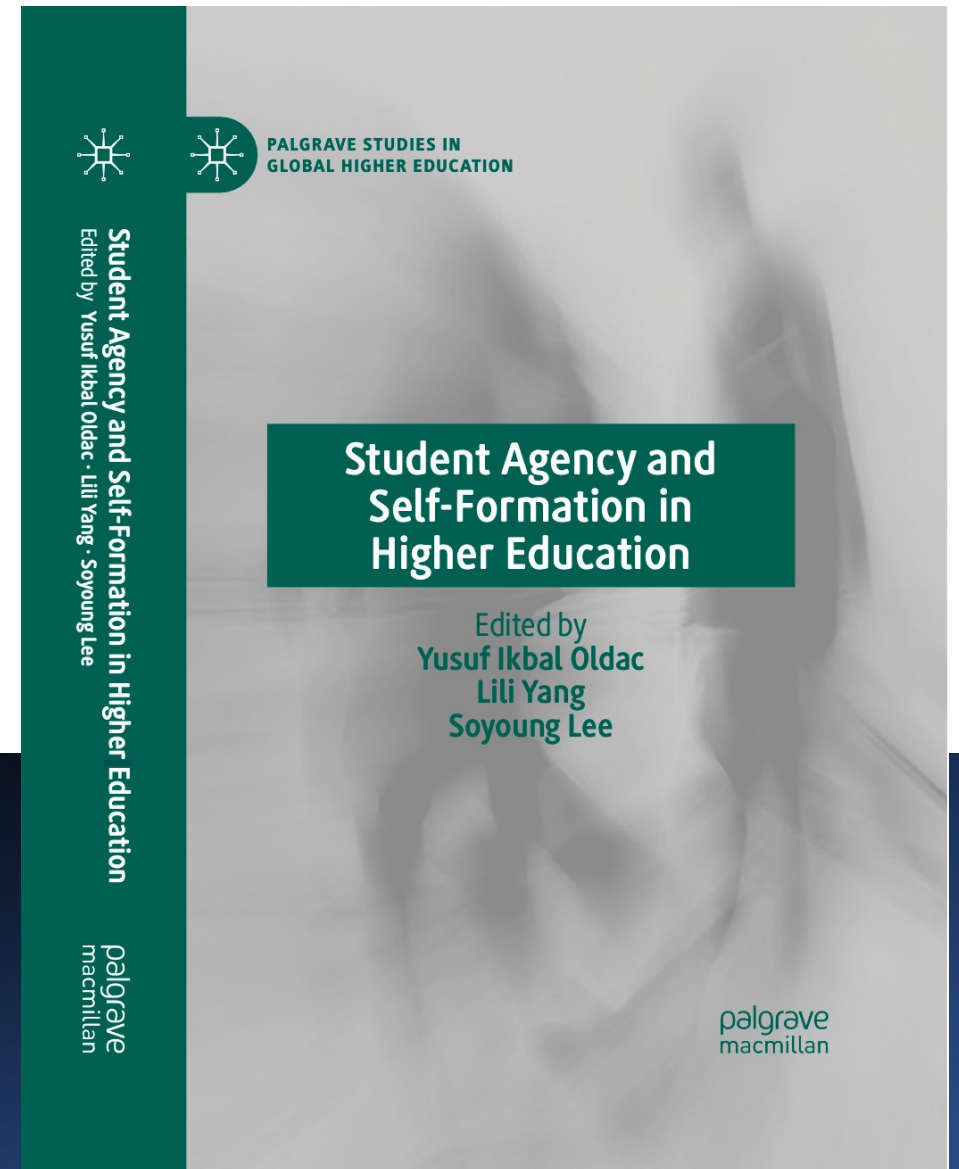


‘Student Agency and Self-Formation in Higher Education’: Book Launch and Discussion

Presentation at the Centre for Global Higher Education,
Feb 2024

By (order of appearance)

Yusuf I. OLDAC; Soyoung LEE; Kelsey INOUYE





PALGRAVE STUDIES IN
GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Student Agency and Self-Formation in Higher Education

Edited by
Yusuf Ikbal Oldac
Lili Yang
Soyoung Lee

palgrave
macmillan

The core idea of the book

- The book argues for **positioning students at the centre of higher education, drawing from the concepts of student agency and self-formation.**
- The book highlights that **higher education has broader and more important purposes than what a neoliberal human capital approach would suggest,** and explores how students exercise their agency and realise self-formation as inherently connected concepts throughout university education.
- We provide **disciplinary, cultural, and contextual diversity,** as the chapters **provide international perspectives to readers** interested in higher education theories, policies, and practices.

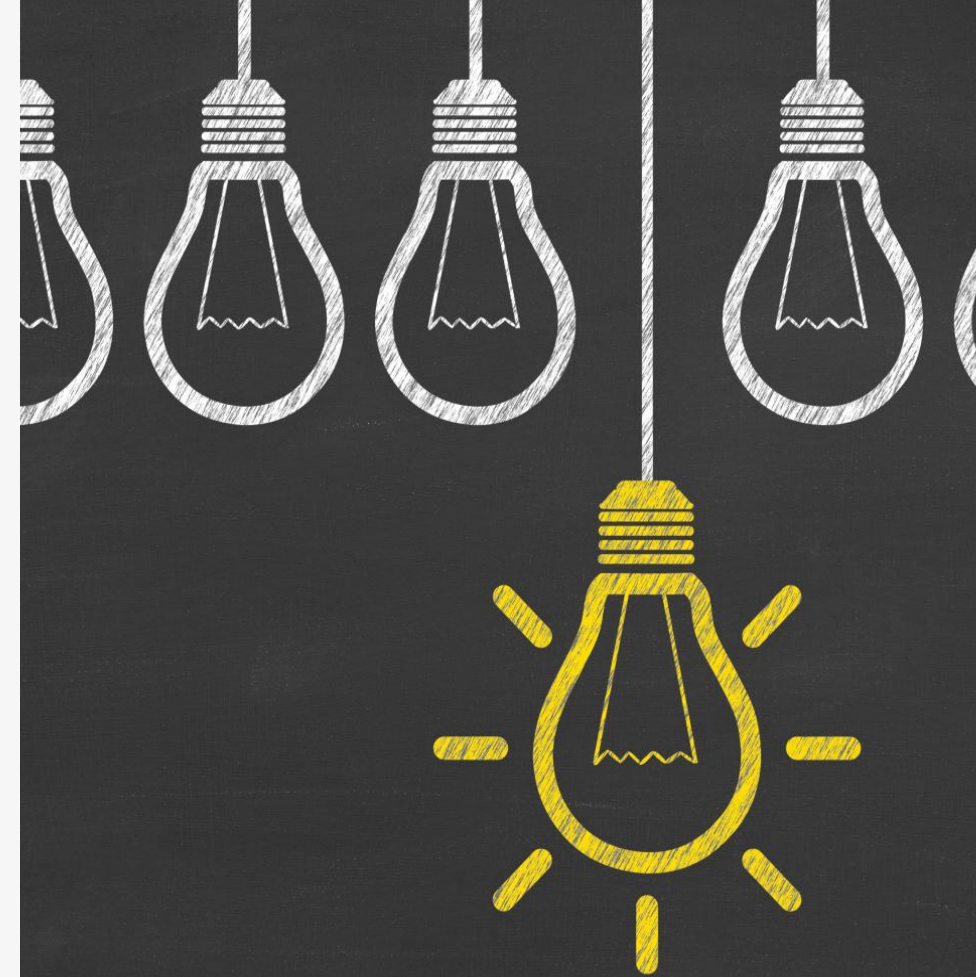
Definitions of core concepts

What is meant by *student agency*?

- This concept acknowledges students as agential subjects and incorporates the aspects of general human agency and the distinct features specific to education:
- Generally, human agency refers to individuals' capacity and autonomy to act with their self-determined objectives in mind. Agency stems from human consciousness and critical thinking, which facilitate reflexive deliberations and actions in the forms of active engagement and negotiation with the environments, whether challenging or resourceful and facilitating.
- Student agency differs from general human agency, particularly because of the impact of education:
 - On the one hand, education is believed to enhance student agency by fostering well-being, skill development, critical thinking, human capability, and, thus, freedom.
 - On the other hand, the success of education depend on the presence of student agency, which is essential for initiating student engagement in the form of self-motivated, self-regulative, and self-reflective thinking and behaviors.

What is meant by *self-formation*?

- Student self-formation is a multifaceted concept with deep historical roots, combining both ancient and modern philosophies. While the manifestation of this concept varies from context to context, self-formation primarily emphasizes the role of students as the masters of their educational experiences in higher education. They are active learners who shape their holistic development through active agency.
- The concept of self-formation goes against reducing students to consumers, income maximizers, or passive information receivers (Marginson, 2018).



Each chapter contributes to an aspect of the core argument

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How to get the book?

- You are welcome to order the book for your university libraries or buy it for yourself using the link: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-44885-0>
- The book already has more than 1200 accesses to its landing page.
- We hope the book will benefit scholarship across disciplines and serve as a good source book for researchers interested in this topic.



The first chapter: Students at the Heart of Higher Education: An Introduction

- The chapter includes a historical overview of higher learning: Students in higher learning have never been as narrowly defined as they tend to be in the last decades.
- The narrow definitions of the last decades include reducing students to consumers, income maximizers, or passive information receivers.
- We also provided an overview of the relevant literature in the chapter.
 - The review of research on student experiences discusses how agency and self-formation are implied in the extensive theories and concepts of student development in higher education.
 - Then, the emerging line of literature that engages with the agency and self-formation concepts more explicitly is introduced.



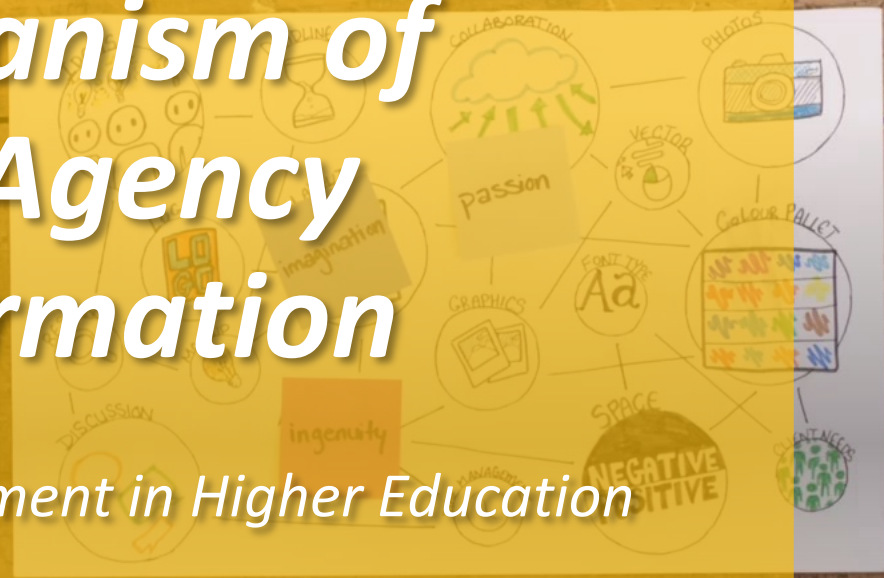
Following this introduction to the book, **two chapter authors will discuss their chapters:**

- 1. The Mechanism of Student Agency in Self-Formation Through Knowledge Engagement in Higher Education – By Soyoung Lee*
- 2. New Spaces for Agency in Doctoral Education: An Ecological Approach – By Kelsey Inouye*



The Mechanism of Student Agency in Self-Formation

Through Knowledge Engagement in Higher Education



Soyoung Lee
University of Oxford

Researching student self-formation



#1. Discussions on self-formation currently exclusively on the domain of **international education**



#2. The normative and comprehensive nature of self-formation limits empirical inquiries; need to focus on a **specific aspect**



#3. Need to **operationalise** student agency beyond illustrating its manifestations and using it as a **buzzword** (Inouye et al., 2022)

RQ. How do students exercise agency for their academic self-formation?

Theoretical frameworks of student agency



Realist social theory

Social reality as having two independent layers, structure and agency, which have different features and powers. To illuminate the interplay between agency and structure, Archer (1995) places the causal efficacy of human internal conversation, or reflexivity, between them.

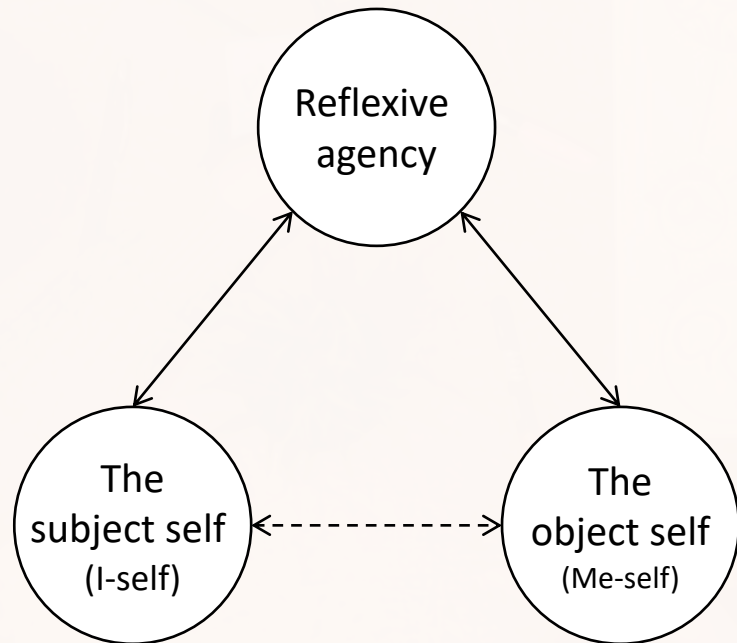
Psychology of reflexivity

Theories and findings about human reflexivity emerged in the psychology field through deductive and inductive endeavours to explain how people think, feel, and act. Examples are self-theories (e.g. self-efficacy, Bandura, 2018; self-determination, Ryan & Deci, 2000; self-authorship, Baxter Magolda, 2023).

Socioculturally mediated agency

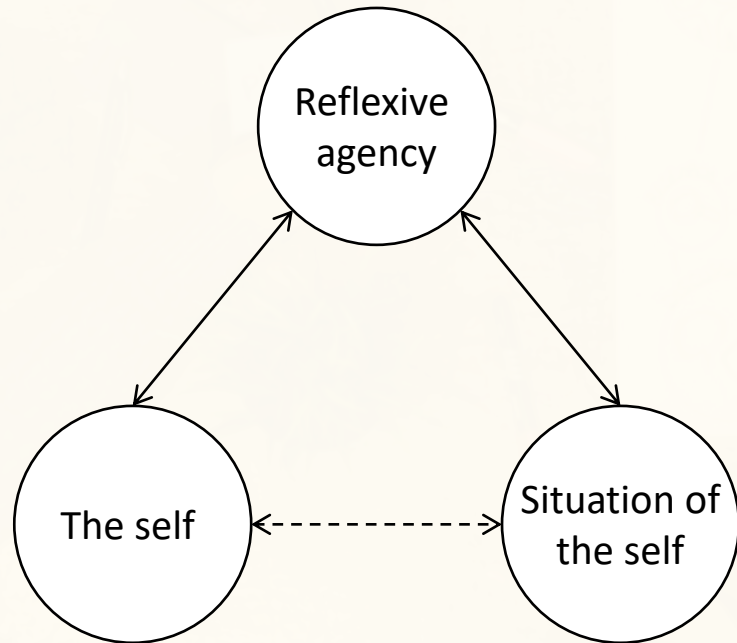
Theories advocating the impact of social contexts and structure on agency development in one way or another (Ahearn, 2001; Biesta & Teddar, 2007; Emirbayer & Mishce, 1998; Klemenčič, 2015).

Mediating agency in self-formation



- **Self-reflexivity:** internal conversation about the self
 - **Yeolsim:** translated into English as ‘effort’ or ‘hard work’ as a main cause, to which participants attribute their past successes or failures.
 - **Self-criticism:** directs and energises the continuous process of becoming in self-formation, without which student formation might be confined to a linear, unilateral process

Reflexivity and resources for self-formation



- **Active conformity:** passivity for activity
 - Teacher-student relationships filter how students engage with knowledge
 - Conformity as an aspect of reflexivity
 - Enacted in their interaction with the environment
 - Students' intentional delegation of self-control to referential others in the course of self-formation
 - Not only the extent but also the content of reflexivity should be considered to theorise academic self-formation

Changing agency in self-formation

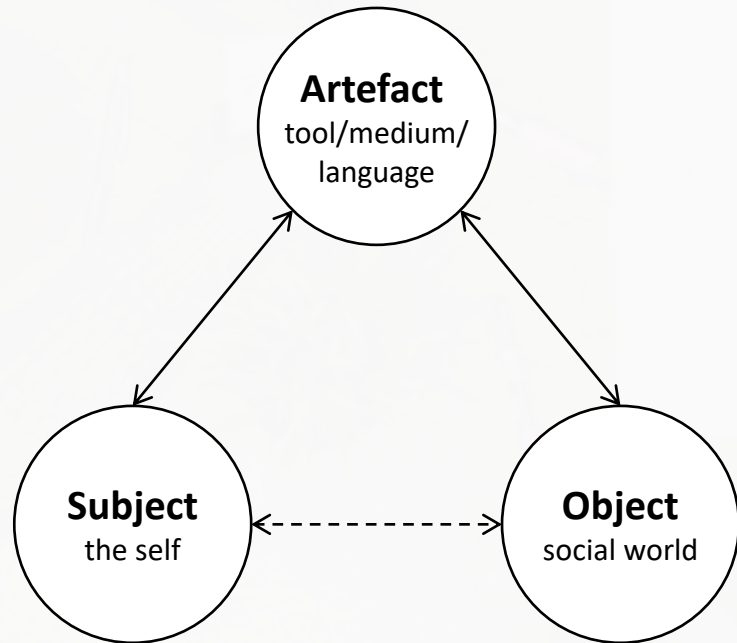
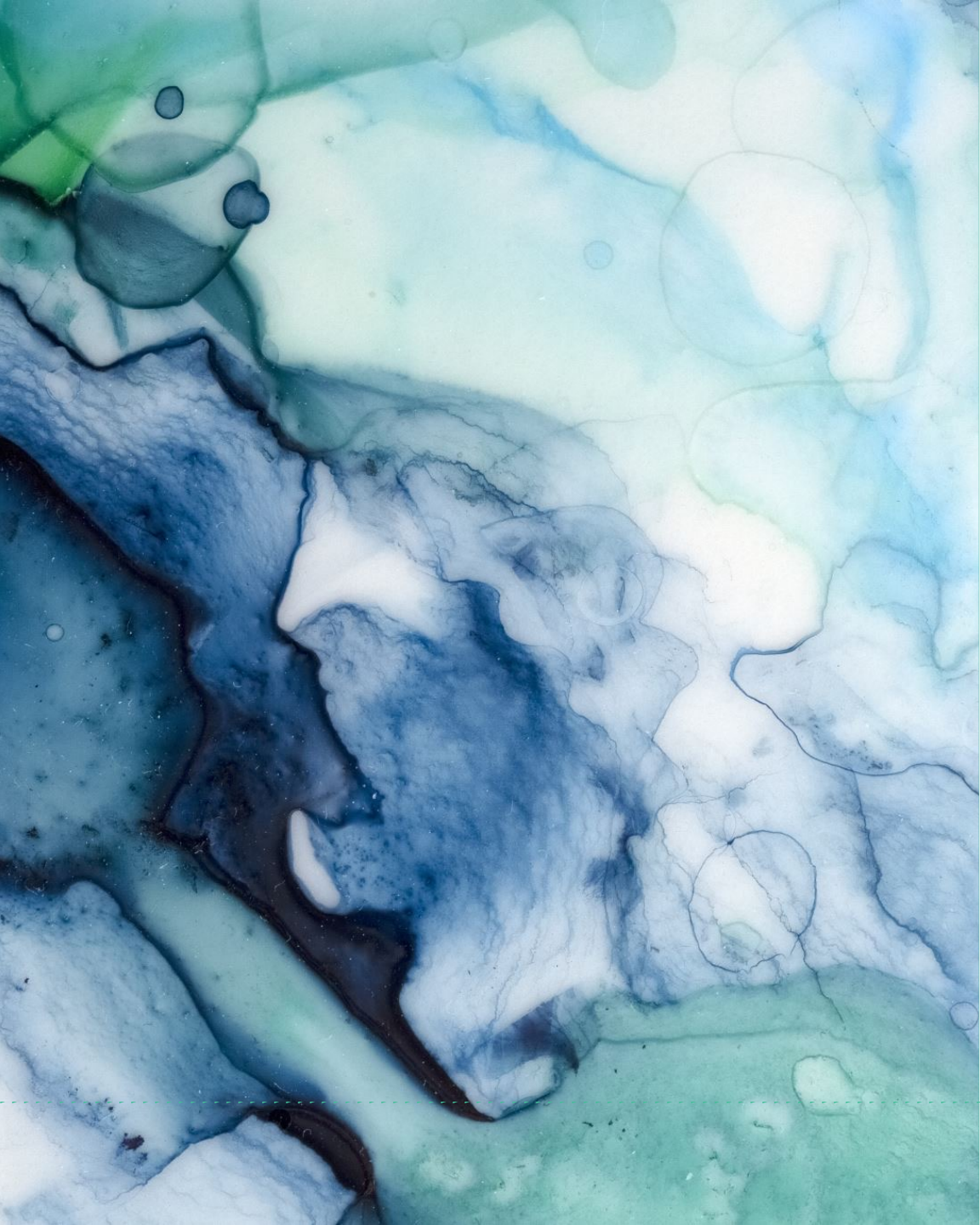


Figure 1. Vygotsky's (1997) model of human learning through instrumental act (Source: Hadegaard, 2004, pp. 22&26)

- Students' **changing content and extent** of agency in relation to the self and structure
 - **Example 1:** A student experienced a significant shift in her conception of *effort*, an aspect of reflexivity, while she studied Art Design in the UK.
 - **Example 2:** Another student case demonstrated a paradigm shift while studying Sociology that led her to question the power relation such as hierarchical relationship with professors.
- Knowledge as an explanatory factor for changing agency
- Disciplinary **knowledge as a language** or medium shapes a language for students' reflexive agency

Conclusion

1. **Various aspects of reflexive agency:** both extent and content of agency should be considered in research
2. **Mediating mechanism of agency:** various aspects operate in a similar mechanism in self-formation; student agency mediates the thoughts and actions of the (subjective) self about the (objective) self; about the situation of the self
3. **Emerging *disciplinary agency* in academic self-formation**



New spaces for agency in doctoral education: An ecological approach

Kelsey Inouye¹ & Søren Bengtson²

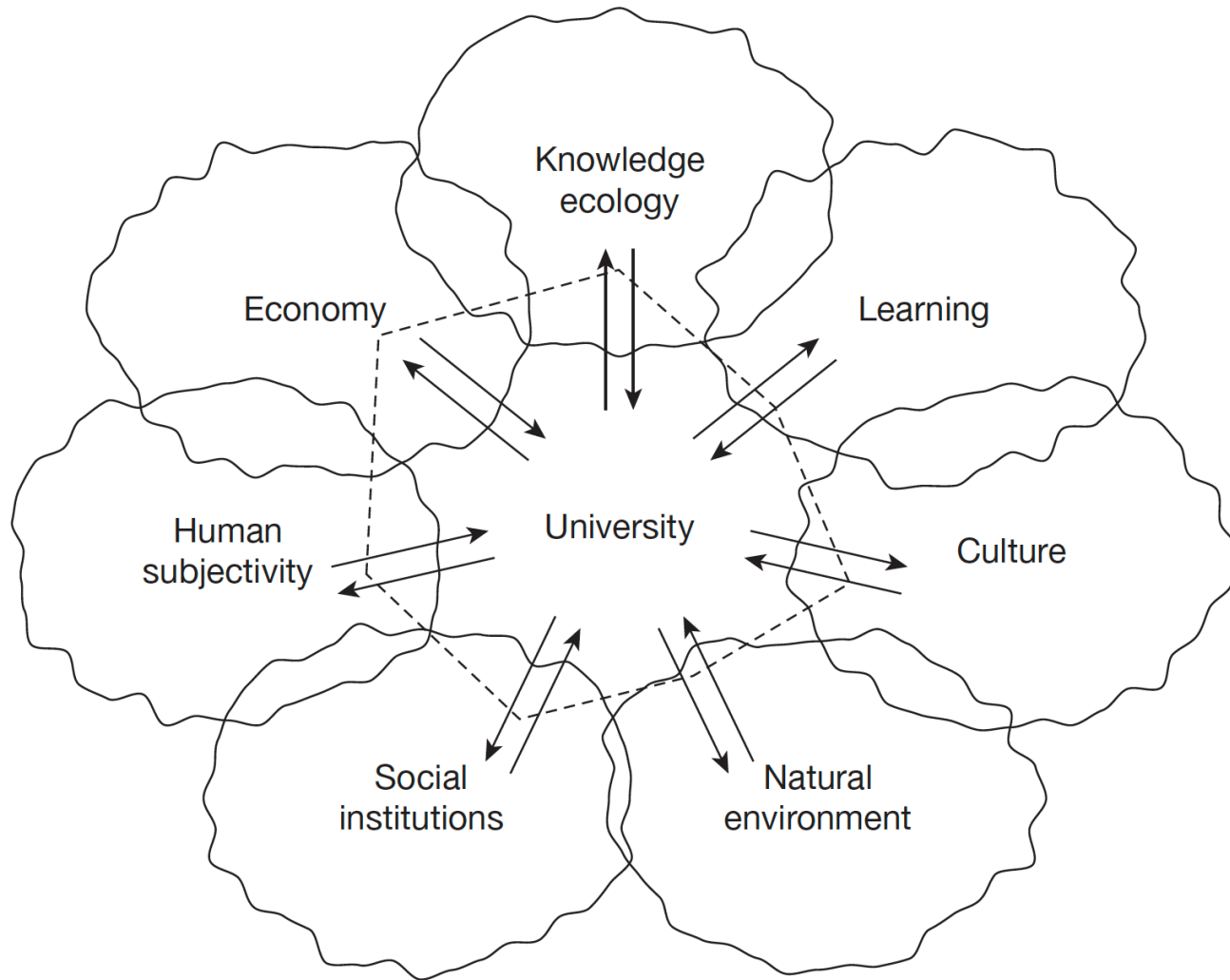
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Outline

- ◆ Conceptualization of ecological agency, drawing on Barnett (2018)
- ◆ Four examples of spaces for agency in which doctoral researchers navigate transitions in the PhD:
 - ◆ Careers
 - ◆ Writing
 - ◆ Citizenship
 - ◆ Justice
- ◆ Discussion and implications



Ecological agency

- Doctoral researchers are key stakeholders within the ecological university
- Doctoral researchers must navigate these interrelated ecosystems, which necessitates a more societally wide and entangled understanding of agency

FIGURE 4.1 The ecological university

(Barnett, 2018, p. 67)



Careers

- ◆ Careers are key points of transition for PhD researchers
- ◆ The career landscape presents opportunities for agency
 - ◆ Career/professional development
 - ◆ Technical and 'soft' skills
 - ◆ Interdisciplinarity
 - ◆ Cross-sector work



Writing

- ♦ Diversification of the PhD thesis as site of transition
 - ♦ Changes in doctoral knowledge production
 - ♦ Reflection of wider 'publish or perish' discourse and academic labor market
- ♦ Spaces for agency:
 - ♦ Choice of thesis format most aligned with goals
 - ♦ Creativity and expression in doctoral writing?



Citizenship

- ♦ Societal impact and social contract
 - Institutional strategies
 - Funding schemes
 - External partnerships
- ♦ New forms of agency through
 - the 'care-ful PhD' (Barnacle, 2018)



Justice

- ♦ Increasing focus on epistemic and social justice
 - Power dynamics and ownership in PhD supervision
 - Equity and equality in PhD enrollment and 'nudging'
 - Decolonization of knowledge and methodology
 - PhD associations and unions



Conclusion

- ♦ **Boundary crossings**
 - PhD as boundary object (Elmgren et al, 2015)
 - Blurring lines *and* enabling new connections
 - Implications for curriculum, regulations, supervision

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Thank You!

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