



Strategic cultures of philanthropy: English universities and the changing geographies of giving



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 March 2014

Received in revised form 29 May 2014

Available online 2 July 2014

Keywords:

Philanthropy

Higher education

Institutional location

Internationalisation

Giving

Professionalisation

ABSTRACT

UK universities are receiving record amounts of funding from private philanthropists. In 2013, it was reported that, for the first time, UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) obtained more major donations from philanthropic sources than any other cause. Three decades of increased neoliberalism and internationalisation of the Higher Education (HE) sector, together with a decline in state funding, have heightened the imperative for English universities in particular to intensify engagement with potential private donors. The UK government, via its Matched Funding Scheme (MFS) 2008–2011, sought to incentivise giving to HEIs in England. Universities have thus been encouraged to grow a 'culture' of philanthropy. Yet, there has been limited investigation by geographers into the impact of private donations on UK HEIs.

In this paper, we undertake a critical examination of the official publications of 17 diverse English HEIs which participated in the MFS 2008–2011. Particular attention is paid to the differentiated levels of participation by universities with the MFS and the ways in which donations were represented in their public documents. We argue that diverse cultures of HEI engagement with philanthropic giving are critically linked to their: location in conventional institutional hierarchies; integration in professional knowledge networks; and ability to mobilise strategic connections across geographical scales. In doing so, we advance theoretical work on the role of philanthropic giving in reconfiguring contemporary geographies of HE.

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Introduction

In November 2013, the annual *Million Dollar Donor's Report*, sponsored by the merchant bank Coutts, reported that, for the first time, universities in the UK received more major donations from philanthropic sources than any other cause (Coutts and University of Kent, 2013). During the same month, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) announced receipt of a 'transformational' £20 m donation from a foundation headed by a former student (SOAS, 2013) and the University of Birmingham reported that it had been presented with a £15 m gift from a former academic and alumnus to research 'the impact of climate and environmental change' (University of Birmingham, 2013). These three announcements highlighted the growth in philanthropic activity among UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) following three decades of increased internationalisation and marketisation of Higher Education (HE), culminating in the introduction in 2012

of fees of up to £9000 per annum for undergraduate study at English universities (BIS, 2011; see also: Teichler, 2004; Lynch, 2006; Marginson, 2013). In recent years, a decline in state funding of HE, together with successive government policies encouraging universities to take responsibility for their financial future (DfES, 2003, 2004; Cabinet Office, 2011), have heightened the imperative for English HEIs, in particular, to intensify their engagement with potential private donors. More specifically, the UK government has, through initiatives such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE's) Matched Funding Scheme (MFS) 2008–2011, sought to 'promot[e] a culture of individual giving to higher education' (DCSF, 2007: n.p.). Accordingly, by 2012–2013, UK universities had received a record £660 million in new philanthropic cash income, a rise of 23% over the previous year (NatCen, 2014).¹ This success was, at least in part, attributed to the enactment of the MFS and the increased circulation of knowledge on

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¹ The Ross-CASE Survey Report 2012–13 did not break down income by countries within the UK. However, as 113 out of the 136 participating HEIs (or 83%) of that cohort were based in England, it can surmised that this trend is indicative of English universities.

fundraising and alumni relations activities – collectively known as ‘advancement’ – among HE professionals (Coutts and University of Kent, 2013; NatCen, 2014).

Yet, whilst emerging debates within geography have considered philanthropic giving and HE (Hay and Muller, 2013; Warren and Bell, 2014), there has been little examination of the impact of private donations on English universities – eligible to participate in the MFS 2008–2011 – or on the transfer of ‘effective practices’ of advancement amongst HEIs located within, and across, national borders. This is surprising, given the shifting policy landscape and the spatial transformations inherent in, for example, transactions between institutions based in England and overseas donors, and knowledge exchange amongst advancement professionals. In this paper, we commence our analysis by investigating related literatures on the internationalisation and neoliberalisation of universities, the expansion of philanthropy in the HE sector, and the professionalisation of HE advancement functions. By means of empirical research, examining the depiction of large-scale donations within official publications of selected HEIs participating in the MFS, we argue that institutional engagement with philanthropic giving raises questions about institutional geographies, knowledge circulation and the visibility and reach of English HEIs. Specifically, we assess the extent to which HEIs, when describing their encounters with private donors, act strategically, using personal philanthropic donations to drive their reputations as ‘transformative’ institutions.

Emerging geographies of advancement and giving

Neoliberalism and the internationalisation of HE

In their introduction to a *Transactions Virtual Issue* on Geographies of Education and Learning, Holloway and Jöns drew attention to the diversification of ‘practices of internationalisation in higher education’ which, following the decline in state support, had become a ‘priority’ for many UK HEIs (2012: 485). These processes, often depicted as being rooted in ‘neoliberal restructuring’ (Holloway and Jöns, 2012: 485), have resulted in many HEIs extending their spatial reach through a series of measures such as enhancing connections with other universities, establishing overseas campuses and recruiting fee-paying international students (Teichler, 2004; Altbach and Knight, 2007; Madge et al., 2009; Rye, 2014). Consequently, it is important to ‘examine the historical and contemporary policies about [...] education’ (Holloway and Jöns, 2012: 482) and to consider the ‘restructuring and rescaling of higher-education institutions and policy’ (Thiem, 2009: 165). Within this landscape, universities are increasingly being defined by national and city policymakers as one part of broader ‘knowledge hubs’, a crucial resource servicing a globally operating economy (Hoyler and Jöns, 2008: 128) and, arguably, ‘jump-start[ing] development [of] key industries’ (Thiem, 2009: 164; Lai and Maclean, 2011). At the same time, individual universities have sought to form networks with preferred public and private sector partners to both consolidate their position within these spatially determined clusters and secure competitive advantage at local, regional and international scales (Olds, 2007; Hennemann, 2010; Petruzzelli et al., 2010; Glückler and Ries, 2012; Cochrane and Williams, 2013; Goddard and Vallance, 2013; Addie and Keil, 2014).

These ‘changing institutional geographies’ in HE have resulted, for example, in increased attention being paid to world university rankings, in particular by policymakers and HEI managers (Jöns and Hoyler, 2013: 45). Although the limitations of the data, and geographies, produced by the world rankings have been critiqued, the league tables are indicative of the ‘growing significance of

transnational processes’ across the HE sector (Jöns and Hoyler, 2013: 45, 48; Findlay et al., 2012). In part, these processes reflect on the ‘cross-cultural reach’ of leading HEIs (Warren and Bell, 2014: 50), predicated on academic, student and alumni mobility (Waters, 2006, 2012; Jöns, 2009, 2011; Leung, 2012). Within the UK, this ostensibly ‘neoliberal corporatization’ of UK universities (Castree and Sparke, 2000: 228; Ball, 2012) has been examined through studies into HE policy reform (Thompson and Bekhradnia, 2010), notably changes in HE funding and shifts towards increased institutional accountability and greater measurement of academic performance (Castree, 2006; Pain et al., 2011; Rice, 2011; Winter, 2013; Rogers et al., 2014). In this paper, we draw attention to one aspect of HE neoliberal reforms which has been neglected in the scholarly literature: the increased reliance on philanthropy by UK universities of varying chronologies and sizes in order to fulfil their core functions.

Changing HEI philanthropy

Granted, geographers have begun to give attention to the connections between philanthropic funding and HEI image-making (Warren and Bell, 2014). Moreover, Hay and Muller, in their wide-ranging discussion on the current ‘golden age of philanthropy’ (2013: 1), identified a number of areas which ‘appear to warrant critical geographical inquiry’ (2013: 1), including: connections between philanthropic engagement and place; favouring of ‘culture’ and education; moral and ethical issues; and ‘conscience, place and inequality’, specifically, the extent to which individuals ‘turn[ed] to philanthropy to salve their consciences’ (2013: 13). In addition, research has been conducted, within and beyond the geographical discipline, into: genealogies of philanthropy, and their impact on global North–South alignments (Bell, 1998, 2002; Lambert and Lester, 2004); motivations of individual philanthropists, including reference to their personal ‘moral biographies’ (Schervish, 1994: 167; Odendahl, 1990; see also Schervish, 1998, 2006; Ostrower, 1995; Harvey et al., 2011; McDonald and Scaife, 2011); the deployment of philanthropy by individuals and corporations to specifically further business objectives (Saiia et al., 2003; Ball, 2008; Osei-Kofi, 2010; Parry et al., 2013); and the historic role of large-scale giving in promoting academic mobility (Kohler, 1985; Collins, 2009; Jöns, 2009). Much of this cross-disciplinary research has focused on university donation-seeking and philanthropic behaviour in the US, with a smaller body of work considering activities in mainland Europe (Jöns, 2009; Glückler and Ries, 2012) and Australia (McDonald and Scaife, 2011). Analysis of the undertakings of UK HEIs on this topic has, until recently, been neglected (Warren and Bell, 2014).

More generally, within HE, whilst the ethics of individual universities accepting donations from particular sources came under considerable public scrutiny in the UK in 2011 following the LSE’s links with Saif Gaddafi (Woolf, 2011),² there has been a dearth of scholarly research into strategies deployed by universities to secure competitive advantage across spatial domains from the receipt, and then presentation, of philanthropic gifts. This is a surprising omission given that universities within the UK neoliberal funding environment are increasingly expected to act in an entrepreneurial manner and compete for private finance, including personal donations, in a ‘winner takes all’ market (Rice, 2011: 333; Ball, 2012). More fundamentally, this competition is geared towards generating funds for ‘basic’ functions such as supporting students, providing modern libraries, research and teaching in emerging disciplines.

² In July 2009, nine months after Saif Gaddafi was awarded a PhD at the university, the LSE signed a Gift Agreement with the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation (GICDF) facilitating the receipt of a donation of £1.5 m from the latter to the LSE’s Centre for Global Governance (Woolf, 2011: 15).

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