

CGHE webinar 3 February 2022

The global scale in higher education and knowledge Is 'global' higher education a friend or a foe?

Simon Marginson

[Opening slide]

Every so often in history there is a new development so profound and so universal that it eventually transforms every aspect of human life as an irresistible force.

[Transformation 1: Worldwide radiation of agriculture in the Holocene from c. 10,000 BCE onwards]

The first and most important change was the emergence of agriculture in different parts of the world and its radiation everywhere else, enabling a vast expansion in food supply and population, social surplus and steeper hierarchies, and beginning to remake the ecology.

[Transformation 2: Urbanisation from 6000 BCE onwards]

Another great transformation has been the growth and spread of cities, a slow burn for most of history but tremendously stimulated by industrialisation and electrification and on track to 75% of world population by 2100. Cities enable more complex social organisation with an intricate division of labour, concentrated resources, states and large-scale communications. They changed how we think and how we relate.

[Transformation 3: The radiation of printing East and West after 9th century CE]

In culture and technology the development of block printing in pre-Song China, moveable type in 14th century Korea and printing in 15th century Europe helped to expand literacy, institutionalise public communications and common linguistic cultures, and facilitated governance, economic markets, civil society and the massification of education.

[Transformation 4: Fossil fuels and later, electrification enable rapid movement through physical space]

The 19th century saw the emergence of rapid forms of human transport, powered by fossil fuels, and cheaper massified travel, including oceanic travel, bringing new freedoms of mobility to ever widening circles of people. At the same time there were asynchronous postal services and synchronous speech and messages through telecommunications.

Today I will talk about another global transformation sweeping the world, which directly affects higher education and knowledge. But first I'll start with the idea of the 'global'. The material reality of the world as a sphere was understood by Ancient Greek science, and by mathematicians and astronomers in India and the medieval Islamic world. But the 'global'

did not become widely felt until the 16th century European circumnavigations. This new idea of the world gripped popular awareness. Shakespeare's theatre was called 'The Globe'.

[Global and colonial]

This brought into being the association between the global and the colonial – the idea of the world not as an interdependent common home but as a place where self-interest and greed could run amuck; with endless resources, ripe for exploitation at the point of a gun and with every cruelty. The world beyond the nation and all it contained was seen as an 'other'.

[Only five countries in the world have not been under Euro-American control in the last 200 years]

Europeans and then North Americans used their geographic knowledge of the world to intervene politically everywhere, through direct conquest or sustained intervention. Imaginings of the global remained closely shackled to the colonial project.

[Seeing the interdependent planet: the overview effect]

Until, suddenly, the shackles were broken. Space flight in the 1960s had an unexpected and dramatic effect, pluralising imagining of the global, lifting them beyond the colonial imaginary. The first photographs of the earth from space went everywhere that was accessible to media. The green and blue planet hanging in the void, singular, fragile and beautiful, was burned into the common mind. The cosmonauts and astronauts were transformed by 'the overview effect', in which the oneness of the world overshadowed other identity. This underpinned the new global ecological movement in the 1970s and after and later the rapid grasp of the climate crisis once it became apparent. The old association between the global and the colonial did not disappear, as we shall see, but pushing against it was different idea of global possibilities, global responsibilities and global action.

[Transformation 5: The formation of the global communicative space after 1990]

All this was a major development but not a great historic transformation. Then the idea of the global became materialised, in practice in a new way, through technology. As with the emergence of agriculture, and printing, new technology enabled the turning point.

I suspect the last thirty years are the early stages of a transformation equal to or greater in importance than printing and rapid mobility. In 1990 there were just 2.6 million users of the Internet, many in universities in the United States. By January 2021, states the World Bank, there were 4.7 billion Internet users, 59.5 per cent of global population. The emergence and spread of the Internet has made material, practical, the idea of a one world society. We have not fully explored the possibilities of global space but it has already transformed the knowledge circuits and made global higher education as real as national, regional or local.

[Growth of networked global higher education since 1990]

The world is always changing. Every unforeseen development opens new possibilities for the imagination and for social relations. Of course it is not technology as an independent

force that shapes history, but the junction between the new materiality and new human practices, and the relations of power in play. The teaming, multiple possibilities are confusing and unclear in the early stages of the transformation. So it is with the global scale. Globalisation has enlarged higher education as a 'space of possibles' in Bourdieu's sense. Since 1990 there has been remarkable openness, dynamism and innovation in the global scale, as well as old/new forms of hierarchy, capture and closure.

[The pool of global science has tripled in one generation]

The most spectacular development has been the formation and rapid expansion of the networked global science system. Published global science has grown at 5.15% a year since 2000. In most science-based fields, though not the social sciences and humanities, global science epistemically dominates national science. One quarter of global papers have international co-authors.

[Science systems where *output grew faster* than the world average rate of 5.15% per year between 2000 and 2020]

Global science has stimulated a growing number of countries to build national science capacity so as to access global knowledge. Some of the fastest growing science systems are in countries with per capital incomes well below the world average

[Mobile students grew 5.5% per annum between 1998-2019]

Until the pandemic there was rapid growth of student and faculty mobility, and the appetite for educational travel has not diminished. Cross-border institutional collaboration has advanced continually since 1990. Only adversarial geo-politics seems capable of retarding that trend. Cross-border online education also advances, and without displacing face-to-face national education as some predicted.

[Higher education and knowledge are multi-scalar]

While the global scale has become more important it has not eclipsed the national or regional. Nations and regions like the EU evolve in response to global transformations. It is clear now that higher education and knowledge are multi-scalar. The main practical scales are the global, the national, and the local. There are also pan-national regions with multiple countries, regions within nations like states or provinces, and cross-country border zones.

The scales are different to each other, heterogeneous. They are not replicas of each other at varying levels, they do not fit neatly into each other, the larger scales containing the smaller, like the Russian dolls *матрёшка* [Matryoshka]. It is very important to grasp the fact of difference. Consider the national scale and the global scale in science. National science is normatively centred on the nation-state and shaped by laws, policies and funding. In the global scale there is a vast pool of scientific papers and networked collaboration but no normative centre. Global science is regulated informally by the interactions and protocols of professional scientists. Science is primarily organised and funded at national level yet practised globally. Many global scientists are leaders in national scientific communities, and

local institutions, yet their primary loyalty is to their discipline. They manage the mix. Agents in higher education – faculty, university leaders and administrators, governments, corporations - are accustomed to being active in more than one geo-cognitive scale.

[Relations of power in global higher education]

I'll get to 'geo-cognitive' later. First, though, let me expand on relations of power in the global scale of higher education and knowledge. This is a darker story. Networks have encouraged openness, and new national higher education powers appear amid a more plural political economy, but neo-colonial globalisation has been strongly asserted.

[Anglo-American globalisation]

The dominant model of institution and system is the Anglo-American science university in a competitive market. The model exercises varying direct influence, nuanced by national and local histories, traditions and resources. Some nations have tuition fees and others none, some nations have a steep hierarchy of institutions and others are flatter. Systems are more or less like the US. However, all must contend with the values installed by the rankings.

Global processes impose the primacy of Anglo-American language, culture and science and stigmatise and exclude everything different. Global science by no means contains all global knowledge, far from it. The disciplinary mix is grounded in the 'Western' or European (Hellenic-Judeo-Christian) cultural heritage, but in linguistic terms it has suppressed even non Anglo-American Europe. The bibliometric collections Web of Science and Scopus which define globally recognised science are 95% plus in English. All indigenous knowledges are wholly excluded, marginalised as 'local' and not 'global'.

['Whiteness as futurity': Why the United States and the UK are so attractive to international students and families]

Globalisation in higher education and knowledge sustain a neo-colonial hierarchy in three overlapping ways. First, the worldwide diffusion of neoliberal norms and policies, normalising a business market imaginary in which the Anglo-American countries shape the global as space of revenues and soft power, a space to exploit. Second, through the reproduction of a racialised hierarchy, grounded in White Supremacy, as Riyad Shahjahan and Kirsten Edwards point out, elevating white persons, countries and institutions and trapping non Anglo-European agents into status aspirations they can never fully achieve. Third, the linguistic-cultural monoculture that shuts out all other knowledge. The potential for a cosmopolitan higher education, opened by communicative globalisation, is partly lost.

I acknowledge that this critical analysis is not universally agreed, but it is widely understood. The question for me is how global formation works, how the global relations of power are sustained, and whether the hegemony is inevitable. This takes us to the heart of the matter: the formation of the global scale. Unpicking how the global scale in higher education is imagined, practised and understood can provide clues as to how it can change.

Here there is no consensus in the literature. In a widely cited formula David Held and colleagues define globalisation as processes of convergence and integration on the world scale. This is broadly agreed. Beyond that, the terms are used in two different ways.

[Conflicting understandings of 'the global']

In the first approach, which can be called 'teleological', scholars understand the terms 'global' and 'globalisation' as normative and associated with one or another purpose. The character of the global is fixed, closed, specific to the normative baggage it carries. There is more than one version of the teleology. Some believe the 'global' in higher education must mean neo-liberal economic markets and 'Western' hegemony in higher education practice. The idea that the global must always be thus is propagated not only by mainstream neo-liberals but by some critics of neo-imperialism who note the continuities with colonialism.

The other teleology of the global sees it very differently: as the broadening of networked democratic communities, information and knowledge exchange, agentic potentials though mobility, cosmopolitan cross-cultural engagement and creative hybridisation.

We have two different teleological analyses based in two different claims about the purpose of the global scale. In the alternative critical realist approach, which I prefer, scales don't have purposes. People have purposes. Terms like 'global', 'national' and 'local' are neutral tools for mapping the world. Descriptors, not agendas. We need non teleological terms to understand reality. How can we do without the concept of 'global ecology', for example? Likewise we need 'global higher education'. We need a term for discussing what happens in the space beyond nation-states. Here the term is seen as neutral and the ultimate potentials of the 'global' scale in higher education and knowledge are seen as open. That does not mean that there are no savage relations of power. It means we can better understand them.

Setting aside teleology enables us to see reality more clearly. It is no longer blocked out by what we *expect* to see before we look. Interestingly, when using the critical realist method we find both teleologies have a point. Empirically, global convergence and integration in higher education are associated with vertical hierarchies and horizontal networking, and all of imperial, nation-centred, regional and locally grounded projects. There is centralisation and dispersal, heteronomy and autonomy, homogeneity and heterogeneity. These pairings are dynamic and not equally balanced or the same everywhere. Euro-American dominance seems stronger in science and global knowledge than the education function.

[Lefebvre on space making]

How then is the global scale constructed? Following the French theorist Henri Lefebvre, scales like the global are 'spaces' within which agents are active. Yet geo-cognitive space is also partly *created* by agents, by what they imagine and do. Some agents have a greater capability in space making than others: a favourable history or positioning, better resources, opportunities. This plays into struggles over the character of the space. That struggle is inevitable. Every transformation is attended by ongoing contests over relations of power.

[1 + 1 + 1: Geo-cognitive scales like ‘global’, ‘national’ or ‘local’ combine three elements that intersect]

Again taking a cue from Lefebvre, we can say that space making has three components: the material, the imagination and interpretation, and social practices. These three components continually interact, and they help to produce each other.

I use the term ‘geo-cognitive’ scale to combine the material and mental elements. The *material* component is both natural (for example global ecology) and also constructed (for example network-based communications) but it all confronts higher education as a pre-given force. Agents have more discretion in the mental domain of *imagination and interpretation*, and the domain of *social practices*.

[Global as material + global as imagined + global as social practices]

I want to emphasise imagining and interpretation. This domain in global higher education is pivotal. As the diagram suggests the effects of the material domain in social practices, the transformations in practice engendered by, say, financial resources and networked communications, are mediated by the perceptions, interpretations and imaginings of agents, their readings of the global setting and the changing possibilities within it.

Correspondingly, agents globally active in higher education themselves create new materialities, resulting from imaginings mediated by social practices (e.g. governments imagine science as an arms race in innovation and fund more research). Meanwhile the domains of imagining/interpretation, and social practice, continually constitute each other.

[Global social practices: global higher education is made in three different ways]

In terms of social practices, agents build global relations in three different ways – first, by building *global systems* beyond the nation-state, partly or largely independent of its direct regulation, such as global science; second, through *connections* across borders, such as people mobility and university partnerships; third, through *diffusion* of ideas and models and norms of good practice, for example in relation to quality assurance.

In summary, agents experience the global scale in two ways. On one hand, it is a pre-given space in which they have greater or less freedoms, depending on material and mental resources, and the extent to which space is closed by other agents or there is scope to build something new. On the other hand, the global scale is continually being constructed, brought into being by the imaginings and practices of agents. While the national scale is pre-given, populated by an institutional hierarchy with long roots, framed by governmental authority, managed by allocation regimes and standardised outcomes requirements, the global seems more free, its borders more porous, its operating rules more sparse. This provides openings for subaltern agents, as well as those with traditional advantages.

Imagining and interpreting the global: Different lenses

Now, let's look more closely at imagining and interpreting. Agents bring a great variety of lenses to bear in imagining global space. We can identify epistemic lenses, national-cultural lenses, different approaches to relational ethics, and spatial differences in methodology.

Epistemic or disciplinary differences govern the way we understand the world. Global higher education and its potentials look different to an economist, an anthropologist, an engineer.

Second, there are national-cultural differences. Lili Yang and I recently presented a paper in this webinar programme which highlighted the differences between an Anglo-American and a Chinese or Sinic understanding of the role of higher education in producing global goods – differences shaped by variations in traditions of individual and collective, the role of the state and of the scope for communicative society. Potentially there are many kinds of global higher education with something distinctive to offer. We limit ourselves if we see only one.

Third, relational ethics. Much rests on the extent to which agents see global connections as embodying a concern for the world as a whole, or at least forming community and devising shared purposes, as well as individualised purposes, or solely as a medium for achieving individualised purposes. Strategies of partnership building, university consortia and regional schemes like Horizon Europe in research assume commonality and equivalence between the parties, and that the value of the combination exceeds the sum of the parts. When the global space is practised as competition for rankings, research talent or fee paying students, cooperation is merely a route to the real end of self interest.

Lenses that limit what we can think and see in the global: methodological globalism, methodological nationalism

Fourth, there is the question of the spatial lens or lenses. This plays directly into agentic behaviours. Indeed, it determines how much the global scale can be seen at all. It has been profoundly strategic in shaping relations of power. Let us expand on this.

Since the 1990s the potentials of global relations in all spheres, including higher education, have been stymied by two lenses which impose single scale visions on the multi-scalar global setting. We can call these two lenses 'methodological globalism' and 'methodological nationalism'.

Methodological globalism sees the global scale as necessarily dominant in relation to the national and local – for example the idea, prevalent in the 1990s and still alive, that global forces are sweeping away the nation-state, or wholly determine national higher education systems. The mistake is the assumption that global and national are zero-sum; that more of one is less of the other, that we do not live in a multi-scalar world.

The methodological nationalist has the opposite viewpoint. He or she sees the nation/state/society as 'the natural social and political form of the modern world'. Through this lens global phenomena can be perceived only within the national scale, as if they are

functions or outgrowths of the nation. Powerful, formative practices in higher education such as international education, faculty mobility and scientific cooperation (in fact even the interdependent global ecology!) are pushed to the edge of vision or slip from sight.

Relations of power in the global space: how these limiting lenses are deployed in shaping higher education

It is striking how each of these contrary lenses are deployed, selectively, to legitimate continuing 'Western' or Anglo-American domination of global higher education.

Methodological globalism is embodied in the happy idea that if it is international, it must be good. This is invoked to justify the one-way cross-border strategies of Anglo-American countries and institutions – their internationalisation must be good, and this confers the 'right' to intervene educationally in any country at any time, regardless of the local effects.

Methodological nationalism embodies the opposing bias, yet there is a curious consistency of purpose. Methodological nationalism, grounded in a deeply felt sense of superiority, allows Anglo-American countries and institutions to provide the contents of global knowledge and higher education without blushing, without regard for the plurality of knowledge, or any obligation to engage on the basis of mutual respect.

The alternative lens is 'methodological pluralism' - recognition of and engagement with the differing visions, values and practices in a process of mutual learning, which carries with it the obligation to both identify common ground and respect the diversity

I will now move to concluding remarks.

'Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of plurality, of the co-existence of difference'

Global higher education and knowledge take place in a distinctive geo-cognitive scale which constitutes worldwide relations. The global scale is brought into being by material structural factors such as worldwide communications, while also constituted by the imaginings and social practices of agents. Institutions and persons are active simultaneously in the local, national, global, regional and other scales. No single scale is necessarily or always dominant. The pivot seems to move in unstable fashion between national, global and regional.

All in all, the facts of scalar difference and movement, and the concurrent existence of multiple identities, have opened a larger and richer world. 'Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of plurality, of the co-existence of difference', says Doreen Massey. Global systems, connections and diffusion much expand what is *possible* in higher education and knowledge. But they have done less to expand the *actual*.

We have our work cut out if we are to expand the possibilities of the global. In global higher education methodological nationalism is potent, limiting the possibility of commonality, and

facilitating a forceful Anglo-American monoculture, especially in relation to knowledge and its valuation. This gravely restricts openness and diversity. It holds in place a steep global hierarchy of institutions and countries, manifest also as a hierarchy of cultures, languages, sensibilities, ideas, personal qualities and even skins. National exceptionalism, global racism and the neo-imperial project fall on us as a single set.

The way out is not counter-nationalism alone, reverse othering, it is to embrace the other. We need to be relentless in critiquing the half blinded vision of methodological nationalism. National politics dominates our world but we can now talk and organise globally.

‘All things are in flux, like a river . . . Everything flows’

For none of it is inevitable. No global imaginary is fully realised. Neo-imperial globalisation has limits. Higher education is becoming more multi-polar though whether that leads to fragmentation or a better ‘global’ remains to be seen. The potential is there. The gaps in global knowledge are obvious and injustices once made visible begin to implode.

In short, the world is constantly changing, the wisdom of Heraclitus. It is neither universally patterned nor predictable. It is an always partly open system in which both the actual and the possible are real and the future is unknown. The practices of human agents, including their ideas and interpretations, are among the causal factors in play.

Educated agents from anywhere have more advantages than most. And all agents share a crucial element. This is the irreducible autonomy of agency in relation to the structures that confront it. Structures are prior to agency and agents can only reproduce or transform them. However, as Margaret Archer puts it, ‘people are not puppets of structures because they have their own emergent properties’. The independent potentials of agents derive from their inner self-consciousness and capacity for reflexivity and will-based action. People in higher education can build cross-border relations genuinely based on mutual respect, appreciation of national and cultural diversity, and understanding of our common fate. Working separately and together, we can and will make global higher education different.

Is 'global' higher education a friend or a foe?, 3 February 2022



00:40:44 James Robson: Do start thinking about and posing questions for Simon here

00:51:02 David Mills: I wonder how helpful it is to extend (and possibly dilute) the meaning of 'methodological' beyond the realm of epistemology to include system -level practices ...why not just talk of 'ideological nationalism/globalism'

00:51:55 C Sanger: Hmmm, this is a very rich mixture today...

00:52:47 Marta Kozłowska: Thank you - this is truly deep and enriching.

00:53:26 Trif Victorița: Congratulations!

00:53:28 Lori Lee Wallace: Wonderful presentation! Thank you!

00:53:40 Diana Laurillard: Yes, @ David, I'm trying to see what we do, as well as how we perceive our position in these different scales. I think it does go beyond the epistemology.

00:54:25 Doria Abdullah: as a chemist in my past training we learnt the concept of "instantaneous" in reactions. Now I wonder where instantaneous came about amidst this concept of "global" higher ed

The differentiators presented are moot when the individual are able to penetrate the global via the Web w/o considering national boundaries

00:55:12 Doria Abdullah: (not a question, but observation)

00:55:16 Diana Laurillard: We do need to think about methodology in order to use this way of imagining scale

00:55:32 mutia Alnimrat: Interesting presentation.Thank you.

00:55:40 Eliel Cohen: My two cents in response to David's great question: I feel that we might fall back on thinking with a national or global lens despite our best efforts. Whereas ideological nationalism or globalism implies a normative stance. They overlap but I think the terms capture something distinct

00:58:31 Trif Victorița: The global and national network of spaces is very important for contemporary political communication.

01:00:01 David Law: A powerful call to action based on shared values and shared humanity. However, my advocacy of internationalism in my university is based on shared experience. And the reason I promote partnerships is because they depend on shared experience. My question is about student mobility. Is it really correct to say that USA and UK "retain dominance in global student flows"?

01:00:08 Eliel Cohen: Thanks James but I think it is just a very minor point I am happy to just leave it as a written comment on this occasion if that's okay! Also I'm currently walking home and listening in from my phone so could be a bit loud! Thank you

01:00:39 Ian Prawiromaruto: wonderful point Diana

01:03:55 Marta Kozłowska: Indeed, these two contrasting perspectives mentioned by Diana seem well-worth some research.

01:06:47 Marta Kozłowska: Following on one of the points mentioned in the talk, this article may be of interest to some: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01797-0>

01:07:54 Diana Laurillard: @David Law - it's in overseas student recruitment that HE is put in conflict with its missions and values because our QA regulatory system is only really interested in the economic and soft power value of HE as export.

01:07:59 James Robson: We have time for a few more questions, so do post them here

01:10:38 CGHE Webinars: Thank you for joining us today. A recording of this session will be on the CGHE site tomorrow morning:
<https://www.researchcghe.org/events/cghe-seminar/is-global-higher-education-a-friend-or-a-foe/>

01:10:50 CRISTINA DE CARVALHO: Thank you so much, Simon. Wonderful presentation! Congratulations!

01:11:08 Jyoti Arora: Thank you so much

01:11:41 CGHE Webinars: Our next webinar, 'Cosmopolitan agency and meaningful intercultural interactions between international and domestic students: An ecological conceptualisation', is on Tuesday. You can register here:
<https://www.researchcghe.org/events/cghe-seminar/cosmopolitan-agency-and-meaningful-intercultural-interactions-between-international-and-domestic-students-an-ecological-conceptualisation/>

01:12:53 solomon zewolde: Thank you, Simon for a very bold, honest, and insightful presentation!

01:13:18 Tim Hampson: Thank you :)

01:13:23 Thanh Pham: Thank you Simon. It is always a great honour to listen to you! Thanks James and CGHE Team!

01:13:31 Diana Laurillard: Very thought-provoking session, thank you.

01:14:10 Trif Victorița: Thank you!

01:14:24 David Law: USA took 28% of globally mobile students in 2001 but now c20%; UK declined from c14% to 10%. China rose from near 0 to 9%.

01:14:37 yaqiao liu: Thank you Simon. Very thoughtful presentation!

01:15:42 Richard Edelstein: What if anything does the current political/ideological crisis represented by Russian military threats to the Ukraine relate to this analysis of global higher ed?

01:17:30 Marta Kozłowska: Thank you for an excellent seminar! 😊

01:17:33 Lori Lee Wallace: Thank you!

01:18:03 Eray Kara: Thank you, this was a great session

01:18:44 Saumen Chattopadhyay: It was a brilliant presentation, Simon. Thanks a lot, regards

01:18:47 Shuting Tan: Thank you Simon and James!