



| LEAD ARTICLE

RE-IMAGINING THE UNIVERSITY AS ANCHOR INSTITUTION

PROFESSOR SHARON BELL



This article is the third in a triptych for Transform exploring the nature of

university engagement in our times – times when we can no longer take for granted our communities' continuing trust, or assume public confidence and unquestioning acceptance

of the role of universities in the search for truth and transfer of knowledge.

The first article in the series explored the impact of the stratification and commodification of higher education and the ramifications of our intertwining with, and mirroring of, an economic system. The second contribution explored the challenge of whether, when we are increasingly aligned with the generation of economic capital, we can continue to aspire to be aligned with the generation of cultural and social capital as an engaged and sustainable sector with a critical civic role. The analysis highlighted the imperative to generate our own authentic narratives of the university of the future emphasising the evidence of our adaptive organisational capacity.

The focus of this third article is on place – specifically the city-region contexts in which universities play an increasingly important role as they actively shape the urban landscape and environment. At a time when the city has become a unique and beneficial environment for higher education, as 'anchor' institutions, our role arguably extends beyond the traditional role of anchor institutions, that of 'mooring' individuals and communities. Focus on place also serves to remind us that our narratives are not just articulated through the words, or increasingly tag lines, we employ to describe ourselves, but through the ways in which we occupy, design and refashion space and how we engage in dynamic relationship with our communities.

The triptych began with the observation that Oxford Dictionaries had declared

'post-truth' to be its 2016 word of the year, as did the *Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache*¹. Two years later the 2018 word of the year is 'toxic'. Oxford Dictionaries data shows that, along with a 45 per cent rise in the number of times 'toxic' has been looked up on oxforddictionaries.com, over 2018 this word was used in a wide array of contexts, with the scope of its application underpinning its current prominence in the English lexicon. If we accept that the Oxford Word of the Year reflects the 'ethos, mood, or preoccupations of the passing year, and has lasting potential as a term of cultural significance' for the English-speaking world, 'toxic' should cause us as educators and researchers to pause and reflect. It was previously proposed that we need to re-imagine university engagement in a post-truth world. Do we now need to re-imagine the role of universities in a 'toxic' world?

To focus this challenge, the top 'toxic' collocates for the year, words that are habitually used with 'toxic', provide a clear indication of what really matters. In this case the evidence is that our pre-occupation is with the environment (chemical, substance, gas, waste, algae, air)². Reinforcing the prominence of the environment in our collective experience and psyche *Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache Wort Des Jahres 2018* was '*Heißzeit*' literally 'hot-time or heat-age', phonologically analogous to '*Eiszeit*' (ice age), evocative of an epoch of climate change³ Latour's (2017) New Climatic Regime.

As Birch et al observe (2013:7-9), urbanism of the 21st century has become species defining, with more people now living in urban rather than rural settlements.

These expansive urban settlements⁴ are dramatically changing the environment in which the majority of the human species live and the nature of the institutions that define their communities:

Although market institutions and the corporate and productive capacities they offer are certainly central to the modern development of place, non-market, place based institutions are also key "anchors" of place for by their practices, they "root" or otherwise "moor" the people of the urban in place (2013:8).

Goddard (2018:356) observes that 'anchor' institutions might be characterised as not just *in* the place but *of* the place' [emphasis added]. He deploys the U.K Work Foundation definition of 'anchor' institutions which importantly distinguishes such institutions from government, or agencies of government:

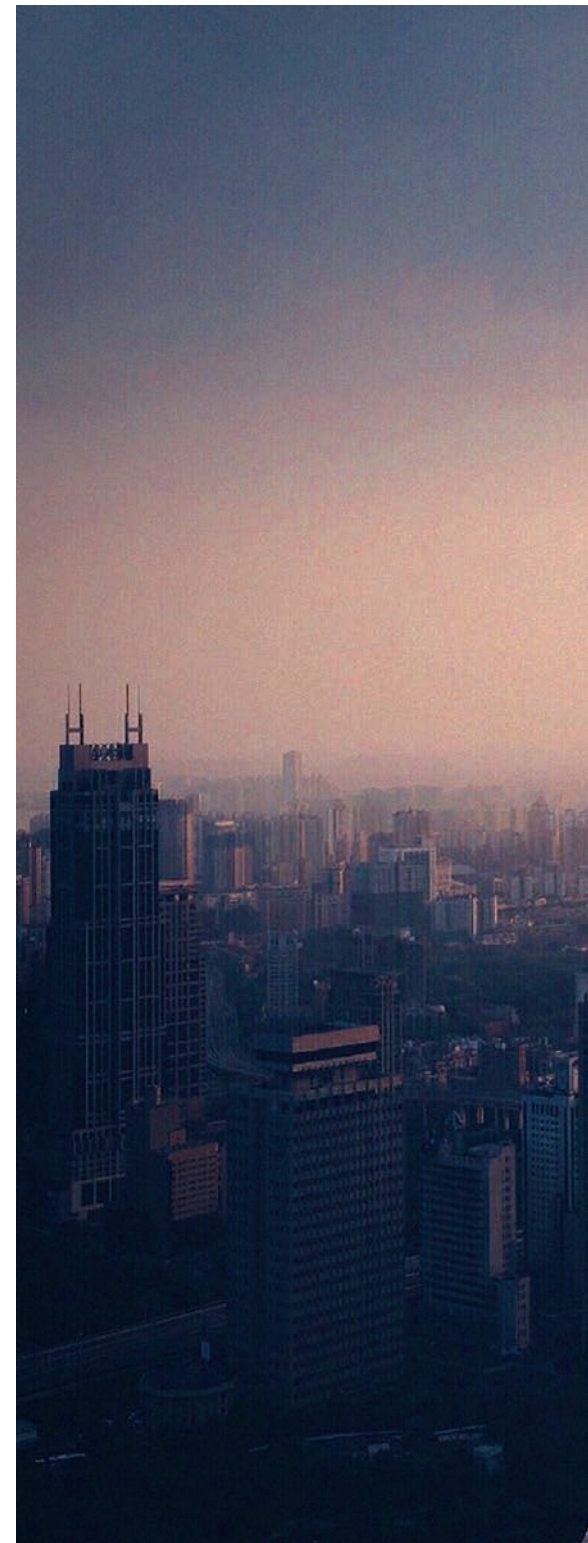
...large, locally embedded institutions, typically non-governmental public sector, cultural or other civic institutions that are of significant importance to the economy and the wider community life of the cities in which they are based. They generate positive externalities and

¹ Bell, S (2017) "University Engagement in a Post-Truth World", Transform: The Journal of Engaged Scholarship, Vol1. No1, <http://www.engagementaustralia.org.au/transform.html>

² <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2018>

³ <https://gfds.de/wort-des-jahres-2018/>

⁴ Critical urban researchers have shifted their gaze to outside the global core zones of capitalism to rapidly growing metropolitan centres based on new forms of industrialization (Calthorpe, 2011).





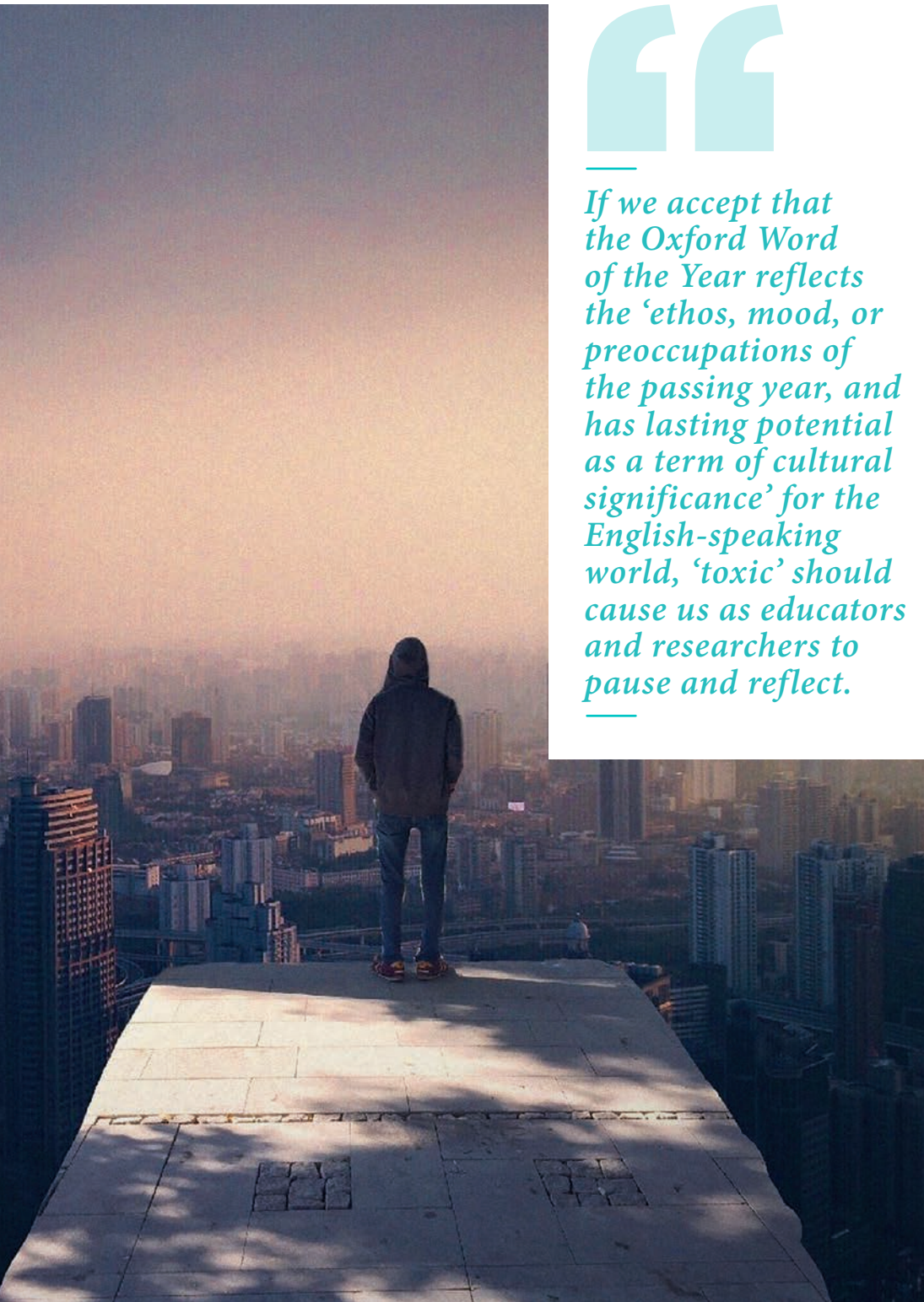
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relationships that can support or “anchor” wider economic activity in the locality. Anchor institutions do not have a democratic mandate and their primary missions do not involve regeneration or local economic development. Nonetheless their scale, local rootedness and community links are such that they can play a key role in local development and economic growth representing the ‘sticky capital’ around which economic growth strategies can be built. (The Work Foundation, 2010:3)

The pre-dominance of the urban setting is reflected in the purposive practices of universities as ‘anchor’ institutions: institutions that are spatially and philosophically embedded in place i.e. of place⁵; characterised by a high degree of stability and longevity, scale and influence; yet fluid and dynamic; and simultaneously globally networked. Universities as ‘anchors’ epitomise the spatial logic of distinguished urbanist Castells (1996) – the ‘space of places’ and the ‘space of flows’.

In a variation on this theme, Sharon Haar (2010: xxx) in her analysis of Chicago ‘city as campus’⁶ argues that urban campuses cannot be understood as entities separate from their host cities, and the city, once anathema to the American ideal of higher education, is now acknowledged to be an extraordinarily beneficial environment for contemporary higher education:

The conditions of the late-nineteenth-century industrialization established the ground for the urban university. This is not to say



that universities (although they were typically colleges at that time) did not previously exist in cities. But in the late nineteenth century what we have come to know as American higher education and the American city began to solidify around progressive ideas of citizenship, the need to educate a growing and urbanizing population in an industrializing nation, the need to train professionals and managers for the industrial economy, and the need to build institutions around modern scientific and scholarly research (2010: xiv-xv).

It is important to note that the Brookings Institution, particularly post the global financial crisis, has been very influential in framing the urban focus of this agenda. In addition to a raft of previous urban research⁷ in 2008 Brookings launched a metropolitan-centric view of prosperity *Unleashing the Potential of a Metropolitan Nation*, an ambitious, multi-year initiative to build long-term US prosperity by reinvigorating the federal role in promoting the health and vitality of America's metropolitan areas. This, together with the long-standing coupling of higher education with civic purpose and participatory democracy in the United States, is undoubtedly one factor in the apparent American dominance of the recent literature on the city-region and higher education. Working from a different axis of knowledge, Heffernan et al (2018: 1-2) note that the earliest geographical research on universities was contemporaneous with the 1950s and 60s expansion of higher education across the globe, with significant contributions by European as well as American scholars, and analysis that

extended beyond the Western world.

Glyn Davis asserts that the professionally focused, metropolitan environment shaped the formation of the Australian university in the mid-19th century, with a focus on professional education to meet the needs of the time:

This is a *metropolitan* model of a university, an institution of the city rather than a separate residential community. Metropolitan implies an urban setting, as opposed to a small and self-enclosed community set apart from the world. Like a city office block, a metropolitan university is a place people inhabit during the day, not a dwelling or a metaphysical ideal. It is a pragmatic and utilitarian understanding, fitting for a nation of practical people (2017:10).

Den Heijer and Curvelo Magdaniel (2018) see innovation, and the concomitant attraction of talented students and highly skilled workers, as a defining factor in city-university partnerships, and a common goal of municipalities and universities in the knowledge economy:

However, the simple presence of universities and their human capital is not enough to stimulate innovation and create wealth in cities. There are challenges for cities in exploiting and managing the provision of human capital as economic assets. Accordingly, managing the interaction between universities, industry and governments is considered the essence of remaining competitive in the knowledge economy (2018: 440).

Not least of these challenges might be that students and staff of universities

do not see themselves as 'economic assets' to be exploited, nor their role within their city as primarily that of wealth creation.

Echoing the late Sir David Watson, who reminded us that the modern university is expected to be many contradictory things simultaneously (2007: 362-63), Haar emphasises that universities are predicated on the intersection of the past and the future as 'symbols of future overcoming, of knowledge facing the unknown' (2010: xxiv). The attendant responsibility for universities is to enact complex and contradictory roles for multiple constituencies, including institutional funders and founders, past, present and future students and their parents, all the while embracing the imperative to accommodate changing cultural, disciplinary and intellectual discourses (2010: xvii).

These emergent discourses are unlikely to align with the values and expectations of all constituencies, and may position students in particular in contested spaces with family members and their communities, and university representatives and leaders in contested spaces with community priorities and local leaders. The campus, the urban space, the university and its diverse communities are thus in constant negotiation – the strenuous, thoughtful and argumentative interaction identified by the Association of Commonwealth Universities as defining university engagement at the turn of the century (Bjarnason & Coldstream 2003: i).

THE CITY AS CAMPUS

Although the relationship between the city and the university can be traced

to the 19th century, with antecedents in medieval institutions (Bender 1988), the role of the university in the city-region has arguably undergone dramatic transformation with the growth of the knowledge economy. Urban universities are now playing critical roles in shaping their context and social relations, not as discrete scholarly communities but as cosmopolitan communities activating new city centres and new forms of engagement in physical and virtual space (Haaretz, 2010). In parallel, the concept of a co-production model of innovation in which ‘... government, industry, academia and civil participants work together to co-create the future and drive structural changes far beyond the scope of what any one organization or person could do alone’⁸ fundamentally redefines understanding of the innovation process and universities’ role within this.

Large projects involving campus expansion and the development of specialist health and medical research precincts⁹ are designed to meet university needs, but are also contiguous with city planning, the needs of communities, the growth patterns of urban neighbourhoods, transport infrastructure and public amenity. Campuses are increasingly porous, with opportunities for co-location of commercial, public sector and not-for-profit partners factored in from the design stage. Collaboration with a range of service providers is no longer an afterthought in campus and precinct design but an integral component of realising the dynamics of new forms of interaction, exchange and innovation. Metropolitan universities help define and sustain the economies of their city-regions and, importantly, they are seen as enduring institutions.

This is arguably a long way from the established manifesto of universities engaged in urban revitalisation and social transformation, such as that historically championed by the Centre for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania and more recently articulated in the 2007 manifesto *Dewey’s Dream*¹⁰.

As others have noted¹¹, the very nature of the knowledge economy demands new forms of engagement on the part of universities. City-regions now have a symbiotic relationship with universities, who are not only knowledge brokers but also produce ‘knowledge workers’, as observed in a pointed, if crudely instrumentalist fashion, by Robert Campbell and echoed earlier in this paper:

In a way, universities are the industries of today. They’ve replaced the manufacturing that has almost disappeared from US cities. A university imports raw material in the form of 18-year-old minds and bodies, processes that material, and four years later ejects a finished product that is ready for the market. Education is today’s equivalent of the production line. It’s an economic boon to any city (cited Haar, 2010: 149).

As Haar observes, cities are willing to take the risk of the expansion and expanding influence of universities to capitalise on their potential to realise urban development and economic growth (2010: 150).

When Michael Gibbons outlined how he saw university engagement evolving in the knowledge economy of the 21st century he noted that such engagement in the ‘agora’ will not be without tension (Gibbons 1997). The central role of

universities in the knowledge economy and broader participation of universities in the creation of new, or renewed metropolitan environments and city-regions, often involving the expansion of campuses or creation of new campuses and precincts, is indeed not without the potential for conflict. Haar astutely observes that the potential for conflict is not confined to the well-documented cases (Cantor and Englot, 2016) of physical campus expansion and neighbourhood ‘revitalisation’:

The expansion of these relationships leads to an intersection of the needs and the goals of both the city and

⁵ A relationship often mandated through their foundation legislation.

⁶ A theme recently explored in the Chronicle of Higher Education summary report (2019) *The Campus as City*.

⁷ <https://www.brookings.edu/topic/cities-regions/>

⁸ The European Commission’s rubric of the ‘Quadruple Helix Model’ (European Commission, 2015) which extends the ‘triple helix’ model inclusive of civil society.

⁹ Harkavy and Zuckerman’s ‘eds and meds’ (1999).

¹⁰ The ‘manifesto’ that the University of Pennsylvania collaborators Puckett, Harkavy and Benson propose is essentially that, following John Dewey (1859-1952) community schools through their capacity to generate cohesive ‘organic communities’, are the most appropriate and powerful organisations to realise participatory democracy (2007:44). Their project, based on Dewey’s early seminal work on education and pedagogy, extends his paradigm through the ‘third’ educational revolution – community school partnerships with higher education institutions to realise the civic, democratising role of the university (2007:79).

¹¹ Kezar and Lester (2009); Pinheiro et al (2015); Holley and Harris (2016); Harris (2019).

the academy “on the ground” (in neighbourhoods and communities) and within a “global network” (the space of exchange of goods, services, knowledge, information, an international elite and large migrating groups). As with all intersections some result in expanded opportunities for all involved, and others lead to further conflict (Haar:151).

Universities may well define their role as in the vanguard of the knowledge economy, sometimes with what may be interpreted as smug confidence, whilst failing to exercise mindfulness and consideration of the displacement of those without formal education or the habit, and capacity to engage in the continuous learning that economy demands (Drucker, 1994:6). This is especially pertinent in large urban conurbations and their peri-urban regions where deep pockets of historic, intergenerational educational and economic disadvantage are characteristic.

As Goddard (2018: 358) observes, universities cannot avoid the inequalities present in most large cities where they are located, not least because of the element of self-interest – the likely impact of inequality on attracting students and staff from elsewhere, but also due to the overriding imperative of the public good institution to contribute to social well-being. He notes that the local dimension of institutions that frame their missions as ‘public good’, is particularly important when such institutions are publicly funded and governments are accountable to their electorates. Universities are internationally networked institutions but people’s experience and their perspectives are strongly framed by the local, in

both territorial and cultural terms. As cosmopolitan institutions, universities in urban locations often reflect, or aim to reflect¹², the cosmopolitan nature of their locality.

The intersections of the global-local knowledge and political economies mean that the role of place and that of dynamic, place based institutions, such as universities, takes on new importance in defining urban development and change in city-regions, but may also generate significant competing imperatives, and confusion regarding the role of the university. Michael Harris (2019), in a case study of a downtown American university aspiring to research excellence, examines how the university’s research activities are perceived by the local community, provocatively exposing ‘the soft underbelly’ of universities as anchor institutions. The study reveals the lack of consensus in the community around the role of the university, and tensions between local relevance and global excellence:

In order for the university to thrive as an anchor, the university must not only perform within the norms and metrics of higher education, but also fulfil the expanded local responsibilities of an anchor institution. Yet, the expectations of academe and the city may well push the institution as well as individual faculty in competing if not contradictory directions...there was no countervailing narrative or culture to push faculty or administrators toward engagement and against traditional academic notions of research and productivity (2019:14).

THE ANCHOR INSTITUTION IN A TOXIC WORLD

The urban nature of the human species, not just in the central city, but in the suburbs, the hybrid landscapes of peri-urban growth corridors and in the increasingly ubiquitous city-regions, has demanded and generated change in our ‘ways of being’ as institutions of higher education and as ‘anchor’ institutions in the knowledge economy.

As the discussion above indicates, there are underlying risks to the positive, activist and often entrepreneurial role of universities in expanding city-regions: that their very success and spatial expansion displaces communities, especially disadvantaged communities and workers who may be excluded from ‘lifelong-learning’; that their complex and contradictory roles obfuscate their overarching mission – their public good role; that in the milieu of the expanding metropolis, universities see themselves as others do – an ‘asset class’¹³ of intellectual capital, human capital, resources and infrastructure to be leveraged or ‘exploited’; that their institutional wealth, relative to their surrounding communities, generates blindness or insensitivity to inequality and

¹² See for example Rutgers Newark Strategic Plan http://www.newark.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/run_strategic_plan_-final.pdf

¹³ Or ‘value chain’ as in Ernst & Young’s Ernst & Young (2018) Can the universities of today lead learning for tomorrow?: The University of the Future

¹⁴ <https://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Talloires-Network-JHEOE.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.brown.edu/swearer/carnegie>

¹⁶ https://www.timeshighereducation.com/rankings/impact/2019/overall#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/undefined

the responsibility to contribute to redressing disadvantage; and that, as globally networked institutions whose status is now measured and promulgated globally rather than through local knowledge and experience, sense of *place* is lost or rendered insignificant as the university transcends its geographic location.

Judging from our communities' preoccupations however, there is one overarching risk for universities as anchor institutions: that we fail to model the actions, priorities and strategies to ensure that sustainability, particularly environmental sustainability, defines our ways of being and ways of creating and re-creating the metropolis. As institutions with expansive research and scientific expertise we cannot afford to be seen to be contributing to the 'toxic' environment, literally through our development and management practices, or metaphorically through failure to

support and prosecute the importance of the relevant scientific and social research for which we are responsible. 'Public good' for universities must now be defined to include the creation, maintenance and transfer of sustainable 'ways of being'.

Cause for optimism that universities are taking this imperative seriously comes in many forms. The Talloires Network¹⁴

has recognised, since 2005, the capacity for universities to mobilise their human and intellectual resources to address community problems—combating poverty, improving public health, promoting environmental sustainability and enhancing the quality of life. The Carnegie Classification of colleges and universities, which has been in operation since 1970, now includes a classification for community engagement¹⁵ to recognise collaboration

between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

But perhaps the most significant incentive for purposeful engagement of universities comes in the form of the world's first university impact ranking, published by *Times Higher Education (THE)* World University Rankings¹⁶ based on universities' contribution to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ranking

offers new insights on universities' work towards climate action and sustainable cities and communities, poverty and gender equality. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals were developed and agreed to by 194 nation states, providing an internationally recognised framework for achieving sustainable development. They are valuable to universities because

they enable universities to frame priorities in a way that enables their contributions to address the interlinked local and global challenges of poverty, inequality, health, resource consumption and production, and climate change and for this commitment to be formally recognised. This particular manifestation of the globally engaged anchor institution is one that may well refine our understanding of what it means to be 'anchor institutions' in a 'toxic' world.

Professor Sharon Bell is an academic leader with over 25 years of leadership experience in the Australian higher education sector. She is currently Deputy Vice Chancellor Strategy and Planning at Western Sydney University and an Honorary Professor at the Australian National University. She is also an Emeritus Professor at the University of Wollongong.

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