

The Uberisation of Higher Education: Reclaiming Space and Time for Study in the Platform Era

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ABSTRACT

The platformisation of higher education has brought about a deep transformation of the university's pedagogical, institutional, and epistemic foundations. This article critically examines how the spread of platform logic—characterised by automation, datafication, and modularisation—reconfigures the traditional role of the university. By analysing the emergence of MOOCs and platform-based models, we argue that these systems increasingly frame education as a transactional, individualised, efficiency-driven activity. This occurs at the expense of the relational and open-ended nature of teaching and research. The resulting uberisation of the university redefines students as clients, teachers as content producers, and institutions as logistical interfaces. This marginalises the pedagogical encounter as a shared, dialogical practice. Rather than rejecting platforms outright, this article explores the conditions under which they could support the university's formative role. Drawing on the notions of *scholé* and the pedagogical triangle (teacher–student–subject of study), we argue for the recovery of study as a time of collective attention and inquiry. We also consider how automation, if designed and governed critically, could free up time for reflection rather than enforcing standardisation. Ultimately, we argue for the reappropriation of digital infrastructures in ways that uphold educational responsibility, intellectual openness, and the co-presence of individuals gathered around matters of concern.

KEYWORDS: MOOCs, Pedagogical forms, Platforms, Study, University

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the proliferation of digital educational platforms has transformed teaching and learning practices at all levels of education. Since the onset of the pandemic, this shift has accelerated as educational institutions and private organizations have increasingly adopted these solutions to address the challenges posed by reduced physical presence, offering more accessible and efficient forms of education in the process (Williamson et al., 2020). These platforms are often presented as tools for democratising learning and optimising educational outcomes. However, as Van Dijck et al. (2018) have demonstrated, the operational logic underlying these platforms is shaped by mechanisms such as datafication, selection and commodification. These are far from neutral logics that significantly reconfigure traditional educational values and relationships.

Within the context of higher education, massive open online courses (MOOCs) have emerged as a paradigmatic example of this process of platformisation (Van Dijck & Poell, 2018). Promoted by some of the world's leading universities, MOOCs offer access to a wide range of topics and claim to democratise knowledge by reaching global audiences. However, empirical analyses suggest that the business models underpinning these platforms frequently prioritise commercial imperatives over educational aims (Daniel et al., 2015). Consequently, the widespread adoption of MOOCs is reshaping the structure and function of university curricula, particularly as institutions face rising operational costs, increasing competition and fluctuating student enrolment. Carvalho et al. (2022) argue that this trend marks a broader process of the uberisation of universities, in which concerns around productivity, efficiency, and consumer satisfaction reshape pedagogical practices, institutional arrangements, and the academic division of labour.

In this article, we use the term *uberisation* as an analytical device to capture the growing influence of platform-based, on-demand service models within higher education. Inspired by the Uber model, this concept highlights how educational activities are increasingly unbundled, modularised, and reassembled via digital platforms. In this context, universities act less as integrated providers and more as intermediaries that coordinate the matching of learners with specific educational services. As a result, pedagogical labour is reframed as an on-demand, data-intensive form of work, oriented towards efficiency, immediacy, and user satisfaction. Linked to this is the notion of 'educational automation', which is not only understood as the technical replacement or optimisation of tasks, but also as the delegation of pedagogical, administrative and evaluative functions to algorithmic systems. Educational automation reshapes the temporal, relational, and epistemic conditions under which study becomes possible. Our starting point is that the process of platformisation simultaneously drives the uberisation of universities and engenders new automatisms, the pedagogical implications of which require careful examination.

In this order of things, this article examines the implications of platformisation, together with the associated dynamics of uberisation and automatisisation, for the pedagogical form of the university as articulated by Masschelein and Simons (2018). Although opposing educational platforms outright may seem impractical or futile, we argue that substantial changes are necessary before they can be considered educational in any meaningful sense. We therefore ask under what conditions, if any, platform-based arrangements might be reoriented towards genuinely educational purposes, beyond their dominant alignment with employability, efficiency, and lifelong skills acquisition.

Our analysis is based on the idea that study is a fundamental part of education, as explained by Masschelein (2019). Drawing on the medieval model of the *universitas studii*, Masschelein proposes a conception of the university that is rooted in *scholé* — not as leisure or productive time for self-improvement, but as time set apart for attentive reflection, openness and shared enquiry. This time of study requires specific material, temporal, personal and institutional conditions: supportive spatial architecture; a deliberate slowing of temporal rhythms; educators capable of suspending instrumental aims; and an institutional commitment to indeterminacy and openness (Masschelein, 2011). Conceived in this way, the university is not merely a place for the transmission of knowledge or the training of skills, but a pedagogical form —and potentially a form of life— that calls for the co-presence of students and teachers, and that is oriented towards reawakening and engaging with the world.

For the purposes of this paper the focus will be on educational concerns, specifically the pedagogical implications for universities, both in terms of teaching practices and the underlying principles that define the university as an institution dedicated to study and research. As will be argued, universities create spaces and times for gatherings in study and research that extend beyond a transactional relationship between clients (learners) and content (courses). This perspective carries with it a distinct responsibility and establishes a particular relationship with society and its future, one that is not solely determined by economic or other instrumental imperatives. While the influence of digital platforms on higher education is now inextricable, it remains possible to explore ways in which these platforms can be meaningfully integrated with, rather than supplant, the pedagogical traditions and formative practices of the university.

The present analysis, articulated as a form of practical argumentation, seeks to connect reflective theoretical discourse with educational practice. Following Craig (1996), the theorisation of practice involves a movement of conceptual abstraction through which a practice is typified or idealised, enabling particular instances to be redescribed in more universal terms. While philosophical reflection and conceptual analysis each make distinctive contributions, alongside their inherent limitations, their value lies in the conceptual templates they

offer for articulating complex perspectives and for supporting comparisons and generalisations across situations.

Building on this approach, we undertake an exploratory exercise in thought that aims to move beyond the practical challenges posed by automation, datafication and modularisation within contemporary universities. Our intention is to open alternative ways of understanding (theory) and provoking (practice) educational forms in the platform era. Against this backdrop, we ask whether the emerging educational practices of the uberised university can sustain or regenerate this pedagogical form. What practical consequences follow from the expanding reach of platform logic in higher education? How are relationships between pedagogical actors, digital infrastructures and institutional arrangements being reconfigured? And, crucially, under what conditions might platform-based environments support and sustain the experience of study?

2 THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY AND THE RISE OF EDUCATIONAL PLATFORMS

Over the past decades, educational research has examined what may be termed a crisis in the university, marked by profound transformations in its structure and purpose. Contemporary universities now operate within globalized frameworks shaped by international standards, entrepreneurial logics, and knowledge capitalism. These dynamics have aligned institutions with transnational policies and performance metrics, emphasizing outputs, rankings, and competitiveness (see Peters, 2011; Izak et al., 2017; Masschelein and Simons, 2018; Jiménez, 2024). As Biesta (2011) contends, such shifts risk marginalizing the university's broader societal role, redefining quality and usefulness through market-driven responsiveness and productivity, thereby challenging its traditional public mission.

Although the transformation of university objectives and practices can be attributed to a range of complex factors, there are three primary drivers to be noted. First is the broader societal shift towards economies structured around knowledge and services rather than traditional labour and manufacturing (Beck, 2000). Secondly, the ongoing process of economic globalisation, coupled with the rise of digital education and the proliferation of digital platforms, often heralded as a form of "new salvation" for the modernisation of education, offering transformative possibilities for its future development (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2021). Third is the growing prominence of the notion of "excellence," which permeates and mobilises all aspects of university activity (Readings, 1996).

In recent decades, as universities have increasingly positioned themselves within the knowledge economy, innovation has emerged as a central concern. It is now widely regarded as a key driver of long-term competitiveness, economic development, and employment, closely linked to enhanced productivity and the advancement of knowledge-based economies. Traditional linear models of innovation have been supplanted by systemic and networked frameworks that emphasise the dynamic interactions among multiple stakeholders. At the heart of this transformation lies the Triple Helix model, which highlights the critical role of collaboration between academia, industry, and government. Within this framework, universities have come to play an increasingly pivotal role in the generation and dissemination of knowledge (Philpott et al., 2011).

In this educational context, the concept of uberisation has gained increasing relevance, as it aligns with learners' specific interests and areas of expertise. This phenomenon reshapes traditional relationships with both content and educators, effectively commodifying knowledge into a marketable product. Digital platforms play a pivotal role in addressing challenges such as locating appropriate educational services by streamlining interactions between students and teachers, thereby reducing associated effort and costs.

These platforms provide personalised, on-demand educational support, granting learners greater autonomy over the timing and manner of their engagement, analogous to the convenience of summoning a taxi (Khusyainov, 2022). In particular, since the emergence of COVID-19, the widespread shift to online education platforms has created new opportunities for learners globally. These platforms have expanded access to higher education resources and content for students who previously lacked such opportunities, while also fostering connections and collaborative relationships among individuals separated by significant geographical distances (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022).

The simultaneous emphasis on the language of learning in educational scenarios (Biesta, 2018) and the increasing demands for performance and monitoring has created favourable conditions for the implementation of digital learning platforms in higher education. These platforms have emerged as institutional responses to the growing needs of lifelong learning sought by both individuals and industry. Among the most representative examples of this platformisation in higher education are Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Over the last decade, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) have become a popular form of online learning. MOOCs often present themselves as an alternative to—if not a replacement for—traditional university education. These platforms typically offer content free of charge to end users: students can enrol, watch pre-recorded lectures, complete online exercises, and take tests. In most cases, the educational content is developed by a university, while the platform provides the digital infrastructure and visibility needed to attract a large, global audience. Connectivism, a learning theory tailored for the digital era, underpins the conceptual foundation of MOOCs by shifting the focus from knowledge retention to the ability to access, connect, and co-create information through human networks (Speight, 2018). This theory privileges collaboration over individualism, disrupting traditional tutor–student hierarchies and framing learning as a distributed process. Within MOOCs, knowledge is generated and mediated across networks via participants' contributions, fostering diverse pedagogical approaches that have influenced the evolution of their design and purpose. While MOOCs have been widely promoted as innovative forms of education that aim to democratise access to high-quality courses offered by prestigious universities to any learner with an interest and internet connectivity, several concerns have been raised regarding their implementation. In particular, questions have emerged about the business models adopted by well-known platforms, as well as issues related to data privacy (Van Dijck et al., 2018).

Although the integration of digital platforms into higher education is often presented as a response to demands for accessibility, flexibility and lifelong learning, closer inspection reveals that their implications go far beyond pedagogical benefits. These platforms are not just tools for delivering content or facilitating communication; they are also embedded within wider socio-economic changes that are reshaping the structure and *ethos* of universities. The convergence of globalised metrics, market-oriented rationalities and digital infrastructures has made universities increasingly susceptible to the logic of standardisation, quantification and datafication (Jarke & Breiter, 2019; Van Dijck & Poell, 2018). Consequently, platformisation must be understood not only as a technological evolution, but also as a rearticulation of the purpose, practice and nature of education (Nichols & Garcia, 2022).

Within this broader reconfiguration, two interrelated developments demand critical attention: the uberisation of the university and the progressive automation of academic and administrative tasks which is related to the displacement of teaching from the centre of educational practice. Driven by imperatives of efficiency and accountability, these transformations risk reconfiguring educational labour as a set of discrete, codified processes to be optimised by algorithmic means. However, as argued in the following section, despite its entanglement with uberisation, automation is not a univocal force. Its pedagogical implications depend on how it is conceptualised and implemented. By distinguishing between reductive and potentially

emancipatory forms of automatised, we can engage with the platformisation of higher education as both a constraint and a space for rethinking the epistemic and institutional conditions of study and education.

3 THE UBERISED UNIVERSITY: FRAGMENTATION, INVISIBILIZATION, AND DEPERSONALIZATION

The increasing use of platform-based models in higher education, recently referred to as the uberisation of higher education (Bolin, 2022; Carvalho et al., 2022; Collins et al., 2022), raises fundamental questions about the purpose, responsibilities and role of institutions within society. Commercial platforms such as Uber position themselves as neutral intermediaries, merely connecting service providers with clients, while systematically disavowing any responsibility for the quality, ethics or consequences of these interactions (Srnicek, 2017). This disaggregation of responsibility is not accidental, but structural. It enables platforms to grow, avoid regulatory obligations and maximise profits while minimising accountability (Davis & Sinah, 2021).

The application of this model to higher education —whether through large-scale online platforms, modularised credentials or the outsourcing of pedagogical labour — signals a shift in how universities are conceived and managed (Aibar, 2023). The university is increasingly being reconceptualised as a logistical infrastructure that facilitates the matching of educational demand and supply, rather than as a community of scholars engaged in a shared educational project (Komićenovic, 2022). According to this view, students become clients, academics become providers of discrete services, and the institution itself becomes an algorithmic, data-driven, depersonalised coordinating interface.

This model is more than just a new organisational form. Rather, it reconfigures the very *ethos* of higher education. Traditionally, universities have been characterised by a dual responsibility: to the world —as something to pay attention to and establish a studious relationship with— and to their members —students and teachers (Masschelein, 2017). These ethical and educational responsibilities cannot be outsourced or dissolved without fundamentally altering the nature of the institution. Indeed, the legitimacy of the university depends on its willingness to be accountable for what is taught, how it is taught, and the consequences thereof.

The platformisation of the university challenges this *ethos* in at least three ways. Firstly, it fragments the educational process. Rather than being offered a coherent pedagogical pathway, students are presented with a marketplace of modules, certifications and micro-credentials that are often minimally integrated and lack meaningful continuity (Gallagher, 2016). Knowledge is treated as an aggregate of informational units and learning becomes a transactional activity oriented towards measurable outputs (Biesta, 2010). The ethical consequence of this fragmentation is that no one is responsible for the whole, whether that be the student's development or the societal impact of the education provided.

Secondly, the process of platformisation introduces an element of opacity and abstraction. Algorithms determine content visibility, student-instructor matching, and the prioritisation of certain engagement methods over others (Williamson, 2017). These processes are rarely transparent, and their decisions are often unaccountable. In such an environment, the ability to make pedagogical judgements, traditionally exercised by educators who are aware of context, history and personhood, is replaced by computational systems that are oriented towards optimisation and prediction (Selwyn, 2019). Not only is responsibility outsourced, it is also rendered invisible.

Thirdly, the uberisation of universities undermines the relational dimension of education. Teaching and learning are not merely the transmission of information; they are fundamentally relational activities (Arango et al., 2024). Disintermediating educational labour erodes the conditions necessary for these relationships to flourish. When teachers are treated as gig workers and stripped of institutional affiliation and long-term commitment, and when students are viewed as isolated consumers of educational products, the university ceases to function as a space for study, which requires a community of students and teachers who have a certain degree of temporal continuity (Masschelein & Simons, 2018).

These structural changes associated with the uberisation of universities are inextricably linked to the broader processes of automation and datafication sweeping through the contemporary educational landscape. In both cases, it is not only organisational or technological reconfiguration that is at stake, but also a mutation in the ethical, epistemological and relational frameworks that underpin university life (Decuyper et al., 2021). The adoption of platforms and algorithmic systems implies the reorganisation of relationships between students, teachers and institutions under logics that prioritise efficiency, standardisation and the quantification of results. Consequently, the university is no longer viewed as a community of shared study and thought, but rather as an operational interface connecting data, bodies and expectations, all of which are regulated by performance metrics. This shift in logic reinforces the tendency to dissolve educational responsibility into a multitude of technical actors, thereby limiting the potential for true educational experiences (Simons & Masschelein, 2021).

However, a critical reading of this scenario should not simply denounce the university's submission to the instrumental logic of platform capitalism. As some studies have pointed out, these processes also offer a potential opening towards new forms of pedagogical imagination (Decuyper et al., 2023). While automation can be used to control and fragment teaching practice, it can also free up time and attention, creating conditions that enable the possibility of studying. This ambivalence requires us to reconsider the role of technology in education. Rather than viewing it as a neutral tool, we must recognise it as an ontological entity with which we must establish relationships of recognition, responsibility, and co-production. Rather than reproducing the model of relational dispossession that characterises uberisation, we should explore possibilities for educational automation that expand and reinvent the collective, open and transformative nature of knowledge. From this perspective, universities should not merely manage technical devices; they should also question, reinterpret, and reconfigure them.

4 THE AUTOMATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

One of the most significant phenomena within the framework of contemporary transformations in universities is the progressive automation of their practices. Linked to a logic of standardisation and quantitative optimisation, this shift has substantially reconfigured the role of teachers while reducing the margin of indeterminacy that is characteristic of pedagogical encounters (Perrota et al., 2021; Selwyn et al., 2021). The increasing importance of measurable results, particularly those related to the attainment of learning competencies and objectives, has reinforced a rationality focused on control, predictability and efficiency, at the expense of the more open and uncontrollable aspects of education.

As mentioned above, this process must be viewed within the broader context of platform capitalism, which is defined as a market model based on the systematic extraction, processing and monetisation of user-generated data (Srnicek, 2017; Couldry & Mejias, 2019). In education, this logic is evident in digital platforms that mediate and reconfigure teaching practices as socio-technical assemblages, comprising artefacts, actors, techniques, values, and epistemologies (Decuyper et al., 2021), and instituting specific forms of

visibility, value, and agency. These platforms, far from being neutral tools, are programmable digital architectures (Van Dijck & Poell, 2018) that organise user interactions through graphical user interfaces (GUIs) and application programming interfaces (APIs). Their design encodes certain conceptions of learning, teaching, and pedagogy (Perrotta, 2020; Kelkar, 2018).

In this sense, the platformisation of higher education involves profound changes to the regulatory and symbolic frameworks governing relations between teachers, students and institutions. Through mechanisms such as classification, categorisation, commensuration and evaluation, platforms establish certain forms of performativity and construct specific images of what constitutes “good learning”, “effective teaching” and “appropriate behaviour” in the digital classroom (Decuyper, 2019). These configurations shape practices and contribute to producing particular forms of self-understanding in teachers and students (Solé Blanch, 2025).

However, it would be insufficient to understand automation exclusively as a process of subordination to technical-economic rationality. As Strathern (2004) has pointed out, the relationship between humans and tools should not be considered in terms of a subject/object dichotomy, but rather as an expansion or realisation of capabilities. Under certain conditions, automation can have an emancipatory character in that it frees up time and cognitive energy by delegating repetitive tasks. This enables new forms of attention, thought and pedagogical invention to emerge. From this perspective, it is possible, following Decuyper et al. (2023) to distinguish between the automation *of* education —that is, applying technical solutions to educational practices for efficiency's sake—, automation *through* education, which is the development and training of automatic systems in a formative sense, and *educational automation*. This refers to practices in which automation takes on an emancipatory role, freeing the mind and hands from repetitive tasks and creating the necessary temporal and cognitive space for imagining and experimenting with new ways of thinking, relating and studying.

Realising this emancipatory potential, however, requires a number of ontological and institutional preconditions. At a fundamental level, this entails dismantling the strict dichotomy between automated systems, human beings, and living organisms. Rather than conceiving of these entities as fundamentally separate, they can be understood as sharing a common characteristic: they are all self-acting or self-moving — that is to say, in a sense, they are all ‘automatons’ (Decuyper et al., 2023). This shared characteristic gives rise to the need to recognise the singularity of each automaton and the specific forms of care it requires. Rather than treating automated systems as neutral instruments subordinated to external goals, they should be approached as entities that require specific forms of attention, responsibility and representation.

In this regard, any viable educational ethics of automation must also ensure that automatons — whether mechanical, digital or biological— are not reduced to mere means. They must have a ‘voice’, or at least a spokesperson capable of articulating their particular needs and limits, in order to resist exploitation, domestication or instrumentalisation. This approach involves creating institutional spaces —*schools of automation*— that operate beyond conventional spatio-temporal constraints. Here, automated systems can be studied, reflected upon and reimagined as part of a broader pedagogical project. These schools would not only teach the use of automation, but also foster critical inquiry into what automation is, what it could become and how it could contribute to an expanded conception of higher education.

In summary, the automation and digitisation of higher education should not be viewed solely as technological impositions or unambiguous threats to educational integrity. While they introduce obvious risks, such as the subordination of the university to productivity metrics, the devaluation of teaching and the conversion of

academic activity into divided, intelligible and monetisable operations, they also open up a field of possibilities for reimagining educational practice. The university of the future will largely depend on its ability to address this situation critically: it must recognise the educational potential of certain forms of automation, resist those that reduce education to a transactional exchange of data and cultivate ways of thinking and relating that preserve the open, unpredictable and collective nature of *scholé*.

5 THE *UNIVERSITAS STUDII* IN AN AGE OF PLATFORMS

There is little doubt that a significant number of universities are adapting their academic practices in response to external pressures, evolving learner expectations, heightened competition —particularly within a context where institutions are no longer confined to local markets but are expanding globally through technological advancements—, and a perceived crisis of autonomy and relevance. Increasingly, younger generations do not necessarily view a university degree as essential or desirable for achieving professional success. Within this landscape, educational platforms are emerging as effective tools that not only enhance institutional visibility but also provide additional revenue streams that complement campus-based programmes. In particular, the growing interest in short courses offering micro-credentials and digital badges presents an attractive alternative for learners who prefer not to pursue traditional, long-term degree programmes requiring several years of study to achieve employability. This trend also aligns with the needs of industry sectors seeking candidates equipped with specific skills and competencies that do not invariably necessitate a full professional degree.

While ongoing institutional transformations may be interpreted as necessary adjustments to meet contemporary educational imperatives, they also give rise to a deeper tension between adaptation and the preservation of the university's core academic mission. Increasingly, fundamental principles that have traditionally underpinned higher education risk being overshadowed or reconfigured under the influence of market-oriented ideologies (see Sandel, 2012) that privilege economic utility and competitiveness over intellectual development and critical inquiry. Although invoking the medieval origins of the university may be perceived as a nostalgic or futile attempt to reclaim a supposedly better past, we contend that certain essential pedagogical elements embedded in that tradition were constitutive of the very idea of the university and are now being eroded by ongoing transformations. Rather than a prescriptive model to be reinstated, we view the *universitas studii* as a “pedagogical form” (Masschelein & Simons, 2018) that offers a valuable lessons through which to reconnect with foundational academic practices, practices that define the university as a distinctive space and time dedicated to study, setting it apart from other forms of higher education provision.

For the purposes of this paper, we focus on two aspects that we consider essential for reinstating meaningful educational practices within platform-based activities. First, we emphasise the need to restore the pedagogical triangle, that is, the relationship that unites the teacher, the students, and the subject of study, re-establishing a genuine pedagogical connection among these elements (Friesen & Osguthorpe, 2018). Second, we argue for the importance of rediscovering ways to engage in sustained and thoughtful study of the world. In this regard, we recognise the opportunities afforded by new technologies to enrich educational and research practices within the university, enabling academic experimentation that encourages renewed inquiry into the realities of the world, rather than confining scholarly activity to the resolution of immediate or instrumental problems.

While educational platforms have been heralded for their potential to offer personalised, on-demand learning and to unbundle traditional classroom activities across a global network of providers (Alman & Jumba, 2017),

this promise warrants critical scrutiny. Although such platforms may appear to enhance learner autonomy, with potential implications for cognitive engagement and predicted learning outcomes (Jiang & Peng, 2023), they often perpetuate a narrow conception of education as the consumption of pre-packaged content. This tendency is particularly evident in the case of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), where meaningful interaction between teachers and students is frequently absent and dropout rates routinely approach 90 per cent (Fink & Brown, 2016). The underlying issue is structural: teachers and researchers are often relegated to the role of content producers, tasked with designing texts, videos, and activities for mass distribution, without opportunities to engage with the learners who access these materials. In turn, large-scale automation systems substitute for human interaction, attempting to resolve learners' questions but ultimately failing to establish the pedagogical relationship that distinguishes genuine education from mere information delivery.

From our perspective, this relationship is fundamental, as it enables the emergence of authentic 'events of study': educational moments that disrupt prefigured norms and expectations of learning activities, drawing participants into a shared encounter with a matter of concern (Jiménez, 2020). The figure of the teacher is therefore indispensable, not merely as a producer of content or a facilitator of learning, but as the one who gathers students around something that compels attention, provokes curiosity, and invites collective inquiry. It is in these gatherings, in the immediacy of sharing a matter of concern, that educational relationships are enacted, shaping the identities of those involved: the teacher, the student, and the subject under study. Creating such moments within platform-based environments is possible, but it would require relinquishing certain features that currently sustain the platforms' dominant business models. Restoring the teacher's role as the one who meaningfully connects students to the matters of the world under study has the potential to profoundly transform the educational quality of these systems. This shift would undoubtedly challenge prevailing tendencies toward datafication and standardisation, yet it would reintroduce the inherent uncertainty of teaching, the unpredictable, dialogic, and singular nature of pedagogical encounters, that has historically constituted the university's distinctive academic form.

Building on this perspective, a second dimension, equally fundamental to reinstating the pedagogical form of the university, concerns the role of research and its significance for imagining the future of the world. In contemporary contexts, academic research has increasingly adopted an instrumental orientation, frequently valued for its capacity to generate revenue and measurable outputs. This shift has had tangible effects on the practices and relationships among researchers, fostering competitive dynamics often driven by politics of performativity (Smyth, 2017), in contrast to institutional discourses that claim to promote collaboration. Yet, the essence of research in the university extends beyond the imperative to produce immediate solutions to pressing societal challenges, for instance, how to improve teaching effectiveness or reduce unemployment in a particular region. One of the university's enduring contributions lies in its ability to create spaces where inquiry is not constrained by demands for rapid answers or utilitarian outcomes. It allows time to engage with questions that may not appear immediately relevant, to pursue knowledge without the burden of having to provide definitive solutions. In this regard, Stengers (2018) introduces the notion of "matters of concern" as an invitation to abandon the assumption that there is always a single "right answer." Instead, research becomes a process of hesitation, deliberation, and attentive scrutiny, a mode of engagement that foregrounds complexity and uncertainty rather than closure. Adopting such a stance inevitably requires renouncing the pursuit of quick rewards and the accumulation of recognition tied to immediate research outputs. Genuine research, as we conceive it here, demands time, patience, and the courage to dwell in uncertainty.

While it may be unrealistic to expect a complete transformation of research practices within the university, it is possible to explore how existing structures, practices, and technologies could be reoriented to foster the

kind of research envisioned here. For instance, the defining characteristics of MOOCs: Massive, Open, and Online, could be leveraged to initiate collective research exercises that gather diverse participants around a shared “matter of concern”. Such endeavours would require a twofold renunciation. First, research conducted in this way becomes public, open to scrutiny, and therefore subject to critique, challenging the security of established theories and accepted facts. Second, it necessitates relinquishing the traditional position of academic expertise. As Masschelein and Simons (2018) suggest, participation in these forms of study involves not assuming the role of the expert, but rather that of a seeker, someone “moved by ignorance and ready to think in public and let her knowledge and existing ways of inhabiting the world be put to the test” (p.54). In addition, drawing on Decuyper et al. (2023), educational automation could be mobilised to experiment with novel forms of engagement with knowledge. In particular, emerging artificial intelligence technologies might open new avenues for interacting with established theories, generating questions that invite alternative ways of relating to “matters of concern”.

In sum, the current form and use of educational platforms could be redirected to support modes of study that align more closely with the university’s educational *ethos*. Achieving this, however, requires a deliberate reappropriation of the pedagogical motivations that underpin both research and teaching within the university. It also calls for sustained efforts to disentangle these practices from the economic imperatives that currently dominate platform-based education, thereby reclaiming spaces where intellectual inquiry and study can prevail over market-driven logics.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This article examined the pedagogical implications of the platformisation of higher education. This is not simply understood as the introduction of new technological tools, but rather as a profound reconfiguration of the institutional, epistemic, and relational architecture of the university. Placing platformisation in the context of structural transformation at the university, manifested especially in its processes of uberisation and automation, we show how the adoption of platform logic is transforming the conditions under which teaching and research are conceived and practised. This challenges the foundational *ethos* of the university as a *universitas studii*.

One of the practical consequences of this transformation is the fragmentation of the educational experience. Platform logic redefines learning as a series of quantifiable, modular interactions, which are often governed by opaque algorithmic systems that obscure pedagogical intentions and diminish the role of educators. This results in a growing disconnection between students, teachers, and the subject of study—a disarticulation that undermines the possibility of shared inquiry and the emergence of what we refer to as ‘events of study’. Furthermore, platform-based environments tend to redefine students as clients and teachers as service providers, reducing the university to a logistical interface for optimising transactions. In this context, educational labour becomes disembodied from institutional responsibility, reducing pedagogy to a set of deliverables and metrics.

These shifts entail a reconfiguration of the relationships between pedagogical actors, digital infrastructures, and institutional arrangements. The role of the teacher is becoming increasingly marginalised. They are being reduced to content producers and are being deprived of the authority and temporal conditions necessary for sustained educational encounters. Students, for their part, are encouraged to adopt a consumerist posture, engaging with content on demand, but often in isolation with limited opportunities for dialogue or collective exploration. At the infrastructural level, the opacity of algorithmic systems and the

importance of data extraction introduce new power imbalances, replacing pedagogical judgement with predictive analytics and optimisation routines.

However, as this article has argued, the consequences of platformisation are not univocal. While these developments pose serious risks to pedagogical integrity, they also create opportunities to reconsider and redefine the purpose of the university. If automation can be repurposed to alleviate cognitive and administrative overload, it could foster new conditions for attention, reflection, and imaginative inquiry. Similarly, if digital infrastructures are designed to support, rather than replace, pedagogical relations — making room for co-presence, indeterminacy and epistemic risk— they can be meaningfully integrated into the university's formative mission.

In order for platform-based environments to support the study experience, several conditions must be met. Firstly, there must be an institutional commitment to preserving the relational and ethical core of education. This involves restoring the pedagogical triangle —teacher, student and subject matter— as the basis for any meaningful educational practice. Secondly, studying should not be viewed as the accumulation of competencies or the consumption of content, but rather as an open-ended, shared, temporal activity oriented towards exploring the world rather than mastering it. This requires infrastructures that slow down, rather than speed up, the rhythms of learning and support the development of shared attention, rather than fragmenting it. Thirdly, the design and governance of platforms must be subject to critical scrutiny. Rather than accepting their operating logic as a given, universities should engage in co-design processes to ensure these technologies are accountable, transparent and responsive to pedagogical criteria.

Ultimately, this article calls for a rearticulation of the purpose of the university, one that resists both nostalgia for a pre-digital past and capitulation to market-driven logics. The question is not to reject platforms outright, but to reconsider their role within a broader pedagogical project that is grounded in responsibility, intellectual openness and the practices of study. If the university is to remain an educational space in the truest sense —a place for asking questions, dwelling in uncertainty and forming thoughtful relationships with the world— it must reclaim its formative purpose and prioritise pedagogical judgement over the imperatives of platformisation.

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L'UBERITZACIÓ DE L'EDUCACIÓ SUPERIOR: RECUPERAR L'ESPAI I EL TEMPS PER A L'ESTUDI EN L'ERA DE LES PLATAFORMES

La plataformització de l'educació superior ha comportat una transformació profunda dels fonaments pedagògics, institucionals i epistèmics de la universitat. Aquest article examina críticament com l'expansió de la lògica de plataforma —caracteritzada per l'automatització, la datificació i la modularització— reconfigura el paper tradicional de la universitat. Analitzant l'aparició dels MOOCs i dels models basats en plataformes, argumentem que aquests sistemes emmarquen cada vegada més l'educació com una activitat transaccional, individualitzada i orientada a l'eficiència, sovint a costa del caràcter relacional i obert de l'ensenyament i la recerca. La resultant uberització de la universitat redefineix els estudiants com a clients, el professorat com a productors de continguts i les institucions com a interfícies logístiques. Això margina la trobada pedagògica com a pràctica compartida i dialògica. En lloc de rebutjar les plataformes, aquest article explora les condicions sota les quals podrien arribar a sostenir el paper formatiu i investigador de la universitat. A partir de les nocions d'*scholé* i del triangle pedagògic (professor–estudiant–objecte d'estudi), defensem la recuperació de l'estudi com un temps d'atenció i d'indagació col·lectives. També considerem com l'automatització, si és dissenyada i governada críticament, podria alliberar temps per a la reflexió en lloc d'imposar l'estandardització. En darrer terme, defensem la reapropiació de les infraestructures digitals d'una manera que preservi la responsabilitat educativa, l'obertura intel·lectual i la copresència de les persones reunides al voltant d'allò que importa.

PARAULES CLAU: Estudi; Formes pedagògiques; MOOCs, Plataformes, Universitat

LA UBERIZACIÓN DE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR: RECUPERAR EL ESPACIO Y EL TIEMPO PARA EL ESTUDIO EN LA ERA DE LAS PLATAFORMAS

La plataformización de la educación superior ha supuesto una profunda transformación de los fundamentos pedagógicos, institucionales y epistémicos de la universidad. Este artículo examina críticamente cómo la expansión de la lógica de plataforma —caracterizada por la automatización, la datificación y la modularización— reconfigura el papel tradicional de la universidad. Al analizar la aparición de los MOOCs y de modelos basados en plataformas, sostenemos que estos sistemas enmarcan cada vez más la educación como una actividad transaccional, individualizada y orientada a la eficiencia. Esto ocurre a expensas del carácter relacional y abierto de la enseñanza y la investigación. La resultante uberización de la universidad redefine a los estudiantes como clientes, a los docentes como productores de contenidos y a las instituciones como interfaces logísticas. Ello margina el encuentro pedagógico como práctica compartida y dialógica. En lugar de rechazar por completo las plataformas, este artículo explora las condiciones bajo las cuales podrían apoyar la función formativa e investigadora de la universidad. Basándonos en las nociones de *scholé* y del triángulo pedagógico (profesor–estudiante–objeto de estudio), defendemos la recuperación del estudio como un tiempo de atención e indagación colectiva. También consideramos cómo la automatización, si se diseña y gobierna críticamente, podría liberar tiempo para la reflexión en lugar de imponer la estandarización. En última instancia, abogamos por la reapropiación de las infraestructuras digitales de manera que se sostenga la responsabilidad educativa, la apertura intelectual y la copresencia de individuos reunidos en torno a asuntos que les conciernen.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Estudio; Formas pedagógicas; MOOCs, Plataformas, Universidad

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