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Unraveling University–Community Engagement: A Literature Review

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Abstract

University–community engagement has been implemented by an increasing number of universities across the world, in a period characterized by growing international competition. The growth of interest in university–community engagement has led to multiple definitions of this term and a high level of complexity in defining what it entails. Using a literature review, this article offers a critical assessment of the academic literature on university–community engagement. The article aims to provide insight into trends, commonalities, and variations in the literature, to enable the identification of an agenda for future research. We identify four main gaps in the literature, which we suggest addressing through a more critical conceptual discussion supported by empirical research, broadening the theoretical lens, and using particular research approaches, such as theories of change. Altogether, this will enable a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of university–community engagement.

Keywords: community engagement, higher education, engaged university, civic engagement, outreach, literature review

In recent years, university–community engagement has been implemented by an increasing number of universities across the world. Activities such as service-based learning and participatory research are receiving more and more attention from various stakeholders such as policymakers, academics, and authorities (Grau et al., 2017). Interestingly, these changes are taking place during a time when universities are expected to have a global impact through their research.

Since the second half of the 20th century, academia has been characterized by international competition, global rankings, exchange programs for students, and substantial staff mobility. This seems to result in the promotion of "a model of university disconnected from the nation state and constituent cities and regions as it concentrates on diversifying and privatising its funding base, recruiting talent internationally and engaging globally" (Goddard et al., 2016, p. 3). In addition, higher education institutions are increasingly influenced by neoliberalism (Goddard et al., 2016; Olssen & Peters, 2005). More and more, "universities operate as entrepreneurial, purely competitive business-oriented corporations" (Lynch, 2006, p. 7). These trends are accompanied by a loss of public confidence in researchers and science. Political parties often question the contribution that universities can make to society. Especially among less educated citizens, public confidence in science and universities appears to be low (Van der Waal et al., 2017).

In the context of the countervailing trends of internationalization and marketization in higher education (Goddard et al., 2016), universities across the world have adopted university–community engagement. Thus, universities are asked to conduct innovative and ground-breaking (global) work, while simultaneously remaining place-bound with strong ties to their local communities (Harris & Holley, 2016). University–community engagement has developed and

evolved both in academia and among practitioners during the last decades, resulting in a variety of definitions and a high level of complexity regarding both the meaning of the term and what it entails.

There seems to be a need to comprehend the complex relation between universities and wider society and the role of university–community engagement within this relation (Albertyn & Daniels, 2009). Some authors have aimed to improve the conceptual understanding of university–community engagement. For example, Sandmann (2008) wrote about the evolution of the term "scholarship of engagement." More recently, Jones and Lee (2017) performed a review of academic publication trends in the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. However, to our knowledge a comprehensive overview of the literature on university–community engagement remains lacking. Thus, we focus on this research question: "What are the main questions and issues on university–community engagement that have been addressed to date, and what gaps can be identified in the academic literature?" This article aims to provide a better insight into the emergence, motives, and dynamics of community engagement in the context of higher education, and to provide an agenda for future research. It offers a deeper theoretical and conceptual reflection on university–community engagement by presenting a critical overview of the current academic literature in this field.

The literature review mainly focuses on publications written in English from the past 2 decades, as its aim is to assess the current state of the academic literature. The literature review was carried out in two phases. The first phase focused on a search through major online databases including Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus. The terms *university*, *community*, and *engagement* and their synonyms were used as keywords in the search for literature. In the second phase, more literature was found by using snowball methods, such as forward and backward reference tracking, to identify additional prior and subsequent relevant articles, book chapters, and books. Given the multidisciplinary nature of university–community engagement, no disciplines were excluded. In both phases, relevance of the literature was determined by examining the abstracts, to ensure that the works concerned some aspect of university–community engagement.

The review begins with a discussion of the concept of university–community engagement, diving deeper into the different definitions and theoretical models. We then examine literature on the motivations of universities to engage with local communities. Next, tensions and challenges for university–community engagement will be addressed. The article will then discuss the target groups of university–community engagement and what is known about its impact on these target groups and on the academic community. Finally, we conclude with a section on research recommendations.

What Is University–Community Engagement?

There are many ways to conceptualize and measure university–community engagement. This results in broad, general definitions and overlapping terms such as "civic engagement," "public engagement," "community outreach," "community–university partnerships," "scholarship of engagement," and "community–university collaborations" (see, e.g., Hart & Northmore, 2011; Sandmann, 2008). In addition, terminology differs between various disciplines (Doberneck et al., 2010; McIlrath & Lyons, 2012). For example, in fields of arts, humanities, and design, such terms as "public scholarship" and "public engagement" are common. In health and medical fields, "translational science" is often used, and participatory action research is an often-adopted approach (e.g., O'Fallon & Dearry, 2002). The terms "community partnerships" and "scholarship of engagement" frequently appear in social sciences (Barker, 2004). When analyzing the literature, several main themes can be recognized in the definitions of university–community engagement.

Definitions and Perspectives

The first theme stressed by several authors is the spatial element of university–community engagement (e.g., Brabant & Braid, 2009). For example, according to Goddard (2009),

> The engaged civic university . . . is one which provides opportunities for the society of which it forms part. It engages as a whole with its

> surroundings, not piecemeal. . . . While it operates on a global scale, it realises that its location helps to form its identity and provide opportunities for it to grow and help others, including individual learners, business and public institutions, to do so too. (p. 5)

Several other authors emphasize the mutual and reciprocal dimensions in their definitions (e.g., Bednarz et al., 2008; Bridger & Alter, 2007; Bringle et al., 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 2012; Holland & Ramaley, 2008). The Carnegie Foundation's conceptualization of university–community engagement is one of the most well-known definitions in the United States: "Community engagement describes the 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" (Driscoll, 2009, p. 6)

Another perspective that can be distinguished is a developmental perspective on university–community engagement. Some authors focus on the transfer of knowledge to communities outside academia (e.g., Bond & Paterson, 2005; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008), whereas others define community engagement from an entrepreneurial perspective in which universities have a role in technological innovation and economic development (e.g., Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Smith & Bagchi-Sen, 2012). For example, an engaged university "can lead to enhanced human and social capital development, improved professional infrastructure and capacity-building and, more broadly, to benefits for the socio-economic, environmental and cultural dimensions of the wider community" (Munck, 2010, p. 32). Swaner (2007) identified two definitional strands that both concentrate on the developmental aspects of university–community engagement for students: The involvement perspective focuses on educational experiences and learning outcomes of students, and the civic engagement perspective "suggests that civic engagement entails the development of both citizenship capacities necessary for participatory democracy and social responsibility necessary for community membership" (p. 19).

Finally, several authors adopt a more instrumental approach to university–community engagement. Their definitions include concepts such as relevance, accountability, and societal expectations (e.g., Bender, 2008; Benneworth et al., 2008). For example, according to Jongbloed et al. (2008), "Engagement here involves a set of activities through which the university can demonstrate its relevance to the wider society and be held accountable" (p. 313). A definition that offers a more holistic view on the concept of university–community engagement, by combining spatial, reciprocal, and developmental approaches into one, comes from Mulligan and Nadarajah (2008):

> Community engagement can be broadly described as the process of working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest and/or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those groups of people. Discussion of the notion of community engagement suggests that its aim must be the empowerment of individuals and community-based organizations which can, in turn, implement relevant practices and influence broader policies. (p. 87)

University–Community Engagement Activities

Due to the broad range of definitions, many activities can be used as a form of university–community engagement: for example, lifelong learning, volunteerism among staff and students, service-based learning, participatory research, knowledge exchange, cultural and educational events, and access to universities' buildings for others to use (e.g., art groups who rent a space for their classes; see Goddard et al., 2016; Humphrey, 2013). Note that many of these activities already existed before the concept of community engagement gained attention (Bender, 2008; Mtawa et al., 2016).

It can be argued that these activities can be ordered in terms of degree of engagement of universities, based on the embeddedness and complexity of the activity. However, the literature is inconclusive on the categorization of engagement activities. For example, Hall (2009) argued that lifelong learning "is the basis of all forms of community engagement and still represents arguably the most profound set of community partnerships" (p. 15). In contrast, Furco (2010) did not in-

clude lifelong learning in his classification of engagement activities. Furco proposed a model of an engaged university that aims to embed university–community engagement into the core work of universities, wherein the closer you get to the core of the model, the more closely the activities are related to the "ideal type" of engagement. According to Furco (2010), the ideal type of an engaged university is characterized by authenticity and genuineness:

> (1) the intellectual, disciplined-based resources at an institution are harnessed, organised and used to address community issues and concerns; and (2) the community issues and concerns are incorporated as a legitimate part of the scholarly, academic work of departments, faculty and students. (p. 388)

Similarly, Goddard et al. (2016) placed volunteerism on the lower end of the spectrum and "holistic civic engagement" as the ultimate level of university–community engagement, meaning that "engagement is a holistic, self-reinforcing and sustainable circle of activity, embedded across the entire institution, and acting as the horizontal and reciprocal glue linking teaching to research" (p. 70). Other authors do not develop a hierarchy of engagement activities at all (e.g., Conway et al., 2009).

Theoretical Models

Over the years, several theoretical models have been developed in an attempt to provide an overview of different interpretations of university–community engagement. Most authors seem to base their theoretical models on the integration of engagement activities into the core of academic work. From an organizational standpoint, universities can be described as consisting of three main pillars: teaching, research, and the "third" pillar—the latter including engagement with external parties such as local authorities, enterprises, organizations, and citizens. These three pillars are often used as a visualization of the organizational embeddedness of university–community engagement. For example, Figure 1 represents the balance between these pillars in both an "un-civic" university and a "civic" university (Goddard et al., 2016).

A civic university would be characterized by a number of principles: a sense of purpose, active dialogue and collaborations with "the wider world," a holistic approach to engagement, a sense of place, willingness to invest, transparent and accountable communication with its stakeholders, and the use of innovative methodologies such as social media (Goddard et al., 2016, pp. 10–11).

A similar way of visualizing different perspectives on community engagement was developed by Bender (2008), who distinguished the silo model, the intersecting model, and the infusion model. The silo model is similar to the un-civic university model of Goddard et al. (2016), in which universities have three roles that they pursue separately (See Figure 2). According to Bender (2008), this view on university–community engagement is the most traditional. The intersecting model assumes that all activities of universities imply engagement with the community: All teaching and research activities have either a direct or indirect effect and make a social, cultural, or economic impact. As all activities of universities are perceived as a form of engagement, there is no conscious perception of social responsibility in university–community engagement in this model (Bender, 2008). Similarly to the notion of the civic university of Goddard et al. (2016), the infusion model argues that university–community engagement should be integrated within all universities' activities—but in a more explicit way than in the intersecting approach. In the infusion model, university–community engagement is actively pursued by universities, with a strong emphasis on collaboration and mutual relationships with communities. This model assumes that universities should prepare students "to be responsible citizens as demonstrated through civic engagement and social responsibility"—instead of just prepare them for employment (Bender, 2008, p. 91).

A less common typology of universities is based on four pillars. For example, Conway et al. (2009) distinguished four areas: research, teaching, service, and knowledge sharing (see Table 1). Similarly, Doberneck et al. (2010) composed a typology of four broad categories: research and creative activities, service, commercialized activities, and instruction—similar to the area of teaching in the other typologies. The main distinction from the three-pillar typologies

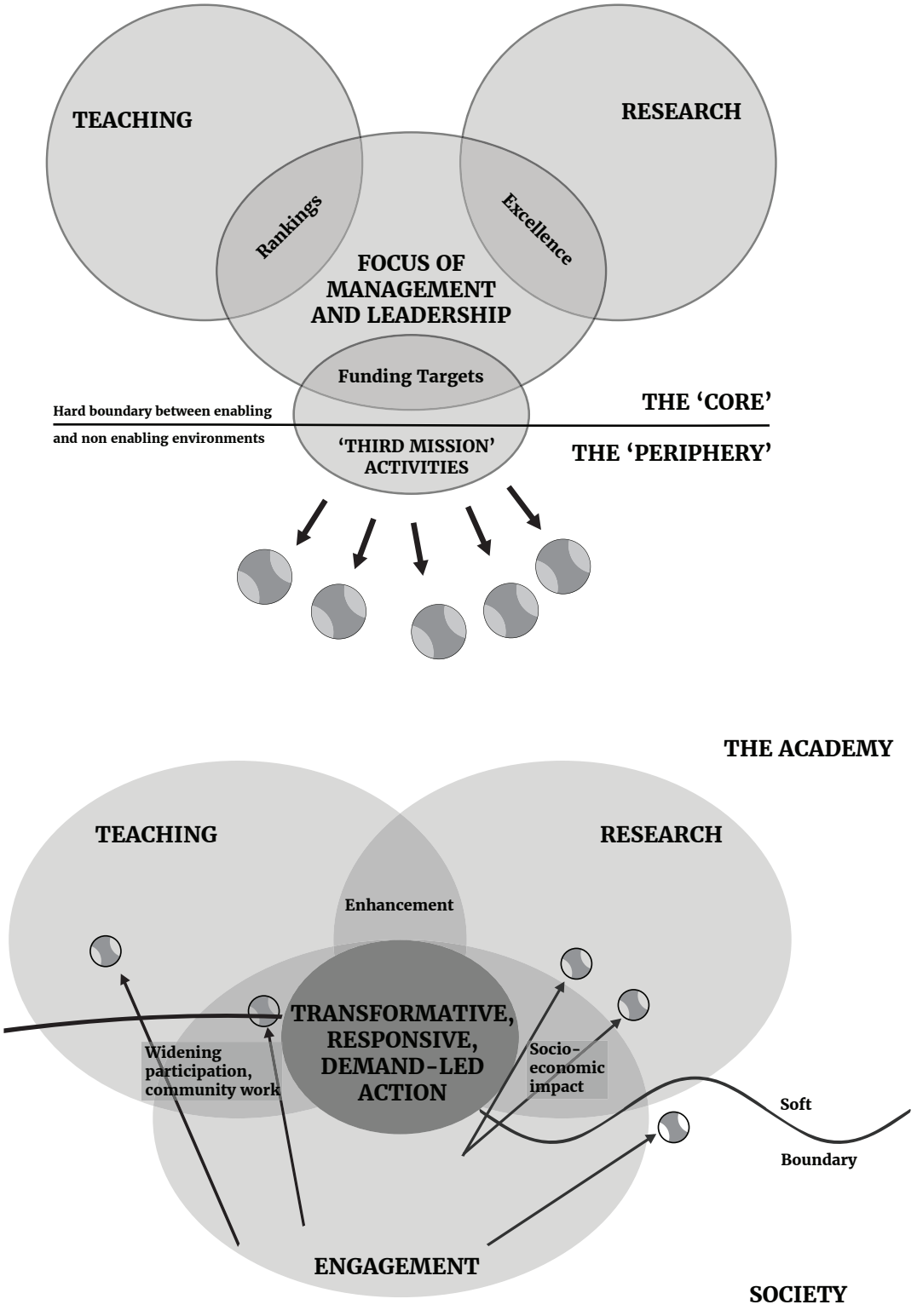

Figure 1. The "Un-civic" and "Civic" University
Note. Adapted from The Civic University: The Policy and Leadership Challenges, by J. Goddard, E. Hazelkorn, L. Kempton, & P. Vallance (Eds.), 2016, p. 6, Edward Elgar Publishing.

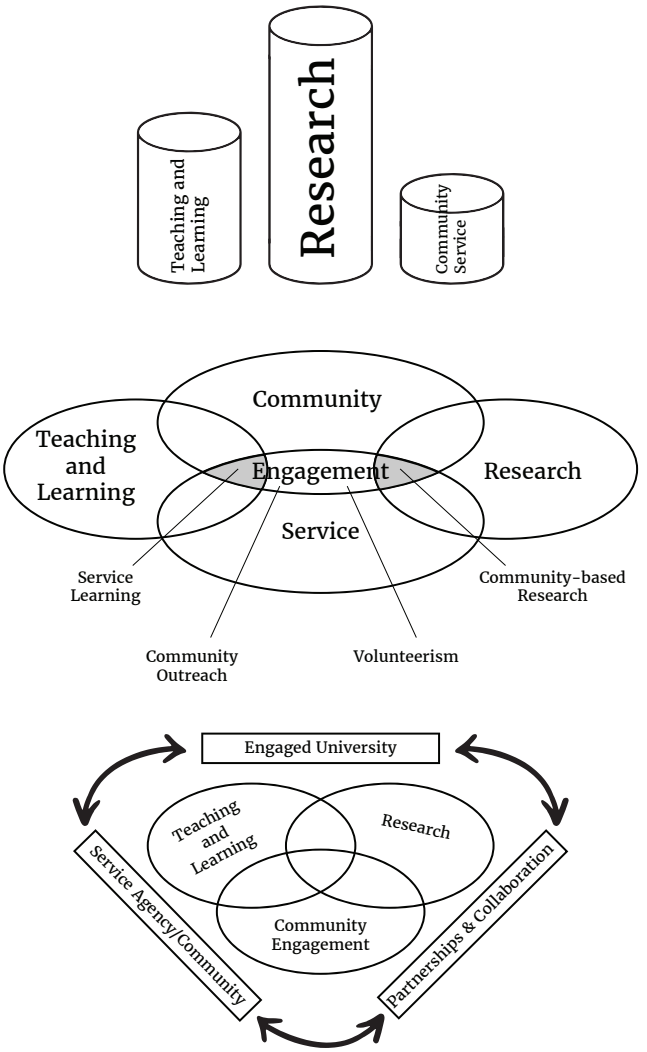

Figure 2. Silo Model, Intersecting Model, and Infusion Model
Note. Adapted from "Exploring conceptual models for community engagement at higher education institutions in South Africa," by G. Bender, 2008, Perspectives in Education, 26(1), pp. 88–90.

is the division of "service" and "knowledge sharing" or "commercialized activities," whereas the typology of three pillars merges these areas into one—only "service."

Another way of conceptualizing university–community engagement involves differentiating between the economic and social contributions of universities. Four different dimensions can be distinguished that reflect the different interpretations of university–community engagement: the entrepreneurial university model, the regional innovation system (RIS) model, the Mode 2 model, and the engaged university model (Trippl et al., 2015). As Figure 3 shows, the first two models have a more narrow approach: They target the economic dimension but do not include social, cultural, and societal activities of universities. The latter two models do involve these activities; they differ in which type of activities they focus on. The Mode 2 model is related to knowledge production. Mode 2 is a new form of university research that focuses on societal challenges, transdisciplinary research, collaboration, and applicability, in contrast to Mode 1 (not shown in Figure 3), which refers to traditional, linear, and disciplinary forms of research. The engaged model not only focuses on research, but "also includes teaching and other university functions, directing attention of university contributions

Table 1. A Typology of Different Kinds of University Engagement Activity

Area of university activity		Main areas of engagement activity
Engaged research	R1	Collaborative research projects
	R2	Research projects involving co-creation
	R3	Research commissioned by hard-to-reach groups
	R4	Research on these groups then fed back
Knowledge sharing	K1	Consultancy for hard-to-reach group as a client
	K2	Public funded knowledge exchange projects
	K3	Capacity building between hard-to-reach groups
	K4	Knowledge sharing through student 'consultancy'
	K5	Promoting public dialogue & media
Service	S1	Making university assets & services accessible
	S2	Encouraging hard-to-reach groups to use assets
	S3	Making an intellectual contribution as 'expert'
	S4	Contributing to the civic life of the region
Teaching	T1	Teaching appropriate engagement practices
	T2	Practical education for citizenship
	T3	Public lectures and seminar series
	T4	CPD for hard-to-reach groups
	T5	Adult and lifelong learning

Note. Reprinted from *Characterising Modes of University Engagement With Wider Society: A Literature Review and Survey of Best Practice*, by C. Conway, L. Humphrey, P. Benneworth, D. Charles, & P. Younger, 2009, p. 6, Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Engagement), Newcastle University. Copyright 2009 by Newcastle University. Reprinted with permission.

to regional development that are related to their social, political and civic roles" (Trippl et al., 2015, p. 1728).

In short, university–community engagement is understood in many ways, which results in a wide variety of activities and theoretical models. Key elements in university–community engagement seem to be spatial, reciprocal, developmental, or instrumental aspects, or a combination thereof. In addition, there is a normative ideal type of university–community engagement; some university–community engagement practices are perceived as "better" than others. University–community engagement that is completely embedded within all functions of a university—with the explicit aim to take on social responsibility—seems to be considered the ultimate form of university–community engagement.

There is great variation in terminology used by authors, not only across articles, but even within articles. This raises the question of whether such variation is just a matter of language or reflects larger differences in the phenomenon being studied (Giles, 2008; O'Meara et al., 2011). For example, the variation could reflect universities' different motivations for engaging with communities. The motives may be based on the perception of the concept of university–community engagement, or vice versa; definitions can be selected that support aims in relation to university–community engagement. For this reason, the next section will address universities' various motivations for engaging with communities.

Motivation—Why Do Universities Engage With Local Communities?

The origin of university–community engagement can be divided in two categories. First, a number of authors state that

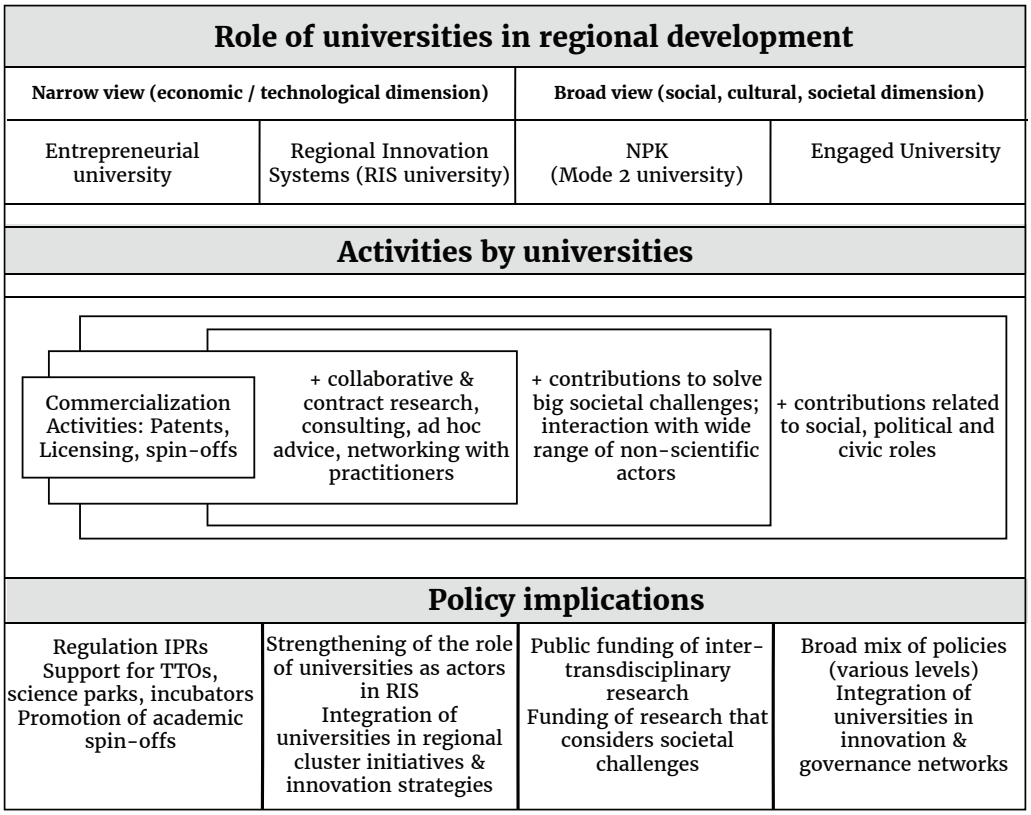

Figure 3. University Models: Activities and Policy Implications
Note. Reprinted from "The Role of Universities in Regional Development: Conceptual Models and Policy Institutions in the UK, Sweden and Austria," by M. Trippl, T. Sinozic, & H. Lawton Smith, 2015, European Planning Studies, 23(9), p. 1728.

university–community engagement has an ideological, intrinsic basis (Albertyn & Daniels, 2009). For example, Goddard et al. (2016) argued that university–community engagement in the United States is linked to the idea that a sense of citizenship is an essential element of education, whereas in Europe, university–community engagement is more related to economic development and funding. Others argue that beliefs have changed on how to contribute to society besides research and teaching, which has led to the formulation of explicit and intentional goals and the integration of university–community engagement into the core work of universities. This type of university–community engagement is often based on moral values (Benneworth et al., 2008). Furco (2010) linked this trend to the generation of Millennials, who want to make contributions to society through their education. This attitude has led to more community-based learning.

Farrar and Taylor (2009) distinguished three different historical perspectives on (motivations underlying) university–community engagement. First, the progressive perspective holds that universities perform a democratic function by transmitting knowledge to the working class in order to ensure the social order. This model was most common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The second model, the knowledge transfer business perspective, became dominant from the 1940s onward. This perspective emphasizes the importance of education and training at high levels for economic competitiveness. During recent decades, a third perspective has gained interest. The radical social purpose model argues that universities take responsibility for tackling social inequality by getting involved with community engagement, based on socialist and other progressive ideological stances. According to this model, universities should emphasize the social purpose of education, rather than the economic and political purposes (François, 2015), by educating students in various values that enable them to make a responsible contribution to society.

Nevertheless, Farrar and Taylor (2009) emphasized "that universities are inherently elitist institutions and that such egalitarian impulses have remained relatively marginal" (p. 250). University–community engagement is often understood as knowledge transfer and collaboration with large corporations—a result of the growing influence of neoliberalism on higher education institutions (Goddard et al., 2016; Olssen & Peters, 2005).

A second group of authors ascribe the increasing interest in university–community engagement to the influence of external pressures, which have rapidly changed in the last 3 decades (Albertyn & Daniels, 2009; Benneworth et al., 2008). In general, universities are nonprofit organizations that receive subsidies and tax exemptions from local and national governments (Hayter & Cahoy, 2018). However, public investments have been declining in recent years, which seems to result in universities relying "on market discourse and managerial approaches in order to demonstrate responsiveness to economic exigencies" (Gumport, 2000, p. 67). Universities are increasingly self-financed participants in the international market for higher education (Czarniawska & Genell, 2002; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

Hence, financial and economic incentives can function as external pressures for universities to engage with local communities. According to Chatterton (2000), key reasons for greater university–community engagement include new sources of funding that promote the practice. For example, in the United States, a number of federal grant programs were established in the early 1990s to engage colleges and universities more in addressing local societal issues (Furco, 2010). In Europe, European Union–funded research projects encourage universities to collaborate with industry "to develop their entrepreneurial and innovative potential" (Hazelkorn, 2016a, p. 50).

Some authors argue that university–community engagement can also be regarded as a marketing tool to attract future students (Benneworth, 2013). In the context of global competition in higher education, students can be considered consumers who are an important source of income for universities—in particular international students (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). This can be linked to the argument of Furco (2010) about the Millennial student generation, whose attitude toward education and societal relevance may have pushed universities to accommodate community-based learning experiences. By advertising the opportunity to have these experiences, universities aim to attract new students. Finally, various stakeholders such as policymakers and political parties ask universities to demonstrate the societal impact of their research and their contribution to the public good. Universities are expected to be "good citizens" or "good neighbors," and university–community engagement is—presumably—a way to meet these expectations (Benneworth et al., 2008). By engaging locally, it is argued that universities could ensure their relevance to society, strengthen public trust, and partially justify the public resources they receive (Benneworth et al., 2008; Hart & Northmore, 2011). Academics should reinvent themselves, get out of the perceived "ivory tower," and engage with local communities. Supposedly, this would lead to the enhancement of "the goals of universities while also increasing local actors' capacity to address and resolve the issues they confront" (Dempsey, 2010, p. 360). However, little empirical research has been performed on the role of societal perceptions and expectations of universities and their effects on university–community engagement.

Concluding, the historically constituted relationship between the university and its surrounding communities is influenced by several factors. Two perspectives toward university–community engagement are dominant in the literature: Either intrinsic motivations or external incentives appear to be the major drivers behind university–community engagement. However, it is also possible that both models simultaneously coexist in universities and their environment. Regardless of what motivates universities, they face several challenges in the actual implementation of university–community engagement into their core activities (Calleson et al., 2005). We now turn to these challenges.

What Challenges Occur in University–Community Engagement?

Increasing engagement between universities and external stakeholders can be a complex process; multiple actors with different agendas are involved, requiring appropriate governance and organizational models (Goddard et al., 2016). The main

challenges seem to be linked to the priorities, timelines, and goals of universities, caused by the current academic culture and its underlying research processes and regulations (Racin & Gordon, 2018).

First, academia is characterized by an emphasis on disciplines rather than interdisciplinary work. This approach is supported by the prevalent instrumentalist view that some disciplines are more important than others (Goddard et al., 2016). In another aspect of this hierarchy of knowledge, abstract theoretical work is appreciated more than applicable research derived from practice (Klein et al., 2011). This approach has often led to a silo model of the roles of the university, in which research, teaching, and service are pursued independently of each other, with a bias toward international issues (Bender, 2008; Goddard et al., 2016). For example, reports on university–community engagement projects tend to be not recognized as valid for publication in academic journals and therefore have not been widely disseminated (Gelmon et al., 2013; Hardwick, 2013). In such cases, university–community engagement is seen as an add-on.

Second, the focus on competition in higher education has resulted in an absence of incentives or rewards reflecting appreciation of engagement activities that do not directly contribute to rankings and impact (Gelmon et al., 2013). This is in particular true for regions where university–community engagement is a newer phenomenon, such as Africa and Continental Europe (Hazelkorn, 2016b). In contrast, in the United States and the United Kingdom, promotion and tenure guidelines were at some universities revised to encourage and support university–community engagement since the 1990s, based on the work of Boyer and the Carnegie Foundation (Boyer, 1996; Gelmon et al., 2013; Klein et al., 2011). Nevertheless, criteria for promotion or tenure often puts more weight on traditional scholarly activities, such as publication in academic journals or acquiring grant funding, than on community work (Klein et al., 2011).

Finally, there are concerns among academic staff about the time it takes to engage with local communities. The content and logistics of activities have to be created, partnerships have to be formed, and students, staff members, and participants have to be recruited (Hardwick, 2013; Holland, 1999). Some staff members report a lack of confidence in skills and techniques of outreach. Academic staff who are engaging with local communities may have to learn new skills, communication styles, and sensitivity to community concerns and problems (Klein et al., 2011). In addition, a lack of clear procedures for documentation and evaluation leads to less participation by staff who are not personally motivated.

Thus, the global focus of the current academic system challenges universities in fully taking on university–community engagement as a central component of their activities. At the same time, university–community engagement is often framed as the general answer to the question of how universities should fulfill their local societal duties. This contrast between the demands universities have to meet raises questions about the benefits of university–community engagement.

For Whom: Target Groups and Impact

The question of for whom university–community engagement is most beneficial is closely related to the motivations of universities to engage with local communities. Where university–community engagement activities are based on altruistic beliefs, universities could be expected to pay more attention to the impact on local communities than universities that practice engagement because of external pressures, as the latter may primarily have their own interests in mind. Central to this discussion is the concept of community, which in this article relates to which groups universities have in mind in terms of university–community engagement: that is to say, those groups who are targeted by the universities.

Most of the literature is not conclusive on what is meant by "communities" in the context of university–community engagement. Most authors describe communities in a broad manner, for example "non-academic" (Bond & Paterson, 2005) or:

> "Communities" refer to those specific, local, collective interest groups that participate, or could potentially participate, in the community service activities of a higher education institution. They are regarded as partners who have a full say in the identification of service needs and development challenges. (Bender, 2008, p. 86)

Again, the notion of place in the context of university–community engagement comes forward. A recurring theme among definitions of community is the focus on vulnerable, socially disadvantaged, and hard-to-reach groups, but many authors do not elaborate on which specific communities these are (e.g., Blouin & Perry, 2009; Cahill, 2007; Klein et al., 2011; Schmidt & Robby, 2002; Zlotkowski, 1999). For example, Benneworth et al. (2008) stated that "engaged" universities provide services for excluded communities to improve their social capital. Benneworth (2013) described excluded communities as "a group whose problems are societally urgent and who traditionally rarely interact with universities" (p. 4). They are "marginalized groups whose views are seldom sought, and whose voices are rarely heard" (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, p. 197).

The lack of clarity in defining university–community engagement and the targeted communities hinders research on the effect of university–community engagement activities. While interest in university–community engagement has increased drastically over the last decades, the number of evaluation and audit studies has remained low (Hart et al., 2009; Hart & Northmore, 2011). The majority of studies on effects are at the project-specific level. However, these findings do not necessarily indicate effects at a higher institutional level. In addition, longitudinal data are required for measuring higher level outcomes and broader community outcomes, whereas most studies are short term (Hart et al., 2009). In addition, as mentioned earlier, many activities can be clustered under the heading of university–community engagement. Therefore, one has to investigate a broad field when seeking effect studies.

An example of university–community engagement is service-based learning. In this form of education, students learn how to use their academic knowledge and skills to solve actual social or civic issues, in cooperation with community organizations (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000). Evidence of student outcomes is inconclusive. Postulated positive outcomes of service-based learning include improved grades and job skills; enhanced communication, analysis, writing, and data collection skills; increased civic engagement; greater appreciation for diversity; personal growth; sense of autonomy; and the development of a professional identity (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Hardwick, 2013; Klein et al., 2011). However, other authors have argued that some of these positive outcomes are assumed, rather than proven (Spalding, 2013). Community organizations benefit from the extra help they receive through students participating in service-based learning, access to campus resources, increased relationship-building capacity, improved local visibility, and participation in neighborhood planning (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Klein et al., 2011).

Volunteerism of staff and students is another way to engage with local communities, but this remains a relatively underresearched field (Tansey, 2012). Research on the effects of university volunteering is inconclusive as well. Some research has found a positive relation between university volunteering and adult volunteering and well-being (Bowman et al., 2010), whereas others have shown that requiring college students to engage in community service reduced their intentions to volunteer in the future (see, e.g., Clary & Snyder, 1999; Stukas et al., 1999). During recent years, more critique has been vocalized about whether the expected benefits of student volunteering to communities have been realized (Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010). Similar to other university–community engagement activities, evaluations of student volunteering are mainly based on the perspectives of community organizations and not the community members themselves (Edwards et al., 2001; Tansey, 2012).

University–community engagement activities can also be used to increase higher education participation of people from a lower socioeconomic background. For example, Scull and Cuthill (2010) examined an initiative that aimed to increase access to higher education through an action research project. By involving potential students, parents, and members of the broader community as relevant stakeholders in the research process, trust, mutual respect, and community awareness were increased. However, as the authors mentioned, it is not possible to conclude whether higher education aspiration and participation increased solely based on this research project; long-term and large-scale research will be needed for this purpose. Nevertheless, the findings of Scull and Cuthill (2010) raise this question: If universities strive to increase higher education participation of people from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, how

should they do this and to what extent are these activities effective?

In conclusion, the targeted community is often not clearly defined, and there is a lack of studies focused on effects and using longitudinal data. This makes it difficult to state whether university–community engagement is truly effective for its target groups; many benefits are assumed (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Harris & Holley, 2016). In addition, most research on effects addresses only learning outcomes of students and benefits for the community-based organizations, but no specific outcomes for the actual service recipients (Khalaf, 2017).

Discussion

We distinguish four main gaps in the literature: the underresearched role of societal perceptions, the need for a more global perspective, a lack of communities' voice, and insufficient insight into the impact of university–community engagement on local communities and the academic community. These gaps will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

Societal Perceptions of Universities

As discussed in the section Motivation—Why Do Universities Engage With Local Communities?, external incentives can motivate universities to get involved with university–community engagement. One of these incentives is the societal perception of universities. There is a growing pressure for corporate social responsibility and accountability, which seems to affect public institutions as well (Albertyn & Daniels, 2009; Munck et al., 2012; Powell & Owen-Smith, 1998). Simultaneously, universities are more and more driven by business priorities and "the imperative to survive and prosper" (Williams & Cochrane, 2013, p. 78), due to changes in funding (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010). Corporations use corporate social responsibility programs intending to contribute to society in a responsible and ethically correct way, by addressing social and environmental concerns (Vasilescu et al., 2010). As parallels can be drawn between the behavior of universities and that of corporations, university–community engagement may be seen as universities' way of fulfilling their social responsibility.

However, it can be argued that universities already make a contribution to society by educating students. Academics are engaged by default; "they in fact already perform a great deal of work that is of direct or indirect benefit to the economy or society more widely" (Bond & Paterson, 2005, p. 348), making social responsibility redundant in the context of higher education (Nejati et al., 2011). The issue seems to be that, in general, social inequality in terms of levels of completed education is rising, widening the divide between "cans" and "cannots" (Van den Broek et al., 2016). Universities serve highly educated students, the "cans," but their contribution to the "cannots" may be limited or perceived to be limited by the "cannots," resulting in negative perceptions of universities.

In particular, societal expectations and perceptions may play a role in the motives of universities that have recently taken up university–community engagement. Many of the university–community engagement activities at these universities were already taking place, which introduces the question of whether these institutions are expanding their activities or merely reframing them in order to improve their reputation (Bender, 2008; Mtawa et al., 2016). It is assumed that university–community engagement would ensure the relevance of universities to society and strengthen public trust in universities and science (Hart & Northmore, 2011). However, research to date on the relationship between university–community engagement and societal perceptions is limited.

A More Global Perspective

Another finding that emerged from this literature review is that the majority of the literature on university–community engagement comes from the United States and United Kingdom. Although more recently authors have drawn attention to university–community engagement in other regions, such as Africa, Europe, and Australia (e.g., Bender, 2008; Mtawa et al., 2016; Trippl et al., 2015; Winter et al., 2006), only a small body of literature addresses university–community engagement beyond the U.S. and U.K. context (Doberneck et al., 2010; Sandmann, 2008).

In addition, research has mainly focused on universities in small towns, although many universities are located in urban areas (Harris & Holley, 2016). So far, little research has taken spatial factors such as universities' locations into account, al-

though they can be seen as anchor institutions. Universities are geographically tied to a certain location and have an economic and social impact on that location (town, city, or region; Birch et al., 2013; Brammer et al., 2012; Harris & Holley, 2016). This gap may be explained by the selection of literature for this review. As we mainly focused on publications written in English from the past 2 decades, we may have missed relevant literature from other regions and written in other languages. English has become the dominant language in all international domains of academia: conferences, publications, and research projects (Mauranen, 2016). The field of university–community engagement is no exception. Interestingly, it seems that literature from practitioners, such as reports from universities and consultancy agencies, is more diverse in language and geographical background.

The lack of geographical diversity in the literature on university–community engagement is particularly interesting as the notion of local is a fundamental element of university–community engagement. This can be seen in the frequent use of spatial elements in definitions and theoretical models of university–community engagement, but also in the actual application of university–community engagement by universities. Terms such as "local," "surroundings," and "regional" are often used, and activities such as service-based learning are often based on collaboration with organizations from universities' local surroundings. As shown in the literature review, the location of a university influences its university–community engagement behavior, through the broader political, economic, historical, and social context (Harris & Holley, 2016). University–community engagement manifests itself in different ways in different regions, countries, and even cities. Since the majority of the literature is in English, it may not be applicable to institutions from other regions. Thus, the academic literature on university–community engagement can be enriched by taking spatial aspects and other "factors, structures, and processes outside of higher education" into account (Harris & Holley, 2016, p. 429).

Community's Voice

Another gap in the literature is the lack of community's voice. Much of the literature focuses only on the university side of university–community engagement, whereas the community aspect is mainly absent from the research agenda—community is often "just" one of the variables (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Jones & Lee, 2017). In addition, when the community perspective is considered, representatives of community organizations are often the ones who are talking. However, as Brabant and Braid (2007, p. 72) argued,

> Speaking with the designated leaders of the neighborhood associations does not necessarily mean that they in turn share the information with their constituents or that the constituents think their associations' leaders represent their views accurately or adequately.

There seem to be several reasons why the literature is not explicit about what communities universities refer to in local engagement. First, "community" is one of the most vaguely defined concepts in social sciences (Allman, 2015), thus "what we mean by 'community' continues to baffle scholars across fields of study" (Cruz & Giles, 2000, p. 29). The term has symbolic, moral, emotional, and spatial dimensions. The need to also take into account changing technologies such as communication and transportation (Allman, 2015) results in methodological issues that complicate understanding of the term "community" in the context of university–community engagement.

A political aspect may also play a role in the lack of focus on the voice of communities within university–community engagement. Many engagement activities target socially disadvantaged communities that lack social capital and competencies, and are less organized than universities (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Miller & Hafner, 2008; Northmore & Hart, 2011). These unequal power relations have resulted in a prioritization of students' and universities' outcomes from university–community engagement (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Dempsey, 2010), as well as a lack of trust between universities and communities. Historically, local communities have primarily been seen as sources of data, while often not receiving any output of the research they participated in and rarely perceiving any benefits (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; O'Fallon & Dearry, 2002). Negative attitudes of community partners and academic staff toward each other—such as distrust, prejudice, fear of science, and sense of superiority—hinder university–community engagement and the

evaluation thereof (Klein et al., 2011).

Concluding, the literature review shows that the perspective of local communities is lacking, even though these are one of the main stakeholders in university–community engagement, being its target group. Thus, future research on university–community engagement should aim not only to call for a dialogue, but actually put this into practice.

Impact of University–Community Engagement

The literature review shows a lack of thoroughgoing studies on effects of university–community engagement activities as well as longitudinal data on these effects, which makes it difficult to establish how and to what extent university–community engagement is effective at all.

Besides the possible impact on local communities, university–community engagement likely affects the academic community as well. Often, local communities and the academic community have a negative perception of each other. The presence of a university and its students may have negative effects on local levels of social cohesion. Studentification of (inner) cities is a process of urban change, wherein neighborhoods are characterized by a high influx of students—a societal process that can lead to conflict over ownership of space, services, and territory (Smith, 2008). It reduces opportunities for positive and mutually beneficial interaction between groups; students and locals seem to be separate communities with different outlooks, needs, lifestyles, and levels of economic capital (Kenyon, 1997; Smith, 2008). Activities such as service-based learning may help bridge this town-gown divide, as both students and community members widen their horizons: "Students learn about the community beyond the university's walls, and community members discover that not all college students fit negative stereotypes" (Blouin & Perry, 2009, p. 126).

As more and more universities engage with local communities, it is essential to understand to what extent university–community engagement is effective. A greater focus on the (long-term) impact on both the local communities and academic community can contribute to the realization of the full potential of university–community engagement.

Recommendations for Research

With regard to the aforementioned gaps in the academic literature on university–community engagement, we have some recommendations regarding research topics, theories, and methodology. First, future research can explore the motivations of universities more, by asking fundamental questions such as why universities adopt university–community engagement and what they aim to achieve with it. The literature review also reveals a need for more global perspectives on university–community engagement. For example, future research could focus on how the concept is understood and operationalized among universities across the world, beyond the situations already covered in the extant literature. Furthermore, future research should bring more attention to the variety of needs and expectations of different local communities regarding university–community engagement. Finally, future research should focus more on the (long-term) impact of university–community engagement on both local communities and the academic community.

With regard to theory, primary conceptual frameworks that have previously been used may have lenses too narrow to explain the complexities involved with university–community engagement (Harris & Holley, 2016). Rather than examining the phenomenon separately from its social, economic, and political environment, broadening the theoretical lens to the business and organizational sociology literature can contribute to the conceptual understanding of university–community engagement. For example, institutional isomorphism could play a role in the rise of university–community engagement, implying that institutions adopt management practices and procedures that are socially valuable in order to seek legitimacy, resulting in convergence and isomorphic change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Kitagawa et al., 2016). This process may have pushed universities toward university–community engagement in an imitation drift (Hayter & Cahoy, 2018; Teichler, 2006).

In addition, applying frameworks from the corporate social responsibility literature can shed light on how to understand universities' motivations for getting involved with university–community engagement, the variety of approaches they adopt, and how to assess university–community engagement

activities (Maurrasse, 2002). By comparing university experiences with businesses' practices and experiences, insights could be gained in "common practices and pitfalls that may assist in shaping the expectations of all parties involved" (Maurrasse, 2002, p. 137).

The field could benefit from methodologies such as meta-analysis, mixed-methods approaches, ethnographic approaches, and policy and discourse analysis, as these methods are currently underused in research on university–community engagement (Jones & Lee, 2017; O'Meara et al., 2011; Sandmann, 2008). Another potentially useful research design could be comparative case studies. The majority of existing research focuses on single-site case studies, which offer rich data on a given setting but lack the "explanatory potential that comparisons across multiple cases would offer" (Harris & Holley, 2016, p. 424). In addition, policy analysis will offer insight on how local, national, and global policies and regulations shape universities' engagement activities. Little research has focused on the policies enacted by different levels of government that might affect universities' behavior in relation to community engagement or on the dynamics and interplay between these different levels of policies and regulations (Harris & Holley, 2016).

A useful research approach to study the impact of university–community engagement is making use of theories of change, which highlight underlying assumptions and mechanisms of specific programs. In particular, theories of change are focused on mapping out what has been described as the "missing middle" between what a program or project does (its activities and outputs) and how these mechanisms lead to the achievement of the desired goals (Ofek, 2017). Through this approach, the link between activities and the achievement of long-term goals (outcomes) can be more fully understood. This enables evaluation, as it is possible to measure progress toward the achievement of longer term goals that goes beyond the identification of program outputs—even after the activity is finished. Theories of change offer long-term data on the impact of university–community engagement, which is lacking from the literature so far (Harris & Holley, 2016).

Conclusion

This article has presented a critical overview of the academic literature on university–community engagement. It aimed to provide better insight into trends, commonalities, and variations in the literature, to enable the identification of an agenda for future research. The main research question of this article was "What are the main questions and issues on university–community engagement that have been addressed to date, and what gaps can be identified in the academic literature?"

The majority of the literature has focused on the origin and development of university–community engagement, best practices, and challenges. We have identified four gaps in the literature: the underresearched role of societal perceptions, the need for a more global perspective, a lack of communities' voice, and insufficient insight into the impact of university–community engagement on local communities and the academic community. We further conclude that a great part of the literature on university–community engagement is descriptive, editorial, and anecdotal with a lack of critical theory perspective—the debate on community engagement has primarily remained normative and often based on assumptions (Bond & Paterson, 2005; Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010; Jones & Lee, 2017; Sandmann, 2008). In general, there is a lack of empirical research. Concluding, we believe that, to adequately address the four main gaps we found in the literature, the need remains for a more critical and geographically diverse conceptual discussion that is supported by empirical research and a broader theoretical lens.

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