Governance in Local Government–University Relations: smart, local and connected?

A university campus and its connections to place are an important intersection of local, regional, national and global realities

I acknowledge the Aboriginal traditional owners of the Country which hosts our meeting today and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and future. I would also like to acknowledge our Indigenous colleagues present today and pay my respects to the Elders, families and teachers in the communities who have supported my journey.
Universities and their Cities

Universities are important to their host cities. They build regional competitiveness, social capital, employment, initiative and cultural change.

For example, Boston’s eight leading research universities in 2000:

- purchased goods and services from local sources at a cost $1.3 billion,
- spent $850 million on construction,
- employed close to 50,000 people
- supported a further 37,000 regional jobs
- about 310,000 alumni of the universities resided in the Boston area (Simha 2005)

In 2012, universities in Sydney were characterised by large student and staff numbers (see left)

Many universities, however, remain poorly integrated into urban governance, planning and management (Humphrey 2013).

### Universities in Sydney

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>TOTAL EFTSL 2012</th>
<th>Total EFTSL 2011</th>
<th>Total Staff FTE 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macquarie University</td>
<td>28,538</td>
<td>27,081</td>
<td>2,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Sydney</td>
<td>40,916</td>
<td>39,662</td>
<td>1,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of New South Wales</td>
<td>37,245</td>
<td>37,400</td>
<td>6,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Technology, Sydney</td>
<td>25,777</td>
<td>25,756</td>
<td>7,554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
<td>30,179</td>
<td>29,670</td>
<td>3,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>185,326</strong></td>
<td><strong>180,407</strong></td>
<td><strong>23,395</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au](http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au)


University-Community Partnerships

Local partnerships between universities and their local government authorities are important, 

*BUT* ...

Relations between these sectors are often strained and, perhaps at best, ambiguous.

– Research performance is a priority
– Learning and teaching is important
– Service and engagement is generally a poor cousin

Under pressure to compete globally, universities’ local footprint can seem strategically unimportant.

For local governments, the global research university can be a rather intimidating neighbour.

Macquarie University’s partnership with Ryde Council operates across a wide portfolio, including sustainability and social inclusion – both of which are key performance areas for the university and the council.
Using the experience of the Macquarie-Ryde Futures Partnership, this paper will consider three distinct discursive threads to explore the notion of university engagement with local councils and communities and to consider some implications for urban management and planning.

The discursive threads discussed are:

- ‘the engaged university’
- ‘knowledge-based urban development’
- ‘edge cities’

Key texts for each discursive thread:

**The engaged university:**

**Knowledge-based urban development:**


**Edge Cities:**
Universities can seem somehow ‘extra-local’ – above and outside their particular local settings.

Sophisticated theories of globalisation, scale and governance, help conceptualise the co-construction of ‘local’, ‘global’ other scales.

For ‘global’ universities, ‘local’ engagement easily transforms into a patronizing top-down relationship. A more sophisticated scale politics can support better understanding universities’ local footprints and strategic orientations to local engagement.

Local scale partnerships need a nuanced and connected strategic matrix that integrates the core missions of scholarship.
In December 2011 Macquarie University completed a memorandum of understanding targeting development of a long-term, research-based partnership with its local government authority, Ryde City Council.

Building relationships with local government has not commonly been a focus for Australia’s globally oriented universities, but the local footprint, town-and-gown and community relations issues encompassed in these relationships are increasingly relevant to operational success and the vision of an integrated mission addressing learning and teaching, research and service.

But the dynamics of the local government and community sector are complex and often poorly understood in universities’ administration.

Signing the Macquarie-Ryde Futures Partnership MOU, December 2012

L to R: John Neish (General Manager, City of Ryde), Artin Etmekdjian (Mayor, City of Ryde), Steven Schwartz (Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University), Jim Piper (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, Macquarie University).

In terms of the dynamics of the relationship between institutions, it is worth noting that since December 2011, Mr Neish has resigned (Jan 2013), Mr Etmekdjian was not returned as Mayor in local government election (Oct 2012) and both Macquarie signatories have retired (August 2012 and June 2013 respectively).
The Engaged University

The ‘scholarship of engagement’ creates multiple drivers for university engagement.

- local problems
- charitable contributions to neighbours
- active neighborhood involvement
- local research collaborations
- stakeholder expectations from local governments, state agencies, landholders and community organisations.

For some, the entrepreneurial university epitomizes local engagement through links to local business.

For others, a ‘triple helix’ of university-industry-government relations shifts engagement from the ‘ivory tower’ to the ‘university of the future’.

Building collaborative partnerships with community, whether in the context of teaching and learning, research, outreach or other public engagement activities, is demanding and challenging (Boland 2011: 113)

We need to recognize that the distinction between local and wider scale ‘engagement’ is conceptual and contextual rather than categorical.


Knowledge-Based Urban Development

Universities and other research institutions are important drivers of knowledge-based urban development. Local partnerships between universities and their host communities are central to universities’ strategic futures but inconsistent policy constrains universities’ in regional development contributions.

The presence of a leading research university is a critical asset for urban and regional economies, it is not sufficient in itself to stimulate strong regional economic growth (Bramwell and Wolfe 2008: 1175).

Being competitive in this knowledge economy is not like running a race where all the competitors are independent or have an equal chance ... Rather, it is like thriving in an ecology where everything is connected, and success depends on how you relate, how you build resources over time, and how every layer of the ecology supports you (Hearn 2008: xxiii).

Knowledge-Based Urban Development

Clockwise from top left: Macquarie University Hospital, Macquarie University Library, Australian Hearing Hub, Cochlear Building

Macquarie University’s situation in Sydney’s knowledge economy is unique and compelling. The university was established with a view to creating a strong local link between industrial development, economic growth and university research, but investment reflecting that link has been slow in being realised. The Herring Road Urban Activation Precinct puts the university as central to the success of an ambitious urban design exercise. Simultaneously, the university’s success in managing integration of its land, environmental and built environment assets into a vibrant and viable commercial, cultural and transport hub will be central to the future success of the university.
Garreau (1990) asserted the emergence of ‘edge cities’ in North America. This “helped focus popular, academic and governmental attention on the restructuring of metropolitan space” (Freestone and Murphy 1993: 184).

The edge city reflects commercial imperatives in property development more than urban design and planning processes; it did not conform to existing suburban governance structures; it was characterized by car parks and dependence on private car use; it had large amounts of office space and retail space; it hosted more jobs than bedrooms; it had become a destination for a regional population for work, shopping and entertainment; and it was different to the old urban form.

Murphy & Freestone (1994) and Zarafu et al (2013) have characterised Macquarie Park in these terms. But simply defining the area as an ‘edge city’ fails to actually explain anything. It certainly fails to address some important characteristics of Macquarie Park from the vantage point of the council-university partnership.
Macquarie University’s partnership with Ryde Council addresses a wide range of urban planning and community development issues. Although it was initiated as a research-based partnership to develop a range of joint projects, the partnership is fundamental to a wider vision social responsibility.

The partnership specifically encompasses:

– Research;
– Planning;
– Development; and
– Funding commitments.

In the context of the preceding discussion, several elements of the partnership emerging between Macquarie and Ryde are notable:

– Integration of research, learning and teaching and community service aspirations across both university and council portfolios and activities;
– Major urban planning issues; and
– An emerging focus on ideas of place-making, capacity-building and strategic planning to guide the.
The local context for global change is always important (Massey 2004).

The partnership is likely to evolve as an important element of the sense of place that develops around the campus and the urban precincts of which it is part.

Changes in infrastructure, employment and planning controls as well as student recruitment and local demography are all driving local change.

Building productive long-term relationships, cannot focus only on developing links to the local council as a research funding stream. The partnership needs to negotiate a range of relationships.

Governance of the partnership

Success will, of course, rely on good governance within the partnership and care in developing and maintaining a wide range of thoughtful relationships (Boland 2011, Conway 2011).

The MRFP steering group consists of senior leaders (General Manager and Group Manager level from the Council and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor level from the University).

Perhaps the political intrigue generated by conflict within the council and a subsequent inquiry by the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption has detracted from the achievements of building the partnership through research, student activities and broadening and deepening the network of engagement between the council and the university. As an external reviewer of the partnership recently observed: “The issue is very much of building a better cultural understanding between two organisations which have sharply different missions and cultures” (Phibbs 2013).


Macquarie University’ effort to develop a partnership with Ryde Council is neither unique nor particularly remarkable – although it may be quite rare in the Australian context.

It is certainly an interesting innovation in thinking about the place of universities in terms of their place in Australian cities.

Like any effort to foster an ‘engaged university’, or to build ‘knowledge-based urban development’, the partnership faces significant challenges.

The biggest risk, perhaps, is that it will sink under the tedious and everyday burden of the expanding academic workloads, increased insecurity and performance management of Australia’s neoliberal and entrepreneurial higher education sector. To succeed in the long term envisaged by the partners (20+ years), it is essential that the work involved is valued, recognised and resourced.

The Pew Partnership (2004) in the USA, identified three steps that are required to advance partnerships,

- increasing access,
- increasing rewards, and
- increasing visibility.

The external review of the MRFP, made recommendations to strengthen and extend the partnership that focused on:

- Breaking down barriers
- Understanding each other’s worlds and getting the partners together
- Getting people together
- Increasing participation amongst Macquarie University researchers
- Setting the research agenda and selecting research projects

The MRFP is a foundation for a new imagined geography that shifts the place of the university in its local setting. It is a work-in-progress.
Macquarie’s partnership with Ryde Council has already moved beyond the focus on a research partnership to begin exploring the interplay of research capacity, learning and teaching, community service, local action research and the management of the site against key strategic priorities such as sustainability and social inclusion.

A new leadership group is in place at Macquarie and has focused on exactly what sort of global university will be developed on the campus at North Ryde over the next decades.

There are exciting times in store and my suggestion would be to watch this space (and place)!!