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Editorial

Dare to Evolve / Dare to Become:

From Knowledge Production to Producing Knowledges

Juliana Gonçalves, Trivik Verma, & Jing Spaaij

Higher education has always evolved, though not always consciously, to meet the demands placed upon it by society. It has adapted to technological revolutions, economic restructurings, and cultural shifts. Universities today, however, face a more complex and unsettling horizon. Climate change, widening social inequalities, ecological degradation, food insecurity, and political polarisation collectively threaten the stability and well-being of communities worldwide. At the same time, universities themselves are under pressure: budgets cut in the name of austerity, the erosion of public trust in expertise, accusations of being "out of touch", "woke", or "too political", and the emergence of new technologies – especially AI – that unsettle established modes of teaching, research, and knowledge production.

Despite being accused of wokeness, higher education is a space of privilege. In the words of the feminist sociologist Victoria Reyes, the academy is overwhelmingly white, wealthy, and Western. For all the rhetoric of inclusion and global citizenship, structural barriers remain: access to elite institutions is still tied to financial resources and social capital; research agendas often marginalise knowledge traditions outside the Euro-American canon; and curricula rarely centre plural voices and approaches, particularly excluding those from Indigenous

communities and historically oppressed groups. In this sense, higher education has been complicit in reproducing exclusions and oppression, rather than dismantling them. If universities are to play a meaningful role in addressing today's crises, they must confront their own histories of exclusion and make space for plural ways of knowing and being.

Perhaps paradoxically, alongside budget cuts and decreased public trust, universities, academics, and students are pressured with increasingly complex and demanding tasks to address societal challenges. Many of these challenges cannot be understood - let alone addressed - from within the silos of traditional disciplines and within the frameworks and ideologies that have caused them in the first place. Climate change, for instance, is not only an environmental process but also a political, social, and ethical one. Technical universities, however, insist on making it a design challenge for bachelor's and master's students, training them to become technophiles instead of understanding the state of the world. Addressing environmental, political, social, and ethical challenges requires transdisciplinary approaches that bring together and closer to students not only multiple academic fields but also knowledge from communities and practitioners. Ethical review boards, originally designed for biomedical research, also often struggle to accommodate participatory, community-based, or Indigenous methodologies in both research and education, limiting the transformative potential of these practices.

The procedures that govern universities often do not fit the kind of research and education we urgently need, stretching the current institutional fabric, which remains structured around departmental boundaries, quantitative metrics of research productivity, and competitive funding models. Bureaucratic metrics, audit cultures, and rankings all reward individual achievement, short-term outputs, and prestigious publication numbers, rather than collaboration, long-term engagement, or social impact. Teaching practices remain oriented toward credentialing rather than cultivating the imagination, empathy, and critical thinking needed to navigate the real world. To transform themselves, universities will need to rethink not only what they teach and research, but also how they assess value, accountability, and impact.

It is tempting to imagine that universities can respond to these pressures with incremental adjustments. Think of revising curricula, embracing digital platforms, or launching new interdisciplinary programmes. But the challenges we face demand more than adaptation. They call for transformation. The ways in which higher education teaches, assesses, and governs itself are deeply entangled with the very systems that have produced today's crises. Universities frequently replicate extractive logics – privileging certain forms of knowledge while erasing others, celebrating

neutrality while ignoring positionality, producing linear approaches to issues that are inherently complex. As we are writing this editorial, the University of Oxford announced unfettered access to OpenAI's ChatGPT Edu license for all students and staff, becoming the first in a long list of universities in the United Kingdom (UK) that are expected to follow suit. During a crisis in the higher education sector in the UK, axing social science and humanities programs and simultaneously setting a precedent for uncritically adopting AI technologies[1] is causing a wider rift in our social fabric. If left unchallenged, these logics will continue to reproduce the inequalities and environmental damage they claim to address.

This requires our community – academics, teachers, students – to delve into the pressing issues facing higher education today and take an active role in reshaping the learning landscape at universities. Evolving Education: A Manifesto to Reimagine Higher Education responds to this imperative from the premise that higher education must learn to evolve differently. Evolution here is not a matter of survival through competition like the recent neoliberalisation of the academy has us thinking, but of re-imagining purpose, cultivating reflexivity, and embracing pluralism. Here, teaching and learning practices become spaces where complexity is acknowledged, not simplified; where collaboration across disciplines is not an exception but a necessity; where justice, inclusion, and care are not add-ons to DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) roles for promotion but commitments of accountability from top management and leadership teams. At its core, Evolving Education is a call to action - a collective manifesto that dares us to dream big, to think creatively, and to imagine a future where "education is freedom", as advocated by the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire.

The book is a peer-enriched and edited volume of manifestos written by academics, students, and education professionals to reimagine higher education in a bold exploration of the future of learning. Embracing critical insights from a diverse range of disciplines and perspectives, the manifestos explore innovative perspectives, transformative strategies, and bold visions that can redefine the role of higher education in fostering critical thinking, justice, and societal impact. The book is not only inspirational and reflective but also provides actionable insights.

The chapters in this book assert the role of universities as catalysts for social transformation, not just the production of scientific knowledge. Key themes include decolonisation, inclusivity, and justice in educational systems; shifts from traditional, hierarchical pedagogies to collaborative, reflexive, and student-centred learning; and the integration of transdisciplinary, practice-based, and community-engaged approaches. Authors emphasise the need to bridge academia with real-world societal and environmental challenges, especially through ethical, localised, and

[1] Guest, Olivia, et al. "*Against the Uncritical Adoption of 'AI' Technologies in Academia.*" (2025). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17065098

politically aware education. They also advocate for rethinking the role of technology, embracing epistemic diversity, and developing critical, adaptive, and imaginative skills in response to crises like climate change, inequality, and systemic oppression.

Why frame the volume as a collective manifesto? Because manifestos are twinning spaces of discomfort and action. They get us to think outside the box without the bounds of academic peer review. We believe writing is a formative process, a space to articulate deep ideas, values, feelings. Writing down our intentions and views on paper gives us a sense of concreteness, reinforcing our commitments to the ideas we lay down. Yet, despite this concreteness, we think manifestos should be open to reflection. Related to what Roberto Rocco and Caroline Newton describe in the opening chapter of this book, writing a manifesto is an exercise of *becoming* – for students, in their case, but also for educators and other professionals involved in higher education. We are all evolving.

We therefore see manifestos not as texts that provide definitive answers to complex questions, but as instruments that sketch pathways towards alternative approaches to higher education. They open space for hope and collective imagination in the face of complex and wicked situations. They signal both a critique of the present and an invitation to envision different futures. Writing and reading manifestos cultivates the courage to imagine and pursue alternative trajectories together, mobilising communities. To us, manifestos are a powerful and inspiring practice of imagination, without claiming to be final or complete (always evolving).

“Collective” in this book is enacted through three modes of collectiveness. The first refers to a workshop held at TU Delft in September 2024 to collect perspectives on education from TU Delft academics, educators, students, and alumni. The central theme revolved around the concept of “open education”, sparking dynamic conversations about what it truly means for education to be “open”. Participants were invited to dream big and think out of the box. As we discussed our biggest ideas for higher education, we also identified a host of practices we are already doing and examples from elsewhere that foster these dreams. The conversations were not about textbooks or lectures but about the emotional, social, and caring side of teaching and learning: how education needs to be attentive and patient in relation to our lives now and in the future. The insights from the workshop are presented in the chapter *Big dreams, Everyday acts: A Manifesto from the Evolving Education Workshop*.

The second mode of collectiveness refers to collective authorship, where manifestos are composed by a team of co-authors. These account for the majority of the chapters, with 19 out of 24 being produced collectively. The individually written manifestos are no less significant. We commend and celebrate our brave single authors for being equally bold in their

declarations. Writing alone can be a vulnerable and deeply personal act. These voices complement the collective manifestos, ensuring that the volume captures both the energy of shared commitment and the intensity of personal convictions.

The third mode refers to our unique review process, designed to foster dialogue and learning. Instead of using a conventional review process, where reviewers have to choose between major/minor revisions or rejection, we implemented a "commentator" process based on a tip-top feedback process. The TOP served to provide highlights of the manifestos, and the TIP for suggestions for further development. Commentators include academics, educational support staff, as well as students and PhD candidates. We provided clear guidelines to commentators to provide constructive feedback to either improve readability or deepen the ideas in the manifesto. This was to move the review process away from "what are the flaws of this manuscript?" toward "how can I help make these ideas stronger and more accessible?". Selected testimonies of the reviewers are added to the book to illustrate what they learn from the manifestos they reviewed. Select comments of the chapter authors reacting to the feedback are also added at the end of each chapter. The process was well appreciated by both authors and commentators.

Organising the chapters of this book proved to be a challenging task. Each contribution addresses critical issues from complex and overlapping perspectives, making it difficult to draw clear boundaries between them. We begin with a set of manifestos that call us back to the deeper purpose of education. These pieces invite us to reflect on how higher education can nurture our shared humanity, foster values-based learning, and serve society in ways that go beyond narrow performance metrics. They include: *Embracing our Humanity: a Manifesto for Higher Education* by Robbert Winkel, *Learning in Uncertainty: Towards a Values-based Education* by Olga Ioannou, *Exploring the purpose of what it means to be human to understand the purpose of education* by Angela Rout and Saba Hinrichs-Krapels, and *Between a rock and a hard place: Reflecting on and reimagining PhD processes* by Caiseal Beardow and Laura Barendregt.

From purpose to pedagogy, the next set of chapters highlights the importance of imagination, adaptability, and responsibility in shaping curricula that can meet both present and future challenges. Together, they illustrate how education can be re-envisioned to expand what counts as expertise, support student identity development, and create spaces where diversity and collaboration are embraced as essential to learning. These contributions include: *All Hail the Imagination! Expanding Notions of Engineering Expertise in Technical Higher Education* by Roy Bendor et al., *Reshaping Engineering Education* by Emma Crichton et al., *Transforming Higher Education Today to Shape Education for the*

Future by Juri Mets and Erna Engelbrecht, *Change to Care: Transforming Our Education and Focus on Students' Identity Development* by Steven Flipse et al., *Facilitating Safe and Reflective Environments to Approach, Analyze, and Act Upon Diversity in (Engineering) Education* by Juliette Cortes-Arevalo and Camilo Benitez-Avila, *Reflective Collaboration* by Annie Aggarwal and Katie Barry, and *Rethinking Architectural Education: Towards a Transformative and Emancipatory Pedagogy* by Mehmet Ali Gasseloğlu and S. Zeynep Yılmaz Kılıç.

We then move on to transdisciplinarity in practice. In these manifestos, transdisciplinarity is understood not only as a method of combining fields but also as an orientation toward multiplicity, civic engagement, and social responsibility. These contributions include: *Bridging the Gap: Transformative Higher Education through Blended Learning* by Akruti Murhekar et al., *Frugal Innovation Research Event (FIRE) Program: Igniting Human Ingenuity via Co-creation* by Christopher Adlung et al., *Learning in the Field for Responsible Design* by Diwen Tan and So Yeon Park, *Realizing the Promises of Transdisciplinarity* by Wander M. van Baalen et al., *Promoting Civic Engagement through Transdisciplinary Education* by Dieudonné Elohym, and *Towards a Humanitarian Engineering Paradigm* by Rhys Evans et al..

Subsequently, we turn to chapters focused on inclusion, justice, resistance, and decolonial practices. These manifestos confront the exclusions and silences that persist within educational institutions, while also grappling with the role of education in times of crisis and conflict. They show how education can widen its horizons to honour diverse ways of knowing and being. These contributions include: Reimagining Global Education: *A Call for Queer Inclusivity in 21st Century STEM Curricula* by Ajayshankar Jagadeesh et al., *Land, Music, Stories, and Embodiment Learning as Pedagogies* by Fatima Delgado Medina, *On the Architecturing of Destruction: Building Space Within Academia for Difficult Discussions During an Unfolding Genocide* by BK Scholars for Palestine, *Breaking the Silence: A Manifesto for Justice, Inclusivity, and Decolonization in Higher Education* by POLIS, *Resistance by Research and Design: Challenging Academic Neutrality and Epistemic Hegemony in Design Education - Six Actions of Resistance in Conflict Zones Within Oppressive Regimes* by Marh Echtai and Johnathan Subendran, and *Hacking Spatial Design: An Educational Opportunity* by Irene Luque Martin.

Finally, the book closes with the manifesto *Dear University, A Manifesto* by Wander van Baalen, Joseph Catlett, Tamara de Groot et al., addressed directly at the university as an institution. Written collaboratively by artists, scholars, educators, and students, it offers a multivocal reflection that speaks from within the everyday spaces of the university. Structured as a cascade of questions, it holds the university to account while also

reminding us that we are all part of its ongoing becoming.

As such, the book addresses a broad range of challenges in higher education related to the following: What should be the overarching purpose of higher education in the 21st century? How can institutions create more inclusive environments that embrace and celebrate diversity and foster belonging? How can teaching and learning practices be reimagined to cultivate essential skills such as adaptability, collaboration, critical thinking, and resilience? What innovative curriculum models can prepare students for the challenges of an ever-changing world? What ethical considerations must be taken into account when integrating technology into teaching and learning? Transdisciplinary Education: How can transdisciplinary education break down silos and foster a critical understanding of societal challenges? How can we challenge power dynamics and colonial structures in higher education? Readers looking for answers to these questions may not find them in this book, but will certainly find pathways for exploration. Our collective exercise in knowledge production is a testament to what it means: a *verb* producing plural knowledges than a *noun* of capitalist production where knowledge is transferred for some gain.

Acknowledgements

This project could not have come together without the generosity, energy, and powerful insights of all the authors and commentators who joined us on this journey. Each contribution during this process, whether a chapter, a comment, a provocation or a conversation, enriched the book and challenged us to think more openly, critically, and creatively. We are deeply grateful for the time, care, and commitment that went into this shared effort.

We would also like to thank TU Delft Open Science and Education for providing the funding that made this project possible. Their commitment to open education has not only supported this work but also inspired us to reflect on what it means to make knowledge genuinely accessible. A heartwarming thanks to Marcell Várkonyi, a sincere supporter of this project from the very beginning and throughout. We also thank the TU Delft Library and the TU Delft OPEN Publishing, particularly Frederique Belliard, Juliana Costa Pitanguy, and Rixt Tuinstra, for their support in publishing the book.

As editors, we affirm our shared belief in the values of openness, inclusivity, critical thinking, and collaboration. This book is both a product of those commitments and, we hope, a contribution to the ongoing work of making higher education more just, open yet connected, as well as responsive and responsible to the world around us.

Editors' Biographies

Juliana Gonçalves is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Urbanism at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft. Her work spans three interconnected fields: (spatial) critical theory, participatory planning, and socio-technical studies. By engaging with questions at the intersection of these domains, she examines how space, knowledge, and technologies co-produce social realities and shape possibilities for just futures. With a transdisciplinary and justice-centred approach, Juliana's pedagogy encourages critical reflection and engaged education. She advocates for education as an awakening and empowering experience rather than a process of passive knowledge transmission. Her teaching invites students to grapple with real-world challenges, engage with people and communities, and question dominant narratives in spatial planning and development.

Jing (Hongjing) Spaaij is a recent graduate from the MSc Urbanism program at TU Delft and former board member of POLIS 24'-25', a study association for master students specialising in Urbanism and Landscape Architecture. Her academic interests focus on biodiversity, citizen engagement, and addressing social-spatial stigmas in superdiverse neighbourhoods. Jing is part of the TU Delft Citizen Voice indicative, where she contributed to the development of three digital citizen engagement tools under the Bio-CiVo and CIVILIAN projects. She was also part of a multi-disciplinary student team, Space Oasis 1, a TU Delft's Dream Team, contributing to the design of a lunar village.

Trivik Verma is a Professor of Just Urban Futures at the department of Geography and environment at Loughborough University, UK. His works centres on various challenges of urbanisation, such as segregation, inequities in access and wellbeing, transport and energy poverty, climate-related vulnerabilities, and social justice. He recently launched Urban Futures Collective with the aim of intervening in the decline of public services in global cities, building capacity through transformative education and research practices with a variety of relational partners in society, and building a network of cities in the Majority World who are willing to undertake a different pathway than unabated economic growth and social decline. Trivik's commitment to empowering and relational learning extends beyond the classroom. As a National Geographic Teaching Fellow, he has instructed expeditions for high school students covering issues of conservation, climate change, anthropology, and rural life. These experiences allow students in formative years, age group 12-18, to have the opportunity to deeply reflect on the careers they want to pursue.