

**Serial number** 0146  
**Title** Engagement and equity; a conceptual framework to help us understand university anchor engagement and what an English socially just anchor model may look like.  
**Session** What is valued in higher education? Identity, equity and engagement in and around the neoliberal university (Lomer)  
**Submitter** Dr. Carl Emery

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*Paper proposal*

Driven by activity in the US, we have witnessed a growing movement of universities re-emphasising their public mandate through the adoption of local and regional anchor strategies (Jongbloed et al, 2008; Cantor et al, 2013). Yet, the concept of universities as anchor institutions lacks a precise or consistent definition (Goddard et al, 2014). One could conclude that like other past zeitgeist terms (for example Emotional Intelligence (XXXX, 2016)) what it means and how it is understood and populated is somewhat slippery, acting as a catch all for possibly many different activities. This fluidity is according to Maurrasse, (2013) a reflection of the evolving nature of the concept as it develops and gains greater public traction.

One can draw from the literature that anchor institutions are generally understood as large geographically place based organisations that have been in the community for generations and provide economic, social and cultural benefits to the locality (Taylor et al, 2013; Patterson and Silvermann, 2013; Harkavy, 2014). Hodges and Dubb (2012) consider that it is the organisations connection to a specific geographical location, one that they are unlikely to leave, that literally anchors them in the community and ensures that the success of the organisation is inextricably linked to the area in which it is located.

From an American perspective, Taylor et al (2013) summarise the potential of universities as levers of change for local communities through four specific factors closely connected to concepts of network governance and public innovation theories (Sorensen, 2014). The first of these is the human and economic capital of universities, \$1 trillion per annum according to Harkavy & Hodges (2012). Secondly, and very much an American factor is the stake they hold in local schooling systems. Thirdly, they believe that the view of higher

education institutions as neutral organisations places them in a unique position to mediate between different community powerbrokers. Finally, they cite the semi independence of faculties and staff members to pursue activities independent of central leadership yet still under the auspices of the university.

Although we have a generalised sense of what anchor institutions are the literature tells us that when it comes to why university anchors do what they do there are considerable gaps in the field (Harris & Holley, 2016). There is little clarity or external scrutiny of anchor strategies in the research literature which could be used to support critical thinking about what anchor strategies should be seeking to achieve. Aside from the third mission concept and claims of economic growth there is considerable variation in approach, aims and activities (AITF 2015; Harris & Holley, 2016). The research literature is, with some notable exceptions (Taylor et al, 2013; Patterson and Silvermann, 2013; Harkavy, 2014), weighted to descriptive accounts, and compared to the volume of grey literature in the field, which is weighted to advocacy and description, is relatively sparse. The literature is heavily U.S.-centric, and as anchors are gaining transnational appeal, being able to scrutinise the underlying premise and assumptions embedded within anchor practices is vital to considering how university anchors operate in other contexts.

Regarding what universities are and do it is evident that English universities, although rapidly moving towards a free market status, are still greatly different to their US counterparts. The number of institutions (132 in England (HEFC, 2015) 3, 400 in America (Hersh and Merrow, 2015)) able to award degrees, the number of students (England 1.7 million (HEFCE, 2015), America 15 million (Hersh and Merrow, 2015)), the reputation and history, intellectual traditions, governance procedures, funding structure, teaching and learning activity and the general absence, so far, of private for-profit universities are just some of the many differences to note. England is not America. Many of the features of distressed communities identified in the US anchor literature either do not feature or take a different shape and form in those English low-income communities sat beside our universities. In England, a history of public services and universal welfare provision means that deprivation and poverty is generally less concentrated and severe than that experienced in America. Although Davies and Pill (2012) in their work examining Bristol in England and Baltimore in America warn that ‘despite significant and continuing differences, there has been incremental convergence in the governance of neighbourhoods in the two cities’ (p.

2200). In regard to both how place is understood and enacted and the (possible) role of the university it is also necessary to identify that the English collective memory (Emery, 2016) has been shaped by a very different relationship to public service and private enterprise than its American counterpart.

Alongside conceptual confusion and questions of policy importation also sits a ‘social responsibility’ tension regarding the role of university anchor institutions in addressing issues of oppression, poverty and inequality inherent to many of the urban communities in which the institutions reside or work beside (AITF, 2015). Going beyond the possibility of simply driving economic development several anchor commentators (Harkavy et al 2009; 2014; Taylor et al, 2013) have called for university anchor initiatives to adopt a moral imperative focused on social justice and promoting notions of democratic engagement and civic consciousness (Bergan et al, 2013). Advancing this transformative, *beyond economics*, perspective Taylor and Luter (2013) contend that such a focus “imbue[s] their institutions with the spirit of democracy and a commitment to building a better, more just and equitable society” (p. 8). However, in a similar vein to the conceptual confusions the literature has so far failed to present empirical evidence regarding which university anchor programmes pursue a social responsibility agenda or adequately problematize the realities and impact of non-economic anchor activity (Harris & Holley, 2016). Drawing from the literature and guided by an English HE perspective, we contend that there are three critical dimensions fundamental to gaining greater understanding of current university anchor activity. These can be defined as how the institution understands notions of place, the social purpose the institution brings to the activity and finally where power operates and sits in the university/community relationship.

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