SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND LOCALLY-CONNECTED UNIVERSITIES

EXPLORING INSTITUTIONS' SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEIR LOCAL PLACE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evidence review explores what is known about universities' social impact, and the ways in which they can contribute (and are contributing) to arts and cultural scenes in their own communities. The civic university agenda and the Civic Impact Framework (Civic University Network, n.d.), highlight the scope for universities to do so in their local place and with local people.

While this evidence review finds a growing body of evidence on engagement between universities and their local communities, evaluations and evidence of the resulting impact on those involved, as well as broader outcomes, are often missing. Systematic evaluations and further research are necessary to increase understanding of the broader, and harder to quantify, social impacts of civic engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, many universities saw themselves as "increasingly global first, national second, and local third" (UPP Foundation, 2019, p.7). However, as places around the UK face increasingly complex social challenges – from entrenched inequalities and the cost-of-living crisis to the impact of Brexit – the social role of universities in their local places is becoming more important. This is partly due to pressure from government and, to some extent, from the public, for universities to demonstrate their value and relevance, and to make a positive impact, especially locally.

In playing a more active 'civic role', universities can realise their potential (and some would argue duty) to address social, economic, and environmental challenges on their doorstep, as well as acting as 'placemakers', which, in this evidence review, means an institution contributing to flourishing and creative places.

Given the UK's industrial strategy and government ambitions to address regional inequality, paired with a move towards greater devolution, universities can leverage their role as employers, and as land and property owners, to help shape their local place and support their communities, arts, cultural and social spaces.

OVERVIEW OF EXISTING EVIDENCE

Kelly and McNicoll's (2011) report reviews evidence on the social value of universities in the preceding two decades, highlighting that much of the data is disparate and often focused on the individual institutions, making it difficult to generalise or draw sector-wide lessons. The report also touches on debates such as the 'impact agenda', the varying definitions and meanings of 'value' and 'impact', and the wider challenge of a lack of shared terminology across disciplines and sectors. While this report is more than 10 years old and new evaluation frameworks for research (the Research Excellence Framework), and public engagement (the Knowledge Exchange Framework) have been introduced, many of the challenges it raises remain today.

The UK's civic university movement (influenced by civic university movements across the world) has led to more research in this area, some of which is discussed below. Though there is limited evidence available on the impact and outcomes of community and public engagement, this does not necessarily equate to a lack of impact, nor does it suggest a diminished value of relationship-based approaches. A potential risk of metrics-based evaluations is that they can imply that only what can be 'counted' counts – thereby favouring outputs and outcomes that are easily quantified, and hindering those that are not. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for academia, including the need to explore the impact of civic engagement from the point of view of partner institutions, involved individuals (residents, academics), and the wider community.

The social and cultural impacts of universities are far reaching and often difficult to define and distinguish from other areas of impact, such as economic and environment. However, the Civic Impact Framework (Civic University Network, n.d.) outlines some of the key debates in each area of impact, which are considered in this review.

For this evidence review, 'social impact' considers:
- the relationship between universities and their local communities and stakeholders
- bridging the 'town and gown' divide
- opportunities for universities to tackle local challenges through innovative approaches
- the potential impacts of student volunteering and social action.

In terms of cultural contribution, this review considers:
- the relationship between universities and cultural and arts organisations
- levelling up cultural and arts activities
- how universities can and are supporting cultural life and pride in place.

Although this selection of topics is by no means exhaustive, it presents some key debates around universities' social and cultural contributions. The choice of centring on relationships – between universities, their local communities, and other local organisations – is in recognition that these relationships are key to delivering social change in places (Goddard et al., 2016).

1. Socio-cultural impact

1a. Engaging local communities

Place-based social impact requires effective engagement of local communities to understand the needs and opportunities in a place, and to work collaboratively to address them (Gherhes et al. 2020). This is sometimes referred to as 'civic engagement', 'community engagement' or 'public engagement', and is done in a range of ways. This inconsistent terminology reflects the lack of coherence in definitions and wide range of approaches to civic engagement across the sector. At its core, civic engagement by universities can be thought of as building and continuously improving locally beneficial relationships, with civic impact describing the outcomes that flow from such relationships.

Public engagement in higher education (HE) has been explored in detail by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), which defines it as "the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public" (n.d.). NCCPE emphasises the two-way nature of public engagement, which involves "interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit" (n.d.). This looks different for each university and place, and can include activities such as outreach, public consultation, collaborative research, citizen science, participatory arts, and lifelong learning (NCCPE, n.d.). The table below (adapted from Kelly and McNicoll 2011, p. 44) presents public engagement across different dimensions and provides examples of what this can look like within a university. The diversity of activities underneath the umbrella term 'public engagement' has created a challenge for evaluating what works and for sharing best practice across institutions.

Dimensions of public engagement	Examples of public engagement
1. **Public access to facilities** *Includes: Commercial and non-commercial use; Restricted and unrestricted access*	• Access to university libraries • Access to university buildings and physical facilities eg for conferences, meetings, events, accommodation, gardens etc • Shared facilities eg museums, art galleries • Public access to sports facilities
2. Public access to knowledge *Includes: Universities' capacity for creating and transmitting knowledge makes public access to this a central strand of public engagement*	• Access to established university curricula • Public engagement events eg science fairs; science shops • Publicly accessible database of university expertise
3. Student engagement *Releasing student capacity for community (and student) benefit*	• Student volunteering and student led activities • Experiential learning, eg practice placements • Curricular engagement • Student-led activities eg arts, environment
4. Faculty engagement *Overlaps with dimension 2, but emphasis here is on individual staff involvement*	• Research centres draw on community advisers for support and direction • Volunteering outside working hours eg on trustee boards of local charities • Research helpdesk/advisory boards • Public lectures
5. Widening participation *Equalities and diversity agenda*	• Improving recruitment and success rate of students from non-traditional backgrounds through innovative initiatives eg access courses, financial assistance, peer mentoring

6. Encouraging economic regeneration and enterprise *Already a number of research projects focussing on measuring this. Some captured through HEBCIS*	• Research collaboration and technology transfer • Meeting regional skills needs and supporting SMEs • Initiatives to expand innovation and design e.g. bringing together staff, students and community members to design, develop and test assistive technology for people with disabilities
7. Institutional relationship and partnership building *How the institution operates and organises itself to meet public engagement objectives through corporate level activities*	• Collaborative community-based research programmes responsive to community-identified needs Community-university networks for learning, dissemination, or • knowledge exchange • Community members on board of governance of university • Public ceremonies, awards, competitions and events • Website with community pages • Helpdesk facility • Corporate social responsibility

Summary Table from Kelly and McNicoll (2011), p. 44

There has historically been separation and disconnect between universities and their local people and place, often described as 'town and gown'. Still felt today, this tension poses a challenge for universities to engage local communities. It is partly due to a lack of understanding of the value a university brings to its place, and how local people can benefit from that, both from university and community viewpoints.

Lazzeroni and Piccaluga's (2015) study analyses the contribution of universities to small and medium cities, finding a threefold impact; knowledge and economic; relational; and cultural impact. They describe the presence of universities in broadly positive terms, as the "construction and evolution of knowledge spaces" and of contribution to general urban development producing distinctive identities of knowledge cities" (Lazzeroni and Piccaluga, 2015). However, a 'knowledge city' identity may not be relatable to everyone in a place, especially those who do not take part in university activities. There is an opportunity for universities to be more inclusive of experiences beyond knowledge generation. Furthermore, Lazzeroni and Piccaluga (2015) warn that attempts to strengthen the relationship between the university and local communities "often end up as no more than slogans and metaphors which do not translate into concrete experiences and results" – sometimes called 'civic washing' (Grant, 2022).

Problems arise when capturing the impact of efforts to reduce the 'town and gown' divide. The target community is often not clearly defined, and there is a lack of research focusing on outcomes. This makes it difficult to understand whether community engagement efforts are effective (Harris and Holley, 2016). Additionally, evidence tends to focus on the economic impact of universities on their surroundings, with less attention paid to the non-economic benefits (Harris and Holley, 2016). Evidence of the relational aspects of university presence, such as relationships between internal and external stakeholders, and who exactly should be included in these groups, is underdeveloped (Harris and Holley, 2016).

SPOTLIGHT ON PLACE
GLOUCESTER'S CITY CAMPUS PROJECT

Universities can utilise their resources, including their courses, infrastructure, and community partnerships, to consider how they develop and deliver civic culture. One example of this is the University of Gloucester's City Campus Project, involving the refurbishment of a 20,000 square metre building in Gloucester's city centre, creating a hub for teaching, learning, and community partnership, as well as restoring its heritage.

This included turning part of the ground floor into an arts, health and wellbeing centre, with Gloucestershire County Council moving its city library there. Over the lifetime of this project, it is estimated that it will add more than £700m of direct and indirect value to the economy, generating 7,225 jobs in the UK.

1b. Civic partnerships

Civic partnerships typically agree shared priorities between universities and other 'anchors' in the community. They are key to the delivery of public or civic engagement activities (UPP Foundation, 2019). However, Robinson (2021) suggests that universities need to carefully consider who they partner with and for what purpose. Robinson (2021) has identified a 'quadruple helix' of stakeholders in a place, which includes education providers, government, industry, and local communities. Robinson argues that only through a shared vision and language can change be delivered in places, as universities cannot and should not do everything. Robinson also emphasises equity when engaging local communities and partners, believing universities should listen to what is important to communities, use this to inform civic strategies and build long-term relationships for the delivery of initiatives.

There are some assessments of university approaches to partnerships with local community groups, other universities, and the public, private and third sector. For example, the 'By All, For All: the power of partnership' 2023 report – a deep dive review of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Creative Communities programme – assessed hundreds of place-based university partnerships. The

report (Creative Communities, 2023) identifies the benefits of working in these cross-sector collaborations, such as new ways of working, increased resilience and awareness, pooling of resources, and linking the education-to-industry talent pipeline. It also highlights the key enabling features of these partnerships (see below), and how these can translate into positive economic and social impacts.

Key enabling features of Creative Communities include:

- Collaborative conceiving and structuring
- Participative shared leadership processes
- Place based focus with an outward looking dimension
- Openness to experimentation and failure, modification and risk taking
- Participation of local communities with cross-sector (sometimes unlikely) allies

Activity often occurs around local spaces like a community centre, heritage or arts site, enabling new social, cultural, digital and economic networks between local industries and organisations that share similar interests. While levels of expertise, forms of engagement, location, depth of partnership and purpose varies region to region, as well as nation by nation, the Creative Communities model provides a flexible and inclusive approach, nurturing new diverse partnerships for long-term sustainable networks.

Creative Communities, 2023, p.4

The Creative Communities report also highlights challenges and barriers to engagement including distrust of partnerships, low confidence, poor accessibility, lack of clarity on benefit, lack of continuity in funding, hard to capture value of contribution, short-term funding solutions, local or cross-sector government working, and power imbalances (2023, p.32). However, the report highlights what is echoed in much of the literature – a gap in knowledge around community partners' experiences in these collaborative partnerships. It is vital to capture these experiences in future evaluations to identify and address barriers to partnership from partner perspectives.

A report by Arts Council England and University Alliance (2016) sets out guidance on how universities and arts organisations can partner, and to what aim. Partnerships between universities and arts organisations have been found to ''bring numerous benefits to the organisations involved'', while contributing to

"improvements within the local and national cultural landscape" (Arts Council England and University Alliance, 2016, p.4). However, there is little detail on what improvements the local and national cultural landscape may reap from these partnerships, and for whose benefit. Some of the potential areas that universities and arts organisations can partner on are:

- Improving the talent pipeline
- Innovation and research
- Further potential opportunities

Risks involved in these partnerships include staff turnover at universities and a perception that they are less agile due to their size (Arts Council England and University Alliance, 2016). In response to these challenges, the report recommends formalising agreements, for example through a memorandum, as well as undertaking joint financial commitments (Arts Council England and University Alliance, 2016). While there are examples of such memorandums, they are ad hoc and there is limited evidence available on their impact. Memorandums are often held privately, which limits knowledge-sharing between institutions. Although Arts Council England and University Alliance suggest some potential activities that universities and arts organisations can undertake collaboratively, their report lacks evidence on the impact of such collaborations. Case study examples are provided as evidence of practice, but these do not include evidence of the outcomes or impact of the activities.

Challenges remain in evaluating what works in place-based partnerships and public engagement. The diversity of possible approaches and often limited time and resource given for evaluation make it difficult to assess what is working and for whom regarding local community and stakeholder engagement. There remains a gap in establishing a unified approach to evaluating, auditing, and benchmarking public engagement (Kelly and McNicoll, 2011; Reed, et al., 2018). Additionally, despite recognising the importance of partnership approaches, there is a scarcity of evidence that prioritises and privileges the role and voice of community partners (Reed, et al., 2018).

SPOTLIGHT ON PARTNERSHIP
COMMUNITY GATEWAY, CARDIFF UNIVERSITY AND THE GRANGETOWN COMMUNITY

Community Gateway (CG) is a flagship engagement programme that was launched in 2015 with the aim of developing long-term, equal, and mutually beneficial partnerships. Led by the Community Gateway team comprised of both community and university-based staff, this is a long-term partnership with Grangetown - the most ethnically diverse ward in Cardiff - and its residents and businesses. Activities and projects can be research, teaching, or community development focused, and they must have a community lead and a university lead. A key aspect of CG's approach is that they invested time in the beginning of the adventure to develop relationships with the local community. They did not start out with a set idea of what the programme would look like or entail, and they let it grow organically.

They are also a rare example of a programme that sits across teaching, research, and community engagement. Of particular interest for this review is the partnership that evolved between the Business School and some of the local Grangetown businesses. This led to the involvement of several Grangetown business owners in developing a module on community-based student projects, and forming a local business forum where knowledge and skills were shared between the university and the business owners.

Some of their achievements to date include 85 projects, over 35 'live' teaching projects, collaboration with three colleges and more than 30 sector partners, including Cardiff Council and the Welsh Government.

(More information available at: Community Gateway - Community - Cardiff University)

1c. Supporting local cultural life and pride in place

Universities have the potential to contribute to cultural life in their communities, generating a sense of identity and pride in place. Universities themselves – what they offer and their physical buildings - can be a source of pride for local areas, even in areas that seem the least enthusiastic about university presence (UPP Foundation, 2019).

By being sources of public art and cultural activities, universities can bring people from diverse backgrounds together, utilising art to stimulate discussion, inspiration, and connection amongst people who might not normally interact with one another (Cross River Partnership, 2018). Communal activities, especially those that are site-specific (ie, art or activities that focus on place), have the potential to also strengthen pride in place (Parkinson et al., 2020).

The UPP Foundation has found that many universities are involved in local cultural life, and in many cases collaborate with local partners to support cultural and creative industries (2019). How universities participate in local cultural life varies, from student volunteers helping at events or putting on performances, to universities partnering with the National Trust to preserve and make use of cultural heritage. The effects of such participation are overwhelmingly positive, making culture more "available and accessible to both residents and students" (UPP Foundation, 2019).

Although cultural events on campus provide value for those who attend them, it is unlikely that they are inclusive of all demographics. Not everyone will feel comfortable visiting a university campus, and information about cultural opportunities may not reach all potential participants. Events taking place during work hours exclude those in work. There may also be challenges around financial accessibility for people on low or restricted incomes, including expenses such as travel and childcare. This creates what the UPP Foundation (2019) calls 'cultural elitism', where cultural events and opportunities end up serving just a few. There is an opportunity to explore how universities might further democratise access to cultural opportunities, moving away from models where universities 'push out' cultural activities, towards a bilateral cultural exchange between communities and universities. For instance, universities can take up co-production practices to include people in the local community when designing and communicating cultural activities (UPP Foundation, 2019).

There is an opportunity to explore the cultural contribution of universities beyond the campus and their own cultural production. For example, universities could support the cultural life and wellbeing in their places by using their internal resources to "raise funding for community place-based projects to boost the cultural impact in an area" (UPP Foundation, 2019). Universities could also increase

the visibility of local cultural activities and practices by communicating their value to national or even global audiences (UPP Foundation, 2019).

SPOTLIGHT ON PEOPLE
SUPPORTING LOCAL ARTS ORGANISATIONS TO DEVELOP SKILLS AND CAPACITY

Universities are well-placed to support the development and delivery of local cultural opportunities – for example, through research – and these can play a key role in building pride while also delivering economic outputs for the region.

One such example, recognised in 'The Role of 'Place' in Collaborations Between HEIs and the Arts and Cultural Sector' (Rossi and Hopkins 2021), is where cultural and academic partners co-develop skills-building workshops or courses for local organisations and businesses. Examples include capacity building events for local cultural networks and co-designed research aimed at increasing awareness of the lives, working practices, and employment of professional artists in specific places.

2. Social impact

2a. Student volunteering

Universities can have a positive impact on local communities through student volunteering. Whether informally or through formal placements organised by the university, volunteering is a powerful way for students to contribute to their local places, while reaping benefits themselves.

Universities provide opportunities to volunteer through course-based activities (eg, engaged learning or work placements) or Student Union volunteer centres. Students are rewarded with experience, networks, and in some cases, credits for their modules. In addition, volunteering has been shown to improve student performance, outcomes, and employability, particularly for those with lower academic attainment (Kerrigan and Manktelow, 2021; Barton et al., 2017).

However, there is no coherent framework to effectively evaluate the longitudinal

benefits and outcomes of volunteering in higher education (NCCPE, 2009). Furthermore, there is a significant gap in evidence on the impact of volunteering on communities, and how it is experienced by those hosting students. In recent years, research has critiqued whether the benefits of student volunteering to communities have been realised (Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010). This is partly because student volunteering literature is most often based on the perspectives of students, and not community members (Tansey, 2012).

2b. Approaches to tackling social issues

Universities have a key role in tackling societal challenges faced by their local communities. In the face of increasingly complex social challenges, universities are well-placed to test and champion new and experimental approaches to problem solving. Innovative examples include social labs, living laboratories, and community organising:

Social labs are spaces that reject planning and instead take an experimental, prototyping approach. Hassan (2014) describes three key characteristics of social labs: 'social', or drawing together diverse stakeholders across sectors and areas of expertise; 'experimental', or taking an ongoing, iterative approach to generating and testing solutions; and 'systemic', or attempting to address the root causes of a challenge within a system. Universities can play a part in social labs, both as participants and as 'case owners', or as participants who introduce and test an intervention in a representative context. Universities are well placed to capture learning and can provide a relatively controlled environment to test solutions with reduced risk.

Living laboratories or living labs, are testbeds for novel solutions that carefully monitor social and physical impacts to generate a robust knowledge base for learning. They are often in cities, testing solutions that look to impact the urban environment. Universities can play a role in living labs, as they have a "degree of intimacy with the cities that host them" (Konig and Evans, 2013, p. 2), and they are well placed to deliver knowledge and technological advancements that can improve conditions in cities. Furthermore, universities are core stakeholders in urban development as property owners and developers. Living labs provide a "mechanism through which academics from various disciplines whose research and teaching have applications for urban environmental sustainability can engage with real-world challenges in an applied setting" (Konig and Evans, 2013, p. 2).

Community organising represents a different approach to tackling local social issues and strengthening relationships with local communities. Community organising brings groups together to address collective themes. It is premised on the idea that with strong enough relationships, investment in leadership development, and an effective, targeted strategy, communities can build the power

to change local issues. This approach to community intervention recognises that community members are best placed to know what their communities need, and gives them the tools to make changes. It can be particularly effective in reducing social division by bringing community members together and creating an equitable platform for action. Universities are becoming increasingly involved in community organising as a way of supporting local communities to influence changes on issues that matter to them. Universities can act both as local member organisations, and as places for the transmission of community organising skills, involving students, staff, and residents through training and active participation.

Although these approaches hold promise, there is little evidence of their effectiveness in addressing challenges. Given their novelty, there is no systematic evaluation of the impact on the partners involved and the challenges targeted. Where evaluation does exist, there is often no inclusion of community or stakeholder voices in assessing their usefulness. There is an opportunity to conduct further research to identify and articulate the comparative benefits of these approaches.

SPOTLIGHT ON PURPOSE
DESIS NETWORK AND LABS

Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability (DESIS) Network is a non-profit cultural association promoting the use of design for social innovation in higher education institutions to "to create meaningful social changes in collaboration with other stakeholders" (DESIS, n.d.). It brings together DESIS Labs, spaces based in design schools that are working with local, regional, and global partners to "support social change towards sustainability" (DESIS, n.d.). DESIS Labs operate all over the world, connecting with each other to exchange learning and coordinate ideas, sometimes developing regional programmes (as is the case in the UK).

DESIS Network promotes innovation "driven by social demands rather than by the market and/or autonomous techno-scientific research" (DESIS, n.d.). The Network finds that design schools are a good home for social innovation, as they can become laboratories where "new visions are generated, new tools are defined and tested and where new projects are started and supported". DESIS posits that, given the size of the challenge of the climate emergency, there is a need for "the best possible use of all existing resources", including design schools, which can be "a potentially powerful promoter of sustainable change" (DESIS, n.d.). DESIS Labs harness the innovative ideas and enthusiasm of staff and students to test and mobilise solutions to complex problems.

DESIS invites a step change in who we think can and should participate in addressing complex challenges, sourcing, and testing solutions. This invites a more expansive approach, not only to disciplines valuable to addressing the climate emergency and other complex problems, but also to what individuals should be involved. DESIS Labs showcase design students' potential to contribute valuable ideas and participate in prototyping and testing solutions. Further research is needed to understand the impact of this on both student participants and stakeholders.

3. Cultural impact

3a. Increasing equality in the arts and culture sectors

Arts and culture can play a key role in improving people's lives. However, the UK's cultural activities and assets remain heavily concentrated in the South-east, (UPP Foundation, 2019). Although cultural organisations exist in other parts of the country, they may face greater barriers such as a lack of sustainable funding and difficulties in scaling up cultural activities.

Furthermore, access to arts and culture is unequal not only between places, but within places. There may be limited opportunities for participation for individuals who face economic and social disadvantages, such as "people living in poverty, people with learning and physical disabilities, prisoners and ex-prisoners, the homeless and older people in care homes" (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2022). This not only has a negative impact on those who are excluded, "rob[bing] them of the opportunity for self-expression, to developing critical life skills and forg[ing] closer connections", it also limits the visibility of a range of life experiences, "rob[bing] audiences from hearing [their] stories" (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2022).

There is evidence of concerted efforts to increase participation in arts and cultural activities. Between 2014 and 2018, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation ran a 'Participatory Performing Arts' programme to widen participation in the performing arts to all people, especially those from the most vulnerable and underserved communities. The programme focused on participatory performing arts, which involves non-professionals in activities such as acting, singing, and dancing. The intended outcomes were for participants to derive joy from participation, as well as developing their "strengths, gain[ing] confidence and develop[ing] a positive image" (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2022). The programme funded 10 organisations to undertake innovative initiatives, coming together as a learning community to share practice and develop creative solutions to shared questions. The results of the programme, as well as the impact of each of the funded organisations' initiatives, have not been published. A question remains as to how effective these approaches are to widening participation in the arts, and whether they can be scaled.

Another key area is participation in creative industries across the country. A report from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) showed that creative industries contributed £109bn to the UK economy in 2021, representing 5.6% of total economic activity that year (Scott, 2022). The economic output of creative industries fell during the Covid-19 pandemic, though to a lesser degree than the UK economy. Creative industry employment has seen a rapid recovery, with three million jobs filled in the creative industries in 2021, representing 7% of

jobs in the UK (Scott, 2022). Jobs in the creative sector grew at twice the rate of the UK economy between 2011 and 2019, with 400,000 new jobs created since 2015 (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2022).

Although creative industries are a key part of the UK economy, a question remains about the quality of employment in these fields. The UK government worked with the CIPEC throughout 2022 to review job quality and working practices in the sector. The review found that although there are variations across creative sub-sectors, there was a trend in the creative industries to under-perform in job quality (Carey et al, 2023). Job quality for creative freelancers was a particular concern, as working hours were found to be extremely long and levels of pay dissatisfaction and unpaid work were high (Carey et al, 2023). The review concludes that improving job quality "represents both a considerable opportunity for creative industries and an imperative, to ensure their future resilience and success" (Carey et al, 2023, p. 77). This raises questions about the role that universities can and should play in supporting a more just creative sector.

Participation in arts careers is also limited because creative skills are not valued as highly as 'hard' skills, such as mathematical abilities. Universities play a role in perpetuating this, for instance by encouraging students to prioritise STEM subjects over creative ones. Russell Group universities identify creative A-levels as 'facilitating' subject areas, which do not hold the same merit for entry to university (UPP Foundation, 2019). However, this does not necessarily represent reality, as creativity is increasingly believed to be a crucial skill for the future, given the increasing impact of automation and artificial intelligence (UPP Foundation, 2019).

The UPP Foundation argues that universities have an opportunity to recognise the benefits of creativity and ensure that it is valued for future employment (2019). It urges universities to promote STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics) in local schools, which adds creativity, design, and entrepreneurship to the widely accepted STEM agenda. Overall, universities can play an important role in their local arts and culture sectors, to ensure a wider proportion of local communities can participate in a range of ways — from arts and culture activities to education and careers in the sector. Universities can leverage their resources to contribute to this, by bringing together arts and cultural organisations in their places, advocating for better policies to support cultural activities, and using their fundraising capabilities or their own funds to address financial inequalities.

3b. The civic role of arts organisations

Arts organisations play a key role in their places, giving jobs to more than 400,000 people around the country, as well as benefiting the individuals who engage with their arts and cultural assets and activities (Arts Council England and University Alliance, 2016). The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) launched a UK inquiry

into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations in 2016. During Phase 1, the inquiry identified levers that can help advance the civic role of arts organisations, creating a "movement of change-makers collaborating with their local communities" (CGF, n.d.). These levers include connecting and collaborating with other organisations within and beyond the UK, communicating civic value, creating the conditions for change, and connecting communities. Universities can be a key partner for arts organisations looking to explore their civic role.

Furthermore, as arts organisations in themselves, universities can consider how cultural assets and resources might be mobilised towards civic aims. For instance, universities should address how their rich cultural assets such as libraries and museums might be made more meaningful to people outside of the university, especially those that are not reached by the arts. This ties into how university assets can be made accessible and contribute to local people's quality of life.

To evaluate the role of universities in their local arts and cultural scenes, it is key to understand how universities might collaborate with and support arts organisations, and to what aim. Given the geographic spread of universities, their resources, and capabilities, they can act as a promoter or supporter of cultural activity throughout the country. Universities are also particularly well-placed to generate knowledge that supports the growth of creative industries in underdeveloped places through the creation of new technologies, intellectual property, and business models. This research can help identify new opportunities and challenges for the industry and inform policy and practice.

One such example is the AHRC's Creative Industries Cluster Programme – a five-year applied research programme, which launched in 2018 (Creative industries clusters programme – UKRI). This £120m programme is funded by the UKRI Challenge Fund (UKRI Challenge Fund – UKRI) - and was a response to the UK government's 2017 Industrial Strategy. It comprised nine research and development (R&D) partnerships with partners including universities, Nesta, and leaders in the creative industry – for example Creative England and the British Film Institute (among others). Its stated aims were to create jobs and drive the creation of companies and products – thereby accelerating growth in a range of creative sectors and contributing to the UK's regional and national economic growth. However, the impacts of the programme are only just starting to emerge.

Therefore, it is not yet possible to know what worked, for whom, and to what extent. he scale of this programme and reach is quite large, meaning there will most likely be impressive outcome statistics. However, as in all engagement, it is difficult to know the impacts beyond the numbers – the deeper, slower-to-emerge, and often intangible, yet potentially very powerful impacts. This highlights a key challenge in the civic university and engagement agenda: the lack of evidence on the deeper, longitudinal impacts of civic activities and engagement institutionally

and sector-wide. The programme also raises questions around the future of partnerships and relationships formed, and what responsibilities universities have to their partners once the funding ends.

CONCLUSION

Universities have been criticised for perpetuating a 'town and gown' divide in their places, where institutions' activities fail to include local communities and, in some cases, entrench existing marginalisation. Yet as our evidence review shows, this relationship with place is far from inevitable. Civic universities have been exploring ways to enter equitable partnership with communities in their places, through civic partnerships, civic agreements, and a greater investment in community engagement.

A challenge, in evidencing the impact of these agreements and initiatives, is moving beyond what is 'easy to measure'. Metrics of engagement, whilst providing interim evidence that an initiative was popular, fail to show if any meaningful difference has occurred across the community. Deeper and slower to emerge impacts from community partnership, such as community cohesion and greater economic opportunity, can support learning and catalyse enthusiasm for university civic work addressing social and cultural spheres.

A focus of the National Civic Accelerator project is to support universities in collaborating to capture such impacts and share learnings with other universities. Programme evaluations such as the review of the AHRC Creative Communities programme offer examples of what could be possible, and it is important that resourcing for civic work includes enough funding and manpower for evaluation. By turning the knowledge apparatus of the university towards tackling local social issues and creating a positive and supportive relationship with communities, civic universities can shape a new way forward for universities and their places.

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