

Chapter 4

Ecological University for Transformative and Critical Intellectual Capital Advancement and Scholarship in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter interrogates an ecological model of university as a framework to understanding evolving roles played by institutions of higher learning, particularly universities, thus including their implications for a wider society transformational change. Barnett has explored various models ranging from the metaphysical, scientific, entrepreneurial, and bureaucratic to liquid, therapeutic, authentic, and ecological models. The author further argues that being and becoming ecological is a huge project, as it takes the university into a new order of being. A university within this model becomes an entity that constantly engages with itself and its adjacent environment in order to remain relevant and be part of the solutions to the societal challenges. In this chapter, case studies from the South African universities were used as the research technique, including selected interviews with key stakeholders in the higher education sector.

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INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher learning are challenged to transform themselves to play a decisive role in an ever-changing environment (Rugunanan, 2015). Globalization and global restructuring of economies have a major effect on how the institutions of higher learning function, more particularly in the emergence of a knowledge-based economy (Moja, 2004). Globalization expects higher education systems to play an active role in social and economic development in the 'knowledge society' (Castle, 1998). The demand for intensive labour with high-level skills has placed high a demand on the universities as institutions of higher learning to train and produce a professional and competent workforce. The higher education system is charged with the responsibility of expanding the production of highly skilled professionals and further enhance the innovative capacity of the nation (NDP, 2011: 263). The developed nations compared to their developing counterparts have managed to benefit from the globalized economy, by taking advantage of their highly competitive higher education systems.

Thus, assessed from an open system theory, these institutions like any other organization are compelled to discover, contextualize and employ appropriate and deliberate strategic planning, management and tools to address the needs and aspirations imposed by their environments. The environments within which institutions of higher learning, especially the universities, operate have become the determinants for either their success or failure in executing their mandate. With the global demand for universities to provide diverse solutions to multiple challenges confronting societies, more particularly in the developing nations, these institutions are compelled to configure, revisit their role and models for them to impact positively on their immediate and wider stakeholders. Thus, the existence of universities as social institutions Teferra and Altbach (2003), compels them to transcend their traditional role of teaching and learning, research and community engagement to using knowledge as a social tool to transform society. However, due to the encroachment of neo-liberalism and managerialism, universities are run or expected to run like businesses-based on bureaucratic structures (Muller, 2016).

In an attempt to reclaim their identities and development role, universities have configured themselves and assume different responsibilities in response to multiple societal needs and challenges. Through globalisation and internalization, universities are compelled to experiment with various models, which are categorised as being: 1) the metaphorical university, 2) the scientific university, 3) the entrepreneurial university and 4) the bureaucratic university. The secondary category falls within those 'becoming possible' universities as: 5) the liquid university, 6) the therapeutic university, 7) the authentic university, 8) and ecological university (Barnett, 2011). The

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