

## **Universities as Place Leaders in Emerging Countries: A Case of Sustainable Urban Development in India**

**Dane Anderton\*** and **Malini Niar\***

\*Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

\*\* Christ University, Bangalore, India

### **Abstract**

Recent literature suggests that place leadership is the missing link in urban and regional development (Sotarauta, 2016; Clower and Beer 2014; Haynes and Langley, 2014). Equally, universities have been highly cited as key catalyst for driving the social, economic and sustainability agendas within cities and regions (Haynes and Langley, 2014; Goddard, 2016; Benningworth, 2018). Most research papers tend to focus on developed contexts in UK, Europe and North America. Hence, there is limited work focusing on University as place leaders in developing contexts. The aim of this paper is to explore the place leadership role Universities have in a developing context. Focusing on an Indian university in Bangalore, we investigate how this anchor institution has created relationships to lead sustainable development initiatives within its locality.

UN sustainability goals are high on the agenda of policy makers and of educators around the world. India's higher education sector is expanding at a colossal rate, with new HEIs opening on a weekly basis to take up the demand for home based students. These institutions will have economic power and influence within the place they exist (Goddard, 2016). If place leadership is the missing link in development and universities play a central role in urban and regional development, then together there is a strong argument for universities to take action through their curriculum but also in the places in which they operate. Universities pride themselves on global reputations and global networks but are fundamentally connected to local places. Increasingly we see place based approaches writing in policy, research papers and organisational missions. In our case, the university has realised this mission by establishing a Centre for Sustainability. Their aim is to transform their local area, envisions sustainable environment promotion, provide systematic and scientific decentralized waste management practices and create livelihood opportunities. Equally, to ensure every student is aware, sensitive, empathetic and contributing to sustainable changes in the society. Overall, the university wants to lead efforts and instil a mind-set to achieve zero waste into landfill against a backdrop of significant waste mismanagement and pollution in Bangalore

Data has been collected via interviews with university leaders, employees and residents in the community. This is combined with secondary data based on the outputs and financial sustainability of the sustainability centre at the university. The result imply that although the university has

genuine intentions to act responsibly, maintain a sustainability centre, lead community employment and environmental improvements locally, it has not been financially sustainable. For the individuals employed at the centre who were homeless, they have been able to secure further employment and improve their quality of life. The local environment for students is vastly improved as well as a sustainability centre curriculum. For Indian policy makers and other aspiring place leaders, this case can be a foundational blueprint for other HEI and organisation operating throughout India. There is even the possibility to explore partnership working on such initiatives. Leveraging the capital and positive role these anchor institutions have on a place, needs to be evolved into policy for more sustainable development that is economic, societal and environmentally positive. Finally, the paper brings together literature on place leaders, anchor institutions and universities in regional development.