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Universities: in, of, and beyond their cities

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ABSTRACT
Universities are necessarily implicated in processes of globalisation and neoliberalisation. But this also finds an expression in the ways that they operate in the cities in which they are located. They are always located *in* place, but the question remains whether they can be understood to be *of* the places in which they find themselves, capable of contributing to their development as learning cities. That is the question explored in this paper, with the help of evidence drawn from a research project in the United Kingdom which examined the regional role of four contrasting universities in four different urban locations. The paper highlights the importance of understanding the complexity of the relationships between universities and their cities—universities negotiate their roles within particular urban settings, and they do so in instrumental ways, reflecting their own distinctive institutional priorities.

Exploring the ambiguous geographies of higher education

It may once have been possible to imagine that universities somehow existed in their own very special space, driven by a commitment to the generation of knowledge for its own sake, as well as a belief in the value of disseminating that knowledge to students and other seekers after truth. From this perspective, knowledge was universal, even if it was produced and transmitted in a particular context. If such a vision was ever persuasive, however, then the experience of the last half century confirms that it is no longer a helpful starting point. Instead, the close interconnection between changes within higher education and wider processes of economic and political change has become increasingly clear.

This has been reflected in arguments that have located British universities within an emergent neoliberal paradigm, characterised by forms of marketisation and globalisation (McGettigan, 2013; Robertson, 2010b). Susan Robertson highlights the ways in which what she calls 'Rounds of neoliberal political projects' have resulted in universities being 'structurally predisposed toward new regionalising and globalising horizons of action' (Robertson, 2010b, p. 191). The globalisation story in particular has been clearly told, highlighting the growth of overseas campuses, the role of global reputational ranking systems, and the increased significance of international students crossing national boundaries for many universities (see, e.g. Marginson & van der Wende, 2007; Robertson, 2010a). In other words, instead of seeing universities as somehow exempt

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from post-Fordist and post-Keynesian restructuring because of their special status, they are understood to be deeply embedded within it, even potentially acting as key transmission belts of the ideas that underpin it.

But the implications are not simply to be found at the global level or in stories of transnationalism. One of the paradoxes of globalist analysis is that it also highlights the significance of local (or sub-national) activity and engagement. The urban is a key node in many globalist visions, and it is in cities that the global is given its material expression. So, for example, Edward Glaeser (2011), celebrates the 'triumph of the city', while Richard Florida (2002) emphasises the role of the creative class which is, he says, to be found in particular urban settings. This localised or urbanised aspect of globalisation may also have significant implications for universities, their roles and potential, and it is on such issues that this paper focuses.

In what follows, and in the context of wider debates around the 'learning city', we will reflect on the experience of four contrasting universities in different regional and urban contexts within the UK, drawing on a research project that focused on the relationship between the universities and the places within which they were located (for a more extensive discussion of the project, see Brennan, Cochrane, Lebeau, & Williams, 2018). The project adopted a qualitative case study approach, interviewing representatives of the universities and the local communities. Some 182 interviews were conducted, divided roughly evenly between the four cases studies. The 62 university staff who were interviewed were a mixture of academic, managerial, and administrative staff relevant to the themes of the project. Of the interviews outside the universities, 58 were with people working in health and social services, 42 with people working in local businesses and 20 with representatives of the local communities. In addition, there were some group interviews with local residents and a survey of 200 local residents was conducted in one of the regional case studies.

The university in the city

In the context of higher education, Marginson and Rhoades (2002) helpfully introduce the notion of what they call 'glonacal agency' suggesting that it is necessary to recognise the significance of the intersection between global, national, regional, and local agencies. Although they tend to focus most attention on the global level, they also note that 'Local communities respond to and shape the global activity of local institutions' (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002, p. 304). But what if our starting point is not the global, but rather the locating of universities in place, in the city? The intersections identified by Marginson and Rhoades remain central to our discussion, but viewed from below rather than above.

Significant claims are increasingly being made about the importance of universities for their local economies and societies. It is believed they are central to building competitiveness (e.g. through their role in the knowledge society and knowledge exchange), as well as contributing to the transformation of local populations through up-skilling and re-skilling. They are understood to be powerful agents of cultural change, as well as potential sources of initiatives to challenge social disadvantage (as no more than an indicative and far from comprehensive list see, for example, Addie, Keil, & Olds, 2015; Benneworth & Hospers, 2007; Goddard & Vallance, 2013; Harding, Scott, Laske, &

Burtscher, 2007; Kitigawa, 2004; Lebeau & Cochrane, 2015; Pinheiro, Benneworth, & Jones, 2012; Stachowiak, Pinheiro, Sedini, & Vaattovaara, 2013; Uyarra, 2010; Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2007). Their significance as employers and generators of economic activity and innovation is also often asserted and it would be dangerous to dismiss the evidence for this, even if some of the claims may sometimes seem overstated (Etzkowitz, 2008). The OECD (2007) has certainly identified them as providing the base for the development of learning regions because of the ways in which they are said to enable the transfer of knowledge between places and to support the development of innovation networks.

All of this fits with the arguments developed by Robertson (2010a, 2010b), as competitiveness between universities can be seen as a surrogate for 'building a globally-competitive, knowledge-based economy' (Robertson, 2010b, p. 16). However, it may also open up rather different ways of thinking about universities in place, particularly as the urban itself is imagined rather differently and not purely through the lens of competitiveness. In a globalised world the urban can be seen to represent a social formation around which sets of relationships overlap, settle, and come together as a space of connectivity; one that involves the intersection of relationships drawn from far and wide across the globe, which combine and settle in cities in very specific ways (for a more extensive discussion of these issues, see Allen & Cochrane, 2014). As Doreen Massey puts it, rather than

> thinking of places as areas with boundaries around [them], they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, locality, or a region. (Massey, 1991, p. 28)

Amin and Thrift (2002, p. 157) neatly summarise what they see as the possibilities inherent in the modern city, which is 'so full of unexpected interactions and so continuously in movement that all kinds of small and large spatialities continue to provide resources for political invention as they generate new improvisations and force new forms of ingenuity'.

In this context, the potential of the city lies in exploring the ways in which the apparently informal networks that make up urban life can be enabled through policy and more formal interventions to deliver positive outcomes for urban populations. In a sense, this means that cities are necessarily also 'learning cities', but the implications of this have not always been pursued actively in policy terms. As Keri Facer and Magda Buchczyk (2019) note, this reinforces the importance of understanding processes of learning across urban space that cannot be reduced to formal systems of education, instead exploring what they identify as forms of learning infrastructure. From this perspective learning becomes a defining characteristic of cities as they are actively assembled, negotiated, and contested as spaces for living (McFarlane, 2011). Once the city itself is understood in these terms then the traditional image of the university as somehow outside and beyond the fray becomes difficult to sustain, as does the notion that the relationship is always necessarily one way—as knowledge is transferred from 'us' (higher education teachers and researchers) to 'them' (communities and even businesses). In other words, it becomes necessary to re-imagine the university as part

of the urban system (although not necessarily simply with a local inflection) incorporated, productively or not, into the learning city. From a university perspective, the challenge then becomes how that insight may also be translated into positive outcomes in and for the city. A cluster of creative thinking has emerged in which attempts have been made to highlight what might be possible if universities were to recognise their potential contribution to the development of ecologically and socially sustainable cities, fostering processes of positive and collective learning (see, for example, Chatterton, Owen, Cutter, Dymski, & Unsworth, 2018; Facer & Enright, 2016; May & Perry, 2017).

Here we turn to reflect on the experience of universities as a formal aspect of the education system, with representation in most urban areas. We consider the extent and ways in which they may foster (or even hinder) the development and maintenance of learning infrastructure, either formally or informally, as intended policy or unintended consequence. However, rather than focusing on what universities ought to do, our emphasis is on a critical engagement with their existing practices. The central question becomes what role do universities play in the existing urban ecology, whether they are necessarily located *in* the city or can also be understood to be *of* the city.

Making sense of difference

Our research revealed a more complex world of universities than can be captured by simple—if helpful—typologies, like the distinction between elite, mass, and universal institutions identified by Martin Trow (1973) or that developed in a previous European study (Boucher, Conway, & van der Meer, 2003) which distinguished between four distinct types of higher education institution and region. These were: single player universities in peripheral regions; multiplayer universities in peripheral regions; traditional universities in core regions; and newer technologically oriented universities in core regions. The typology is partially reflected in the four case studies used in our project but city and university differences were more complex than these typologies suggest, reflecting but not locked into past history and perceived reputations within their locality and beyond, in forms of 'path dependence' analogous to those identified by Ron Martin in his discussion of the evolution of regional and local economies (Martin, 2010). The research highlighted the ways in which place and institution were entangled in the process of identity making and local engagement.

In what follows, we have chosen to rename both the institutions and the urban locations in which they were based, rather than to identify them directly. This is not intended to be a fully-fledged typology, but rather to provide a means of identifying sets of relationships and the dynamics that underpin them without pretending that we have captured the full complexity of each institution or each city. We have renamed the four universities as Aspirational, Glocal, Regenerational, and Transformational, located respectively within the cities of Eastside, Northville, Metrocity, and Rivertown. Below, we summarise some of their key features.

Introducing 'Aspirational' University in Eastside

As with many contemporary universities, Aspirational University was an educational institution for many years before gaining university status at the end of the 20th century. It sits alongside a much older well-established university with a strong research reputation that attracts students from beyond the locality and region. Aspirational is a much smaller institution than its neighbour (with 5000 students) and has a strong local dependence, mainly recruiting students from the local area and emphasising its commitment to the local community with statements and activities intended to raise aspirations in local schools, foster knowledge transfer, deliver continuing professional development, and promote cultural activities.

Eastside, within which Aspirational University is located, is an older industrial city with a low employment rate and high levels of deprivation. The traditional industries have been in decline for some time, although there is some evidence of growth in newer media-related industries. The role of the universities in contributing to the reshaping of the local economy—to enabling forms of learning—is widely recognised in policy terms, particularly by Aspirational University and by local policymakers. Eastside is disconnected from other cities and its universities have an important 'connecting' role, establishing linkages with other universities and organisations often quite far away—it has been the focus of significant external investment in cultural infrastructure. With its more localised focus, Aspirational University has entered into partnerships with many other organisations in the city, as well as drawing on the local population for its student body.

Introducing 'Glocal' University in Northville

In contrast, Glocal is a long-established university, founded in the 19th century, in Northville, a large city within a major urban region. The city-region has historically had a strong industrial and manufacturing base which has been eroded since the 1960s, but it has experienced considerable regeneration, economic renewal, and re-imagination in recent decades. There are several other universities and other higher education institutions in the city most of which have, in comparison to Glocal, rather more localised orientations towards student recruitment, and are less embedded in global university networks. Most of Glocal's students are drawn not from local areas but from the wider region, across the UK, and beyond the UK. The relationships between the city's different universities are a mixture of collaboration and competition. But all, in their different ways, are engaged with their local and regional communities. Glocal presents itself as a 'world class' university but in that context it also has an interest in constructing Northville as a 'world class' city.

Northville is a city in the process of transformation, rooted in an industrial past, but now increasingly reframed as a metropolitan and cosmopolitan centre. Its civic leaders seek to reposition the city within national urban hierarchies and have global or world city aspirations, to match those of Glocal University. And the wider local framework of higher education feeds directly into this—this is a city with a very large population of students, several universities, and considerable research and development involving partnerships and collaboration between different organisations. In wider strategic terms, Glocal University has a focus that goes beyond the city—it seeks to position

itself among those institutions that are highly ranked internationally. But that does not mean it is somehow divorced from the city. On the contrary, the vibrancy of the city is a selling point for students (nationally and internationally) and Glocal University's ambitions fit very well with those of the city's planners, ensuring that its strategies (for developing its estate, for example) are supported and even encouraged.

Introducing 'Regenerational' University in Metrocity

Regenerational University is located in Metrocity, a large metropolis which is widely understood to be the UK's global city. The wider city contains many universities and other higher education institutions. Students come to the city from all over the world and the city's universities include elite institutions with strong political linkages and connections with a wide range of economic and social organisations. While the metropolitan area is economically vibrant and a generator of significant wealth, it is also deeply divided, in terms of income, across lines of class and ethnicity. Although average levels of education among its population are high, that masks dramatic inequalities in access.

Regenerational is located in Metrocity East, a part of the city whose population is largely made up of diverse and socially disadvantaged communities, existing close to symbols of wealth and global finance. Metrocity's status as a global city is reflected in its position within global financial and elite networks, but it is also reflected in the rather different multicultural population of Metrocity East, which is the product of overlapping migration flows positioned in rather different, but no less globalised, networks. Regenerational only achieved university status in the 1990s, although it has a longer institutional history. It is locally focused and mainly engaged with more socially disadvantaged groups. Around two-thirds of its students are from black and minority ethnic groups.

Regenerational University's business model relies on the extent to which it can draw previously under-represented groups into higher education. In that sense, it is necessarily focused on challenging social disadvantage. Universities are sometimes criticised for the extent to which, intentionally or otherwise, they are in practice engaged in the reproduction of social advantage and privilege. By contrast, Regenerational is focused on supporting the disadvantaged, of using learning to generate change, of making an impact locally. It has worked closely with other agencies involved in regeneration as a means of supporting its own development, with new campuses and buildings. The higher education sector in Metrocity is highly stratified and divided. It could be argued that different players serve the different needs of the city as a learning city, feeding different labour markets, but ensuring that each is able to deliver what is required. From that perspective, Regenerational can be seen to fill a particular niche, although more positive interpretations might suggest that its task is also to begin to challenge pre-existing educational hierarchies.

Introducing 'Transformational' University in Rivertown

Our fourth case city, Rivertown, has only one university, Transformational, which was described by its then Vice Chancellor as 'the only show in town'. The town has a long industrial history stretching back into the 19th century but it has neither a mainline

railway station nor a nearby motorway. It is relatively disconnected from other major cities, although it is part of the extended urban sub-region of Riverregion, which incorporates several other post-industrial towns. In the Referendum held in 2016 on the UK's membership of the European Union, all of the boroughs in the region recorded votes of between 60% and 70% to leave, and the area has been clearly identified by political scientists and others as one of those 'left behind' by globalisation (Clarke, Goodwin, & Whitley, 2017). We heard a senior member of the university telling a conference that 'People come to Rivertown for one of three reasons: (i) their football team is playing in Rivertown; (ii) they are visiting the university; (iii) they are lost'.

Much of Riverregion's traditional industry has disappeared or severely contracted and the policy challenge has been identified as fostering development and innovation to secure a better future. Transformational University presents itself as having a central part in this process. Its campus is located in the centre of Rivertown and local residents are invited to use many of its facilities. It also runs the town's art gallery. The university has also developed strong connections with businesses and other organisations across the sub-region and has sub-campuses in several other towns. The vice-chancellor and other senior staff play active roles in civic organisations, often chairing committees representing the different interests in the sub-region.

Although Transformational was the 'only show in town' within Rivertown, a larger research-focused university has a small campus in one of the neighbouring towns, but with limited local connection since a high proportion of its students are international. Most of Transformational's students are local and many of them, at the time of the project, were mature students studying part-time, getting retrained to meet changing employment needs and opportunities. The university works closely with industry and other local organisations, with a particular focus on providing training opportunities, and it is strongly engaged with political, economic, and cultural developments.

Institutional partnerships in place

Most universities have active strategies that seek to engage with local (business and government) partners to deliver on shared agendas that are seen to be of mutual benefit. In many respects, these partnerships can be seen as instrumental and consistent with the patterns identified earlier as shaping the contemporary world of neoliberalised higher education, even if more altruistic claims are sometimes made for them. Universities have learned to identify opportunities for funding and development, whether from government agencies or business actors, and to work with those who provide them.

There was an emphasis on new technologies and new industries in the stories we were told around university/business partnerships, but that shared emphasis masked significant differences in what was possible. So, for example, Glocal in Northville had taken a leading role in the establishment of a successful science park in the city and local stakeholders from the policy community emphasised the university's international reputation as being a key factor behind its success. As one senior local authority manager commented: 'If we didn't have the university, you wouldn't have a successful science park, and the science park collectively (adding all our companies) is the largest employer in the (ward) which is one of the disadvantaged wards'. Transformational in

Rivertown identified itself as being 'business facing' and had been working with the help of funding from regional agencies to develop the city as a digital hub, seeking to build on the university's strengths in information technology in ways that fitted with the local development agency's priorities. Aspirational in Eastside had a more specific focus on providing skills resources for the digital industry, particularly digital gaming, which already had a significant local presence. Regenerational in Metrocity put an emphasis on producing student entrepreneurs who could themselves play roles in creating new businesses and jobs within the area. A senior university manager commented that: 'We see ourselves as making an important contribution to business formation and business growth … (and) supporting people who are setting up in business'. In each case, therefore, universities were engaged in more or less explicit economic development activities but the balance and content differed considerably according to their distinctive regional contexts and institutional base.

In the post-industrial setting of Riverregion, Transformational University emphasises its role, in collaboration with local employers, in addressing a perceived skills deficit in the region, providing a labour force capable of meeting the demands of new industries that have yet to arrive. The case of Metrocity is different, since there are significant local employment opportunities in finance and business services, as well as the creative industries, so Regenerational's commitment to developing the employability skills of local residents has a rather different framing (and a rather different and more multi-cultural population). A local businessman leading a development initiative in the area commented that 'There are many, many more jobs in the borough than there are people to work in those jobs. It's just that the borough doesn't have the skills levels to meet the demand'. Again, Aspirational has a tighter focus (and is a significantly smaller institution than the others) working with local firms to develop biotechnical businesses with the university contributing to the creation of an appropriately skilled workforce. The contrast with Glocal is marked. Glocal is less focused on training the local population and more concerned with attracting outsiders to come to Northville, whether students or other investment partners. Paradoxically, perhaps, its more than local focus and its global ambitions fit well with those of local policy elites in Northville. Alongside various knowledge-based initiatives like those discussed above, the existence of a large student body drawn from across the UK and beyond, has helped to underpin the city's reputation as a cosmopolitan space.

Universities are now major actors in their local economies in their own right, often among the biggest employers, which means they may also be significant drivers of economic change. This finds a particular expression in their role as investors, developers, and businesses. Universities are major property developers and this is powerfully reflected in our cases. Glocal has developed a massive campus on what was previously a relatively deprived part of Northville, and has done so in close collaboration with the city council, effectively creating a new space, shifting existing populations and activities. In that context, global ambition has gone alongside and fostered dramatic local change in material form. More modestly, Aspirational has a 10-year estates strategy to create a city centre campus in Eastside, in which institutional priorities for concentrating provision have come together with local ambitions to regenerate the city centre. In Rivertown, home of Transformational University, a local resident commented that 'the university has taken over the run-down parts of the city and regenerated them',

concentrating development around its central campus. Regenerational University has pursued a particularly active strategy, not only concentrating its activities to larger campuses, but also taking advantage of major government-led regeneration strategies in Metrocity East to access resources and land in doing so. Its new campuses are dominated by iconic buildings, linked into wider property-led development.

One illustration of the contrast between our cases can be found in the ways in which apparently similar activities take on a different meaning in different places. In the case of Glocal University, its commitment to providing a museum and art gallery in Northville is an expression of its status as an institution aspiring to national eminence, while in the case of Transformational, the university's support for a gallery in Rivertown is quite explicitly directed towards looking for ways of using the gallery to drive wider change in the city. In the former case, of course, it is important to recognise the local cultural significance of the museum beyond the university, just as in the latter it is important to acknowledge its significance beyond the locality. The complex interaction between university and place is apparent in both cases. In the case of Transformational, shifting perceptions of place, through the fostering of cultural change, are also intended to feed back into the university's own marketing and recruitment, particularly around media and cultural development. The wider recognition of the university's role was also apparent in the outcome of a household survey conducted on behalf of the research project in areas whose residents were on low incomes. Despite the lack of any significant contact with the university (either in terms of employment or the participation of family members in study), there was a largely positive rating of the university and its value to the city and region.

In all of the cases we considered, the image and reputation of the university was understood by university managers to be intertwined with the image and reputation of the city. Each had consequences for the other, in a process of mutual branding and promotion, reflected in promotional material produced by universities, local governments, and real estate promoters. On the one hand, a high reputation university was sought after by external organisations but, on the other hand, its staff might give low priority to local interests because their emphasis was on positioning themselves effectively within wider networks—often academic networks, but sometimes also business and government networks. It was common to hear from local stakeholders that staff in the less prestigious universities were often the better equipped and motivated to engage effectively with local businesses and organisations.

Transforming people and shaping places

All of the universities on which we focused had relatively disadvantaged communities nearby and all had institutional policies which aimed to benefit them in some way. But policies and impacts differed. As a prestigious university located in a large city, parts of which were socially disadvantaged, Glocal had a policy aim 'to be the UK's most accessible research-intensive university' although its recruitment of local students was low in comparison with that of the other universities in the study and also low in comparison with recruitment by other universities in and around Northville. Glocal invested time and resources in working with local schools, aiming to extend opportunities and raise aspirations of their students, but its recruitment of their students was quite low. The reason was primarily that Glocal's reputation was partly dependent on its

elite characteristics, aiming to recruit 'the best' rather than 'the needy'. It attracted students nationally and, increasingly, internationally. A senior member of a local further education college commented that 'As a city, we have more undergraduates, more learners in higher education, than anywhere in Europe. But the city has the least proportion of its residents in higher education of any city in the UK'.

By contrast, the other three universities each had a much more local recruitment base. Of Aspirational University's students, 62% were drawn from the local region and the university worked with local schools and other organisations to develop skills and raise confidence in students, drawing them into a relationship with the university. The wider challenge of attracting students from beyond the region was to be handled through the development of specialist curriculum as indicated above. Transformational University also worked closely with local schools. There were summer schools and student mentors and high numbers of local students were recruited. As with Glocal, it aimed to be 'aspiration raising' but, unlike Glocal, the aspiration raising activities were linked closely to student recruitment. In the same way as its 'business facing' strategies were mainly focused on supporting the business community of Riverregion, so Transformational's 'widening participation' strategies were targeted on the people of Riverregion. A distinctive feature of Transformational was the close integration of the economic and social dimensions, with large numbers of adult part-time students being up-skilled to meet local labour market needs.

Reflecting its locality in a disadvantaged part of the large prosperous Metrocity, recruitment at Regenerational University 'unashamedly' aimed at widening participation by addressing race and age factors as much, or more, than social class. The university had a community outreach programme, it worked with local students and colleges, it offered an access course, and it had a student ambassadors scheme, all of which was directed towards improving opportunities for local residents, many of whom were from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. As at Transformational and Aspirational, widening participation was linked to enhancing employability and a vocational orientation of much of the university's curriculum, even if the urban context of a global city with a highly multicultural 'local' population was very different.

One of the biggest impacts of universities on the cities in which they are located often arises from the student population attracted to study there (Munro, Turok, & Livingston, 2009). In our cases, however, only one of the institutions (Glocal) drew in a large student population from elsewhere. In their different ways the other institutions had a more local orientation, including a significant number of part-time students. Northville (the city in which Glocal is located) has a reputation as a place with a vibrant club and entertainment culture, and that is one of the claims made in the university's own promotional materials. The student population both benefits from and helps to sustain that culture—as one of the places identified as being a cosmopolitan city. But the project also learned from representatives of a community organisation that the process of studentification had transformed a more traditional working-class area, as private rental for students became a dominant mode, with high levels of activity during term time and what was described as a feeling of 'tumbleweeds' being blown down empty streets in vacation time. The university has worked with the city council to develop a strategy for studentification, seeking to minimise any negative impacts, while enabling what council officers see as positive development activities, but—not

surprisingly—the fundamental objectives of the institution remain meeting and exceeding recruitment targets, since students (both UK and overseas) are a key income source. Impacts on the city are secondary concerns (for discussion of wider policy issues, see Munro & Livingston, 2012).

In several of our project's case studies, most students could be identified as 'local', that is, largely drawn from local populations, but even where the picture is less clear cut, it may be necessary to recognise that the 'local' is not a fixed category. All cities bring together people with connections to other places in ways that help to define them in practice. As temporary residents, students may even play a significant part in this process. Some of them may remain in the city after their graduation and many will retain connections with their university 'place' (Sperlinger, McLellan, & Pettigrew, 2018).

The extent to which the different aspects of each university's engagement with its local community are integrated into clearly articulated institutional strategies is uncertain. It is not surprising in that context that several of our project's universities undertook surveys of their own staff to ascertain the extent of involvement in community and voluntary sector activities. The involvement of senior staff in formal settings (regional and local partnerships, for example) was certainly taken for granted, city or regionally focused research and policy initiatives were set up in several cases, and the rise of 'impact' strategies was reflected in claims made for the relevance of research.

One of those we interviewed suggested that relationships between universities and their cities could be described as a mixture of 'altruism' and 'marketing'. There was some genuine interest and commitment but also a need to bring in money. In several of the university/city collaborations that the project investigated, the external stakeholders complained about the self-interestedness of the university participants, with a dominance of the university's agenda and priorities over those of the wider community. Placed in the larger contexts of national policy changes and priorities for higher education, there is a genuine challenge arising from a perceived lack of policy interest in many of the external relationships that were available to university staff. Staff who were collaborating with local businesses, schools, cultural and political entities often complained that there was neither reward nor recognition of these activities within their university. There were no relevant metrics or league tables, and there was a question of whether the activities would be able to continue (Fransman, 2018).

In conclusion

There is a tendency among those of us who are based within universities to answer any question about the learning city in terms that position us centrally to the process—we are, after all, concerned with the fostering of learning and the knowledge we generate is (at least in our heads) central to the positive development of urban society. But once one acknowledges the extent to which cities may themselves be machines for learning and a wider understanding of learning infrastructure is accepted, then it becomes necessary to take on a more modest perspective, in which the academic community may have a role, but it is better understood as a potentially enabling one, rather than a leading one. The shift from traditional understandings of knowledge production (institutionalised within universities and transmitted from there to the wider world) to what has been identified as Mode 2 knowledge production (as non-hierarchical and

networked through collaboration in and beyond the university) makes this an urgent necessity (Gibbons et al., 1994; Harloe & Perry, 2004; Nowotny, 2003).

Even with what might be called 'actually existing' universities, there is plenty of evidence that universities can make a difference and that they do so across a number of dimensions. These include economic development, image change, aspiration raising, providing opportunity, tackling inequalities and relative disadvantage, active citizenship, and leadership and co-ordination. Reale and Primeri (2015) stress that boundaries are and need to become increasingly blurred in order to capture the changes occurring in the functions, objectives, and scope of higher education and research institutions and their role and relationships with states, markets, professions, and other organisations in today's changing world. While our research confirms that boundaries within and between universities and other organisations are becoming blurred, it is also clear that this is not an easy or linear process.

If one framing of universities relates to their position as agents within globalising neoliberalism, another celebrates their potential as sources of alternative vision—Ron Barnett (2018) identifies their responsibility to the whole earth, celebrating the possibility of 'the ecological university', while Simon Marginson (2004a) points to the importance of 'global public goods'. Similar arguments emerge from any consideration of universities in place. Our cases highlight the ways in which universities operate in uncertain and apparently contradictory ways. As Marginson (2004b, p. 162) notes, they can be understood as 'self-serving corporations' in an emergent and self-renewing neoliberal settlement, and may also be called on to play a significant role in underpinning forms of regional and urban competitiveness. But he goes on to summarise a range of other roles played by universities in practice, perhaps most important as a 'site of political conflict and resolution' as well as still being 'a privileged site of scientific imagination'. The university, he confirms, is a 'discourse sticky' institution, around which a range of possibilities continue to circle. These tensions were evident in the four case studies of our project, where external pressures on institutions to conform to current policy drivers and consumer demand could lead to an emphasis on short-term compliance at the expense of longer-term development and innovation.

The relationships between the universities and the cities on which we focused were multiple and uncertain, emphasising the tensions within universities as institutions as well as the significance of place in shaping what was possible. It was hard to ignore the formal positioning articulated by strategy documents and in interviews with senior managers. In each case, there was a clear institutional requirement to operate effectively within the emergent educational market place, with an emphasis on student recruitment and other sources of income, including research where appropriate. How this played out in practice was highly dependent on the position of the university within competitive hierarchies—reflected, for example, in the different ways of imagining aspiration raising in local schools, whether as a source of students or as a form of corporate social responsibility. And, of course, the emphasis on research and sources of funding for research also varied significantly, with some more focused on research council income and others on more policy focused and often localised funding.

Alongside these fundamental imperatives there was also always a stated commitment to some forms of local engagement, particularly around knowledge and innovation. The

nature of this varied by institution and place, and the interaction between the two shaped what was possible. In that sense the universities contributed to building forms of urban competitiveness, whether through large-scale partnerships (like those associated with Glocal) or more specific and detailed forms of partnership in the other cases. In each case, too, it is important to note that institutional commitment was also usually justified in terms that fed back into stated business priorities—whether in terms of building student numbers through the identification of skills needs, in terms of image building or branding or (very often) in terms of access to funding. In each case, the universities were actively engaged with local and regional agencies through their various plans for real estate development—in three of our cases, they had received support for campus development.

But universities cannot simply be understood through their business plans and instrumental engagement, even if access to resources and funding is often a better guide to their behaviour than the mission statements that each has adopted. The most significant aspects of their relationships to place, to making up the cities in which they are located, cannot be reduced to policy statements of one sort or another. This is perhaps clearest in the ways that students become intertwined with local residents and in the local economy in positive and sometimes less positive ways, helping to define how people live in and experience cities. It may still be premature to celebrate the possibilities identified by May and Perry (2017) in their call for universities to provide a space within which participative futures may be explored in the search to develop shared urban futures, but their evocation of a research model that moves beyond institutional boundaries is a powerful one that has echoes in the practice of research in several of our cases.

And since universities, too, cannot be understood as expressions of some fundamental essence of 'universityness', not only will they play different roles in various urban contexts, but those roles will be shaped by their own strategic priorities and perceptions. Every higher education institution cannot be a civic university, even if there are aspects of the 'civic' on which each might draw (Goddard, 2018; Goddard, Hazelkorn, Kempton, & Vallance, 2016). There are always different balances between internal and external perspectives, between teaching, research, and broader knowledge transfer roles, and in the nature of the impacts on the city, on who benefits, and on the internal/external emphasis of each university's work (see Addie et al., 2015 for a review of similar issues in a Canadian context). Universities both reflect the current and historic features of their city and act to shape its futures, and their own. (Cochrane & Williams, 2013)

There is no simple category of 'university', just as there is no universal category of 'city' or 'place'. Such a statement may not seem controversial, but taking it seriously has significant implications. Instead of dealing in generalities, it requires us to look more closely at the intersecting and overlapping relationships between universities and the places in which they are located. This paper is intended as a step in that process. Neoliberal globalisation may provide a context, but it is through the place-specific practices of the university in the city that they are given their rather more uncertain and ambiguous meanings, generating alternative possibilities as well as fatalistic outcomes. Today's universities are businesses, but they also remain universities. The achievement of success in both is their biggest challenge.

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