

A university of the city: shifting classrooms, emerging solutions, deepening change

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Ours can be a University in the city, without being a University of the city.

In their work, *The University and the City*, Goddard and Vallance¹ explore the extent to which the university is *in* the city, or part of the life *of* the city in a way that actively contributes to city-making. They then explore the different forms that a relationship between the university and the city could take. They argue for much stronger connections between policy, practice, and theory, if the potential of the university as an urban institution is to be optimised.

The university has to discern its vocation contextually. The world has changed and became more complex. Over the past three decades, South Africa has experienced immense transitions. And yet the more that things change, the more they seem to stay the same. Our own society is still marked by deep socio-spatial and economic inequalities, with historic wounds that threaten to tear our country and our cities apart, whilst the quality of service delivery in the cities declines.

It is in changing, complex, wounded, and unequal contexts like ours, that we have to imagine the future of the university. We² dream of an institution³ that opted in 2021 to make a number of deliberate shifts in responding to social change:

- from being in the city, to learning how to become a university *of* the city
- from 'the death of the classroom' to the 'city as classroom'
- from being 'experts' to being listeners and collaborators, and
- from rhetoric about transformation, to city-making engagement that

1 Goddard, J. & Vallance, P. 2013. *The University and the City*, London & New York, Routledge, <https://www.routledge.com/The-University-and-the-City/Goddard-Vallance/p/book/9781138798533>

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3 We drafted this opinion piece to contribute to reimagining the future of the University of Pretoria.

produces concrete and measurable change.

In so doing, we are mindful of the sheer precariousness of the city's most vulnerable populations and communities, who remain perpetually 'outside the gate of the city'.

In reimagining our university, we should strongly consider prioritising such communities as key interlocutors for how we choose to reshape and recommit ourselves, and then, in the classrooms of the city, consider how best to bring to bear our institutional gravitas, networks, resources, and knowledges, in order to effect fundamental change, transforming vulnerability into resilience, making the city functional, and serving the common good of all the people of the city.

Critical disruptions that changed the world: engaging complexity creatively

Specific disruptions have changed the world over the past decades. We consider just three.

24 Traditionally, the role of governments and bureaucracies was to negotiate and distribute resources to people and communities through public service systems. The efficacy of these systems has eroded significantly, as was evident in the most recent public audits of South African municipalities. There are no signs of change in the immediate future. This manifests in intractable deterioration of functional cities and towns. Civil society, of which the university is a major institutional resource, will have to take co-responsibility for the effective, just, and equitable negotiation, management, and distribution of resources and services to people and communities.

In the context of fluid and complex African cities, there have already been marked shifts in terms of understanding (urban) governance⁴. Instead of an emphasis on top-down governmentality by those in political power, there is increasing appreciation for the necessity of governance that is broad-based, participative, and inclusive, allowing for civil society – and ordinary urban dwellers – to take a much more active role in the creation and management of urban futures.

4 Smit, W., 2015. 'Urban governance in Africa: An overview.' In Amman, C. & Förster, T. (eds), *African Cities and the Development Conundrum*. Leiden & Boston, Brill Nijhof, pp. 55-77.

A second disruption of the world as we know it involves the multiple ways in which the fourth industrial revolution is virtualising the world. One of the results is the democratisation of knowledge and information. The university and its 'experts' no longer have a monopoly on knowledge, nor are they alone privy to the best information resources, which can then be shared with students in academic classrooms. Both the creation and consumption of knowledge have changed. In addition, the insights of de-colonial thinking subvert the idea of one-way knowledge transfer from the north to the south, from the privileged to the poor, or from the 'experts' to the masses. Geographies of reason have shifted, and the experiential knowledges and insights of communities and practitioners are recognised and validated alongside academic knowledge.

A third disruption occurs through pandemics. Covid-19 clearly demonstrated the interconnectedness of everything, and how the dominant ways of humans interacting with each other and with nature, have rendered us vulnerable. Imagining 'normalcy' once Covid-19 is 'over' is a fallacy. The next pandemic is looming and the devastating effects of climate change are real. Ethnic and interreligious strife and violence are not diminishing, and mechanisms for sustainable peace seem to be perpetually precarious.

25

We need to find new ways to interact with each other, with the worlds around us and with nature; we need new knowledge to live and new ways of finding and sharing such knowledge. If our desire to know does not arise from love, but from a need to control others, and control the earth, it is violent⁵. Such knowledge needs to be countered by a knowledge expressed in love for others, the world, and the planet.

Today we are much more aware of complexity in the world. The disruptions that change the world, and the complex challenges resulting from such change, require complex solutions and practitioners who can engage with complexity creatively. In complex situations, new knowledge and solutions can emerge from the ways in which people retrieve information, and wisdom from the contexts in which they find themselves. New knowledge and solutions for real-life problems are not necessarily found in the academic classroom, but rather in the city and its communities. Students need to develop competencies preparing them for living well in the face of complexity, and such competencies are best nurtured

5 cf. Parker Palmer. 1993. *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco, Harper San Francisco; p. 25.

through being immersed in real-life situations. Lecturers and researchers need to be similarly immersed, both to listen and drink from the wells of knowledge and wisdom present in local communities, but also to accompany students as their preconceived ideas are disrupted in the classrooms of life.

It is in response to these critical changes in our world – the disruptions and complexities – that we reimagine the university, making a number of deliberate shifts.

The city as a classroom

Universities are disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic with the ‘death of the classroom’. Cities are disrupted by financial constraints, lack of capacity, and corruption.

26 In the middle of the pandemic, the classroom has been superseded by web-based learning. This has a place, but can clearly not replace the classroom as the place of learning and sharing. This is where we propose the city and its functional structures become the ‘classroom’, meaning that it holds together the core of learning. Learning while participating in the city’s functioning becomes a core activity and not a form of ‘outreach’ (or ‘community engagement’).

This creates an opportunity for a major reset: the city becomes a classroom and studio for the university, and the university becomes an active implementation partner for, and with, the city.

This reset will be made possible and fast-tracked by implementing solutions in selected communities in the city, in partnerships between local government, universities, and communities. This should include non-government organisations (NGOs), religious communities, and private partners.

Leadership will be crucial to provide the vision and framework for such collaborative city-making processes. Leaders in the academy, civil society, and government should create new, innovative, and truly trans-disciplinary spaces to find solutions for real-life problems⁶.

Innovative collaborations could assist to mobilise resources from a broader base, through demonstrating with clear and measurable examples, how systems, communities, and lives are being transformed.

6 cf. Klein, J.T., et al. (eds). 2001. *Transdisciplinarity: Joint Problem Solving Among Science, Technology and Society. An Effective Way for Managing Complexity*, Basel, Birkhäuser Verlag.

Twenty-first century African cities require collaborative leadership, able to transcend bureaucratic and technocratic impossibilities – grounded in a solid value-base, aimed at solution-driven urban responses, and characterised by a visionary, entrepreneurial, and justice-seeking ethos. In the City of Tshwane, our university is an ideal institution to broker and facilitate such collaborative approaches.

This could be an extension of some proven successes. One is the partnership between the Gauteng Department of Health and the University of Pretoria. This partnership is the key factor in the excellent performance of the Steve Biko Academic Hospital, Tshwane District Hospital, Kalafong Hospital, and the Pretoria West Hospital during Covid-19.

Similarly, a new approach to street homelessness and substance use, which saw local government, various civil society organisations, and departments at the University of Pretoria collaborate during Covid-19, not only reduced the risk for more than 1 800 homeless people during this time, but also contributed to innovative and solution-based homeless interventions, operationalising the City's policy, and informing policy at both provincial and national levels of government.

None of the above would have been possible had different sectors stayed within their silos.

Diane Peters⁷ reflects on a number of universities in Canada that have a deliberate self-understanding as *urban* universities, deeply connected to the cities in which they find themselves. The city becomes their classroom and urban neighbourhoods become live studios in which theory and practice are in constant dialogue with one another. Peters writes, 'And by transforming the cities around them, universities are transforming themselves'⁸. And they are doing so through hybrid spaces of learning in which university and city becomes intertwined:

Indeed, as city-building projects get more sophisticated and universities grow creatively into their surrounding neighbourhoods, the lines blur. No one knows where a campus begins and ends⁹.

Ryerson University's Cherise Burda says that their university is 'of the city':

7 Peters, D. 2017. 'Universities are helping to shape city development.' *University Affairs / Affaires Universitaires*, 4 October 2017, <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/universities-playing-big-role-development-cities/>

8 Idem.

9 Idem.

‘It’s not just a little fortress; it’s integrated into the city’¹⁰. The city became their classroom.

A listening university

As an expression of epistemic justice, such a reset is not merely about the university offering its staff, students, resources, and knowledge *to* the city, as if we know all the answers; it is also, and firstly, about the university, its staff and its students, listening well and humbly, to *the city*, drawing on the deep wells of knowledge and experience residing *in* the city – with a specifically attentive ear to listen to those communities and people who are so often shunned, rendered invisible, or made out to be illegitimate.

In reflecting on the approach of the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, Edgar Pieterse¹¹ speaks of how ‘an experimental research institute grew into a leading intellectual voice in global urbanism’. But this growth was preceded by a deliberate shift from being ‘experts’ to becoming listeners:

28 ... as researchers, academics, and students, we stepped outside traditional roles towards a deliberative context where we were not the experts. In short, we had to learn how to ask better questions.

The African Centre for Cities became a global leader, not through ticking boxes to assess whether it had done well in terms of internationalising or Africanising its scholarship – it was through their deep immersions into local urban contexts. Some 80-90% of South Africa’s waste removal and recycling is undertaken by informal waste pickers. Annually, they save municipalities between R300 million and R750 million in landfill costs¹². They are the heroes of our streets, carrying the seeds of a global best practice for waste management, yet are hardly recognised, and often vilified. In their classroom, thinking about sustainable economies is forever altered.

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Pieterse, E. n.d. ‘How we put African urbanism on the map’, *Times Higher Education*, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/cn/hub/university-cape-town/p/how-we-put-african-urbanism-map>

¹² Godfrey, L., Strydom, W. & Phukubye, R. 2016. *Integrating the Informal Sector into the South African Waste and Recycling Economy in the Context of Extended Producer Responsibility. Key Findings*. Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council.

The sophistication of entrepreneurial networks created by transnational migrants in South African inner cities is an indigenous knowledge infrastructure not facilitated by academic textbooks, but which results from extreme forms of hardship and precariousness. The classrooms of the streets and transnational migration birthing socio-economic-spiritual networks, the university needs to lean into, listen to, and learn from.

Countless examples of innovative social entrepreneurs, creating solutions for impossible urban problems, bypass the knowledge systems of the university to create ground-breaking new urban patterns. We neglect retrieving from their classrooms at our own peril.

Careful listening to communities, urban social movements, religious leaders, urban policymakers, and urban developers would help create clear research agendas that are connected directly to life-and-death urban issues.

Prioritising urban vulnerability: a key shift

Nelson Mandela¹³ wrote, 'A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones'. As a critical institution in shaping citizenry for a healthy society, this measure should also be applied to the university.

29

As a key public institution tasked to shape future citizens and neighbours, prioritising the city's most vulnerable populations not just theoretically or rhetorically, but in embodied and concrete ways through a scholarship of citizenship, would be a bold demonstration of care, but also a key investment in a sustainable, well-functioning, and healthy society.

A few years ago, the great German political theologian Jurgen Moltmann received an honorary doctorate from our University. Moltmann¹⁴ wrote: 'Society is always as strong as its weakest links. So to respect and strengthen these weak links means to strengthen the whole society.' Without a deliberate emphasis on transforming vulnerability into resilience, we place our entire city at risk, and render it vulnerable in terms of our collective future well-being.

Someone once said, 'If the city does not care for its poor, the poor will not care for its city'. We have seen this starkly as a South African nation during the lootings, violence, and killings of July 2021.

¹³ Mandela, N.R. 1994. *Long Walk to Freedom*, New York, Back Bay Books.

¹⁴ Moltmann, J. 1981. *Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, London, SCM Press.

Our vocation should not only be found in the transfer of rational knowledge, but also, and critically, in how we foster character, consciousness, integrity, community, justice, and care.

These are ethical traits or virtues, which feminist practical theologian Elaine Graham¹⁵ suggests are best fostered, not through conversations about ethics or care, but through learning to practise these virtues together.

In Graham's mind, fostering knowledge about care, justice, or collaboration has to be embodied in caring, just, and collaborative actions. It is in so doing that such knowledge is anchored and written into the soul of the university. Embracing vulnerable urban spaces as classrooms provides an opportunity to foster ethical virtues in conjunction with theoretical knowledges, through collaborative actions.

30 In making a shift to prioritise urban vulnerability – the most vulnerable populations and communities in the City of Tshwane – it becomes possible for the University to contribute even more tangibly to urban change, not through aloof academic work, however sophisticated and relevant it might be, but through embodied pedagogies and evidence-based research, aimed at strengthening the city's weakest links and most vulnerable spaces, until these too are able to function as self-reliant, proud, and included parts of the urban body.

The city as contested space: rethinking scholarship, practising just citizenship

The city is never a neutral space, particularly not in the type of unequal society which South Africa is. Urban land, urban spaces, and urban properties are contested. Urban gentrification displaces the poor, and housing backlogs perpetuate urban fragmentation.

An example of an urban research agenda that is acutely aware of urban contestation is the Urban Studio in the University's Centre for Faith and Community. The Urban Studio is journeying with six urban sites, through fostering long-term relationships, doing engaged research connected to local challenges, supporting the aspirations of local community activists, documenting local narratives, and supporting these communities through appropriate capacity-

¹⁵ Graham, E.L. 2017. 'On becoming a practical theologian: Past, present and future tenses', *HTS Theological Studies*, 73(4), a4634, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4634>

building interventions.

Course work of undergraduate students is tailored to engage actively with these communities, and postgraduate students from different disciplines contribute to an understanding of these communities through research, addressing issues identified by the communities.

This is transdisciplinary work in which various disciplines – theology and religion, health sciences, built environment studies, social work, geography, and occupational therapy – collaborate with practitioners and communities, acknowledging the diverse knowledge and experiences of all participants, in solutions to make long-term change possible.

Themes which emerge from these sites include long-term housing solutions for backyard shack-dwellers, informal settlement upgrading in upmarket neighbourhoods, optimising vacant public land for socially inclusive redevelopment, socially inclusive inner-city management, harm reduction approaches to substance use, and ‘housing first’ solutions for street homelessness.

The Urban Studio project has similarities to the CityLab programme in the African Centre of Cities at the University of Cape Town¹⁶. Their CityLab focuses on the co-production of knowledge – on issues such as healthy cities, urban violence, safety and governance, and sustainable human settlements – through collaboration between researchers, civil society, and government officials, in order to inform and transform urban policy and practices. It is an approach in which experimental approaches to urban research deliberate about the co-production of knowledge are fused with more traditional research approaches, combining the best of conceptual theorising, policy considerations, and solution-driven scholarship¹⁷.

These examples acknowledge the city as a classroom, in which mutually transformative processes become possible for all participants – researchers, community leaders, practitioners, and city officials.

In contested, divided, and unequal urban spaces where access to health care, secure housing, water and sanitation, education and an income cannot be taken for granted, a different kind of scholarship is required. The university’s

16 African Centre for Cities. 2021. Mistra Urban Futures: CityLab Programme, <https://www.africancentreforcities.net/programme/mistra-urban-futures/citylab/>

17 Pieterse, E. 2009. Exploratory notes on African urbanism, African Centre for Cities Seminar Paper, 6 June 2009, Cape Town, https://www.africancentreforcities.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/exploratory_notes_on_african_urbanism_06june091.pdf

corporate citizenship, as a large and resourceful public institution, needs to be reframed and remodelled into just citizenship or scholarship as citizenship for social justice. At the University of the Free State, 'community engagement' was transformed into 'engaged scholarship', fusing engaged research, engaged pedagogy, and engaged citizenship¹⁸.

Paul Farmer writes, 'In a world riven by inequity, medicine could be viewed as social justice work'¹⁹. The cost of inequalities and perpetual socio-spatial-economic exclusions, now mostly carried by the urban poor, will become increasingly unbearable for society as a whole. It means being at war with ourselves. It is simply unsustainable.

Suddenly, none of our disciplines are neutral, and all of our disciplines can be seen as social justice work. Contested urban spaces plagued by the 'urbanisation of injustice'²⁰ asks of a university and its researchers to practice engaged, just, and ethical citizenship.

Our scholarship, in a society at war with itself, has to be scrutinised and fundamentally reconsidered. We have to reconsider the nature, locale, and commitments of scholarship, the methodologies of our research and pedagogies; and the choice of interlocutors who will help us 'see' a city we often do not see.

An ethical *commons*: Measuring change through mutual accountability

In shifting from being a university in the city to being a university of the city, we can identify specific neighbourhoods, places, populations, and themes that present particular challenges for collaborative work. This could constitute an ethical 'commons' of ideas, exchange, and innovation as solutions are found for urban problems.

The reset mentioned earlier can now take effect. In relation to clearly identified areas of focus, collaborative approaches can be designed, including evidence-based research, incubating small-scale interventions, strategic resourcing, continuous evaluation, documentation, and – when successful –

18 University of the Free State. 2000-2020, 'Community engagement model transformation at the UFS', <https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/community-engagement-home/community-engagement-at-the-ufs/engaged-scholarship>

19 Farmer, P. 2004. *Pathologies of Power. Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Oakland, CA, University of California Press.

20 Merrifield, A. 1997. *The Urbanization of Injustice*. New York, New York University Press.

replication and scaling.

Whether our collaborative approaches, evidence-based research, and incubation of urban interventions really facilitate deep change²¹ needs to be measured. Too many self-serving interventions are executed in perpetuity by government, universities, and civil society, without necessarily breaking cycles of poverty, transforming socio-spatial patterns, or reviving ethical forms of governance in all spheres of society.

Measurement is about accountability, mutual respect; strive towards excellence in what we do together, as well as authentic resolve to make change. Without mutual accountability, based on some form of social contract, deep and sustainable change will remain elusive. Such accountability should take various forms.

The university has to be accountable to the city and its citizens. Do we equip students for citizenship that will help build flourishing African cities, starting in Tshwane? Are our pedagogies and research approaches contributing to urban change-making? Do we steward our resources of people, facilities, intellectual property, and programmes well, in the interest of a flourishing city for all its inhabitants? Considering the ethics of our research, it has to also ask how much it contributes in tangible and measurable ways to actual urban change.

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Chatterton, Hodkinson, and Pickerill define the goal of research not as 'the interpretation of the world, but the organization of transformation'²². Our research and the university's vocation have to be fleshed out in relation to how it effects individual, communal, institutional, and systemic change and wholeness.

Local government has to be accountable to the inhabitants and institutions of the city. Our critical scholarship as a university of the city should take different forms. It should include the university leadership engaging the city's leadership critically-constructively; recommendations made in research reports; consciousness-raising through academic and popular writings; critical urban consciousness being fostered pedagogically; working in solidarity with local communities to counter unjust and exclusionary urban patterns; investing human and

21 'Deep change' here refers to change that is personal, communal, institutional and systemic; irreversible and sustainable; radical in how it addresses the roots of a challenge; and resulting in high levels of individual and societal freedom and well-being.

22 Chatterton, P., Hodkinson, S. & Pickerill, J. 2010. 'Beyond scholar activism: Making strategic interventions inside and outside the neoliberal university', *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 7/1/2010, 9(2), p.61.

intellectual resources in addressing specific urban challenges; technical and disciplinary contributions to urban policy formation; and our volunteering in civic organisations to work for the good of the city.

Practising just citizenship would require, at times, that the university not be silent in the face of grave urban injustices, but choosing instead to be a voice of reason, conscience, and memory, offering an imaginary of a good, inclusive, and just city. If the university is to contribute to the collective freedom of our city, and nation, then the assertion of Bali²³ is important:

the end goal of critical thinking is to challenge the status quo in order to achieve social justice, collectively raising consciousness of conditions promoting oppression in order to achieve liberation.

A very practical mechanism could be the development of indicators for measuring good urban governance²⁴, creating regular public platforms for assessment, public debate, and critical dialogue; involving diverse urban citizens and stakeholders concerned with the good of the city.

34 *Civil society and community leaders have an equal responsibility to be accountable for the ways in which they foster and practise good citizenship.* In various urban classrooms we will discover inspiring examples of agency being practised and innovations being fostered in relation to grave urban challenges. At the same time, the university could support local communities and institutions to design and implement simple but effective systems of accountability, driven by ethical leaders. This could be backed up through popular education and evidence-based research.

A concrete example where scholarship is practiced as just citizenship – in an evidence-based manner that measures change through mutual accountability – is the work of the UP COPC Research Unit. This Unit is leading the establishment of the UP SAPRIN INSPIRE site in Atteridgeville and in Melusi, a fast-growing informal settlement in Pretoria West.

23 Bali, M. 2013. 'Critical citizenship for critical times', *Al-Fanar Media*, 19 August 2013, <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2013/08/critical-citizenship-for-critical-times/>

24 Stewart, K. 2006. 'Designing good urban governance indicators: the importance of citizen participation and its evaluation in Greater Vancouver', *Cities*, 23(3): pp.196-204, DOI: 10.1016/j.cities.2006.03.003

SASPRIN, financially supported by the Department of Science and Technology, creates a research platform where key demographic and health indicators are monitored over a period of 20 years and longer, and hosts a wide range of research. The network conducts studies and compares data in diverse communities. It creates a dataset that monitors the health and well-being of people over time, in order to gather new information on the situation of poorer South Africans. All data sourced by SASPRIN is validated and provides sound evidence to inform the strategies of the Departments of Health, Social Development, Home Affairs, Basic Education, and others.

SASPRIN has three rural sites and has now added urban sites in Gauteng and Cape Town. In Gauteng, comparative data assessment will be done between an inner-city site, an established township site, and a fast growing and formalising informal settlement (Hillbrow, Atteridgeville, and Melusi).

This offers the university community a concrete opportunity for significant community-based trans-disciplinary research that contributes to evidence-based change. This was the first successful research proposal of The Gauteng Research Triangle (GTR), an initiative taken by the three vice-chancellors of UP, Wits, and UJ.

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A university *of* the city ...

Becoming a university *of* the city, and, even more, embracing the *city as university*, requires not only a moral and intellectual commitment on paper, but comprehensive stock-taking of every element of the institution, in order to re-shape what it needs to become. We dream of *five deliberate shifts*, and recommend a number of *strategic interventions*.

We started off this essay by articulating a dream of a university that shifts from being in the city, to becoming a university of the city; embracing the city as a classroom; becoming listeners instead of 'experts'; replacing transformation rhetoric with engaged city-making processes, producing concrete, measurable, change; and finally, prioritising urban vulnerability as a key interlocutor for reimagining ourselves.

In becoming a university of the city that embraces the city as a university, the following key interventions should be considered:

- Identifying and rallying behind academics and students currently trail-blazing innovative responses to urban challenges, through finding ways to broadcast, resource, replicate, and share their lessons learnt.
- Identifying specific urban themes and neighbourhoods in the City of Tshwane – in conjunction with local government and communities – for engaged scholarship and citizenship.
- Supporting trans-disciplinary action through removing institutional obstacles that perpetuate narrow disciplinary confinement.
- Encouraging and incentivising urban innovation, investing the University's own resources and brokering further resources, particularly focused on some of the neighbourhoods and themes presenting the greatest challenges in the City of Tshwane.
- Rethinking *community engagement* as scholarship committed to engaged, just, and ethical citizenship.
- Re-assessing how the University's land and properties are utilised – and optimised – in service of the city. The 'death of the classroom' opens up opportunities for our various campuses to serve as incubators for social enterprises; clusters for creative industries; night schools and vocational academies; and catalysts for local transformational change.
- Optimising access to education for people in under-resourced communities where the University has a footprint, but access remains elusive. Creative mechanisms should be found, such as the proposed Pre-University Academy, or a University of the Streets, serving the city's 6 000 homeless persons.
- Supporting the introduction of appropriate research chairs committed to the idea of a *university of the city*, or the *city as university*.
- Considering the creation of a strong collaborative mechanism (an urban cluster/urban consortium/urban institute) with other institutions of higher education and research in the City of Tshwane, serving the vision of a good, inclusive, and just city, through engaged scholarship. Although we are in the nation's administrative capital, the City of Tshwane – unlike Johannesburg or Cape Town – lacks such a vehicle for collaborative urban scholarship.

Dying to the old ... ushering in the new

In daring to reimagine the university, how free are we 'to imagine and articulate a real newness in our situation'?²⁵

Such newness might require dying to some old habits and ideas of the university. Instead of only importing ideas from elsewhere, it is in the vulnerability and contestations of *our city* – as classroom – that we might discover our vocation anew, as a transforming African university *of* its city. We will be transformed as we contribute concretely to the socio-economic transformation of the city that holds us.

Morrison²⁶ writes, against the backdrop of the 'death of the university',

The hidebound, authoritarian, hierarchical, self-reverential university is dying. But progressive educators and innovative reformers can still revivify the institution, using rapidly maturing information technologies and building upon the timeless values of scholarship, collegiality, open dialogue, and intellectual integrity to create a post-industrial university that will be capable of reaching both new heights of academic excellence and new breadths of community access and social utility. And that would be a death-bed conversion worth cheering.

37

In reimagining our collective future, the voices of the city, the voices of the vulnerable, and the voices of the diverse community at the university need to be listened to carefully – to discern what we need to die for; and what we need to embrace. Such an embrace should be aligned to the contextual realities, cries, and demands of the city that hosts us hospitably.

In the classrooms of the city we might find fresh clues for our future.

25 Brueggemann, W. 1978. *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, p. 44.

26 Morrison, J.L. 2002. 'The university is dead! Long live the university!' Discussion paper, 24 September 2002, <http://horizon.unc.edu/projects/seminars/futurizing/The%20University%20is%20Dead.asp>