Place-based Institutions of Higher Learning and their Role in City Growth and Development: A Case of East London, South Africa

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ABSTRACT The paper explores the use and contribution of institutions of higher learning in innovative city development strategies through knowledge production. Higher learning institutions in the Global North have become central in the redevelopment of post-industrial cities that can no longer depend on heavy industries but knowledge through the adoption of triple helix models. In the Global South, higher learning institutions have lagged in leading redevelopment initiatives. This paper uses an exploratory approach in examining how universities, through knowledge production and dissemination, can lead the growth agenda in the city development. It makes use of East London as a case study where knowledge-driven initiatives have the potential to reinvent the city. The paper concludes that, by embracing knowledge-based approaches, great opportunities exist for collaborations between the city and universities in the growth and redevelopment of East London, and other cities in the Global South.

INTRODUCTION

The inner-city decline is a common phenomenon, more so for cities that used to rely on heavy manufacturing industries for their survival. To redevelop such cities, there is a need for new strategies and interventions. However, these strategies can no longer solely depend on the heavy industries that once led to the booming growth of cities. Even in growing cities that still rely on these industries, the production and application of intensive knowledge have been key to their strategies. New approaches to city development and growth are increasingly driven by knowledge and innovation (Bergman 2014; OECD 2015; Ardito et al. 2019). In applying strategies for redevelopment and economic growth, cities cannot achieve their goals in isolation. To grow and sustain themselves, cities need to develop partnerships that share their vision and assist in fulfilling their plans and objectives. These partnerships include the business sector, the community and knowledge-based institutions such as universities.

The city of East London, like other post-industrial cities, has been experiencing a decline over the years. In most parts of the city, blight has crept in while there is little effort directed at arresting the downward spiral, playing down the vast opportunities and potential the city has with correct interventions. While emphasizing the importance of different stakeholders in city development, this paper focuses on universities and the role they play in and within cities. Knowledge and innovation are key to growth and development, and institutions of higher education are the prime producers and disseminators of this knowledge. As such, they cannot be excluded from meaningful growth strategies in knowledge-driven economies, especially in the cities where they are located. A university gives the city means to enable it to successfully take part in the transformation to a post-industrial society, in which knowledge- instead of labour-intensive functions dominate the economy (Meer 1997; Ardito et al. 2019). Universities are anchors of development within cities as the local knowledge base is of increasing importance for urban economic growth and change (Matthiessen et al. 2006; Addie 2017). Whether be it in innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship, knowledge or any other aspects, the university is in a key position to act as the agent to drive these processes.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to explore how institutions of higher learning can contribute to the redevelopment of post-industrial cities. Through exploratory descriptive qualitative approach, the paper seeks to outline existing relationships between knowledge institutions, the city and the business community. It also seeks to find ways of enhancing and readjusting these relationships in knowledge-based approaches to city development.

METHODOLOGY

The study used an exploratory descriptive qualitative approach to determine ways and strategies that higher education institutions could employ, together with other stakeholders, in the growth and development of the city. The methodology was suitable for this paper, as it needed to identify where problems, opportunities and situations of interest resided in knowledge-driven city development approaches. The literature used in this paper sought to develop a set of attributes to illustrate the symbiotic relationships between higher learning institutions (HEIs), the city, and the business community in a triple helix system. It also reviewed the role of the university in knowledge creation, exchange and transfer to establish the range of activities through which knowledge exchange may be achieved (Hope 2016). Furthermore, having worked in city development projects involving various stakeholders, the author was able to draw some lessons from that experience. The use of interviews with key informants contributed greatly to a better understanding of development matrices within the city. They also assisted in addressing the central research question of determining the kind of relationships between knowledge institutions and how they could be enhanced.

Background to the Study

The interest of this paper lies in the critical role cities play in human development. It is for this reason that their growth and development should be of concern to knowledge institutions. In many countries, cities are creators of wealth and contribute the larger shares of their nations' GDP. Cities have also been locations of the main producers of knowledge and vehicles for economic growth and development. It can be argued that they have long been centres of innovation. As centres of innovation cities strive to become competitive, to have a universal outlook, to attract investments and be accorded 'global city' status. The more international businesses invest in a city; the greater the numbers of tourists that visit a city, the more connections develop between the city and other cities and the more it is considered 'global' and developed.

Cities drive the economy of their regions and countries; they are centres of economic growth and social development (Knight and Gappard 2001; Addie 2019). As noted by the World Bank Institute (2005), cities also offer social diversity and attract talented people, providing unique opportunities and cultivating the creativity required to meet the challenges of growth and development (World Bank Institute 2005).

In this post-industrial era of rapid technological innovation and communication where cities can no longer rely on traditional heavy industries to drive their economy, knowledge and innovation have become new anchors of development. Cities have therefore to tap into these factors to become competitive. Since universities produce knowledge through research and are anchored in places where they are located, they have become major players in the economy and planning of cities. They have assumed the role of being urban planners (Campbell et al. 2005) and drivers of the urban economy (Haar 2010). This reflects the extension of the academic mission of universities but, above that, it acknowledges their critical function in making cities the centres of the global economy (Haar 2010)

Universities are also considered significant catalysts that stimulate the development of city centres and their neighbourhoods economically, culturally, and socially (Yacobi 2005; Anttila and Jussila 2018). Thus, it has been argued that great universities are found in great cities and that great cities have great universities (Shaheer 2008). This illustrates the close relationship that should exist between these two institutions. White et al. (1969) argue that the health of institutions of higher learning is integrally tied to the health of the inner cities. They contend that the city and its academic institutions either grow together or decline together.

The future of both the city and the university are intertwined; one cannot survive without the other. In Boyer's (1994) words, universities cannot afford to become islands of affluence, self-importance, and horticultural beauty in seas of squalor, violence, and despair (Cisneros 1996). Universities do not, and cannot, stand completely outside the realities of their geographic, social, cultural and political environment (Bergman 2014). In this light, this paper investigated existing relationships between institutions of higher

learning based in East London and the role they play in the development and growth of the city.

The city of East London provides a unique and understudied instance of a stagnant or declining city endowed with numerous institutions of higher learning, making it an ideal location for enquiring how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the city can better facilitate urban development. It has three universities and other institutions of higher learning, namely, the University of Fort Hare (UFH), Walter Sisulu University (WSU), University of South Africa (UNISA) and Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) colleges. If universities are real city builders and if they are touted as anchors of development for their host cities, how has East London benefited from having not one, but several of these institutions? Has the city itself realized the 'jewel' and the advantage it has over other cities for its revitalisation?

RESULTS

Place-Based HEIs in East London

In East London, various stakeholders in city development such as the businesses, the universities, the community and the city itself, generally acknowledge the existence of the other and the relationship ends there. The city recognises the existence of the three universities within its boundaries, the business sector and the community; so do other parties as well. However, the relationship between these stakeholders can be described as synthetic or superficial. Despite the different platforms where various issues of common interest are discussed, there is little evidence on the ground as to whether decisions taken in these platforms are ever implemented. A business executive, who sits in several platforms that bring together the city, the universities, the community and businesses expressed his reservations about the usefulness of these platforms. He stated that the agenda that is often discussed in these meetings turns out to be a marketing of various institutions instead of mapping the way forward in terms of city growth and other developmental issues (Business Executive 2017). The failure of these platforms may reflect the non-existence of shared vision or lack of focused conduit between these stakeholders.

Unless the divergent visions from these stakeholders are aligned, and a common purpose set, that benefits all participants; little progress can be attained from these collaborations.

For instance, at the UFH, some academics believed that the university should not focus on externals that are not related to teaching and research. They argued that by fulfilling its mission of education and research, eschewing a broader role in economic and social development, the university fulfils its third mission (Sorlin 2002). Within the city, some officials felt that by involving itself in the planning and building of the city, the university was meddling in the city affairs and should restrict itself to its core business of teaching and research (Stakeholders' Meeting 2017). However, in general, there were good interactions between the city, university and the business community as evidenced by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, who stated that

We hold various meetings and discussions with the city authorities and the business chamber through various platforms. There is generally good neighbourliness between us and we strive to achieve what is beneficial for all of us. We do not always agree on certain issues, but that is not to say there is hostility. Sometimes we view things from different angles, which at times hinders progress (UFH VC 2016).

However, what should be guarded against is the disconnection in the lower rungs of institutions. This means that the VCs and mayors may have mutual relations, but as long as this does not filter down to all personnel, who are tasked with implementation within these institutions, then the good relations enjoyed at the top, would not be beneficial for the growth and development of the city nor other stakeholders. For instance, one of the faculty deans stated that the university (UFH) should expend its efforts in consolidating the Alice campus instead of splitting resources by expanding the East London campus (Dean of Education 2016). This is an example of how institutional plans and visions can fail if those tasked with implementation differ from the vision pursued by institutions. The vice chancellor's purpose of participating in city development platforms, such as the Mayor's Forum, was an attempt at aligning the focus of the university, the city and the busi-

ness community, but if some within the university drove a different agenda, such developments were likely to fail.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the other important aspect of an anchor strategy is that it becomes institutionally embedded. This implies that from the top management right to the bottom, everyone must be made aware of the central role that the institution plays in the development of the neighbourhood and the city. The leadership makes a point that staff, students and all associated with the university must know about the change of the organisational culture of the university. This is a prerequisite for any anchor strategy to take off. Everyone should be aware of how they fit into the bigger picture and understand their role therein and how this integrates with their respective functions and objectives. This explicit alignment removes the existence of contradictory views that may exist within an institution.

A balance has to be established between the universal knowledge produced and the local growth and development of the place in which it is generated. In East London, the city is fast declining, on one hand, yet on the other, there is vast knowledge being produced on development issues by local HEIs. The question then arises as to why the knowledge produced is not applied to solving local challenges. City authorities need ideas on how to retrofit cities for more sustainability and competitiveness but often lack the time, personnel, or resources to access the latest knowledge and thinking (Cantor 2011). At the same time, as Cantor (2012) further states, students and faculty at universities in the city and across the country are studying and creating valuable new ideas every day. All that lacks are the connection between the two so that the knowledge produced becomes useful to the places where it is created. Once the link is established and place-based approaches, targeting the inner city, are adopted and employed in East London, prospects of the growth and development of the city and wider areas could be achieved. It is proper to conclude this section by referring to Ratajczyk et al. (2018) on the importance of reciprocal relationships between stakeholders in city development. They state that

…the universities gain a local training ground for the research and implementation of their ideas, while the city itself and society ben-efit through innovations and knowledge-based problem solving. These benefits extend into the areas of spatial development and the implementation of natural capital-based sustainable development within spatial planning (Ratajczyk et al. 2018: 59).

DISCUSSION

Cities and Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

In his article, William Gumede (2015) argues that a fundamental re-assessment of the role of universities is needed in South Africa. He contends that universities have largely played an 'outsider role', conducting 'research and teaching removed from both industry and government and the nitty-gritty of national and regional economic development'. Gumede suggests that the local universities should become 'developmental institutions' which actively 'research what needs to be done to make Africa's industries globally competitive, develop new production chains around them, develop new strategic sectors, introduce value-added services and find avenues for beneficiation' (Gumede 2015). He sees the universities as critical 'mediators', facilitating growth and development in the economy.

William et al. (2008) affirm that both for successful cities likely to experience job losses and for struggling cities likely to find it even harder to increase their productivity now, like East London, universities provide an opportunity to grow productivity, develop skills and stimulate ideas, as well as to work more closely with the local community. To comprehend fully the factors bedevilling the city of East London, an outline of its historical settings suffices. Nel (1991) described it as an apartheid city:

East London stands out from many other South African cities and towns by virtue of the degree to which racial segregation of the African and Asian populations was initiated in the pre-Union and pre-apartheid eras. This legacy preempted later national measures creating a highly segregated city prior to 1948. These early attempts at racial segregation laid a foundation of a smooth transition from segregated city to the apartheid city form in subsequent years (Nel 1991).

The present social and spatial planning and subsequent developments within the city of East London reflect its past dynamics. There was concerted effort throughout the history of East London to protect the city from undesirable elements that would encroach on urban spaces meant for the privileged. The fact that the city was not designed to accommodate other racial groups meant that their inclusion in the later years caused discomfort. By creating and claiming their spaces, conflicts were certain to arise. Some of those who had previously sought exclusive access to the city left and rebuilt on the outskirts, yet some put their efforts into restoring the old exclusive image of the city (Nel 1991).

The city of East London initially grew as a centre for trade until it was eventually transformed radically through industrialisation, which was in line with the modernisation route of the Western developed world. Industrialisation became the engine and the driver of the economy. There was a massive growth of the automobile and textile manufacturing industries in East London. Bank (2011) attests that in the 1930s, there was a massive industrial drive around the harbour, and the city was marketed as a growing industrial hub. This is further augmented by the fact that by the end of the war, there were already over 100 manufacturing plants in East London, which increased from 135 in 1946 to 523 in 1958 (Bank 2011). Black and Davies (1986) had earlier contended that the economy of East London became largely driven by industries. In 1958, out of the more than 800 industries within the 'eastern half of the Eastern Cape', most of them were located in East London (Bank 2011).

Thus from the foregoing, it can be deduced that East London developed as an industrial city backed by mostly the automobile and textile sectors. The harbour and transportation systems gave the city some competitive advantages in strengthening its industrial base (Eastern Cape Government 2010). The apartheid government also gave incentives for the growth of these industries in and around the city of East London. Global trends were also favourable for the expansion of these industries, especially the motor sector that was facing challenges in the United States and Europe and looking for suitable locations to operate from (Freund 2016). East London, therefore, became a beneficiary of these circumstances and grew its industrial base.

However, these conditions were temporal as drastic changes soon took place. First, the political landscape changed in South Africa. The incentives that the apartheid government had dished out to industry were frozen with the ushering in of the new government in 1994. Industries could no longer withstand the disadvantages posed by the location of these industries without government support. Therefore, they relocated to competitive areas and cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, leaving behind infrastructure that would never be maintained nor be suitable for other uses. Besides the effect this had on infrastructure, it also led to the increase of unemployment in and around the city. This has had a telling effect on the city's economy as poverty levels worsened due to industrial closure and capital flight. A case in point was the closure of industries in places such as Dimbaza Wilsonia, Fort Jackson and West Bank (Freund 2016). Dimbaza, in particular, had been established as one of the industrial centres where the apartheid government sought to encourage struggling industries in the larger urban areas to relocate to the 'border regions' where they would find abundant supplies of labour. This would also minimise the influx of Blacks flocking into cities in search of work. Incentives were therefore given to those industries that relocated to these areas. Nevertheless, this arrangement was short-lived when the government reduced and ultimately stopped the incentives. Factories that had been dependent on these government incentives and subsidies began to close in the early 1990s.

The other factor that contributed to the demise of East London and other industrial cities was the change in the world economy, from heavy industries driven by manufacturing to knowledge and service economies. As stated elsewhere, industrial cities that depended on less diversified economies suffered the greatest casualty of globalisation and technological change. When political, social and economic changes take place, industrial cities are typically detrimentally affected by those changes; they are even termed "the losers" of transition (Kunze 1997; Lintz et al. 2007). In the same way, East London can be classified under those cities that suffered great loss due to this transition. Those cities that were slow in restructuring their eco-

nomic base soon found themselves in a quagmire, facing all forms of urban blight and dilapidation as the former industries had given them their lifeline.

Apart from the big cities that had global links and networks, located in prime economic zones and with relatively advantageous factors, the cities in the periphery experienced much less economic renewal and were, instead, confronted primarily by the cost of restructuring without much scope for participating in, and benefiting from, economic improvements (Goddard et al. 2014). East London has equally been battling with rebooting its economy but with little success. Although marginal benefits have accrued from the process, the challenges remain enormous. Critical steps and planning still need to be conceived and implemented for any significant growth and development to occur in the city.

It is in this light that universities and other institutions of higher learning are expected to be at the forefront in redeveloping cities and reviving their economies by being anchors through 'new knowledge.' Knowledge permeates all facets of development in the changing global context, and as custodians of knowledge production, HEIs are in a prime position to provide insights into development issues and act as anchors of development for those processes, to stabilise and guide development through the insecurity and volatility of commercial and industrial growth in a market-led economy.

Higher Education Institutions as Anchors of City Development

The concept of an anchor strategy using anchor institutions generally refers to large locally embedded institutions, typically non-governmental public sector, cultural or other civic organisations, that are of significant importance to the economy and wider community life of the cities in which they are based (Dever et al. 2014). Anchors inhabit and manage enormous pieces of real estate; they purchase large quantities of goods and services, and also attract investments through capital and research (Viveiros and Sturtevant 2016). By their presence, the anchor institutions bring about changes by driving and generating positive externalities and relationships that can support or 'anchor' wider eco-

nomic activity within the locality (Dever et al. 2014). They bring together 'economic and financial assets, human resources, and physical structures' to impact on the community (The Work Foundation 2010). Anchor institutions through their scale, local rootedness and community links are acknowledged to play a key role in local development and economic growth, representing the 'sticky capital' around which economic growth strategies can be built (Adams 2003).

Universities and medical institutions are regarded as anchors because they do not easily relocate or move but are fixed in their localities or cities. They are the most commonly cited examples of anchor institutions, informally termed 'Eds and Meds' in the literature (Adams 2003). Ehlenz et al. (2016) contend that matching the mission of the anchor institution and city is the main challenge in engaging anchors in urban revitalization. They state that, at times, anchor leaders can find themselves unprepared or ill-equipped to think beyond their immediate needs. Local government officials are often equally challenged to identify areas of interdependence. This leads to uncoordinated activities that have little or no benefit for either the city or the anchors themselves. Shared interests between the city and the university enable anchor institutions to play a valuable role in city and community development (The Work Foundation 2010).

The anchor institutions are acclaimed for their economic effect on cities and places where they are located. Their ability to influence the economic health and vitality of their cities is important for the growth and development of those cities and regions. For instance, the number of employees and students that HEIs bring to the city of East London is so vast that their contribution to the city's economy cannot be ignored. The University of Fort Hare has a total of 857 staff members of which 326 are academic and 531 non-academic, with 5 170 students (as of 2018) in its East London campus. Some of the employees at UFH transverse between the East London campus and Alice. Walter Sisulu University has a total number of 6 700 students in its East London campus and 460 academic and support staff. UNISA has also a large number of students and staff within the city. Students from these institutions, who also spend their finances in businesses around these areas, occupy

most residential areas of Quigney and South-ernwood. Some students work as interns or part-time in various companies and businesses around the city. A large number of staff in these institutions shows that universities are large employers and significant purchasers of local goods and services that, magnified by multiplier effects, have considerable direct and indirect impacts on the wider local economy (Glasson 2003; Siegfried et al. 2007; Breznitz and Feldman 2012). This makes the contribution of institutions of higher learning significant. Therefore, any planning strategies that exclude this substantial constituency cannot yield significantly positive or meaningful development.

It is also increasingly being recognised that universities can and should do more to help solve socio-economic problems in cities where they are located. It should be understood that the problem of the city is the strategic problem of our time. As such, it is a problem most likely to advance the university's primary mission of advancing and transmitting knowledge. Being engaged with city challenges could positively contribute to the research agendas practised by HEIs, the learning experiences of students, in addition to direct benefits to local stakeholders (Gumede 2015). Dever et al. (2014) affirm the need for anchor institutions to be closely tied to their surrounding communities for mutual benefit.

It is contended that anchor institutions have to be place-based for the anchor strategy to be effective. The term 'place-based' means that the institutions should target a specific geographic area and concentrate their efforts within that boundary to achieve maximum impact (Bank et al. 2018; Viveiros and Sturtevant 2016). The place-based approach assumes that the interactions between institutions and geography are critical for development, and many of the clues for development policy lie in these interactions (Mansfield 1991). This further affirms the relationship that should exist between an anchor and the place where it is located. It can, therefore, be asked whether HEIs in East London have place-based policies or are they placeless entities that could be located anywhere and yet still perform their functions. However, as stated above, for an anchor strategy to be successful, and for the city and neighbourhoods to be revitalized and grow, anchor institutions should be closely linked with their neighbours so that mutual benefits can accrue. For the economic competitiveness of their communities directly correlates to the health of HEIs and vice versa.

Place-based policies and approaches have been criticised for limiting HEIs by advocating for a focus on local geographies when the latter are meant to have global impacts. There has been substantial debate in the literature as to whether universities should focus on local or global issues. Should, for instance, the University of Fort Hare (UFH) focus on development issues within the city of East London or its global networks and grow its international status, or are the two activities compatible? By concentrating on local issues, does UFH not lose sight of the wider vision and mission of universal higher education? These issues emerge when the global ranking of universities is given more prominence than research that connects them to their respective milieus. In the past few years, UFH has seen its publication ratings rise and is recommended as being one of the fast-growing universities. On the other hand, no recognition has been given to the work that the university does for its communities and the city where it is located. The academe, therefore, finds no reason to engage in development issues, which no one acknowledges and have no bearing on their promotion. These factors contribute to how HEIs relate to their neighbours.

Universities are tied to their places and at the same time, they are not bound by those places. According to Russo et al. (2007), it can be argued that the generation of new knowledge in those locations serves global development. However, it also becomes a solid factor of competitive advantage for cities where it is produced to such an extent that it is managed in the best interest of the local society: strong synergetic links have to be established between the host community and the landscape generated by higher education. However, universities are not simply bound within their regions but are complex institutions operating within multilevel policy frameworks-global, national and local (Marginson 2004) -and as such seek to join up and integrate across missions and spatial scales. Furthermore, universities take on responsibilities as 'stewards of place,' (AASCU, 2002) as partners in local governance, but bringing knowledge and resources from other spatial scales (Arbo and Benneworth 2006). Gaffikin and Perry (2013) con-

clude that the university is at once more localized in its significance for economic development and more globalized in the virtual and collaborative spaces of research and learning. Thus, its global and local missions are not exclusive but mutually enabling and both should be promoted. Institutions of higher learning bring formidable intellectual and economic resources to their communities by drawing on research and experience from around the world (Cisneros 1996).

Anchor strategies require collaboration and cooperation between stakeholders, in this case between the city, the universities, business and the community. HEIs, as producers of knowledge, should be leaders in the formation of these relationships and partnerships with other stakeholders. These collaborations between stakeholders in city growth and development are sometimes referred to as 'triple helix' or 'quadruple helix.' Within these relationships, the university assumes a crucial and challenging role of leading innovation initiatives in knowledge-based societies (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2008). Not only is the university expected to fulfil its traditional functions, but it has also to take the role of others (Saad et al. 2008). This means that the university should not only occupy itself with teaching and research but should be involved in city building, for instance, which traditionally would be reserved for city authorities. In this way, the university 'takes up the role of others' and contributes to other spheres, other than its own.

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined some of the challenges faced by cities in transitioning from industrial to the post-industrial age. Most of the challenges are because of the unwillingness or the incapability to adopt a knowledge economy that is driving growth and development in other global cities. Higher education institutions, as producers of knowledge, play a critical role in city development strategies. They are the new anchors of development on which city planning should depend. City authorities that aim to grow and develop their cities should work together with higher learning institutions and other stakeholders such as businesses and the communities. However, the knowledge economy should anchor the whole process, of which the HEIs are the primary producers.

The city of East London has many HEIs that it may harness for its development and growth.

The paper has illustrated that this has not been the case, although greater prospects exist. Through partnerships, the city of East London has the potential to regenerate itself, attract investments to inner-city areas and grow its economy. This, in turn, will have a positive impact on the lives of its citizens and people in the surrounding regions that depend on the city for their livelihoods. HEIs have invested interest in places where they are located; they research and produce new knowledge. The city, therefore, should tap into these aspects in its conceptualisation, planning and implementation of growth and development strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends the promotion of knowledge transfer or exchange between the city and institutions of higher learning. To achieve this, programmes where graduates work with the city to build skills and capacity within the local government can contribute to the development of a sustainable city. The city can also employ graduates and interns in its various departments. This initiative can benefit both the universities and the city. The business community can play a critical role by sponsoring relevant disciplines within the university that contribute to the development of the city. On its part, the university has to adapt its curriculum and tailor it to local needs without neglecting its international mandate and connections. The formation of these strong partnerships between stakeholders has the potential to transform development initiatives within the city and region. Thus, platforms for university, city, business and community leadership to discuss development issues and share a common vision on best strategies for building a 'world-class' city is recommended.

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