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Innovative Universities and the Experience City

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ABSTRACT

What happens to the role of universities in societies that are changing their economies and social constructions from 20th century industry and material consumption towards a 21st century combination of industry, entertainment and education? What happens to the content of engineering educational programmes and to the pedagogical setup in which immaterial consumption and edutainment are more in demand than traditional products?

This article outlines a number of dilemmas relating to the role of universities as “heterotopias of illusion” in present-day societies, in which the global restructuring of the economy is changing the requirements for knowledge and advanced skills. The article presents various international examples of joint developments by industry, entertainment and education, and on this basis outlines the need for pedagogical experiments and new learning environments. The article relates some preliminary experiences in the development of informal learning environments in association with performance and city life. New models for “fun-based learning” have been developed. They place the focus on the interplay between the intuitive and the goal-oriented aspects of university pedagogy - by including intuitive and reflective tools, artistic progression and critical interpretation. These models also embrace a changed vision of the relationship between city and university in the development of the learning environment – both physical and virtual relationships and environments need to be developed in a new way.

THE UNIVERSITY AND URBAN PLANNING TODAY

Economic and planning conditions have changed radically in recent years—for both universities and town planning.

At the universities we stand at a crossroads. We are moving away from the strong focus on teaching and research that addressed itself to industry's need for qualified workers and to the core service functions of the welfare state, and are now increasingly creating new educational programmes involving aesthetic studies within architecture, design, new media and communication. At the same time, we are establishing networks of universities that embrace entire regions and multiple campuses. Moreover, we are looking for selective competitive strategies with new hybrid, supplementary educational programmes that build on a close relationship between culture and education and which focus strongly on the city as a framework for a free and experience-rich educational life.

Over the last 40 years the town planning discourse has been under the same kind of pressure, and new strategies have been brought to the fore. The pendulum is swinging in two opposite directions, bringing about conflicting strategies.

Two different planning discourses are at work here. On the one hand suburban areas are suffering from loss of services and are in desperate need of strong investments in housing, infrastructure and jobs. This discourse is a continuation of the the last 40 years' thinking in relation to urban growth, the continued suburban sprawl along the primary highway systems and the geographical extension of travel centres. On the other hand there is a strong focus on the revitalization of city centers, massive construction in the harbours, investment in cultural projects, and massive investments in abandoned industrial sites and emancipated harbour areas. This discourse relates to postmodern thinking on planning, which emphasises the qualities of the dense inner city and urban renewal.

University and city development are linked and mutually interdependent in this double discourse on strategic planning. This article examines the dilemmas and opportunities confronting the city in its economic and social transition from an industrial economy to a culture-based knowledge economy.

THE CAMPUS AS A “HETEROTOPIA OF ILLUSION”

Michael Foucault (Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, 1964) and Graham Shane (Shane, *Recombinant Urbanism*, 2006) describe universities as a frame for interpretation and experimentation relating to society, technology and human activities. They describe universities, along with theatres, movie theaters and media, as fora for translating and staging social and human reality, and call such institutions “Heterotopias of Illusion” :

- *Heterotopias of Illusion* reverse the rigid codes of social life, by inverting, mirroring or reflecting the relations that they happen to designate;

- *Heterotopias of Illusion* allow actors to monitor and adjust the shifting balance of images and values by manipulating symbolic icons within communication systems;
- *Heterotopias of Illusion* allow the creation of virtual, mechanized mirror-spaces embedded in networks of communication (Shane 2006).

Universities are characterized as “mini-systems” that “reflect” and “invert” our experienced-based everyday practice; Foucault conceptualizes this for the purpose of generating new knowledge and directions for new practices. Society needs these kinds of independent institutions to critically describe themselves, to blast away at conventional thinking and to be innovative in relation to new challenges.

This type of institution has usually been planned as an independent site with its own set of norms and values, often physically and functionally separated from prevailing everyday practice.

The “campus model” of a university emerged more than 300 years ago when universities and the advent of scientific methods deposed and broke away from the church’s “spiritual stranglehold” in the city centre. In the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th century The campus model] turned away from scholasticism in favour of using Aristotle’s classification of knowledge into different scientific categories and disciplines. A hundred years later Thomas Jefferson, one of America’s first presidents, and Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher, were among the first to formulate the principles that laid the groundwork for the development of the so-called “academic village.” The university on a campus isolated from the ecclesiastical world provided space for absorption in thought and research, bringing together different faculties and research centres, dormitories for students and teachers, sports facilities, activity centers, and so on.

In the 20th century technical studies, medicine and social science were incorporated into the universities’ degree programmes, turning the universities into comprehensive educational units, and for at least the last 100 years the “campus model” has been elevated to a general design strategy used in the planning of nearly all the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic universities.

However, campus layout has been dominated by two quite different design principles. One is a hierarchical design with a main entrance, the most important buildings and landmarks in the centre and the faculties ordered in a tight structure. This design is constructed as an enclosed enclave — as a “gated community” with symmetrical and carefully designed spaces in a clear hierarchy. The other design principle is more “chaotic” in its construction. In this model, which we call “Dionysian”, it can be difficult to find the central administration, in that the design is based on a network principle with a random distribution of equal faculties and a considerable openness between the university campus and the surrounding city.

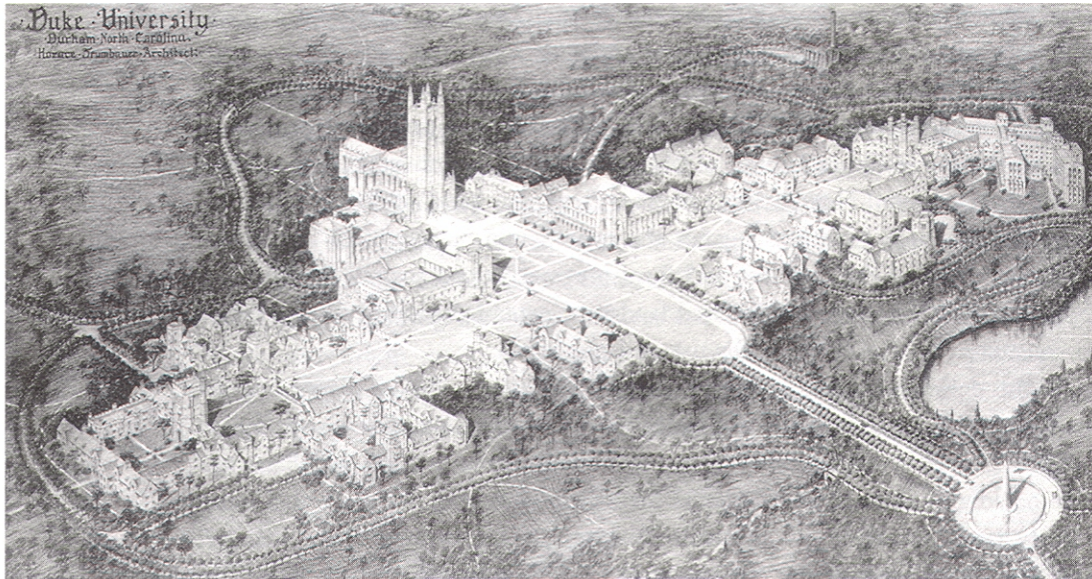


Fig. 1 Duke University. An apollonian design principle based on a fixed axis with the Theology Faculty and a symbol of Newton in the main axis, flanked by the Law Faculty and the Medical Faculty.

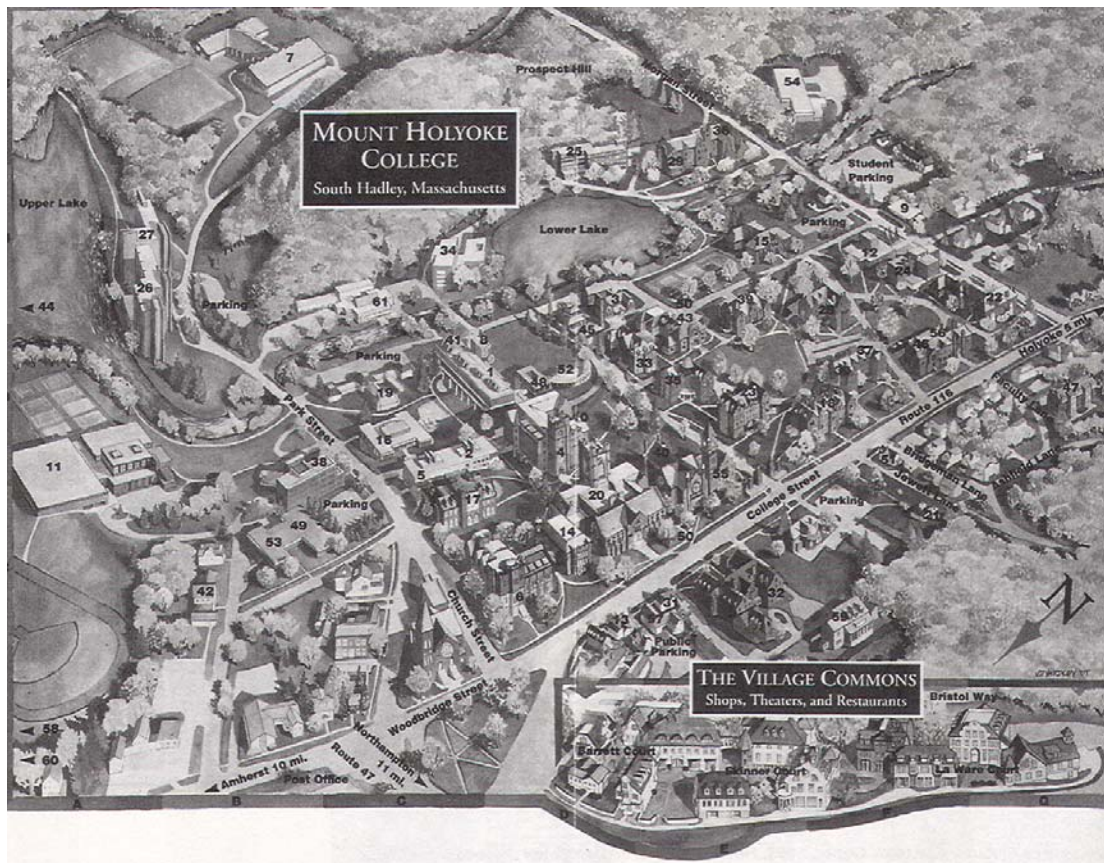


Fig. 2 Mount Holyoke College uses a Dionysian design principle which scatters/arranges faculties equally in a park-like setting.

If we turn to university planning in Denmark, three new universities (Aalborg, Odense and Roskilde) were established in the 1970s. The projects in Odense and Aalborg became success stories in terms of regional development, and have become symbols of the “welfare society” with equal distribution of education, work and good housing conditions for everyone.

All these institutions chose the Dionysian design principle. The universities were placed on campuses in newly-planned suburban areas. The campus was intended to define its own functional domain, but also to work in an open structure with the modern city and become a “life-giving” integrator and facilitator in the suburb’s housing and offices complexes. It was conceived as a symbol of the modern age - marked by growth in service and industry and physically designed with big parking lots and large housing projects integrated in the low-density suburban city structure.

FROM CAMPUS PLANNING TO THE NETWORK UNIVERSITY

Over the last 30 years business, industry and universities have built up close relationships, partly due to mutually binding project work and partly to the creation of innovative environments with businesses in the university area. More recently, this development has been followed up by creating “science parks” integrated with local businesses. The initiative has usually been taken by the university, and it is often the larger, international, industrial businesses that have been able to use their research results.

But with new developments in the wake of globalization - in which industries are increasingly moving both production and development to other continents - a number of questions are being raised about innovation and new thinking:

- How can universities as “Heterotopias of Illusion” meet the demand for knowledge from the emerging experience society?
- How can the contemporary universities “mirror” and “invert” society’s general globalized network structure, and what will this mean in terms of the content of research and education?
- How should the universities of the future be organized and designed and where should they be placed?
- How do we get to grips with this task?

Professional academies, colleges and universities have recently tried to improve their comparative position in the global educational market and their ability to change through fusions and the creation of network organizations. A network organization is one in which the university consists of several campuses and centres and may be spread over several countries and cities. This kind of organization allows for greater flexibility and the ability to change, and shared administration tasks can be taken care of using internet-based services. To a certain extent teaching can also be synchronized at several locations with the use of video conferences, the internet and computer-supported learning.

On the one hand, the relation: “one city -one university” is no longer intact. Universities have become - just like any other large institutions -more focused on their internal organization and less interested in the host city’s

need for jobs and taxpayers and new innovative businesses. The university looks at the improved recruiting opportunities brought about by establishing university centres in smaller cities, and by setting up university satellites in large cities - taking advantage of the capitol city's special status as an educational and cultural centre. This explains why Aalborg University has a branch campus in Esbjerg and has just started up small campus units in Copenhagen and Bombay; and why Odense University has become "The University of Southern Denmark" with campuses and branches in Odense, Esbjerg, Sønderborg, Kolding, Slagelse and Kerteminde.

The universities are interested in optimizing the services offered by the host cities. However, the host cities are questioning whether the present location of university campuses in suburban areas is the right solution. Oughtn't the new scientific and educational complexes to be located near the cultural institutions in the city centre and near the harbour? Shouldn't the relationship between education and business be rethought and supplemented with a more production-like environment - relating to cultural institutions and experience-oriented industries?

FROM INDUSTRIAL CULTURE TO CULTURAL INDUSTRY

The "experience economy" has become a metaphor for new strategies created to meet new challenges, especially in the search for ways to replace jobs in the industrial sector that have been lost. Whereas education and culture were earlier conceived as preconditions for industrial and service companies, these two sectors today play a decisive role in the city's economy and life. Educational and cultural planning have become central pivotal points, and planning has been forced to reconsider strategies and methods.

As Charles Landry, Richard Florida and many other future researchers predict, successful cities will be those that best understand the new conditions and try to use their creative potentials and networks. According to Landry, "creative cities" involve new partnerships in which research, creative innovative environments and investors work together to create a new, sustainable and socially responsible research basis for our cities' future. (Charles Landry, 2000) It is a matter of combining strong positions and networks in a traditional economy with creative competencies, art and science. The "winners" are those cities that understand the new challenges and can organize planning and implementation procedures in partnership with science, art, economics and city management. New partners in the "Experience City" must therefore share the goals of securing a position in the new market for art, cultural tourism and media events. The universal starting point is to entertain and convey an understanding of artistic experience, while simultaneously anchoring strategies in local conditions. Legitimacy and successful strategies are based on recognition of the city's special characteristics or peculiarities.

EDUCATION, INNOVATION LEISURE AND PERFORMANCE

Landry's and Florida's statements should not be transferred directly to host cities in Denmark or elsewhere. Rather, they need to be adjusted to fit our urban context and our tradition of public involvement in both culture

and education. Nevertheless it is clear that, with respect to the university city's new conditions, suburban campuses have become a large obstacle to the further development of a creative centre of education and culture. The academies' isolation from creative and artistic educational programmes is a major problem, and so long as the universities are located on the outskirts of the cities, it is difficult for them to connect with the cultural scene, which has remained in the city center. The suburban campus lacks intensity and is not conducive to urban entertainment culture; nor can it connect with the artist communities that traditionally tend to gather in diverse and crowded inner city milieus.

Professionals in cultural and events production also need creative educational programmes that relate learning, entertainment and performance. It is catastrophic that we lack artistic educational programmes and fail to provide support for artistic potentiality. It makes no sense to talk about the "experience economy" or to construct concert halls if aesthetic and artistic performance is not first-rate. Nor is it useful to talk about creative alliances between culture and business if the artistic level and creative talent do not match the professionalism that traditional businesses demand. Urban educational institutions and especially universities need to raise the level of knowledge and competence that are the foundation of the new economy.

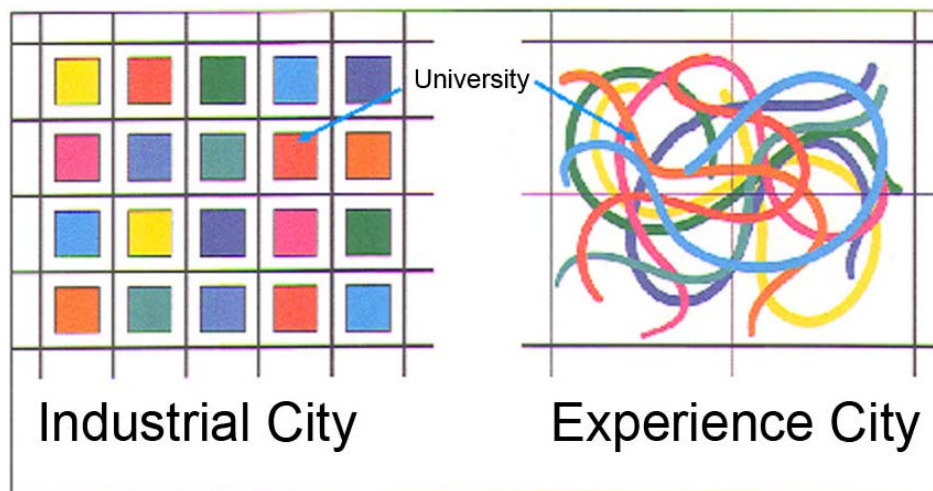


Fig. 3 Modernism's zoning plans minimize the interfaces between society's separate functions in a manner similar to today's new integrating models, which aim to maximize contact and optimize interaction and overlap. (Diagrams from Per Risom, Byplan 3/2006)

The universities need therefore to put more weight on the development of these competencies, and to place these centres of teaching and research within the city. New educational programmes should link with and enrich cultural meeting places and open urban spaces and by so doing create the basis for new types of culture-bearing businesses and experience environments. Instead of "plugging in businesses on campus" to create the desired development, we should turn our attention elsewhere and begin to talk about "plugging the university in the city centre."

Several experiments and initiatives in various Danish and European cities have already begun to link education, culture and entrepreneurship relating to the experience economy. One local example is "the Culture Project" at

the Waterfront in Aalborg. This project has placed a number of cultural institutions and educational programmes within the creative arts alongside some of the city's biggest cultural institutions (music, media, theatre and performance), as well as a 3,000 square metre Architecture Center and a 15,000 square metre Concert Hall. Altogether, this is a gigantic investment by the city of Aalborg, and local politicians are hoping that this investment will be followed up by Aalborg University, which might identify additional creative teaching programmes and research centres that could be located in the area.

Similar projects are seeing the light of day in Sønderborg, Kolding, Odense and Herning, where educational and cultural projects are coming together almost under the same roof. Malmö in Sweden offers the best example so far of a conscious effort to create a university that is city-integrated on the Waterfront. From the very beginning 12 years ago the aims here has been to offer training in the creative arts.

These cities and universities are looking for novel and pragmatic ways to meet new challenges. We can describe these creations as “hybrid experience environments.” They offer a challenging new educational structure in which a number of academic and artistic skills are to be combined. By linking the city's existing competencies and spaces with as-yet-unforeseen activities and events, it will be possible to lay the foundation for a new creative knowledge and experience industry.

As Pine and Gilmore showed in their interesting book with the provocative title *The Experience Economy—Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage* (Pine, B.J. & J.H. Gilmore (1999)), our cities nowadays rely on an increasingly refined organization of consumption, work, education and leisure. The core of this statement is that a combined strategy for the participation of both universities and cities in the experience economy cannot be limited to planning and creating a concert hall, opera house and art museum. The experience economy requires that all sectors adjust their position, and that the traditional economies (retail, service, communal administration, industry) then “mutate” and absorb these new types of activities as part of their business foundation.

DESIGN OF NEW LEARNING/EXPERIENCE SPACES

New physical (and virtual) learning environments demand great transparency and flexibility in the relationship between teachers and students and between formal and informal learning situations relating to the public realm. Learning will no longer be an isolated phenomenon confined to pre-determined, designated learning environments. It will go hand-in-hand with recreation, performance, conversation and entertainment. The borders between these activities will be fluid. There will also be a shift away from “serious research-based teaching” towards a more complex pedagogical model aimed at knowledge transfer and knowledge generation. Learning and fun will be two sides of the same coin, and the importation of these principles will not be restricted to higher education. All levels of the educational system will be involved in this learning situation, in which the ability to find and develop knowledge and become involved in creative teams for the use of knowledge and innovation will be more highly prioritized.

This development requires that the existing learning milieus be redesigned, and a new kind of learning space will come to supplement the old. For example, a large number of open learning environments could be characterized as “exploratoria” or “observatories” in the sense that informal spaces, transparency and flexibility will be the code words. Examinations could similarly evolve, moving away from a closed room in which students, the examiner and censor confront one another, to a process consisting of a series of conversations and dialogues in situations better characterized as “dialogue spaces” and “fun stages”, where the roles of the public and actors are constantly changing.

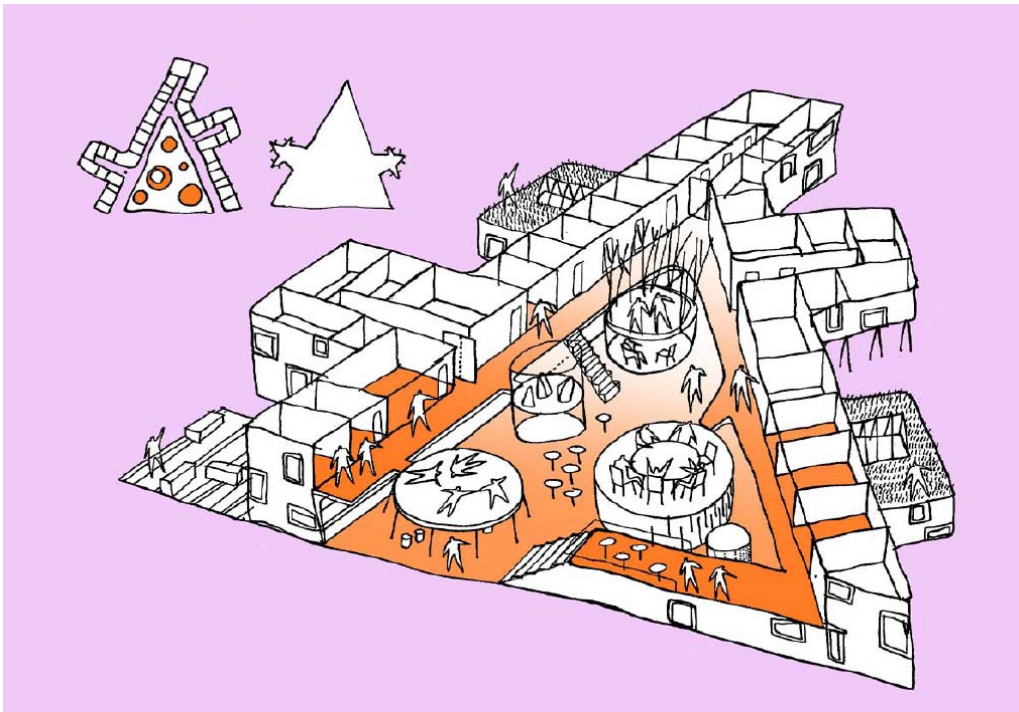


Fig. 4. Open, transparent learning environments, in which formal classrooms are replaced by a huge variety of learning and developmental situations, performance and play. (Diagram from “The University of the Future”, *The Danish Education and Research Buildings*, 2003)

CONCLUSION

In this future scenario we return to the striking concept “Heterotopias of Illusion” and link it to the new educational challenges. The contemporary “Heterotopias of Illusion” should “mirror” and “invert” society’s new network structure, and universities need to re-interpret and organize these in an innovative conglomeration of research and teaching, entertainment and learning, performance and critical dialogue. Universities need to develop open and flexible learning environments that are adequate to establish a “new story” on the shoulders of the old and thereby create the basis for “the innovative university” in the “creative knowledge city”.

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