

UNIVERSITIES AS ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS IN PLACE-BASED DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The concept of anchor institutions has emerged as a more integrated way in which universities are engaging with their communities towards achieving social and economic transformation of the city regions as well as the university itself. Starting in the United States, the anchor institution concept has widely gained currency, especially for universities in historically disadvantaged or socio-economically declining communities. Exacerbated by Covid-19, many universities are reviewing their place-based mandates within a period where communities are facing huge and increasing socio-economic demise. This article teases out the core components of an anchor university to argue for a more active hands-on and outcome-oriented approach to university-community engagement for South African universities. The article identifies facets for anchoring including economic transformation, infrastructural development, and sociocultural transformation. Four active functions for universities are proposed within their immediate communities. These include a core institutional role, an economic role, an infrastructure development role, and a public good role. The last section provides a reflection on possible pathways for South African universities to adopt an anchoring posture and mandate.

Keywords: universities, anchor institutions, higher education, South Africa, development

INTRODUCTION

Universities since their early conceptions have in one form or another been in a relationship with their external and immediate communities, cities, and regions (Glass and Fitzgerald 2010; Doberneck, Glass, and Schweitzer 2010; Mcdowell 2009). Even before the coining of the term university-community engagement Land Grant universities were established in the United States of America (USA) to provide readily available research-based programmes and educational resources. Arguably, the relationship between the university and society has been built partly on the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994, which established Land Grant

universities and the need for universities to align their three-gold mission towards improving the lives of the individuals, families, and communities within the state (Gavazzi 2020; McDowell 2003). This mandate has been adopted, adapted, and translated across higher education systems globally with the emergence of various concepts, approaches, and even university types towards becoming more locally engaged and globally competitive (OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2007).

A range of policy statements has been enacted towards ensuring universities remain relevant to the development of their immediate communities (Mtawa, Fongwa, and Wangenge-Ouma 2016). At the continental level, the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 and its Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) positions the role of higher education in supporting it achieve its mandate and strategies through its core functions of teaching, research, and engagement. Reflecting on the CESA's ninth strategic objective which calls for the revitalisation and expansion of African higher education Teferra notes

“According to CESA, virtually all development players now concur that for meaningful and sustainable economic growth to be achieved, tertiary education must be central to any national development agenda ... building a tertiary education system is no longer a luxury that African countries were once chastised for indulging in, but a critical imperative for national development and global competitiveness.” (Teferra 2018).

Within the South African context, the Council for Higher Education's (CHE) 20-year review of higher education (Council on Higher Education 2016) notes that significant effort has been achieved in mainstreaming university engagement as a core function of the university. However, it observes that practice and forms of engagement have been diverse, ad hoc, and sometimes out of context. In addition, Bank, Cloete, and Van Schalkwyk (2018) argues that the early conceptualization of the university system “did not seek to promote the idea of regional universities with place-based research agendas and developmental roles but rather aligned HEIs with national developmental priorities along broader policy objectives of skills redress from part inequalities”.

However, in their 2018 *Debate* paper Damons, Sathorar and Geduld (2018) highlight a contradiction within the ontology and epistemological assumptions upon which university community engagement is premised. They recognize the responses to the White Paper's call for more engagement, and the critical question of “what influences are they – universities – having on improving the conditions within these communities”?

Accordingly, Tewdwr-Jone and Kempton (2021, 1) argue that the space-blind policy framing which has largely characterised university engagement needs to be replaced by a place-

based approach as a critical feature of engagement policy, scholarship and practice. Such an approach, they argue, would “generate interactions reflecting both the concepts of proximity and community without the risk of becoming localistic”. Furthermore, Van Schalkwyk and De Lange (2018, 641) argue for “the delegitimization of the one form of university-community engagement that values exchange with external communities for the financial benefit of the university and the institutionalization of a form of university engagement that values place-specific development”.

In this article, I argue that the operationalization of universities as anchor institutions provides both a policy and practical platform for universities in South Africa to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach of engagement toward a placed-based approach without being localistic. The next section highlights some gaps and tensions within the literature. Section three introduces the anchor institution framing. This is followed by teasing out core tenets and attributes of anchor institutions. Section five explores implications for South African universities. Then a short conclusion is provided.

SOUTH AFRICA’S UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES

University community engagement has long been accepted as a third function of universities and most Higher Education Institutions (HEI) (Compagnucci and Spigarelli 2020; Zomer and Benneworth 2011; Bender 2008). However, the field of Community Engagement (CE) research has not been void of gaps, barriers, and tensions (Wangenge-Ouma and Fongwa 2012; Damons et al. 2018; Almjeld et al. 2022). The tensions and contradictions of what CE should be within the university, and how it is supported and institutionalized within the academe are some of the ways through which the gaps and tensions in the literature have been manifested (Bhagwan 2020; Pinheiro 2012; Favish 2010). While community engagement scholarship has evolved and gained significant currency within the South African higher education landscape, the policy and practical implications of universities serving their communities remain elusive (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021). This section seeks to tease out some of the key tensions within the CE debate and discourses with emphasis on the South African context.

Starting with “Solidaridad” in Latin America (Rabin 2014), and service-learning or volunteerism or engaged scholarship in South Africa (Kruss et al. 2012), these concepts all relate to the involvement of the university with its external communities the argument this article seeks to make lies along Brink’s (2021) conviction that we need to go beyond engagement, to sustainable place-based development.

Another tension observed within the CE scholarship, and which tends to affect how effectively universities engage with their communities is the perceived gap between the strategic and operational levels of university leadership. According to Goddard and Wallace (2011) there is a dearth of capacity needed to bridge the CE policy and practice from the national policy level through institutional leadership down to the operational level with obvious tangible local benefits within the immediate precinct of the university. In the South African context Fongwa (2018) shows a disjoint between national development policies, university mandates and their application in local or provincial development praxis.

Furthermore, Johnson (2020a) reflects on the challenge of balancing the functions of a deputy vice-chancellor (DVC) for engagement as a third function, and that of the DVC teaching and research where communication across these offices does not always reflect the expectation for engagement to be integrated within the teaching and learning functions. This tension of strategic versus operational leadership is also observed even in the recognition and incentivisation of CE within the academe (Cloete, Bailey, and Maassen 2011). As observed by Almjeld et al. (2022, 14) while incremental changes have been adopted to recognise community engagement at operational levels, “the emerging infrastructure to support community engagement, and new approaches to rewarding participating faculty have not fully replaced an academic culture that often resists the collaborative approaches to teaching and research that are essential to a broad range of community engagements”. Such tensions have been observed to undermine engagement that leads to tangible outcomes for the university and the community.

Thirdly, there seem to be inherent tensions within the motivation for why academics tend to engage with their communities and the role universities are supposed to play within the communities. Koekkoek, Van Ham, and Kleinhans (2021) capture two main factors motivating engagement. First, the normative ideological position adopted by universities that view their role in serving a democratic and transformative function through the values they uphold and transmit. This is also shown in the knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer function and their role in addressing societal inequalities. However, such egalitarian values have not always been maintained by academics who usually display narrow and selfish ambitions either through course completion or financial benefits. Within this is the usually inherent elitist nature of universities and the observed inequalities being perpetuated sometimes unwittingly (Dlamini 2018). Second, the main motivation is described as a response to external pressures linked to financial and economic incentives such as benefiting from tax exemptions, access to research funds, and seeing engagement as a marketing tool (Hayter and Cahoy 2016). These two motivations one normative and another responding to coercive market forces has been seen to divide the perceptions of not only academics, but even university managers regarding the forms

of engagement to adopt and the outcomes to aspire for.

A fourth tension in the literature is the determination of what or who forms the community. The term “community” remains hazy and vague in its definition within the literature (Allman 2015). It has been used to refer to symbolic, moral, emotional, and even spatial dimensions. Within such hazy conceptualisations of the community, power dynamics have sometimes resulted in an over-emphasis on disadvantaged communities that seem to depend on the university for their well-being, while the universities perceive these communities as sources of data or validating their purpose and identity. In other cases, the spatial dimension has been taken out of the notion of communities and engagement has focused on stakeholders within communities of practice, or virtual communities which somewhat erode the context or place-based relevance of engagement. As argued by Bank et al. (2018, 17) “greater place-based sensitivity in higher education planning and development would support racial redress within the higher education system and foster greater engagement by higher education institutions in broader socio-economic development”.

A more important priority for this article as pointed by Sathorar and Geduld (2021, 101) is that “the scholarship of community engagement requires a critical academy that will prioritize community development instead of focusing on increasing institutional research outputs”. They further reckon with earlier authors that “university-community engagement should be a priority at universities and not seen as an add-on to teaching and research because it is a philosophical belief that can help evolve, shape, and progress higher education ...”. Arguably, serving as an anchor does not erode the knowledge creating function of the university, but requires [the university] researchers to link their research to real community problems that will not just bring about research outputs but also contribute to sustainable solutions that will bring about social transformation. Understanding the core tenets of the anchor institution framing becomes vital to achieving this.

ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS: AN OVERVIEW OF ORIGIN AND APPLICATION

The emergence of the concept of anchor institutions as a concept can be traced back to the 1960s in the USA, where the effects of deindustrialisation, capital flight, and the rise of neoliberal policies and forces, including globalisation, began to undermine domestically owned manufacturing. Within this institutional and policy vacuum anchor institutions emerged as community anchors (usually universities and hospitals) to address growing developmental needs within the cities and towns and to provide stability, stimulate development and growth (Ehlenz 2018; Taylor and Luter 2013). According to Dragicevic (2015) an “anchor mission strategy is the intentional deployment of an institution’s geographically bound assets and

economic power to revitalise neighbourhoods where individuals [communities] face historic barriers to economic growth and survival” (Ogude et al. 2020, 36). The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development defines anchor institutions as (1) having regional socio-economic significance and (2) serving as a key economic driver or those organisations including universities that generate jobs, create business opportunities, and develop human, social and cultural capital of their city-regions (Harris and Holley 2016). A fundamental aspect from the preceding is the intentional commitment to betterment of the community at the doorsteps of the anchor institution.

The concept has grown beyond the USA and in the United Kingdom, for instance, the British government advanced the concept of anchor institutions as part of a “building stronger communities and businesses” policy strand (Smallbone, Kitching and Blackburn 2015). A key feature of an anchor institution is that they are geographically based, or place-based and spatially immobile (Webber and Karlstrom 2009). Furthermore, anchor institutions are tied to specific locations by their missions, invested capital or relationship to customers or employees (Ibid).

The Syracuse University president describes its mission as an anchor institution as follows: “Ours is a *place-based strategy*, where we’re making significant investments *in* our community *with* our community” As an anchor institution “we aim to transform our region. In the process we know that we ourselves are being transformed, both in the composition of our academic community and in how we do our work” (Cantor 2011). This aspiration or vision for mutual transformation and development has been described as one of “institutional citizenship” and affords the university the best chance of being a change agent in society (Sturm 2007). The Anchor Institutions Tool Kit developed by the University of Pennsylvania’s Netter Centre for Community Partnerships (Sampson, 2008, 5) provides helpful questions to assist in identifying anchor institutions. These questions include:

- Does it have a large stake and an important presence in your city and community?
- Is it one of the largest employers, providing multilevel employment possibilities?
- Is it among the largest purchasers of goods and services in your region?
- Does it have economic impacts on employment, revenue and spending patterns?
- Does it consume sizeable amounts of land?
- Does it have crucial relatively fixed assets and is not likely to relocate?
- Does it attract businesses and highly skilled individuals?

Arguably, most universities will fit the description of anchor institutions due to their physical presence, land-use patterns, and spending and purchasing capacity within their cities or communities (Glass and Fitzgerald 2010; Doberneck, Glass and Schweitzer 2010; McDowell 2009). Even before the coining of the term university-community engagement, Land Grant universities were established to provide readily available research-based programmes and educational resources with the goal of improving the lives of the individuals, families, and communities within the state (Gavazzi 2020). Arguably, the relationship between the university and society has been built partly on the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994, which established Land Grant universities and the need for universities to align their three-fold mission towards improving the lives of their immediate and extended communities (McDowell 2003). Within the current global pandemic, there have been changing dynamics facing universities and other employers with increasing remote learning and working affecting their place-based identity and demanding a revisit of their engagement function and potential anchoring role (Jordaan and Mennega 2021).

In South Africa, only a few universities have described themselves as anchor institutions. Within the African continent, most universities were established with a national mandate (Wangenge-Ouma and Fongwa 2012) which most often is in tension with the regional or place-based mandate. Within the African context, while universities have been observed to contribute to local and city development in many countries, the anchoring mandate has not been acknowledged as a core mission of the university and these developmental contributions have in the main been unintentional very little coordination between the academic core functions and the external stakeholder engagements (Stachowiak et al. 2013; Pinheiro 2012).

CORE ATTRIBUTES OF A UNIVERSITY AS AN ANCHOR INSTITUTION

Recognizing that the fate of their communities is intrinsically tied to that of theirs, universities have adopted an anchoring role in revitalizing their communities (Anchor Institutions Task Force 2016). Serving as anchor institutions, universities have built coalitions, mobilized multidisciplinary and multi-sector talent, empowered “home-grown” voices, providing a platform for attaching the key levers to prosperity which include educational attainment, sustainable environments, and economic opportunity (Cortright 2008). This has been founded on values of sustainable development, promoting social justice, and democracy. In the South African context, Bawa (2018) argues that anchor institutions can serve as a framework for South African universities to face the three main global challenges: sustainability, poverty and inequality.

The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) framework identifies seven key areas

through which anchor institutions in the urban inner-city or rural communities can meaningfully impact disadvantaged areas towards stimulating community revitalisation through their work in the community (Ehlenz 2018). Another initiative, the Democracy Collaborative framework, contributes to the literature by evaluating the roles of anchor institutions by focusing on issues beyond the core institutional business of the university and its contribution to economic development alone. This framework incorporates values of public health, environmental awareness, and pre-university education metrics as it perceives the anchor as an institutional “state of mind with a public good mandate”. The operationalisation of the ICIC and Democratic Collaborative frameworks provide a hybrid framework that capture four key roles for anchor institutions within their communities and neighbourhoods. Irrespective of whether in the city or rural context these roles are ultimately aimed at effecting a place-based approach to transforming the socio-economic outcome of locality. These values include:

- *An anchor mission and vision*; The university needs to clearly articulate its vision and mission towards becoming an anchor institution within its institutional documents. The question of “What is the institutional vision and mission of the university to city or urban renewal?” must be clearly answerable.
- *Institutionalisation of the mission and vision*: The well-articulated place-based policy needs to be embedded throughout institutional structures, policies and implementation plans to ensure that the policy is not just a document but becomes an action plan throughout all levels of governance and relating with external stakeholders.
- *Establishing pact with local stakeholders*: These include collaborative structures, networks and partnerships towards a mutually benefiting relationship with local stakeholders.
- *Leveraging institutional resources* towards achieving the anchor vision. The university must clearly identify how it will leverage its human, physical and social resources towards socio-economic wellbeing and revitalisation of its immediate and extended communities.

Harkavy and Hodges (2012) argue that the combination of both frameworks provides a deductive anchor institution roadmap derived from the philosophical principles that guide the discourse on a shared value model with a range of tools to achieve broader community revitalisation while accomplishing institutional goals of the university. Using these tools, Ehlenz (2018) argues for a wider application of the framework towards achieving three purposes. First, to empirically assess universities anchor strategies including neighbourhood

market and socioeconomic outcomes. Second, she argues for more non-USA and international case studies to determine why universities do or do not pursue anchor strategies and third, to seek integrating university-community engagement partnership initiatives and anchor revitalisation research which have so far operated separately from each other.

FACETS FOR ENGAGEMENT BY ANCHOR UNIVERSITIES

Universities can serve as a place based anchor institution through four main facets or avenues. These included firstly through (i) fulfilling their core academic functions of teaching, research, and engagement with a range of stakeholders, (ii) actively serving as a stimulus for economic development, (iii) leveraging infrastructural development and (iv), serving a public good function as an agent for socio-cultural development and advancing democratic values.

Doing the core business of the university – teaching, research, and engagement

The core institutional function of the university centers on the provision of education through teaching and learning and research with strong innovation and the development of a relevant workforce.

While most traditional research universities have been successful in performing this function, there remains a continuous disconnect from their local communities, economy and realities. According to Harkavy et al. (2014, 110) one of the key aspects of Penn State University's rise to prominence was the Penn Compact with local communities wherein "Local engagement work moved from being primarily a means to help Penn revitalise its local environment to becoming a way for it to achieve eminence as a research university. Moreover, the Compact's clear directive has become infused in nearly every aspect of the university, shaping both operations and culture across campus". Anchor universities find a balance between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge forms within its research and knowledge production function as they collaborate with their external stakeholders. Teaching, learning, research, and engagement is not conducted in a vacuum but rather informed by context.

Serving an anchor role through stimulating economic development

As major sources of employment, procurement, and attraction, universities have the capacity to trigger and support economic growth and development within their immediate neighbourhoods through intentional policies and action (Goddard and Puukka 2008). Universities create direct employment through their staff, indirect employment through employment by businesses that supply the university, and direct enhancement of production within the city-region. The development of clear policies for local procurement of goods and services can actively trigger

the development of local businesses and the local economy. A study of food spending in Northeast Ohio shows that purchasing by the University of Pennsylvania in West Philadelphia increased from \$1.3 million to \$90 million between 1986 when the university started and 2008, creating thousands of jobs and millions in local wages (Masi, Schaller and Shuman 2010). However, as argued by Kempton et al. (2021) the character of the regional context remains critical in achieving an anchoring role as some regional contexts are more conducive than others.

Place-based developer

Anchor institutions are place-based organisations that invest in their surroundings as part of their business. Universities as place-based institutions have a significant potential to develop “policies and operating practices that enhance the[ir] competitiveness while simultaneously advancing the economy and social conditions in the communities in which it operates” (Porter and Kramer 2011). Birch 2009 argues that the revitalisation of downtowns in older American cities has, in the main, been driven by the work of anchor institutions. The university plays a role in real estate development, urban revitalisation, city improvement, and transforming neighbourhood infrastructure. The Education Park at Cleveland University highlights the university’s response to its “dual obligation of educator and community-builder” (Berkman and White 2016, 20). The model seeks to “dramatically improve the physical environment of the community, spur new housing and commercial development while accelerating the creation of educational opportunities in the area through a collaboration of various stakeholders including public, private, philanthropic, civil society, School District governing body, Key Bank, Cleveland Foundation among others” (Berkman and White 2016, 21).

Public good function

The Anchor Institution Task Force has argued that anchor institutions should support economic development and city-region transformation and hold a social-purpose mission. The task force posits that “anchor institutions demonstrate inherent core values of democracy, equity and social justice that enable the organisation to serve as a force for change” (Harris and Holley 2016). This function is founded on the democratic collaborative framework wherein the university is expected to build community experiences, support public health challenges, develop and promote democratic values, and serve as a platform for social engagement. Green, Lloyd and Parham (2013) argue using evidence from Hertfordshire that universities as anchors have a responsibility to preserve heritage by preserving a few important buildings and infrastructure and reflecting a more subtle relationship with the wider set of elements that

contribute to collective memory. Cantor, Englot, and Higgins (2013) show how the “Say Yes to Education Syracuse” by Syracuse University brought community members and partners to work together, leading to higher enrolments in the city schools, increase in home sale values, and decline in dropout rates of 9th Graders between 2009 and 2012. Universities serving an anchoring role play an active role in shaping the social and cultural fabric of their communities capable of fostering social cohesion and local development in urban communities by mooring people, business, and capital in place (Addie 2020). The figure below provides a visual framework of the four dimensions of how universities can serve as anchor institutions toward enhancing place-based development.

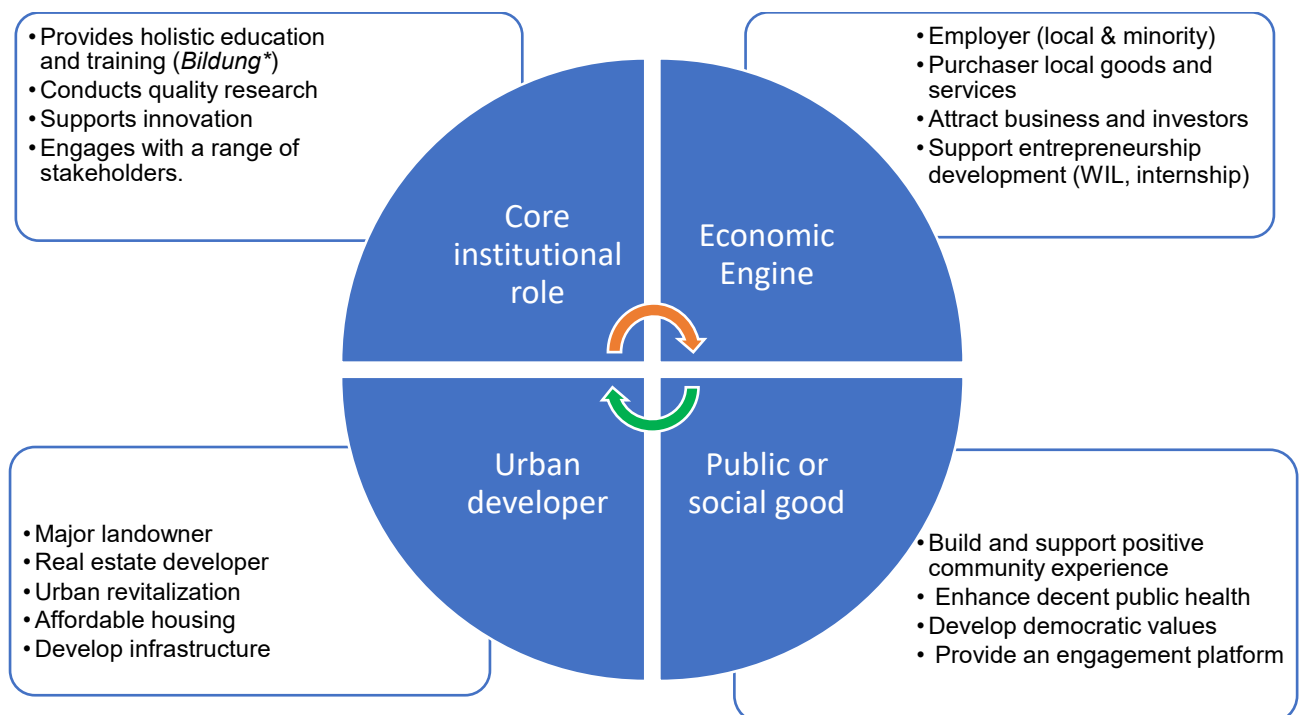


Figure 1: Proposed framework for universities as anchor institutions (Source: Fongwa 2022)¹

UNIVERSITIES AS ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS: WHAT IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

From the preceding, universities are increasingly being perceived as anchor institutions, not only in the changing visions, but also in their missions, relationships, and internal restructuring. Of importance to the South African context is to ask what will a university serving an anchoring role in South Africa look like? Four principles are proposed here:

Establishing a clear mission and vision towards responsiveness

In making the case for land-grant universities Bishop (1963) argues that for land-grant universities to perform this role in a creditable manner, they must make the problems and opportunities of the people an integral part of their program. Hence, the land-grant universities have a moral obligation-not just an opportunity-to be sensitive to the needs of people and to provide dynamic leadership in improving the welfare of the people.

The contribution of universities to the generation of new knowledge, their capacity to innovate, and even dictate the culture within their neighbourhoods has been established in the literature (Combrinck and Nortjé 2021; Porter, Fisher-Bruns, and Ha Pham 2019; Saxenian 1994). However, such influence is only as strong as the nature of the institutional leadership and internal governance structures within the institution (Maassen 2014). Furthermore, Taucean, Strauti, and Tion, (2018) argue that to serve as an anchor, strong leadership and good governance are vital to developing a responsive and innovative culture. In making a case for land-grant universities and their responsiveness to their communities, Bishop (1963) argues that universities must make the problems and opportunities of the people an integral part of their mission and vision. This, he argues, is a moral obligation for any institution seeking to provide dynamic leadership in improving the welfare of the people (Lyons, Miller, and Mann 2018).

A quick look at most university's vision and mission statements will show the use of words of “relevance”, “responsive”, and “engaged”. The integration of these ideals into the institutional culture remain lofty aspirations as academics and management most often get caught up in the core business of teaching and learning and knowledge production (Goddard et al. 2016). Universities that have become engaged, responsive or even “servant universities” as proposed by Gavazzi (2020) have clear leadership traits aligned to the vision and mission of relevance to which adequate provision is made. Birch, Perry, and Taylor (2013) strongly suggest that:

“The entire topic of the university as an engaged, anchor institution is a strategic element of the modern academic embedded in the practices of university leadership. They further argue that top-level leadership matters when establishing a university’s approach to place-based engagement, especially in a research university, where decentralisation at the disciplinary, college, or academic unit level is the norm.”

They further posit that when an anchor mission and vision are driven by institutional leadership, the issues which affect the institutional buy-in can be holistically addressed. These include the institutional reward system and the resourcing or funding of engagement initiatives (Johnson 2020). Serving an anchoring role requires conscious institution-defining leadership to activate

and legitimise the practices of those faculty and staff who emphasize engagement such that they are not considered “second class citizens” compared to those who focus on research for international audiences. Such a rewarding structure if not clearly articulated at the institutional level by senior leadership could cause a dichotomy between those who engage with their immediate stakeholders and those who perceive engagement as secondary to the core academic function (Macfarlane 2007).

The first and main aspect of serving an anchoring role is setting out a leadership-driven institutional policy.

A possible example in South Africa is Rhodes University’s (RU’s) policy of *Reviving Grahamstown Schools*. Being part of RU’s mission to be responsive to the needs of its immediate and extended community within its policy discourse, the university acknowledged that “the future and sustainability of Rhodes University is intimately bound up in the future and sustainability of Grahamstown” (RU 2021, 4). Such a clear commitment articulated at the policy level was institutionalised through several initiatives, programmes and structures. Such initiatives include the school’s revitalisation project and the Early Childhood Development project conceived in partnership between academics and local stakeholders.

Embracing institutional partnerships, collaboration and networks

It is important to note that such an explicit policy drive towards social responsiveness by the university is only one side of the equation. Getting similar commitment from external stakeholders such as local government, business, and other players within the community is critical for establishing an anchoring role. Bürger and Fiates (2021) observe that by strengthening the role of government and building trust across internal and external stakeholders is critical in achieving a strong regional and local development function of universities. In more successful cases of universities serving as anchors the strengthened role of the local, city or state government has significantly enhanced partnerships and collaborations towards developmental outcomes.

In a bid to ensure successful collaboration towards city development, the mayor of the City of Rochester, New York, established an office for Community Wealth Building to bring together all stakeholders within the community as they work closely with the government. The city government sought to go beyond being a collaborator with the HEIs, and become a convener of the various stakeholders, which helps to short-circuit the bureaucratic processes within government, which present a challenge to the pace at which change can happen (Porter et al. 2019).

In the US city of Syracuse, the development of a democratic, non-profit organisational

body known as the Near Westside Initiative, was the vehicle to transform the arms-length relationship between the university and community stakeholders into a collaborative momentum. Such a collaborative initiative became the strategy for attacking the grand challenge of decades of urban disinvestment towards sustainable urbanisation (Cantor et al. 2013). The After Schools Programme initiative by the University of Pretoria's (UP's) Mamelodi campus (Ogude et al. 2020) has been borne from UP's positioning as an anchor institution mission to "not only improve the infrastructure and economy of the communities in which its campuses are embedded but to also improve academic access and success, as well as foster sustainable community development that enhances the lives of communities in which the university is located" (Ogude et al. 2020, 37). These initiatives are based on strong partnerships with local schools and other stakeholders in the community.

Harris and Holley (2016) argue that the collaboration of multiple organisations, including HEIs, strengthens civic indicators in the city. Cantor (2011) further shows that for universities to serve their anchoring role in cities and metropolitan areas, universities must embrace a seamless two-way street relationship between the communities and campuses to facilitate knowledge sharing and human capital, which is too often unseen and unappreciated. Goddard and his colleagues (2014) add that universities ought to be "unavoidably embedded" within their home region. However, within the South African context the relationship between the local or provincial government and most universities, especially those in rural settings, seems to hinder such constructive collaborations. High levels of financial mismanagement, corruption, and inefficiency (Mishi, Mbaleki, and Mushonga 2022) have eroded much of the trust between universities and government structures around rural based universities and present even more laborious challenges for anchoring.

Leveraging university resources and expertise for the greater community good

The fundamental purpose of land-grant universities was not just to provide skills to farmers through training but to develop new and innovative knowledge whose application would transform agriculture at the time (Gavazzi 2020). They were expected to develop and implement research-based programmes and educational resources with the goal of improving the lives of the individuals, families, and communities within the state (Aronson and Webster 2007). Universities aspiring to serve an anchoring role will have to deepen research, expand teaching curriculum and pedagogy and extend their institutional resources towards social and economic transformation.

As major landowners, employers, and purchasers within their immediate and extended communities, universities have the capacity to leverage their capacities, resources, and capital

actively and consciously toward the development of their communities. Through real-estate development and transformation, the purchase of day-to-day goods and services, or the sourcing of talents, universities have been able to support the development of their cities, regions, and communities. The literature highlights some evidence of how South African universities are leveraging their resources for the development of their communities. Ehlenz (2019) observes that campus-adjacent development projects enable universities to actively respond to future demands of their communities without traversing into problematic territory of campus extension. This along with the motivation to respond to millennials as the emerging generation of consumers presents universities with a unique opportunity to respond issues of space and place (Roberts and Taylor 2016). Furthermore, Combrinck and Nortjé (2021) observe that university architecture has historically been used as an instrument for exclusion rather than transformation and recommend that the university campus and the spaces in between must serve in enhancing cohesion. They argue that “the university campus has meaning bound in the human experience of place ... the spaces between buildings should become more important than the buildings themselves while the housing of students on and off campus can contribute to a lively culture of place” (Combrinck and Nortjé 2021, 364).

The gentrification of the Woodstock area around the University of Cape Town (UCT) has been criticized as lacking the expected level of engagement and inclusiveness to accommodate the working class. In the case of the transformation of the Hatfield precinct UP was perceived to have adopted a partnering model developed in Detroit and Philadelphia from a partnership of the University of Pennsylvania, Mid-Town Detroit, and the University of Maryland based on mutual place-based transformation of the city area, and by extension providing conducive living experience of adjacent community residents (Kromer and Kerman 2004). Based on this model UP in 2015 adopted a City Improvement District (CID) plan to enhance infrastructural development, improve security in the city district and support socio-economic development in the greater Hatfield precinct (Hendricks and Flaherty 2018).

In Braamfontein, Johannesburg, the development of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) Tshimologong Digital Innovation Precinct initiative is a collaboration between Wits, partners in government, the City of Johannesburg, business and industry towards revitalising the fringe areas around the university, creating cheaper and safer accommodation for students, and reimagining new spaces for retail, restaurants, music clubs, bookshops, and other offerings attractive to the Wits and Braamfontein community. This is ultimately working towards creating a digital innovation precinct and the Wits Tech hub in the area (see www.wits.ac.za). While the concept of an anchor has not been officially used to describe its role, Wits, like many other South African universities, is beginning to recognize its place-based mandate toward

socio-economic development and infrastructural transformation. Such efforts need to be systematically documented.

A WAY FORWARD

This article has argued for a rethink of university-community engagement in its present form to one anchored in place and more responsive to the community. Previous anchor institution authors have adopted a specific focus such as infrastructure development (Combrinck and Nortjé 2021; Hendricks and Flaherty 2018), or for social development (Bawa 2018), and school support programs (Ogude et al. 2020). This article aligns with Bank et al. (2018), attempting a much broader institutional approach toward community development. While this article does not claim a conclusive characterization of what an anchor university in South Africa should look like, be like and do, it argues that community engagement in its traditional conceptualization lacks the tenets to lead to tangible sustainable development outcomes for the university and the community.

The article proposes a broadened conceptual discourse, borrowing from the anchor institutions framing. Acknowledging the relevance of university engagement as the widely accepted mechanism through which universities relate, transmit and communicate with their local stakeholders, there is scope to enhance this process. Adopting an anchoring approach can further enhance the relationship with the constantly changing demands and needs of external stakeholders.

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NOTE

1. Bildung is the combination of the education and knowledge necessary to thrive in your society, and the moral and emotional maturity to both be a team player and have personal autonomy. Bildung is also knowing your roots and being able to imagine the future (Izquierdo 2021). Explaining the concept of Bildung in relation to SDG 4 (sdgwatcheurope.org).

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