Strengthening Higher Education's Civic Engagement and Societal Impact

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Higher education institutions hold a strategic position in society. But are they fully oriented towards charting a more sustainable inclusive course for the future?

This is the main question we have to put on the table.

What will it take for them to adapt to our troubled times once peace is increasingly fragile, where climate change is wreaking havoc, where the digital revolution challenges the very notion of our humanity?

Stefania Giannini, UNESCO, 2022 at signing ceremony for the *Magna Charta Universitatum 2020*

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Because Higher Education Sits at Centre of Complex Knowledge-Research-Innovation Eco-System what it does and says carries huge significance for society now and into the future.
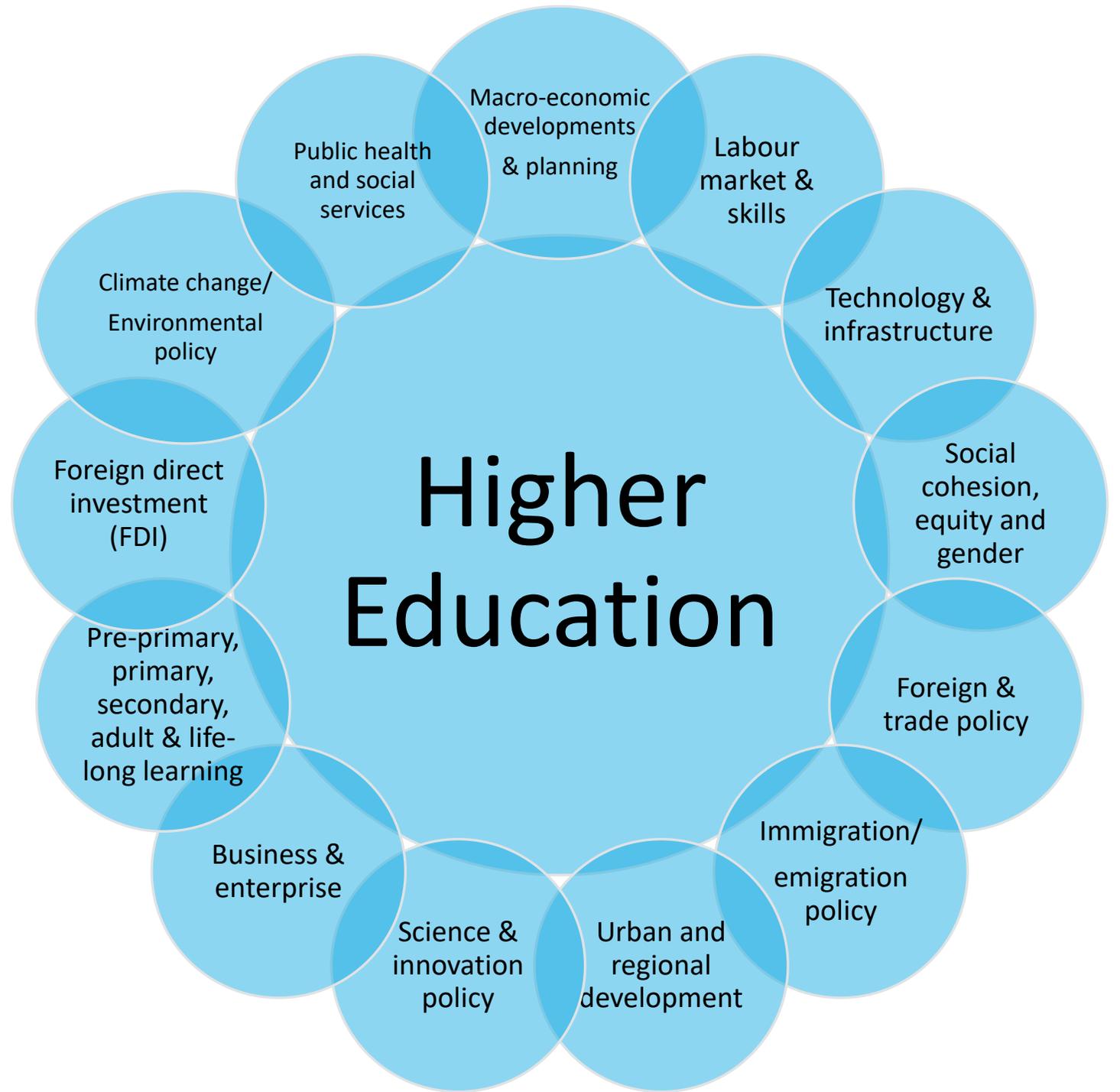
What Are HEIs Good For?

Higher education has historically had a strong relationship with the communities in which the institutions are borne and hosted;

Over the centuries, the institutions have served society well.

- Supporting people to achieve their personal development goals, providing the basis for a society rich in culture and social capital and providing the skills needed to serve our economies and maintain and enhance our living standards;

However, today's societal challenges require collective and co-ordinated engagement.

- HEIs asked to rethink their role and responsibilities with respect to enhancing the competitive advantage of nations and regions as well as underpinning societal democratic values and active citizenship.

Current debate asks: ***what are HEIs good for – not what they are good at.***

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What Are HEIs Good For?

Provide	Provide breadth of educational, research and student experiences for a demographically, ethnically and culturally diverse population;
Source	Source of human capital, innovation and entrepreneurship to fuel and sustain personal, social and economic development, and meet the needs of complex and challenging socio-political and natural environments;
Develop	Develop knowledge and critical skills that citizens require to succeed in the labour market, and underpin civil society and democracy;
Engage	Actively engage with a diverse range of stakeholders, and act as a magnet for mobile talent and investment, underpinning the global competitiveness of nations and regions;
Provide	Provide medical schools, museums, theatres, galleries, sports facilities and cafes – all of which play a significant role in their community, city and nation.

Why Societal Engagement?

Anchor Institutions and Regional Development

- HEIs play key role as place-based actors; generating local innovation environment, along with other education providers, industries/business and civil society, for social, cultural and economic sustainability;

Equality of Access

- Widening access to people/learners of all abilities, ages, ethnicities and talents, especially as people live longer, and change jobs & careers more frequently;

Public Trust

- Trust in public institutions, and HE, is under scrutiny arising from unequal access to societal public goods and opportunities as well as concerns as to whether the system is providing what is required.

Little Consensus What Engagement Means

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: "college students' exposure to and participation in a constellation of effective educational practices, including service learning" (McCormick et al., 2013).

SERVICE: academic involvement in campus or professional committees/organisations.

THIRD MISSION/PILLAR: comes after 1st/2nd missions of teaching and research, respectively

REGIONAL, CIVIC OR COMMUNITY: inter-relationship w/ societal, civil and economic stakeholders beyond campus.

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Engaging With Whom?

Concepts of community, civil society or stakeholders vary considerably:

- Include: civil society organisations including non-governmental organisations (NGO), public and regional authorities, business and enterprise, citizens at large and "the people", etc.
- Is "community" geographically proximate to the university or distant?

Local, regional, national and/or international:

- Previously seen within balanced, complementary and synergistic portfolio of activities;
- Pursuit of "world-classness" has made global dimension "qualitatively more important".

Criticism Of Engagement Actions

Too often HEIs are "islands of affluence, self-importance, and horticultural beauty in seas of squalor, violence, and despair"(Harkavy quoted in Boyer, 1996, 19).

HEIs often treat their communities simply as "pockets of needs, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise." (Bringle, Games and Malloy quoted in Bringle and Hatcher, 2002, 503-504)

Engagement can give way to a "distressing cultural voyeurism". (Butin, 1996, 19-20)

HEIs spend a lot of time broadcasting what they do rather than genuine engagement or co-creation. (Goddard, Hazelkorn et al, 2016)

HEIs often undertake a wide range of activities, but "mere activity in a community does not constitute engagement." (Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton, 2009, 6)

Rethinking Engagement

Differing views as to what engagement represents:

- Alignment of higher education society & economy – seen as a negative and attack on institutional autonomy and academic freedom;
- (Re)alignment of higher education with society & economy – seen as a positive and reassertion of public good principles.

What's clear is that as the demands of society and the economy have strengthened, HE is being asked to rethink its role and responsibilities,

- Re. enhancing the competitive advantage of cities, regions and/or nation-states;
- Re. underpinning societal democratic values and active citizenship.

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Higher Education Needs to "Own the Problems"

While societal problems are not sole responsibility of higher education, HEIs have a responsibility to help solve them in partnership with local/regional government, employers, cultural institutions, schools and further education colleges, and other civil society organisations.

HEIs have the capability, opportunity and responsibility to support the places where they are based to solve some of their most pressing and major problems:

- Developing a shared vision and development plan for their city/region,
- Helping local business adapt to technological change,
- Boosting the health of local people,
- Improving education for school pupils and adult learners,
- Training and developing new civic leaders in every field from politics to the arts.

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Three Perspectives

1. Social justice –
   - Rooted in John Rawls, w/ origins in social movements of 18/19th C.
   - Emphasis on education's responsibility and societal duties: making a "difference in the civic life of our communities"

2. Economic development –
   - Rooted in knowledge economy and "academic capitalism" arguments
   - Stresses HE as a driver of social and economic growth.

3. Public good –
   - Rooted in Mode 2, quadruple/quintuple helix arguments
   - Engagement as the horizontal linking teaching and research.

Three Approaches To Engagement

	Social Justice	Economic Development	Public Good
HE Model	Community-Engaged	Entrepreneurial	Regional/Civic
Influencers	Distributive justice; focus on community and democratic society	HE as a driver of social and economic growth	Knowledge as output – linked holistically with research and teaching
Characteristics	Collaboration between HEI and community for mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources	"Third mission" focus on research and innovation, enterprise and business development, human capital development	Engagement embedded across the whole institution – as horizontal link between teaching and research.
Descriptive Concepts	Public engagement, Civic engagement and Democratic engagement	Regional engagement; Corporate Partnerships	Academically-based engagement; institutionalized engagement

	Social Justice	Economic Development	Public Good
Activities	Faculty & students working with community partners to research social problems and form a community development council to work on comprehensive revitalisation plans and offer solutions to the problems.	Faculty & students working closely with industry and business to establish science parks, innovation parks and enterprise centres, including start-up companies.	Joint planning of urban/regional environment, shared initiatives for health and/or innovation, formal governance arrangements to oversee and monitor developments, city-university-enterprise initiatives, etc.
Evaluation/Monitoring	Student volunteer activity; Students learning with community; graduates employed locally; continuing education training programmes; total credits for engaged learning courses; student internships in local/regional community employments; faculty involvement in volunteering advisory/expert advisory engagement; faculty hours.	Number of licences, options & assignments; Total budget from commercialisation; Start-ups/spin-offs, etc.; R&D sponsored agreements; Contracts & collaborative projects with non-academic partners; Graduate students/Postdoc. Directly/co-funded by stakeholders; Co-funded facilities or projects; Enterprise involvement in curriculum development/teaching; Faculty with	Evidence of mutually bi-lateral activity; Joint and sustainable initiatives in regional/city-building, incl. strategic planning; Research and publications with industry, public bodies and civil society; Patents, start-ups and social innovations; Exchanges and placements in private, public and third-sector organisations; Internationalisation beyond campus

Public Good Definition

"Engaging in learning beyond the campus walls, discovery which is useful beyond the academic community, and service that directly benefits the public."

Mutually beneficial engagement that promotes and embeds partnerships *with* the community, industry and government, in co-production of knowledge, because complex problems require collaborative solutions

Implications For Organisation

Engagement is a Transversal rather than a "Third Pillar"
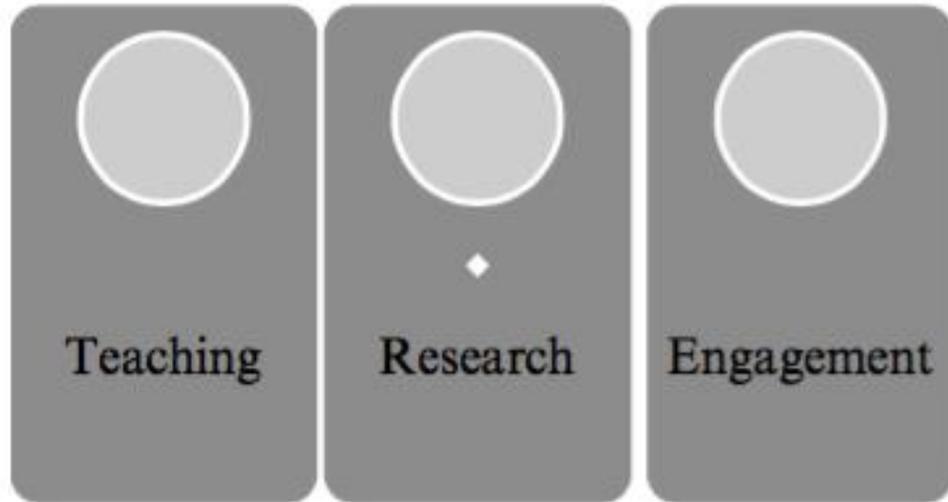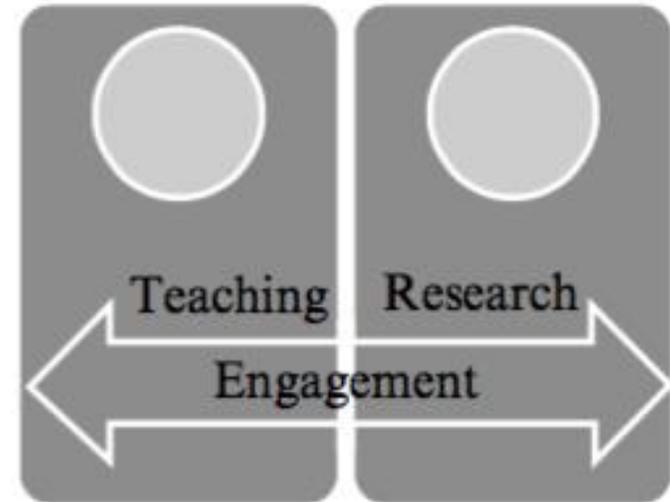
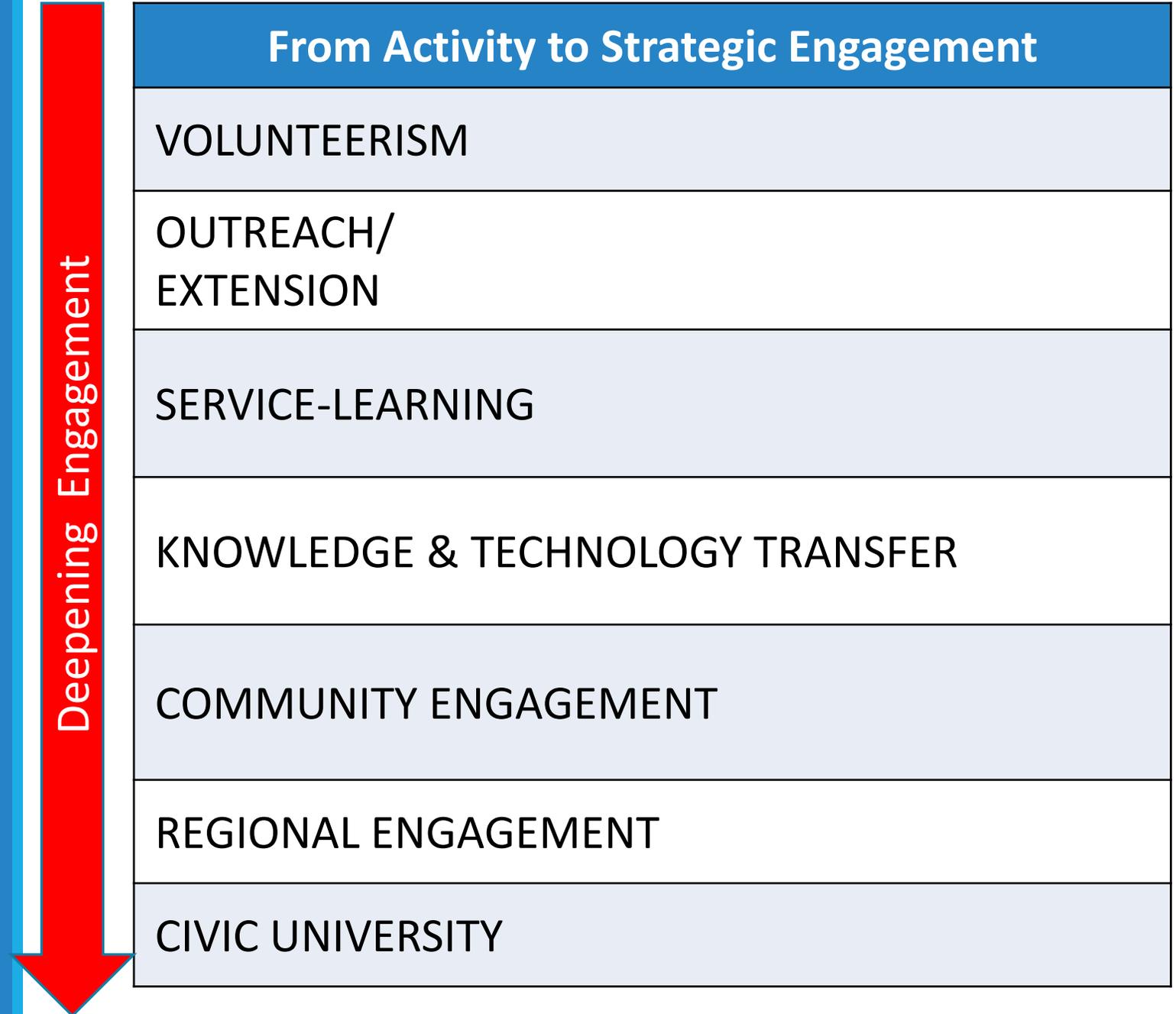# Civic University Framework

EMBRYONIC   EMERGING   EVOLVING   EMBEDDED
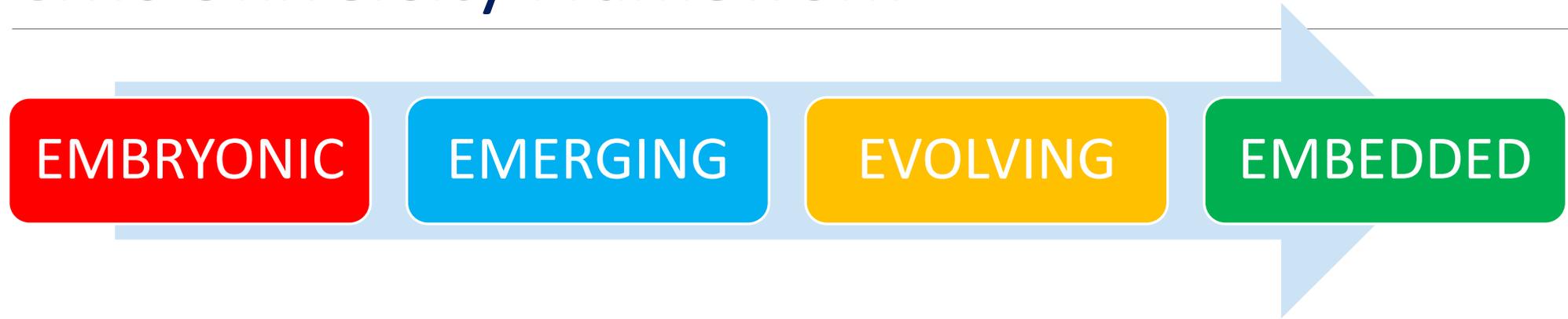
SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF A CIVIC UNIVERSITY
1. Sense of purpose
2. Active engagement
3. Holistic approach
4. Sense of place
5. Willingness to invest
6. Transparency & accountability
7. Innovative methodologies

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From Activity to Strategic Engagement

What are the levels of engagement?

Deepening Engagement

From Activity to Strategic Engagement
VOLUNTEERISM
OUTREACH/ EXTENSION
SERVICE-LEARNING
KNOWLEDGE & TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT
CIVIC UNIVERSITY

Implications For Quality Assurance?

HE has responsibility to foster excellence, drive discovery & innovation and ensure graduates have the knowledge and critical skills to prepare them for future careers and role as active citizens;

This requires HEIs to engage with internal/external stakeholders, and partner with industry actors, their local and regional environment, and other higher education institutions;

So – how can QA processes help HEIs meet expectations and needs of all stakeholders and demonstrate their value to society?

Issues To Consider/Questions to Ask

1. *Governance*: How is SE embedded holistically across the HEI? How does the HEI align its policies and interests with those of society? Does the HEI embrace SE as a strategic objective, or does it simply promote spontaneous ad hoc actions? Are their targets, and a processing for monitoring developments?

2. *Curriculum, Learning Outcomes*: How does the curriculum prepare graduates to be global citizens, who can have a positive impact locally and globally? Too what extent is SE supported by innovative pedagogies, with emphasis on multi-disciplinarity and challenge-based learning?

3. *Widening Participation and Learning Support Systems:* How does T&L support access and successful completion? Has the HEI re-organised its provision to facilitate diverse learners, shifting from time-served to just-in-time, recognise competency-based education and/or offer online, open and flexible learning?

Issues to Consider/Questions to Ask

4. *Research*: How is the societal impact and relevance of research supported, undertaken and evaluated? To what extent are participatory approaches endorsed where end-users are part of research design, as co-producers?

5. *Faculty*: To what extent is SE a criteria for appointment and promotion? How are faculty supported?

6. *Collaboration and Partnership*: To what extent does the HEI collaborate with other partners in the quadruple helix? How does the HEI balance local/regional, national and global aspirations or is pursuit of "world-classness" its primary ambition?

Conclusion

Engagement agenda is bigger than grandstanding about what the institution does for "the public good".

- What's required is for higher education to be holistically engaged and to reflect this engagement in its vision and mission, and throughout its teaching and research.
- HEIs need to be key institutions at the national/regional level.
- Must aspire to being globally-engaged institutions that educate open-minded, critical and aware citizens, and through their research activity help to define global lines of action leading to a fairer and more sustainable world.
- Ultimately, success requires vision, commitment, and leadership.

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	Embryonic	Emerging	Evolving	Embedded
Sense of Purpose	Primary focus on teaching & research; no reference to "third mission"	HEI struggles to translate intentions into meaningful action	Increasing external partnership and collaborations	Conscious approach to addressing societal problems
Active Engagement	No strategy – engagement is ad hoc	Strategy dependent on activities of individuals	Strategy established, collaborations increasing	Engagement taking place at multiple levels and integral
Holistic Approach	Engagement narrowly defined; undertaken by small group or students	External engagement taking place, but additional or optional	Formal mechanisms	Delivering public value integral and equivalent to teaching/research
Sense of Place	HEI "detached" from local environment; limited local linkages	Some "opening up" of campus but linkages superficial	HEI making linkages with businesses and groups for research and placements etc.	Blends location with local built environment as "living laboratory" for teaching and research
Willingness to Invest	Resources, policies and procedures focused on teaching and research	Limited investment in external projects; engagement not valued as success indicator	Some resources ring-fenced; engagement is KPI but not same as teaching or research	Significant resources; reward and promotion criteria; recruitment of "boundary spanners"
Transparency and Accountability	Information difficult to obtain by external stakeholders.	Engagement well communicated but emphasis on individual "success stories"	Clear benchmarks and KPIs go beyond "core" research and teaching	System/processes for effectively measuring impacts and outcomes beyond academy
Innovative Methodologies	Focus is "traditional" teaching and research methodologies.	Innovative tools to improve delivery of core functions and interact with external partners	Increasing collaborations with other HE/FE and "non traditional" partners.	Social innovation and other novel process; Collaborations initiated/managed at institutional level.