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Engaging with Tradition? How History Shapes Engagement with Local Communities in Universities in England and Ontario, Canada

S'engager avec la tradition ? Comment l'histoire façonne l'engagement avec les communautés locales dans les universités en Angleterre et en Ontario, au Canada

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Abstract

The impetus for universities to engage—to reach out, share, and exchange knowledge—with the communities around them is not a new phenomenon, but one that has gathered salience and speed in recent years. University engagement takes place in a range of dimensions within the global-national-regional-local spectrum. This comparative study of six public universities in England and Ontario, Canada uses place-building theory in its focus on engagement with local communities. By analysing both institutional histories and universities' contemporary strategic plans, this study shows that understanding universities' foundations offers important insights into their current levels of engagement with their local communities. Using the local level as a lens not only demonstrates connections between a university's past and its present, but also offers a counterweight to the prevailing dominance in higher education policy and literature of international and global factors.

Résumé

L'élan pour les universités de s'engager – tendre la main, partager et échanger leur connaissance – avec les communautés qui les entourent n'est pas un nouveau phénomène, mais un qui a pris de l'ampleur et de la vitesse au cours des dernières années. L'engagement de l'université est multidimensionnel à sein de l'éventail global-national-régional-local. Cette étude comparative de six universités publiques en Angleterre et en Ontario, au Canada, utilise la théorie de la construction d'espace, avec son emphase sur l'engagement avec les communautés locales. En analysant à la fois les histoires institutionnelles et les plans stratégiques contemporains des universités, cette étude révèle que comprendre les fondations des universités offre des perspectives importantes sur leur niveau actuel d'engagement avec leurs communautés locales. Utiliser le niveau local comme objectif démontre non seulement les liens entre le passé d'une université et son présent, mais offre également un contrepoids à la dominante hégémonie des facteurs internationaux et globaux dans les politiques et la littérature sur l'enseignement supérieur.

Keywords: comparative higher education, engagement, local communities, university history, England, Ontario.

Mots-clés : enseignement supérieur comparé, engagement, communautés locales, histoire de l'université, Angleterre, Ontario

Introduction

The impetus for universities to engage—to reach out, share, and exchange knowledge—with the communities around them is not a new phenomenon, but one that has gathered salience and speed in recent years (Watson, 2007; Hall, 2009; Davis, 2016). Universities and communities alike are becoming increasingly attentive to the mutual social, cultural and economic benefits that can be obtained through processes of engagement (Hart & Northmore, 2010). In the English and Ontarian settings explored in this study, these interactions are also supported by government policies, particularly in relation to the perceived economic development that may occur as a result of engagement (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2009; Woodsworth, 2013; Council of Ontario Universities, 2015).

University engagement takes place in a range of dimensions within the global-national-regional-local spectrum (Benneworth, Charles, Conway, & Younger, 2009; Goddard, 2009). This can create tensions, particularly between the apparently simultaneous pull of the global and the local (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Although global-scale engagement may be more “attention-grabbing” (Silka, Teisl, & Settele, 2015, p. 89), the critical functions a university plays closer to home must not be overlooked. As Deem (2001, p. 13) states, “we must not forget the continued importance of local as well as international and global factors in higher education.”

The local level is also significant as this is where most universities have their roots (Watson, Hollister, Stroud, & Babcock, 2011). These roots extend beyond physical location, as “most university foundations had an immediate element of service to the community in their agreed mission and purpose” (Watson, 2008, p. 44). Higher education scholar David Watson—whose influential works inspired this paper—emphasized the need to connect the past to the present, noting the importance for modern-day universities to understand their founding purposes and context surrounding their creation in order to “contribute to contemporary society” (2008, p. 48). This is substantiated by historian Tamson Pietsch, who argues that “to make sense of higher education in our own time, we need to attend to the ongoing effects of inherited structures” (2016, p. 35). Yet whilst there are ample narratives telling the story of how individual institutions came to be, and some studies using these stories as “a way to explore broader changes in the social, intellectual and cultural fabric of society” (Horne, 2014, p. 174), there is comparatively little literature seeking to make sense of these historical local connections in relation to universities’ contemporary engagement with local communities.

In response, in this paper I use the local level as a lens to comparatively analyze six public¹ universities in England and Ontario. The six universities—Oxford, Manchester and Loughborough in England and Toronto, Waterloo and Algoma in Ontario—were chosen to represent institutions founded at different points in history by a range of founding bodies and with varied institutional missions. A direct comparison of institutions in two similar but geographically disparate jurisdictions offers an empirical contribution to the field of comparative higher education, and responds to the lack of attention paid to institutional rather than systemic differences in higher education (Slaughter, 2001). I explore the following research questions: How important is an institution’s history to its present-day engagement with its local communities? What does a focus on engagement with local communities tell us about universities’ sense of identity?

Through an analysis of both institutional histories and universities’ contemporary strategic plans, I show that understanding universities’ historical foundations offers important insights into the contributions they currently make to local communities (Watson, 2008; Watson et al, 2011). In other words, history matters. Furthermore, I also contend that the local level matters. Not only does the local level demonstrate connections between a university’s past and present, it also offers a counterweight to the prevailing dominance in higher education policy and literature of (trans)national discourses of competition and the knowledge economy (Boulton and Lucas, 2008).

Conceptualizing university engagement with local communities

University engagement is referred to in a number of ways, including third stream or mission (the first and second being teaching and research), knowledge exchange/transfer/mobilization, public service, community-university partnerships and the co-production of knowledge (Hawkins, n.d.; Maurrasse, 2001; Onyx, 2008; Davis, 2016). Given the institutional-level focus of this study, I

¹ Defined as a not-for-profit institution with the state as the main but not the only funder.

define engagement here as activities undertaken by universities to reach out, share, exchange and co-produce knowledge as well as the policies and procedures that underpin those activities.

The emphasis of this paper is on the local level, which refers to communities in the immediate geographic environs surrounding the university. This bounded definition of “local” nevertheless allows for a broad interpretation of “communities,” which I deliberately use in the plural in recognition of the complex and multi-layered nature of contemporary societies. Communities as experienced in the 21st century “can no longer be conceptualized only as having essential characteristics that focus on location and the ‘sameness’ or homogeneity of its members” (McNay, 2000, p. 169). As such, communities can be understood as communities of interest, which are joined together on a particular issue or with a geographic focus (Hawkins, n.d.). The diversity and dynamism both of forms of engagement and of local communities are exemplified by one of the case study universities in its description of innovations designed to “build a better Toronto.” These range from boosting suburban cycling, using business students’ knowledge, supporting homeless people, and offering advice to hospital patients (University of Toronto, 2015).

Thus, engagement with local communities can be widely defined. It can incorporate engaged research (e.g., collaborative research involving students/faculty and community groups), knowledge sharing (e.g., offering consultancy to hard-to-reach groups), service (e.g., contributing to local civic life) and teaching (e.g., open seminars, adult and continuing education) (Benneworth et al, 2009). Engagement can be formal or informal, spanning the creation of business ventures to opening sports events to the public (Jacob, Sutin, Weidman, & Yeager, 2015). A common definition in the North American context comes from the Carnegie Foundation which describes community (note the singular) engagement at a general level as “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (2015).

In addition to considering what engagement with local communities means, it is also helpful to think about what motivates universities to engage. Table 1 offers an overview of some possible influences on engagement, which have been grouped into *internal* drivers (led by the institution and/or its constituent parts) and *external* drivers (guided by factors outside the institution) for clarity of presentation. There is no intended comparability between information presented in each row; for example, it should not be interpreted that institutional policy operates at the same level of globalization.

Theoretical framework

The local-level focus is explored through the theoretical framework of this paper which draws on place-building theory. This theory is used to identify the extent to which universities value and invest in their locations (Kimball and Thomas, 2012). Place is a social construct, and universities as agents can be analyzed to appreciate “how they conceptualise themselves in relation to place as well as the meaning they give to place, which then influences their goals, contributions to place, and all variety of their behaviour” (Kimball and Thomas, 2012, p. 20). It offers an appropriate theoretical grounding for this study, which employs a place-based conceptualization of local communities to explore questions of institutional identity. In place-building theory, four types of organizations can be identified:

1. Exploitative: the organization is independent of its location and seeks only to maximise economic benefit to itself;
2. Contingent: the organization is a participant in a place. The location is valued because of the resources (such as staff) it can offer the organization, such as human resources;
3. Contributive: the organization invests in and contributes to the well-being of its location through, for example, engagement with local organizations;

4. Transformational: the organization takes responsibility for constructing positive change and improving the lives of people in the location (Kimball and Thomas, 2012).
- 5.

This continuum resonates with Watson's three orders of engagement (2007, 2008) in which the extent of a university's interactions with its communities progressively deepens. First order engagement comes from a university's simple existence in a community, being "a social institution in its own right" (Watson, 2008, p. 46). Second order engagement demonstrates a greater responsiveness by the university to its surroundings, and third order engagement describes the more complex moral and actual commitments between an institution and its communities.

Table 1: Drivers of university engagement with their local communities

Internal drivers	External drivers
Institutional policy University-wide policy, typically laid out in a strategic plan, asserts the institution's aspirations and provides a framework for engagement across the university. Engagement competes with other demands on the institution, many of which will have more direct (financial) rewards.	Globalization Forces of globalization pull all universities into a bigger context than they have historically served. Universities may benefit and/or lose out in this environment. For example, a benefit might be the sharing and application of technologies and research developed globally to help solve local issues.
Departments/faculties The group identities of departments and faculties may help define local-level engagement activities, regardless of the overarching institutional plan. Departmental-level engagement can be broad, from public lectures to cultural shows/exhibitions to outreach work with local young people.	Public policy The shift towards neoliberalism in England and Ontario places emphasis on universities demonstrating "value for money", creating the general conditions in which universities now operate. Other government policy tools such as funding competitions can also determine how universities engage locally.
Faculty members and staff With most faculty and staff likely to live locally, it could be argued that they have a vested interest in local engagement, for example, through fundraising or environmental initiatives. Engagement by faculty and staff may be driven by personal motivation.	Business/industry Universities are now more responsive to the needs of employers and bring the world of work onto campus through co-operative programs, careers services and more. External funding incentives and opportunities may have a significant impact.
Students Students may seek engagement with local communities as part of their formal training and increasingly as an extracurricular activity, for example, through voluntary work. However, some argue that students are more engaged with issues crossing national boundaries, such as globalization and anti-war movements.	Other universities Perhaps a less influential driver, it may nonetheless be the case that universities are inspired in their engagement activities both by attempting to emulate the success of other universities' initiatives, or in an attempt to gain a competitive edge over other locally-based institutions.
	Local communities A common example of local communities' influence on universities can be found in communities' responses to building plans, but citizens can also shape universities' local engagement by simply making their voices heard, for example, in response to university consultations or by publishing letters in the local media.

Source: Author, drawing on Parker & Williams, 2011.

Methodology

The use of case studies as a research strategy allows for the “studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials... that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, pp. 3-4). As well as depicting individuals, case studies can be a useful means to analyze such moments and meanings at institutional level (Hartley, 2004). A relevant example for this paper is the effective use of case studies to analyze how universities enact policies at the local institutional level (Vidovich, 2014). A focus on institutions is important for this study as it gives agency to the six case study universities and offers a means to interpret the values they denote as significant.² This is concordant with Hartley who argues that a key feature of the case study approach is “the emphasis on understanding processes as they occur in their context” (2004, p. 10).

As a series of short instrumental case studies that focus on particular aspects of a case (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013), two approaches are used to achieve an institutional perspective. Both approaches use documents as the main source of data, and the thrust of both is to demonstrate that “attentiveness to issues of temporality highlights aspects of social life that are essentially invisible from an a historical vantage point” (Pierson, 2004, p. 2).

First, I draw on universities’ histories, the majority of which were commissioned in book format by the institution. Where possible, I tried to source two types of histories: those written fairly recently after the university was founded (with the exception of Oxford) and have an explicit focus on the early story of that institution, and contemporary sources that recount the story of one of the institutions under study whilst carrying more general social histories. Since it was not possible within the scope of this study to undertake archival searches, all the books I accessed were written during the 20th century. Such primary sources as well as oral history—with the exception of Oxford—could enrich future study on this topic (Horne, 2014). The histories of the six institutions are presented chronologically by the date they obtained university status, and are illustrated through short vignettes charting the university’s evolution.

The second approach enhances the vignettes by analyzing the universities’ current strategic plans and other relevant official documents describing their engagement with local communities. These documents were obtained from the universities’ public-facing websites. The use of institutionally authored documents allows for analysis of the ways the universities present their construction of social reality; the culture and image they try to propagate both internally and externally (Vidovich, 2003). Weaving these approaches together, I then locate the case study universities within the place-building organizational typology.

Choice of case study regions

In three important and broad areas—system-level governance, purpose and funding—contemporary higher education in England and Ontario is remarkably similar despite their inevitable differences in how specific policies and programmes play out.

Although one of the case study regions is a country (England) and the other is a province (Ontario), both are part of a bigger whole: England as part of the United Kingdom and Ontario as part of Canada. Devolution within the constituent parts of the UK means that higher education policy made in London is now only directly applicable to England and Northern Ireland, thus system-level governance in the UK increasingly reflects the type of decentralized model that has always been in place in Canada. In addition, both jurisdictions are premised on the Anglo-Saxon model of higher education which has traditionally emphasized institutional autonomy and self-government (Shattock, 2009). For university engagement, the main

² As such, whilst the viewpoints of the local communities with which the universities are engaging and the government and private bodies that fund and support universities’ activities are both valid and important, it is not possible to incorporate these perspectives in the scope of this paper.

consequence is that universities are in principle able to set their own agendas, although in practice this may be constrained by tensions between local and national/regional policies.

Changes in university-government relationships in the latter part of the 20th century reflect a major shift that poses “challenges to, and conflict over, the ‘traditional’ objectives and goals of the university” (Amaral, Jones, & Karseth, 2002, p. 285). The impact of this reshaping has led to the view that higher education in England and Ontario has a “broader public purpose” (Jones, 2014, p. 12). These notions are connected to the now widespread conception, fuelled by processes of globalization, that knowledge in the modern world is key to economic success, with universities being pivotal to that journey (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). In both jurisdictions, the outcome has been a growing emphasis on economic/business-focused projects as opposed to social and cultural activities in university engagement.

This shift to the idea of a knowledge economy has impacted the funding of universities in England and Ontario, which now receive their revenue in three similar areas: government funding through direct operating grants and intermediary bodies such as research councils, income from student tuition fees, and other income, for example, from industry/charity funders or interest on endowments. Universities in both areas are increasingly reliant on a diversifying range of income sources and have been steered strongly by governments in the direction of the private sector (Lang, 2013). This impacts the extent and type of engagement with their local communities.

This brief overview has identified three core areas of convergence between the two jurisdictions which are important not simply because they posit a similar starting ground for the case studies that follow, but because of the impact that these trends in governance, purpose and funding have on how universities engage with their local communities. These connections are further explored in the case studies that follow.

Institutional stories

University of Oxford

Tracing the history of the foundation of the University of Oxford, which today remains a decentralized, collegiate and complex institution, is a challenge that is best encapsulated in the understanding that it “was not created, it emerged” (Catto, 1984, p. 1). England’s oldest university evolved from the 11th century as a result of the convergence of a growing number of independent *magistri* (masters)—teachers who set up shop wherever they felt they could find a market for their services in the small town of Oxford.

Circumstances in the country were ripe for educational development with the church requiring more literate clergy and the government needing educated officials. Oxford, unlike Manchester, was not an important or large town, but it gained significance for its strategic location in the middle of England and as a good crossing point for the river Thames. This advantage in location led to the establishment of ecclesiastical courts and growth in the number of religious communities as well as connections to the crown through a royal residence. The loose collection of masters slowly became more specialized and organized with the first official recognition as a *universitas* or corporate body in 1231 with the granting of royal privileges (Evans, 2010).

As Catto noted, by the mid-14th century “the university had grown from an obscure association of scholars into a powerful and privileged corporation with an acknowledged role as England’s chief nursery of prelates and royal ministers...it had acquired links with public life which made it a formidable interest” (1984, pp. 112-113). Connections with other centres of learning in Europe, notably Paris, also influenced its growth. Thus, from its inception and historical development, Oxford has been both a magnet for those seeking advanced learning as well as a force in state and religious development. As such, it can be argued that Oxford has never had the same local mandate as other newer universities.

Although it is not possible to point to a single foundational document definitively creating the University of Oxford, the preceding exploration of its roots demonstrates that whilst the university was active in forming and influencing society, it has never specifically focused on the local level. This is apparent in contemporary Oxford where one of two overarching priorities in the university's 2013-18 strategic plan is "global reach" (University of Oxford, 2013 p. 3). The institutional mission is "to lead the world in research and education...in ways which benefit society on a national and a global scale" (University of Oxford, 2013, p. 2). On top of this far-reaching focus, "widening engagement" is listed as one of the four core strategies, and within this strategy, one of the three commitments is dedicated to developing a "strong and constructive relationship with the wider communities of Oxford" (University of Oxford, 2013, p. 10).

The relative weight placed on Oxford's role in the world and the university's own use of the term "curatorial responsibility" (University of Oxford, 2013, p. 5) suggest an apex institution that has, along with Cambridge, "acquired uniquely privileged roles in the life of the nation" (Vernon, 2004, p. 9), and has taken on responsibility for the preservation and advancement of higher education. This is in keeping with the role it has played in society from the outset, an institution that is part of its local communities but with a greater purpose in the world.

University of Toronto

Whilst Oxford developed organically into a university and became valuable to the state over time, the University of Toronto was born of politics, created to quell (rather than perpetuate) religious influence and to encourage (rather than passively permit) market forces. The difference in time of establishment places the University of Toronto on a par not with the University of Oxford, but with its 19th century English contemporary, the University of Manchester, and both are reflective of the development of the contemporary nation state.

However, whilst the University of Manchester came to being as a product of a rapidly industrializing city, the University of Toronto was founded at a time when the European population of Upper Canada numbered just 25,000 (Friedland, 2013). The idea of higher education in Upper Canada came with the colonizers, some of whom had experienced university themselves and brought with them notions of an education that would retain the social *status quo*, further establish the dominance of the British over the native population, and offer an alternative for young men who might otherwise travel to the USA and return with anti-British ideals (McNab, 1925).

The founding of the university's predecessor, King's College, in 1827 owes a great deal to the persistence of two Lieutenant Governors, John Graves Simcoe and Peregrine Maitland, and to John Strachan, an educationalist and clergyman who was also part of the old school "Family Compact" that dominated early Canadian politics. Under Strachan's influence, King's was created as a Church of England College, which later became a point of political contention. The political atmosphere of the time, particularly in respect of the 1837 rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada against the established order (including in relation to religion) and the subsequent unification of these parts (Friedland, 2013) contributed to the failure of no fewer than 14 university bills to pass in Upper/United Canada between 1832 and 1851. McKillop also attributes this failure to the "tensions and discontentment caused by two diverging conceptions of which social and economic groups should govern" (1994, p. 8), that is, the competing notions of whether government should ensure social stability or foster economic change.

The new era of "responsible government" created the conditions for the creation of University of Toronto by legislature in 1849. From the outset, the university was a creation of the state, and as a provincial university, it became a benchmark for other universities as well a symbol of privilege (McKillop, 1994). This resonates with the contemporary image of the university,

deemed to be the “best” in Canada according to global rankings and taking a leadership role in Ontario (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2014).

Like the University of Oxford, the University of Toronto takes a stewardship role as representative of its country; even with its stated commitment to local communities, it has a greater sense of contribution to the national and global levels (University of Toronto, 2008). Whilst there is no institutional strategic plan, the university’s community impact report reinforces the importance placed on the global and national, even when ostensibly focusing on the local: “as an internationally recognized research university...situated in the heart of Canada’s largest urban centre, we bring our knowledge and expertise into the communities that surround the University of Toronto” (University of Toronto, 2013).

University of Manchester

At the same time when the University of Toronto was being established, the Industrial Revolution in England was creating on a practical level a growing need for workers capable of operating new types of machinery. More broadly, the impact of the Industrial Revolution led to prosperity and rapid growth in population. Additionally, a variety of popular movements began to spring up, gearing education outside the confines of the previously dominant church. As a result, the state became more involved in running education, with the introduction of compulsory elementary schooling by the close of the 19th century.

The confluence of more sophisticated training needs, a greater appreciation of such needs, and the desire for education in general—higher education in particular—mark the environment in which the University of Manchester came into being. John Owens, a local businessman, left £50,000 in his will to create Owens College, “a plain Manchester merchant’s ideal of what he would like a college in a great town to be” (Charlton, 1951, p. 27). Why precisely Owens, who had no particular connections in this sector, decided to establish a college is unclear, but it is known that he believed education to be the main instrument of social progress, that he was involved in the growing discussions that Manchester, an important industrial city by that time, ought to have its own university, and that he supported what we might now call education with a purpose—to “add greatly to the improvement and refinement of an industrial community and to its happiness” (Fiddes, 1937, p. 21). Although initially unable to convince a southern-centric government to provide national funding, the trustees of Owens College were finally able to lead an innovative and successful fundraising campaign in the Manchester region on this basis.

During its first fifty years, Owens College kept with its mission to “supply Manchester and its district with genuine academical culture for its future merchants and manufacturers and for others who by reason of good parts and aspiring nature may seek such culture” (1876 Report, as cited in Vernon, 2004, p. 114). The college became the University of Manchester³ in 1903, eventually earning state recognition and financial support. The University of Manchester and the other provincial/civic universities that were founded in the period that followed changed the shape of higher education in England from being a training ground for the elite to serving local as well as national purposes.

The University of Manchester is the strongest example in this study of an institution deeply committed to continuing the spirit of its history through its current and planned activities. It is the first English university to have made social responsibility one of its three core missions, which “gets to the heart of the question ‘what are we good for?’” (University of Manchester, 2015, p. 3). It has created a senior leadership position and a team focusing on social responsibility; recent research undertaken by that team found that 85% of staff who responded are

³ It was called the Victoria University of Manchester as the initial plan had been for Owens College to join a federated Victoria University with two other northern English colleges. However, Owens was the only member and subsequently became Victoria University until the 2004 merger with the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). The current institution is now known formally as the University of Manchester.

involved in public engagement with research (Cruickshank, 2015). The university positions itself as “a partner of the city [that is] perfectly placed to help drive the region forward” (University of Manchester, 2015, p. 7). It is clear that the institution takes great pride in its story: “we were England’s first civic university and our founders invested us with the progressive desire to improve people’s lives through research and teaching” (University of Manchester, 2015, p. 19). In the case of Manchester, a compelling argument can be made that their words are backed up by nearly two centuries of actions.

Loughborough University

We now move fully into the 20th century, and find that the next two case studies, Loughborough University in England and the University of Waterloo in Ontario, were also developed in response to changing industrial and technological needs. Loughborough came about through the dedication and single-mindedness of a single man, Herbert Schofield; though, the exceptional and ongoing support he received from the local government’s Director of Education, William Brockington, was instrumental in smoothing his way. It was Brockington who put forward the initiative to establish Loughborough Technical Institute, which opened in 1909 with Schofield as its first Principal. The institute, which offered technical education, was a response to the burgeoning growth of industry, and in particular engineering. This had made Loughborough, a small market town in the Midlands, the second most important engineering centre in England (Cantor & Matthews, 1977).

During World War One, Schofield spotted an opportunity to shift the institute’s provision from evening classes to what became known as “training on production.” In the first instance, this meant running—often with barely any planning period—short government-sponsored training courses for munitions workers. Schofield admitted that the format was “purely intensive and commercial” (Cantor & Matthews, 1977, p. 24) rather than educational, but his “instructional factory” received strong national support, and Schofield could see a compelling post-war future for the institute by strengthening this expertise. In the 1920s, it became Loughborough College to realize Schofield’s twin aims of developing training on production⁴ in engineering as well as a solid university community through residential and sporting facilities on a purpose-built campus just outside the town. The college became Loughborough University of Technology in 1966, three years after the publication of the hugely influential Robbins Report which underpinned many of the subsequent changes in the English higher education system, including its marked expansion (Barr, 2014). As a publication of the time notes,

over the years, Loughborough has contributed to the national and international requirement for men educated and trained to make their contribution in the fields of technology and science... It is proposed to continue and extend these efforts in line both with the increasing demand for higher education and with the needs of the country (Arup Associates, 1966, pp. 6-7).

Thus, the history of Loughborough and its very specific focus on engineering (and later sport/sports science and sciences in general) are rooted in the local in terms of the immense support of the local government, but more so the national—and even international, with evidence that Schofield had college prospectuses printed in 17 languages as early as 1925 (Cantor & Matthews, 1977).

The modern-day Loughborough University (renamed in 1996) retains its heritage as England’s first technological university focused on meeting the nation’s needs, and this is reflected in its strategic plan which notes that this is “an ethos that is still evident at Loughborough today” (Loughborough University, n.d.). Engagement with communities is built around partnerships, particularly those with an economic dimension such as a partnership with sports manufacturers to

⁴ This would later become known in England as a “sandwich course” i.e., normally two years in university followed by a year at work and a final year at university. The Ontarian equivalent is co-operative education.

improve athlete performance. As with the University of Waterloo, the driving forces behind Loughborough's contemporary engagement strategies are thus not solely local but national. Today, as with so many other institutions, a global element has been added, with each part of their four-point mission connecting to the national and/or international.

University of Waterloo

Where Loughborough had Schofield and Brockington, the University of Waterloo's equivalents were J. G. Hagey, the first Vice-Chancellor and President, and Ira Needles, the first Chair of the Board of Governors and second Chancellor. Ontario after World War II was, like England, experiencing rapid population growth, although expansion of the higher education sector began a good decade earlier in Ontario. International technological developments such as the Soviets sending satellites into space "dramatized the need for accelerated scientific activity in the western world" (Scott, 1967, p. 30) and reinforced in the Canadian context the need to address the shortage of engineers and trained technicians.

At a local level, this was taken up by Hagey, who had in 1953 left his corporate job to become President of Waterloo College, originally a Lutheran seminary set up in 1911. However, Hagey's primary concern was funding: there was a desire to expand the college and to ensure that it didn't fall behind the growing number of other local higher education institutions. As a religious college, Waterloo was not eligible for provincial government funding, and so after discussions between Hagey and his former manager and mentor Needles, the two agreed to develop a case for a secular affiliated institution, the Waterloo College Associate Faculties (WCAF). WCAF was incorporated in 1955 to set up a Faculty of Science after a series of consultations that, unusually, involved local businessmen as well as the church and local government.

Hagey's drive to increase income had led him to consider ways that would make students become more involved in running the institution. Later, he learned of the concept of co-operative education—not dissimilar to Schofield's notion of training on production—and visited several universities in the US where this principle had been implemented. Although the co-operative model had not gained great traction in the US, it was nevertheless adopted in Waterloo where it would not only keep costs down and increase income but would offer an educational model that supported the needs of the nation (Redmond, 1998). This was path-breaking, as Scott notes, "Waterloo had to do things which no other university in Canada had done before... the University had to develop a much closer working relationship with industry than any other in the country" (1967, p. 59).

Incorporated as a university in 1972, Waterloo experienced rapid growth and success, and today still builds on what it now calls "experiential education." Using 21st century terminology, the university talks in terms of innovation and entrepreneurship, understanding their strengths in being able "to anticipate the needs of society and respond effectively as challenges arise" (University of Waterloo, 2013, p. 8), setting a mission to "answer the call of society and emerge as one of the world's top innovation universities" (University of Waterloo, 2013, p. 4).

As with Loughborough, Waterloo emphasizes the economic benefits the university brings through its interactions with its communities and connects its local situation to a greater goal: "this [local] community—its dynamism, entrepreneurial spirit and innovative culture—is the main reason that our University has become a global innovation powerhouse" (University of Waterloo, 2015). The university calls itself the "economic engine of our regional innovation system" (University of Waterloo, 2015), noting that over 70% of businesses in the local region employ its co-operative students or graduates at some point. And yet, Waterloo still draws on its initial mission to respond to national needs in connecting to its plans for the future: "Waterloo will lead Canada's innovation agenda" (University of Waterloo, 2013, p. 18).

Algoma University

Along with Manchester, Algoma University shares an embedded commitment to its local communities. Algoma is Ontario's newest university, attaining university status in 2008 but with roots that go back half a century, formally being created as Algoma University College in 1965. Increasing local pressure throughout northern Ontario for access to the university system was the main driver for post-war higher education growth (Weller & Rosehart, 1985) in a context of a burgeoning population (Algoma University, 2015) and mass immigration (Guth, n.d.). The political ideology in Canada at the time steered away from planned regional development towards market forces, meaning that societal groups could be very influential (Weller & Rosehart, 1985), and this was clearly the case for Algoma.

Over a ten-year period, local citizens came together and formed a community project to raise funds, initially for a junior college but then later for a university college to ease future transition to university status. This became the Algoma College Association, which impressed the local Sault Ste. Marie council. However, the association only secured support from a somewhat reluctant Ontario government after agreeing to affiliate with another university, which it was hoped would be found in southern Ontario. After unsuccessful attempts to find a partner in the south of the province, the college was eventually linked to Laurentian University (Guth, n.d.), a new institution in northern Ontario. First year undergraduate courses were offered from 1967.

However, an older history—that of Chief Shingwauk (1773-1854, also known as Shingwaukonce or Shingwaukhonse) and the Anishinabek Nation⁵—intertwines with the background of Algoma. Chief Shingwauk's vision was to bring together Anishinabek and European knowledge through “teaching wigwams.” From the late 19th century, the teaching wigwams had a physical location on the grounds of what is now known as Shingwauk Hall (Algoma University College and Shingwauk School, 1992). These histories came together in 1971 when Algoma—at this point running out of physical space, and now permitted by Laurentian to offer second year courses—leased the former site of the Shingwauk Indian Residential School (now Hall). In a dark moment in Algoma's history, the college bought the site outright in 1975 and evicted the Keewatinung Anishinaabe Institute that had been founded to continue Chief Shingwauk's ideals of cross-cultural understanding and preservation of Anishinabek culture and traditions. The eviction led to a Human Rights Commission and the first Royal Commission on a university in Canadian history (Algoma University, 2015). Within five years the relationship was transformed into one that promoted respect and inclusivity within Algoma and provided institutional support for what has now become the Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig (University).

From a college founded by and for the local region, Algoma University now takes a more holistic and plural understanding of the local with a special dual mission of supporting development and embedding tradition by servicing “a region of Ontario which has historically had the lowest postsecondary participation rate of any in the province.... a region which is historically resource-driven” and “by cultivating cross-cultural learning between Anishinaabe (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and other communities” (Algoma University, 2010, p. 12). Whilst in some respects the university's engagement with its local communities mirrors what has been seen in other case studies—providing employment, recruiting local students, working with local schools (Algoma University, 2010)—Algoma stands out for engaging with the diversity of its local communities.

⁵ The Anishinabek (also Anishinaabe [singular] or Anishinaabeg [plural] depending on transcription) Nation is a First Nation of Canada. Anishinabek is a collective term referring to Ojibway, Odawa and Algonkin peoples whose languages are very similar. The term “First Nations” refers to the groups of indigenous peoples who are the original inhabitants of the lands now known as Canada and the United States of America.

Locating the universities

To locate the institutions' connections to their local communities, I have mapped my interpretation of the value the universities place on their local communities through their strategic plans/institutional documentation. This may be value in and of itself, or value relative to other communities. Each university has been assigned an organizational type drawing on the four-part place-building frame of exploitative, contingent, contributive and transformational organizations. This created three cross-national pairings: Oxford and Toronto, Loughborough and Waterloo, and Manchester and Algoma.

Table 1: Institutional connections to their local communities

University	First established	Date obtained university status	Main reason for foundation	Main actors involved in foundation	Value placed on local communities	Organizational type
Oxford	Around 1096	Around 1231	Supply of/demand for education	Scholars	Low	Contingent
Toronto	1827	1849	Create demand for education	Individuals in provincial government	Low	Contingent
Manchester	1824	1903	Local needs	Individual; local business community	High	Transformative
Loughborough	1909	1966	National economic needs	Individuals; local/national government	Medium	Contingent / Contributive
Waterloo	1957	1972	National economic needs	Individuals; local/national business community	Medium	Contingent / Contributive
Algoma	1965	2008	Local needs	Local community	High	Transformative

None of the universities matched the “exploitative” type, indicating that they are not independent of their location and do not seek solely to maximise financial returns to the institution. Given the primarily public nature of knowledge and universities (Marginson, 2007), this is an unsurprising finding.

At the time of their founding, both Oxford and Toronto had less of a clear mission but more a general sense of the need for higher education. Despite several hundred years separating them, they are united by their relative maturity and flagship status in their jurisdictions. Both have generated sufficient prestige that they now act as national and global gatekeepers for a particular model of university and type of knowledge. Yet, as their mission statements/institutional documentation show, in recent years both have developed some genuine commitments to their local communities (University of Toronto, 2008; University of Oxford, 2013). As such, Oxford and Toronto can be seen as “contingent” organizations, suggesting that the value placed on their local physical location is perceived to be relatively lower than the value the universities obtain through their engagement with their national and global communities.

A second cross-national pairing can be made with Loughborough and Waterloo, perhaps the most similar institutions in terms of age, institutional type, and mission. National economic needs were the driving force for their creation, connecting closely to the impact of the two

World Wars. Although both institutions owe much to a pair of dedicated individuals (Schofield and Brockington for Loughborough, Hagey and Needles for Waterloo), the support of the state—which by the 20th century had assumed much greater responsibility for higher education in both jurisdictions—was also instrumental. The experiential nature of the education provided means that the universities engage well with local communities (e.g., through work placements for students), but both also place significant value on their national and global connections (Loughborough University, n.d.; University of Waterloo, 2013). In this way, Loughborough and Waterloo could be described as mixed contingent/contributive organizations: invested in and contributing to the well-being of their locations, but increasingly with a clear eye on the wider context.

The final pairing of Manchester and Algoma, established over a century apart, suggests that the date of establishment does not always indicate similarities in present-day missions. Instead, the link created by the pivotal role of local communities in supporting the institutions' foundations appears to play a much more significant role in understanding their contemporary commitments to these communities. The initial lack of state support for each institution—neither English nor Ontarian government being totally convinced of these northern projects' merits—may have helped solidify local sentiments in advocating for higher education in their regions. The evident importance of local communities to both universities leads to their grouping as transformative organizations: Manchester and Algoma actively take responsibility for their locations, seeking to make positive changes and improve lives (Algoma University, 2010; University of Manchester, 2015).

Conclusion

This paper has engaged with the idea of universities' contemporary sense of identity, using their connections with their local communities as a lens for analysis. Using a typology from place-building theory, three pairs of institutions—each consisting of one English and one Ontarian university—falling into the “contingent”, “contributive” and “transformative” categories were identified. Discussing the universities in these terms enabled a response to the research questions posed at the outset: How important is an institution's history to its present-day engagement with its local communities? What does a focus on engagement with local communities tell us about universities' sense of identity? Although employing a typology is inevitably reductive, the use of a framework giving agency to universities and the recognition of the constructed nature of value and location add a valuable perspective to our understanding of institutional identity formation.

In all three pairings, connections could be made between the universities' histories and the value they place on their engagement with local communities in the present day. As institutions founded without particularly high levels of local involvement and with the longest histories, Oxford and Toronto assign the lowest value to local communities—though this must be understood not as disinterest but as relative to the greater importance placed on their global communities. Loughborough and Waterloo's nationally-grounded founding missions and their focus on experiential/applied education connect to their relatively higher engagement with their local communities, but it is Manchester and Algoma that have by far the strongest connection to their localities. This can be directly tied to the backing of the local communities in the establishment of higher education institutions in these locations.

In this way, it is clear that an institution's history matters. It matters not simply because of the story it tells us about the university (or that the university tells us about itself) and about social change, but because a university needs “to know and understand itself, at a deep and satisfying level” (Watson, 2007, p. 132) in order to understand and plan the extent and manner in which it wishes to engage with its local communities. It is also clear that the local level matters. The local element is important both because most universities' heritages are closely aligned with the communities around them, and because it allows for a revived focus on the

local dimension, so often overlooked in the race for the global in contemporary higher education literature.

Although I have argued for the importance of the local level in this paper, this should not be taken out of the larger context of the multi-faceted nature of contemporary higher education (Maurrasse, 2001), where universities “operate within a number of concentric spheres: their immediate locality; an economic region, whether formally defined or not; a home nation; and as members of the global family of universities and colleges” (Watson, 2007, p. 2). A logical next step for comparative higher education research, then, would be to extend the framework deployed in this paper to consider the tensions that emerge as universities seek to make sense both of their histories *and* of competing and overlapping contemporary demands on engagement. This would also support a transformation of engagement with communities from the technicalities of institutional documentation to becoming “a deliberative, reflexive, and transparent institutional place-building paradigm” (Kimball and Thomas, 2012, p. 26).

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to Professor Sir David Watson, who died after a short battle with cancer in February 2015. He was an inspiring and wise colleague and professor, and my interest in both the history of universities and the way universities operate in their communities, two of his specialisms, has been considerably influenced by what I learnt from him. As a budding scholar of ideas, higher education and of the world, I have much to be grateful to David for in shaping my journey.

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