LOCATING THE URBAN UNIVERSITY: TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON POLICY AND PRACTICE

URBAN STUDIES INSTITUTE WORKING PAPER SERIES #2

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INTRODUCTION

The extreme poverty, persistent deprivation, and pernicious racism afflicting communities in the shadows of powerful, relatively wealthy urban universities raise troubling moral issues, as well as questions about higher education’s contribution to the public good... [I am] arguing for the development of truly engaged universities, in which a very high priority is given not only to significantly improving the quality of life in the local community, but also working with the community respectfully, collaboratively, and democratically... No urban university, as far as I can tell, presently meets these criteria (Harkavy, 2016, pp. 2155-2156).

Ira Harkavy’s recent call for (U.S.) tertiary education institutions to (re)claim an active, democratic role in their cities is indicative of how the ‘urban university’ has tended to be understood in aspirational and policy terms. This approach calls for universities to (re)take a center stage in the production of urban space and in the rebalancing of a splintering society; reflecting an intellectual and institutional lineage that, in large part, originated in the United States in the 1960s. Indeed, the notion of an ‘urban university’ is strongly linked with both public institutions that adopted, or were founded upon, an urbanized articulation of the Land Grant university mission in the mid-twentieth century (Diner, 2017; O’Mara, 2010) and private research institutions located adjacent to economically-challenged inner-cities (Etienne, 2012; Rodin, 2007). Early champions of the U.S. urban university lauded its potential as “a noble and exciting enterprise because it is an engagement with the most crucial problems of our times” (Tinder, 1967, p. 492).

Assertions that ‘urban-serving’ universities should be responsive to their local communities persist, via networks like Campus Compact and the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (Johnson and Bell, 1995). Local engagement and place-based problem-solving remain important tasks in shaping cosmopolitan and equitable societies (Calhoun, 2006; Harkavy, 2006). However, four decades of dramatic urban restructuring and sectoral re-regulation have transformed the social and spatial environments universities find themselves in. The extension of urban agglomerations and interconnectedness of cities problematizes whether the imaginaries associated with the urban university can hold in an era of global urbanization. This necessitates a reappraisal of the 21st-century urban university in global perspective.

This discussion paper sets the scene for such a conversation. It begins by examining the emergence of the modern ‘urban university’ to demonstrate how higher education institutions (HEIs) have attempted to place the city at the core of their missions and highlight the discursive and policy legacies that inform contemporary debates. This history illustrates that change is possible, but reveals deep barriers to restructuring that must be accounted for when attempting to leverage universities located in urban areas to act for them. The paper then moves to assess the new roles and responsibilities ascribed to universities in response to current urban transformations. It offers a critique of renewed academic and policy calls to mobilize universities as anchor institutions, urban economic drivers, and civic leaders. The major limitations of these frameworks are identified, and space is opened for a new discourse and mode of urban praxis to emerge. The argument is grounded in an analysis of urban universities in North America and Europe. As recent
post-colonial urbanism attests, alternative theories of, and possible futures for, urban higher education may emerge when ‘thinking with elsewhere’ (Robinson, 2002; Robinson and Roy, 2016). The remainder of the paper forwards a series of ideas and provocations to catalyze debate and discussion around the potential opportunities (and limitations) for universities and cities to work together on adaptive responses to the lived experience of the ‘urban age’.
TRACING THE MODERN (AMERICAN) URBAN UNIVERSITY

The idea of the urban university is not new. Cities and universities have a long and intertwined (if often far from collegial) history (Bender, 1988; van der Wusten, 1998). Linkages between the two were distinctly recalibrated in the wake of industrial urbanization. The Civic University Movement in the United Kingdom spurred the creation of two waves of ‘redbrick universities’ intending to meet the needs of the country’s rapidly industrializing urban centers. Their curriculums (which introduced disciplines including engineering and modern languages) disclosed a vital concern with applied research that benefited the societies in which they were embedded. Technical universities established in Germany’s emergent industrial metropolises reflected a comparable trend that favored practical knowledge over the heady pursuits and sequestered reflection of the ivy tower (Hall, 1997). The United States presented an alternative narrative as the founding of Land Grant universities in 19th century exhibited a strong tendency to tie university-based research to the needs of a largely agricultural society. Interest in practical knowledge persisted, but the American spatial imaginary of the university remained largely bound to the anti-urban valorization of the rural campus; despite the urban roots of prestigious institutions like Yale, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Chicago (Bender, 1988).

Establishing clear research agendas, however, would lead many maturing modern universities to reconfigure their institutional missions towards the universalism of scientific enquiry through the late-19th century (Rodrigues, 2011). The modern university consequently tended to exhibit a ‘denial of place’ that promoted both a physical and institutional separation of universities and their local context (Bender, 1988, p. 8). Even in cases where a university’s location directly facilitated radical disciplinary investigations of urbanizing society, HEIs faced increasing disassociations as entities located in, but not of, their cities (Brockliss, 2000). As universities became bound to the state and national R&D programs in the Cold War era, the image of the ‘scientist in the garden’ crystallized the imaginary of the modern university as closeted space in which universal knowledge was generated (O’Mara, 2005, pp. 60-75). Suburban and rural modern campuses, along with the anti-urban aspatial imaginary of the academy proliferated globally following the Second World War.

The concept of the modern ‘urban university’ would ultimately find its roots in the United States during the 1960s in the face two major trends. First, rising student enrollments driven by the 1944 Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (the GI Bill of Rights) and the baby boom increased the pressure of universities to restructure their curriculum (providing practical training for the postwar workplace) and expand their facilities. Second, universities in urban centers were confronted with the racial tensions and rising socio-economic inequalities of the ‘urban crisis’ (Sugrue, 1996). Urban decline, deindustrialization, and social unrest spurred growing interest in interdisciplinary programs that viewed the city as a pressing object of analysis and strategic area of engagement. The urban university was to be both an active actor in the city and a site of urban knowledge production. J. Martin Klotsche, a former chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, argued novel approaches to contemporaneous urban issues were necessary ‘for the insights of the humanist and philosopher, the social scientist, the
scientist and engineer, and the artist can all be employed to help our cities fulfill the promise of urban living’ (1966, p. 29). In 1966, President Johnson backed calls to adapt the ethos of Land Grant universities to urban institutions via legislation incorporated in his Model Cities Program (Haar, 2011, p. 51). Over the next two years, urban ‘riots’ would break out in Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Washington D.C.

Universities embedded in the shifting urban fabric of America’s cities needed to respond to these dramatic transformations. For Leonard Goodall, then vice-chancellor of the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle (an Urban Grant university founded in 1965), the solution lay in establishing the city as the mission of the ‘urban university’:

…the institution that is striving to be an urban university rather than just a university built in a city should seek to: (1) maintain the high quality of teaching, research, and public service that has long been expected of universities; (2) place more emphasis than has usually been the case in the past on the public service and community involvement aspect of the university; and (3) develop ways to take advantage of the urban location to enrich the educational and research programs of the university while at the same time being of use to the community (Goodall, 1970, p. 48).

Goodall called for universities to establish clear objectives to orient themselves towards engaged urban higher education. This moved beyond introducing new pedagogical practices. Creating an urban university necessitated restructuring institutional mechanisms to reward applied research, community involvement, and undergraduate teaching. Student activism inspired by the Civil Rights Movement played an important role in pressuring universities to be more responsive to their surrounding communities. Foundational work at (what would become) the Pratt Center for Community Development from the 1960s proved instrumental; both as an institutional model and in assisting local communities to oppose urban renewal in New York City (Venkataraman, 2010). Other American campuses embraced the potential of service-learning to realize transformation for community participants, cities, and university researchers themselves.

This wave of community-engaged urban research, however, marked the highpoint for the 1960s vision of the ‘urban university’ in the United States. As Angotti, Doble and Horrigan (2011) detail, community-involved scholarship raised fundamental challenges for those seeking to operationalize the urban university in practice. Faculty members, despite their passion, were not trained in such new interdisciplinary and outward-facing approaches. They struggled to align their strategic interests and tactics with those of their community partners while developing new pedagogies on the fly. The rhythms of the academic calendar did not neatly mesh with the everyday struggles of urban inhabitants. Researchers and students engaged in action research often found themselves opposed to university administrators on questions of urban development and campus expansion (Nash, 1973). This became deeply problematic as the failure to recognize community-based scholarship in tenure and promotion files emerged as a major barrier to restructuring the practice of urban higher education (Angotti et al., 2011, p. 8). Federal monies supporting urban policy research centers dried up during the 1970s, leading such institutes to fold or be incorporated into other faculties. The Reagan Administration terminated the Urban Grant university program in 1981 as the ‘urban agenda’ receded from the American political spotlight (Fitzgerald et al., 2012).
URBAN UNIVERSITY REDUX: POLICY, THEORY, LACUNA

Universities and cities have once again reached an intersection where their interests strategically (if only partially) align. While the tradition of engaged urbanism and service learning has persisted on a pedagogical and institutional level (Block et al., 2018; Campkin and Duijzings, 2016; Johnson and Bell, 1995; Rooke, 2016; Winkler, 2013), the relationship between the city and the university has transformed in an era of neoliberalization and global urbanization. Alongside the rise of the ‘knowledge economy’, cutbacks in public funding since the 1980s have served to heighten pressure on HEIs to produce skilled labor and relevant outputs that demonstrated their social impact – increasingly at a global scale (Ball, 2012; Deiaco, Hughes, and McKelvey, 2012; Evans, 2016). Processes of massification have fueled the expansion (in number and size) of universities in most countries while economic and political restructuring has reconfigured the socio-spatial relationships HEIs are embedded in (Addie, Keil, and Olds, 2015; Frank and Meyer, 2007; Harrison, Smith, and Kinton, 2016).

Since the 1980s, public policy agendas across North America and Europe have sought to formalize the externally-facing socio-economic ‘third mission’ of academic institutions alongside their teaching and research activities (Nelles and Vorley, 2010). While far from a singular or harmonious process (Pinheiro, Langa, and Pausits, 2016), the desire to harness universities’ positive externalities and locally capture their outputs has profoundly reframed the institutional and discursive relationship between higher education institutions HEIs and their urban and regional contexts. In part, this reflects the changing demands of an increasingly knowledge-based global economy. But city leaders and state agencies have also come to view universities as essential, if under-leveraged, ‘anchor institutions’ providing the highly-skilled labor and technological innovations necessary to drive growth and ensure social stability for their surrounding communities (Drucker and Goldstein, 2007; Maurrasse, 2007; Tewdwr-Jones, Goddard, and Cowie, 2015). Kleiman, Getsinger, Pindus and Poethig (2015) advocate cities, universities, and the philanthropic sector pursue a collaborative ‘grand bargain’ that selectively identifies shared interests and co-creates goals along extended timeframes. Comparably, the European Commission’s Smart Specialization platform attempts to mobilize universities’ capacities – in collaboration with local government and industry – to contribute to regional economic and social development around key industrial enablers (Foray, 2014).

As knowledge capital agglomerates in key urban places, policy-makers have sought to codify universities and cities as co-dependent custodians of regional economic development (Pugh et al., 2016). In the U.S., HEIs have been called on to work on behalf of their cities, since:

Colleges and universities depend on their surroundings to serve their overall purpose. They require a degree of vitality in their host cities to attract faculty and students and to provide environments conducive to teaching and learning. Simultaneously, cities depend on universities to bring vitality, not to mention a competent workforce and intellectual stimulation (Maurrasse, 2007, p. 9).

In the United Kingdom, a RSA City Growth Commission report on the role of universities as growth engines asserted:
Universities can achieve excellence in research and teaching through coordinating core activities with opportunities oriented to metro growth priorities. Just as excellence in teaching and research are understood as being mutually reinforcing, rather than competing priorities, so teaching and research and the metro economy support one another (2014, p. 4).

And tellingly, a landmark OECD report argued universities ought to play a greater role in regional development as countries turn their economies towards knowledge-intensive products and services. To wit;

HEIs must do more than simply educate and research – they must engage with others in their regions, provide opportunities for lifelong learning and contribute to the development of knowledge-intensive jobs which will enable graduates to find local employment and remain in their communities (2007, p. 11).

Universities across Europe and North America have responded to shifting political-economies and regulatory landscapes by adopting a variety of expanded mandates. Whether as a result of pursuing publicly-assigned mandates (as is often the case in Europe) or their own self-interest (more prevalent in the competitive landscapes of American higher education), universities have rearticulated their institutional and territorial profiles, including reframing their relationships with the urban-regional contexts (Etzkowitz, 2008; Harrison, Smith, and Kinton, 2017). As illustrated in Table 1, varying schools of thought operating at the interface of academic analysis and institutional practice have attempted to conceptualize universities’ emergent territorial relations, ranging from narrow economic to broader socio-cultural perspectives (see Tripl, Sinozic, and Lawton Smith, 2015; Uyarra, 2010).

Universities are well positioned to assume proactive roles in their urban and regional contexts. Indeed, a recent spate of flagship projects, including Applied Sciences NYC, the U.S. Federal Government’s MetroLab Network, Amsterdam Metropolitan Solutions, and the University of Paris-Saclay, Singapore’s Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise (CREATE), Songdo International Business District, and the proliferation of Chinese ‘university cities’ (Addie et al., 2015; Liu, 2017; van Heur, 2010) (among others), have positioned universities as vital catalysts for urban innovation and ‘smart’ policy formation.

The size and complexity of universities, however, make it difficult for urban communities and decision makers (both near and far) to identify, access, and mobilize the knowledge they hold. Academic administrators, urban leaders, and public officials have often failed to grasp the implications of HEIs’ spatial relations and struggle to account for the range of urban interactions. Moreover, there is nothing inherently progressive about the university as an urban actor. As universities adopt powerful positions as local developers and economic drivers they can be self-serving members of growth regimes as much as altruistic agents pursuing urban improvements and facilitating public participation in the urban process (Bose, 2015; Harding et al., 2007; Perry and Wiewel, 2005; Ross, 2012). Not only has the economic impact of universities tended to be overstated (Siegfried, Sanderson, and McHenry, 2007) but strong tensions exist between universities’ civic goals and the imperative towards commodification and private sector
funding, particularly since the knowledge economy largely rests on the assumed publicness of knowledge benefits arising from university collaboration (Srinivas et al., 2008). Counter to the inclusive rhetoric, anchor institutions continue to utilize top-down governance structures that have the capacity to perpetuate geographical and racially-based inequalities (Adams, 2014; Lipman, 2011). There is growing recognition of, and advocacy for, the mutually-beneficial relationships universities and cities can forge around local and regional development, but despite the potential of emergent policy synergies, the steps of the anchor institution dance remain unclear.

Beyond (but sometimes integrating) these policy frameworks, global urbanism has also prompted scholarly interest in recalibrating the urban university for the 21st century metropolis. Bender (1998) was an early observer arguing that the multiculturalism of an increasingly pluralized world both opened, and necessitated, new bonds to be forged between urban universities and their globally-interconnected cities. The rising significance of the global cities network, he suggested, warranted reorienting the academy from national to metropolitan culture. The American urban university could then be realigned – with direct parallels to the early modern era – by reaching outside the campus walls to partner in new instances of knowledge production:

The qualities of the emerging global culture have a considerable resemblance to the eighteenth-century cosmopolitan republic of letters, an ideal and mode of practice inherited by the modern university. Today’s cosmopolitanism, however, extends more deeply into the social body. The pluralized culture of the university resembles the complex life of contemporary immigrant neighborhoods, where residents live in local urban neighborhoods and diasporic networks... The challenge for us as contemporary metropolitans (and cosmopolitans) is to locate ourselves – both in time

Table 1: Typology of University Urban/Regional Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Models</th>
<th>Key Characteristics</th>
<th>Representative Literature</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Factories</td>
<td>Focus on the production of scientific knowledge; Promote localized impact of research; Bi-directional knowledge sharing with firms</td>
<td>Andes, 2017; Youtie and Shapira, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial Universities</td>
<td>Prioritize active commercialization, patenting, and licensing; Restructuring to support technology transfer, incubators, science parks, spin-offs; US-centric (post Bayh-Dole Act, 1980); Triple helix</td>
<td>Audretsch, 2014; Etzkowitz, 2008, 2013; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Innovation Systems (RIS)</td>
<td>Outward-facing university engagement; Collaborative research and networking around innovation, economic development; Support for territorialized knowledge economies; Smart Specialization</td>
<td>Asheim, Lawton Smith, and Oughton, 2011; Doloreux and Parto, 2005; Foray, 2014; Katz and Wagner, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Mode 2’ Universities</td>
<td>Address large societal challenges; Promote research with uses beyond the academy; Fosters interaction with non-scientific actors</td>
<td>Reager et al., 2009; Swan et al., 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Universities</td>
<td>Responsive to territorial development; Promotion of ‘third mission’ activities; Cross-sectoral coalitions stressing social and civic roles</td>
<td>Goddard, 2009; Nelles and Vorley, 2010; Watson et al. 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchor Institutions</td>
<td>Universities (and other large, locally dependent non-profit institutions) as custodians of place; Key role in supporting local social and economic stability</td>
<td>Adams, 2003; Anchor Institution Task Force, 2009; Birch, Perry, and Taylor, 2013; Ehlenz, 2015</td>
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and in relation to the places of local knowledge – in such a global perspective (Bender, 1998, p. 27).

Despite the recognition of a new reticulated global topology here (albeit one missing the urban-regional spaces between neighborhood and global scales), the desire to return to some idealized model of city-university relations has proven a markedly persistent leitmotif in scholarly approaches to the 21st century urban university. Haar (2011, p. xxx) sees the transformations within global city economies and morphologies – notably the strategic reclamation of downtown space by universities in American cities – catalyzing the need to ‘reconceive the campus not as a discrete community set apart from others but as an urbanity capable of engaging both new forms of cities and city living brought about in physical and virtual space’. Her prescription though, as with Bender, looks back to the zeitgeist of a previous institutional era in calling ‘for a return to the model of campus-community interdependency present in the earliest stages of American collegiate growth, when institutional development was prompted by local community need’ (ibid., p.xxx). Goddard (2009) and his collaborators have engaged in a comparable mission by looking to ‘reinvent’ the 19th century British civic university for a globalized economy and society. Their policy-oriented approach elevates the significance of overarching societal ‘Grand Challenges’ as a means to strategically direct universities towards the public good; encouraging the new civic university to ‘operate on a global scale but use its location to form its identity’ (Goddard, Kempton, and Vallance, 2013, p. 44). Concerted attention is placed on integrating the social and economic dimensions of university innovation, but in a manner that remains instrumentally tied to issues of regional development.

There are pertinent lessons to be gleaned from these academic and policy paradigms of urban-university engagement, and their normative appeal is reflected in the ‘fast policy’ mobility of anchor institution thinking. Birch, Perry and Taylor (2013, p. 9) suggest broadened notions of ‘the city’ and ‘the urban’ are beginning to infiltrate the conversation via appeals to extended regionalized spatial imaginaries. However, extant frameworks for the urban university fail to adequately account for the evolving university-city relationship in an era of global urbanization: largely as they still operate with localized territorial conceptions of the city. As Magnusson (2011) might have it, they continue to ‘see like a state’ rather than ‘seeing like a city’, with its inherent multiplicity and diversity. Urban policy agendas looking to leverage universities’ positive externalities have gained significant and impactful purchase in cities like Newcastle (Tewdwr-Jones et al., 2015) and Newark, NJ (Rutgers University-Newark, 2014) whose universities have established civic commitments. However, it is less clear how this thinking resonates with universities’ national or global aspirations. Differences within and between universities and their urban environments present further challenges for HEIs to adjust engagement strategies and broader ways of operating. Academic and urban leaders in cities with one or two universities can open dialogues aimed at stimulating citywide collaborations towards unified ends, but such conversations are rendered highly complex in larger, globally-integrated metropolises where provosts and presidents must compete for attention in a crowded governance arena. Little consideration has been given to how anchor institutions operate in differing national contexts, or might inform city-university partnerships in the Global South (for exceptions, see Patel, Greyling, and Parnell, 2015; Winkler, 2013).
Building on recent debates in urban theory and critical engagements with the neoliberal university, there are four central issues characteristic of current attempts to retool the urban university that need to be addressed:

(1) Interest in urban-university engagement has overwhelmingly focused on static territorial understandings of the city and the neighborhoods in which urban universities are located. Town-gown relationships are defined by geographic proximity (e.g. around campus expansion, studentification). Contra Birch et al. (2013), ‘the urban’ continues to be equated with the local scale and sits uneasily with global (and other) social-spatial imaginaries. Local/global binaries are normalized and reproduced as the urban university is understood through its relations with its immediate geographic context. Yet cities are shaped by evolving trans-national, distanced interactions that undercut notions of the local and the global as binary opposites (Allen and Cochrane, 2007). Crisis-induced urban restructuring and governance rescaling have resulted in a diffuse patchwork of urban constellations articulated from the micro-neighborhood to the mega-region. Each scale, site, and community opens different points of engagement and different urban politics.

(2) There is a tendency to myopically focus on growth-oriented drivers and outcomes. Universities have emerged as vital drivers of an increasingly urbanized knowledge economy. The perceived role for many universities located in metropolitan areas now centers on the promotion of knowledge transfer and the creation of mechanisms that can capture outputs for local and regional economic development. The cultural capital of higher education is reframed through its place-making function. More attention needs to be paid to alternative urban social relations and spatial imaginaries (i.e., surrounding environmental sustainability or systemic urban inequality).

(3) Much academic and grey literature treats both ‘the city’ and ‘the university’ as rational, monolithic, and capable actors whose spatial relations continue to be viewed instrumentally, separated from the contingencies of place and divorced from broader urbanization processes. Scholars working within the overarching RIS paradigm, for instance, forward universities as territorial actors, but rarely engage the city or region as critical objects of analysis (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 1022). Urban and regional terrains thus appear as spatial containers through which innovation processes flow, and not as constitutive elements of these processes. Explicit acknowledgement is occasionally given to the complexity of the university and city as social and institutional spaces. Bender (1988, pp. 290-291) advocates approaching both as ‘incompletely bounded fields of contestation comprising various traditions, interests, and ideals’. Goddard et al. (2013) point to the multifaceted structure of the university presenting obstacles for external actors wishing to engage with HEIs. Yet the tendency to target policy recommendations at provosts and mayors privileges top-down restructuring and directs resources at aligning strategic interests between upper-level leadership. Such managerial frameworks struggle to accommodate engagement and interpersonal relations forged by faculty, students, and institutes on a day-to-day basis (Kroll, Dombusch, and Schnabl, 2016) and overlook the contradictions,
power relations, and opportunities present across highly-variegated urban structures (Addie et al., 2015).

(4) Critical scholars have paid attention to the role of universities as urban developers within a neoliberalized spatial economy and in doing so, have introduced a sensitivity to questions of scale and social diversity (Bose, 2015; Cochrane and Williams, 2013; Gaffikin and Perry, 2009; Harding et al., 2007; Schafran, 2015). Lipman (2011) goes as far as tying the future of urban education policy to ‘the right to the city’. Yet despite the incisive nature of these critiques, critical scholarship and policy-making have rarely engaged in substantive dialogue. Willingly or not, urban and regional theorists (those with relevant expertise on community planning, urban renewal etc. and those reimagining cities and regions in novel ways) have been largely absent from debates over the future mission, structure, and governance of the urban university itself. How might alternative ways of understanding cities and regions progressively inform the theorization and practice of universities as actors in, and contexts for, global urbanization?
RELOADING A GLOBAL URBAN UNIVERSITY

If the shock of the 1960s ‘urban crisis’ prompted a radical reimagining of the urban university, the contradictions of an aggressive neoliberal higher education regime and the extension of urbanization processes at a global scale demand a comparable reappraisal of the 21st century urban university.

Universities may potentially be ‘the generative principle of knowledge-based societies’ as Etzkowitz (2008, p. 1) would have it, but imprinting the needs of regional economies and globalizing cities onto their core functions raises deep questions regarding the university’s role as an urban actor and site of urban knowledge production. Neoliberalization inside and outside the academy has presented a disciplinary stick to complement the carrot of urban and economic leadership. On-going debates over public funding for academic research and HEIs (magnified by austerity politics) have compelled universities to embrace commodification and financialization as they seek to demonstrate their societal value, relevance, and impact (Christopherson, Gertler, and Gray, 2014; Engelen, Fernandez, and Hendrikse, 2014). Universities are not irreducible to a single business logic (and exhibit significant variation across their missions, structures, and national regulatory frameworks) but critics note the societal value placed on particular types of university-produced knowledge is shifting – premised, by enlarge, upon a narrow understanding of ‘useful knowledge’ as that which can be strategically deployed in the economy (Boulton and Lucas, 2008; Perry, 2006). It’s no coincidence that critical concerns with reclaiming universities’ public mission have risen at the same time as academia’s doors are opened to more entrepreneurial ways of operating. Craig Calhoun – writing in an academic capacity before assuming the post of Director of the London School of Economics – argued that ‘it is a crucial task for critical theory to ask about the institutional organization of knowledge and the public sphere, and an obligation of critical theory to ask reflexively about the institution that underpins it’ (2006, p. 10).

There is a need to move beyond reading ‘urban university’ practice predominantly through highly-localized forms of academic engagement. Universities are being asked to do more for their cities and regions in ways that extend well beyond established teaching and research functions, and practices associated with ‘urban-serving’ institutions. As evidenced across North America and Europe, various stakeholders now “expect a more direct return on their investment” (Harrison and Turok, 2017, p. 978). Influential policy frameworks originating the U.S. and U.K. express new expectations that point to synergies which may be forged between leadership in City Hall and the ‘ivory tower’. Yet diverse pressures (competition for resources, financial austerity) have created contradictions that are difficult to resolve (Bousquets, 2008; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). These developments in higher education are of vital interest to urban and regional studies given the tensions that exist between universities’ civic goals and the imperatives of commodification. Urban issues can be placed at the center of universities missions and mandates, but this requires they adjust their social and spatial urban horizons.

Universities are now regionalizing and globalizing in ways that express a distinct loyalty to place (civic identity formation, investment in technopoles), open networks with other universities and external partners (applied science campuses, research consortia), and add new modes of internationalization and outreach (international branches, student
mobility, MOOCs). These spatialities manifest in myriad ways. They may be territorially and politically linked to the city but do not neatly align with cities’ strategic interests or remain bound by the geography of administrative units. This is not to downplay the place-based relations universities negotiate; what Cox and Mair (1988) would term their local dependency. Local student and labor markets and the vast capital sunk into the built environment mean they remain locally-dependent institutions while the city continues to act as a significant administrative entity for policy-makers and governance agencies (Cochrane and Williams, 2013). However, as Addie, Keil and Olds (2015, p. 30) assert, ‘universities are more likely to be actors involved over multiple scales; they are global players who are highly influential beyond their immediate locale while exhibiting a significant capacity to affect the social, spatial and symbolic structures of the metropolis’.

As universities both respond to, and produce, new territorial and topological urban structures, they are implicated in the global extension of urbanization processes that, alongside the expansion and fragmentation of metropolitan space, defy the reduction of ‘the city’ to an administrative unit or ‘the urban’ to the local scale (Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Amin, 2004; Brenner, 2014; Keil, 2018a; Lefebvre, 2003; Schmid, 2018; Wachsmuth, 2014). The multiscalar networks, relational processes, and variegated experiences of global urbanization – which HEIs are embedded within – mean urban universities must be understood as more than localized institutions serving their adjacent communities, or partners in the governance of regional clusters, innovation networks, or economies. These evolving geographies have significant ramifications for how the urban and regional roles of universities are understood.

The contemporary ‘urban university’ is embedded in the geographies of planetary urbanization (Brenner, 2014) as much as global higher education political-economies, and needs to be considered from this angle rather than a localized reality. It is now a well-worn adage that the majority of the world’s population – nearly 3.3 billion people – live in towns and cities rather than in rural areas (UN HABITAT, 2006). But quantitative demographic measures only tell us a narrow part of the story (Brenner and Schmid, 2014). The urbanization of the globe is dialectically conditioned by the globalization of qualitatively distinct expressions of urbanism as a way of life as “the spatial reach of city-based societies, economies and cultures [extends] to every place on the planet” (Soja and Kanai, 2007, p. 54). Globalized urbanization is a variegated process; at once highly-localized in its expression and truly global in its social, economic, and environmental impacts. Notably, the on-going agglomeration of knowledge capital in key urban places has been matched by the expansion and fragmentation of metropolitan landscapes in social and spatial terms, bringing with them new and uneven patterns of urbanization and social transformation (Keil, 2018b; Schmid et al., 2018). The emerging spatial patterns of the ‘urban age’ will have an undeniable and immediate impact on the way universities orient their teaching, research, and outreach activities as populations relate to space and place differently now than in the past.

**Leveraging Crisis and Opportunity in the Urban Age**

Cities are complex and contradictory. On one hand, urban centers are sites of cosmopolitan hubs of prosperity, diversity and dynamism. Most industrial societies have long been highly urbanized but the rise of the ‘knowledge economy’ has reinforced cities’
role as seedbeds of social and technological innovation and economic growth. Urban areas generate more than 80% of global GDP (NSF, 2018, p. 4). The 200 largest OECD urban areas produce 60% of jobs and growth (OECD, 2018, p. 3). Yet on the other hand, cities concentrate risk, scarcity and inequality (Beauregard, 2018; Simone and Pieterse, 2017). They are responsible for over two-thirds of the world’s energy consumption and account for nearly 75% of global carbon emissions (Acuto, Parnell, and Seto, 2018, p. 2). Cities are exhibiting rising socioeconomic polarization (Storper, 2018) while a third of the world’s urbanites live in slums (Davis, 2006). Concerns regarding the negative impacts of agglomeration – crime, squalor, pollution and the breakdown of the social fabric – have long provided a counter-narrative to the utopian imaginaries of urban triumphalists. For every The Triumph of the City (Glaeser, 2011) there is a Planet of Slums (Davis, 2006). Cities offer hope for socially-inclusive societies but the rapid pace of urban transformation disrupts communities and established orders. Often, many of the most vulnerable are left to fall through the cracks; an issue evident in urban-based protests against escalating university fees, colonial legacies and precarious employment from Amsterdam and Quebec to Johannesburg and Hong Kong (Hall, 2016; Ratcliffe, 2015). Cities offer an intoxicating mix of innovation and insecurity – the dialectics of which open opportunities to develop the foundations for inclusive and sustainable urban futures. City leadership operates with an adaptive and pragmatic politics that promotes networking and learning from crisis, yet the power of city halls tends to rest under the auspices of senior levels of government (Moir, Moonen, and Clark, 2016). Although there is a consensus that cities are critical pathways for societal transformation, and evidence that policymaking is increasingly targeting urban problems, there is little agreement regarding the data, expertise, and assessment tools needed to support sustainable urbanization in the 21st century (Acuto and Parnell, 2016).

**Going Global**

While industrial societies have long been highly urbanized (and now face the realities of antiquated infrastructure and stagnant economies, albeit selectively), most of the accelerated urbanization into the 21st century is driven by rapidly developing countries in the Global South. By early 2013, the number of urban regions with over one million inhabitants had soared to 503. Of these, 79 are in China and 53 in India, compared to 50 in the United States and 60 across the whole of Europe. Estimates suggest that by 2030, four in five urban dwellers will live in developing countries, with sub-Saharan Africa the most swiftly urbanizing continent (Soja and Kanai, 2007). Urbanization, particularly in the developing world, presents an array of formal and informal opportunities for economic development. It also offers significant potential to open avenues for democratization – even if it does not necessarily engender a demand for more democratic institutions on the ground (Glaeser and Steinberg, 2017). But cities, and the problems they face are also rapidly changing. While some nominally ‘urban’ (i.e. U.S. inner-city) issues persist, as Harkavy suggests, cities and the problems they face have changed over the past half-century. The challenges of contemporary urbanization now unfurl at the global scale: from fiscal crises and demographic transitions to global pandemics and climate change. Universities, too, are regionalizing and globalizing in new ways that both respond to and reshape urban society (Addie, 2017; Marginson, 2004). With this comes a tremendous capacity to analyze and inform urban decision-making on sustainability,
social inclusion, and resilience issues beyond their immediate environments. This has important implications for global urbanization. For example, with the formal adoption of global frameworks like the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in December 2015, or the UN New Urban Agenda in October 2016, universities are assuming greater responsibilities in producing the evidence base needed to support the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (Acuto and Parnell, 2016). New modalities of urban university engagement (reticulated and place-based) are required to inform sustainable development and governance arrangements in rapidly urbanizing areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America that require expanded, flexible data gathering, capacity-building, and practical knowledge generation (Acuto et al., 2018; Elmquist et al., 2018).

**Life on the Edge**

The problematics and potential of the urban age cannot be confined to ‘the city’ in geographic, analytic, or political terms. Metropolitan areas are rapidly expanding at their fringes. The most pervasive social and spatial expression of the ‘urban age’ may, in fact, be suburban (Keil, 2018b). In the face of an often-expressed normative preference for creative inner-city economies and compact urban living, many urban regions now exhibit patterns of growth associated with more dispersed and therefore less-dense concentrations of people. This is not to suggest everything is reduced to sprawl, even as it is forwarded as an often-cited driver of fragmented, unsustainable auto-centric landscapes (OECD, 2018). Today’s urban peripheries, including decentralized ‘in-between’ landscapes and interdependent ‘post-suburban’ cores, are sites of remarkable transformation (Keil, 2013; Keil and Addie, 2016; Phelps and Wood, 2011; Sieverts, 2003). They open possibilities for people to forge new and differentiated livelihoods. But the suburbanization of poverty and race also mean urban problems once indicative of the inner-city have decoupled from the urban core. In North American and European city-regions, traditional immigrant neighborhoods are being bypassed in favor of new suburban ‘gateway’ communities. The working class, priced out of gentrified central areas, now make the metropolitan periphery home. The outskirts of African, Latin American, and Asian megacities are the setting for shantytowns and hyper-securitized gated neighborhoods. As cities spill over their administrative boundaries and are integrated into global networks, city leaders must look beyond their own backyards to address the governance mismatch between the municipal borders (and powers) and the functional dynamics of the 21st century metropolis (Roy, 2009). Here, universities have the potential to foster collaborative frameworks that connect diverse urban stakeholders and help build the regional and trans-local perspectives needed to tackle the realities of local and global urban transformation – even as they are confronted with the difficulties of accessing communities in areas lacking connectivity and ‘institutional thickness’ (Benneworth, 2013).

**Comparative Imaginaries**

Where we theorize from has significant consequences for how we understand the urban and for the transferability of urban concepts and policy packages: including those related to the urban university. The elevation of ‘cognitive-cultural’ capital in the knowledge
economy has emerged in an era marked by the rise of city-regions as economic and political hubs (Scott, 2008). The geographies of the global city system, global university rankings, and global urban knowledge production continue to show a strong overlap (Florida, 2017; Jöns and Hoyler, 2013; Kanai, Grant, and Jianu, 2017). But as well-established arguments in post-colonial urbanism attest, urban theory cannot be solely abstracted from a select few sites in the Global North: more theoretically-informed comparative research is needed (Robinson and Roy, 2016; Sheppard, Leitner, and Maringanti, 2013). Divergent experiences between the Global North and South are indicative of differing higher education structures, institutional capacities, governance frameworks, and path dependencies (Marginson, 2011). Equally they are illustrative of transformations underway in the architecture of global urbanism. Universities (in and beyond the Global North) producing new material and morphological urban structures (Addie et al., 2015; Bank, 2018; Bank and Cloete 2018; Ruoppila and Zhao, 2017; Sun, 2018) and new geographies of knowledge production (Appadurai, 2006; Kong and Qian, 2017; Li and Phelps, 2017; Ong, 2016). The histories and development of university systems beyond the Global North are as telling as the dominant cases that capture the international imaginary, and we should strive to represent these stories to rebalance the global discourse (Robinson, 2002).

What lies ahead for our discussions? Can, or should, the core ideas associated with the socio-spatial structure of the university hold firm while the socio-spatial structure of societies is spreading across an increasing scale? This paper, and the workshops for which it is written, are an attempt to catalyze the processes of decentering and ‘worlding’ conversations on the urban university. The preceding text attempts to open fissures, present provocations, and reset the stage for discussion and debate surrounding how universities negotiate the contradictions of urban societies. The aim, in part, is to position universities at the center of a “reloaded urban studies” (Merrifield, 2013) to critically examine their role in the urban process, and to prompt urban scholars to ask the demanding questions of universities that they would other political, economic, or social institutions. For our present purpose, the paper concludes with a few questions to guide an examination of how universities and cities interact to facilitate urbanization through the production of urban space and urban knowledge:

- How do universities relate to their urban context as urban developers, economic engines, and participants in local growth regimes?
- How have socio-spatial transformations impacted universities’ teaching and research practices?
- How can universities adjust institutional infrastructures, pedagogical practices, and ways of operating, to better serve people in places, versus drawing people to a place?
- How can the mission of urban-serving universities, and practice of community engaged research and serving learning be reimagined for differing urban contexts?
- Does ‘urban thinking’ impact strategies of university leadership, and how are global ambitions balanced with local engagement?
- How do universities produce, collate, disseminate, and mobilize urban knowledge?
- What types of knowledge are needed to support urban decision-making, and how
best can they be generated?

- How do different urban knowledge claims emerge in the city, and what is the role of the university in collating and mobilizing them?
- How can universities better support sustainable urban development and realize a greater, and more inclusive, influence on urban decision-making?
- Where, and at what scales, do universities (re)produce urban space?
- What pedagogical, technological, and institutional strategies are used to open access to university capacities and resources?
- What are the institutional, social, and spatial consequences of university’s strategic actions? How are they experienced unevenly across space?
- In what ways can current thinking in urban theory and planning practice inform our understanding of universities’ urban roles?
- What does present university engagement in cities tell us about possible future trajectories of urban society?
REFERENCES:


