

# **Universities as Anchor Institutions: What implications for South African universities?**

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

AITF:	Anchor Institution Task Force
CHE:	Council on Higher Education
CHESP:	Community-Higher Education Service Partnership
CID:	Community Improvement District
CSU:	Cleveland State University
HEIs:	Higher Education Institutions
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
ICIC:	Initiative for a Competitive Inner City
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPE:	Personal Protective Equipment
RU:	Rhodes University
SAHECEF:	South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum
UCT:	University of Cape Town
UK:	United Kingdom
UP:	University of Pretoria
USA:	United States of America
USU:	Urban Serving Universities
VC:	Vice Chancellor
Wits:	Wits University
WSU:	Washington State University

## Abstract

The concept of universities as anchor institutions proposes a more deliberate and purposeful approach to responding to social needs. Especially in the United States and increasingly in other regions, urban and sub-urban universities have over the last two decades or more been instrumental in revitalising their neighbourhoods through an anchoring role. This new role is only an addition to their core functions of teaching and research done through various forms of engagement with external stakeholders. Universities serving an anchoring support collective action especially among fragmented local institutions, build civic and economic capacity and capabilities of local governments, promote inclusive and democratic principles, and foster cultural values through targeted collaborative initiatives through the leveraging of university resources and capabilities. While the concept of anchor institutions has been largely used interchangeably in some literature this paper attempts to delineate some of the core principles of anchor institutions that set it apart from an engaged university. The paper captures some of the key attributes of anchor institutions which suggest a new impetus for South African universities who seek to serve an anchoring role.

Exacerbated by covid-19 challenges, South African universities are largely located in communities characterised by extreme poverty, inequality, unemployment and social decay. A passive approach to these social and economic needs under the auspice of university community engagement has failed to adequately respond to these challenges and demands more conscious and intentional approaches to revitalising these communities. The paper identifies facets for anchoring including economic transformation, infrastructural development and socio-cultural transformation through four core principles including (1) a strong and clear anchoring policy driven from the topmost office of the university, (2) institutionally embedded structures, policies and resources towards serving an anchoring role, (3) strong local mutually beneficially collaboration and partnerships and (4) leveraging institutional resources and capabilities towards an anchoring role. Arguably, most university have focused on their international and national profile, with less coordinated and sometimes ad hoc institutional approach towards supporting the transformation of their immediate and extended urban and sub-urban regions.

South African universities can adopt an anchor institution mandate to address this lacuna. Four active roles for universities are proposed within their immediate communities. These include: an institutional role of (teaching, research and engagement), an economic role (as a strong employer and supporter of economic growth and activities), a physical role (as developer of local infrastructure and real estate landscape) and a public role (by promoting social, cultural and democratic values towards a social-transformation and redress agenda). The paper concludes by emphasising that while South African universities have adopted a broad engaged scholarship approach, becoming an anchor institution seeks deeper and more tangible local outcomes while not compromising national and international competitiveness.

# 1 Introduction to anchor institutions - an overview

The origin of the notion of anchor institutions draws on the structure of the United States of America (USA) economy that took place from the 1960s onwards, highlighting the effects of deindustrialisation, capital flight, globalisation and the rise of neoliberal policies which undermined the domestically-owned manufacturing sector (Ehlenz, 2018; Smallbone, Kitching and Blackburn, 2015; Taylor and Luter, 2013). In the absence of services in urban and rural settings and across communities, cities, towns and villages, institutions had to emerge as anchors of their communities to provide stability, growth and development. Today, this concept is growing in popularity as a way of thinking about the developmental role of institutions in cities, towns and villages.

A key point made by Smallbone et al. (2015) is that in the 2000s, the notion of anchor institutions gained popularity in the USA as a new paradigm for understanding the role that place-based institutions could play in building thriving communities and local economies. This is drawn from the understanding that the economic situation in the USA worsened in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including the decline in the public service provisions, and as a result, searching for solutions to solve the societal problems (see also, Taylor and Luter, 2013). In this context, the term anchor institutions emerged to refer to institutions with long-term planning that aligned with the development and wellbeing of their local communities. In the past years, the idea of anchor institutions had also begun to grow beyond its origin in the USA and started to gain a wider currency. In the United Kingdom (UK), for instance, the government has advanced the concept of anchor institutions as part of a ‘‘building stronger communities and businesses’’ policy strand (Smallbone et al., 2015).

However, despite the growing popularity of the anchor institution, it remains a vague concept that needs a more precise definition (McCauley-Smith *et al.*, 2020). A key feature of an anchor institution is that they are geographically based, or place-based and spatially immobile (Webber and Karlstrom, 2009). Furthermore, anchor institutions are tied to specific locations by their missions, invested capital or relationship to customers or employees (Webber and Karlstrom, 2009). Universities meet all these criteria to be considered an anchor institution.

It is important to clearly establish that while universities already serve their three-fold function of teaching, research and even engagement (which goes beyond their immediate communities through competitive knowledge production, innovation, graduates training and development of global citizens), adopting an anchoring role does not aim to limit these functions. Rather it

demonstrates an intentional commitment to the development and welfare of their immediate urban and city wellbeing. Serving an anchor institution demands that while universities continue to track their teaching and research within the national and international arena, they become intentional in effectively measuring and assessing their role as urban and regional anchors for development and transformation.

Friedman, Perry and Menendez (2010) argue that while the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities in the USA serve an important role in knowledge generation and human capital training of the country due to their strategic location within urban areas, these universities have not clearly articulated their anchor role. Using a survey of the 43 universities across the eight regions, they identify six main attributes in becoming and effectively serving an anchor mission while not compromising the core functions of the university. These attributes include:

- Clear anchor mission statement and strategic plan
- Built into administrative structures
- Embedded in the curriculum
- Institutionalised in policy
- Included in budget and resources allocations
- Tracked and evaluated.

While universities might have various forms of engagement activities within the various faculties, departments and through individual academics, developing an anchor institution demands an institutionally driven mandate with buy-in from a large segment of the university.

Furthermore, anchor institutions are characterised by their corporate status. Taylor and Luter (2013) provide some insightful questions to consider when defining anchor institutions based on their corporate status. The key question they ask is whether a large privately owned corporation be an anchor institution, or are anchors always non-profit organisations? The literature usually identifies those institutions as non-profit organisations (Anchor Institutions Task Force, 2016; Culkin, 2016; Dubb and Howard, 2006; Harris and Holley, 2016). Anchor institutions, therefore, are organisations established for public purposes in a specific geographic location. These institutions draw funding from non-local sources, spend substantial amounts on goods and services for their communities, act as major employers that train the local workforce and utilise their vast resources to benefit their local communities.

Compared to for-profit organisations, which might move due to different reasons such as lower labour costs, physical stability or relaxed government regulations, anchor institutions are

spatially immobile and mainly aim towards community engagement and social services. Goddard et al. (2014:307), provide a summary definition of anchor institutions as “large, locally embedded institutions, typically non-governmental public sector, cultural or other civic organisations, that are of significant importance to the economy and the wider community life of cities in which they are based”. As such, when listing anchor institutions, scholars include only non-profit organisations including (not to mention all): cultural institutions (libraries, museums), medical centres or hospitals, universities, and sports franchises (Devins *et al.*, 2017; Elliott, 2018; Vize, 2018; Mersand *et al.*, 2019). This does not automatically cancel the prospects of large privately owned institutions serving an anchoring role within their communities.

On the contrary, other scholars consider the privately-owned institutions, including banks, radio and television stations as anchor institutions. The main argument among these scholars is that although these corporations are privately owned and depend on stable relations with customers and suppliers in particular places, they are not likely to move. Also, Taylor and Luter (2013) use an example of a community development bank, South Shore Bank in Chicago, to talk about the “footloose” private corporations. This bank had branches in Chicago’s South and West sides, Cleveland and Detroit. Notably, the bank pursued urban development strategies informed by a social purpose until it sustained significant losses and closed in 2010 (Ibid). This suggests that regardless of the philanthropic endeavours of the bank, it had to close after it incurred losses. On the other hand, it is significant to argue that private business corporations are not anchoring institutions since they are not likely to forge long-term sustainable partnerships with communities depending on their profit margin.

Referring to the definition of anchor institutions provided earlier by Goddard et al. (2014) that anchor institutions are large, this offers us the third characteristic of anchor institutions, which is their size. This is a critical feature of anchor institutions as these institutions are attached to local communities’ economy and social development. It is important to state that the largeness of an institutions depends on its influence within its context as some universities might not be as large as others, but if serving an influential role within their immediate and extended region or community they can serve as an anchor institution. This way, Taylor and Luter (2013) argue that anchor institutions are either very influential or large institutions and note that it can be complicated to measure these factors. The Anchor Institutions Tool Kit developed by the University of Pennsylvania’s Netter Centre for Community Partnerships (2008:5) provides helpful questions to assist in identifying anchor institutions, including:

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

From the above questions, it is important to note that the anchor institutions tool kit does not indicate the number of variables that must be present for an institution to be considered as an anchor. However, it helps institutions formulate the right questions and seek effective answers that will lead to collaborative actions that benefit both institutions and communities.

However, within the current global pandemic there has been changing dynamics facing universities and other employers with increasing remote learning and working, and the spatial or place-based dimension of universities needs revisiting. However, their physical presence within the city, or urban region as well as their land use patterns, and spending or purchasing capacity maintain the potential of serving an anchoring role as discussed in section five below.

## **2 Revisiting the function of universities**

An obvious observation of the current higher education system is that there is a range of responses to changes in demand, relevance and contextual realities. Within this space, universities play a major role. Cardinal Newman's idea of a university did not conceive of the university with only a utilitarian function of teaching, but instead emphasised a liberal education which is different from instruction for a vocation or a profession (Newman and Turner, 1996). He further proposed the establishment of a separate research institution for knowledge production. The word 'university' for Newman implies the pursuit of universal knowledge because all knowledge forms one whole (Newman and Turner, 1996). In many ways, the university space has changed from its earlier conceptualisation, mandate and purpose, management styles and approaches, and relationship with internal and external stakeholders (Martin and Etkowitz, 2000). The Medieval University was with two narrow functions -

teaching and scholarship. The teaching function focused on priests, teachers and public servants to fill the public offices. In contrast, the scholarship function focused on various disciplines, including philosophy, biblical and classical studies.

These two main functions have evolved. In the USA system, where this evolution was most evident, the teaching function evolved to establish Land Grant universities through the Morrill Act of 1862. Fundamental to this Act was the revolution of universities moving from their aristocratic and exclusive state to becoming more inclusive, relevant and responsive through their teaching mission (Mcdowell, 2009). Within a changing societal context, a changing and adapting university is conceived to serve the needs of the changing society in which the intellectual life is not to be divorced from the practical, accepting the reality of pluralism of social and economic needs and purposes (Brooks, Kerr and Hutchins, 1969). However, such an institution still needs to be narrow and define its mission.

In more recent discourse, Manuel Castells (2001) outlines four functions of the university: elite formation, ideological apparatus, knowledge production, and workforce production. As mentioned earlier, pioneer university systems were designed for a select few of society to maintain an elite class. As captured within Martin Trow's (2007) framework, this function has shifted, showing how university systems are moving from elite to mass access systems. Universities, according to Castell (2001) serve an ideology formation function through the development of national identities. This was observed in the church-based theology schools as well as professional institutions such as the grand école in France, which trained civil servants with nationalism ideologies. According to Castells (Ibid), the more responsive function is the generation of knowledge through research on new forms of knowledge for society. This function has also been characterised by a closer relationship with industry towards becoming more responsive to the skills needs of employers while maintaining a level of curriculum and pedagogical autonomy (Altbeker and Storme, 2013; Bothwell, 2015; Mccowan, 2015; Tomlinson, 2012). Castell's (2001) perception of the function of the university echoed earlier arguments by Clark Kerr that the university must shift from a university to a multiversity (Brooks, Kerr and Hutchins, 1969, p. 23) with more functions and responsibilities to a wider range of stakeholders than those initially conceived:

There is an irreducible plurality of communities, functions, disciplines, internal interests, external constituencies, agendas, and beliefs in the multiversity. The majority, always threatening to pull in every direction, is somehow contained within an unspoken consensus about the common good of the multiversity. This consensus,

this residual harmony, never explicitly stated but sensed instinctively by all, is almost the defining feature of Kerr's institution.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has also captured the multiple functions of the higher education institutions and universities. Four core functions are identified: university research in regional and city innovation; teaching and learning towards the development of human capital and skills; contribution to social, cultural and environmental development; and building regional capacity towards a competitive global economy (OECD, 2007). This evolving purpose and function of the university have, in a sense, led to the creation of various forms of universities. These new university forms have been mandated to respond to one or more functions within a specific timeframe and context. Some of these university types include the Land grant universities (Mcdowell, 2009), research universities, regional universities (Wise and Carrasco Montalvo, 2018), entrepreneurial universities (Pugh *et al.*, 2018), engaged universities (Boyer, 1996; McCauley-Smith *et al.*, 2020; Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma, 2016) among others. An overarching characteristic of these universities is to respond to the needs of society within its national, regional or local context (OECD). Whether economic, social, cultural, knowledge-related or skills related, universities have adopted and adapted to be increasingly relevant to their society.

Explicitly, Goddard *et al.* (2014) specify that many larger universities are now major employers in their city and significant purchasers of local goods and services. That magnified by multiplier effects has considerable direct and indirect impacts on their broader local economy (Culkin, 2016; Fongwa, 2018a; Harris and Holley, 2016; McCauley-Smith *et al.*, 2020). Correspondingly, evidence from the Anchor Institution Task Force (2016) suggests that higher education institutions are working towards becoming key drivers of economic development within their immediate and extended communities, cities, and regions (Cantor, 2011; Cantor, Englot and Higgins, 2013). This is mainly achieved through, among other things:

- First and most fundamental, leveraging institutional resources in long term planning for development through various forms of collaborations and partnerships with external stakeholders
- Putting their research power to work by developing new ideas that will strengthen the country's competitive edge in the new economy and then by helping to deploy those innovations into commercial use.

- Providing a wide range of knowledge-focused services to businesses and other employers, including customised job-training programs, hands-on counselling, technical help, and management assistance.
- Embracing a role in the cultural, social, and educational revitalisation of their home communities through transforming civil infrastructure to social infrastructure.

However, while universities have the potential and capacity to play this developmental and transformative role within their communities, cities and regions, research has also shown some inconsistencies especially in the developing context. While most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and universities are not passive to the plight of their immediate communities, their approach to their communities' needs has been ad hoc, philanthropical and sometimes unintended (Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma, 2015; Kruss et al., 2012). The OECD review of the Free State province concludes that "the current South African higher education and training policy does not recognise or reinforce initiatives by universities and further education and training colleges to relate their missions to regional issues" (OECD, 2012, p. 207). In a more recent study, Combrinck and Nortjé (2021, p.368) show that the current infrastructural conception of most South African universities undermines their anchoring role as they argue "for the necessity to include the spatial aspirations of the university as an anchor institution in the future planning and frameworks of South African tertiary institutions". They further state that this will be in keeping with Boyer's (1996, p.19) sentiment that "great universities simply cannot afford to remain islands of affluence, self-importance and horticultural beauty in seas of squalor, violence and despair". In recent years universities in the USA have sought to balance their national and international vision, aspirations and footprints to that of their immediate communities. A typical example is the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities which is a president-led organisation including 43 public urban universities with the aim of enhancing urban university engagement to increase prosperity and opportunity in the nation's cities and tackling key urban challenges (Friedman et al., 2010).

### **3 Towards an anchoring role for universities**

The literature on anchor institutions labels higher education institutions ("eds") and hospitals ("meds") as the key developmental assets of their communities (Goddard et al., 2014; Elliott, 2018; Lilly, 2018; Sladek, 2019). Using the case of the USA, where the discourse emerged and has grown, Ehlenz (2018) identifies five eras of the USA universities anchoring in various

ways. Universities have become the most studied type of anchor institutions since the 1990s. This anchoring role has evolved along with various terminologies to what is currently known as an anchor institution.

### 3.1 A word on the origin of university anchor concept.

The concept of anchor institutions was borne in the USA context in the 1960s wherein major urban areas characterised by social and economic need, strained race relations and business flight that basically relegated those left behind to limited economic opportunities (Koh *et al.*, 2020). The departure of these major economic players and entrenched deindustrialisation led a substantial drop in the tax revenues which then pushed the remaining institutions to assume a more direct role to the economy. Furthermore, urban renewal programmes by the federal government became synonymous with black communities' removal which coincided with the expansion of place-based institutions who became more active in urban transformation. In the UK, the creation of the new "metropolitan universities" in the depressed inner cities was another response as another catalyst for the development of anchor institutions. These institutions focused less on academic excellent and more on service provision, in-service programmes and urban upliftment. Also there have been different understandings of what anchoring might mean or should mean. In some cases, an entrepreneurial approach has been aggressively adopted, while in others the focus has been almost welfarist. Generally speaking, the European/UK approaches have been more city and regional planning orientated – although they are now less regional focus and they are more closely linked to "science cities".

### 3.2 Evolution of anchor institutions

The first era is described as characterised by the Morrill Act of 1862, which led to the establishment of a social contract. In the main, the Act provided for the creation of land-grant colleges as part of the expansion of the higher education system to develop a more responsive curriculum and pedagogy. This pedagogy extended the role of higher education beyond the liberal arts and theology function to more practical education within the agricultural sector towards industry needs. One evident success of the Act was to "foster an enduring connection between a university and the regional economy" (Koh, et al., p.77).

The second era, which is closely linked to the third, started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with rapid industrialisation and expansion of cities with the growth in numbers and size of universities. Some universities embraced the concept of an 'urban laboratory' and developed strong ties with local neighbourhoods to address physical and social ills (O'Mara, 2012). Originating in the

UK, this era interrogated the ivory tower notion, introduced participatory research and provided basic services to communities. The third era is perceived to have emerged in the wake of the second world war. Universities worked with cities towards urban renewal to address physical, social and economic deterioration within the Urban space. However, the era's Modernist architectural designs of universities reinforced inward-looking campuses and entrenched mistrust in university community interactions (Ehlenz, 2018). There was an inevitable need for a return to some sort of engagement between university and communities, which was what characterised the fourth era. University outreach became the main form of engagement. However, this engagement was void of physical intervention. The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities of 1996 triggered a shift in the relationship between universities and communities. Of note was the emphasis that universities must go beyond "a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents...the Commission envisions partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among its partners for what each brings to the table (Kellogg Commission, 2001). The conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the current anchor institution literature evolved from the scholarship developed within this era. Hence, the close connection with the fifth era ushered in the notion of universities as anchor institutions for revitalisation and development of their neighbourhoods, whether city, urban, or rural.

It can be argued that most of the current global scholarship has focused on the university engagement discourse, with only a few universities adopting the hands-on approach in serving an anchoring role. In the anchor model, according to (Ehlenz, 2018), anchoring provides "an opportunity (and necessity) to intervene in place but in a less hegemonic way". This suggests a paradigm shift from both the passive engagement approach of academics, and how the university approaches engagement from a position of stronger power compared to community stakeholders. Identifying relevant stakeholders within the local and global context is critical in achieving its anchoring function. Benneworth & Jongbloed, (2010) argue that for universities to effectively serve as anchors they must expand beyond the narrow-perceived stakeholders of students, industry and national government to include donors, non-governmental organisations, other governmental organisations, suppliers, financial intermediaries, joint venture partners and employees among others.

Understanding the anchoring role of universities demands a definition for anchoring institutions and their relationship to their context. A myriad of definitions has been proposed for anchor institutions. The Anchor Institution Task Force (2017) defines anchor institutions

as "enduring organisations that are rooted in their localities, and it is difficult for them to leave their surroundings even in the midst of substantial capital flight". According to Taylor and Luter (2013), these institutions are regarded not only as their physical landscape but are social establishments that mediate the intersection of people, localities and other players within their context. Goddard et al. (2014) agree with the preceding in arguing that the presence of these institutions is expected to generate positive externalities and relationships that can support or 'anchor' wider economic and social activities within the locality and its stakeholders.

The Work Foundation concurs that while anchor institutions might not have a democratic mandate to ensure local economic development of their immediate city or region, their scale, local rootedness and community or stakeholder links enables them to play key roles in development through the 'sticky capital' they possess and through which growth strategies can be built (Morris and Jones, 2010).

A more expanded definition of anchor institutions is provided by Porter, Fisher-Bruns and Ha Pham (2019):

anchor institutions are non-profit or public place-based entities such as universities and hospitals that are rooted in their local community by the mission, invested capital, or relationships to customers, employees, residents and vendors. Anchor institutions have an ability to engage in long term planning in a manner that aligns their institutional interests with those of their local communities. They have both ability and motivation to play a key role in improving the long-term wellbeing of the communities; they serve by better aligning and deploying their institutional resources-such as hiring, purchasing, and investment-with the needs of those communities.

Broadly, it is worthy arguing that higher education institutions, specifically universities have the potential to act as anchors of their society's problems. Interestingly, this is not a new vision; throughout their history, universities have always been linked to societal issues, economically, politically, and socially (Harris & Holley, 2016). This suggests that higher education has transformed from the old and relatively unengaged ivory tower to a new, highly engaged, place-based institution (Birch, Perry and Taylor, 2013). This stability makes universities worthwhile institutions around which to develop economic strategies, and city leaders can rely on the financial steadiness of universities even during poor economic situations (Goddard et al., 2014). In this way, Harris and Holley (2016) suggest that in order to understand how universities serve as anchor institutions fully, scholars need to consider factors like structures and processes outside of higher education. Similarly, in acknowledging the contribution of

higher education in transforming the USA, cites Nancy Cantor relates to Barack Obama's inauguration speech that:

Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin the work of remaking America again...We'll restore science to its rightful place...We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil...And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. And all this we will do (Cantor, 2009, p. 3).

Key to this speech is the realisation of universities' potential to answer to the demands of society. While this is true in the USA, it is no different in the UK, where the most identified anchor institutions are universities (Smallbone and Kitching, 2015). It is argued that the current political climate in the UK, as elsewhere, gradually encourages universities to be actively engaged and embedded in their local communities (Goddard *et al.*, 2014). These institutions are expected to perform their anchor role through a range of activities as well as through a changing of the internal architecture observed in a changing external posture (Bawa, 2018). The new relationship is expressed as the university serving an anchoring role in economic revitalisation, social development, political and democratic engagement, spatial transformation towards the wellbeing of its immediate and extended urban, city or community inhabitants.

The preceding is prefaced on a few assumptions which need to be clearly articulated in relation to the university serving an anchoring role. Firstly, while many universities are engaging with communities through various faculties, departments, centres and individual academics, a university's anchoring role demands an institutionally driven mandate which is clearly articulated by the university senior leadership such as the vice chancellor, provost, or president. Like many USA based universities, the case of Penn State university adequately captures this starting with President Amy Gutmann's full embrace of local engagement as "an integral part of the University's mission." As described by (Harkavy *et al.*, 2014) engagement has increasingly moved from the periphery to the core of Penn's work. It has required senior management policy driven through the presidential, trustee, and faculty leadership in both integration of local engagement into the University's academic mission, and its role as a corporate citizen and the development of democratic, mutually beneficial, mutually respectful partnerships with the community. Also observed was the creation of organisational units and operational integration within the University to sustain the commitment over time.

To balance the high-level policy driven approach along with institutional buy-in from the academics and all through the institution leads to the second assumption – the identification of, and partnering with, a broad range of stakeholders including university employees, and external stakeholders affected directly and indirectly by the functioning of the university and its aspirations towards serving an anchoring role within its city/region. This would demand, inter alia, the establishment of an integrative operational strategy along with various institutional or organisation structures to harness the power of the institutions and community to collaboratively produce meaningful and systemic change. While university stakeholders might differ in their aspirations and visions, forging a collaborative structure for an operational decision-making process based on mutuality, reciprocity, trust, and democratic principles has been critical in effective anchor institutions relation with stakeholders. In the case of South Africa with its history of exclusion of some while privileging others, as well as the spatial dimensions within which most universities find themselves, engaging in extensive consultation with external stakeholders becomes the next step towards universities serving an anchoring role beyond a strong institutional vision statement.

A third assumption is that universities are located in different socio-economic regions with different forms of economic, industrial and physical endowments. Hence, the extent of how one university will serve an anchoring role will be totally different from another. While the economic impact of some universities through student staff expenses, housing and real-estate development and business activity will be more salient in one context, other context will require that the universities play a more social, cultural or human role. This can be through cultural events, educational support of local schools or supporting the development of a more positive culture and identity within a community. How universities serve their anchoring role will be across a continuum of tangible and intangible benefits to the community.

## 4 The anchoring university within a Covid-19 pandemic

The previous section demonstrates the university serving an anchoring role within periods of normalcy and not a crisis. Since 2020 universities have been significantly affected by the global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in some cases in a total shut down of university activities, while in others total shift to online, distant and remote working. Universities have significantly adapted and adopted different models and approaches to performing their core functions of teaching, learning and engagement. Ranging from online learning, new research methodologies and forms of engagement influenced by the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is worthwhile to reflect on how a university can serve an anchoring institution during such periods, now and even when the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. The global response of universities to the pandemic has been as different as the local response. While some universities have led the way in developing cutting-edge research to understand the virus and contribute to vaccine development and other forms of personal protective equipment (PPE), some universities have been constrained by a convergence of resources limitations and even lack of political will and drive. At the local level, the response of management at some universities and campuses as argued by the company U3 Advisors, who work with anchor institutions, demonstrates that universities and colleges have the capacity to effectively respond to emergency and can rapidly convert their facilities to support frontline affected communities: “Preparing for future quick conversions to serve broader needs will be a central element of any “Anchor Strategy 2.0,” but new thinking cannot stop there” (U3 Advisors, 2021). Forging new partnerships with neighbourhood organisations and residents with the aim of creating healthy environments, affordable housing options and robust employment pipelines, the production of PPEs and other basic needs highlight the role and spending power of the university in supporting the local economy and sustaining livelihoods.

This has also been the reality for South African universities. The Vice Chancellor (VC) at the University of Pretoria echoes this sentiment as he states that

In times of crisis, we are compelled to change our strategies and move away from conventional approaches. Confronted as we are with the global COVID-19 pandemic ..., there is no place for ‘business as usual’ – because nothing will be ‘as usual’ again. Our universities need to be engaged in creative and innovative research, teaching and learning strategies, to address the many different spheres required to solve the complex, intersectional African and global crises that the pandemic has further exposed. (Kupe, 2020)

The VC goes on to define a new pathway for the university within the period of crisis arguing that

We need strong institutions that nurture leaders, anchor truly democratic futures, and promote inclusive economic development, environmental sustainability, and social progress... and we must develop new knowledge to save lives, to live more sustainably, and, during our tenure, to substantively contribute to creating a better life for all. (Ibid)

While the preceding is a fair assessment of the place the university finds itself within the current global context, the OECD (2007) has long urged universities to develop values of global competitiveness while also being locally engaged. The OECD (Ibid) emphasis that such a university must do away with the perceived dichotomy of global competitiveness and being locally engaged by developing values that serve an anchoring role linked to their strengths, resources and uniqueness. The report concludes that in summary, higher education institutions do and should have different profiles and strengths, but all can and should contribute to the development of their societies and communities local and regionally as well as nationally and internationally. The anchor institution framework has been identified to provide core principles for universities to deal with this dichotomy in an institutionalised and integrated way.

Within the current realities, Osman (2020) warns of new forms of discrimination, inequality and asymmetries in how universities engage with external stakeholders, suggesting COVID-19 should provoke more dialogues on inclusivity and intersectionality. She argues that universities need to develop an interdependent relationship between the diverse external players, knowledge forms, curriculum as it aims to drive broader socio-economic transformation within and beyond the institution (Ibid). While the next section highlights some of the principles that have characterised an anchor university institution, these principles and values will have to be carefully considered when conceptualising an anchor institution within a crisis – whether global, national or local.

## 5 Facets for university anchoring

From a developmental perspective, universities serve an anchoring role in the urban and city-region renewal of their immediate and extended vicinities through three broad ways: economic development, infrastructural development and revitalisation, and lastly, through social and cultural transformation.

### 5.1 Economic development

Universities can contribute to the economic development of their immediate and extended regions and communities through passive and active processes. As major sources of employment, procurement and attraction, universities have the capacity to trigger and support economic growth and development within their immediate neighbourhoods (Puukka, 2008). Universities create direct employment through their staff, indirect employment through employment by businesses that supply the university, and direct enhancement of production within the city-region. A study of food spending in Northeast Ohio show that purchasing by the University of Pennsylvania in West Philadelphia increased from \$1.3million to \$90million between 1986 when the university started and 2008, creating thousands of jobs and millions in local wages. Elsewhere, a study of northeast Ohio food spending (which totalled roughly \$15 billion) observed that a shift of 25% of food production to the local producers within a 16-county Northeast Ohio region, would create about 28,000 new jobs, providing work for about one in eight unemployed residents. It could increase annual regional output by \$4.2 billion and expand state and local tax collections by \$126 million (Masi, Schaller and Shuman, 2010). Anchors provide a vast range of employment and career opportunities for local people. For example, a local authority, a hospital and a university in the Leeds City Region together employ 27000 workers, they spend more than £817 million a year on the payroll and the disposable income that this generates contributes to the demand for goods and services in the local economy (Devins *et al.*, 2017). In an earlier study in the USA, Dubb and Howard (2006) show that colleges and universities purchased over \$373 billion in goods and services or more than 2 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product. This aligns with Clarke's (2017) comment that anchors usually are the leading employers and create local business opportunities and contribute to economic, social and cultural development. In Philadelphia, for example, the University of Pennsylvania is the city's top employer. Johns Hopkins Medical Centre is not only the city of Baltimore's top source of employment, but the state of Maryland's as well (Bank, Cloete and van Schalkwyk, 2018).

The U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development defines anchor institutions as (1) having regional socio-economic significance and (2) serving as a key economic driver or those organisations including universities that generate jobs, create business opportunities and develop human, social and cultural capital of their city-regions (Harris and Holley, 2016).

Moreover, Harris and Holley (2016) add to the debate on the economic developmental role of universities by drawing on the impact of students as residents on urban areas and as workers in urban labour markets. They argue that universities draw students (domestic and international) to live in a city and contribute to the local economy through spending (perhaps most significantly on rented housing) and provide flexible part-time labour.

Table 1 provides some examples of the economic effects of the universities in serving this development mandate (Ibid: 417).

**Table 1: Classification and examples of economic effects of universities**

<b>The role of anchors in city-region revitalisation: a strategic framework for a competitive inner city.</b>	
Anchoring role	Description
Purchaser	Direct institutional purchases towards local businesses.
Employer	Offering direct and indirect employment opportunities to local residents.
Workforce developer	Addressing workforce needs within the city region through direct skills training and improvement.
Infrastructure development	Providers / leverages resources towards infrastructural development and upliftment within the community.
Real estate developer	Using real estate development to anchor economic growth through several real estate development initiatives.
Knowledge sharing and innovation	Developing new and novel ideas, products and services towards improving the city-region community. Designing and providing short training courses.
Cultural and social development.	Addressing social and cultural challenges towards a better quality of life, social integration, and human dignity of the community.
Cluster anchoring	Stimulates growth of city-region through a number of channels: the attraction of economic activity into the community, staff, students and visitors expenses.

## 5.2 Social and cultural development

The Anchor Institution Task Force has argued that anchor institutions should support economic development and city-region transformation and hold a social-purpose mission. The task force posits that “anchor institutions demonstrate inherent core values of democracy, equity and social justice that enable the organisation to serve as a force for change” (Harris and Holley, 2016). There is, however, little evidence demonstrating how universities serving an anchor role have embraced and integrated this social-purpose mission in their broader institutional missions. Using concepts such as the engaged university or the civic university (Brink, 2020), authors have argued for a university model which moves beyond the narrow conceptualisation of university benefits towards more expansive, human-development oriented and democratically responsive outcomes. Concepts such as epistemological access (Morrow, 2009), expanded graduate outcomes (Fongwa, 2018; Walker, 2011), and education for the global citizenry (Nussbaum, 2005) have been proposed.

From a place-based approach, universities serving as anchors have been observed to preserve and foster heritage and culture of its immediate locality through developing a sense of place. Green, Lloyd and Parham (2013) argue using evidence from Hertfordshire that universities as anchors have a responsibility to preserve heritage by preserving a few important buildings and infrastructure and reflecting a more subtle relationship with the wider set of elements that contribute to collective memory. At Queen's University in Northern Ireland, the establishment of a Social Charter codified the university's civic and social contribution. Under the social charter is the university's commitment to promoting democratic culture and practices by creating spaces for a conversation on difficult and controversial issues needed to move the society from its history of political violence (Anchor Institutions Task Force, 2016).

Another important facet of university anchoring linked to social development is their contribution to educational outcomes within the city region or locality. Numerous studies have shown how universities anchoring has developed into enhancing educational outcomes in schools due to initiatives with local schools and other external stakeholders. Anchor institutions have worked with various communities to provide access for those who will otherwise not be able to access educational opportunities and have increased the skills base of those with qualifications but no skills. Cantor et al. (2013) show how the 'Say Yes to Education Syracuse' by Syracuse University brought community members and partners to work together, leading to higher enrolments in the city schools, home sale values increased, and dropout rates of 9th Graders declined between 2009 and 2012. Other studies have articulated the education

development roles of universities in communities (Anchor Institutions Task Force, 2016). The Education Park model by Cleveland University highlights the university's response to its "dual obligation of educator and community-builder" (Berkman and White, 2016, p. 20). The model seeks to "dramatically improve the physical environment of the community, spur new housing and commercial development while accelerating the creation of educational opportunities in the area through a collaboration of various stakeholders including public, private, philanthropic, civil society, School District governing body, Key Bank, Cleveland Foundation among others" Ibid, p. 21).

### 5.3 Infrastructural revitalisation

Anchor institutions are place-based organisations that invest in their surroundings as part of their business. As part of both economic development as well as social development, anchor institutions have served a role in transforming infrastructure within their immediate vicinities. Especially in less economically active areas and areas in decline with other businesses leaving, anchor institutions are usually among the region's largest property owners. These established buildings as well as new building designs, can be used to support city revival or transformation if the right social structures are in place to convert solid infrastructure into social infrastructure. Birch (2009) argues that the revitalisation of downtowns in older American cities has, in the main, been driven by the work of anchor institutions.

Using Michael Porter's theory of shared value, universities as place-based institutions have a significant potential to develop "policies and operating practices that enhance the[ir] competitiveness while simultaneously advancing the economy and social conditions in the communities in which it operates" (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Where such policies and practices are well established with the community, a community of practice is established, reorienting the university to work collaboratively with the community towards sustainable beneficial outcomes. Using a combination of consultative, contractual and collaborative approaches, the Sustainable Toronto project, a community-based initiative between the University of Toronto, York University, City of Toronto and local environmental groups to improve educational outcomes, reduce crime rates and better accessible public transportation systems (Harris and Holley, 2016)

However, it should be mentioned that in some cases, the transformation of the urban or downtown infrastructural fabric has come at a cost for poor working-class city dwellers who find themselves in the periphery of what used to be their home. While many studies have not adequately covered issues of residential displacement of poorer city residents, other studies

have shown how sustained engagement and collaboration between residents, anchor institutions and local or city government, and a broader range of stakeholders can mitigate the negative effects anchor-based infrastructural transformations and development. Elsewhere, Silverman, Lewis and Patterson (2014, p. 164) conclude that within the anchor led infrastructure development strategies in inner cities, “it is essential to expand the scope of citizen participation, mandate negotiated CBAs, and incorporate historically disenfranchised groups into the governance structure of anchor institutions”.

In South Africa the gentrification of the Woodstock area around the University of Cape Town (UCT) has been criticised as lacking the expected level of engagement and inclusiveness to accommodate the working class. In the case of the transformation of the Hatfield precinct based on a partnership between the Tshwane Municipality and the University of Pretoria (UP), and with consultations with local stakeholders, UP adopted the model developed in Detroit and Philadelphia from a partnership of the University of Pennsylvania’s, Mid-Town Detroit and the University of Maryland (Kromer and Kerman, 2004). Since 2015, the UP has adopted a City Improvement District (CID) plan to enhance infrastructural development, improve security in the city district and support socio-economic development in the greater Hatfield precinct (Hendricks and Flaherty, 2018).

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

With South African universities perceived by most of their immediate stakeholders as elitist, and the previously white advantaged universities aspiring towards research and teaching, excellence serving as an anchoring role could seem outlandish or irreconcilable. However, a key aspect of Pennsylvania State University’s drive from excellence to imminence as based on the Penn Compact (Harkavy et al., 2014). The Penn Compact was founded on three principles

related to the South African experience – these are increased access to Penn State for minority groups, the integration of knowledge, and to engage locally and globally. Through this Compact:

Local engagement work moved from being primarily a means to help Penn revitalise its local environment to becoming a way for it to achieve eminence as a research university. Moreover, the Compact's clear directive has become infused in nearly every aspect of the university, shaping both operations and culture across campus (Harkavy *et al.*, 2014, p. 110).

Similarly, to the Penn Compact, Cloete, Bailey and Maassen (2011) have argued that for African universities to become engines for national and local development, there is need for three core aspects – strengthened academic core, better coordination between the university and the broader society and more importantly the development of a pact.

While some of these initiatives can be perceived as private sector investors partnering with university for purposes of making profit from the presence of the university, it is important that universities adopt a more inclusive approach. A university serving an anchoring role would strive to design policies and procedures which seek to not only accommodate affluent students and businesses through the gentrification or urban development process but create opportunities for all. Universities serving an anchor role have worked with community-based organisations, private organisations and real estate developers towards developing shared values such as affordable housing for students and the wider community (Cantor *et al.*, 2013; Englot and Higgins, 2013; Porter *et al.*, 2019; Serang, 2010). These case studies show that universities serving an anchoring can leverage their numbers of students, staff and the business they attract towards infrastructural development not only for the affluent but even for working class, senior citizens and poor students.

## 6 Principles and practices of universities as anchor

The literature on anchor institutions is growing, with the number of HEIs serving anchoring roles within their immediate local and urban settings increasing. This section seeks to present some selected cases highlighting the core principles of anchoring by universities. While each case study's contexts, challenges, and dynamics are different, the review seeks to highlight the areas of intersection, processes, and values involved within an anchoring relationship between the university and its stakeholders.

### 6.1 Establishing a clear mission and vision towards responsiveness

While universities can generate new knowledge, innovate and even dictate the culture within their neighbourhood, such influence is only as strong as the nature of the institutional leadership and internal governance structures (Maassen, 2014). Taucean, Strauti and Tion, (2018) argue that strong leadership and good governance are vital to developing a responsive and innovative culture within a university needed to serve an anchoring role. A quick look at most university's vision and mission will show the use of words of 'relevance', responsive, engaged, but with little or no institutional capacity or support towards such lofty aspirations as academics and management get caught up in the core business of teaching and learning and knowledge production. Universities that have become engaged, entrepreneurial, or civic universities have clear leadership traits aligned to the vision, mission, and provision. Strategic objectives are linked to vision, mission, resourcing, funding and investment, people, expertise and incentive systems to support and sustain such a focus (OECD, 2016)

Birch et al. (2013) strongly suggest that:

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

The first and main aspect of serving an anchoring role is setting out a leadership-driven institutional policy. One that is driven organisationally across the university through the vision, mission and institutional culture, posture, and mandate. A typical example from the literature is Cleveland State University (CSU). Situated in downtown Cleveland, Ohio, CSU has described itself as an anchor university seeking to respond to a multiplicity of economic and social challenges in and around the city. From its senior level leadership, CSU set out its mission "to encourage excellence, diversity and Engaged Learning by providing a

contemporary and accessible education in the arts, science, humanities and professions and by conducting research scholarship and creative activity across branches of knowledge”<sup>1</sup>. CSU's commitment to the city of Cleveland was evident from the nature of its relationship with the city – its institutions, organisations, leaders, and even its challenges. The Education Park concept was developed to assist in meeting its anchoring aspirations within the Campus District

The Education Park was conceived as a product of three guiding principles advanced by CSU to achieve its aspirations as an anchor institution in the heart of the Campus District. Firstly, the university sought to leverage the physical reconstruction of CSU's campus to physically enhance the community and in the process spur investment within the campus district and beyond. Secondly, the university leadership embarked on an aggressive strategy to strengthen organizational partnerships and build institutional networks to achieve high-impact outcomes in an accelerated pattern that the university would otherwise not achieve in the stated timeframe. Thirdly, was the intentional emphasis on developing and producing high-quality, accessible, educational opportunities tied to regional workforce needs as a catalyst for community-building and shared interest (Berkman & White, 2016).

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

Birch et al. (2013) posits that when an anchor mission and vision is driven from institutional leadership, the issues which affect the institutional buy in can be holistically addressed. These include the institutional reward system, and the resourcing or funding of engagement initiatives. They argue that it requires conscious institution-defining leadership to activate and legitimise the practices of those faculty and staff who emphasise engagement such that they are not considered ‘second class citizens’ compared to those who focus on research for international audiences. Such a rewarding structure if not clearly articulated at the institutional level by senior leadership could cause a dichotomy between those who engage with their

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<sup>1</sup> CSU Mission statement from online website: [Our Program | Cleveland State University \(csuohio.edu\)](https://www.csuohio.edu/our-program)

immediate stakeholders and those who perceive engagement as secondary to the core academic function.

In terms of resourcing, while academics might seek opportunities to engage within their communities, these resources are usually not sustainable and hence the engagements become ad hoc and philanthropic in nature. A disappearing start-up account is not enough. A university that seeks to serve an anchoring role led from the top must through the institutional fiscal and structural investment define how its anchoring role will be funded and institutionalised through reciprocal investments in the community, the city-region or the place the university considers itself part of.

## 6.2 Embracing institutional partnerships, collaboration and networks

It is important to note that such an explicit policy drive towards social responsiveness by the university is only one side of the equation. Getting similar commitment from external stakeholders such as local government, business, and other players within the community is critical for establishing an anchoring role. In a bid to ensure successful collaboration towards city development, the mayor of the City of Rochester, New York, established an office for Community Wealth Building to bring together all stakeholders within the community as they work closely with the government. The city government sought to go beyond being a collaborator with the HEIs, and become a convener of the various stakeholders, which helps to short-circuit the bureaucratic processes within government, which present a challenge to the pace at which change can happen (Porter et al., 2019).

Echoing early scholars who have argued that being place-based is important, but not the sole requirement for universities to contribute to city-region development, Stachowiak and colleagues (Stachowiak *et al.*, 2013) use the notion of an 'innovative infrastructure' or 'internal structures' to describe the internal strategic processes, that support innovation or anchoring role to extend the benefits of the university beyond the campus sustainably.

In the USA city of Syracuse, the development of a democratic body, a non-profit organisation known as the Near Westside Initiative, was the vehicle to transform the arms-length relationship between the university and community stakeholders into a collaborative momentum. Such a collaborative initiative became the strategy to attacking the grand challenge of decades of urban disinvestment towards sustainable urbanisation (Cantor et al., 2013).

### 6.3 Leveraging university resources to the benefit of the neighbourhood.

The question remains for many how the university makes its resources and facilities available to its external community. Cantor (2011) argues that for universities to serve their anchoring role in cities and metropolitan areas, they must embrace a seamless two-way street between the communities and campuses to facilitate knowledge sharing and human capital, which is too often unseen and unappreciated. Goddard and his colleagues (Goddard *et al.*, 2014) also argue that universities ought to be ‘unavoidably embedded’ within their home region. Good physical development and planning of the campuses can be one vehicle for such embeddedness (Perry, Wiewel and Menendez, 2009). In such a planning approach, universities make their services and resources available to residents while also making it easier for community members to interact actively and passively with university students, staff and management.

The Education Park project at CSU was conceived to meet its mission of “building a thriving neighbourhood in the area surrounding the Campus District”<sup>2</sup>. One of the guiding principles in achieving this was through changing its infrastructural outlook to relate better with its neighbourhood. From 2002 the then fifth president of CSU decided to transform the campus architecture from a traditional inward-oriented with courtyards isolated from the city to an outwardly focused alignment that placed building fronts along the city's major corridors. The Student Centre became closely linked to the city. The sixth president inaugurated in 2009 continued this theme of creating a physical intimacy between city and university through other buildings and renovations.

In the case of RU, a key principle of *Reviving Grahamstown Schools* was that “the more accessible Rhodes University is to the young people of Grahamstown. The greater the influence it will have and the stronger the bond of association with the entire community, eroding the dominant schooling culture of exclusion and despair” (RU, 2021, p.4)<sup>3</sup>. According to the Plan reviving Grahamstown’s schools cannot be a blanket, one size fits all approach: but rather a multi-pronged, multi-stage and multi-partner one. Such an approach recognises that different partners have different strengths and interests which can be combined and aligned to achieve greater impact. Resources will also be directed to where they can make the most difference – into the community at large to create a supportive environment. Harris and Holley (2016)

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Rhodes University (2021) *Reviving Grahamstons Schools Vice Chancellors 2021 Plan.*

argue that the collaboration of multiple organisations, including HEIs, strengthens civic indicators.

## 7 Some conceptual and methodological considerations

Several conceptual and theoretical approaches have been used in studying anchor institutions in general and universities in particular (Harris and Holley, 2016). This section captures some of the widely used conceptual models and methodological approaches that would inform an empirical study within the South African context.

### 7.1 Conceptual considerations

Conceptually, studies focusing on the role of universities in their immediate and extended communities have adopted several conceptual approaches. Firstly, the human capital approach seems to be the primary conceptual framing in studying universities as anchor institutions in cities and regions (Abel and Deitz, 2011; Caragliu, Bo and Nijkamp, 2011). The human capital framing approach shifts slightly from the research and community engagement function of the university. Still, it emphasises how much the university's teaching mission supports the human capital development needed to drive and sustain development within the immediate region (Barra and Zotti, 2016; Winters, 2015). How this role is conceptualised and implemented within an anchoring relationship will be a function of the context, role players and skills needs agreed upon between the various role-players.

Since highly skilled and well-educated graduates are one of the key determinants of economic growth within a country or region, and a main output from the university, the share of graduates is considered an ultimate driver for regional or city development. Regional economies studies have strongly linked human capital stock to place-based employment growth, wages, income and innovation (Ball and Chik, 2001; Dragicevic, 2015; Siegfried, Sanderson and McHenry, 2007). These studies lean on the human capital theory tenets that human capital increases individual-level productivity and, by extension, regional or local productivity (Becker, 1964). A critical aspect of the stock of human capital in the region is its graduate retention capacity (Abel and Deitz, 2011) which is affected by a range of push and pull factors within the region (Kitagawa *et al.*, 2021).

Stakeholder theory has also been applied as a conceptual framing in understanding universities as anchors in regions (Jongbloed, Enders and Salemo, 2008). Pioneered by the work of Freeman (Freeman, 1984; Freeman, Phillips and Sisodia, 2020), the stakeholder theory argues that within complex social and political dynamics, all individuals or groups with any form of stake in the organisation are to be considered in the strategic management with the aim of creating value for customers, suppliers, owners, employees and local communities (de Freitas

Langrafe et al., 2020). Identifying and mapping all stakeholders and their interests and demands become relevant for survival and sustainability within place-based development. Stakeholders should not be perceived as passive recipients of philanthropic donations but rather as more active voices in determining the outcome of any kind of collaboration or partnership within a reciprocal beneficitation relationship with the university. For universities, Benneworth and Jongbloed (2010) propose a nested stakeholder framing approach that takes into consideration stakeholders at three levels of influence: macro level, meso and micro level. They opine that "analyses which are interested in understanding stakeholder salience as an explanation of changing university behaviour must therefore consider the wider systemic relationships and networks within which salience is defined" (Ibid: 583). Working with a macro level stakeholder does not in any way replace the place of micro level stakeholders due to differences in interest, aspirations and possible contribution to the anchoring relationship.

The neo-institutional theory has also been applied in examining university-stakeholder relationships, focusing on the blurring boundaries between universities and industry (Doutriaux, 2003). Within such industry-linked research and patenting relationships, isomorphic behaviours seem to constrain university actors in the implementation of institutional policies aimed at more inclusive outcomes (Baldini *et al.*, 2014). Stronger private sector players seem to affect more influence in stakeholder engagements. Furthermore, social dynamics such as power relations and knowledge epistemologies are not adequately captured within the current neo-institutional theory literature in relation to the role of universities in society.

While this review cannot cover all conceptual approaches in understanding universities engagement within an anchoring framing, other conceptual approaches worth mentioning include the triple helix framing (Leydesdorff, 2012); innovation systems approach (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000; Mowery and Sampat, 2009); and the learning regions approach (Fongwa, 2018; Keane and Allison, 1999). In conclusion, studies on the relationship of universities within their cities and regions demand nuanced conceptual approaches and methodologies.

## 7.2 Methodological considerations

Four methodological approaches that have been used to examine the role of universities as anchor institutions are discussed here. These include the econometric approach with a focus on impact studies, longitudinal approach, the comparative approach, and finally the quasi-experimental approach. This brief overview aims at highlighting the core tenet of these

approaches while highlighting limitations towards developing a holistic approach. Identifying the units of analysis at different levels (macro, meso, micro), and the variables has also been a core part of econometric approaches.

#### 7.2.1 Economic impact studies

Several economic impact approaches and methodologies have been applied in measuring the economic transformation of a city, region or community because of the presence of a university. Especially in the global north, these studies have largely been institutionally driven as universities seek legitimisation for public funding (Goldstein & Renault, 2004; Puukka, 2008; Wangenge-Ouma & Fongwa, 2012). Approaches such as the counterfactual approach and other regressions analysis focus on the change in income levels, business development, direct and indirect jobs growth and their multiplier effects within the region and GDP contributions (Siegfried et al., 2007). One critique of the economic impact approach is the challenge to effectively establish causality hence the use of concepts such as contribution rather than impact. Increasingly econometric studies are therefore complemented with qualitative data from interviews with stakeholders as well as institutional data from universities and government institutions (Keane & Allison, 1999). Given the popularity of economic impact studies and the policy relevance, researchers have progressively developed and improved models to best account for all variables within a wide range of contexts and for specific universities – teaching versus research university, as well as rural-based versus urban/city-based campuses.

#### 7.2.2 Longitudinal studies

Longitudinal studies dealing with HEIs as anchor institutions seem to be few and far between due to the need for continuous data collection across a longer period. According to Harris & Holley, (2016), while researchers have recognised that studies using the single snapshot view of institutional impact is not sufficient, little research on anchor institutions has been conducted using a longitudinal approach. The longitudinal approach allows for patterns and trends to be identified within the long-term data, which will be important for universities to more clearly gauge their contribution to the surrounding communities (Taylor and Luter, 2013).

#### 7.2.3 Comparative case studies

Comparative case studies have been identified as a potentially useful design in understanding and evaluating the contribution of universities as anchors within their city regions. The design will fundamentally shift from the one case design adopted by most current studies to include more than one institution within their cities or regions (Benneworth and Hospers, 2008). Such an approach would enable a more nuanced contextual analysis of in situ factors responsible for

the nature of the university's relationships, contribution, and impact as an anchor. Within a similar policy jurisdiction, the difference in the impact of one university to another would be the soft issues and intangible factors which could contribute to theoretical development. To explain some contextual and success differences between Route 128 and Silicon Valley, Saxenian, (1994) adopted a comparative methodology using ethnographic data. Comparative studies can be conducted simultaneously or in subsequent series, using similar theoretical and conceptual frameworks that can be applied in other cases.

#### 7.2.4 The quasi-experimental approach

This approach seeks to measure the impact of a particular intervention of an institution within the city region wherein other factors and variables are controlled for (Harris & Holley, 2016). According to Drucker and Goldstein (2007), this approach has not been widely used within the field of regional studies and economic development due to the need to effectively account for the counterfactual (Siegfried et al., 2007). Considering the complex impacts of anchor institutions being able to isolate and measure specific variables makes the quasi-experimental approach more advantageous if carefully combined with other approaches such as the econometric. Specific variables such as tax revenue or job growth can be isolated and analysed statistically to analyse the contribution of a particular initiative of the university such as local procurement drive.

### 7.3 Contextual considerations

As earlier mentioned, studies on universities as anchor institutions have been dominated by Western scholarship with studies from the USA contributing the greatest share. However, even in the USA, the role of context in understanding how universities serve an anchoring role has been highlighted. As an anchor institution the university has an impact on and within its local area – hence defining the local becomes critical in determining its anchoring role. Factors include size of the university, the land and other infrastructural assets it possesses, number of people it employs, its spending power, the nature of its services (utilities, emergency and health support), and the ways in which it can interact with the community. Goldstein and Drucker (2006) assert that the anchoring role played by a university does not only depend on the type and size of the institution, but even more with the context of the place in which it is located. They show that universities in smaller cities have a stronger economic impact.

Birch et al. (2013: 9) argue that “the changing meaning of “city” and “urban” might not alter the “immobile” dimension of anchor institution definition; however, it certainly does change the urban space within which anchor institutions are expected to operate”. The nature of

interactions within rural context, secondary cities and metropolitan areas further suggests consistent contextualisation of the locality within which an anchor institution operates. Bender (2008, p. 93), refers to the notion of “contextual codes of engagement” to refer to the different approaches’ institutions may assume in different context suggest a contextual code of anchoring by universities.

From a policy perspective (Goddard et al., 2014) argue that policy implementation needs to reflect the distinctiveness of particular cities and the institutions they house. Operationalising that within a research project would suggest that the conceptual and methodological approach in understanding the anchoring role of a long-established university within a vulnerable city which has another vulnerable institution will be different for a vulnerable university that is the only university within its city or region. Fostering the anchoring role of universities there will demand context-sensitive research design from one university and context to another.

## 8 Proposing a conceptual framing of universities as anchor universities in South Africa

### 8.1 Introduction

The preceding literature on universities as anchor institutions suggest a skewed representation of studies in favour of the global north countries with very few in developing countries. South African scholarship on university community engagement has witnessed significant growth in the last two decades (Council on Higher Education, 2016). Different conceptual approaches to the contribution of universities to their immediate and extended communities, cities and regions have been developed (Bender, 2008; Kruss et al., 2012). These included the Community-Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) within which service learning was largely embedded (Akhurst *et al.*, 2016; Preece, 2017), engaged university scholarship (van Schalkwyk and de Lange, 2018), universities in regional development (Fongwa, 2018b; Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma, 2015; Mtawa et al., 2016); university community innovation (Kruss, 2012), and the development of a pact (Cloete et al., 2011).

A limited emerging body of researchers has started using the notion of anchor institutions (Combrinck and Nortjé, 2021; Olowu, 2012). However, the anchoring role of universities in South Africa as in most parts of the continent remains poorly developed (Bank et al., 2018). Within the broader engagement scholarship, different variables such as economic development contribution, or social justice value, or the research and knowledge engagement role of universities have been analysed separately in the different studies. As argued by Holley and Harris (2016: 429–430) “The complexity of city-university interactions presents theoretical and methodological challenges that scholars will need to address to more fully develop our understanding of these issues”. This complexity is even more nuanced within a society wherein the university most often represents so much inequality within communities plagued by poverty, unemployment, and historical injustices.

As captured by Bawa (2018), the current higher education system in South Africa demands a rethink in how it reflects and represents the social, economic, cultural and spiritual needs and aspirations of the society in general but also of its immediate surroundings – rural, urban, and city. However, designing a framework which permits universities to sustainably engage with their immediately and extended stakeholders towards social, economic and democratic development demands an anchoring strategy. A growing body of literature is emerging aimed at developing strategies that bring together the economic and innovation role and function of universities along with the social, cultural and public good discourse within an integrated

framework. These frameworks are being developed within the anchor institution discourse (Ehlenz, 2018).

Becoming an anchor within their immediate and extended cities, urban and rural contexts, universities need to redefine and expand their mission and vision. Such a redefinition of vision demands a clearly articulated top driven policy established with adequate buy-in from the middle and bottom stakeholders. Such a policy drive will be further supported by institutional resources and structures which do not aim at forcing engagement unto faculty members, but adequately communicate the shared value benefits of serving such a role both for academia and the broader society.

## 8.2 Towards an operational framing for anchor universities

To understand how South African universities are serving or can serve an anchoring role within their city-regions or rural communities this section proposes an adapted framework from two complementing frameworks. First, is the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) framework proposed by ICIC and CEOs for Cities in their joint study. The ICIC framework was initially presented in 2002 and later refined in 2010. The framework identifies seven key areas through which anchor institutions in urban inner city or rural communities can meaningfully impact on disadvantaged areas towards stimulating community revitalisation (Ehlenz, 2018).; These include purchasing of goods and services; employment; developing real estate; creating business incubators; advising businesses and building networks; and workforce development. While the university cannot always provide for these services, creating an enabling environment for skills development through co-curriculum development, internships and entrepreneurial training opportunities, as well as the attraction of venture capital, are some of the potential opportunities an effective anchor institution can trigger. The Front Door programme of Wayne State University (WSU) in the USA was an example of how an anchor university leverages its resources to connect industry with university resources. The Front Door serves as a portal for local businesses to tap into WSU's resources, including faculty consultants, research expertise, facilities, technology, licensing opportunities, and investment in research. "In addition to these services, the program also matches students to serve as interns with local businesses to support entrepreneurship efforts" (Rubin and Rose, n.d.)

The Democracy Collaborative framework contributes to the literature by evaluating the roles of anchor institutions by focusing on issues beyond the core institutional business of the university and its contribution to economic development alone. The framework incorporates

values of public health, environmental awareness and K-12 education metrics. It further perceives the anchor as an institutional ‘state of mind with a public good mandate.

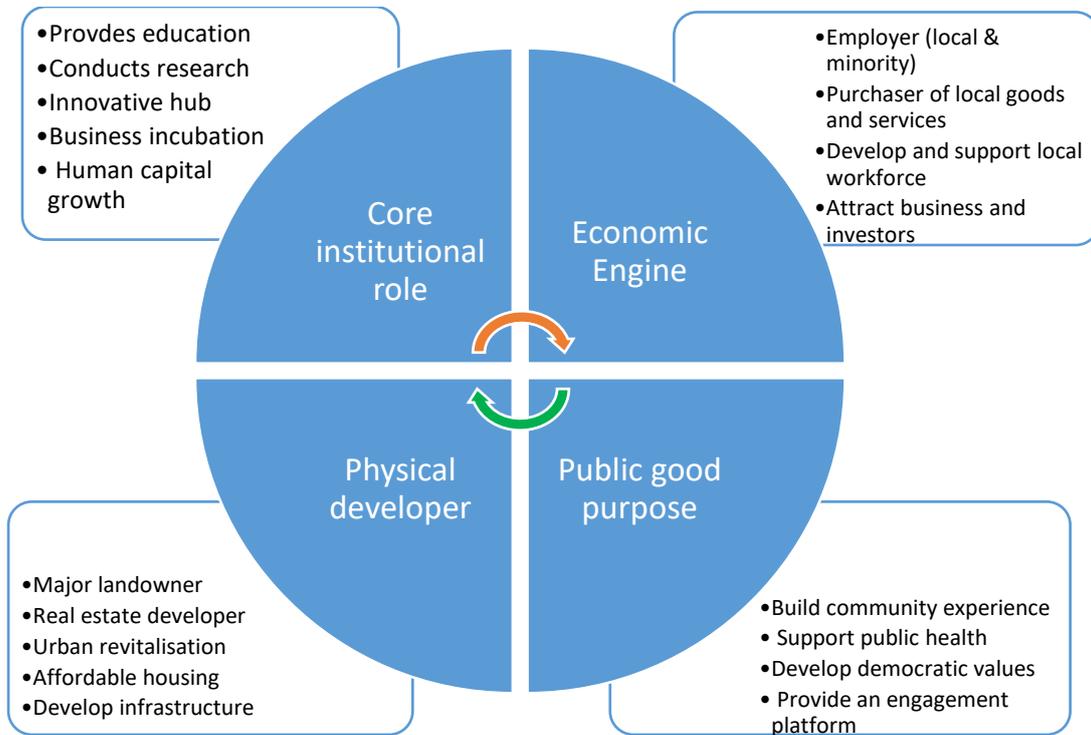
The operationalisation of the ICIC and Democratic Collaborative frameworks provide a hybrid framework which captures four key roles for anchor institutions within their communities and neighbourhood whether in the city or rural context. The first role is linked to the core institutional mandate of the university which includes provision of education services, including teaching and conducting research and knowledge production, serving as an innovation hub based on research and patenting outputs, supporting human capital stock within the area; and supporting business development and growth. The second role is linked to serving as an economic engine for economic development. Here the university is expected to serve as an employer, purchaser of goods and services, incubator of local business, creator of indirect jobs from its service providers, and developing the local workforce. A third role as an anchor institution is linked to its physical role as major landowner. The university serves in real estate development, urban revitalisation, city improvement, and transforming neighbourhood infrastructure. Some universities have supported the development of affordable housing in their city region area. A fourth anchor role of the university is its public good mandate. This function is founded on the democratic collaborative framework wherein the university is expected to build community experiences, support public health challenges, develop and promote democratic values, and serve as a platform for social engagement.

Central to the above framework are four governance principles each university must possess and clearly articulate in its policy, practice and institutional values: These values include:

- ✚ an anchor mission and vision; The university needs to clearly articulate its vision and mission towards becoming an anchor institution within its institutional documents. The question of “What is the institutional vision and mission of the university to city or urban renewal? must be clearly answerable.
- ✚ Institutionalisation of the mission and vision: The well-articulated place-based policy needs to be embedded throughout institutional structures, policies and implementation plans to ensure that the policy is not just a document but becomes an action plan throughout all levels of governance and relating with external stakeholders.
- ✚ Establishing pact with local stakeholders: These include collaborative structures, networks and partnerships towards a mutually beneficiating relationship with local stakeholders.

- ✚ Leveraging institutional resources towards achieving the anchor vision. The university must clearly identify how it will leverage its human, physical and social resources towards socio-economic wellbeing and revitalisation of its immediate and extended communities.

**Figure 1: Proposed framework for universities as anchor institutions**



As argued by Harkavy and Hodges (2012), the combination of both frameworks provides a deductive anchor institution roadmap derived from the philosophical principles that guide the discourse on a shared value model with a range of tools to achieve broader community revitalisation while accomplishing institutional goals of the university. Using these tools, Ehlenz (2018) argues for a wider application of the framework towards achieving three purposes. Firstly, to empirically assess universities anchor strategies including neighbourhood market and socioeconomic outcomes. Secondly, she argues for more non-USA and international case studies to determine why universities do or do not pursue anchor strategies and thirdly to seek integrating university-community engagement partnership initiatives and anchor revitalisation research which have so far operated separate from each other.

### 8.3 Concluding remarks

The role of universities has been changing and evolving from a traditional inward-looking institution to an outward looking and responsive part of a broader society. One of the main facets of this changing landscape of the university is its capacity to respond to societal needs

(Conner, 2021). Different university forms and types have evolved in response to calls for more university relevance. Within the current debate the notion of anchoring is gaining much currency. Arguably, the anchor institution approach suggests an integration of discrete forms of university community engagement, service learning, and engaged scholarship towards one which brings all the stakeholders and role players, as well as functions of the university, together within an institutional driven mandate and support by the various internal players. It is again important to emphasise that while South African universities have at different levels embraced their engagement function as one of the three core functions of the university, a university serving an anchoring role demands more than an engagement function by one faculty, department, or individual academic.

The university serving an anchoring role does not limit its vision and mission to a local and narrow focus, but rather balances its global or national competitiveness and contextual relevance. This balancing act is endorsed by actively engaging within its city/regional, urban or local context through a clearly defined, systematically and sustainable coordinated set of priorities agreed upon through a network of partners and stakeholders within and external to the university. Such a vision is not only driven from the highest office of the university governance but is strategically embedded into the culture and functioning of the university. In so doing the core functions of research, reaching and engagement become core instruments in achieving its anchoring role.

The review of evidence from the global north as well as from South Africa suggests that universities can support the transformation and revitalisation of their localities through a wide range of activities, without compromising their national and international aspirations. This concept paper proposes a conceptual framing towards an empirical study to assess and understand how South Africa universities can serve as anchors within their rural or urban settings while driving their teaching and research functions. The application of this framing will yet have implications for the different context within which the university is situated. Given that the university is expected to put in place a policy statement, structures, incentives and programmes to enhance its anchoring role, the level of buy-in from all its constituencies such as academics, city or local political governance structures and role players remains a constantly negotiated process aimed at ensuring win-win for all.

Serving an anchoring function is a relative new concept within a changing South African higher education context. However, many, if not all South African universities have one form of engagement with one community constituent or another. These endeavours pursue engaged

scholarship and accept the expanded development role of university to society. Furthermore, South African universities continue to enjoy global international recognition for the quality and quantity of research outputs across the rating agencies. However, serving an anchoring role remains elusive, loosely conceptualised and sometimes even contested. This fluidity in understanding the anchor concept is even more critical considering the internal and external transformation imperatives facing South African universities. This imperative demands them to transform not only their internal cultures, postures and identities but more so to contribute towards the transformation of the South African society towards one which socio-economically inclusive, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic.

For this to be achieved, South African universities need to rethink their external postures. While all universities cannot become anchors there is adequate evidence that universities have a significant role to play in socio-economic transformation of their immediate and extended communities and neighbourhoods. Each university that aspires serving an anchoring role will need a clear mission statement and strategic plan; followed by administrative structures built into the policy and strategy. The anchoring vision will be embedded into various aspects of the curriculum and pedagogy through an institutionalised policy to which specific funding, budgeting and resources are located. Finally, the university will need to constantly track and evaluated its anchoring strategy success, footprints and address unintended consequences within its constituencies.

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