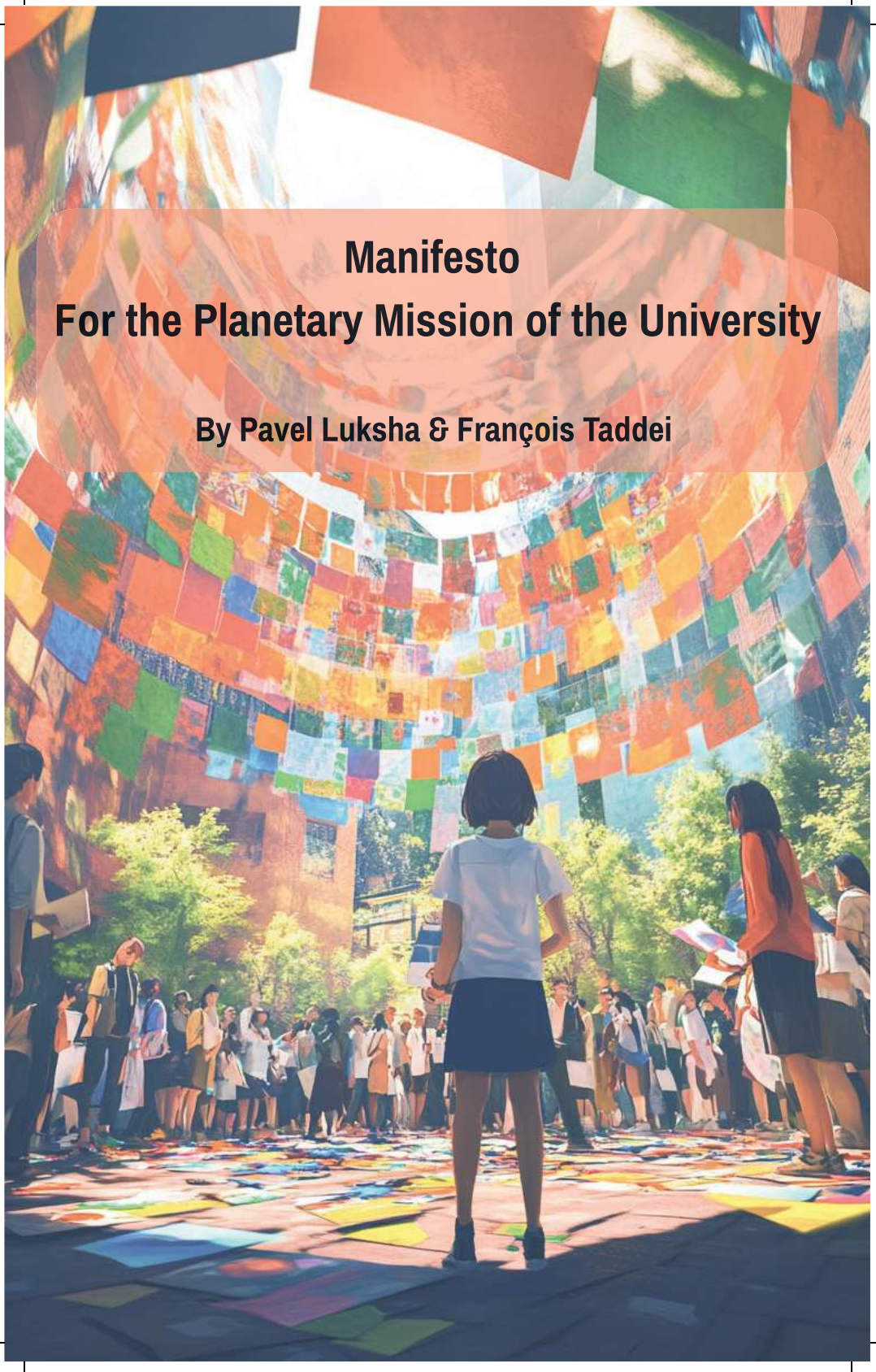

Manifesto
For the Planetary Mission of the University

By Pavel Luksha & François Taddei

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Abstract

Universities stand at a critical juncture as global challenges, collectively known as the polycrisis, grow increasingly complex. Despite a centuries-long history of resilience and ability to adapt, the traditional university model—shaped by Enlightenment ideals and embedded in modern industrial paradigms—now faces a convergence of disruptions that threaten its core missions of education, research, and societal development. These include intensifying pressures to provide more relevant and agile learning, the ascendancy of advanced technologies such as AI that outpace conventional research & teaching, and growing skepticism about academia's ability to address urgent ecological and social issues.

This Manifesto proposes a Planetary Mission for universities to pivot from being knowledge gatekeepers to bridge builders capable of devising transdisciplinary solutions, acting as stewards of the global commons, and practicing inclusive learning and governance models. We argue that universities must embrace an ethos of "weaving," i.e. fostering ecosystems that integrate multiple forms of intelligence (human, artificial, and beyond), bridge intergenerational perspectives, and nurture ethical leadership across global networks. The rise of artificial general intelligence and the ongoing erosion of social trust underscore the urgent need for a new path forward, one focused on research in regenerative economies, collaborative creation, and greater cultivation of care—both for individuals and our planet. We identify serious obstacles to innovation—rigid silos between fields, reductive metrics, political co-opting, and more—but highlight examples of institutions already manifesting the transformative potential of the planet-focused university. The Manifesto concludes by inviting policymakers, funding partners, university leaders, and students themselves to participate in co-constructing a higher education ecosystem suited to our collective future.

Confucius famously said we have two lives and our second life starts when we realize we have only one. Our ability to have an awareness of our finite lives may be what most distinguishes our species, and our era is a special one as, since the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, our civilization and even our species have also entered a second life, and our awareness of it keeps growing as we conjure up ways to threaten our very survival, resulting in compounding crises, or the polycrisis. As many universities have closed, unable to contend with the challenges of the complex world, we believe that universities are also entering a second life in an awareness that they must evolve to stay alive.

Thesis 1: We Are at the End of the Golden Era of the University

1. **Historical resilience of the university**

   The university is one of the oldest continuous social institutions, predating even Western European civilization itself. For example, the Mouseion of Alexandria (est. ca. 350 BCE) already exhibited many "university-like" functions, such as scholarly inquiry, collective learning, and dissemination of knowledge. Early versions of universities, though known by other names, existed in Ancient India (Takshashila and Nalanda), China (Taixue), and Arab Caliphate (Bayt al-Hikmah). This remarkable longevity underscores the university's capacity for adaptation across diverse cultures and historical epochs.

2. **Modern university is a product of Modernity**

   The university model as we generally know it today developed in the society of Western Europe and therein it produces the trappings of Modernity, one of these being cutting-edge scientific research and the training of elites.

3. **Universities therefore reproduce the problems of Modernity**

   Despite their significant achievements, universities have also carried forward the limitations of "Modernity" - the colonial, patriarchal, and extractive paradigms inherited from European history. Much environmental degradation and social inequality and fragmentation was fostered by the graduates of modern universities and in some cases research produced within the university, suggesting at first counterintuitively that modern universities are in many regards part of the problem and may not be part of the solution unless they evolve.

4. **A Century of Crises**

   Academic institutions have had to face down a series of crises for at least the last century. From José Ortega y Gasset's *Mission of the University* to Jacques Derrida's criticism of higher education, there's been much debate surrounding what universities promise—cultural leadership, cutting-edge research, social mobility—and what they actually provide. Chronic underperformance, intergenerational conflict, and the ever-expanding expectations placed on universities have contributed to this ongoing strain.

5. **Beneficiaries of the Long Peace (1950–2010s)**

   Despite these challenges, universities flourished in the post–World War II period often referred to as the "Long Peace." Greater access to higher education coupled with greater demand for specialized knowledge catapulted universities to occupy the pivotal position they play societally around the global. Over the past few decades, demand for higher education and research in universities have particularly surged, in part due to a near absence of alternatives on the market. Global enrollment in higher education rose from

32.5 million students in 1970 to over 220 million by 2020, an unprecedented expansion. No other institution is able to match the university in its ability to educate, credential, and research, yet this “Golden Era” now appears to be reaching its limits as external pressures mount.

Thesis 2: Enter the "Perfect Storm": The Mission of the University in Crisis

Universities today face an unprecedented convergence of challenges across their core missions—education, research, and societal development. Competing alternatives, shifting demands, political pressures and emerging knowledge paradigms are driving a "perfect storm" that threatens the long-standing stability of universities.

This crisis reflects the broader crisis of modernity itself. As a pillar of the Enlightenment, the university has contributed to progress, but according to elitist, colonial, and extractive ideals. These have afforded scientific and technological advances in the modern era, but they've likewise catalyzed environmental destruction, greater social inequality, and the exclusion of alternative models of knowledge, leaving universities as equal parts products and propagators of modernity's contradictions—prioritizing predominance over the natural world, certain knowledge systems over others, and economic growth over ecological and societal well-being.

In the current systemic crises in which the traditional paradigm faces scrutiny and potential collapse, universities must redefine their purpose, as the current purpose grows more obsolete with each passing day. The advent of artificial intelligence has only made the need for change more urgent as it helps foment the crisis, further disrupting how knowledge is created and disseminated, therein undermining institutional legitimacy.

A. Education Mission

- Changing demand on the part of employers and students. Graduates often lack the skills employers need, especially in fast-evolving fields like digital technology, sustainability, and business; meanwhile, young people increasingly desire an education that prepares them to be proactive change-makers rather than blank slates to be endowed with knowledge. The situation begets a call for rapid, high-quality, action-oriented education that the traditional university struggle to provide.
- The rise of alternative education providers. Universities now compete with vocational institutes, corporate academies, EdTech platforms, and lifelong-learning programs that can evolve much faster and offer more flexible, affordable, and job-relevant training. Many of these alternatives pathways are able to prepare students for jobs that did not even exist in recent history, exposing the rigidity of traditional university education with its slow cycles of curriculum adaptation and bureaucratic inertia that leaves graduates underprepared for the rapidly changing professional and social world.
- The curriculum crisis and the modernity crisis are one. Academic programs remain largely shaped by 19th-century educational systems that exclude diverse epistemologies, indigenous knowledge forms, and transdisciplinary approaches. The future of education lies in "polyversity," a model that embraces multiple knowledge systems and fosters community collaboration in order to tackle global challenges.

B. Research Mission

- Tension between teaching and research. Faculty find themselves in a balancing act between teaching and the relentless demands of publish-or-perish culture and the race for research funding that goes with it. It's a system that prioritizes hyper-productivity over meaningful impact, distorting academic priorities and discouraging deep, exploratory inquiry.
- "Best in the world" versus "Best for the world". University rankings and performance metrics keep score in a global competition that values prestige and output volume over the creation of transformative knowledge. Excellence in research is too often measured by author citation counts and institutional pre-eminence rather than real contributions to solving humanity's most pressing challenges. Universities are trapped in a race for top accolades when they should instead be fostering cultures where faculty and students aim to be "best for the world," i.e. carrying out research that improves global well-being rather than institutional prestige.
- Competition from specialized research centers. Universities are increasingly challenged by private R&D labs, think tanks, and NGO-based research initiatives, which often produce high-impact findings more rapidly, flexibly, and with greater financial resources. The divide is particularly stark in fields like AI where well-funded corporate labs far outpace university research in computational power and access to large-scale datasets. As a result, academic institutions are increasingly being elbowed out of the knowledge-contribution space on some of the most critical technology frontiers.
- Ecosystem transition and paradigm shift. Digital platforms, data-driven methods, and the rise of artificial intelligence are reshaping the knowledge ecosystem. University research is not evolving in lock step with technology and society. Open-source research networks are challenging the traditional contained-laboratory model, in so doing creating a need for more collaborative methods that tap into citizen science.
- The need for epistemic diversity and alternative knowledge systems. The dominance of Western-centric, monodisciplinary methodologies in research has pushed to the margins interdisciplinarity and indigenous, local, and traditional ecological knowledge systems despite the critical contributions of these latter to sustainability, medicine, and climate science. A pluralistic, transdisciplinary research model is essential for addressing the complex global challenges of our time.

C. Societal-Development Mission

- Internal skills shortages. Universities often lack the adequate competencies to address societal challenges such as sustainability, social inequity, regional development, and global systemic crises at an appropriate scale and speed.
- Conflicts in governance. Traditional administrative structures can often serve as obstacles to a university's goals of openness, interdisciplinary, social responsibility, and collaboration.
- The need for a more balanced playing field. Universities are too often forced to accommodate actors in society more powerful than themselves—governments, corporations, and institutions of various stripes—rather than act as neutral platforms for societal transformation.
- Heightened competition for legitimacy. NGOs, development agencies, social enterprises, and other specialized organizations increasingly position themselves as "development agents," diminishing the impact universities can have in societal development.
- Politics stifling freedom of thought and deed. In times of political upheaval, universities are often pressured to align with the will of those in power. Historical examples include the coercion of German universities in the 1930s and more recent academic targeting in Turkey and Russia, but similar patterns are now emerging across the US where universities are facing political pressure to conform to the ideologies of those in power. Developments like these threaten to turn universities into conduits for divisive and regressive worldviews, undermining the core of the societal-development mission.

Every key mission of universities is being disrupted, making it harder to play their traditionally essential role in society. As a host of competing alternative institutions arise, universities stand to become less exclusive and dissolve into a broader network of actors unless they manage to adapt and redraw their value proposition. For some time, universities have enjoyed a certain unassailability thanks to their exclusive government and philanthropic funding channels and their privileged legal status as degree-awarding bodies, but these historic advantages can rapidly deteriorate in a rapidly changing world.

Thesis 3: The Crises Universities Face Will Intensify as AI Becomes More Sophisticated and AGI Looms

As AI models shift toward artificial general intelligence (AGI) that can perform complex intellectual and cognitive tasks, universities face an even more profound challenge:

- Obsolescence of traditional teaching frameworks: In the age of AI-driven personalized learning, universities are no longer the sole purveyors of education. AI tutors can curate, customize, and adapt lessons for a fraction of the cost, undermining expensive degree programs. As education becomes hyper-accessible, universities must shift their focus from awarding degrees to personal development, mentorship, and community-based learning.
- Transforming how knowledge is created: AGI will not only accelerate research but also challenge universities as the primary locuses of knowledge generation. If AI can generate hypotheses, test theories, and refine knowledge faster than human researchers, will peer review and academic publishing remain relevant? Universities must shift from being producers of knowledge to ethical stewards who can derive meaning, interpret, and manage the impacts of AI-driven discoveries.
- The end of knowledge as a "competitive advantage": Within a few years, AI will very likely be able to outperform humans in analytical and problem-solving tasks, rendering obsolete many skills traditionally learned at the university level. University education therefore must shift focus from memorizing information to cultivating wisdom, creativity, and ethical reasoning—areas where AI can't compete. This will call for interdisciplinary, experience-based models that value personal development and impact over mere rote learning.
- A worsening mental health crisis. The increasing prevalence of AI tools and social-media platforms in our lives are intensifying feelings of anxiety, alienation, and identity crisis across the population, youths being particularly vulnerable in the wake of the COVID crisis. If universities continue to focus solely on rote learning and awarding degrees, they risk leaving students unprepared to cope with the stress of polycrises in an AI-driven world. Instead, universities need to nurture a deeper sense of human purpose, helping learners build self-knowledge, emotional resilience, and an ability to adapt their sense of self in order to thrive (rather than simply survive) as human experience rapidly changes.

In a world where AI can generate knowledge but lacks intrinsic meaning, universities must become hubs where learners can explore purpose and human connection through education. Universities will no longer just prepare individuals for the job market but guide them and their communities toward self-discovery, greater well-being, and collective empowerment. Universities that fail to adapt are likely to grow obsolete, becoming relics of a bygone era, while those that thrive will cease to be knowledge factories, instead acting as sanctuaries for wisdom, ethical leadership, and human flourishing.

Thesis 4: Universities Can Remain Aggregators of Unique Socio-Cultural Capacities and Assets but Need to Redefine their Mission

Despite all the disruption, universities retain three essential value propositions:

- A place where the next generation comes into its own. Universities are a unique gathering place for youths and provide a one-of-a-kind environment for transformative change. While youth voices are too often ignored in the decision-making process that impact them, initiatives like the Pact for the Future serve as a reminder that no decision should be made without input from the future generations. As one youth delegate to the UN General Assembly put it, "We want to learn to be the change we want to see in the world."
- A place for fostering the commons essential to human civilization. The long-term well-being of humanity will depend on safeguarding and nurturing three commons: natural (planetary systems including climate and biosphere), socio-cultural (including science, arts, and history), and, more recently, digital (including open-source codes and data). Universities stand as a place where these commons are studied, and where conditions for their protection and regeneration are established as the interplay between human, technological, and planetary systems. Students and faculty need to learn to care for these commons and recognize them as pillars of human well-being.
- A place where diverse forms of intelligence meet. Universities cultivate individual and collective intelligence, contribute to artificial intelligence, and learn to connect with the intelligence of non-human life. It's a conjunction of various forms of intelligence that provides a unique opportunity for creating deeper understanding and devising innovative solutions to meet humanity's most pressing challenges.
- A place where essential forms of governance can be modeled. Universities can serve as microcosms for different models of leadership and decision-making, horizontal, democratic, and more. As John Dewey observed, *"Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife."* By involving students, faculty, and staff in transparent governance processes—from budgeting to curriculum design and drafting of purpose statements—universities help foster civic engagement and accountability.

Universities as unique crossroads of opportunities must be taken into account when reassessing the role universities can play in the future of humanity.

Key question: *Is there a new mission that allows universities not just to preserve their role in the society but to amplify it, leveraging their unique capabilities and assets?*

Thesis 5: The Rising Need for "Bridge Builders" to Lead Society Toward Just, Peaceful, and Regenerative Futures

We are living in the age of the "Great Acceleration" when humanity's power and ecological footprint are growing at exponential rates. The contradictory nature of our civilization has catalyzed a polycrisis, an overlapping set of global challenges in the way of geopolitical tensions, rising inequality, technological and environmental risk factors, and more, which undermine social sustainability and collective well-being.

Toward a Safe Space for Humanity

Global thought leaders use the word "polycrisis" to describe instability in the pillars of human civilization: the economy, the environment, technology, and geopolitics. Drawing on Kate Raworth's "Doughnut Economics" and Pavel Luksha's "Bridgeway Across the Decisive Century," we've identified four key limits that will spell disaster if transgressed:

- Planetary boundaries. We approach the "ceiling" of our planet's capacity as climate change, biodiversity loss, and soil degradation become worse, all the while destabilizing ecosystems critical for human survival. Bringing civilization within planetary boundaries will require a shift toward regenerative economic models and practices that will help the biosphere to thrive.
- Social foundations. This refers to meeting basic human needs like food, water, shelter, and security for all people lest we risk deepening social inequality, eroding social stability, and giving rise to more pandemics. To ensure social well-being, societies need to guarantee inclusivity by addressing the challenges of backsliding democracy, poverty, inequality, and social instability.
- Technological ceiling. This touches on the risks associated with misusing or losing control of advanced technologies in the fields of nuclear energy and weapons, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and autonomous systems. Such technologies have the potential to pose existential threats if mishandled. To avoid crossing this Rubicon, societies need to advance inclusive, responsible innovation that heeds to ethical considerations.
- Cohesion-purpose threshold. This less tangible boundary is being threatened by a general erosion of trust, shared values, and meaning as well as doubts about our ability to govern complex systems and manage threats like mass manipulation via AI or the collapse of collective-knowledge systems and democracy. Another key risk factor includes the rising mental health crisis—especially among youths—intensified by climate anxiety, technological disruption, and pressures encountered in the social-media landscape. Avoiding disaster will require a greater fostering of empathy, dialogue, and peacebuilding as cornerstone cultural practices.

The polycrisis can thus be seen as a threat to the commons of civilization, from natural commons such as the climate and biodiversity to cultural commons such as shared trust, democracy, and common sense and emerging digital commons in the way of open-source code and open data, though this latter is rapidly being polluted by fake news. Humanity must cultivate both external solutions through governance, innovation, and resource stewardship and internal resilience by cultivating greater mental well-being, empathy, and shared purpose. Achieving this will require a new social contract, new skill sets, and unprecedented cross-sector cooperation.

Thesis 6: Universities Are Uniquely Positioned to "Facilitate the Transition"

A societal transition of this magnitude requires bridge builders, or organizations capable of forging continuity between the present and the more sustainable future. Successful bridge builders must possess the following qualities:

- Foundational Idea-Shaping: Developing new paradigms and worldviews that help societies navigate rapid technological and ecological change.
- Real-Time Data Gathering & Analysis: Leveraging scientific research, technological advancement, and trends in society to identifying effective strategies for achieving real systemic change.
- Dialogue & Consensus Building: Creating spaces for dialogue across a broad swath of society—policymakers, business leaders, members of civil society and the community—to devise common visions for the future.
- Learning from Nature & Community: Integrating local and Indigenous knowledge, scientific inquiry, and real lived experience into the of the playbook of the shift toward greater sustainability.
- Protecting Public Interests & the Commons: Ensuring that sustainable changes balance local, national, and global needs without losing sight of public goods such as the well-being and mental health of individuals and communities.
- Regional & Industrial Partnerships: Catalyzing systemic change by connecting research institutions with government, industry, NGOs, and grassroots initiatives.
- Education for Youths & Adults: Cultivating new skill sets and mindsets, not only for students but professionals and policymakers as well with an emphasis on building resilience, empathy, and ethical responsibility
- Global Networking: Facilitating international cooperation across institutions, governments, and innovators in a spirit of collaboration to meet shared global challenges.

No other institution besides the university is so apt to fulfill all these roles. Universities are uniquely suited to act as bridge builders because:

- They possess transdisciplinary knowledge. While some university research in emerging fields may lag, universities are home to a vast research infrastructure investigating science, technology, humanities, and social sciences, making these institutions hubs for interdisciplinary problem-solving.
- They link multiple generations, industries, and communities. Students from all walks of life have diverse life experiences to share while alumni hold key positions in nearly every

professional sector from education to business, policymaking, science, culture, and activism. The result is a dynamic feedback loop that enables universities to sense shifts in society and rapidly adapt their teaching and research.

- They are locally grounded yet globally connected. Universities exist within local communities, addressing regional challenges while being deeply integrated into global research and education networks, allowing them to act as both knowledge hubs and action-oriented institutions.
- They are driven by public interest. Unlike corporations motivated by profit, universities embrace a fundamental commitment to knowledge, ethics, and societal well-being while addressing local, national, and global issues.

Taking on the new mission of "Facilitating the Transition," the university can make itself indispensable to the future of civilization. As an avenue for collective learning and research, the university can transcend its historical role of catering to the industrialized world. Universities can evolve into institutions that foster flourishing human communities while contributing to ecological well-being.

At the genuinely transnational, global scale, this new mission represents an embrace of the original missions of the university—education, research, and societal engagement—while expanding upon these by committing universities to the urgent task of leading humanity toward regenerative, equitable, and peaceful futures.

Thesis 7: Universities as Weavers of the Social Fabric

Throughout history, revolutions in communication and technology have disrupted societies, eroded trust, and in some cases bred conflict. The invention of the printing press contributed to religious wars but also laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment, a period when universities in Scotland and elsewhere played a pivotal role in fostering brand-new ideas.

Today's AI and social-media revolutions echo history's disruptive moments, offering unprecedented opportunities for creating and sharing knowledge while destabilizing social cohesion, undermining trust, and amplifying divisive worldviews. The "cohesion-purpose threshold" touches on the bedrock of social cohesion, which is being eroded by divisive worldviews championed by power-hungry, war-mongering leaders.

In the midst of the polycrisis, universities have a duty to assume a new, vital role: that of a weaver—a catalyst of education and steward of innovation that can heal and renew the fabric of society by undoing fragmentation and fostering collaborative resilience. It's a duty that will directly undergird its broader responsibility to serve as facilitators of the transition, outlined above.

There's a maxim from Africa that says, "We are born with a needle to weave." Each of us is born with an ability to restitch frayed social, ecological, and cultural threads in our own way. Universities are tasked with a unique responsibility to nurture this capacity in people, not just among the student population, but among alumni, faculty members, staff, and leadership as well. Weaving can manifest in one of several ways:

1. Interdisciplinary: Bridging knowledge domains to craft holistic solutions.
2. Intergenerational: Creating spaces where the wisdom of older generations can fuse with the creativity of youth to ensure that "no decision is made without future generations."
3. Intercultural and transnational: Valuing diverse epistemologies and perspectives, transcending national and cultural boundaries.
4. Socio-ecological: Linking human flourishing with planetary well-being, recognizing that societal and ecological resilience are inseparable.

A weaving framework eschews top-down leadership models and striving for prestige to instead focus on fostering trusting relationships, diverse communities, and collaboration across various levels of society. Weavers excel at facilitating dialogue and bringing together multiple voices around a shared purpose. They serve as a big tent where personal development and collective intelligence can flourish. Weaving-focused leadership is distributed rather than concentrated in individual heroes. Weavers design and sustain ecosystemic innovations that address challenges at scale.

Embracing the weaver ethos will enable universities to reclaim ethical and cultural legitimacy, not as gatekeepers of knowledge but as catalysts of social learning and innovation ecosystems where maieutics (Socratic “midwifery of ideas”) and cross-sector partnerships flourish. In doing so, they empower communities local and global and everywhere in between to work together to construct a more just, regenerative, and thriving futures. These universities support the broader shift from competition to cooperation, reminding us that the true measure of excellence is being “best for the world,” not merely “best in the world.”

Thesis 8: In Order to Fulfil Their Role in Governing the Transition, Universities Need to Orchestrate Their Own Transition

Universities cannot serve as labs for transition unless they embark upon changes themselves. Today, the rate of change in technology, society, and the environment vastly outpaces that in a university's structure, thus whatever potential a university has to succeed in its mission areas can only be thwarted by obsolete culture and processes.

Key areas of transformation:

- Universities must self-scout and adapt more innovative, more democratic processes to renew their organizational structures.
- The goal should be continual evolution rather than a fixed destination. Universities need to harness evolutionary capabilities—a self-renewing change process that adapts to each new generation of students.
- Universities must increasingly shift from nationally minded institutions to planetary actors, embedding planetary well-being into their core strategies.

Most importantly, universities need to embrace and practice the ethics of the future rooted in compassion and solidarity. Currently, schools prefer competitiveness over compassion and reward self-interest over collective responsibility, corrupting ethical awareness across the institution. Universities must become spaces that develop expertise in tandem with ethical intelligence.

There are many emerging examples of institutions leaning in this direction, including:

- Classical universities such as Oxford University creating fundamental programs focused on future studies and global challenges, and "reinvented" classical universities such as Arizona State University that integrate sustainability, innovation, and interdisciplinary problem-solving into their core curriculum.
- Entrepreneurial universities such as Utrecht University and Aalto University prioritizing ecosystem management, interdisciplinary sustainability initiatives, and regenerative & design-driven education.
- Ecoversities such as Universidad de Medio Ambiente (UMA) and Universidad de Colaboración Internacional (UCI) conducting programs that focused on regenerating local and global communities
- Innovative universities such as the Learning Planet Institute (LPI) establishing extensive partnership networks, including with UN University and UNESCO, interdisciplinary research & educational institutions rooted in collective intelligence & open-source collaboration.
- Post-university leadership schools such as Singularity University and Kaos Pilots concentrating on transformative technology for disruptive breakthroughs

The tidal wave of changes is building, and many more educational and organizational innovations will occur as universities embrace with their new mission areas. By embracing the Planetary Mission, universities not only revitalize their legacy but also reclaim an indispensable, future-oriented role that the world needs here and now.

Our Call to Action

We call upon key stakeholders in universities worldwide to seize this historic moment.

For University Leaders:

- Incorporate the Planetary Mission into institutional governance and strategic planning.
- Develop transdisciplinary, challenge-based curricula that delve into real-world problems.
- Ensure that youth perspectives play a central role in university decision-making.
- Partner across sectors and borders to accelerate systemic change for the common good.

For Students and Faculty:

- Advocate for ethical education and within universities.
- Prioritize care-focused learning: to care for oneself, one another, and the planet through purpose-discovery, creative inquiry, and collaboration.
- Engage in research and projects that contribute to the common good.
- Push for more participatory governance within academic institutions.

For Policymakers and Funding Partners:

- Support universities that prioritize planetary and societal well-being over competition and rankings.
- Align university funding models with long-term sustainability goals.
- Create incentives for universities to transform into innovation hubs that serve future generations, public and planetary interests.

In taking these steps, you can help universities reaffirm their place as indispensable institutions helping to foster the evolution of society with transformative challenges, therein ensuring that higher-education bodies remain beacons of insight, responsibility, and hope for generations to come.

This shift can enable both faculties and students to pivot from the best-in-the-world rat race towards best-for-the-world cooperation in which value is placed on contributions to the ecological, democratic, and digital commons.

Epilogue: Resonances with Otto Scharmer's "Universities as Innovation Ecologies for Human & Planetary Flourishing"

As we were completing the final revisions of this Manifesto, we serendipitously came upon a new Otto Scharmer article, *"Universities as Innovation Ecologies for Human & Planetary Flourishing."* We find it deeply resonant with many of the themes we address here. In particular, we would like to underscore the following parallels:

1. From Knowledge Transfer to Transformative Praxis. Scharmer highlights the need for universities to move beyond the transmission of abstract knowledge toward cultivating "transformation literacy"—an essential capacity for addressing systemic global challenges. This aligns with our call for universities to adopt a Planetary Mission, shift from awarding degrees to deeper mentorship while embracing ecosystemic, action-oriented learning.

2. Rebalancing What We Value in Education. Scharmer calls for moving away from an overemphasis on comfort, certainty, and mere knowledge and toward discomfort, not-knowing, and stillness that fosters reflection. We, too, encourage the cultivation of existential skills such as adaptability, empathy, and ethical reasoning as vital to the future of higher education.

3. The Social Field and "Weaver" Ethos. By describing universities as "innovation ecologies" that foster social soil (collective awareness and relationships), Scharmer's approach echoes our notion of universities as weavers of the social fabric—institutions that bring together a diversity of voices, nurture trust, and catalyze meaningful systemic change.

4. Integrating Inner and Outer Dimensions of Change. Both Scharmer's article and this Manifesto emphasize that regenerating the soil, society, and the self will be impossible without education that addresses both external challenges (climate change, AI disruption) and internal well-being (mindset shifts, mental health, purpose, human flourishing). This holistic approach, merging human development with ecological stewardship, is fundamental to the planetary future next generations need.

5. Ecosystemic Partnerships and Action Learning. Scharmer advocates immersive "breathing in" (immersing learners in frontline challenges) and "breathing out" (reflecting, sense-making, co-creating). Similarly, we call upon universities to expand partnerships, connect with local communities, and foster real-world, challenge-based education—inviting students and faculty to become bridge builders who deploy their solutions in the real world rather than merely theorizing about them.

If this Manifesto resonated with you, we encourage you to read Scharmer's article in full, as it complements our vision stated here. These two perspectives together underscore an urgent need

to redraft higher education into something that merges action and reflection, personal growth and collective well-being, and local engagement and global stewardship to achieve a truly regenerative future for all.

Annex: How To Adopt the Planetary Mission at a "Conventional" University

The Planetary Mission is not reserved for the top-rated and best-funded universities. Any university can integrate this mission. It all starts with tabling conversation between students, staff, community stakeholders, and faculty speaking as peers while addressing the following issues (not exhaustive as adaptation to each evolving context is key) :

A. Educational Content and Formats

- Incorporate global challenges (climate change, health, social equity) into curricula and student projects. For example, integrate climate science across disciplines, from engineering to economics, ethics, and beyond, to expose students to complex decision-making in a carbon-constrained world.
- Develop care-focused curricula that teaches students how to care for themselves, one another, and the planet, with practices of purpose discovery, mental and emotional well-being, creative inquiry, and positive psychology. Such curricula can draw on expertise from medicine, psychology, ethics, and pedagogy, offering tools for learners to find meaning, purpose, and hope.
- Emphasize project-based learning and entrepreneurial skills.
- Develop existential skills (resilience, ethics, adaptability, systems thinking).
- Enable strong student agency: create conditions for self-determination, offer personalized learning pathways, and empower students to propose new learning paths.
- Adopt alternative assessment strategies that prioritize real-world positive impact on the ecological, societal, and digital commons.

B. Partnerships and Ecosystems

- Join or form networks with universities around the world to tackle global challenges.
- Create local and national partnerships (government, business, NGOs) to address complex social issues.
- Foster consortia for standardization in areas like green building, carbon farming, and circular-economy solutions.

C. Research

- Engage in global research consortia—particularly pertaining to data-sharing and co-creation.

- Conduct action research with local communities, enhancing societal impact and integrating traditional and Indigenous knowledge where applicable.
- Link scientific inquiry to pressing global challenges, prioritizing solutions that advance regenerative and socially just futures.

Pavel Luksha is a global thought leader, educator, and catalyst for systemic social innovation, specialising in education, peacebuilding, and planetary regeneration. As the founder of the **Global Education Futures** initiative and co-founder of the University for the Earth, Pavel has been shaping transformative approaches to learning, governance, and social well-being. His work spans over two decades of international collaborations, policy development, and educational leadership, influencing strategies across Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. His research methodologies, such as the Rapid Foresight approach, have been widely adopted and applied in over 20 countries.

GLOBAL EDUCATION FUTURES

LEARNING PLANET INSTITUTE

Learning Planet Institute co-founder and president, **François Taddei** is an internationally renowned researcher. Convinced that learning futures have to be codesigned with learners, he explores learning transitions and planetizenship to learn to take care of ourselves, others and the planet. He advocates for large-scale collaborations to co-construct with all stakeholders from youth to UNESCO and UN University (UNU) a Learning Planet Academy powered by technology and grounded in interdisciplinary sciences. Aiming not to train the best students *in* the world but the best *for* the world, to develop their agency and competencies to nurture our planetary commons and learn to be “the change they want to see in the world”.