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Universities and Engagement with Cities, Regions and Local Communities

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The issue of the engagement of universities with civil society, and inevitably within this with their local communities, is a generic concern internationally. All over the world we observe a huge emphasis being placed on the encouragement of a new set of relationships between universities and their communities. However, whilst we may represent this as a global trend, accelerated perhaps by an exchange of experiences and processes of policy imitation, the form of engagement retains considerable variation. Local contexts vary of course, but national institutional frameworks also differ, and university-community engagement reflects local cultures even whilst translating lessons from elsewhere into local actions.

We tend to reflect these diversities of action either by presenting a limited set of case studies – and it is often interesting which case studies are presented and which are not – or by focusing on small differences between implementations of more standardised interventions. A typical example of the latter is the rapidly growing literature on the commercialisation of university intellectual property. What is perhaps more interesting however has been the diversity and depth of engagement between university and community in particular places – the formal and the informal, visible and invisible, the exceptional and the mundane. Seeing community engagement as more than widening access and opportunity, innovation and enterprise, or simple economic multipliers, requires a concern for the actions of university staff in their institutional and local contexts – a need to join up these actions in a sense of place.

In this paper we examine the growing interest in universities' engagement with their local regions or communities, with a particular focus on the UK and Australia, and place that in the context of the evolution of the university as an institution. It is argued that regional engagement is not inconsistent with the move towards a university system which is oriented to mass markets and also heavily globalised and competitive. The question of what we mean by the region is however not a straightforward issue and the understanding of the term region in the UK (and elsewhere in Europe) and in Australia, for example, is very different. We then look at the range of forms of engagement and specifically address the difficult issue of engagement with disadvantaged communities. Finally we examine the way universities can work with regional partnerships to assist a process of place management or what we might call the 'leadership of place'.

Growing international interest in university regional engagement

University-regional engagement is very topical at present. In the UK we have seen a plethora of university local economic impact reports (examples include Coates, 1994 on Exeter; Robson et al, 1995 on Manchester; and Goldsmiths College University of London, 1995), several national reviews of regional engagement (Goddard et al 1994, Charles and Benneworth 2001, Campbell et al, 1999, NCIHE, 1997), a government enquiry into university business interactions (Lambert,

2003), the introduction of an annual HE Business Interaction survey 1 (Charles and Conway, 2002), toolkits (Charles and Benneworth, 2002), plus a significant increase in government funding for these activities. In 2006 the Economic and Social Research Council launched a new research programme on the regional impact of higher education.

Elsewhere in Europe, against the backdrop of expansion in numbers of institutions (often for regional development purposes) activity has often been more locally initiated, frequently at a city level. City-based public-private partnerships frequently look to universities as key elements in their economic development and urban renaissance initiatives. The lessons of the approaches and mechanisms being used are increasingly subject to international dissemination, both by academic networks such as the Association of European Rectors (CRE), or the OECD's IMHE programme (Goddard and Chatterton, 1999), as well as by the European Union through its structural policies, networking programmes and innovation support. The IMHE has recently completed a 14-region study on higher education and regions (OECD, 2007). The EU is becoming especially important in the context of the European Research Area concept, and the 'Barcelona target' to raise Europe's R&D spend to 3% of GDP. The European Commission sought to start a debate about the role of universities in the 'Europe of Knowledge' (CEC, 2003), specifically examining the balance between the international orientation and the regional role of universities.

There are universities throughout the Union's regions. Their activities often permeate the local economic, social and cultural environment. This helps to make them an instrument of regional development and of strengthening European cohesion. (CEC, 2003, p21-22)

Elsewhere, regional engagement has long been a concern in the US as a consequence of state-funded (i.e. not federal government funded) higher education systems. Aside from the well-rehearsed discussion of spin-offs and clusters, programmes such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Outreach Partnerships Centers (COPCs) have ensured an engagement with communities as well as with economic development objectives (USDHUD, 2000). Different groupings of universities have sought to rethink their role in society and the nature of the contract between themselves and civil society. The land grant universities have considered their role as engaged universities (Kellogg Commission, 1999), whilst the other state colleges and universities have developed the idea of stewardship of place (AASCU, 2002). Richard Florida's recent arguments on the creative class (Florida, 2002) also provide a reinforcing argument for the cultural role of universities, and emphasise the importance of universities in attracting and retaining talent.

In Australia we see a growing interest of state governments in the economic development role of universities, especially through the support for high technology and knowledge intensive clusters and industries, especially in Queensland (Andrews, 2007) and Victoria (Victoria 2007), but more widely universities are supporting a wide range of community activities also.

Several studies of regional engagement in Australia have been undertaken since Garlick's review of 'creative associations in special places' (1998). A plethora of local partnerships and initiatives have been documented at a national level (Garlick 2000, Garlick and Pryor, 2002) and more recently state-level studies have been undertaken, notably in Victoria (Winter, Wiseman and Muirhead, 2005). The Victorian study builds on a form of benchmarking with each university

producing a detailed report (eg Alvarez et al 2005 on RMIT). Other studies have focused on individual universities (Keane and Allison, 1999) or small samples (Gunesekara, 2006) of universities.

The importance of the regional agenda in Australia has been recognised by central government, albeit problematically, in its debate on diversity. There is an expectation that universities based outside of metropolitan areas will focus on regional needs and be rewarded for this, but with an assumed trade off in lower funding for research. From the universities' side the formation of AUCEA as a peak body for university engagement provides a means for the exchange of knowledge and experiences (Temple et al 2005).

Around the world the story reverberates – incubator policies in Brazil (Etzkowitz et al, 2005), community engagement in South Africa (Subotzky, 1999), the regionalisation of science and innovation policies in Japan (Kitagawa, 2006), etc.

There are two main issues here. First there is a change in the nature of the university itself, as an institution, for good or bad, and there is considerable unease at the shift to a more instrumental role for the university in support of technology commercialisation. At the same time though the social role of the university is being reinvented through debate about a new social contract as 'stewards of place', 'renewing the promise' and 'renewing the covenant'.

Second is the specific spatial scale of engagement and the increasing importance and awareness of the regional or sub-national scale. To some degree this is not new and historically universities have often emerged from local interests or were established to address local needs. In some countries a state university system ensured continued focus on a local scale whilst in others the national funding and nation-state building focused attention on national issues.

The next two sections examine briefly these issues before moving on to the conceptualisation of the regional mission.

The nature of the university

Internationally there is a widespread view that the role of higher education in society has shifted to an increasingly instrumentalist position, from a more idealistic position focused on the creation of knowledge (Readings, 1996). This shift is apparent in a number of ways such as through the growing focus on vocational training and the emergence of employability skills within even non-vocational curricula, the growth of contract research and new relations with industrial sponsors, and a perceived erosion of the autonomy and authority of academic governance. Whilst there has been much anguished debate about this within higher education circles (e.g. Barnett and Griffin, 1997), these transformations perhaps need to be seen as part of a longer term historical trajectory. Thus whilst Readings wrote of the ruin of the university as a national institution, an alternative perspective would see the university as an adaptable institution that has always changed in response to and with implications for the development of society.

Gerard Delanty (2002) suggests that the university has undergone four revolutions, with current changes being simply the consequence of the last of these, yet building upon earlier changes. It

is useful to summarise these revolutions, as each reinforces an engagement with society and business, with the erosion of the university as a place apart, and with a particular territorial nature of engagement.

The first revolution was the rise of the Humboldtian university in Germany in the 19th century. The Humboldtian university was a modernising force in society, rational and secular, revolutionary in the link between teaching and research, whereas most universities previously focused on teaching only. Universities also became professionalised with the doctorate being the form of recognition of entry to the profession. Most importantly for our argument though universities were expected to espouse universal values, and were enrolled by the state to uphold national cultural traditions, underpinning the late 19th century obsession with nation-building.

Building on this model,, in the late 19th century the American university system offered a refinement in the form of the American civic university. Modernisation was taken further here to incorporate in the university mission the role of vocational training, and particularly in the land grant university it became a pragmatic institution, serving the civic community (or its rural equivalent). The focus of teaching moved beyond the professor to the department, based around disciplines. The key step in engagement perhaps was the idea that universities could provide services to the community, but that these functions were bundled together with other core activities.

In Europe this model was not universally applied and in many cases the Humboldtian model persisted, sometimes alongside earlier traditions. In the UK the new civic universities initially adopted the American paradigm, but with the steady nationalisation of higher education funding through the 20th century the civic tradition weakened and a universalist approach prevailed.

The 1960s and massive growth led to the third revolution and the development of the democratic mass university. Social change and increasing participation by a wider social mix of students radicalised the universities, awakening a role in public critique. Knowledge became more democratic, typified by the importance of critical dialogue and the seminar, student participation grew, and there was a loss of autonomy within the university. Engagement in a practical sense was seen as an individual political act, for radical academics and students, often against the dominant public authorities, whereas active engagement by the institution itself in partnership with national or local government was disapproved of. E.P. Thompson (1970) wrote a highly critical account of the new Warwick University's attempts to build links with local industry, terming it 'Warwick University Ltd'. Warwick is now seen as an exemplar university in being a highly successful research-led university, whilst still successfully and entrepreneurially engaging with its local region.

More recently though the situation has changed again with the weakening of state funding and the rise of competitive threats from the globalisation of the supply of knowledge and of higher education. The certainties of a universalist and modernist agenda have been undermined by postmodernism, and universities have had to become relativistic and multidisciplinary. What Gibbons et al (1994) have termed mode 2 knowledge production has become more common, although hotly debated, and frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted. The reduced state contribution per student and the need to find alternative sources of funds has inspired forms of

academic capitalism, and the related idea of the triple helix of government, higher education and business entwined and mutually engaged (Etzkowitz, 2004), stimulating innovation in managerial structures, and the importation of private sector models and mores into the academy.

The entrepreneurial university (or other variants such as enterprise university or innovative university) remains a contested and ill-defined idea, with its own internal contradictions. Röpke (1998) suggests that:

An entrepreneurial university can mean three things:

- 1. The university itself, as an organization, becomes entrepreneurial;*
- 2. The members of the university - faculty, students, employees- are turning themselves somehow into entrepreneurs;*
- 3. The interaction of the university with the environment, the "structural coupling" between university and region, follows entrepreneurial patterns.*

He makes the assumption that the second depends on the first and the third on the other two.

Burton Clark (1998) says an entrepreneurial university seeks to innovate in its core business and shifts its character to reposition itself for future opportunities, it takes risks. Etzkowitz (2003) by contrast focuses on entrepreneurship as commercialisation of research and suggests the entrepreneurial university is a bottom-up phenomenon, shaped by the actions of entrepreneurial academics. 'A university in which research results are routinely scrutinized for commercial as well as scientific potential is becoming the modal academic institution' (ibid, p112). Marginson and Considine (2000) prefer to focus on the enterprise university as a more corporate body where there is an increased executive control, where institutional change is driven by pseudo-markets and where private sector management models are imposed.

So at the heart of the debate about the entrepreneurial university is who or what should be enterprising. Is it the academic staff or students, academic departments and research centres or service departments such as conference facilities? More particularly is this enterprise intended to benefit individuals or institutions, as there is a difficult balance between the control and commodification of academic knowledge for the interest of the university, and the empowerment of academic staff to become entrepreneurs with all that implies in terms of personalised benefit.

The consequent concern about the future of the university, especially from traditionalists, has been termed by some 'the end of knowledge' and the decline of the university of culture. Certainly the idea of the national liberal university is in crisis, but the crisis is perhaps overstated as the model of the university mutates and adapts to changed conditions.

The scale of investment in the expansion of higher education and the emergence of massification was inevitably going to change the nature of the sector. Expansion to a current level of 30-40% of school leavers plus increased numbers of mature students would inevitably have a dramatic effect on the character of universities, the wider social mix and aspirations of students, coupled with a demand from government that much university capacity should be devoted to preparing students for work. With small numbers in higher education, a tradition of

residential study away from home could be maintained, and indeed this was still apparent in the debates about the location of new universities in the UK in the Robbins expansion of the 1960s (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). However, with mass higher education, and the retreat from student grants, home-based provision has become much more important and universities are now much more widely distributed in most countries. Although a more traditional form of higher education remains in certain institutions, the consequence is of a much more diverse and locally focused sector than previously, within which community and employer relevance is inevitable.

There has been a parallel development of regional universities and campuses in Australia., spreading out from the initial 'sandstone' universities in the state capitals. Mass higher education in Australia has meant more metropolitan universities with more diverse missions, with more campuses in the sprawling suburbs, but also a specific set of regional universities, often multi-campus, and located in smaller cities and towns – the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba and Hervey Bay, Sunshine Coast in Maroochydore, Charles Sturt in Bathurst and Wagga Wagga. Even the sandstones operate some campuses in more rural areas – the University of Queensland in Gatton and Melbourne in Shepparton in the north of Victoria, although mainly concerned with agriculture.

The demand for a more massive higher education sector parallels a wider set of changes in society and the economy, commonly referred to as the emergence of a knowledge-based economy, or sometimes described rather as a learning economy (Lundvall and Borrás, 1997). The transformation of workplaces and the relative growth of knowledge-based office occupations is manifested through demand for greater numbers of graduates.

Additionally the forms of knowledge needed are continuously shifting away from traditional disciplinary lines to new problem-focused themes (Gibbons et al, 1994). Hence within research collaboration and in mainstream training and education there has been a growth in new combinations of expertise and new centres and departments that map onto the needs of employers.

Hence universities become more influenced by external stakeholders and this inevitably includes both national governments and local and regional partners. As we have already noted national governments often expect universities to work with their regions. But there is a question concerning the nature of the region and how it may be defined both by the university and by others, with different answers from different countries and universities.

What do we mean by region and community?

The problem of defining a university's local community is both philosophical as well as methodological. Universities are not discrete entities separate from, but interacting with, some kind of spatially defined market. Rather, the university is embedded in many different types of 'community': some local, some global; some overlapping and interacting, some barely recognising each other. In this sense the university is an essential part of local, national and global society, and forms part of how we define our society.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the university-community dialogue between Europe and Australia is the different conceptualisation of the idea of the region, and the nature of the territorial development problem. I was puzzled when I first visited Australia by some of the statements I heard about the nature of regions, and particularly the idea that 'regional universities' were essentially a group of universities based outside of the metropolitan centres. It became clear that the word was being used in a different sense and it is revealing to unpack this.

In Europe there is a shared understanding of 'regional' as sub-national units of territorial analysis or governance. Countries (or indeed Europe itself – the 'Europe of the regions') are divided into regions for the purpose of policy delivery and governance. All parts of a national territory are divided into regions, often reflecting historical cultural identities, sometimes recently imposed bureaucratic mechanisms, but usually some form of service area focused on a city. European regions are mainly city-regions – cities with a surrounding hinterland, the few exceptions being diffuse peripheral areas on the northern margins. What is clear though is that the idea of a large metropolitan area as a region is probably the rule rather than the exception. Unlike Australia there is no sense of regions as primarily non-metropolitan areas.

This difference in conceptualising the region builds on two main issues. First of course the distances between major cities in Europe are such that most of the non-urban areas are within the daily urban system of the big cities – rural hinterlands are connected to the cities in a much more immediate and direct way than is possible for many Australian 'regions'.

The second issue is that there is not the same geography of economic disparity between city and rural area in Europe and in Australia. Many of the European cities have extreme development needs and concentrate the most economically disadvantaged communities, sometimes alongside great wealth, whilst there are both rich rural areas as well as impoverished remote regions. The map of disparity in Europe is an extremely complex mosaic requiring a rich mix of urban and rural development policies, with regional policies being concerned with the balances between regions as well as developing appropriate internal regional spatial development strategies. The levels of policy themselves are highly complex – European cohesion policies which address high level disparities, as well as supporting bottom up capacity-building in locally disadvantaged areas, national regional redistributive policies and policies focused on urban as well as rural development implemented by national, regional and local government.

For an institution such as the university there is a highly complex regional policy environment – sometimes managed by spatial or territorial policies, sometimes more sectorally focused. Universities need to pick their way carefully through the maze of policies and the complex relationships they may have with the territorial agencies around them. Again, coming back to the small size of many European regions, there may be considerable disjuncture between the service territories of universities and the regional boundaries defined by government, with important consequences if government seeks to use the regions to influence university engagement.

Moving on to the university's idea of its own region, in a previous study we developed four dimensions of universities' definitions of a local community (Goddard et al 1994):

the relationship between an institution and its physical surroundings as influenced by historical and institutional context

the different scales at which attributes or impacts of the university should be measured or assessed

the different geographic scale or territory over which the university provides different types of 'local' service

the perceptions held by the institution and its management of the local community which is identified in institutional plans and through related activities.

The first of these is to identify that the historical development of a university will inevitably be rooted in certain institutional contexts that may have a specific spatiality.

These institutional histories may confer specific relationships with territory, perhaps through the evolving governance of the university, or through a specific mission set on foundation to serve a particular place. Historic university towns have evolved in conjunction with universities to ensure a mutual dependency, albeit sometimes with some conflicts as a result of the dominance of the university over other sources of employment. In contrast the older civic universities (sandstones in Australia, redbricks in the UK) were specifically established to support the professions in their cities, whilst the later polytechnics (and earlier working men's colleges that evolved into polytechnics) met the needs of manufacturing and trades.

In contrast many of the 1960s campus universities were somewhat detached from their localities. Out-of-town campuses and an absence of strong 'rooting' faculties, such as medicine, combined with their small scale, tended to limit the local impact of such institutions, which often subsequently feel the need to strive to develop a community role. More recently new institutions have been established specifically to support regional development in areas lacking higher education and where this has been felt to be a hindrance to development – one thinks of the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia, or the new Combined University in Cornwall, and the emerging University of Cumbria in England.

Finally, a special form of place-traversing institution is emerging, with some form of regional identity mobilised through decentralised campuses. An early example of this was the University of Ulster, its multiple sites in non-urban locations. Across the so-called regional areas of Australia there are several such institutions, such as Charles Sturt and Central Queensland. As some former city-council controlled universities reposition themselves as regional, and potentially networked, institutions, so the identification with a single town or city becomes subsumed in a new regional identity.

A second issue is defining what constitutes a local community for the analysis of the economic impact of a university.

In only a few instances will the local administrative area (district or county) constitute a meaningful entity for economic analysis. University employees will not necessarily live and work within this administrative area or spend the bulk of their income within it. Some

universities are part of large and complex metropolitan systems where there is a greater likelihood of the expenditure being contained within the city region, while others are smaller towns with more limited services.

However whilst employment-based impacts need to be assessed at the labour market scale, expenditure on goods and services may be more sensibly assessed at a different scale. Thus where a university is in a small labour market but adjacent to a major urban centre, expenditure leakage to the major city will be high. In this case it may be more sensible to consider the larger functional regions, based on the conurbations, in which these smaller towns are enfolded.

In general however the definition of the area will depend on the rationale of the investigation, on whether a particular territorially-defined body (local authority, or regional organisation) is sponsoring or to be influenced by any study, or on the university's own definition of its community. The wider the area defined, the greater the absolute impact as leakage is reduced, but the less significant the scale relative to total economic activity.

The third dimension is to recognise that whilst we can define the local labour market area as the appropriate scale for assessing employment effects, there are different geographic scales or territories over which the university provides different types of 'local' service.

Different services have different natural catchment areas, some highly local and others more extensive, depending on the degree of specialisation or exclusivity of the service and the distance customers are prepared to travel to make use of it. So whilst a university sports facility will usually have a very localised demand, technology transfer services may be regional or even international in scope.

So when discussing the concept of a local community, it is important to bear in mind that for different individuals within the institution, their 'local' community may be very different in scale. It is also important to remember that only some universities operate particular services which have a genuine regional role, such as medical schools.

Finally any study of the university and its communities must take account of the university's perception of what constitutes the local community and over what scale its institutional plan is active.

University institutional plans often refer to specific local communities. In some cases these may be laid down in the statutes. For example the statutes of the University of Southampton refer to the five counties of Dorset, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, West Sussex and Wiltshire. The University of the Sunshine Coast was deliberately set up to support this sub-region. Other universities are staking out their regional turf through the creation of new sites or establishing franchise arrangements with further and higher education colleges and by implication defining their own catchment areas.

Many universities also have a two-tier definition of their localities. Such distinctions may map onto the tiered structure of local government from districts and counties through to the standard regions defined by central government.

What should be clear from the above is that universities do not just have one region, but many, overlapping and nested, used at different times and for different purposes, according to historical contingency and evolving patterns of interaction. These different scales and interactions make the development of strategy complex, and that is without consideration of national and international relationships, but it is essential in complex organisations such as universities to recognise the multi-stranded and multiple level nature of external interactions. These interactions are also differentiated by theme, and we also need to consider the types of projects and actions that will have a particular regional dimension and contribute in developmental terms to the university's region.

Conceptualising the regional mission

In recent years the notion of regional development has changed from a view of targeted policies to redress the problems of uneven growth in areas that are lagging, to a more positive understanding of the need for all regions to develop the ability to enhance or simply maintain their economic performance and social cohesion through policies that are sensitive to different asset bases and historic trajectories. Often this is described using the terminology of regional competition. Places can be said to compete in the sense that they engage in rivalry in creating or attracting activities that generate wealth for their citizens. This ability to provide the wherewithal to be successful in these terms is commonly described by the concept of competitiveness.

Territorial/place competitiveness can therefore be assumed to be the ability of places to add value to the activity of business through the interaction of a set of framework conditions (such as wage costs, the quality of labour, infrastructure endowment, etc), with a set of inter-business and local institutional relations, in such a way that business can become more successful against international competition. But, in addition, in order to be reproducible in the longer term, the benefits of wealth generation must be redistributed within the region to enhance social equity and quality of life without compromising sustainability.

More precisely, regional competitiveness can be defined as *the ability of the constituent members of a region to take action to ensure that business based within that region is selling greater levels of value added against international competition, sustained by the assets and institutions of the region, thereby contributing to rising GDP and a broad distribution of wealth across the population, yielding a high standard of living, and a virtuous cycle of learning effects.*

We therefore need to look beyond business success to include also the means of maintaining social cohesion and the quality of life in successful regions. If this is considered as a set of broad processes, then seven main groups of processes can be identified and incorporated into a simple model:

Regional framework conditions —the regional infrastructure, regulatory frameworks and underlying quality of environment and lifestyles.

Human capital development: - the development of human capital through education and training.

Business development — the creation and attraction of new firms within the region, as well as the development of new products, processes and markets.

Interactive learning and social capital development —co-operation between firms and other institutions to generate technological, commercial and social benefits as well as developing new skills in individuals.

Redistribution — ensuring that the benefits of enhanced business competitiveness are widely shared within the community and that the health and welfare of the population is maximised.

Regional cultural development — the creation, enhancement and reproduction of regional cultures, underpinning the other processes above, and interpreting culture both as activities that enrich the quality of life but also as patterns of social conventions, norms and values that constitute regional identities.

Sustainability — long-term regional development must be underpinned by processes seeking to improve the prospects for sustainability, even though some of these objectives may appear to conflict with business development objectives.

If these processes underpin regional or place competitiveness then how do the activities of universities in supporting that ambition map onto these processes? Each of the processes above can be recast in terms of the potential university contribution to varying degrees.

Regional framework conditions are in some senses the most difficult aspects of a region for a university to affect, although as large employers and businesses, universities have the ability to lobby local infrastructure providers, or in some cases take on infrastructure provision themselves. They affect external perception of regional attractiveness through their effects on talent attraction, and through their research they can influence policies which underpin the wider economic environment. A strategic awareness of the role of the university in its local environment is central to its ability to influence this aspect of the region, as is the existence of a consensus with other key local actors as to the direction of this influence.

The human capital role of a university is much clearer and relates centrally to the teaching and learning role. However, a university can still have a limited regional impact on the human capital of a region if students are not retained in the region or if no attempt is made to raise the skills of people based in the region. Significant impact will depend on clearly articulated paths for local students to aspire to and participate in higher education; on some orientation of the degree programmes and their mode of delivery to regional needs; and on attempts to assist the retention of students within the region. This is not to say that the university should seek to encourage students to stay in the region against their best interests, but working with local employers to identify and develop good graduate opportunities and actively promote them to students may be regarded as good practice. It is however important to remember that universities cannot force students to stay in the region, nor provide them with the kinds of jobs they want, and graduate retention does depend on local economic vibrancy and the actions of local employers also.

Business development is also commonly regarded as central to the regional mission of the university, and whilst at the core is focused on innovation and new business ventures is by no means restricted to this. The commercialisation of university expertise is a recurrent pre-occupation at present and there are many mechanisms developed to support this, but these should include support for enterprise amongst graduates and forms of knowledge transfer embodying people through various forms of placement. In addition the expertise transferred need not be technical but could include language and cultural awareness for firms exporting into new markets, or wider business skills. The university can also be used to help attract new businesses into the region through a combination of its research expertise, the promise of a flow of graduates, and the effect on the general attractiveness of the region.

Interactive learning and social capital formation is separated out from human capital formation to reinforce the distinction between the normal educational process which involves imparting students with 'know why' and 'know what' forms of knowledge, and a wider concept of learning which includes 'know how' and 'know who' (Lundvall and Johnson, 1994). At a regional level we are also concerned with the learning that takes place across different policy communities, through socialised forms of learning in what we might term communities of practice². Universities can be central players in these processes through the participation of staff in various boards, committees and working groups, and the sharing of knowledge in different fora. Another term for this could be civic responsibility, and this relates to the notion that academic tenure and freedom is not just a right but also a responsibility to speak up without fear of political or employer pressure (McDowell, 2001).

In our model of regional development we noted the importance of redistribution to ensure that competitiveness is not undermined by polarisation of society. Again this is perhaps more a national economic agenda than one for the universities, but universities can have an effect both through their own access policies – and the consequences for social mobility – as well as through interventions aimed at encouraging inclusiveness and supporting the most vulnerable groups in society. This could include working with disadvantaged communities to build capabilities or the delivery of services direct to children with disadvantaged backgrounds or to other groups which are entitled to public support. A particular dimension of this in some countries is voluntary community activity by students (HEFCE, 2004).

Culture is increasingly seen as a key element in regional development, as an economic sector in its own right, as an important element of quality of life and attractiveness to talented people, and as an element of building social cohesion. Universities have a strong role to play in the development of culture in a region through the provision of cultural facilities, through the activities of their students, through the creation of a base of demand for additional cultural facilities, and through their project management roles. The nature of the cultural role will vary according to the kind of location – between a metropolitan core and a small town location for example – and there are national variations in the recognition of the cultural role, but it is an element of the mission which seems to be growing in significance.

The final element in this overview is the *sustainability* agenda, and the role that universities can play both through their own responsible use of resources as well as through their demonstration and educational contributions to sustainability policies. As large centres of employment and study, universities can have quite significant local environmental impacts, yet they have the

knowledge base to develop workable solutions not only to their own impacts but also to those of other organisations, and indeed many provide environmental consulting to businesses or public authorities and play a key role in local sustainability fora.

These different strands of activity add up to positive effects on the local region, but we need to ask if they simply make a marginal difference to the region or whether they can be strategically directed as part of a comprehensive regional mission. What this points towards is the need for an integrated approach, within which there is a consensus between regional stakeholders in terms of addressing regional needs. In such a system, links are forged between functionally divided areas within the university and the region allowing multiple needs to be addressed. Within the university, the challenge then is to link all areas of activity encompassing the teaching, research and community service roles by internal mechanisms (such as funding, staff development, incentives and rewards, communications). Within the region, the challenge is to engage the university with all facets of the development process (embracing for example skills, technological development, cultural awareness, community regeneration, environmental protection) in a region/university 'value-added management process'.

Focusing resources on disadvantaged communities

These various forms of engagement may be focused on a variety of different communities or groups within a community. The nature of the form of engagement often dictates the groups assisted: the provision of cultural facilities for classical music will tend to be oriented to the more affluent classes, whilst access programmes may be limited to those with specific disadvantage. Tensions and conflicts are not uncommon in that universities are expected to contribute to a variety of needs, with some of the most clearly articulated being those that benefit elite groups such as science-based firms. The aims of addressing regional needs and objectives may explicitly encompass a wide range of beneficiaries – regional development depends on support for firms that may be profitable but footloose, and recent debates on the importance of talent attraction invariably emphasise the need to attract and retain creative professionals. So part of the regional engagement strategy will focus on the needs of elite groups, but by doing so aim to make the region more attractive to investors and talented individuals and hence underpin economic growth. However, there is a need to address the problems faced by the disadvantaged members of society also, and these groups and individuals have considerable problems in articulating their needs to universities or accessing support.

One of the difficulties with disadvantaged communities is the problem of accessing existing university provision as such communities lack the resources, knowledge and contacts to find what they want from the university. A community may be unaware that a university can or does provide a particular service, or else make assumptions about what a university does or doesn't do, based on a narrow understanding of its mission. If a university is assumed to provide only education for bright young middle-class students then why would a community group seek support from such a body? Those with a deeper understanding of universities might be more inclined to seek support, but these are rarely the more disadvantaged. Even if it was known that a university may be of use, then how should one be approached, and how could a community problem be articulated in such a way that it interests the university?

From the side of the university there is a different set of problems. Universities are subject to many demands, and those that are shouted loudest tend to be heard. Organisations that are well equipped to argue for support and resources can often get them – business has various lobby groups that argue for the role of universities in supporting business interests, attracting funding from government to promote industry links. University outreach staff have to prioritise their time and will usually focus on those bodies and places where returns are greatest in terms of revenue for services, access to grant income, numbers of students etc. Hence the areas that are often left out are the poorer inner city areas and rural areas. Rural areas often suffer both because they have significant economic and social problems and difficulties of articulating need, but also because their small and distributed populations make them unattractive ‘markets’ compared with larger scale urban markets closer to universities. In a market driven higher education economy then, sparse populations are easily overlooked. But inner city areas are just as easily overlooked when there are more lucrative opportunities in adjacent suburbs.

There is therefore a two-way information asymmetry:

Communities do not know what universities can provide or how to contact the right people to ask the question.

Universities do not know what the needs of the community are: and the community finds it difficult to articulate those needs in a way the university understands.

Such information asymmetries are self-reinforcing and universities continue to do huge amounts of work without really addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. Worse still, such forms of engagement have to compete with other agendas for attention including an international focus on attracting students and research partnerships that underpin the economic vitality of the institution.

Chatterton (2000) notes that:

there are a number of current factors at play, especially amongst Britain's older universities, which impede the contributions which universities, through their cultural roles, can make to this local public culture ... [including] the lack of attention to addressing issues of exclusion, access, and the radical mixing of identities and experiences. Moreover, the adoption of globalisation discourses and practices by universities may be the most significant impediment to the flourishing of 'dialogue and difference' (Chatterton, 2000, p. 179).

The globalisation and excellence discourses also appeal to local policy-makers seeking to reposition their city or region within the knowledge economy, in which the possession of a ‘world class’ university is a distinct advantage. An artificial distinction between global excellence and local relevance has been widely adopted on the assumption that excellence implies specialisation which is unlikely to be found locally, although economic policy continuously emphasises local specialisation as a key to success in a globalised economic system. But this is a far cry from a focus on the specific local needs of a community.

So how then should universities overcome the barriers in linking with disadvantaged communities?

There is a need both for incentives to engagement for individual academics and universities and for a better dissemination of suitable methods and approaches that have been shown to work. Incentives need to be considered within the context of an overall strategy for engagement and will be touched upon in the next section. As to method, we need to get beyond the expert-suppliant relationship that typifies much university-community engagement and recognise that communities are looking for partners that will help them to deliver sustainable benefits through a collective and joint approach to problem-solving and learning.

One approach to understanding such a collective interaction as a means of learning is the notion of communities of practice (CoPs) (Wenger, 1998), an approach used in my recent CRITICAL project examining learning processes in various communities (see for example Dawley *et al.*, 2005). Underpinning the approach is an understanding of learning as a fundamentally social, experiential and situated process. In this way, Wenger *et al* (2003) describe CoPs as:

Groups of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

CoPs are understood as being informal and self-organising communities. They are distinct from organisational units or teams, instead formed of members who are informally bound together by what they do together and by what they learn from their mutual engagement in these activities (Wenger 1998). As Benner (2003) notes, “the fundamental process by which people learn is through their engagement in social practice” (p.1813). Over time, CoPs accumulate practical knowledge in their domain (the area of knowledge that brings the community together), which increases their capacity to act individually and collectively (Wenger 2004). Collaborating groups develop shared practices and identities, which allows them to achieve their joint purpose whilst also creating a bond between individuals.

This is the way universities work internally, and in partnerships with ‘expert’ partners such as multinational firms. Universities all too often see communities as in need of enlightenment, hence the ‘public understanding of science’ approach, when often we need to see science and the university learning to understand the public. The kinds of problems and challenges faced by communities are rarely easily addressed by existing academic knowledge or services however; hence new knowledge should be created based on experiences and knowledge of both academic and community partners. Not only does this give greater chance of solving problems; it also helps communities by building capacity and social capital through the participation of individuals in the communities of practice developed through such projects.

The UK government has begun to recognise this need in part, although continuing to emphasise business links. One programme has been created to support student voluntary activity, the Active Community Fund (ACF), and this specifically builds capacity within universities to better manage and stimulate voluntary activity (HEFCE, 2004). More recently a new programme has been launched. Through *Beacons for Public Engagement*, the UK funding councils have funded

five university consortia to develop new experimental outreach activities to reach communities not usually engaged with academic research and for the universities to both listen and communicate through a variety of novel approaches (HEFCE, 2006).

This perspective of universities working in partnership with communities in a process of collective learning leads into the final issue, which is the overarching strategy of universities towards their regions, and their role in what can be termed leadership or stewardship of place.

Integrating engagement into the university mission: working with regional partnerships in the ‘stewardship of place’

Universities are increasingly committed to regional engagement – through their mission statements, dedicated units and specific initiatives, often with funding from national or sub-national government. But we should perhaps make a distinction between community involvement and community engagement (Lawson 2002). Many universities are involved through dedicated units without the commitment to adapt the mainstream

the long-term preparedness of higher education to develop a lasting commitment is partly dependent upon its ability to change institutionally. Concurrently, community-based organizations also will require some degree of enhanced infrastructural capacity and political savvy in order to get the most out of partnerships with major institutions. The irony of partnerships of this sort is that each side of the equation must effectively prepare and collaborate internally in order to do so externally. (Maurasse, 2001, p 5-6)

Maurasse recognises the importance of the collective socialised learning and social capital approach that has been expounded above. In this sense engagement must be more than lip service or peripheral activities of the university. Whilst we see examples of this amongst individual universities in the UK and Australia, this is within a national policy context where this is an add-on to other missions which drive the majority of funding. In the US however a more fundamental questioning of the mission has been undertaken among both research-intensive universities and community colleges within the state university system. In both cases the debate arises from a more fundamental (re)appraisal of the role of the university in society.

In 1999, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities reconsidered the role of public universities under the rubric of ‘returning to our roots’. There was a recognition that the unique contribution of universities to contemporary society was both to apply knowledge through the education of students and also to address the problems faced by the communities that the universities serve. The report (Kellogg Commission, 1999) stressed that ‘the purpose of engagement is not to provide the university’s superior expertise to the community but to encourage joint academic-community definitions of problems, solutions and definitions of success’ (ibid, p12). There was a questioning of the willingness of institutions to fully engage in this way and a view that

The engaged institution – one that is responsive, respectful of its partners needs, accessible and relatively neutral, while successfully integrating institutional service into research and teaching and finding sufficient resources for the effort – does not create itself. Bringing it into being requires leadership and focus (ibid p13).

Recommendations were made that all state universities should make engagement a priority, and acknowledgement was made that this would require a degree of institutional transformation and strong leadership.

These thoughts were echoed a couple of years later by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, a different group of universities which used the language of 'stewardship of place' to argue that universities needed to realign themselves to two-way interaction with communities and joint knowledge production. Specific recommendations were made as to how the universities could strengthen their engagement, developing a virtual cycle of building engagement with partners and embedding it back into the institution. The AASCU further reinforced this in a document on 'Renewing the Promise' in 2005, and a further set of 'Tools and Insights' in 2006.

Central to these statements, and to the more recent creation of Beacons of Public Engagement in the UK, is the recognition that effective two-way engagement depends upon significant cultural and institutional change to embed the existing good practices into the mainstream of university policies.

Conclusions

This review has sought to cover a number of issues to be considered in the way universities engage with their regions. It is clear that there is a growing interest and sophistication in the way that engagement is managed, although there remain considerable challenges in institutional management and in the way in which engagement is integrated with other pressures relating to teaching and research quality. For many academic staff in particular, engagement is still seen as partly a trade-off with other activities, although more sophisticated interpretations show the potential synergies between high quality engagement and high quality teaching and research. In a knowledge society it is not just the traditional knowledge producers and high technology firms that must invest in the creation and application of knowledge, but all kinds of organisations and communities. The major challenges faced by society such as an ageing population, climate change, and increasing inequality can only be addressed by collective action involving both universities and communities. Engaged universities can enrich the understanding of problems by drawing on the various knowledges in the community as well as better developing solutions through collective learning. As universities become a more central part of people's lives with a higher proportion attending university and benefiting from the direct consequences of their education and research then it is not possible for universities to maintain an aloof position from society, nor is it desirable for the good of the universities and the pursuit of knowledge.

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