RE-SHAPING THE EHEA AFTER THE DEMISE OF NEOLIBERALISM:
A UK-INFORMED PERSPECTIVE

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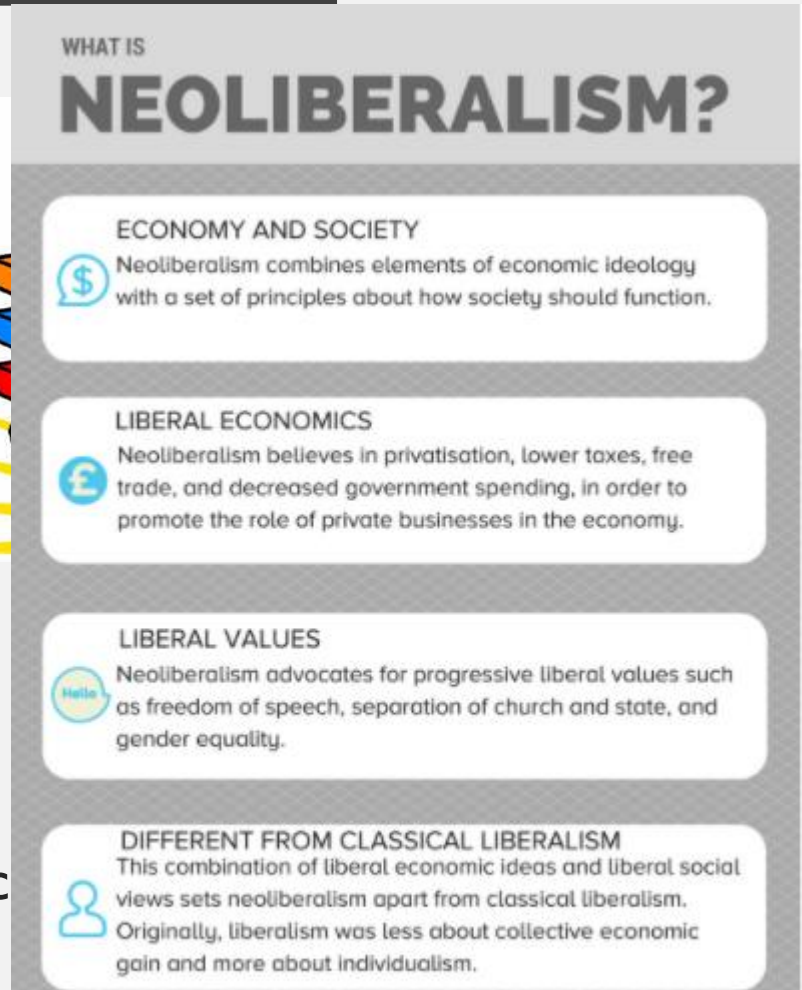
THE UK ACADEMY AND NEOLIBERALISM

- The UK academy has embraced neoliberalism:
- New public management
- Performativity
- Marketisation
- Competitiveness
- Commodification of services and personnel:
  - Everything is costed
  - Everyone must earn her/his salary or pay her/his way
- The EHEA, too, is essentially a *neoliberal* higher educ



THE BEGINNING OF THE END?
NEOLIBERALISM'S DEATH KNELL?

- 'We are today witnessing epochal changes, which are fundamentally redefining the social, economic, political, and environmental realities we live in in unforeseen and unimaginable ways'. (Zanoni et al., 2017)
- Political 'certainties' overturned:
  - 'These "electoral mutinies" suggest that what is under crisis is the gover system of neoliberalism itself' (Zanoni et al., 2017)
- Opposition to inequality
- 'Neoliberal economics has reached a
- 'The neoliberal age had its day' (Bucku
- 'A sure sign of the declining influence chorus of intellectual voices raised against it' (J

OUT WITH THE NEOLIBERAL AND IN WITH THE 'NEW':
REDESIGNING THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

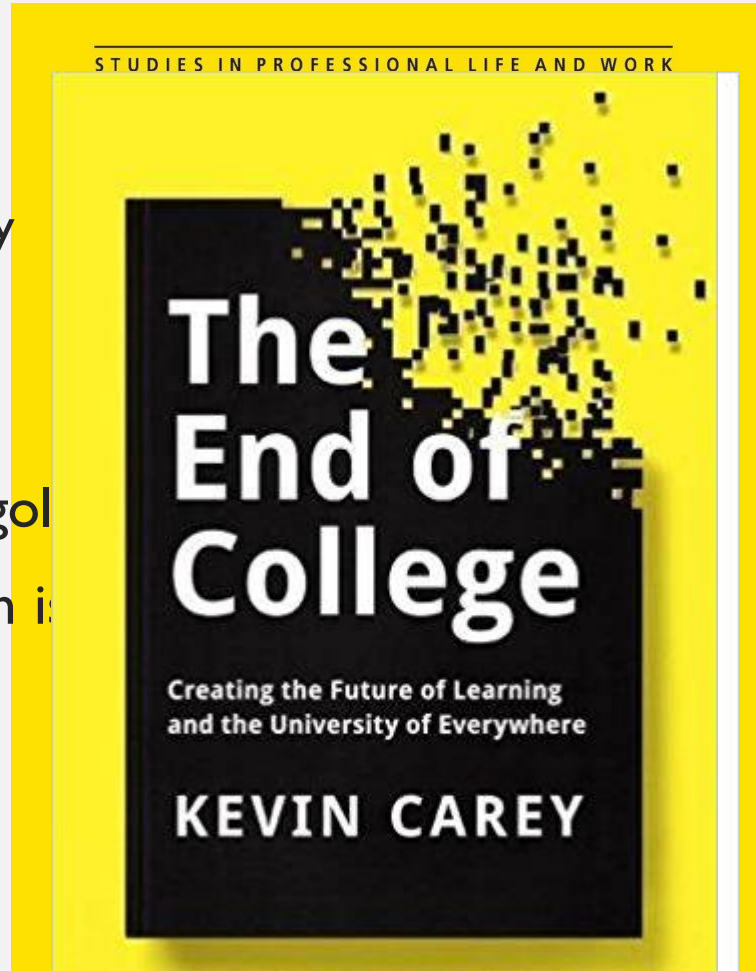
- Much negativity towards neoliberalism from academics.
- Expressed as critical scholarship:
  - Railing against governments
  - Railing against HEI management
  - The Auckland Declaration
- But very few tangible ideas or proposals for a new style academy.
- Difficult to formulate a vision of the post-neoliberal university:
  - The post-neoliberal EHEA

LACKING A VISION?
THE DIFFICULTIES OF CONCEIVING OF A POST-NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

- ‘Neoliberal precepts have hijacked the future: at the moment there simply are no credible, coherently formulated political alternatives’ (Kauppi, 2015)
- ‘What we know is changing and giving way to something new; *what shape that new formation may take is not apparent yet.*’ (Zanoni et al., 2017)
- The neoliberal university emerged as the product of a combination of intellectual, political and bureaucratic policymaking.
  - Any transformation that it undergoes cannot therefore be achieved unilaterally, but must span its essential tripartite constitution and reflect the complexity that this constitution ascribes to the university.
- ‘The problem is systemic, and financial. Running a university means managing a huge budget, paying hundreds or thousands of staff, and keeping the lights on. An ethical university, if we could somehow get back to that, will not come cheap, and this cannot be ignored.’ (Batterbury and Byrne 2017)

A DISCOURSE OF ALTERNATIVES

- A discernible small group of academic activists
  - presenting 'viable' alternatives to the neoliberal university
- Journal special issue focused on:
  - 'alternatives to the deteriorating state of universities'
- This discourse resists the idea of returning to a lost 'gol
- For some European academics, however, neoliberalism i evaluated in relation to what it replaced:
  - the Soviet model of HE
  - 'out of the frying pan and into the fire'



THE PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES:
THE 'SPECIFICS'

- The 'co-operative' university (Wright & Greenwood 2017):
  - 'Universities run by and for the benefit of students, ac
    the public'
  - 'How to restore academics and students, the universit
    creators, as beneficial owners, as direct participants, co
    and decision makers in all major institutional venues a
  - Mimics the John Lewis partnership in
  - Styled after Mondragón University
- A *Times Higher Education* report on
  identified several significant weaknes

Making the
Co-operative University
New places, spaces and models of higher education

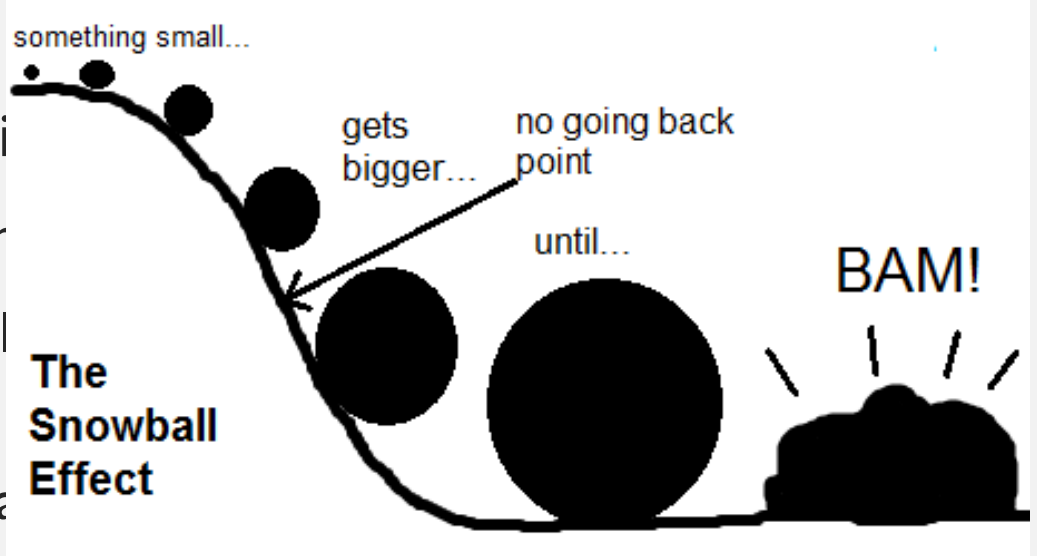
THE PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES:
THE 'SPECIFICS'

- 'From an occupied to a public university' (Halffman & Radder 2015-17):
  - 'a flatter managerial and decision-making hierarchy'
  - 'a limit to time spent on administrative overheads'
  - co-operation, rather than competition, between institutions
  - bans on university mergers
  - bans on student fees.
  - The end of 'productivity' as a research assessment criterion.
- Some of these proposals fail to be convincing in terms of viability.

THE PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES:
THE 'SPECIFICS'

- Moving away from a neoliberal university by encompassing three specific 'traditions or systems of value' (Rustin 2016):
  - 'the industrial', 'the democratic' & 'the old humanist' conceptions of educational provision and purpose.
- 'We cannot be indifferent to the well-being of the economy, or to the traditions of high culture. We … are not, after all, educational Maoists'.
- Proposes, seven principles that HE should embrace, including:
  - stakeholder parity in the governance of HE institutions (HEIs)
  - availability to the public of HEIs' resources, skills and knowledge output.
  - increasing universities' role in 'the making of a good society'.

RESHAPING THE EHEA:
SMALL STEPS



- There are degrees of neoliberali
  - Diluted or reduced neoliberalism
  - Total abstinence from it is unlikel future
  - Residual aspects of neoliberal 'tra
- Snowballing effect of reduced neoliberalism is possible:
  - One country – or one institution – sets the ball rolling.
  - Momentum gathers, as others see it as a 'better way'.

RECOGNITION OF A 'BETTER WAY'
THE MICRO-LEVEL DIMENSION OF RESHAPING THE EHEA

- Recognition of a 'better way' is key to effective change.
- Attempts at renovating or changing a workforce's professionalism represents large-scale professional development (Evans 2011)
- For such professional development to be effective, the workforce must 'buy into' it:
  - Recognisi professionalism
- This facet c academics' attitudes to neoliber
  - People em what they consider to impove
  - Pursuit of
- The neoliberal university demands too many compromises to people's values.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A POST-NEOLIBERAL EHEA:
EUROPEAN ACADEMICS' PROFESSIONALISM(S)

- The European neoliberal university has not got the best out of its academics.
- Leaving behind neoliberalism offers the chance to draft a new psychological contract:
  - Reshaping the professionalism 'demanded' of them
  - The EHEA has never specifically delineated either 'demanded' or 'prescribed' academic professionalism
  - Should be a priority, to mark Bologna Process's 10-year anniversary
    - Add to the list of priorities in the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué

THE ‘SHAPE’ OF AN EHEA-APPROVED POST-NEOLIBERAL ACADEMIC PROFESSIONALISM

- Depending on her discipline, need not constantly c
funds
- Doesn’t need to compromise on her values
- Enjoys high morale and job satisfaction.

EHEA-FACILITATED TRANSITION TOWARDS A POST-NEOLIBERAL EUROPEAN ACADEMY

- The ‘European’ academic and her/his ;professionalism need to be placed on the EHEA development agenda
  - Agendas of ministerial conferences have failed to incorporate a micro-level focus on people at the front line of delivering HE in Europe.
- A 2017 Eurydice brief identifies neglect of this issue:
  - ‘While higher education has been subject to increasing demands amidst fast-moving societal transformation, little attention has been paid to the staff at the centre of the picture.’
  - But this document simply presents statistical secondary data.
  - If the EHEA doesn’t address the issue of neoliberalism’s effect on the academic workforce, specific European nations or regions will do.
    - Scandinavia has begun to address it.

THE DAWN OF A SCANDINAVIAN-LED 'NEW' EUROPEAN ACADEMIC PROFESSIONALISM?

- 'The time for new public management now is ended' (Swedish prime minister, Stefan Löfven)
  - A move towards 'confidence governance'
  - Seeking to get the best out of people – through work psychology
- Will Scandinavian universities lead the way towards a new academic professionalism within the EHEA?
- European higher education now 'stands at a crossroads' (Erkkilä & Piironen 2015)
- The time is ripe, then, for opening our ears to the death knells of Europe's neoliberal university, and turning our attention to how the EHEA may be reshaped after its demise.