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## Urban knowledge arenas: dynamics, tensions and potentials

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**Abstract:** This article examines the relations between the knowledge economy and the modes of developing processes between cities and universities for socio-economic development. It starts by considering discourses on the knowledge economy that raise expectations through the circulation of ideas according to their transferability on the market and a desire to place cities on global hierarchies.

Such processes do not tend to be subject to interrogation in terms of 'how' different parties can work together in ways that either enable or constrain their practice. The article therefore describes work conducted in the Greater Manchester region on collaborations to enhance city development.

It is argued that expectations and actual efforts lie in tension. A resulting gap allows the perpetuation of discourses that exacerbate, rather than address, issues that arise in the implementation of ambitions. The lessons outlined in the article are designed to tackle these and produce more context-sensitive understandings for greater benefit.

**Keywords:** space; knowledge; policy; place; universities; partnerships.

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## **1 Introduction**

The successful implementation of knowledge-based initiatives necessitates understanding complex multi-level contexts, operating in existing networks and forming new partnerships with those normally excluded from such initiatives. These need to be based on trust and an openness to new ways of working that takes time to produce, whilst recognising the different scales of activity at which projects and programmes are rewarded and recognised: from the local, to city, regional, national and international. There are no magic bullets or models that may be adopted or imported to solve these issues and beware those peddling such wares! All too often these are referred to as short-cuts to the practical efforts necessary to realise aspirations in actions. Unfortunately, this field of endeavour is saturated by ‘what’ needs to be done, with ‘how’ it should be done a secondary consideration with learning left in its wake. This article is a contribution to filling that gap in understanding.

Universities operate in a multiplicity of spaces, not only geographical but also epistemic, political and cultural. These mix to produce different processual dynamics and outcomes and this leads to a paradox about the role of universities in urban development. The assumption is made in much of the literature on innovation and technological change that universities are part of innovation infrastructures. Nevertheless, in practice, universities are difficult to coordinate as part of urban strategies, partly due to their status, but also because of conflicting and often unrealistic expectations – among city officials and academics.

These issues are complicated by the complexity of governance arrangements, both internal to and independent of, the university context. Indeed, the idea of a city as a bounded entity is problematic. What this means is a whole set of debates about the relevant scales of activity, as well as the institutional governance of universities in relation to forms of knowledge production, types of knowledge and their potential benefits. The implications are that a greater understanding is needed around the relationship between expertise and territory.

The article subjects these varying expectations to critical interrogation. Its purpose is not problematisation – a valuable activity in its own right – but clarification for the purpose of informing alternative ways of organising these relations. In the first part of the article, the role of globalisation is examined. The pressures produced by this force provide for aspirations through the circulation of ideas and capital according to both their excellence and transferability on the market. In the second part of the article, the dynamics of how these aspirations fall in particular contexts is examined whilst, in the final part, strategic lessons are outlined in order to inform what are more context-sensitive understandings of the role of universities in meeting contemporary and future challenges.

## **2 Global: knowledge, space and policy**

The world is changing at a rapid pace and the scope and impact of these transformations have implications that transcend geographic and cultural boundaries (Turner, 2006). Developed and developing countries alike are acknowledging this phenomenon in their attempts to deal with the complex relations of correspondence and contradiction emerging from what has been characterised as the ‘new world disorder’ (Shaw, 1994).

Globalisation is contributing to major challenges and changes at the level of the state and urban development. The role of the state has been transformed to that of promoting and funding market solutions and placing greater responsibility upon the individual. They have modified the “spatio-temporal matrices of capitalism and the nation; and they have significant roles in managing uneven spatio-temporal development generated by the capital relation” [Jessop, (2008), p.96]. In a compressed world, the comparison and confrontation of worldviews are bound to produce new conflicts. In these conflicts old traditions and new ideas play a key symbolic role, since they can be mobilised to provide an ultimate justification for a view of the world whose implications may be considered at three levels: economic, political and cultural. The former refers to processes of the global dominance of transnational corporations, global finance, flexible production and assembly and the rise of information and service economies (Smart, 2007). Political globalisation may be seen in terms of international organisations, degrees of sub-national regional autonomy and the spread of post-welfare public policies and global social movements (Ritzer, 2004), whilst the latter refers to consumption cultures, tourism, media and information flows and identities with senses of insecurity and change along with potentiality (Franklin, 2010).

Cities have reacted to the trends that have been created by global changes and whilst researchers have argued that there is no ‘new’ spatial order, globalisation has produced evident transformations (Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000). Cities have become “a nexus where many of the new organisational tendencies of economies and societies come together in specific localised configurations” [Sassen, (2006), p.80]. In this way, they are a central point in the reception and formation of the knowledge economy that has both global and local dimensions.

Knowledge-based wealth creation is said to be founded on building economies of scale, clusters and a critical mass of complementary expertise within a particular location. Most often cited in this respect is the work of Michael Porter. His thesis on the *Competitive Advantage of Nations* stresses that firms draw on location-specific factors for competitive success and on resources inherent within local environments (Porter, 1990). That, in turn, was followed by Florida’s (2002) idea of the ‘creative class’ whose differences needed overcoming in order to develop a ‘class awareness’ in recognition that creativity: “is the fundamental source of economic growth, and that it is an essential part of everyone’s humanity that needs to be cultivated” [Florida, (2002), p.17].

In this climate, the relationship between knowledge, economy and society is under scrutiny whether in terms of wealth creation, the rhetoric of social inclusion, climate change, public understanding or the role of expertise and trust in social life. Knowledge has become the subject of policy aspirations across a range of fields, no longer confined to the black-box of science or research policy. The result can be seen as a challenge to the demarcation of boundaries between the academy and the world of business, as captured in the idea of ‘soft capitalism’ (Thrift, 2005). The implication is to profoundly affect the purpose, function and form of knowledge-producing institutions.

The single most important site of knowledge production has traditionally been the university. That is not to ignore other sites that have emerged (or disappeared) over time, but to recognise the status that the academy has enjoyed as the foremost acknowledged source of legitimate, objective, excellence-driven knowledge. The structures, norms and processes of such institutions provide a fundamental context in which external pressures and expectations are met, managed, amplified or mitigated. The implications for universities stemming from the changing international political economy of knowledge

have been variously understood, from those who chart the recasting of university roles and functions and subsequent internal reorientations, to those that chart a diminished role vis-à-vis other knowledge producing institutions (Eggins, 2003; Menand, 2010; Odin and Manicas, 2004).

The question arises as to whether the knowledge economy represents something 'new'. Some recognise that knowledge has always played an important economic role, but that it is the application of knowledge to the production of knowledge that is new (Castells, 2010). In this respect, the move from an industrial to information society apparently heralds a new mode of production in which 'knowledge capitalism' characterises the contemporary economic, social and institutional world (Jessop, 2002; Gibbons et al., 1994). Others argue that the primary importance of knowledge as *the* resource, rather than *a* resource, has led to a post-capitalist society, which fundamentally changes the structure of society, the economy and the political world (Drucker, 2007).

Such accounts are linked by a common assumption that there is inherently something different about the dynamics of knowledge itself in the knowledge economy that represents a fundamental departure from previous paradigms. Others argue, however, that capitalism has not been rivalled by the knowledge economy, insofar as the fundamental tenets of capitalism remain valid. Capitalism and knowledge capitalism both thrive on capital accumulation, open market competition, free trade, the power of the individual and the survival of the fittest. Knowledge capitalism is then seen as a generic form of capitalism based on the accumulation of knowledge, not monetary and physical forms of wealth and may thus replace previous national models of capitalism: "the current trend towards a global knowledge-based economy suggests that ultimately all regional variants will become forms of knowledge capitalism. In the process, many regional differences can be expected to disappear" [Burton-Jones, (2001), p.2].

Contemporary developments support convergence theories with the Bologna process being a case in point. That aims to create a European Higher Education Area as a precursor for the harmonisation of degree cycles and structures and systems of credits across Europe, as well as cooperation in quality assurance, to provide a better fit to supply market demand (Corbett, 2009). At the Lisbon European Council meeting in 2000, the target was for Europe to become: "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Commission, 2003). Increasing cooperation and discussion of Europe's movement towards a knowledge economy has also drawn particular attention to the changing demands of the knowledge economy upon universities. Universities are thereby regarded as unique in their contributions to the core functions of the knowledge society as sites for producing new knowledge, engaging in knowledge transfer activities and being involved in industrial processes or services.

### 2.1 Global-regional policies

In the European context, the local, regional, national and supranational policy levels are strongly interdependent and interwoven. One of the priorities for regional development programmes in the European Union is the promotion of innovation whereby the key challenges for policy involve assisting firms and localities to change by enhancing their learning capabilities. Whilst regional or local governments may have some influence over universities, the big budgets for scientific research are usually at national or transnational

level. National or trans-national governments are good at setting frameworks for action but less so at detailed strategy in contexts with significant geographical variation.

In terms of seeking to achieve a working consensus among different groups in order to face the effects of increased globalisation, universities are often seen as convenient institutions through which to promote certain views; noting differences in governance structures between countries with some exhibiting more centralisation than others (Hambleton and Cross, 2007; Perry and May, 2007a). As these shifts occur, expectations change leading to an absence of institutional capability to form coherent strategies with a resulting fluctuation in institutional aims. In the case of Western Europe, “initiatives to enhance territorial cohesion within metropolitan regions have been promoted in direct conjunction with growth-driven, competitiveness-oriented, and exocentric strategies of regional economic development” [Brenner, (2004), p.86].

Current ways of thinking about regional knowledge-based initiatives need to be located in historical and comparative perspective. The Science Park-led ‘high-tech fantasy’, inspired by successful regions in the USA such as Silicon Valley, has been adopted and emulated in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. In countries in East Asia, such as Japan and South Korea, technology-based local development has been promoted by the central governments since the 1980s. Starting in 1983, high-technology-based local economic development was the key idea of the Technopolis programme in Japan. However, legal and organisational constraints on universities prevented the full development of science-based local economic development in the 1980s and early 1990s. The abolition of a law that prevented the establishment of universities in metropolitan areas thus enabled a greater presence in cities (Kitagawa, 2007).

What such cases point to are gaps in our understanding of how global aspirations actually manifest themselves in sub-regional circumstances: that is, the critical success factors in different contexts and the contribution of different types of knowledge, disciplines and institutions. Unfortunately, instead of efforts working in this direction, initiatives often advance on the basis of suppositions and investments in attempts to emulate perceived, rather than substantiated, practices. To underpin effective action, a need exists to take stock and consider the scope for local initiatives that can support and seed the socio-economic development of the city.

### **3 Local: knowledge arenas in place**

Although regional issues have existed for universities since at least the 1960s, a clear understanding of these is not shared among established universities. Despite this, a great deal of effort is devoted to creating closer links between a university and its region. The issue of ‘territoriality’, however, is not straightforward for universities. For some institutions to become ‘a regional university’ may be seen as a source of stigma, whilst regional partnerships, given the right locality, can be a route to international research standing. There are pressures for universities to be both local/regional and international in the globalising knowledge economy, whilst many of the legislative decisions about higher education are made at different scales from the federal, to national and supranational.

Contexts of knowledge production are spatial. Indeed, it is at the local or regional level that the dynamics of different knowledge capitalisms, from policy conceptualisation to conditions of production, are most apparent with resulting effects upon institutions.

Regions and cities are devoting increasing resources to participating in the knowledge economy. The aspiration is that excellence and relevance can come together; in other words, the ‘embedding’ of academic institutions and scientific expertise in particular places and spaces. Spatial context therefore provides a crucible in which issues of politico-economic, institutional and epistemic cultures react and collide (May, 2006).

Traditional accounts of the relationship between science, technology and context focus upon accounts that tend to be linear and limited in terms of definitions of science, understanding of the needs of relevant sectors and actual capacity matched against considered possibilities. The focus has tended to be on ‘big science’, high-tech sectors and research-intensive universities. What this masks is the fundamental contribution of a range of disciplines, sectors and higher education actors to local and regional economic development. Wider contributions of universities to their localities are made, e.g., in relation to community and social work, cultural contributions in general and informal networks of knowledge exchange and support.

What we find are a series of pressures to constitute an emphasis on different university-based activities. These include:

- international excellence as measured on global league tables according to research grant income and peer-reviewed publications
- socio-economic relevance to the locality, including expanded roles in innovation and business links and development
- contributions to urban sustainability, design and quality of life
- engagement in knowledge transfer activities with different communities
- outreach work to those who would not normally go to university or consider it an option
- the provision of a workforce for the knowledge economy
- contributions to the cultural vibrancy of the urban lifeworld
- estate management with a view to interests beyond the university itself and contributions to increasing public understanding of science.

Taken together these create tensions, but also opportunities to consider how universities can contribute to particular agendas to meet both their own institutional as well as city priorities. While issues remain – i.e., in the tensions between collaboration and competition – policy initiatives are often felt to be able to be joined-up for the collective benefit of the city and region to take best advantage of their institutions of higher education. The challenge is seen in terms of developing ‘effective’ collaborations across a very broad range of activities. To examine the dynamics of these challenges, I now turn to experiences within the Greater Manchester region.

### *3.1 Forging an urban knowledge arena*

An emerging trend for the provision of coherent strategies may be seen in the UK context through the ‘Science Cities’ initiative. That seeks to emulate the success of well-documented cases such as Silicon Valley or Boston Route 128 and build ‘creative places’ for knowledge businesses and workers to locate (Perry and May, 2007b).

Frameworks for action at European ('regions of knowledge'), national and regional levels all support the need for initiatives to take place at the city scale. The aim being to place the expertise and understanding that is contained within universities at the heart of the city's response to the global knowledge economy and engage with existing multi-level agendas. That means uniting universities in cities around common programmes of work for the benefit of the city as a whole thereby bringing together research, teaching, widening participation and outreach agendas and builds upon the city's critical mass of knowledge and expertise to form new working relationships with the public, private and voluntary sectors. In terms of these possibilities, it would be an error to restrict the roles of universities in urban development to an analysis of the 'Science Cities' initiative as that ignores the contributions that come from a range of disciplines and activities.

Greater Manchester was seen to possess potential in respect of the above because of existing partnerships between the universities and within the city itself. There is considerable expertise within the three universities who form the 'Contact' Partnership whose purpose is to work together on particular issues (Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan and Salford), whilst the combined expenditure by staff, students and higher education institutions (HEIs) is a very significant element in the city economy. The universities are thus well placed to develop symbiotic relationships with city and regional partners on a more systematic and collaborative basis. In addition, within a climate in which universities find themselves under increasing financial pressures, such alliances provide for a stronger basis from which to maintain and expand their current activities.

Other contextual issues also play an important role in the potential development of an urban knowledge arena. They include the under-bounding of the Manchester local authority area, as well as historic development of relations between neighbouring local authorities through The Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) which provides a voice for the ten local authorities. They work in partnership with private, public and voluntary organisations, whilst there is also a history of private-public partnerships as a result of bids for the Olympic and Commonwealth Games and through tackling economic disparity in the UK North-South divide.

In this context, Manchester-Knowledge Capital (M:KC) was set up as an initiative that brought together a wide-range of partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors with the common aim of placing Manchester in the global knowledge economy. The first meeting of the Knowledge Capital Working Group took place on 18 February 2002 and built on previous meetings between the Manchester Investment and Development Agency Service (now replaced by New Economy) and the Vice Chancellors of the then four universities in the wider Greater Manchester area: University of Manchester, the University of Manchester Institute for Science and Technology (UMIST), Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Salford (Manchester and UMIST merged in 2003).

The issues raised in the earlier stages of M:KC included: producing the 'Innovation City'; the significance of planning developments along a corridor in which the main physical assets of the universities are located; new local authority/HEI joint initiatives and partnership arrangements including European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) action plans; museum/gallery hubs and the development of local strategic partnerships (LSPs); the City of Manchester's discussions with the Work Foundation (formerly the Industrial Society) who then produced a study on Manchester's potential to become an 'Ideopolis' (see Canon et al., 2003), as well as enhanced HEI cooperation, including working with the Contact partnership.



The working group to take these forward involved representatives from the universities, local authorities, private sector organisations, the National Health Service, investment agencies, the Regional Development Agency (NWDA) and Learning and Skills Councils. The process included a series of national and regional meetings with launches in London and Manchester. In particular, while it was originally intended to produce a master strategy plan for knowledge capital with thematic action plans feeding into this, a request from the UK Government to a number of cities led to the production of a vision that aims:

“to create an internationally acclaimed ‘knowledge capital’ within the Greater Manchester conurbation, which will position Manchester, branded as the knowledge capital, at the heart of the knowledge economy, significantly contributing to the economic growth of the nation and the Northwest region leading to a healthier city/region with a vibrant, safe and attractive environment in which to live, work and play, for people of all ages, social and cultural backgrounds.”

Continual ambiguities in national frameworks for cities and universities translate in the Manchester context into a search for partnerships, alliances and coalition-building, with a mixture of proactive agenda-shaping and reactive rearguard action. Added to this is a long history both between universities in the sub-region and between different local authorities of both competition and collaboration. Against this background there is the core role of Manchester City as driving the sub-regional economy as well as the role of the University of Manchester in seeking to draw in scientific research funds, at least in fields such as biotechnology and genomics, away from the Golden Triangle of London, Oxford and Cambridge.

The work that informed the development of what was eventually called the Greater Manchester Urban Knowledge Arena (GMUKA) took these issues on board in its design and focused, in the first instance, on three areas of activity: the built environment and sustainability; culture and creative industries and health, including medicine and professions allied to medicine. These were selected according to their strategic relevance to the Contact Partnership (the sponsoring organisation for the work) in terms of existing programmes of activity within the city. The purpose was not only to add value to city-region programmes and projects, but also demonstrate how inter-institutional collaboration in the Manchester City could be both nationally and internationally emblematic of good practice in interactions between a city and its universities.

The investigating team was drawn from within three universities and led by the Centre for Sustainable Urban and Regional Futures (SURF). That composition enabled a familiarity of the cultures and structures within the different universities, as well as adding legitimacy to the overall findings through belonging and familiarity, as well as seeking to avoid the trend of paying consultants to undertake such work when the ability to do so resides within the institutions themselves. A two-day workshop began the process through bringing together the core partners from the physical sciences, social sciences and humanities across the three institutions. Each partner presented their view of the ‘state-of-the-art’ at the Greater Manchester scale and analysed gaps in common understandings. The workshop then considered the implications of the gap analysis for capacity-building of expertise within the city. That provisional assessment was then taken forward into each institution to assess it against current activities.

In this second phase, each partner undertook an analysis of actual provision within their own institutions in order that there was a sufficient representation in the three areas.

Such is the complexity of activities and issues associated with their measurement and understanding, there was no claim that this was exhaustive. However, it provided the most in-depth intra- and inter-institutional understanding of these activities that had been provided thus far. The methods adopted were both quantitative and qualitative and deployed desk-based research of documents including internal reports and public documents; analysis of departmental and faculty web pages and other sites, including those relating to specific projects; analysis of university compiled statistics as well as other datasets; analysis of ISI Thompson bibliometric data; sources of external funding for projects and programmes and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with academics and university managers.

Following this work, each partner then hosted a workshop in their institution which focussed on areas emerging from the analysis and acted as a check upon the validity of the findings. The aim was to identify and draw together an interdisciplinary community of researchers able to address the findings and identify potentials. At this stage, capacity-building was strengthened through drawing on existing networks of expertise among the research team: e.g., through considering comparative lessons from European and international contexts and other work conducted in cities, including studies of innovation processes.

A report was then written and presented to the Contact partnership. It established the context for and desirability of establishing the GMUKA with the aim of placing the universities at the heart of the city's response to the global knowledge economy. It provided an assessment of the capacities that existed within the universities in health and social care, the built environment and sustainability and cultural and creative industries. The purpose was to add value to city-based programmes and projects and demonstrate how inter-institutional collaboration in the Manchester City could be both nationally and internationally emblematic of good practice. Taken together, these conditions created an opportunity to see how universities can contribute to particular agendas to meet both institutional and city priorities. Moving away from expectations and existing conditions towards realisation, the report then examined the capacities within the three institutions and the extent to which they also collaborated in the selected areas of activity.

It was then planned to circulate a shorter version of the report to policy and practitioner communities entitled: 'Future research and policy priorities'. This was planned to achieve the following:

- develop a shared ethos in partnership with identified stakeholders with a clear set of aims
- identify who needed to be involved
- establish programmes of work that would produce benefit to different stakeholders and communities and at different timescales
- clarify the difficulties that will be faced in the process of design and implementation and how they might be overcome
- understand and communicate when and how it will be known that the network is having a positive impact
- build an effective and sustainable infrastructure that can support and enable development over time and coordinate effectively between different institutions and programmes of work

- constitute a public document that would be signed by universities, local authorities and private and voluntary stakeholders to attract resources in order to place GMUKA at the forefront of national developments and deliver local benefits.

That stage of formulating the GMUKA was designed to address underlying questions that are so often omitted from these types of knowledge-based initiatives. Those include:

- What is the added value of the three institutions working together that should then inform a clear communications strategy?
- What messages wish to be conveyed locally, regionally, nationally and internationally about such collaborations?
- What will be the core elements of those collaborations? When and how will it be known that they are successful?
- With which partners will collaborations take place?
- What is the most appropriate form of organisation to deliver the collaborations?
- How will it be known among different parties in the city that they are having the desired outcomes?

A necessary condition of addressing these lies in an honest and open examination of the opportunities that are present in pursuing collaborations. The purpose is to render expectations of the contributions of universities among city politicians, policy makers and communities, much clearer and see where other parties needed to be involved.

At this point in the development of the GMUKA, the collaborative aspirations that informed this work met with the constructions of what were competitive relations in practice; in other words, when faced with this process each institution did not appear to regard a more public process of consultation and capacity building as being in either their collective, or individual, interests. Part of this might be explained by the extent to which the research revealed a relative lack of cross-institutional collaborations. The available quantitative metrics did not indicate who initiated collaborations, whilst it was also difficult to partition the quantitative data according to the three areas of interest. As a result and according to the indicators available, collaborations did not appear significant. Potential reasons for this include: the lack of a shared agenda; the specific nature of collaborative funding arrangements; lack of awareness of the agendas in each institution; the difficulties in actually undertaking interdisciplinary work, as well as an absence of institutional incentives to engage in joint working.

As a corollary to this limited picture, the report presented examples of existing collaborations explored through qualitative analysis. Clearly, they were not complete maps of collaborative endeavours, but examples of actual working patterns and so provided a basis for creative potential that was in the spirit that informed the development of the GMUKA. Three particular issues emerge from this analysis. First, the three areas were not only of interest nationally and sub-regionally, but were ones where existing collaborations were concerned with the city as a place itself. Second, a great deal of work remains hidden from view and takes the form of informal and/or more individual styles of working that are omitted from the collaborative radars. These may or may not be amenable to more formalised interventions, as a great deal of what counts as 'informal' is peculiar to different modes of working, attempts to formalise these patterns may

undermine the basis of their original success. Nevertheless, there was scope to consider how a more favourable environment could be created in which informal links or 'serendipity' in research collaboration could develop, as well as actively fostering institutionalised linkages. Finally, the work demonstrated how existing forms of work could easily be harnessed for city benefit through translation of its implications without losing the novelty of the work itself.

Whilst the qualitative dimension of the work indicated evident potential against a relative lack in quantitative measures, the latter absence does not, in itself, explain the reasons for an unwillingness to take the work out of the universities into a broader coalition of interests. The ethos of the work was clear: it was driven by the idea of collaboration to produce greater collective benefit through a concern to further democratise the constitution of understanding among different parties who are normally excluded from these processes. That, of course, may be seen as a threat to established interests in the universities, as well as among city elites.

#### **4 Strategic lessons for developing urban knowledge arenas**

Although the development of the GMUKA met with a political impasse, important lessons can be drawn from this for initiatives seeking urban knowledge-based development. In this section, I outline those and in so doing, draw upon work conducted in this area both prior to the GMUKA initiative and after that time. The latter, specifically, draws upon experience in working for clients who wanted to develop new initiatives around knowledge generation and exchange, as well as lessons from partnerships that sought to act as conduits and catalysts for innovative urban environments (for further information on these projects, see: <http://www.surf.salford.ac.uk>).

The geography of university engagement is varied and there are possible conflicts and tensions between global/regional and local roles with potential unrealistic expectations on the part of local and regional policy makers that HEIs should 'serve' the region first, or university managers that they are pursuing global goals. This is also equally true of national and transnational business interests whereby the region or city is simply a convenient location for its operations according to regulatory environments, the pool of skilled labour and taxation incentives.

Here we see typical responses in knowledge-based initiatives in cities. This may be seen when declarative statements blend into categorical assertions leaving alternative forms of action to one side. A clear casualty becomes the understanding between different parties and how they are positioned in their institutions. However, if the intention is to benefit different constituents in a city through the constitution of alternative practices, such language and tactics are abstract and unhelpful. It is more helpful to speak of the mutual constitution of needs within a spirit of cooperative inquiry. That enables expectations to be more realistic with outcomes that are seen to improve conditions through better understandings of what may be achieved and how.

Such re-phrasing is important as it is indicative of a preparedness to shift towards more reflexive understandings of the relationship between the content, context and consequence of types of knowledge (May with Perry, 2011). It also enables a greater reflection on the part of the universities about the appropriate 'collaboration strategy' that is feasible and desirable from an institutional perspective across a range of their activities.

That, in turn, means reaching a more commonly agreed understanding of what is to be achieved, with what resources and according to what desired ends? The basis for collaboration exists at the level of those who are actually delivering the core tasks, not those whose positions tend to be more about rhetorical allusion without concern for translation into practice. To render this more effective means taking inter-institutional collaboration for the benefit of the city seriously and devoting the necessary resources to its success.

#### *4.1 The importance of mutual understanding*

In terms of developing better understandings between universities and their cities, there is a clear need to broaden and deepen understandings of activities not only in universities, but also other relevant sites of activity that are presumed to be of significance in the city. Whilst three areas of work were prioritised in GMUKA in the first instance, other areas of work could easily have been incorporated. Such activity forms a basis for an intelligence gathering system that includes both quantitative and qualitative data and addresses the lack of appropriate measures which can then feed into communication mechanisms to overcome a perceived lack of awareness of activities across institutions in a city. That would not only increase visibility, but also help in establishing channels of cooperation and collaboration and provide a basis for community groups and others to access the knowledge that exists in their city.

Knitting funding sources together is both a precondition for success, but also a challenge to existing interests. Two key factors combine to highlight the necessity of attracting funding from a variety of sources. First, there are limitations to deploying traditional modes of research funding for creating a sustainable financial basis for work at the urban level. These funds tend to derive from national research councils and whilst there is an increasing need to demonstrate 'impact', that is not the same as benefit through outcomes at the city level. The pursuits of relevance and excellence are, in this case, 'devilish dichotomies' (Perry and May, 2010). Second, the largely interdisciplinary nature of work implied in an urban knowledge arena requires 'joined-up' solutions to complex problems that are beyond the remit of any one funding institution or source. More imaginative funding solutions are therefore required beyond those which tend to dominate the urban landscape.

Once a common understanding has been shared between different parties and institutional collaborations have been provisionally agreed and the wider academic and policy community enrolled, there is a need to engage with city representatives in order to identify mutual areas of interest and forge a 'city-based agenda'. At this point, expectations can be raised as a result of creating a process and forum that is so often lacking in its representation at a city level. Due modesty is required to match expectations to possibilities in a process to arrive at mutually constituted needs. A clear programme of identification and enrolment is needed for this purpose.

#### *4.2 Partnerships and purpose*

To deliver the above, it is necessary to consider different forms of organisation that are not associated with entrenched interests but have cross-institutional buy-in and support. The dynamics of good partnership working for delivering the kinds of benefits (and reducing the negative effects) intended are essential. Knowledge exchange is not a simple

construct. It is taken to refer to a range of activities from commercialisation and intellectual property to the generation of intelligence for informing policies and initiatives. Less attention has been traditionally given to HEIs' contributions to policy development and strategic capacity for socio-economic competitiveness as 'political' agents and in contributing to the formulation of 'intelligent' policy. Instead, it is often assumed that universities are simply suppliers and not partnership-shapers of services, understandings and needs. Importantly, knowledge exchange is a non-linear and context-specific process, the success of which is based on better understanding cultures of knowledge production and reception. Populating the missing middle between production and reception requires in-depth analysis of the dynamics and content of different partnerships and knowledge exchange mechanisms between sectors.

'Partnership' is a generic term for a range of structured or unstructured interactions between organisations for mutual gain. Such partnerships have impacts at a number of scales, designed with international competitiveness, research excellence or social and cultural objectives in mind. Partnerships involve differing constellations of actors orientating themselves to and shaping different environments. For instance, the potential impact of universities on a cities' competitiveness is likely to be an outcome of a collective and iterative process, related as much to the behaviour of city partners as to university contributions.

The notion of 'competitiveness' is not unproblematic or a necessary positive sum game. There may be trade-offs between notions of competitiveness and winners/losers that have not been systematically explored. Greater understanding is needed of the content and context through which joint working between higher education and different sectors impact on a range of communities at national and sub-national levels. Collaboration involves a partnership aimed at clearly defined, mutually beneficial outcomes and a toleration and recognition of difference. Progress towards such outcomes involves the exchange and generation of new knowledge, or existing knowledge deployed in new ways and the components essential for successful collaboration are trust, cooperation and understanding the outcomes in terms of mutual benefit.

For the above reasons, attention needs to be given to appropriate forms of organisation. Whilst we have introduced the idea of active intermediaries for the purposes of mediating between institutional expertise and city partners, this is not suggested as a model that should be imported, but a framework of considerations that needs to be addressed (May et al., 2009). That is because needs will vary between cities and there will be differences in the capacity to enrol and second suitably qualified personnel from within the collaborating institutions. They could then act as translators of the content and possible consequences of knowledge into intelligence for the needs of different groups.

Core to the above is working towards embeddedness for the viability and success of developments. If there is commitment to pursue partnerships, then the issue of capacity to deliver is raised. Secondments and the movement of staff between organisations and communities provide for a fertile culture for working practice and a learning context which adds value to overall activity. For this purpose, funding streams should be identified, along with issues associated with incentives, careers and appropriate sectors, to set up a reflexive urban knowledge arena. Concerted action does not simply require policy frameworks for action, but also effective organisation in action and there is no substitute for continual efforts that are based on clear understandings which are coordinated and well communicated.

### *4.3 Establishing foresight capacity*

We now come to the matter of not just responding to issues, but anticipating those that may arise in the future. The development of foresight capacity that is clearly defined and well-developed can achieve two things. First, it can underpin and accelerate the sort of work that partners need in order to 'locate' particular initiatives according to city needs within a broader, longer-term strategic perspective. Second, this can be made readily accessible to policy makers responsible for shaping the broad direction and content of future development strategies in the city and conurbation, along with those communities whose existing initiatives and ideas can be incorporated into such activity. To underpin effective action, a need exists to take stock and consider the scope for local initiatives that can support the sustainable development of the city.

Universities are sites of many different expectations. Because of this there is a need to establish their distinctiveness in the knowledge economy and not become a site of disparate activities within organisational contexts that could be replicated anywhere. In search of distinctiveness, we can say that a combination of particular professional cultures and the speed of knowledge production, leads to a different form of knowledge. For some, this means a process of 'unhastening' (Pels, 2003). Yet, we live in a world in which 'quick hits' drive criteria of relevance. Balancing these is important if the civic role of the university in society is not to give way to a short-term instrumentalism.

## **5 Conclusions**

The paradox of the university in urban knowledge development strategies relates not only to institutional cultures of recognition for particular forms of work and accompanying incentives, but also to different scales of action: from the local, to city-regional, to national and international. Place-based initiatives need to take account of these different orientations if they are to be successful. Developing clear understandings of what needs to be achieved and how, among a cross-section of urban communities, within new partnerships that have institutional support from different sectors, is a clear condition for success.

Such a process of honest appraisal requires the management of expectations of what can be achieved in the short, medium and longer term. It separates the symbolic status that comes with a city adopting the latest 'global thinking' with the actual outcomes that an urban knowledge arena may provide to its populations. Global hierarchies operate according to the status that comes with the adoption of the latest thinking that signifies one at the 'front of the game'. They are characterised by a surplus of expectations according to their ability to live up to the promise of a future that is never realised. The idea of the GMUKA sought to pierce the rhetoric that surrounds these processes and tackle the missing middle between expectations set in a global symbolic space through an encounter with actual practices in a place.

The strategic lessons drawn from such experiences are designed to inform effective knowledge-based initiatives. A proper appraisal starts from an honest and open point of view and does not bracket the work and effort needed to translate needs into practice. It is modest work that can make a real difference and it requires to be recognised as such. Whilst the contemporary climate in places such as the UK is extremely poor due to

savage cuts in social infrastructures, collective efforts to ameliorate their consequences are possible.

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