Anchored in Place
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Preface

To determine the origins of a long-term project requires a mix of conjecture, selective memory and connecting dots while knowing that some dots are missing. From CHET’s perspective, the interest in universities and cities was part of its concern that the Nelson Mandela-appointed National Commission on Higher Education (1996) had paid lip service to the issue of development while focusing on redress (equity) and governance (democratisation). Prof. Martin Carnoy, a participant in the network of international scholars who participated in the NCHE deliberations, informed us that if we wanted to understand the relationship between globalisation, higher education and development we should engage with Prof. Manuel Castells who had just published his ‘trilogy’: The Role of the Network Society (1996), the Power of Identity (1997) and End of Millennium (1998). CHET’s engagement with Castells from 2001 onwards on the issue of higher education and development is documented in Castells in Africa: Universities and development.

The exchanges between CHET and Castells shone light on many aspects of universities and development, but one aspect that Castells drew our attention to was the regeneration of cities and the role that knowledge institutions played in their regeneration. The discussions with Castells led CHET to one of the leading scholars in this new field of study, David Perry, professor and director of the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois in Chicago. In September 2003 Prof. Perry was the keynote speaker at seminars hosted by CHET in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

The title of the Cape Town seminar was ‘Terms of Engagement: Renewing the Role of the University as an Urban Institution’ while the Port Elizabeth seminar was called ‘The University and the City: Towards an Engaged University for the Nelson Mandela Metropole’.
The visits of both Castells and Perry were funded by the Ford Foundation, who had been funding city–university engagement in the US. At that time, however, neither the universities nor the Ford Foundation expressed interest in developing a further project in this area.

Indirectly, as is so often the case with intellectual trajectories, the policy proposals for the mergers made by the National Working Group of the Department of Education and CHET, in collaboration with the Eastern Cape Higher Education Association, included merger models based on closer collaboration between universities and cities. The proposals of the Working Group suggested a Comprehensive Higher Education System for Buffalo City (East London) and a Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Higher Education System. Government accepted and implemented the latter (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) but decided on a more traditional university model that would preserve and strengthen the heritage of the University of Fort Hare.

In 2012, the Council of Fort Hare University invited CHET to deliver a presentation on higher education in South Africa and the role of Fort Hare in the national system. While the presentation was more about the big picture of the South African higher education system, the meeting ended with a discussion about Fort Hare’s dual campuses in Alice and East London. It was at this meeting that two of the editors of this book first met.

This book is a product of the City-Campus-Region project funded by the Ford Foundation at the University of Fort Hare. The project was initiated and envisaged as part of the centenary celebrations of the university in 2016 and the need for the university to reflect on its past, while considering appropriate strategies for growth and development for the future. Following the incorporation of Rhodes University’s East London campus into the University of Fort Hare in 2004, the role and function of the new campus within the university became an issue of considerable internal debate. The City-Campus-Region project chose to focus specifically on the role and function of the urban campus within the context of the development of the city and the region. Work on the relationship between town and gown was also undertaken around the historic Alice campus of Fort Hare in the Nkonkobe Municipality. The project was led by Prof. Leslie Bank, then Director of the Fort Hare Institute for Social and Economic Research (FHISER). The research and learning activities of the project were integrated into the African Studies Masters programme at the university in 2015/2016. Some
of the African Studies masters students based at FHISER, including Sipho Sibanda, Zaza Fazzie, Siphamandla Rumsha, Bonginkosi Masiwa and Khaya Mabuto, helped with literature searches and survey work on the project. Dr Francis Sibanda, who served as a project manager, has since completed his PhD with the support of the Ford project, while Nkosazana Ncgongolo helped with project administration. Dean Peters at the Buffalo City municipality produced the graphs and charts for the project.

In September 2016, a conference was organised at the Human Sciences Research Council in Cape Town to share the findings of the project with a wider group of scholars and practitioners from other urban universities in South Africa. The event was co-hosted with CHET, which served as a project partner on the project, focusing specifically on the role of universities as knowledge producers. The collection of essays in this book emerged out of that conference and dialogue.

The book includes essays on the Fort Hare Alice and East London campuses, as well as comparative reflections on the city-campus dynamics at several other South African universities. The chapters in the book are written by a combination of academics and administrators. The keynote address at the conference was delivered by Prof. David Perry from the Great Cities Institute at the University of Chicago Illinois and formed the basis of his essay in the book.

Since the completion of this project, a conversation has emerged with the Buffalo City Metropolitan Development Agency concerning the development of strategies for the city to become more directly involved in restructuring the relationship between the universities and the city. The new interest is also associated with the announcement in July 2018 of a ZAR 7 billion investment by Mercedes Benz in the restructuring of its East London plant for accelerated auto-motor production in the city for global markets over the next decade. The Mercedes Benz investment presents a new platform of urban growth and development in the city, which if supplemented with the reconfiguration of the relationship between the university and the city, could provide a firm footing for wider urban regeneration and inclusive growth in Buffalo City-East London.

One of the key questions for the future will concern the capacity of the two main historically black universities in the city to reassess their own roles and historical commitments to forms of anti-urbanism. The growth and development of Fort Hare University, in particular, has been predicated on the cultivation of an African elite within a gated
rural campus, where concerns of character-building, old-fashioned African nationalism and close-knit, class-based networking have been prioritised over urban engagement. The culture and orientation of Fort Hare and Walter Sisulu Universities, as well as their capacity to contribute to city- and region-building, with the support of the state, the city and the province, will remain critical questions for the future.