

## **Introduction to Ashoka U's Issue for Social Innovations Journal: Activating Changemaker Ecosystems through Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this issue is to contribute to the multi-stakeholder global dialogue around, in, and for changemaker education. It is also to contribute to potential collaborations that will creatively impact higher education's stewardship towards a more peaceful and sustainable life for humans and more-than-humans. The contributors share their passion for equipping young leaders with future competencies by creating experiential learning opportunities and measurements of educational success that matter in a world of uncertainty and dynamic change. The issue is divided into two parts. Part One: Changemaker Education showcases the role of higher education institutions in developing changemakers – primarily through helping students develop changemaking competencies. Part Two: Transforming Higher Education Ecosystems is focused on changing the contexts, systems, and structures within which higher education institutions operate.

### **Introduction to the Edition**

Part One starts with the text – **Equipping Students as Changemakers within a Health Sciences Capstone Course at the University of Waterloo (Williams, Yessis, Hogan, and Del Matto)**. University of Waterloo's team's case study illustrates how a Health Sciences course co-designed and delivered in collaboration with several stakeholders, including a student start-up, motivated and engaged students to see themselves as changemakers, improved their future-ready skills and built trust for the way the university nurtures a compassionate health workforce.

**Transforming Changemaker Education in Business Through B Impact Teams (Joys, Yinka Thomas, Nath, and Haynes)** explores and promotes a groundbreaking educational innovation that takes the education of business leaders outside of the walls of academia and engages both students and other stakeholders in a cycle of experiential learning with efficient feedback loops.

**Piloting 'Krewe School': An Org School Approach to Social Learning in Social Innovation Education (Faughnan, Tomczuk, Alan, Lang, Monhartova, and Otten)** comes from a Tulane University team, and it describes Krewe School, a pilot program that is using an innovative "Org School" approach to social innovation education that targets groups rather than individuals. It provides a case study of an applied social learning program for teams that build capacities and relationships for social change to show how this program's learning actors, environments, types of learning, and methods foster new collective understandings and relationships. The paper concludes with advice on how to adapt the Org School model,

highlighting a cohort-based approach, skilled facilitation, a welcoming environment, and varied activities to meet diverse learning objectives.

**What Life Is Guiding Us to Do to Change Business Education (Kroening)** presents the Living Systems Framework as a novel guide to changing business education from a model valuing economic growth metrics to a different model recognizing the interconnectedness of human systems with the global biological ecosystem, essential for fostering true societal health. The article analyses the framework on three levels:

1. Living systems pursuing life,
2. Aspects that afford them to do this, labeled *Perspectives*, and
3. Living *Requirements*.

The second part of the publication starts with **Rebuilding Universities of Past for Future Ukraine and Beyond (Slesarenko)** as the loud research-based plea by Ukrainian teenage refugee students. It is a call for academic leaders to go back to the original concept of universities as intergenerational communities serving each other's needs for growth as changemakers - as stewards of peace and prosperity rather than institutions focusing on financial profits or prestige. The call is for ethics and empathy to be integrated not just into learning outcomes but to become the foundation for academic relationships.

The juxtaposed text comes from Phil Baty, Chief Global Affairs Officer of Times Higher Education (THE), who collaborated with Ashoka U on publications supporting universities in becoming changemaker institutions. In the article, **Impact Rankings: Measuring what Matters (Baty)**, Phil presents his social innovation that re-defined university rankings, framing them based on the UN SDGs. Impact rankings allow innovative universities to become visible in alternative ways by contributing to social change in one or more sustainable development areas, which helps them to build trust with other stakeholders, especially employers seeking graduates equipped with future competencies.

**Innovations in Social Innovation Research: Towards Structuring Innovation Dynamics (Fuessel and Irwin)** is an article on structuring innovation dynamics. The authors depart from theories and approaches that focus on individual social innovators to consider the full range of actors or time. Responding to the field's call for innovative research methodologies, the writers introduce their respective case studies, which both employed Strong Structuration Theory as part of bricolage to better understand the dynamic interactions and processes across social structures and levels of analysis.

**Growing a Region of Changemakers through Community-Based Participatory Action Research: A Journey to be Shared (Hunter and Mitchell-Ashley)** comes from a Georgian College research team, and it presents the *Manifesting As A Changemaker Model* and adjacent tools co-created using findings from community-based participatory action research methods and changemaking skills and mindsets rigorously studied by Ashoka and incorporated into the Ashoka Changemaker Index™. The resulting model and tools are designed to aid educators in early childhood education, K-12, and higher education to incorporate changemaking into the curriculum.

As we see from the above contributions, higher education institutions have a pivotal role in nurturing and graduating changemakers. They can foster a culture of innovation, critical thinking, and social responsibility by implementing a whole range of strategies. Working in strategic partnerships, they can encourage students to explore the intersections of different disciplines, fostering a holistic understanding of complex issues. Those multistakeholders' collaborations allow the institution's leaders and faculty members responsible for modern education to incorporate real-world experiences like internships, service-learning, and research projects to develop practical skills and a sense of purpose. They teach students to approach challenges with a human-centered design mindset, emphasizing empathy, creativity, and iteration. By adopting new strategies, experiential methods, and intergenerational dialogue, as well as considering impact measurements and rankings that really matter, higher education institutions can empower students to become changemakers who are equipped to address the world's most pressing challenges.

Acting as a guest editor for this edition was a rewarding journey for me. Coming from Poland but working in former communist countries, I was privileged to offer a more diverse perspective on global tendencies and developments in higher education. It is a perspective of a social innovator who spent over 25 years in higher education and interacted with hundreds of changemakers who needed universities as stewards for more sustainable futures. I am proud that this edition includes new voices and groundbreaking approaches. I wish to thank all the contributors, Heather MacCleoud, and Rities van Rooijen, for their invaluable support in putting the edition together.