

Why the time is right for a civic turn

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Why the time is right for a civic turn

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In April 2022, two months after Russian armed forces blasted their way into Ukraine, a professor at the Kyiv School of Economics shone a spotlight on a dilemma facing universities globally: are they there to make societies wealthier, or better? And if the latter, what does ‘better’ look like?

Inna Sovsun, a Ukrainian MP who was deputy education minister between 2014 and 2016, told a *Times Higher Education* conference in Stockholm that the role of universities was to make societies ‘more open, more inclusive, and more tolerant and more caring about each other’ (Morgan, 2022). She claimed research developed at German and French universities had helped Russia develop military capabilities: while the research had made those institutions better off, had it made society better?

Professor Sovsun’s intervention was a visceral response to a humanitarian, political and ethical crisis. But it reflected and underlined a more widespread heart-searching in and around higher education. If universities are a public good, who and what are they good for? Are they an expensive irrelevance at a time of global crisis – a crisis that extends far beyond the Ukraine conflict to include rising costs of living, growing wealth disparities, long-term impacts of Covid-19, food insecurity, climate change and drastic biodiversity loss? Higher education is not only seeking to define its contribution in an era of crisis. Increasingly it is also adopting a defensive stance in which its own existence is deemed to require explanation and justification to governments and publics in an era in which trust in elites, experts and institutions has been badly eroded. Part of this stance has involved universities searching for a convincing and engaging mission that connects them to the communities and places they serve.

This book examines and explores an emergent narrative that promises to fulfil such a role for many institutions: the tradition of the civic university. Its overarching argument is that, given the right resources and commitment, a civic orientation has the potential to produce deeper, broader and more lasting benefits for communities than we have seen in recent decades. During this time universities have increasingly come to look and behave like private corporations, serving ‘customers’ in students and research partners who may have only the most tangential connection to the locality. In the UK in particular, the idea of the civic university offers a driving logic that can frame strategies and decisions across all the domains in which universities are active, from learning and teaching to economic, environmental and wellbeing impacts within the communities that universities serve. This

requires a searching analysis of who universities are good *for* in addition to what they are good *at*.

This book stems from and builds on work undertaken by the editors with the Civic Universities Network in 2020-21. Working with senior university leaders, we prototyped a framework to assess civic impact. The Civic Impact Framework¹ - which we published in its ‘beta’ form for discussion in 2021 – is designed to enable universities and their partners to understand the difference they are making and challenge themselves to do better. It identifies seven domains through which universities may have civic impacts (Table 1) and stresses the importance of understanding the geography over which universities may seek to have such impacts. Importantly, rather than offering a unified set of metrics to measure impact, the framework emphasises institutional reflection and learning by adopting a ‘maturity matrix’ model for understanding strategic progress and encouraging peer learning. We return to the framework and how it may be applied later in this chapter.

Table 1. The seven domains of civic impact

Social impact	How do we want our university to bridge and reduce social divides and improve the quality of life of our communities, including the most disadvantaged? How can our university help our places move from ‘functioning’ to ‘flourishing’? What part can our students play in this?
Environment, climate and biodiversity	How could our university play a leading role in mitigating and adapting to climate change, reversing biodiversity loss, and educating students for sustainability? How will it influence environmental behaviours throughout our city or region?
Health and wellbeing	How does our institution support the health and wellbeing of our localities and communities? What does a flourishing community look like to us?
Our cultural contribution	How does our university celebrate and enrich the cultural life of our localities and communities? How do we create vibrant, creative and playful places?
Economic impact	How could our university’s work create more prosperous places and address and reduce economic inequality? What impacts is it having now? Can we articulate and promote a coherent vision of a flourishing local economy in partnership with local stakeholders?
Estates, facilities and placemaking	How can our facilities be used for the benefit of the whole community? Do all members of the community feel welcome? How do our facilities set the standard for placemaking and sustainability in our city or region? How can our digital infrastructure benefit our communities?
Institutional strategy and leadership	How will top-level governance and strategies at our institution reflect our civic commitment to ensure we make the difference we want? Which partners are we working with and to what ends, and what are their priorities? What would it look like if our civic priorities were embedded throughout our core activities of teaching, learning and research?

¹ <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/resources/civic-impact-framework/>

Source: Dobson, J. and Ferrari, E. (2021) *A framework for civic impact: a way to assess universities' activities and progress*. Sheffield: Civic Universities Network. Available at <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Civic-Activity-Framework.pdf>.

This edited collection extends the initial work that the Civic Impact Framework represents to offer a broader perspective, with expert contributors exploring and teasing out just what it might mean to be civic in current circumstances. While the book's structure broadly echoes the domains of impact identified in the framework, it uses this scaffolding to foreground wider challenges, concerns and opportunities for higher education in the 21st century.

Why now? Higher education under scrutiny

Universities in the UK have faced a torrent of criticism in recent years. Some of it has played on current 'culture wars', often imported from public discourse in the United States, in which liberal universities are depicted as standard-bearers for 'wokeness'. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, which is working its way through Parliament at the time of writing, is seen as an example of government entering this particular fray, sometimes accompanied by veiled threats to reconsider the funding of institutions that sign up to benchmarking schemes such as the Race Equality Charter².

Of greater long-term concern, however, is the argument that universities are not delivering skills and opportunities for the people who most need them. The commodification of higher education through the introduction of fees and loans, especially in England, has shifted the relationship between students and their lecturers: students are seen, and often see themselves, as customers who have bought a product designed to meet a particular consumer need (a degree and access to a well-paid career). If graduates do not enter the labour market at the expected level, they – and the governments that oversee higher education policy – hold the universities responsible.

The need to attract and retain 'customers' – especially at postgraduate level – has created continuing tensions between income generation and sustaining academic excellence, and has eroded the standing of humanities degrees once viewed as hallmarks of a liberal education. Many universities have invested in their estates and courses as a marketing exercise, wooing students with shiny state-of-the-art buildings and satellite campuses. In the words of the Civic University Commission (UPP Foundation, 2019):

'...as universities have become magnets for global students and massive research programmes, their connection to their place ... can sometimes be called into question: how are the people in a place benefiting from the university success story?'

² See <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter>

The commission goes on to note that this disconnection from their localities leaves universities ‘with fewer friends at a time of unprecedented challenge’. Most recently, a cap on maximum fees in England and proposals for ‘minimum eligibility requirements’ suggests that a university education is no longer perceived within government as a privileged pathway into the labour market. Having bought into the principles of market competition, universities are now being accused of failing to deliver public goods. The traditional university experience – delivered within large, broad-based campus-focused institutions – is also increasingly competing within a more fragmented, diversified and specialised set of educational and vocational marketplaces which includes further education colleges, modern apprenticeships, distance learning (delivered both by traditional and new entrants), smaller private universities, and an explosion of online content (both free and paid-for) on platforms like Coursera and Udemy.

So the universities that for decades rode a wave of public policy geared to increasing participation in higher education are now having their status called into question. This context has created fertile ground for a new debate on universities’ ‘civic mission’, but also risks reducing that mission to an exercise in self-justification.

Restoring the vision: from anchor institutions to civic mission

The notion of the civic university has a long history, stretching back to the land-grant universities of the US established under the Morrill Act of 1852, and the ‘redbrick’ universities that sprouted in manufacturing cities in the UK in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In both cases there was an understanding that these new institutions would directly contribute to the economic, intellectual and social development of their localities.

While there has always been a strong economic narrative to discourses of the civic in higher education, this has come to the fore in recent decades. The Dearing Report (1997, p. 90), for example, viewed universities as central to a ‘learning society’, noting that they ‘make a significant economic contribution simply by their existence in a locality, whether or not they adopt an explicit mission to generate local or regional economic activity or to play a part in the cultural life of their locality or region’. This role has often been framed in terms of a ‘third mission’ of economic development under the label of the ‘entrepreneurial university’ (Vorley and Nelles, 2008).

The start of the 21st century has seen a flurry of intellectual activity around the idea of the civic university. There has been a recognition that universities have significant impacts within their localities: they are often among the largest employers in an area, among the biggest holders of real estate, and have make a difference to local prosperity through their spending and effects on housing markets. In the United States, the Obama administration picked up the idea of universities as ‘anchor institutions’ (Taylor and Luter, 2013), supporting the work of the Anchor Institutions Task Force. Reflecting on the value of universities to place-based leadership, Robin Hambleton notes that

‘The American public university has, from the outset, aimed to fuse scholarly inspiration with a strong commitment to practical implementation. This value stance has advanced the quality of American scholarship, while also benefitting the cities where these universities are located’ (Hambleton, 2020, pp. 123-4) while also observing that ‘British universities have, until recently, been relatively detached from their surroundings’ (*ibid.*, p. 124).

This tradition has spawned much of the recent thinking in the US and beyond around ‘community wealth building’ – the promotion of shared prosperity ‘through the reconfiguration of institutions and local economies on the basis of greater democratic ownership, participation, and control’ (Democracy Collaborative, 2020). In the UK, fresh debate on universities’ civic role has been stimulated through the work of academic leaders such as John Goddard at the University of Newcastle (Goddard and Vallance, 2013), again focusing especially on how universities can support local and regional economies. Goddard and Kempton (2016, p.2) envisage mutually beneficial economic and social relationships between universities and the communities they serve:

‘The civic university can be characterised by its ability to integrate its teaching, research and engagement with the outside world in such a way that each enhances the other without diminishing their quality. Research has socio-economic impact designed in from the start and teaching has a strong community involvement with the long term objective of widening participation in higher education and producing well rounded citizens as graduates.’

Building on this work, the Civic University Commission describes a civic university as having ‘a clear strategy, rooted in analysis, which explains what, why and how its activity adds up to a civic role’. While it doesn’t impose a definition, leaving this to individual universities to devise according to their circumstances, it does suggest there should be four key tests of a civic university:

- A **public test**, covering participation, understanding of local needs and public pride in the institution
- A **place test**, covering alignment with local labour markets and serving diverse local populations
- A **strategic test**, covering universities’ analysis of local needs, links with local leadership and definition of its geographies of interest
- An **impact test**, covering both how universities achieve impacts through relationships with other institutions, and how they measure the effects of their work

In practice, there will be many overlaps between these elements.

Any definition or test runs the risk of excluding institutions that do not fit a mould, or offering validation to activities that may be little more than token gestures. The descriptions that exist are largely variations on a theme of what ‘good’ looks like. Goddard et al. (2016), for example, identify seven characteristics of a civic university: a sense of purpose; active engagement with the wider world; a holistic approach to engagement; a strong sense of place; investment in impact beyond the academy; transparency and accountability; and

innovative methods of communicating with publics and stakeholders. One may justifiably ask why these descriptors were advanced and not others; and what is it about these that is specifically civic rather than a generic quality associated with effective management and public engagement in a place-based institution.

There is no escaping the fact that ‘civic’ is a normative concept, with an implicit political economy baked-in to the idea as we discuss in the next section. Arguably this opens up as many debates as it seeks to capture. Neither should we fail to notice that most descriptions of ‘civic’ have been constructed within the academy. Little of the literature seeks to explore how localities and communities might define civic from their perspectives, or whose perspectives are given prominence and why; Gratton and Jones, in their contribution in Chapter 7, pick up this baton as university leaders.

There is thus a tension at the heart of the civic university agenda. Is ‘civic’ simply a positioning and orientation fashioned by universities to explain or justify their role, or a set of behaviours co-designed between universities and the wider community? And who constitutes the ‘community’ for each institution?

For all the work that has been done on developing ideas of civic universities, the concept continues to raise as many questions as answers. But that is to be welcomed. Far from being a shibboleth to divide insiders from outsiders, ‘civic’ at its best is a catalyst for strategy, engagement, and action. It offers an opportunity for fresh thinking about place and purpose, and for entering constructively into the contests that such thinking will inevitably stimulate.

Place and purpose: the current challenge and opportunity

The notion of civic implies a polity within which the common good transcends the advancement of individuals. It attaches worth to the collective, often in institutionalised form (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). Benefits are valued insofar as they accrue to and across communities. This challenges the individualistic orientation of academia, where value is often perceived as the aggregation of individual student achievements and outcomes and reduced to crude economic indicators, such as average graduate salaries or the monetisation of knowledge transfer. A civic university, by implication, holds itself to account according to its contribution to the collective good (which can include the earning power of graduates, but also much more that cannot be measured simply in market terms).

This requires a judgement about where the collective is situated (a spatial orientation) and about whose needs are prioritised within that collective (a purposive orientation).

Both questions are tricky, although the place issue is perhaps more straightforward. Most universities have historic connections with a city or locality: in the UK, these are usually enshrined in the institution’s name and identity. British universities are very much *of* particular places, even it is not always clear that they are *for* those places. However, these place connections have been progressively weakened. Undergraduate recruitment has been *into* the university’s location rather than *from* it more often than not; at postgraduate level,

universities compete in a global market and rely on international students as a key source of income. As their reach has expanded, universities have opened satellite campuses both within the UK and internationally. A student can study at the University of Nottingham at its campus in Ningbo, China, or at Glasgow Caledonian University's postgraduate campus in Shoreditch, east London. But when the University of Nottingham considers its civic role its focus is on the city of Nottingham, not Ningbo (although this volume also highlights some unexpected spatial relationships: between Coventry and Scarborough in Chapter 5, or Central St Martins in London and Dalby Forest in North Yorkshire in Chapter 8).

This question of where universities locate their civic identity and activity has been inflected by a new parochialism in British politics (Vail, 2021), encapsulated by the Brexit referendum in 2016 and an anti-urban rhetoric in England in which 'towns', rather than cities, are for the first time in decades the focus of political attention. Anti-urban can also sometimes embrace anti-intellectual: politicians (generally university-educated) have maintained a background rumble of anti-expert rhetoric and adopted populist tones pitched to resonate with working-class voters whose communities and industries have been displaced in the globalist, capitalist project of (re)making the city. Universities that once considered themselves a fount of policy expertise for political leaders have found themselves sidelined, and universities that consider themselves global players are having to reconsider what 'local' might mean to them.

The 'local' will inevitably vary. For the University of the Highlands and Islands, the scale of operation is necessarily huge and sparsely populated. Queen Mary University of London, by contrast, despite its international profile, is localised within a packed corner of London's East End. History, campus locations and partnerships all tug at the boundaries of place, teasing them in different directions.

Partnerships can often be a defining factor. In the UK, the local authority may provide the most obvious scale of engagement between the university and the public. It is through the local authority that citizens exercise their local democratic rights and experience many public services. The democratic mandate of local authorities gives them a legitimacy as the collective voice of citizens within their boundaries: they embody the civic in ways that universities, as currently configured within the UK, cannot do through their governance arrangements and organisational status.

The local authority, though, is often not coterminous with urban settlements: a university may be active in only a small pocket of a local authority's area, or a local authority may cover only part of a university's 'catchment' (indeed, for leading research-intensive universities 'catchment' is probably more accurately a social rather than spatial concept). However, the local authority offers a scale at which university leaders can engage with their peers in local government at a strategic level, at least within the UK context. But frequently a local authority – Leeds or Birmingham, for example – will host several universities. In the worst case, 'civic' can then become a source of potential competition between institutions and risks being reduced to a branding exercise.

While place presents challenges of how and where to draw spatial boundaries, ‘purpose’ challenges the direction of travel. To what end do universities see themselves as civic? Historically, discussion has focused on universities’ economic impacts. These are often couched in terms of support for business and enterprise, especially at a regional scale. Benneworth (2019) argues: ‘Universities’ main role is as a connection point to global knowledge resources in ways that make that knowledge more easily available to local partners.’ Others see economic impacts more in terms of direct employment and supporting local supply chains through procurement (Devins et al., 2017; Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2019).

Alongside support for business, there is a growing view that universities have a specific mission to raise attainment and skills within their local populations. The Civic University Commission asserts that ‘while civic agreements must be decided locally, we would be surprised if adult education did not form a core plank of the majority of agreements and make up one of the biggest shifts in university behaviour.’ This may include contributing to areas of skill shortage or supporting key workforce groups such as healthcare staff (Frostick, 2016).

But there is also recognition that the civic mission may be put into effect through contributions to local regeneration and public engagement (as highlighted by Research England’s emerging Knowledge Exchange Framework); cultural input (Riviezzo et al., 2019), strategic foresight (Goddard, 2018) and place-based leadership (Hambleton, 2018). This public engagement work can take a wide variety of forms, including festivals and cultural events, support for neighbourhood-based initiatives in disadvantaged communities, and engagement activities undertaken during the course of research projects.

There are questions over the impact these activities have beyond the realm of those who are already engaged with higher education institutions, including isolated or minoritised communities. Recent research commissioned by the UPP Foundation (2020) highlights the limitations of this engagement: its study of post-industrial towns found that one third of respondents had never visited their local university, even though more than half (59%) believed universities should play a greater role in the local economy. There is currently no consensus about what combination or balance of activities distinguishes the ‘civic university’ from one that is simply fulfilling its core tertiary education role. The UPP Foundation report recommended that universities should focus in particular on supporting town centre regeneration; jobs and economic localism; local educational attainment; local innovation and R&D; and the NHS.

Civic universities, though, need to do more than simply attach their own tag to such lists of current political priorities if they are to become – in the UPP Foundation’s words – ‘truly civic.’ In the United States, this has been expressed as a ‘larger purpose ... to play a vital role in the building of a better, more democratic, equitable and just society’ (Taylor and Luter, 2013).

This civic mission could dovetail with a number of emerging agendas in the UK. Nationally, the concern with ‘levelling up’ articulated since the 2019 General Election and in the Levelling Up White Paper (HM Government, 2022) reflects a recognition that some places have been ‘left behind’ and marginalised in terms of opportunities and economic benefits. While the Westminster government has not acknowledged its own role in creating and aggravating the conditions it now proclaims a need to reverse, its recognition of the persistent inequalities facing many communities is welcome and opens some space for discussion of causes and potential remedies. The White Paper, for the first time since the Blair era of the late 1990s and early 2000s, calls for coordinated action to address disadvantage across a range of policy domains, with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill promising to extend local government devolution to all areas of England and impose a legal duty on government departments to demonstrate progress towards 12 levelling up ‘missions’.

At a local level, there is increasing interest in emerging frameworks for thinking about local economic development. The community wealth-building agenda, pioneered in the UK through the work of Preston City Council, seeks to channel local institutional spending and strategy to support local economies and communities, retaining wealth within localities (Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2019). Organisations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have advanced arguments for ‘inclusive growth’ that spreads the benefits of economic success more evenly, both socially and spatially (RSA, 2017). Kate Raworth’s notion of ‘doughnut economics’ (Raworth, 2020) highlights the need to conceptualise prosperity in terms of thriving while also supporting social and ecological goals, living within the ‘doughnut’ of sustainable consumption, an approach that has been trialled in Amsterdam. In such a context, the idea of civic universities can become much more than simply a protective cover for higher education institutions that now see themselves as under threat: instead, it can be part of a wider movement for economic and social change.

Framing civic action

Within this context, a way of framing civic activity is needed that is flexible enough to cover the wide range of activities and circumstances across the higher education sector, while being rigorous enough to act as a robust self-assessment tool and a stimulus for further action. This challenge informed the authors’ work in 2020/21 to develop a framework for civic impact (Dobson and Ferrari, 2021a). Much of the context and background for this work is detailed in a paper on ‘capturing and enhancing the impact of the civic university’ (Dobson and Ferrari, 2021b) and need not be repeated here.

It is worth reiterating the rationale for this work, though. First, a civic impact framework can help universities to build on what they have done so far and shows them what evidence they need to gather to inform better practice – ideally through a system of peer review rather

than self-assessment alone. Second, it provides a way of sharing and comparing between universities, allowing comparisons between different domains of activity.

What the framework does not set out to do is to propose another university ranking system based on quantitative metrics. Such a move risks reducing civic activity to a public relations exercise, prioritising box-ticking over genuine reflection and engagement. This is not to deny the genuine need for university and civic leaders to understand their relative position in relation to sensibly constructed peer groups and comparators; but to select particular metrics to represent civic activity privileges what is measurable and excludes what may be messier but of more value to the communities universities serve. The attitudes and behaviours of senior university leaders, for example, including their willingness to listen to community voices and openness to ideas from beyond the campus, are crucial to the success of civic activity but impossible to capture adequately in a simple metric.

The civic framework was developed through a process of workshopping with members of the Civic University Network, sense-checking the domains we identified and the questions we were posing. The outcome is a tool that universities can use to identify, analyse, coordinate and improve their civic activities. It is not the same as a Civic University Agreement, which sets out priorities for civic action that have (usually) been identified in partnership with local institutions and community representatives, but it can be used as part of the development of such agreements and to test how effective they are in practice. The framework does not seek to impose a new set of obligations or a particular model, but instead asks how universities can build the wellbeing of their communities through their everyday activities and core business of learning, teaching and research.

Domains of civic action

The framework identifies seven domains of universities' civic commitment – the core areas in which universities can and do affect their places and communities. These are: social impact; environment, climate and biodiversity; health and wellbeing; culture; economic impact; estates, facilities and placemaking; and institutional strategy and leadership. In each of these domains, attention should be paid to how a university's core work of teaching and research helps to further its civic ambitions.

The framework also identifies six phases of progress. These start with mapping what is happening already, moving on to partnering with other organisations and stakeholders; agreeing priorities and actions; resourcing the agreed activities; evaluating how well they are working; and applying the learning from that evaluation process. Progress is conceptualised as cyclical rather than linear: 'civic' is not a goal to be achieved but a mode of existence that should be regularly reviewed and adapted as circumstances change (Figure 1).

The domains and phases emerged from a review of previous literature, examination of other relevant initiatives (such as the Knowledge Exchange Framework in the UK) and from discussions within the Civic University Network and with its partners.

Figure 1: Domains of civic activity and progress cycle

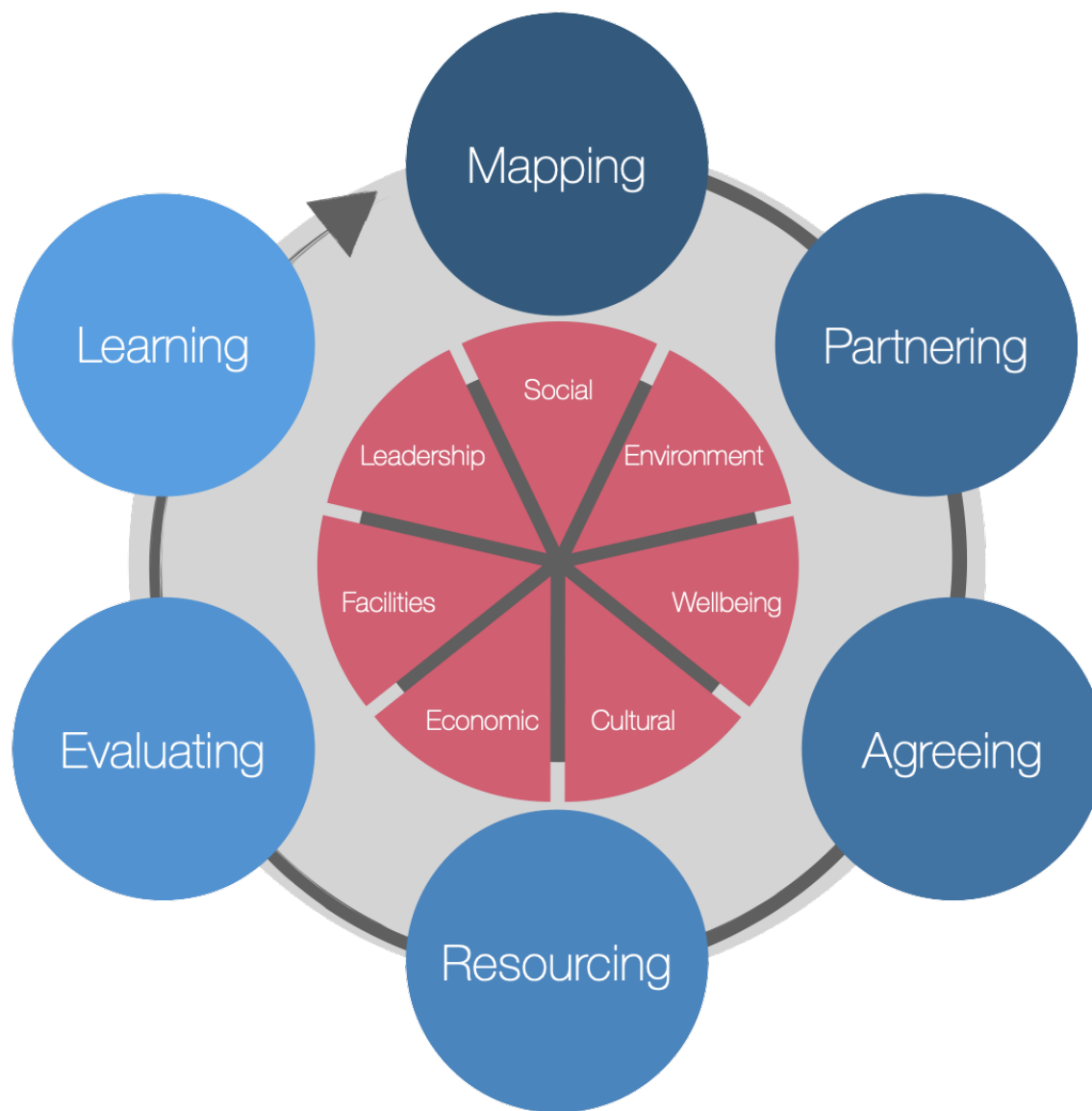


Table 2 provides an illustrative summary of the domains of activity and progress, with examples of overarching questions to be addressed in each phase and potential indicators. It outlines how universities can begin to develop a comprehensive approach to their civic activities, generating a whole-place and whole-system approach. We would expect universities to work across these domains simultaneously as well as sequentially, informed by their relationships with local partners.

In practical terms, this framework is envisaged as a discussion-starter and checklist that can be applied across a range of institutional activities, either within one domain or all together.

Table 2: The Civic Framework in a nutshell

Progress levels	1 Mapping: where are we now?	2 Partnering: where do we want to go, and with whom?	3 Agreeing: who will do what, and when?	4 Resourcing: how are activities supported?	5 Evaluating: how are we doing?	6 Learning: What will we change, and how?
Domains	Core questions and potential indicators					
Social impact	Key questions: How do we want our university to bridge and reduce social divides and improve the quality of life of our communities, including the most disadvantaged? How can our university help our places move from 'functioning' to 'flourishing'? What part can our students play in this?					
	We know how well our workforce and student intake reflects local populations, and the extent of our community and public engagement.	We are working with partners to create a shared vision of a flourishing society, with full involvement of all our communities.	Within our own institution, we have action plans for change in line with our shared priorities.	We have set aside resources to support our public engagement and can show how this will benefit marginalised and excluded groups.	We are measuring our social impact and we have worked with local communities to make sure our indicators are meaningful to them.	We capture and share learning across our university and with key partners, and identify areas for improvement.
Environment, climate and biodiversity	Key questions: How could our university play a leading role in mitigating and adapting to climate change, reversing biodiversity loss, and educating students for sustainability? How will it influence environmental behaviours throughout our city or region?					
	We can fully account for our carbon emissions and we measure progress on carbon reduction. We have done an environmental and biodiversity audit of our estate. We know what we waste.	We engage with local partners to create a shared vision of a sustainable locality and university. We are working with our suppliers, staff and students to improve our environmental impacts.	We have agreed priority targets for improvement and consulted our partners and the wider community on their needs and aspirations.	We have identified resources to support our environmental ambitions. We support staff and students in modelling the environmental behaviours we want to encourage (such as active travel).	We measure the wider environmental footprint of the university within and beyond our locality. We hold ourselves to account by publicising our performance and inviting suggestions for improvement.	We are implementing education for sustainable development across the curriculum. We share our learning with peers and use our academic expertise to support our partners in improving our local places.
Health and wellbeing	Key questions: How does our institution support the health and wellbeing of our localities and communities? What does a flourishing community look like to us?					
	We are aware of the health characteristics of our communities, staff and students, and know how our activities impact on them.	We partner with healthcare organisations and communities to promote local wellbeing.	We have targets for beneficial impact on our communities' wellbeing and we are working with partners to take appropriate action.	We have identified resources to support our communities' wellbeing. We take time to listen and value communities' knowledge and experience.	Our priorities are informed by local communities, public health teams and healthcare organisations. We know what we can do differently and what impact it can make.	We are listening to our communities to understand what wellbeing means for them and adjusting our activities and priorities in response.
Our cultural contribution	Key questions: How does our university celebrate and enrich the cultural life of our localities and communities? How do we create vibrant, creative and playful places?					
	We know what contribution we	We engage with a wide range of	We have identified	We promote and fund events	We have asked our	We actively consider how

	make to local cultural life. We have mapped this against local demographics and identified gaps and opportunities.	local cultural organisations. We ensure local communities are welcomed and included in our events and activities.	priorities for support and know which communities we need to work with more (including our own staff and students).	and activities that enrich and celebrate the cultural life of our localities, and support staff and students to do this.	communities what they think of the activities we support and have listened to their views.	our activities can be better. In doing so we value and learn from the expertise and knowledge within our localities.
Economic impact	Key questions: How could our university's work create more prosperous places and address and reduce economic inequality? What impacts is it having now? Can we articulate and promote a coherent vision of a flourishing local economy in partnership with local stakeholders?					
	We know our economic footprint and our impact on local communities and the lives of our learners.	We have joint economic strategies with local partners, which reflect our shared priorities.	We have agreed indicators of progress, with achievable targets for change.	We are using our employment and spending power to support our local economy and people.	We have agreed economic impact targets and we are measuring progress on reducing inequalities.	We review our impacts with key partners, including the groups most affected by inequalities.
Estates, facilities and placemaking	Key questions: How can our facilities be used for the benefit of the whole community? Do all members of the community feel welcome? How do our facilities set the standard for placemaking and sustainability in our city or region? How can our digital infrastructure benefit our communities?					
	We have agreed design, quality, environmental and accessibility standards and benchmark our estates management against the best in our class. We know who uses our buildings and spaces, how and when.	We work with local communities and planning authorities to ensure our estates meet their needs and aspirations. We are open and transparent in our plans and developments.	We work with civic partners to ensure our estates management supports our civic ambitions. We have agreed priorities for action and improvement.	Our design, procurement, maintenance and management practices support an open and inclusive attitude and we are making our estate suitable for community uses as well as for our staff and students.	We work with peer organisations to critique and improve our practices. We invite local communities to tell us how we can do better.	We review the use and development of our estates to ensure they support our civic mission.
Institutional strategy and leadership	Key questions: How will top-level governance and strategies at our institution reflect our civic commitment to ensure we make the difference we want? Which partners are we working with and to what ends, and what are their priorities? What would it look like if our civic priorities were embedded throughout our core activities of teaching, learning and research?					
	We have drafted, consulted on and approved a Civic University Agreement.	We know the number, remit and make-up of the partnerships we're involved in.	We have committed to SMART targets within civic strategies and agreements.	We have identified resources to support the civic agenda.	We regularly monitor and evaluate the effects of our civic strategies, and review them with peers.	Our senior staff are involved in civic peer networks or communities of practice.

Overview of chapters

In this book we have used the framework as a conversation-starter with our co-authors, and invited them to respond, each starting with one of the domains of civic action but using

it as a platform to develop their own ideas and share their experiences. We then conclude with further thoughts on how the civic agenda could help to take the work of higher education forward at a time of multiple global and local challenges – bringing civic impact to life by pushing the sector and universities individually to challenge and reinvent themselves for their places and communities.

In Chapter 2, Jonathan Slater (former permanent secretary at the Department of Education) and Farah Hussain (a local councillor in London), both affiliated to Queen Mary University of London, focus on the implications of the civic agenda for university leadership and for the higher education sector more broadly. Drawing on their policy and political experience, they outline what it could mean to have a civic focus across an entire institution, and address the current gap between universities' rhetoric on civic impact (as expressed in their civic university agreements) and their achievements.

Chapter 3 turns the spotlight onto universities' social impacts. Institutions often celebrate the social benefits they bring to communities, but it is rarer for them to ask their communities how effectively they think the university is contributing to their wellbeing. Here Sue Jarvis, co-director of the Heseltine Institute at the University of Liverpool, draws on examples both from the University of Liverpool and from local government to show how institutions can become more responsive to the resources, aspirations, needs and inequalities within their localities while drawing on their innate assets.

We then address the question of universities' climate and environmental impacts and ask whether they can act as leaders of a just transition to a 'net zero' economy and society. Kirstie O'Neill, lecturer in environmental geography at the University of Cardiff, considers how universities can reorient their work to put climate impacts at the heart of their civic role, setting the standard within their communities and encouraging others to take action. This chapter is both an assessment of the opportunity and a critique of universities' frequent failure to take meaningful action in the context of climate crisis.

In Chapter 5 we consider how universities can begin to take health and wellbeing seriously, not only among their own staff and students, but across the communities they serve. Liz Mear, managing director of Leeds Academic Health Partnership until 2021, and Paul Johnstone, Public Health England's former national director for regions and places and visiting professor at Leeds Beckett University, outline how universities can work more closely with healthcare institutions to tackle entrenched health inequalities within the localities they serve and directly improve the health of their communities.

The next chapter considers universities' cultural impacts. Universities are major investors in culture, training and teaching the cultural leaders of tomorrow. But they can also offer platforms to celebrate their communities' cultural achievements and amplify the cultures of diverse communities in their localities. Amanda Crawley Jackson, associate dean for knowledge exchange at the University of the Arts London, and Chris Baker, knowledge exchange policy and economic development manager at Sheffield Hallam University, draw on perspectives from practice and academic leadership to highlight the opportunities for

more connected equitable and inventive cultural collaborations, informed by grassroots rather than panoptical perspectives.

Chapter 7 turns to questions of economic development. While these have traditionally been at the heart of the civic and ‘anchor institution’ agendas, we see economic impacts as intertwined with every other element of a university’s work. Universities are major investors in their localities – not only through their campus developments and by attracting students, but by working with their communities to address issues of poverty and inequality. In this chapter Nicola Gratton and Martin Jones, associate professor of civic and community engagement and vice-chancellor respectively at the University of Staffordshire, share their experience of how universities can work with communities affected by multiple disadvantages and act positively to raise community voices and improve local people’s life chances.

Another way universities affect their communities, often without being fully aware of it, is through their physical footprint within places. Campuses and facilities are the most visible symbols of these effects, but universities also shape the use of buildings and spaces in the wider urban milieu – creating ‘interface sites’ in which power is manifest, sometimes progressively but not always so. In addressing the question of placemaking in Chapter 8, architects and academics Julia Udall and Anna Wakeford Holder illustrate how universities can develop an imaginative and inclusive agenda for creating places that nurture both human and more-than-human communities.

Finally, in Chapter 9, we return to the overarching question of what is at stake as universities develop their civic engagement. Reflecting on universities’ civic engagement to date, we argue that universities need to become champions of their localities, acting beyond their immediate institutional interests to make a long-term difference to the prospects of their places. This demands a deeply reflective approach, which looks critically into and beyond academia, holding the questions of the relevance and purpose of universities constantly to the fore.

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