnett's keynote address.

Professor Barnett's Lecture

[Slide 1 – Title]



**Civic, Global, Ecological:
Towards a Collaborative Mission
for the University**

Ronald Barnett, University College London
Online talk, National Conference, Japan Management Society
27 June 2026
www.ioe.ac.uk

Centre for Higher
Education Studies

Thank you very much, Professor Moon.

So, without further ado, I'll get going.

I have just been hearing about the typhoons in Japan. And we have, would you believe, over thirty degrees of heat in my study at home, from where I am speaking.

And who knows, perhaps this talk will be a little bit of another typhoon for you. Let's see how we go.

I must say it is a great privilege and honour to be giving this talk. And I want to thank Professor Sunagawa and Professor Moon for inviting me and for being such generous hosts. It really is fantastic.

I have been privileged to go to Japan a number of times and, Professor Moon, to visit your own university. And so it is a great pleasure to be connected again across the globe in this way.

You have seen the title of my talk:

Civic, Global, Ecological: Towards a Collaborative Mission for the University.

There is a lot there in that title, and I want to go through it with you to identify some of the challenges in front of universities and to see how we might move forward.

[Slide 2 – The Problem Stated]

The problem stated

- Today, multi-faculty research universities live in multiple territories
 - in their 'Third Mission'
- Beyond teaching and research, three territories stand out:
 - Civic/local
 - National–global (these are joint)
 - Ecological
- Is it really possible to live in these three spaces at once?
- After all, they may pull in different directions.

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What is the problem in front of us?

The problem in front of us is a common problem right across the world. And I think, from what I have been reading about Japan and its policy framework for its universities, the problems that I am identifying are very common to Japan as well.

A multitude of challenges are coming at universities, which are being obliged to live, as it were, in different territories all at once.

In much of the world, we have been talking for about thirty years of the university's Third Mission. Beyond teaching and research, universities are expected to engage with society.

This produces, I want to suggest, three big territories now in which universities could be operating: civic and local; national and global; and ecological.

Increasingly, there is talk about the regional challenges of universities.

And then there are wider national and global challenges, and I will put those two together. They contain, for example, issues about the technological environment and the international environment, and I see these coming through in your own policy thinking in Japan.

And then you have what I call the ecological territory.

I see in your own thinking in Japan that you are talking of wisdom, of culture, of the environment, and even of wellbeing. All these themes are coming through in your policy statements on higher education in Japan. And those, I would want to group together under the idea of the ecological.

So, three big spaces: the civic and the local; the national and global; and the environment in its totality, in short, the ecological.

And the question is: is it possible for a university to live in all three spaces at once, in a proper way? After all, they may be pulling the university in different directions.

So that is the problem that I will deal with in my talk with you today.

[Slide 3 – Let's Be Optimistic]



Let's be optimistic

- No question mark in the title of this talk
- Assumes that some kind of coherence across the domains is possible
- But even if it's possible, there's a lot of fancy footwork ahead...

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Let's be optimistic.

There is no question mark at the end of the title of my talk. I am suggesting that there is a major problem here, but I am *not* suggesting that it is impossible. I want to suggest that it *is* possible, but the question is: how do we produce the possible from the seemingly impossible?

There is no question mark in the title of my talk. I want to hope and believe that it is possible for the university to live in all three territories. And I want to hope that we can evolve some kind of coherence across those domains.

All universities in the world—and you are very conscious of this in Japan—are having to respond to all sorts of agendas and all sorts of challenges coming at them in all sorts of ways. How are we going to achieve all of those ends? *Is* it possible?

But if it is possible, we have got to do quite a lot more thinking as to *how* it is possible.

[Slide 4 – Background]

Background

- Universities have long oriented themselves to a civic function
- But what might that mean?
 - 3 transformational themes
 - Environmental Sustainability
 - Human Flourishing
 - Digital and Data Futures
- Hares are running – concepts of civic, public good, civic university, flourishing, sustainability, progress, world ...
- But also risks of undue control, surveillance, limitations of horizons, loss of institutional autonomy, less critical thinking ...

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Let us identify some of the background here.

For a long time, perhaps for a hundred years or more, universities have considered that they have a civic function, as we speak of it in England. In the nineteenth century in England, we established a number of civic universities as they came to be called.

But what does it mean for a university to have a civic function?

Well, I think there are themes that we might now want to identify under that civic function: problems of environmental sustainability; human and community flourishing; and what it is to prosper and flourish in a digital age.

But once we start recognising those challenges, other challenges emerge very quickly: the concept of the public good; the concept of human flourishing; the concept of sustainability or progress; and of world development.

All these are big challenges for universities today.

And there are risks here, and challenges that are opening up across the world: problems of undue control by some governments over higher education; of digital surveillance; of a loss of institutional autonomy; of a limitation of horizons; and of less critical thinking.

All of these are risks that the world of higher education is facing these days, precisely as it opens up to these big challenges.

[Slide 5 – Another Concept: That of “Ecological”]**Another concept: that of ‘ecological’**

- The essence of ecology is interconnectedness
- Other features:
 - Interconnectedness – internal and external
 - Dynamic in great forces
 - Impediments – impairments
 - Worthwhile – value element.
- Mega-ecosystems
 - Major features of the world
 - Institutions and individuals are caught up in them.

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Another big concept that I want to put into the conversation is that of the ecological.

Now what do I mean by ecological?

By ecological, I want to point to interconnectedness.

To be ecological means to have a sense of the way in which systems are themselves interconnected internally, but also a sense of their being connected with the wider world.

So their main feature is that of interconnectedness, internal and external.

But this is all happening within great dynamics, great forces.

This is how I visualise the world: huge mega-forces—ecosystems—which are interacting with each other and imposing themselves upon our great institutions like higher education and upon ourselves as individuals.

And they bring with them severe challenges.

First of all, all ecosystems are impaired. They are damaged. They are distorted in some way or another. They fall short of their possibilities. I will speak more about that in a moment.

These ecosystems are not pure and not wonderful. On the contrary, they are very often damaged. They are impaired. They suffer impediments.

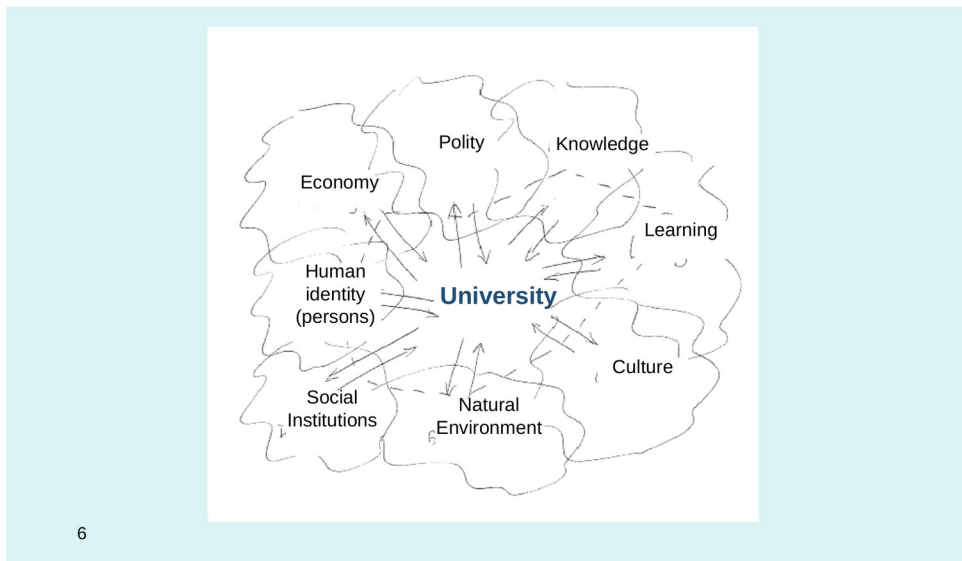
But they are also intrinsically worthwhile. They are valuable. These ecosystems are hugely important to the world. They are worthwhile. To speak of ecosystems and ecology is to introduce a value element into our inquiries.

So there are these mega-ecosystems in the world. They are major features of the world, and both institutions and individuals are caught up in them and are affected by them.

They are not only out there; they are in us.

As I am speaking now with you today, those mega-systems are in me, whether I like it or not.

[Slide 6 – No Title]



I am trying, in this diagram, to capture a sense of mega-ecosystems in and around the university.

So you have a fictional university at its heart, in the middle, and around it eight ecosystems: economy, politics, knowledge, learning, culture, the natural environment, social institutions, and human identity.

The university, any university across the world, is encircled by these eight ecosystems.

And since I drew that diagram, I would now have to put into it a ninth circle, and that is technology.

Technology is now a force in its own right, which straddles and invades all the other ecosystems.

[Slide 7 – The Ecological University]

The ecological university

- Encircled – entangled – with global ecosystems
- They produce a turbulent and conflicted environment
- Some are dominant
- Emergence of a new Triple Helix – economy / technology / polity
- (End of humanities)
- Question of space for new possibilities for the university.

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This diagram, with its intertwined ecosystems, is intended to convey a sense of the university being buffeted and challenged by these mega-ecosystems. Every university across the world, whether it understands this or not, is in this situation, at least to some degree.

This is producing a turbulent and conflicted environment in which universities find themselves.

What you are all interested in is management, so why is management becoming so difficult in large organisations such as universities?

It is because of the turbulent and conflicted environment within which universities now have to operate. That is often said, but perhaps it is not sufficiently recognised just how turbulent and complex that environment is.

Ecosystems are buffeting and challenging the university, but they are not all equal. Some of these mega-ecosystems are more powerful than others. Some are dominant.

We are now witnessing the emergence of what I would call a new Triple Helix.

Many of you will be familiar with the original idea of the Triple Helix, which entered the literature some twenty or thirty years ago. But I want to suggest that we now have a new Triple Helix consisting of:

- the economy,
- technology, and
- the polity, especially the state.

These three are acting together in very powerful ways upon universities. Of the nine mega-ecosystems, these three are particularly dominant; this triumvirate of forces acts in concert.

The result: the ending of the humanities across much of the world.

Now, I do not know exactly what the situation is in Japan. My understanding, however, is that universities in Japan are moving in the same direction as universities in many other parts of the world, with the humanities gradually being withdrawn from the higher education space.

This is a consequence of the way in which the economic system, new technologies, and politics are increasingly coming together. As these three mega-ecosystems converge, there is progressively less space for the humanities. Collectively, their interests lie in economic growth, the defence and increase of capital, control of systems (including human beings now understood as systems), instrumental reason and a corralling of life itself into digital regimes.

The question before us, therefore, is whether there is still space for a new possibility of and for the university in the twenty-first century.

I am suggesting that the space available to universities is steadily narrowing because of these immense forces acting upon them. The question is whether that space can once again be widened, enabling universities to embrace new possibilities in the twenty-first century.

[Slide 8 – The Three Territories]



The three territories

- Civic
- Global
- Ecological
- Question: what does it mean for a university to live in all three?

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I would ask you to hold that image of those mega-ecosystems surrounding and entangling the university in your mind as I go through the rest of my talk. That image is fundamental to everything else I want to say.

We now return to my starting point: the three territories—the civic, the global, and the ecological.

The question is: What does it mean for a university to live in all three?

Given the ways in which universities are being constrained and steered in the direction of technology, the economy, and the interests of the state, can universities properly and seriously engage with each of

these three possibilities—these three territories that open up before them: the civic, the global, and the ecological?

[Slide 9 – Snares of Nests]



Snares of nests

- An option – the three territories are nested
- Just a matter of the horizon – near or far
- The civic inside the global, and the global inside the ecological.
- Russian dolls
- Nothing to see here

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So, how do we understand those three territories: the civic, the global, and the ecological?

How might we represent them? If we were to draw a diagram, what would it look like?

Some might suggest that the four territories are nested, one within the other. The civic is nested inside the national, the national inside the global, and the global nested inside the ecological.

It is rather like those Russian dolls. You start with a large one. Inside it is a smaller one, and inside that is another smaller one.

Everything appears straightforward. The university can attend to all the locales simultaneously. There is no problem—it is simply a matter of scale and horizon.

I want to suggest that it is more complicated than that.

[Slide 10 – The Proliferation of the Units]

The proliferation of the units

- But what happens in practice?
- We see a *proliferation of units*; of new bits and pieces across the campus
 - Even new Deputy President portfolios ...
 - A centre for civic engagement
 - A unit for global enterprise
 - An 'ecology laboratory' ...
 - The portacabins multiply; and so do the name plaques ...
 - Yes, serendipity, as challenges emerge (the university president goes to a breakfast meeting..)
 - But something more fundamental is at play

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What happens in practice?

What is happening around the world is that universities are becoming increasingly sensitive to a wide range of different challenges.

How do they respond?

First of all, the portfolios of the deputy presidents expand. You have a Deputy President for Enterprise. You have a Deputy President for Regional Activities. New units and new offices begin sprouting up across the campus.

Because universities very often do not have enough space for new buildings, temporary accommodation also begins to appear. You have a Centre for Civic Engagement, a Unit for Global Enterprise, an Ecological Laboratory. Temporary huts and offices spring up across the campus as the university pushes and pulls itself in different directions.

So, what is happening here?

The university is fragmenting, rather than forming a coherent view of itself. It is fragmenting and moving off in all sorts of different directions.

This is a highly dynamic situation, one in which the different parts neither know about nor much care about the other parts.

The university president goes to a breakfast meeting with other university presidents in Japan, hears a new idea about responding to the Internet and artificial intelligence, and comes back and launches another initiative.

The university then moves off in yet another direction.

Serendipity rules. Chance rules. Things simply happen in a fragmented way.

But something even more fundamental is at stake here.

[Slide 11 – A Situation of Multiple Constituencies]



A situation of multiple constituencies

- Signs that the university is living amid different spaces
- Each has its own community
 - The local/ regional community
 - UNESCO and its SDGs
 - The polity of the state
- So different constituencies (let's not speak of 'stakeholders')
- And there are tensions and even antagonisms between them.

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The university is not alone, as I have been implying. It has to respond to these mega-ecosystems, which are acting upon it with enormous force and traction.

The university is responding to all manner of different influences and communities.

It has its region, its locality. In large cities, there are powerful councillors, presidents, mayors, and public officials expecting their local university to advance local and regional interests in all sorts of ways.

You have the state and the national government setting expectations for universities within an increasingly political environment.

Then there is a world view. You have the United Nations, you have UNESCO and its Sustainable Development Goals, to which, I think, Japan is particularly sensitive. You are doing a great deal of work on the environment and sustainability front.

And the university has to respond to these communities. They are out there, calling on universities to respond in different ways.

And they all speak different languages, springing from different interests, different networks, different values and different orientations to the world.

There are different constituencies out there, and there are tensions and antagonisms between them. They do not agree with each other, and they place quite different and mutually contradictory expectations upon universities.

[Slide 12 – Messy Turbulence]

Messy turbulence

- So three spaces: civic, global, ecological
- Each has its own language, sets of relations, interests, practices, concerns, horizons
- They straddle those ecosystems but with their own patterns
- Themes/ interests jostle – economic growth, civic pride and flourishing, worldly status and legitimacy, environmental stewardship
- Across research, Third Mission and teaching

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This is a situation of great turbulence for universities across the world.

The civic, the global, the ecological—and by ‘ecological’ I mean the university having an eye to the world of Nature but doing so through its entanglements with all the other ecosystems. (The university can only properly attend to Nature if it understands that the matter of Nature is, in part, a matter of the economy, culture, learning, knowledge, the polity and so forth.)

This is a great challenge for university leaders and managers because they are hearing and sensing these different communities. They are sensing these demands throughout the university. These challenges, these languages, these ideas, and these expectations all have to be translated into a language that the university itself can understand.

And the professor in the humanities and the professor in technology are going to interpret those languages in quite different ways.

The university is itself a cluster of “tribes and territories,” to borrow Tony Becher’s phrase from his 1989 book *Academic Tribes and Territories*.

So we have difference outside the university, and difference inside the university. And this is a very difficult situation for university leaders and managers to handle.

Each of these territories outside the university has its own language, its own networks, its own interests, its own practices, its own concerns, and its own horizons.

The local horizon is quite different from the national economic horizon, and that is different again from the global ecological horizon.

The university has to move across all of these different horizons simultaneously.

So the university will talk internally about responding to and being concerned with economic growth, civic pride and flourishing, the worldly status not only of universities but also of the government and the nation itself, and the stewardship of the natural environment.

These are huge challenges facing universities, and they pull in different directions, with major tensions among these different demands.

We have to be honest and face up to reality.

We cannot do equal justice to all of these expectations.

Why? Because they are antagonistic to one another.

The demands of economic growth cannot be addressed in the same way as those of civic pride and personal flourishing. Nor can either be addressed in the same way as the university's responsibility as a steward of the natural environment.

These challenges pull in different directions and so affect the fundamental practices of universities:

- their research mission,
- their teaching mission,
- their Third Mission,
- and the way they reach out to society.

Who are they going to appeal to?

What values are they going to express?

What language are they going to speak?

All of you, especially the senior leaders and managers among you, will be very sensitive to all of this.

As you speak to a local council, as you speak to a government official, as you speak to the Minister for Higher Education, and as you speak to a representative of the great ecological challenges facing the world, you naturally use different forms of language, different expressions, and different values.

You are jostling between all of these different challenges at once.

The question is whether there is coherence among all of these different languages and networks in which you are involved.

[Slide 13 – Tensions and Antagonisms]

Tensions and Antagonisms

Tensions:

- Instrumental aims – human/societal flourishing
- Growth – conservation
- Endorsement – critique
- Technology – culture

Antagonisms:

- Mutual incompatibilities
- Without resolution

Q: Need the Deputy Presidents—for civic engagement, SDGs and global enterprise—need to talk to each other?

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I am suggesting that there are major tensions and antagonisms here, and I think they lurk within the policy frameworks that are developing in Japan, or at least within the higher education system as I understand it.

There are tensions between being instrumental—getting things done to an identified aim—on the one hand, and being concerned with human and societal flourishing on the other.

I was fascinated to see, in one of the policy papers that was shared with me before my talk, that in Japan your policy circles recognise that not everything that is important and valuable in higher education can be measured.

I thought that was fantastic. I am afraid we do not always see that in governments across the world. For the most part, governments have come to believe that anything of value in higher education can—and therefore has to—be measured.

The instrumental dominates, while concerns about human and intellectual flourishing are much less in evidence, even if there is some discussion of them. There is a fundamental set of conflicts here.

Then there is another conflict between growth—economic growth—on the one hand, and conservation on the other.

Conservation is concerned with preserving what we have in the world.

The whole notion of sustainability, for example, is, in a sense, a conservative idea.

It pulls against the whole agenda of growth, and yet we pursue both growth and sustainability simultaneously. It is a profound tension.

Then we have another major tension between the university as a centre for critical thought and the university as a major vehicle for endorsing and fulfilling the expectations of society. Sometimes, the expectations of society deserve to be critiqued.

The university is, therefore, now in a difficult place across the world, caught between the challenge of being a critical centre and the expectation that it should largely provide society and the economy with what they ask of it.

In New Zealand, universities are required by statute to accept a role as “critic and conscience of society,” and they are *also* expected to endorse, support, faithfully respond to, and even energise society’s expectations.

Those expectations on the part of society may need to be critiqued, and sometimes governments and society do not wish to hear those critiques.

Then we come to technology and culture. Again, I was fascinated to see that higher education, within the Japanese government structure, is located in a ministry whose title includes Culture, namely the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. That is an extraordinary range of responsibilities. And, importantly, Culture appears in the title.

Alongside science and technology, you have Culture. In fact, Culture precedes Science and Technology. That is highly unusual across the world. It reflects a hope, an expectation and a belief that Culture still matters, even in a technological world. Yet there are tensions between technology and culture. Sometimes these tensions become actual antagonisms—situations in which the incompatibilities are so deep that they cannot be overcome.

We cannot do justice both to the imperatives of technology on the one hand and to care and sensitivity towards culture and persons on the other. Ultimately, one may displace the other. These are antagonisms without resolution. They will go on. There is no way of solving these antagonisms. We have to live with them.

For example, imagine that your university has a Deputy President for Civic Engagement, another for the Sustainable Development Goals, another for Global Enterprise, and another for Artificial Intelligence.

The question is:

Do they ever need to talk to one another? And, if so, what would they talk about? Do they have any challenges in common? This is a real difficulty for management and leadership.

In the past I might have asked whether the Deputy President for Research and the Deputy President for Teaching needed to talk to each other. What was the connection between them? Today, however, fragmentation within universities has become much broader, more important, more intense and more challenging as universities seek to connect with society in all of its complexity.

[Slide 14 – The Civic]

The civic

Tones of:

- Public service
 - Generosity
 - Empathy
 - Community engagement
 - Local wellbeing; even local flourishing
 - Civic pride
 - Immediacy
 - Top-down and bottom-up – distributed leadership
- ('Placefulness' – in/of a place ...)

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Remember that I am proposing these three major territories as confronting the university: the civic, the global, and the ecological. Let us look at the different languages and cultures that exist within these three agendas, beginning with the civic.

What are its values?

What are its ideas?

What are the concepts that become part of the civic agenda for any university that takes this agenda seriously?

You hear ideas of public service, community engagement, local wellbeing, even local flourishing, and civic pride.

You hear about listening to the local community, being generous towards it, understanding it, and showing empathy towards it.

You become concerned with poorer people and disadvantaged communities within a locality or region.

Then there is the desire to get things done with a sense of immediacy.

Activities with the local community can only be effective if there is a form of distributed leadership, in which leadership emerges within projects carried out in partnership with the locality, enabling the community itself to develop a sense of ownership.

The notion of place therefore becomes very interesting. Where is the place? Is it in the university? Or is it in the locality?

The civic agenda therefore becomes, as we may say in the West, a ballgame of its own.

[Slide 15 – The Global]

The global

Tones of:

- The university as a company
- With resources
- Transactional relationships
- MOUs
- Income streams
- Business models ('modelling'/ 'scenarios')
- Worldly legitimacy/ positioning
- Rankings
- Top-down leadership – barely that.

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The global presents a different kind of horizon, a different set of communities, a different language, and a different way of being for the Deputy President who is concerned with, and has a responsibility towards, the university's global agendas.

Here, the Vice-President understands that, in projecting the university internationally, the university almost becomes like a private company, with its own resources and its own possibilities for transactional relationships with other nations, other universities, and major corporations around the world. There is a great deal of activity: signing memoranda of understanding with other universities, with other nations, and with major corporations.

This Vice-President is concerned with a different set of priorities: widening the university's income streams, developing business models, and constructing scenarios for the university over the next twenty or thirty years. The concern here is not only with the university's position in the world rankings, but also with its legitimacy and its positioning in the world. How is the university understood worldwide?

Here, leadership becomes much more top-down. This Vice-President becomes all-knowing, all-seeing, understanding the university's place in the world, and exercising a form of top-down leadership throughout the institution.

[Slide 16 – The Ecological]

The ecological

Tones of:

- The imaginative
- The philosophical
- The transcendental (above and beyond Nature)
- The complex
- The critical ('critique')
- The anticipatory
- The messianic ... (fearful of Armageddon ...)

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Next, the ecological territory—the ecological agenda.

Again, we encounter another kind of territory, another kind of agenda, with its own values and concepts. Here, one thinks into the future in quite a different way—not by simply extending where one is, but by imagining *new* possibilities for the university. One tries to imagine new kinds of universities within the ecosystem situation of a university—and that ecosystem situation will vary for each university. What are the possibilities for this university, or that university, in this extraordinarily interconnected, dynamic and evolving world? So this Vice-President becomes much more imaginative. The role becomes almost philosophical and almost poetic, asking what the value of the university is and imagining whether that value can be realised in new ways. It even becomes transcendental. It may lead us back into the culture and philosophy of Japan.

What are the traditions of Japan? What were they? What are they? How might they be realised in the twenty-first century?

What does it mean to respond now, given—for example—the extraordinary care for nature that exists in Japan?

This is a fundamental issue. There is a sense of a world beyond human beings—a transcendental world. How are universities going to take that on board?

Then we encounter the whole complexity of ideas and values, together with the notion of the university as a critical agent, helping society to reflect and to be critical of itself. Are we simply going to go headlong in the direction that the great powers want us to go? Or are we going to create space to reflect upon this, and help society to reflect upon it—to become a learning society?

Many people are now fearful of the direction in which the world is heading. Some even speak of Armageddon, of the complete destruction of systems on this earth.

Can we still be hopeful? What does it mean to be hopeful against this background? Some universities are now beginning to create spaces and units in which they can think much more imaginatively about how the university might move forward within this ecological horizon.

[Slide 17 – A Multiplicitous Situation]



A multiplicitous situation

- Multiple missions;
- Multiple lands;
- Multiple languages;
- Multiple concerns and interests.

- A new kind of 'multiversity'

- '*Tribes and Territories*' – non-comprehension ...

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So this is what we might term a multiplicitous situation: multiple missions; multiple lands; multiple territories; multiple languages; multiple concerns and interests; and multiple values.

The university is having to live in all of these ways, in all of these territories, all at once. This is a new kind of multiversity.

A great friend and mentor of mine, Tony Becher, wrote a famous book in 1989 entitled *Academic Tribes and Territories*, in which he identified the academic tribes and territories within universities. Academics in philosophy, sociology, biology, and technology could not talk to each other very much because of the different territories, languages, and cultures within which they lived.

Now that challenge has expanded enormously because the university has to live in all of these external territories: the local, the global, and the ecological. It is a very difficult situation because these territories comprise different communities, each with its own language and expectations.

[Slide 18 – Where's the Unity?]**Where's the unity?**

- There may be no unity!
- The messiness of supercomplexity
- Institutional fragmentation is inevitable?

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And so the question arises:

Where's the unity in all of this? Can there be unity?

Problem: there may be no unity at all. That may be the world in which we have to live.

Faced with all of those mega-ecosystems that I identified earlier, we may be in such a messy situation that there is no unity at all. This is fundamentally the messiness of what I term supercomplexity—different discourses, different languages, none of which can agree with one another. That is the challenge of being a university today.

Is institutional fragmentation under these conditions inevitable? That is the question that faces us.

[Slide 19 – The University is Pulled into Multiple External Spaces]

The university is pulled into multiple external spaces

- The university is ducking and diving across different spaces
- And these spaces are in tension with each other.
- Clark Kerr spoke of the university as a 'multiversity'
- With only car-parking providing unity
 - Or—these days—exasperation over the university's IT platform
- Now that fragmentation is widening, as the university is called out into multiple external spaces
- Local, national, global and imaginary
- A new heterogeneous set of external spaces
- and consequent heterogeneous internal spaces

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So the university is being pulled into multiple external spaces, whether it likes it or not, and these spaces are in tension with each other.

Clark Kerr, of the University of California, spoke some sixty years ago of the university as a multiversity, which was united, as he put it, only by a collective concern over car parking.

Well, the question is:

Do we have *any* collective concerns today? I suggest that, if we have one, it is a concern over the university's IT and AI platforms and their operations.

That's all that unites us in universities around the world today.

There is very little now that unites the university as it faces the different mega-challenges that the world is presenting.

This fragmentation is widening all the time, day by day, as the university is pulled outwards, locally, internationally, globally, and into real and imaginary spaces.

This is a new situation for the university. The external spaces into which it is being pulled are multiplying and are very different. They are heterogeneous.

As a consequence, the university develops heterogeneous *internal* spaces as it tries to respond to a messy and heterogeneous *external* world. So internal messiness responds to external messiness.

[Slide 20 – Increasing External Heterogeneity]**Increasing external heterogeneity**

- Contrasting horizons and interests
- Different languages and cultures (even in English)
- Multiple organizational/ financing patterns
- Varying identity paths (career opportunities / professorships)

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What I'm suggesting is that external constituencies are now expanding and pulling the university in all sorts of difficult and awkward ways. They have contrasting horizons and interests.

The interests of global AI technology corporations are quite different from concerns about the natural environment, personal and social flourishing, and the preservation and development of culture. These are fundamentally different interests, and we shouldn't pretend that we can easily bring them together. They also exert enormous power.

Through them come new financial and other opportunities for universities. New career paths open up for different kinds of professors. The professor of modern languages tends to disappear, while professors of AI become increasingly numerous as the university is pulled into these different external spaces.

[Slide 21 – A New Ethos: Living with Difference]

A new ethos: living with difference

- Whitchurch spoke of a Third Space – can the multiplicity of external spaces form a new 4th space?
- Ethos – but anew – i.e., an ethos of engagement-through-difference
 - Living with tension
 - Contending value systems
 - Respecting difference
 - *Not just 'Disagreeing Well' (Habermas)*
 - But of recognition and respect (Honneth)
 - And permitting flights of fancy – to imagine the university otherwise.

- i.e., no longer an internal ethos as such but an ethos born of the university-in-the-world

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So the question is: Can a new ethos, a new culture, be developed for the university in which we can live with difference? This is the fundamental question facing university leadership today.

My colleague, Celia Whitchurch, spoke of a Third Space. She was talking about a third space of professionalism within universities, alongside teaching and research. But now the question arises as to whether a Fourth Space can be created in which the university finds a way of living with the difference that it is confronted with.

Living with tension. Living with its contending value systems. Respecting the differences across the system.

The great theorist Jürgen Habermas, who died earlier that year, spoke about just this matter.

Can we evolve ways of living with each other, talking with each other, in which we are rational with each other while living out our differences?

My own university—University College London—has taken this philosophical idea seriously and developed an initiative called *Disagreeing Well*. It is a major initiative at one of the world's great universities. It brings people together to confront the major issues of the day over which there are conflicting ideas and interests.

My university is doing precisely that by identifying some big controversial issues of the day and bringing people together, opening up spaces for debate in which there can be real interpersonal recognition and respect.

Living with each other's different points of view, and even trying to imagine the university otherwise. Imagine the university being quite a different kind of university.

This is not an internal process, not an internal language, but a language and a culture which recognises that the university is linked with, and involved in, the world. This is the new world in which the new university has to evolve.

[Slide 22 – Practising the Ethos]



Practising the ethos

- This ethos – of living with difference – has to be developed
 - The forces work against it
 - The external world comes in – but on its own terms.
 - » And with different sets of terms: “in the national interest”

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So how do we do this? How do we evolve a new culture of the university in which we can live with difference, internally and externally? The problem is, as I was saying earlier, that the dominant forces are working against it. The dominant forces are pushing the university towards national economic growth, AI and technology, and explicit technological and economic aims and outcomes.

As the nation is now itself challenged by all sorts of economic and even social challenges, the economic world is coming into the university—not really to have a conversation with the university, but to push it in directions that serve its own interests. And it comes with its particular themes, terms and values.

You have a great challenge here in Japan with the declining birth rate. The government is pushing universities to think about this, to respond to it. That must be absolutely right. But that is just one example of the way in which the government is putting enormous pressure on universities to act in the national interest.

The question is: given the major interests of the world, society and government, as well as the claims of human flourishing and the flourishing of the natural environment, can we do justice to all of them together? It cannot be presumed that a positive answer is readily available.

[Slide 23 – More Leadership, Less Management?]

More leadership, less management?

Leadership and management differ ...

- But they both matter hugely
 - However, leadership first and then management
- *Leadership* – orchestrating the conversation
- *UCL – Disagreeing Well*
- Collaborative meetings, of academics and professional staff at all levels
- Getting beyond the body language
- Not down time – absolutely necessary
- Developing the university as a ‘corporate agent’.

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This is where leadership and management come into play. Both are profoundly important, but they differ profoundly.

I would put it this way: leadership first, and then management. Leadership is primary. Leadership helps to orchestrate the conversation, to bring in new ideas, and to open up horizons.

I have given you the example of the *Disagreeing Well* initiative at University College London, involving collaborative meetings of academics and professional staff at all levels.

When I was a senior leader at the Institute of Education, I had responsibility for producing its first corporate strategy. And we approached the matter in just that way, through conversations across the whole institution.

We brought academics and professional staff together to discuss really difficult matters about the future of the Institute of Education. Those were difficult conversations because people did not agree with one another. You could see it in their body language. They could barely look each other in the eye.

Characteristically, on these occasions, managers may reason in this way: “This is a waste of time. We know what the issues are. We know what the agenda is. We know what the goals should be. Let’s get on with it.”

Such an approach is misguided. This internal conversation is profoundly important. It is absolutely necessary if we are to develop the university as a collective agent that can engage with the world, with society, and with governments in a collective voice.

A major concept in thinking about university management is that of the university as a corporate agent. What does that mean? We have to work together; come together; act together.

[Slide 24 – Conclusions]

Conclusions

- The university is being called out of itself
 - Into the wider world
 - Multiple agendas – with their own communities
- Danger of the internal tribes and territories being replaced
 - By externally facing tribes and territories.
- The university risks a new and bewildering fragmentation
 - That would tear it apart.
- (Frameworks of endorsement and care)
- A new ethos is necessary – of living with strangeness
 - But it has to be worked at and even fought for.
 - Is it possible?

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So, my conclusions.

The university is being called out into the wider world. The wider world is presenting the university with multiple agendas, each with its own communities. These agendas conflict. They emerge from external tribes and territories which conflict among themselves. So we are faced, as universities, with a new bewildering fragmentation that would tear the university apart.

There are frameworks of endorsement: get with the programme. Do what the nation wants you to do.

But there are other frameworks of social care, personal realisation and care for the natural environment.

How do we live with all these conflicts?

A new ethos is necessary. And it is possible. We have to find a way of living with strangeness. And it has to be worked at and fought for.

It's very difficult. Is it even possible?

Thank you.

Discussion (Q&A): Leadership, Management and Living with Difference

Moderator

We are running out of time, but in any case, we are now moving to the question-and-answer session. If you have any questions, please raise your hand, state your name, and say where you are from.

Professor Kazunori Sunagawa (Chuo University)

Thank you for your presentation.

I'm Kazunori Sunagawa from Chuo University.

This is just a question for clarification.

You separate two things.

Tensions can be resolved.

Antagonisms cannot.

And you base your new ethos on Honneth, on recognition and respect.

But recognition usually calls for reconciliation in the end.

Your antagonism without resolution sounds more like Theodor Adorno's negative dialectics—living with demands that never go away.

So, which is your ethos?

Reconciliation that aims for unity, or accepting a conflict that will never be resolved?

That is my question.

Professor Ronald Barnett

Thank you very much indeed.

Thank you very much for the question. I could answer it immediately and simply. My head is with Adorno and my heart is with Honneth. But let me say a little more and see if I can have my cake and eat it—to do justice to both positions.

The question can be put in this way:

Is there an end point under conditions of severe disagreement?

Can we simply go on talking to each other, debating with each other?

Or is there some kind of resolution available to us?

This is, of course, a very important matter when the university is faced with many and conflicting challenges on a daily basis.

How do we go forward when the world is uncertain and we are unclear within ourselves?

This is a profoundly important question.

If we were to listen particularly to some of the theorists, one would have to say that there is no resolution to this problem.

The debate must go on.

The criticisms must be heard.

The conflicts must be aired.

There has to be room for that conversation to keep going.

That is why I am profoundly impressed, if I may say so, that my own university established the *Disagreeing Well* initiative many years after I left.

Can we set up spaces in which we can go on talking to each other, to air our differences and our disputes?

This is why I want to distinguish between leadership and management.

Both are crucial, but they are different.

Leadership has this challenge of opening up this conversation, and management has the task of making decisions.

Both are crucial.

We can't have one without the other.

Again, I was profoundly impressed by the Japanese policy document that was sent to me, which contains the word wisdom.

Your government is talking about wisdom in relation to universities.

But we can only have wise universities if we have open conversation within universities.

Wisdom implies conversation and an opening up of horizons.

That means different ideas, views, visions, hopes and aspirations coming together and being aired.

And that's part of the role of leadership: to lead that conversation, to be a translator of the different cultures outside the university into the university, and to help the different cultures within the university understand each other.

These are incredibly sophisticated and challenging roles for leadership.

And it's against that horizon that management comes into play, making difficult decisions.

You have a committee meeting, and academics are wonderful at having conversations and never making a decision.

Normally, after a committee meeting, there is a record of the committee meeting.

For each agenda item, those minutes—that record—should state the decision that was reached.

That should be very clear.

What was decided?

What is the decision that has been reached?

And not: "No decision has been reached."

And it's very important that decisions are reached against the background of a very difficult situation.

We need both.

We need horizons.

We need conversation.

We need disagreement.

And we need decision-making.

We need both.

So that is the challenge of universities: making decisions while recognising the difficult, turbulent, challenging and antagonistic situation in which they find themselves.

And this has to happen at every level of the university:

from the President and the senior management team in their weekly meetings,

to the programme team, and to the junior lecturer beginning to assemble a small course team for a course unit.

Decisions have to be made.

And let us make them with full recognition of these challenging issues.

Thank you.

Moderator

Thank you.

Actually, we have passed the scheduled time, so we must now conclude this session.

Thank you, Professor Barnett.

Please join me in giving him a warm round of applause.