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Developing a “Purpose Ecosystem” in Higher Education through Humanistic Business Education and Moral Imagination.

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Abstract

The aim of this research project is to enhance the 'Connected Curriculum' research programme in Higher Education by making students and teachers co-participants in a 'Purposeful Education Ecosystem', thus promoting a shared vision towards the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Through the development of the mass university and the increasingly close relationship between university and society, higher education has come to play a crucial role in shaping current and future generations who will, for better or worse, shape our future. However, as Barnett noted, research and teaching have been separated, whereas *these two functions are intimately linked*. This has led some scholars to develop an integrated vision of the nature and purpose of the university, the Connected Curriculum, which is more suited to the challenges of the XXI century. The driving idea behind this research programme to transform and reinvigorate modern universities is 'connectedness', which can be established across multiple dimensions.

The Connected Curriculum framework aims to translate world-leading research into world-leading education on the 'premise that students learn by participating in research and inquiry' (Grindle & Tong 2022, 108). We believe that this vital principle in higher education should be integrated into and directed towards strengthening the 'purpose ecosystem'. This is an emerging network of multiple intermediaries, initiatives and organisations that share 'efforts and beliefs in changing and redefining the purpose and nature of business by advocating broader non-financial performance outcomes' (Stubbs et al 2022, 1097). We argue that for this to be

effective, it needs to be integrated into educational curricula, taking the educational ecosystem one-step further.

At the heart of the Connected Curriculum, as embedded in the module I intend to develop, is humanomics, which, thanks to its multiple ramifications, can link education and research. Indeed, the relationship between education and research should be studied based on their mutual reinforcement when they are combined, or their impoverishment when they are separated. According to this vision, the role of human agency, with all its desires, passions and goals, becomes central to a humanistic view of management. This is why, in our project, humanomics, as proposed by scholars such as McCloskey, Melé (2016) or Nobel laureate Vernon Smith, should be at the heart of the curriculum.

In line with recent educational research, such as that of Barnett, who has called for higher education to be "realist", "critical", "practical" and "imaginative", we will embed in the course we teach principles that are "realist" in terms of the specific environment in which students operate, "critical" of current practices that are not directed towards the common good, "practical" in terms of providing students with the conceptual tools to change the environment for the good, and "imaginative" in terms of developing their moral imagination for new solutions, "practical" in terms of equipping students with the conceptual tools to transform the environment for good, and "imaginative" in terms of developing their moral imagination to find new solutions to the ever-growing environmental challenges, as the current Circular Economy movement purports to do.

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