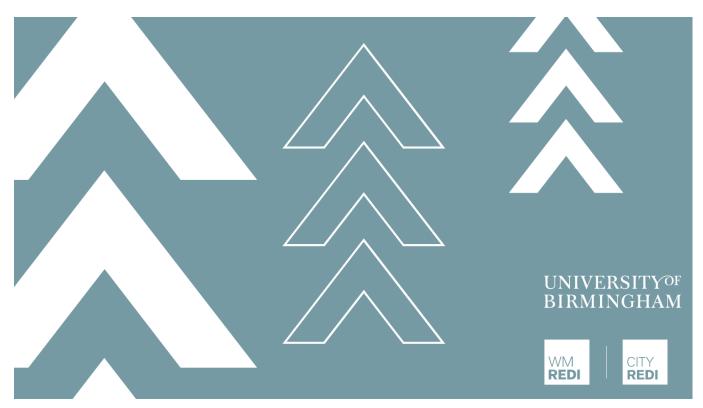# City-REDI/WMREDI Universities and Regions

Forum Policy Briefing: May 2023

Universities, Pride in Place and Levelling Up

Des McNulty and Rebecca Riley

The analysis and recommendations in this briefing – which come from discussion at a workshop held in February 2023 by the Universities and Regions Forum at the University of Birmingham - are intended to clarify what is needed to take forward the delivery of levelling up commitments. They build on previous City-REDI / WMREDI research, as well as participants' insights from working for and providing advice to local and central government in England and the national governments in Wales and Scotland. The authors are very grateful to the speakers and the participants[1] for their inputs to the workshop and accept full responsibility for any errors of interpretation or fact.

Executive summary and key findings

The Levelling Up White Paper is rooted in a spatial deficit model – the proximate causes of places being 'left-behind' are a combination of community demoralisation and the lack of effective leadership, to which 'pride in place' is seen to be the antidote. Past remedies have included sprucing up town centres and public buildings – based on the 'hanging baskets' theory of change whereby a small amount of highly visible, cosmetic short-term investment (Shaw 2022) leads to a sea-change in attitudes of local people and external perceptions of a place.

However, the White Paper acknowledges that being 'left-behind' is also attributable to a wider set of structural deficits. These include low productivity in most of the UK's major conurbations outside London and south-east England; a half-life of long term path dependency stemming from industrial job loss and closures, especially in towns remote from growth clusters or on the fringes of the main cities in northern England and the Midlands (Strangleman 2017); and population shifts with jobs and skilled workers leaving places that have become economically redundant or are isolated (such as peripheral rural or coastal communities in many parts of the UK). Depletion of social capital can take various forms depending on circumstance, the most important of which is the out-movement of young ambitious people who are pulled to London and other cities by better educational opportunities and job prospects. In consequence, many towns and rural areas have higher proportions of older, less affluent and economically inactive people. The growth of remote working, housing costs and quality of life considerations have led to some people relocating away from the London commuter belt, where their purchasing power drives up prices, resulting in a lack of affordable housing for local families and young people, an additional push factor.

Many of those who remain are experiencing a loss of amenities and the fraying of social fabric that previously allowed left behind places to maintain themselves as viable communities – potent symbols of unwanted change include the replacement of stores by betting, payday loan and charity shops. Outside the more affluent and metropolitan areas of the UK, pollsters report many people feeling ignored and looked down on. Pressure on local services resulting from immigration and a perceived threat to the host culture and way of life were amongst concerns raised in places such as Wisbech in Cambridgeshire and Boston in Lincolnshire that voted overwhelmingly for Brexit. In the 2019 General Election, disenchantment benefitted the Conservatives who were able to secure so-called red wall seats and strengthen their hold in other 'leaver' parts of England. David Goodhart's analysis[2] of the emergence of two value clusters: educated mobile people who value autonomy and fluidity and see the world from "Anywhere" versus more rooted, generally less well-educated people who prioritise

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[1] This list of speakers and participants is provided in Appendix A. The forum has been led by Professor John Goddard and facilitated by staff from Citi-Redi at the University of Birmingham

[2] Goodhart, D (2017), *The Road to Somewhere* C Hurst & Co

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group attachments and security and see the world from "Somewhere" is a simple framing of a complex process through which social cohesion is being eroded. Michael Sandel develops a different but related argument about the rise of populism and its corrosive effect on democracy in the USA[3]

In left-behind places, lower levels of attainment and progression to higher levels of education is a vicious circle, leading to smaller proportions of graduates and other highly skilled people in their 20s and 30s, making it more difficult to retain and attract well-paid jobs (EPI 2022). Restricted opportunities available for upward mobility and the age-skewed population consequently found in many left-behind areas reinforce a tendency to hark back rather than look ahead. Resistance to change is not confined to poorer areas but in more affluent places it tends to be protectionist/ exclusionary (e.g., resistance to new infrastructure or housing) rather than a more generalised antipathy to change based on low expectations and/or prior experience of externally generated initiatives. Population movements towards cities and the increased diversity that comes with migration leads to cities being re-imagined and repurposed to meet the needs of incomers alongside existing residents, increasing multiculturalism, and creating a forward-looking mindset. This reinforces cultural and attitudinal divisions between cities, suburbs, and left-behind places.

Injecting dynamism and breaking this cycle of spatial inequality are core aims of the Levelling Up White Paper but it is not clear how the mission statement – *to restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost* - or the targets - *by 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing* - will be delivered. Much more policy thinking is needed to connect the mechanisms identified as drivers; UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) spending, effective local leadership and persuading civic institutions to adopt a joined-up strategy. The discussion in the forum focused on issues that need to be addressed – what we mean by pride in place, how to engage with felt experience, how to build at local and regional level – and on what role, if any, universities might play.

Summary points from the policy forum:

1. *Place is a character* in our lives. It has a specificity; it lives and breathes; it is alive in us rather than being static/ wholly passive. We have a relationship with it.
2. *Narratives are important* in understanding places. Narratives allow us to add qualitative insights to quantitative data in such a way as to gain a holistic view that joins up across different domains of policy and our lives.
3. *Felt experiences* are often the missing part of the jigsaw in accounts of place. They are the way we feel in and about places and the meaningful relationships we have, to and within, place. We tend to overlook 'communities of emotion' that are developed in place and can be linked to identity, local pride, and attachment to place. It would enhance any development of policy or interventions to have greater sensitivity to felt experiences.
4. *Conventional infrastructure metrics* (VFM assessments) rarely come up with strong scores for business cases from left behind areas. If allocation mechanisms and guidelines are to give due weight to uniqueness, pride in place and the cultural impacts of investment over purely economic returns, better ways of incorporating qualitative data and felt experiences into assessments of relative value are needed.
5. *Partnership working for the long-term* is key for building the trust that is needed to develop pride in place. Partnership working is important because pride in place is about the 'journey' – the

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[3] Sandel, M. (2020) *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good* Penguin

relationships and mutual understandings – as well as the 'destination'. In academia, the multi-faceted dimensions of place mean that partnership working across disciplines is important for understanding and interpretation.

6. ***Early engagement involving hearing, listening, and understanding*** is required to develop shared visions and for successful implementation of policies concerning place-based interventions (especially those concerning physical infrastructure). Not everyone will think or feel the same, so there is a need to develop ways and approaches that are comfortable with pluralities of views.

7. ***Collaboration*** underpins successful partnership working. Understanding the different drivers of partners, the disincentives for collaboration (notably amongst universities where the incentive structures are geared more towards competition), and the learning/culture change needed to achieve collaborative advantage is helpful here.

8. ***Strong, confident, clear, and pragmatic leadership*** is important too. But this leadership may be distributed amongst private sector, public sector, universities and third sector actors. Individuals and community groups can also be key influencers in developing place-based coalitions and should be included in stakeholder mapping and workshops where appropriate.

9. ***Capitalising on events*** is a tried and tested way of building pride in place. Events may be negative (e.g., riots) or positive (e.g., Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022). They can accelerate change in mindsets and action. The Covid-19 pandemic is interesting in this regard as it caused people (during lockdown) to appreciate (or not) their hyper-local environment in a new way and opened out possibilities for experimentation and new ways of working.

10. ***Join up in place – Why wait for Whitehall?*** Communities can join locally to undertake activities/ work on projects that are meaningful for them and engender pride in place. It should not be necessary to wait for Whitehall for 'permission' to act. Indeed, as the Bennett Institute (Shaw et al, 2022) has shown, there are signs that feelings of belonging in poorer areas have been increasing and this could potentially be harnessed for the good of the place.

11. ***Cities and metropolitan areas operate horizontally via networks*** that can weave disparate investments into a whole that is often greater than the sum of the parts**.** Connecting left behind places with networks and institutions, some of which (including universities) might not be local, is key to successful mobilisation of a broader array of stakeholders and assets.

12. ***Capacity building is needed –*** local authorities and their civic partners need help to develop their plans in partnership with local people and in understanding their needs and aspirations, acting on evidence of what works in placemaking and adopting clear logic models and appropriate indicators of economic, social, and environmental impacts. Universities can play a significant anchoring role, not just in building the evidence base but also acting as a strategic partner to help develop local plans; a major place investor; an attractor of investment and skilled students and workforce; and a key player in sports, culture, and arts at a local level.

13. ***Universities can work across spatial scales*** – from neighbourhood to town to city-region, unfettered by administrative boundaries. Town and gown divides can be longstanding – persisting for centuries. But universities are amongst other things sites of citizen activism; connectors exchanging knowledge between local, national, and international innovators; and sources of cultural enrichment in those places where they are located. For pride in place, it is important to bridge boundaries between locals - place-attached people - and those who may not come from the place but are motivated to contribute to its prosperity and wellbeing.

14. ***Universities differ from several other anchor institutions*** in the way they work., They can mobilise expertise (amongst their local/regional/ national/international staff and students) top-down and bottom-up to work with local/regional government, firms, voluntary and community groups to

help solve local problems – and in so doing demonstrate impact, build alliances and network capacity, and provide opportunities for enhancing the skills of those involved.

15. ***Universities should take responsibility for advancing their civic contributions.*** Civic engagement should be given prominence in their institutional strategies and missions and this should be reflected in their self-assessment measures and impact KPIs. Work is needed to develop a shared framework that incorporates place contribution and properly recognises its importance.

16. ***Alignment with local needs (community engagement and contribution to place) should be incentivised*** in guidance issued to universities by government. If government wishes to promote horizontal working, collaboration and partnership at the local level and gather qualitative insights on the impact of these activities, it needs to incorporate these objectives into the mechanisms that determine the allocation of resources (i.e. tuition fees, widening access targets, research funding and rankings that reward traditional modes of academic provision and global standing). The trick is rebalancing system incentives to boost the civic mission without undermining the global competitiveness of our universities.

What is the problem?

Does Pride in Place require us to think differently about place?

Pride in place is one of four overarching objectives in the White Paper as well as the least detailed of its twelve missions[4] (DLUHC 2022). The underlying argument is that a combination of community demoralisation and the lack of effective leadership are root causes of places being left behind. Yet despite the importance of harnessing community involvement and consent if places are to move forward, accessing the way people feel in and about place has been neglected in the formulation of place-based policies and decision making. Policy on place has treated it almost exclusively as a geographic location where boundaries can be mapped, data can be collected, economic trajectories can be explored, and policies enacted. In the academic literature, there has been extensive work on gaps between deprived neighbourhoods and other parts of large cities and on the trajectory of cities and regions but much less emphasis on peripheral or remote towns, reflecting a lack of policy focus on the fate of these places now labelled 'left behind'.

Linking pride with place requires taking into consideration the importance of social fabric, lived experiences and how people feel in and about places (Madgin 2022). The richness of people's relationships with their places has been explored through literature, film, and television programmes such as Sherwood and Happy Valley, depicting the complexity of emotions, experiences, meanings and memories. These and other narratives are important in understanding places, not least because identities are bound up in our stories about ourselves and about those places we feel we belong to. Focusing on narratives allows us to add qualitative insights to quantitative data in such a way as to gain a holistic view of place that joins up across different domains of policy and our lives.

Felt experiences are a means of understanding belonging, identity, and attachment.

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[4] "By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing."

A focus on felt experiences can be used to shape and lead the development of place-based policies and practices by anchoring them in time and space.

'Bringing together the social, lived and felt with the geographic, administrative and economic is crucial to securing positive long-term outcomes based on inclusive strategies for both place and people within place'.   (Madgin 2022)

Felt experiences are often the missing part of the jigsaw in accounts of place. Policymakers tend to overlook 'communities of emotion' that develop within places and are grounded in identities and attachment to place. Yet they are very important as the building blocks of social cohesion, whether that is a shared sense of cultural identity such as being Cornish or from a Welsh speaking area. Identification with place is often very local – village or community rather than city or region – and it is difficult to mobilise activity or commitment to a place unless it is combined with feelings of attachment. Some identities are counterposed to identities of neighbouring communities, rooted in community or sporting loyalties such as Geordie and Makem rivalries between Newcastle and Sunderland. Residents may claim they are proud to come from a place while not feeling any responsibility for its condition, appearance or prospects. Interest in (or willingness to be engaged in) efforts to transform the place where people live should not be taken for granted. One aspect of demoralisation can be fatalism – a cynical view that nothing can or will change for the better. Another aspect involves looking back rather than forward – wishing to restore or preserve economic and social patterns despite the time elapsed since the loss of jobs on which de-industrialised places previously relied.

Those with leadership responsibilities for driving change on behalf of places need to take account not only of structural and economic barriers and opportunities but also of the 'felt experiences' of residents. This might usefully include reflecting on the different institutions through which a meaningful relationship to a place is established (family, school/education, work, other community affiliations etc.) and how these might be harnessed in contexts where individuals' self-report as having a sense of pride without that necessarily translating into active contribution to their neighbourhood/ community etc. While many politicians and civic leaders might think they implicitly understand 'their place', their assumptions are rarely grounded in systematically gathered evidence and are often erroneous. In practice, leaders often struggle to persuade communities to buy into regeneration or renewal strategies and find it difficult to get residents to engage in articulating their priorities. Distrust is now society's default emotion - and that is particularly true for politicians and public institutions.

Is a lack of pride or a lack of capacity responsible for places being left behind?

In his 2023 Building a Better Future New Year speech, Rishi Sunak said:

'...the change we need is to do away with the idea that it's inevitable that some communities and some places can never and will never get better. I love my local community and it's not right that too many for far too long have not felt that same sense of meaning and belonging.' He promised *'greater investment in local areas, to boost growth, create jobs...and reinvigorate our High Streets and Town Centres'*.

The assertion that left behind places exhibit weaker forms of civic pride is contradicted by evidence cited in the Bennett Centre's Townscapes report which shows amongst other things that high levels of local pride in North-East England co-exist with high levels of deprivation. Other people may lack the same sense of meaning and belonging that the Prime Minister feels but evidence suggests that a sense of cultural identity and attachment to place remain strong across the population. The capability of local government and its partners to plan successful renewal initiatives or respond strategically to

challenges is undoubtedly a success factor for both engagement and renewal. Yet local government, especially in those parts of the UK viewed by government as left behind, is fragmented. Left behind places typically combine weakened local authorities and a limited array of private sector and civic partners to work with. Councils have been constrained by year-on-year funding reductions from the Treasury, linked to a drive towards volunteerism and the third sector delivering local services. This has had a disempowering effect on local government and the loss of expertise and experience – something which will undoubtedly worsen as finances tighten further.

The lack of a stable, coherent regional strategy, coupled with the highly centralised fiscal and political system in England[5], with its vertical lines of accountability to Balkanised Whitehall departments, have limited the appetite and capability of local partners to devise (or implement) a shared vision for growth. There is abundant evidence that waiting for Whitehall has been a fetter on public and social innovation and delays and uncertainty, compartmentalised funding streams, policy churn and the lack of a consistent flow of investment from government are barriers to capital investment by the private sector in enterprise and innovation. Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, which have benefited most from a) major sporting or cultural events b) city and devolution deals and c) strengthened political leadership and wider powers at metropolitan level, are exceptions: mayoral systems there appear to have cemented capacity to focus attention on place needs and capabilities using adverse circumstances such as the pandemic or lack of investment in rail or more positive events like the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham to help bind the political coalition, shared vision and sub-national collaboration which is critical to achieving regional and national objectives.

However, most English mayors have fewer powers and less leverage with national government or local partners than Andy Burnham or Andy Street and far less when compared with their US or European equivalents. Mayors are not a necessary condition of effective working to maximise partnership working at city region level, as demonstrated by the cumulative impact of the Glasgow city region economic partnership[6] or the success Hull has made of its city of culture year[7], but confident and capable bottom-up place leadership is vital. If local pride and agency are to be catalysts in driving economic renewal and social cohesion in a wider range of places, serious consideration is required of how a forward-looking mindset within a broader range of diverse communities and amongst their leaders can be generated, alongside the capacity needed to develop deliverable plans for change.

The Community Wealth Building approach pioneered in Preston is one example of the effective mobilisation of partners to identify and take forward initiatives that link capacity to local identity, the Eden project in Cornwall in another. It is possible for smaller cities, towns and rural areas to develop successful initiatives and it is important that lessons are learnt from them to be applied elsewhere. It needs to be recognised however that capacity issues are more pronounced in left-behind places including the hinterlands of conurbations which are not benefitting from cities as growth nodes[8].

Universities are part of the problem - but could contribute to local solutions

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[5] Centralisation is also an issue in the devolved nations - a recent Scottish Government regionalisation report has highlighted the need for greater devolution to regions within Scotland and increased strategic capability.
[6] Scottish Government (2022) Regional Economic Policy Review: Paper 2 – The Regional Perspective - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[7] https://citiesofculture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Cultural-Transformation-Conference_Nov2019_April2021_compressed_file.pdf
[8] See Levelling Up Oldham (2022), https://oerb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ING6167_UofM_Levelling-up-Oldham-22-03-22.pdf

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The UK's hierarchical university system advantages students from well to do backgrounds accessing the supposedly highest performing 'research-intensive' universities, most of which operate a residential delivery model which contributes to spatial inequality. The larger and more prestigious institutions attract students from across the UK and internationally while the post-92 institutions serve a less affluent, more local demographic. Having a university (or universities) of either type improves a place's connectedness to the national and international knowledge system, attracts skilled (and younger, ambitious) people, and stimulates business activity. To the extent that a university connects with civic partners and its local communities, acting beyond its passive anchor role[9] (UPP, 2021) to support the place(s) where it is located, it can help tackle demoralisation and help stimulate and shape forward thinking. The extent of its impact depends on a range of factors, including the size and reach of the university, the networks it engages with and the nature of its civic commitment. But what about places without universities? Chris Husbands (Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University) makes the point that places with universities have a head start over places that don't. Towns that are many miles from a university, or places on the periphery of conurbations that have more than one university in their core cities, are arguably being left further behind because they lack equitable access to what a university would provide. This is also an issue for rural areas, and it may become an issue for several places that currently have universities if institutions in the greatest financial difficulty - and hence faced with cutbacks or closure - turn out to be disproportionately those in left-behind places. Cities and more prosperous parts of the country benefit from being HE oases that are surrounded by deserts, lacking not only tertiary provision but also the capability that having concentrations of research-informed expertise can provide. Creating more universities in underserved parts of the country has been the preferred solution in the past – might encouragement of existing universities to think about their contribution to place at a regional level be a more cost-effective alternative?

Although the underlying assumption in the Levelling Up White Paper - that the most deprived places in the UK have the weakest levels of local pride – appears to be untrue, there is little doubt that those places which were reliant on a single industry and have lost vital institutions are particularly disadvantaged. Many of these places have Further Education colleges rather than universities, though universities do engage with them (e.g., Nottingham Trent University in Mansfield, University of Central Lancashire in Burnley). Some universities may conclude that they have no locus to be involved where they don't have a teaching facility, concentrating their civic efforts in those places where they have staff and students. Others (the University of Lancaster is a good example, having become involved *inter alia* in Eden Project Morecombe) may take the view that spreading their activity and influence across the region in which they are located is politically desirable and that collaboration could open out new opportunities. Universities that want to get involved in the levelling up agenda will need to review the spatial footprint and the nature of their civic commitments, take felt experiences and pride in place seriously and learn new ways of engaging with partners that are more collaborative and focused on outcomes.

Analysis of the problem

How committed are the government to levelling up?

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[9] For a critique of universities adopting a passive anchor role, see the report of the UPP Civic University Commission

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Although the Levelling Up White Paper contained some radical proposals including a 'rewiring of Whitehall' and 'rebalancing of the spatial distribution of government spending between regions', allocations of the first tranche of levelling up funding in October 2021 were more geared to the hanging baskets than the structural deficits approach. Subsequent announcements made in January 2023 for transport, cultural and town centre and regeneration projects have been criticised, partly because they appeared to favour constituencies held by Conservative MPs but also because the competitive bidding process meant civil servants in London making decisions on local projects rather than money being devolved to local decision makers to determine what is best for their areas. Levelling up has been criticised as a:

sprinkling of investments across a thematically and geographically disparate array of fixed term projects rather than a strategic intervention capable of shifting the tectonic plates that lie beneath the country's stark geographic inequalities.[10]

It remains to be seen whether spatial redistribution as originally proposed by Michael Gove (e.g., in relation to R & D spending or relocation of government jobs) continues to be pursued as a core policy or whether the spending cuts introduced by Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt force a de-facto abandonment of major parts of the levelling up agenda. However, limitations on finance does not appear to have reduced the significance of pride in place in government rhetoric and there are some indications[11] that it may become even more central to policy thinking about how government might work with local government and civic partners to get maximum economic and political benefit from current and new investment.

Labour's emergent approach in which an industrial strategy sensitive to regional needs is coupled with greater devolution of powers is set out proposals developed by the Commission of the UK's Future led by Gordon Brown. According to Keir Starmer, this would mean 'the biggest ever transfer of power out of Westminster and into the towns, cities and nations of the UK'. The report widens the focus of constitutional reform beyond devolution and the House of Lords to the distribution of power wealth and opportunity across the UK, addressing overcentralisation in that context. The more far-reaching proposals in the White Paper (what some might see as the better bits) could ironically prove more of a template for a Labour than a Conservative government. If there is a change in government following a UK general election, spatial inequalities and devolved decision-making will, likely, become much more central to government policies, especially if the USA's success in using federal and state investments to build distributed capacity in advanced industries also influences Labour's industrial strategy as well as its economic and regional policy thinking.[12]

Previous incarnations of regional policies have been focused on growth and jobs. While these objectives remain pivotal, opposition spokespersons have ambitions to broaden the devolution agenda in favour of collaborations to tackle social and cultural as well as economic issues with a place focus. While this combines the constitutional and levelling up agendas, greater recognition of commonalities and differences within and between regions raises questions about identities that directly link with some of the issues raised here regarding pride in place: how to overcome demoralisation, how to create a forward-looking vision, how to mobilise partners and how to engage communities on their own terms.

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[10] Jack Newman and Steph Coulter "Rishi Sunak Faces a Dilemma over Levelling Up" LSE Blog March 7 2023
[11] Institute for Government "How the government can make progress on levelling up despite tight budgets".
[12] Bruce Katz and Jeremy Nowak "Can the UK Level up? Early Signals and key lessons from the US".

Any transfer of power from central government is beset with difficulties. The experience so far of levelling up under the Conservatives is that departmental ministers and civil servants find it difficult to let go and the Treasury refuses to cede control over finance. There is also an issue about who to hand powers over to – relatively straightforward in those parts of the country where local government and its networked partners have the capacity to plan, bid for funding and manage major capital projects or events, but much more difficult in those parts of the UK that have weak local government and a dearth of non-governmental anchor institutions[13]. Macro-opportunity needs capable places, ready to take advantage of the policies of the day, but this needs to be facilitated rather than micromanaged by central government.

Need for collaborative networks and pragmatic leadership at local level

While strengthening and streamlining local government through structural reorganisation to create larger units and devolution/transfer of powers, including fiscal responsibilities, would create stronger political institutions at conurbation or regional level, making progress on levelling up need not await or depend on local government reform. What is important is building horizontal co-operation between local government and other civic partners that stretches across council boundaries and siloed structures of accountability. Place is where different strands of policy can join up. Leadership can be distributed amongst private sector, public sector, higher education and third sector actors, provided there is trust and the collaborative mindset which is vital for effective partnership working. Understanding the different drivers of partners, the forms of accountability they are subject to and having a realistic approach to overcoming the tensions that disincentivise collaboration while working towards a common objective are all aspects of a maturity model of collaborative capacity, which needs to be created with care over time.

Early engagement involving hearing, listening, and understanding is key

When developing place-based visions and implementing projects, individuals and communities can be key influencers and, at the very least, need to be included in stakeholder mapping. The National Lottery Community Fund in their recent report on Pride in Place[14] (Iqbal, 2022) emphasise the importance of empowering communities through resident-led decision making in ensuring that local knowledge and priorities feed into larger plans. Although the report provides some excellent illustrations of grants leading to more local pride and a sense of belonging, showing how Lottery activity contributes to a better understanding of what pride in place means and how to improve it, much remains to be done, especially in left behind places, in applying the principles identified:

1. *Empower people to design and shape where they live*
2. *Improve and safeguard local amenities*
3. *Make the local environment feel safe and look attractive*
4. *Support community venues to thrive and offer a range of activities*
5. *Create opportunities for people to participate and build broader community ties*
6. *Regenerate and reimagine town centres and high streets*
7. *Restore and use heritage buildings to enhance people's connection to place, family and history*
8. *Harness culture to bring people together*

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[13] The unevenness of the devolution arrangements in England is paralleled elsewhere in the UK. Glasgow and Cardiff city regions co-exist with devolved governments and national institutions in Scotland and Wales that are in principle in favour of regionalisation within their respective jurisdictions while refusing to relinquish control e.g. by devolving power to mayors.

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Not everyone will think the same and there is a requirement to be comfortable with a plurality of views. But if a shared vision is to underpin and guide place-based interventions, especially those that involve physical infrastructure, a carefully managed community engagement process is needed that encourages residents and local organisations, as well as their elected representatives, to converse with each other to build trust. This is not a process that can or should be rushed – in developing coalitions and embedding partnership working aimed at initiating or implementing a cultural, heritage or regeneration project, the journey is as important as the destination. The National Lottery has demonstrated how communities can, in the right circumstances, come together locally to undertake activities or projects in tune with residents' wishes and in which they feel they have a strong stake, capitalising on pride in place. There is much to learn, not just from the Lottery but also from philanthropic organisations in this regard, both here and in the USA where donors and philanthropic bodies have a more developed and extensive involvement in working with local government, civic partners, communities, and universities to promote wellbeing and innovation.

What role should universities play in networking/partnership activity aimed at boosting pride in place and contributing to the levelling up agenda?

In the Levelling Up White Paper universities are mentioned mainly in connection with economic development as traditionally conceived - innovation, research and development, skills etc. Their role in connection with pride in place is ignored - yet many UK universities owe their foundation to ambitious efforts by earlier generations of community and political leaders. The civic universities of the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth century were created by local dignitaries for a combination of practical reasons – investments in capacity building tailored to the needs of local industry and commerce – while stimulating improvements in learning in fields such as medicine, the arts and law. Like cathedrals in an earlier age, or Victorian town halls in the major cities, university heritage buildings are expressions of civic confidence and pride.

Over the last twenty-five years, national structures of accountability and the competition framework imposed on Higher Education institutions by the UK government has led, especially amongst the so-called 'research-intensives', to a covert de-prioritisation of contributing to local prosperity and wellbeing in favour of publications, league tables and attracting international students. More recently, stimulated by the impact agenda, the report of the Civic University Commission and pressures to be socially and environmentally responsible but also conscious of a growing backlash against the grandiosity of new campus buildings and the impact of student housing growth on neighbouring communities, many universities have been refreshing their civic profiles and engagement strategies, becoming more involved in and supportive of activities that contribute to the betterment of place.

For reasons set out earlier - lack of capacity of local government, the legacy of loss, economic forces resulting in more places being left behind and other place specific factors - there are gaps that universities can usefully fill. Should universities now wish to thicken their connections with civic partners and with communities in their localities, by e.g, helping develop network capacities and community assets that contribute to levelling up, they can play an enhanced role. Opportunities may involve a combination of leadership and supporting roles, depending on circumstance. Taking them requires amending institutional missions and strategies, coupled with culture change which will be hard to achieve, given the embedded expectations in strategic priorities, purposes, staff recruitment and promotion criteria etc. highlighted as impediments in John Goddard's work on universities and

place[15]. Encouraging them in this direction would, in many places in the UK, provide a significant boost to network capacity

Change is happening within institutions, as we can see from the number of universities that have signed or are in the process of developing civic agreements and the increased appetite amongst many members of staff and students for greater engagement and contribution to wellbeing by their university. There are good examples of creative thinking in the assessment of economic and environmental impact of universities[16] but mainstreaming these approaches throughout institutions would require a sea change in the ways in which universities operate. As autonomous institutions, universities should take responsibility for advancing their civic contributions. Civic engagement should be given prominence in their institutional strategies and missions and this should be reflected in self-assessments[17] and impact KPIs. While many universities are moving in this direction, progress has been uneven and slow, partly because there is no sector wide framework that can be used to measure place contribution and properly recognises its importance. Government could accelerate change by altering the balance and tone of the guidance issued by funding agencies and the regulators to incentivise collaboration between institutions and civic partners and community engagement. To complicate matters, as Chris Husbands[18] points out:

The individual university is often not the right grain size to think about collaboration. Every university in this country has different strengths and different weaknesses. It's worth spending some time unpacking collaboration in universities. In one sense, there's a lot of it, but it's often opportunistic. It can deliver successful outcomes where it happens at department or team or faculty level or research unit level, but in most instances it's not sustained. If we want long term collaboration between universities or between universities and civic partners, we need to think hard about what sorts of measures are needed to properly sustain it.

Working for places is not a one-off or an individual university endeavour – ideally it should be a network endeavour with a long-term commitment amongst partners to creating sustainable collaborative ecosystems animated by the need to bring together a range of actors with different resources to solve a particular challenge in a place. Pride in place – and the importance of felt experience – highlights another issue, raised by Helen Goulden[19] at the first meeting of the forum. She pointed out that there's a risk that genuine local need becomes disconnected from place conversations conducted by civic partners, either because citizens and community organisations are not fully engaged in the discussion and/or because we lack effective ways of understanding and measuring what people think and feel.

A great deal of effort is put into the analysis of quantitative crushable data to inform strategic priorities for regions and that work gets nothing but applause and admiration. I don't want to take away from the value of that analysis, properly understood and contextualised. But I would suggest remarkably less effort goes into gathering qualitative data and making sense of evidence which is expressed by the people we profess to serve. So, when we think about what we might create, we need to find much more sophisticated and sustained ways of ensuring that that levelling up evidence is interpreted in its

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[15] Goddard, J & Vallance, P (2013), The university and the city.

[16] A good example is the University of Glasgow Economic Impact of the University of Glasgow Report [pdf]

[17] Current university economic impact assessments are predominantly place-blind, focusing on contribution to national GDP, while local multiplier/agglomeration effects are unquantified and/or unacknowledged unless they are linked to regional initiatives such as city deals or innovation accelerators.

[18] Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University, Forum transcript, unpublished

[19] Chief Executive, The Young Foundation, Forum transcript, unpublished

broadest form and that we give parity of esteem with the lived experiences of communities and people, and evidence that's generated outside government and academic roles.

Across the UK there are excellent examples of academics working in partnership with local people and organisations and with practitioners to co-create community led regeneration projects, social interventions and all manner of local pilots, many of them innovative and experimental in nature, but short term and limited in scope. What is needed is more stable funding and support for these activities, together with place-focused conversations at local, metropolitan, and regional level (as appropriate) that open out these possibilities and facilitate collective impact from collaborative action. Mutual misunderstandings and town and gown divides can be longstanding - in some cases persisting for centuries. Bridging divisions between those whose focus in on place and those whose attachment is to their academic discipline or whose motivation is their universities standing in international league tables would allow universities to draw on staff (and student) expertise and enthusiasm to work with local/regional government, firms, voluntary and community groups in way that expand the skills of both academics and local partners.

As with the Levelling Up White Paper, where universities are linked to mission 1 on pay and productivity through new products, businesses, and knowledge transfer, universities are only mentioned once (p14) within the Shared Prosperity Fund Guidance on interventions, output and indicators, in relation to "research and development grants for local organisations. They are not referred to in connection with mission 9, Pride in Place, which covers, public realm, regeneration, events, community resilience, management of green space, cultural and natural heritage, investment in town centres, outreach, design and management of the built environment, arts and cultural activities, visitor attraction, capacity building and civil society, social fabric and fostering a sense of pride. Although these are all areas where universities can play a pivotal role, impact is reduced to a single strand of activity.

Summary of findings and recommendations

The summary points listed on pages 2 and 3 are a combination of findings and recommendations on pride in place, and specifically on the contribution that universities might make to levelling up objectives, that emerged from the discussion at the February 2023 pride in place forum meeting. Andy Haldane,[20] who was a key contributor to the White Paper, argued at the time of publication that there is a need for consistent, long-term investment in regeneration and renewal programmes. Reflecting the importance of both pride in place and felt experience, that approach should also be applied to the protection and investment in local cultural, heritage, and sport assets. Requirements for success in these spheres include building network capability at local and regional level and the ability to initiate and carry through strategic plans. In our view, investment should be conditional on a strategic approach to placemaking and the active involvement of local communities - and where appropriate an expanded role for universities.

We recommend the following steps in preparing the ground for successful implementation of this approach to pride in place:

1. A programme of capacity building for local authorities and civic partners is needed to enable them to take a strategic approach developing the cultural, heritage, sport, and people-based

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[20] Then Chief Economist of the Bank of England, now CEO of the Royal Society of Arts

assets of their area alongside its economic potential. It is not clear who might do this but in our view the programme should be geared towards adopting a collaborative approach to preparing plans in partnership with local people – responsive to felt experiences, understanding their needs and aspiration as well as acting on evidence of what works in placemaking, ensuring that proposals have clear logic models and lead to economic, social, and environmental impacts which universities could usefully contribute to.

2. Short term, piecemeal investment in place, based on competitive bidding should be replaced by longer term, predictable funding streams through which central government resources directed towards places are transparently allocated. Bottom-up development of consistent long-term plans for investment in regeneration and place making should be based on the approaches used for city and devolution deals. Trailblazer deal pilots might be an appropriate way forward.

3. Structural change in places requires that investments in town centres, cultural and heritage assets should be linked to strategic infrastructure and economic development plans, not a series of disjointed and disconnected projects.

4. Responsibility within government for the strands of activity associated with pride in place should be brought together with responsibility for regional economic development as part of the levelling up agenda, with a cross government mechanism being set up to collaborate and co-ordinate policy and activity on place across government.

5. Where there is a perceived and real depletion of anchor institutions or services that threaten place viability, consultation with a wide section of local society aimed at responding to the threat is likely to generate the most effective response. Investment and actions should be visible, highlighting the differences being made.

6. Opportunities for citizens to engage with local, distinctive cultural assets need to be made available to ensure a wide cross section of society benefit from the assets. Investment in place cultural assets should be accompanied with built-in engagement/utilisation from the start, via comprehensive business cases which address the levelling up objective while harnessing pride in place.

7. Post covid, after long periods of isolation and lockdown, there is a need to sensitively build back community and social fabric, recognising the medium- and longer-term impacts of the pandemic. Alongside local authorities, anchor institutions have a key role to play in this, especially those organisations whose significant assets and impact on the local community were mobilised during the pandemic. These organisations, which might include universities, schools, faith communities and other organisations should be proactively engaged in the rebuilding of places and community infrastructure by local policy makers.

8. Especially in places where labour market shortages in key sectors have depleted underlying resources, regeneration can be kick started by building new amenities/physical capacity e.g., to hold and support large events or to house distinctive local assets e.g., the sculpture park and the Hepworth Museum in Wakefield.

9. Investment in skills, expertise, and knowledge is needed to develop new and adaptive place strategies and narratives which overcome past place dependency and promote innovation in place.

Options to deliver on the solutions

In the section above, we argue that the proposed solution, 'Pride in Place', as described in the White Paper, does not adequately address the problem or root causes of spatial inequality, but that harnessing pride in place alongside the mobilisation of local networks can generate bottom-up led regeneration and renewal for left behind places. The percentage of people who feel they 'belong' to their immediate neighbourhood has risen from 58 per cent in 2013/14 when the Community Life

Survey series began, to 65 per cent in 2020/21 (Shaw et al 2022), suggesting that a lack of 'pride' is not the barrier it is assumed to be in the White Paper, rather the wider investment in place as already identified

The clearest opportunity to deliver on Pride in Place is the new framework for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Its aims and objectives align with many of the findings and recommendations of this paper. It is an omission in both SPF and the Levelling Up White paper that there is no mention of how universities could support the improvement of local Pride in Place. The UKSPF programme has a comprehensive set of interventions, example projects, objectives, outputs, outcomes that align with the Levelling-Up Missions and could be harness to address the issues highlighted earlier. The summary points from the forum session could be addressed through this new funding programme if sufficiently targeted and if Universities are seen as key players in the fund. The first section focuses on communities and place and amongst the priorities identified are:

- E1: Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including better accessibility for disabled people, including capital spend and running costs.
- E2: Funding for new, or improvements to existing, community and neighbourhood infrastructure projects including those that increase communities' resilience to natural hazards, such as flooding. This could cover capital spend and running costs.
- E3: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces, community gardens, watercourses and embankments, along with incorporating natural features into wider public spaces.
- E4: Enhanced support for existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer.
- E5: Design and management of the built and landscaped environment to 'design out crime'.
- E6: Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities.
- E8: Funding for the development and promotion of wider campaigns which encourage people to visit and explore the local area.
- E11: Investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups.
- E12: Investment in community engagement schemes to support community involvement in decision making in local regeneration.
- E13: Community measures to reduce the cost of living, including through measures to improve energy efficiency, and combat fuel poverty and climate change.
- E14: Funding to support relevant feasibility studies.
- E15: Investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities.
- E16: Investment in open markets and improvements to town centre retail and service sector infrastructure, with wrap around support for small businesses.
- E17: Funding for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy, such as local attractions, trails, tours, and tourism products more generally.

This set of activities and interventions is very welcome and local authorities are developing proposals to make use of it. However, the pot of funding is considerably smaller than previous years under European Funding. There is, for the time being, a lack of clarity over allocations or an understanding of how this competitive fund will be distributed/balanced across places. These intervention areas and their theory of change could be applied to other funding across government for similar activities to create greater alignment if place-based objectives and targets. We argue that places need to 'own' these activities, they need to mobilise their networks and anchor institutions including universities to plan and utilise these resources, engaging with communities, and plans need to be embedded in a

coherent place narrative. Funding should be allocated transparently and managed locally rather than having separate, multiple pots distributed by central government, pots should also be allocated for the long term to tackle structural issues.

Appropriate businesses cases need to be developed within each place portfolio, with due priority given to pride in place and the cultural impacts of investment prioritised or balanced alongside economic returns. Appropriate guidance (The Green Book 2022) from HM Treasury has been introduced, including a new place chapter and more detailed guidance which covers regeneration, renewal and regional development and provides guidance on the assessment techniques which can be applied in these type of interventions. There is also new guidance on wellbeing which could also be applied in these types of interventions. A worrying sign however is that in February 2023, the Treasury prevented DLUC signing off new capital projects because of concerns about evidence of value for money, which suggests that more work needs to be done on ways of incorporating qualitative data and felt experiences into infrastructure metrics.

Further findings and recommendations

Our paper presents a counter argument to the view that 'Pride in Place' is rooted in a spatial deficit model, where the proximate causes of places being 'left-behind' are seen to be a combination of community demoralisation and the lack of effective leadership. Causes of spatial inequality are structural and deep-seated but lack of capacity within local government (and local networks of civic partners) to effectively mobilise anchors is critical, along with over-centralisation in Whitehall, stop-start funding and allocative arrangements (including funding guidance for universities) that are either place-blind and/or fail to be sensitive to or take proper account of the felt experiences of residents and community organisations. There are positive developments, including increasing civic commitment on the part of universities and the recognition of the different dimensions of the problem in the Levelling Up White Paper and the Treasury guidance referred to above, but there appears also to be a lack of momentum. The volume of public and private investment required to address spatial imbalances on anything like the scale seen in Germany post-reunification or in the USA post-pandemic, driven there by political and security of supply considerations, is missing in the UK. While some cities have addressed the capacity gap (and there is a need to learn from these successes), other places risk falling further behind unless they become better equipped to plan and manage their own regeneration and renewal.

Other issues raised in the forum included:

- Not everywhere has the same asset base, this can mean places lack the strategic capacity to develop plans. There is a need to build networks of locally focused institutions that can collaborate and contribute to taking some of our recommendations forward.
- Budgets are constrained and inflation is impacting particularly severely on infrastructure investment. Local Authorities are struggling to meet burgeoning need under legal statutory requirements (e.g., for adult social care), limiting the resource that they can apply to linking economic development and community empowerment and to developing the business cases for investment that central government rightly requires.
- Communities have changed substantially over recent times, there are fewer community spaces, and our 'community' is often made up of spheres of influence, such as online communities, working from home, geographically dispersed family networks and the pull of big cities for employment. These issues all impact on a sense of belonging, and on the extent and nature of

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- community participation in left behind places, which makes bottom-up planning and securing investment for renewal more challenging.
- While universities are getting more involved in civic projects, especially where there is a fit between sectoral specialisation and research capabilities, the geographical distribution of higher education is skewed towards London and south-east England on the one hand, and major cities on the other, leaving many left behind places without universities with no HE resource at all. Those left behind places that do have local universities do benefit from their contribution, but few former polytechnics or similar institutions have the kinds of capacity that large research intensives might bring.

Suggested next steps

Government should review the budgets, skills, and expertise of places to assess capability to develop plans which address levelling up and incorporate pride in place as a means of engaging communities in the change process. Network capacity and the extent of collaborative working between Local Government, Mayoral Combined Authorities, and anchor institutions is necessary if investments in assets, people, and place are to be effectively co-ordinated and impactful. The aim should be get the most from the UKSPF programme, aligning other programmes where possible into single pots that can be shaped and utilised to meet local as well as national needs.

Conclusions

Pride in place as a thematic policy area as described in our recommendations is essential to the development of local places. Decisions about the future of places should be taken in consultation with and involve the people the place serves.

Austerity has impacted detrimentally on services and assets at a place level. To develop greater resilience and create growing, thriving communities, local people need a greater say and more control. We also need partners to come together to improve the social fabric of places and to collaborate on building trust as well as taking forward projects. In left behind places, there is a need for consistent, long-term investment in regeneration and renewal programmes which should include protection of, and investment in, local cultural, heritage, and sport assets. Where investment is based on a strategic approach to placemaking with the active involvement of local communities it is more likely to be both successful and sustainable.

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