Can Universities of Technology in South Africa Achieve Transformation by Promoting a Culture of Social Responsibility Among Academic and Student Agents?

Elisha Didam Markus[1] · **Nereshnee Govender**[2]

Abstract

University social responsibility is an intrinsic discourse in South Africa. Universities grapple with their identities relating to learning, teaching, research and community engagement. This paper explores how the drive for transformation particularly at universities of technology has promoted a culture of social responsibility among student and staff agents. Two universities were considered in the analysis of existing norms and understanding how institutions integrate the culture of social responsibility while adhering to mandates of creating knowledge societies. This study provides recommendations that could be endorsed as policy to develop innovative developmental strategies and enact new social responsibility partnerships within university spaces.

Keywords Social responsibility · Community engagement · Agential forces · Enabling practices · Social realism

Introduction

Universities are involved more centrally than ever before in the development of responsible citizens and society at large. Considering that the university is an important pillar of society, higher education institutions (HEIs) play a fundamental role in creating and sustaining knowledge societies. Current global conditions call for universities to prepare students not only for the job market, but also to become

✉ Elisha Didam Markus
  emarkus@cut.ac.za

  Nereshnee Govender
  NereshneeG@dut.ac.za

1   Central University of Technology, Private Bag X20539, 9300 Bloemfontein, South Africa

2   Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa

responsible citizens with value systems that will enable them to participate and contribute to local and global development. Social responsibility has become an increasingly important concept in many organisations globally and we propose that higher education generally, and specifically in the South African context, has a critical role to play in inculcating this 'social responsibility' in academic and student agents. University social responsibility (USR) is about the need to encourage student and academic agents to actively participate in USR initiatives and to be responsive to the needs of broader society. USR is also about strengthening active community engagement, inculcating the culture of volunteerism and developing a sense of harmonious civil citizenship. Community engagement is "more than a structural manifestation, essentially it is a philosophical belief that can help evolve, shape, and progress higher education…in the transformation for both the societies and communities" (Bernardo et al., 2011: 5). Significant questions that need to be considered are: What does social responsibility mean and how do universities 'educate' academic and student agents to be socially responsible in a democratic South Africa?

While the different forms of community engagement are expressed in the Higher Education Quality Control (HEQC) national founding documents (HEQC 2004a, b), exactly how universities are expected to promote social responsibility amongst staff and student agents is left to the discretion of individual institutions. This is a challenging feat, as Markus (2021) and Cetindamar and Hopkins (2008) argue that many academics have not sufficiently engaged on issues of social and global responsibility in their own educational learning and experiences. The purpose of this study is to explore how far two universities of technology (UoTs) in South Africa have been able to integrate the culture of social responsibility, while adhering to their mandate as well as contributing to creating knowledge societies. The study focusses on gaining an understanding on how transformation of learning could be achieved by developing innovative developmental strategies and enacting new USR partnerships. It is anticipated that the research will contribute to developing civic-minded graduates who leave university to become agents of positive social change in broader society. Another important aim of the study is to be able to create an awareness among academics on the need for social responsibility and how they can use their agential powers to build knowledgeable societies that are all inclusive. Academics need to change their mindset from just inculcating knowledge to ensure this knowledge is transformative and sustainable.

This paper's key focus areas are, University as a site for transformation; transformation and USR based on the Social Realism framework (Archer, 1995, 1996, 2000); and enabling/constraining forces for USR (critique of university documents (CUT & DUT). The researchers engaged in a review of institutional documents to ascertain commitment to USR. In addition, open ended and closed ended questionnaires were administered to academic and student agents (CUT and DUT staff and students). The administering of questionnaires enabled an understanding of the views of academic and student agents in the two UoTs with regard to USR. Questions posed included: What existing norms do you know exist within your university that encourages social responsibility; Provide one innovative developmental strategy that you have used to promote social responsibility among students or staff.

The key research question was: What can universities especially UoTs do to achieve transformation; and how can universities especially UoTs drive a culture of social responsibility among academics and students? This research aimed to propose more enabling practices that encourage social responsibility in universities. The three main objectives were firstly to critique the existing norms within UoT institutions with a view to proposing enabling practices that encourage social responsibility; secondly, to get the perceptions of students and staff in UoTs on USR; and lastly to provide recommendations that could be enacted as policy to improve social responsibility in universities.
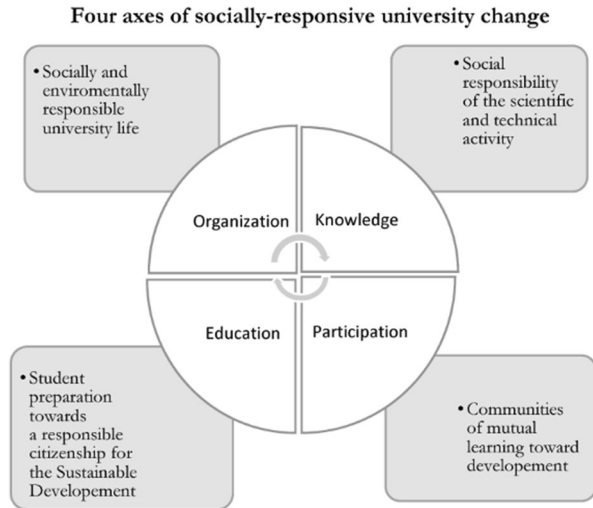
Literature Review

Universities as Sites for Transformation

A major goal of the transformation of universities in South Africa is to develop civic-minded graduates who leave university to become agents of positive social change in the communities in which they live and work. Universities strive to produce education for public good, not just for private benefit of the individual. Therefore, transformation requires that graduates from HEIs are able to think and act for themselves within their communities of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998; Northedge, 2003a, b; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). A transformed education sector also seeks to develop students that are able to critically engage with challenges of social and economic injustices that plagues the country, continent and world.

South African universities and other universities globally have been affected by many contestations that have affected the way they see their graduates. Some of the issues are brought about by the culture of neoliberalism (university for private good). There have also been tensions between private and public interests. More so, power imbalances exist between universities and the communities they espouse to serve. Since universities are a habitat for globalization and internationalization, these could affect the way students think and behave in society. Most students find it difficult to relate their taught curriculum to their lived experiences. As a result, in South Africa, students have recently been calling for a decolonial turn in the curriculum (Mbembe, 2016; Heleta, 2016; Zembylas, 2018). Furthermore, incentivising of research in universities means that academics only need to focus on outputs versus engaged research for public good. These challenges and more have hampered the quality of graduates in society.

According to Reiser 2008 (quoted by Gołaszewska-Kaczan et al., 2017) universities that enact social responsibility practices can affect change on four different axes: education, organisation, knowledge and participation. Reiser (2008) identifies USR as a policy that combines the elements of quality and ethics into the core of the performance of HEIs and key users particularly academic staff, students, support and administrative staff through instituting an avenue of communication with society, aimed at the integration of societal issues and sustainability of the human factor development. The four axes of socially responsive university change as outlined by Reiser (2008) in Fig. 1 portrays universities as a place where social ideas

Four axes of socially-responsive university change

are promoted and where an interactive dialogue with society fosters sustainable human development. *The education axis* foregrounds the preparation of students for citizenship. Universities have a central role in preparing students for accountable citizenship through the development of knowledge and shaping of attitudes. This is evident in for example the DUT's 2030 statement of intent or mission that highlights that "by 2030, Our people will be creative, innovative, entrepreneurial and adaptive to changes in the world; Our people will participate productively in the development of our region, country and the world; Our state-of-the-art infrastructure and systems will enhance an ecosystem created to achieve this vision" (DUT 2022a, b: 1). Similarly, CUT espouses a strong value for innovation in education as it states in its vision 2030 statement "Shaping the future through innovation" which speaks to CUT's aspiration to be an active force for change by finding new and innovative local solutions to problems in the country and continent.

The organisation axis emphasises the importance of universities enacting socially and environmentally responsible practices. University students are searching for a sense of being, meaning and social identity and universities are perfectly positioned to contribute to their growth and development and understanding of what it means to be a socially responsible citizen. Universities need to lead by example as adhering to responsible organizational practices will influence university students whose personal and social identities are being formed and developed.

The knowledge axis refers to the construction of a responsible society anchored in ethical values of technical and scientific activities. This axis underlines the value of universities being able to integrate the culture of social responsibility while adhering to their mandate as well as contributing to creating knowledge societies. Cognition on its own is not beneficial if not properly managed. Universities need to create an enabling environment where these knowledges can be properly harnessed and beneficial to society.

The Participation Axis highlights the role of universities in participating in communities of mutual learning towards development. Academic agents have a key role in shaping the minds of the student population. Some of the ways in which this can be done is to encourage participation in communities that have mutual goals and aspirations. Participation is key to unleashing the potential of communities and leveraging on knowledge spaces of universities.

The education axis refers to the holistic student experience at universities. Education should be lifelong and sustainable. A strong university culture that promotes sustainability is important for transformation. For students to become responsible citizens, universities need to approach education from a sustainable standpoint and see learning for public good.

Transformation and University Social Responsibility Based on the Social Realism Framework

The notion of an "engaged" university has started to receive considerable attention in literature over the past two decades. According to Margaret Archer's Social Realism framework, the drive for transformation could promote the culture of social responsibility among staff and students (Archer, 1995, 1996, 2000). Archer's (1995, 1996, 2000) social realism framework refers to the nature of social contexts such as universities and is underpinned by Roy Bhaskar's notion of critical realism. Bhaskar explains that society consists of people and social relations: "the relations into which people enter pre-exist the individuals who enter them, and whose activity reproduces or transforms them" (1979: 4). The university is a social context and operates in certain ways. Furthermore, universities comprise of structures including faculties, departments, various lecturers, administrative staff and students. As a new staff member or student that enters university one can either continue with the ways things are at the institution or one can enter into a system or set of social relations that operates a particular way. An individual's activity can contribute to transform the university. This shift or transformation is possible if one has the necessary properties and powers.

Archer's Social Realist framework offers a window to understand "what occurs in society that can influence social change (morphogenesis) or, through identification or reproduction, can maintain the status quo (morphostasis)" (Vorster, 2010: 18). Social reality is stratified and it consists of different layers. Archer highlights two categories namely, the parts and the people. The parts that make up society consist of structures and culture and then the people (agency). Therefore, the parts pre-exist the people, and people can play a role in reproducing what is already there or transforming the parts.

Structure and culture are two important aspects of social life and can be analysed using the same framework but should not be conflated into one category, but looked at separately to examine the interplay between them. If one looks at the university as a structure it is important to understand that it has its own pre-existing values, systems, cultures as indicated in Fig. 2, however transforming these 'parts' can contribute to improving student success and development. Archer argues against the
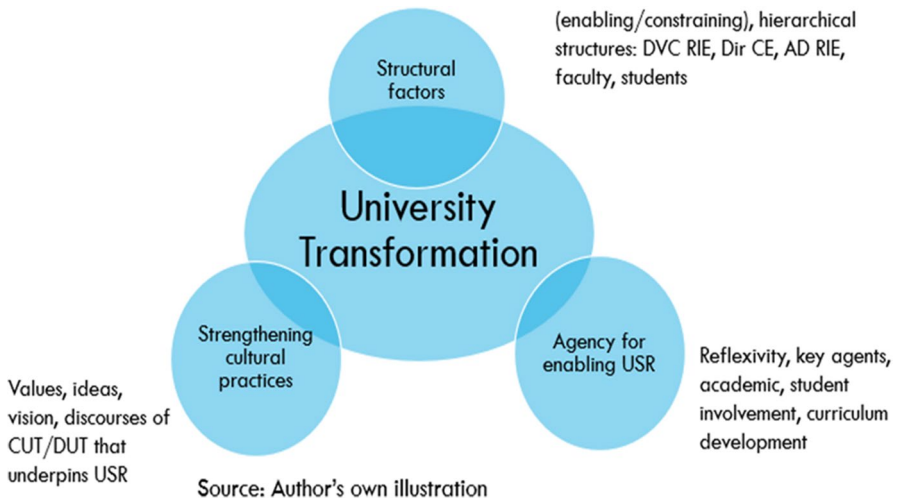
Fig. 2 Transformation and USR based on Social realism framework

"fallacy of conflation" where she expresses the importance of not conflating culture and agency, and structure and agency. The structure is not the same as the person appointed into the role. Each person has his/her own powers and properties, ideas and sets of knowledges and beliefs about how to exercise that role. The role is not the same as the incumbent of the role and ideas are not necessarily the same as the people who hold them. Archer maintains that instead of conflating people and the structures they are in and the ideas they hold, she advocates for 'analytical dualism' as a method of social realism. Analytical dualism enables an examination of the interplay between structure and culture 'the parts' and agency 'the people'.

According to social realists, 'structure' and 'agency' are distinct and irreducible parts of stratified social reality, each with their own properties and powers. There is also an interplay between structure and agency which is responsible for social transformation and social reproduction (Archer, 1996: 2). Agency is the personal and psychological make-up of people and their social roles. Agency refers to acting reflexively and to understand what it is that shapes how one acts in a particular context. Archer was able to create a nexus in the interaction between these two powerful entities. She opined that a correct relationship or conceptualisation between the two could result in social transformation, what she calls "morphogenesis". In the real world, structure alone does not influence agents, but agents also exert their powers on structures, allowing them to deliberate about which projects would realise their personal (and corporate) concerns within society, and to act strategically in order to promote these concerns. This foregrounds the importance of academic and student agents in universities to act within their structures to promote social responsibility that could result in transformation.

Even though culture, structure and agency exist together all the time in social contexts such as the university, Archer suggests that for analytical purposes it should be separated to fully examine, unpack and understand them. A structure like USR

can contribute to the development of learning and teaching in universities and influence the pre-existing cultures. Therefore, creating a shift in structure and culture will result in people changing – academics being more than teachers and researchers and students thinking beyond the classroom. Hence, culture, structure and agency have emerging personal properties to make things happen in the world.

Role of Universities and Enabling/Constraining Forces for USR

HEIs and academic life are complex and differentiated spaces particularly due to massification and managerialism in universities globally. An important question that one needs to ask is whether the permeation of neoliberalism in higher education has compromised the interconnected and collaborative space of academia. The democratic dispensation in South Africa in 1994 paved the way for an increase in participation in higher education for more black students, including epistemological access, (Morrow, 1993) changes in staffing and in university qualifications. The 1997 White Paper 3 was established to address transformation in higher education to reflect the changes in our society under the new constitutional dispensation in South Africa. One of the goals of the National Plan for Higher Education was to outline the framework for implementing and realising the policy goals of the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997). It further sought to "promote equity of access and fair chances for success, to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, simultaneously eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities" (Department for Higher Education and Training, 2013: 27). Despite this move, curricular changes that were meant to be part of the changes in the National Qualifications Framework did not take place as expected affirm that historically "little attention has been paid to the transformation of highly problematic institutional cultures". This is affirmed by the CHE report that states that integrated institutional cultures is still a concern that needs addressing (CHE, 2016). Higher education has an important role in furthering social democracy, and "a transformed higher education system would play a critical role in an emerging, non-racial, progressive democracy, in producing critical, independent citizens as well as skilled and socially-committed graduates who would be capable of contributing to social and economic development" (CHE, 2016: 22).

In 1997 the White paper on the South African Higher Education System was developed to chart a plan for the transformation of higher education. The aim was to move it from being a segregated, inequitable system to one that serves both society and individual needs. As a result, community engagement was identified as a pillar of this system alongside with teaching, learning and research. The Higher Education Quality Committee identified social transformation as HEIs' civic responsibility along individual transformation. Post 1994, higher education transformation focused on equity and the representation of diverse students, staff, curricula, teaching and learning, and funding structures (Boughey, 2019). "Equity without quality is meaningless, while quality cannot be pursued in isolation from the goal of equity in higher education" (CHE, 2004: 241). What is required is engagement at national level and it is imperative to practice both social equity and redress, and quality

simultaneously (Badat, 2009). Badat further proposes collaborative approaches to teaching and learning and deep discussions relating to "research, scholarship, learning and teaching, curriculum, pedagogy" (Badat, 2015: 2) and ensuring justice and human rights. It is however challenging to develop curricula that prepares students for life after university and with appropriate competencies. This is expressed by Amin (2016: 163) who maintains that it is a difficult task to prepare students "with attitudes that are appropriate, with sensitivities that are responsive to work and society's needs, and…people who can embrace uncertainty in a world that is glocal, polyvalent, unpredictable and undecidable."

One way in which South African universities are drawn into the development framework is through the institutionalisation of community engagement. The White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997) sets out broad national goals and refers to community engagement as a core responsibility of higher education, together with teaching and learning, and research. Universities are expected to "demonstrate social responsibility and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes" (1997: 10). South Africa's National Development Plan (2011) maintains that the functions of universities in modern society are to train and educate individuals for the various sectors of the economy, to produce new knowledge and equip individuals to navigate through challenges and social change while strengthening social justice, equity, and democracy (Badsha & Cloete, 2011). This statement emphasises the significant role higher education plays in the development of a modern economy (CHE, 2016: 17). Social justice is another important concept in the conceptualisation of engagement. Community engagement enables the pursuit of social justice through its interaction and concern with societal issues, social justice and empowerment, and students should be taught what social justice and social responsibility are (Pelton, 2001).

As expressed by Boughey (2019), we are experiencing a "new conjuncture" in higher education in our country - she points specifically to the efficiency agenda that has drawn on globalisation - the need for knowledge workers, and neo liberalism; Africanisation and decolonisation; and #Feesmustfall - objections to neoliberalism. Her analysis urges us to understand our students as social beings (Waghid, 2017) and understand that learning and teaching is not neutral - it is culturally, socially, and politically motivated.

Students and Social Responsibility

Students face many challenges at university and need spaces that enable their development. Students' chances of success at university can be enriched through opportunities that promote social and academic integration and develop innovative ways to integrate research, instruction, and outreach (Tanaka & Mooney, 2010; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017). Offering students opportunities to engage on aspects such as programme content, research and experience tutoring, all contribute to the development of holistic individuals. Tinto in his research highlights that students' reasons for leaving university include "academic problems, failure to integrate socially and intellectually, or a low level of commitment" to the university (Long, 2012: 52).

There is growing body of research showing a positive reciprocally causal relationship between what is called subjective well-being and academic success (Ayyash-Abdo & Sánchez-Ruiz, 2012; Suldo et al., 2011). It is essential that universities reflect on students challenges and chart ways in which to integrate students into university programmes to be able to satisfy and retain quality students. Tuna et al. (2017) pinpoint various factors that impact on academic success ranging from students' characteristics, institutional and programme characteristics and external environmental characteristics. Universities need to establish "intentional opportunities for extracurricular activities, informal student interactions, and faculty/student interactions" (Long, 2012: 52). Social responsibility initiatives are one way of developing well rounded, resilient, civic minded students that will succeed in academic and social contexts.

Background to UoTs - CUT and DUT

Post 1994, the South African Ministry had to get rid of the racial and binary divide between technikon and university. This was achieved by establishing three (3) types of HEIs: UoTs (vocationally focussed qualifications); traditional universities (formative and professional qualifications with a post graduate focus and research) and comprehensive universities (included both). The higher education mergers in South Africa were complex as the restructuring was as a result of mandatory and not voluntary processes. The following section provides an overview of CUT and DUT.

CUT The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) has two campuses with a mandate for quality education and training in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Management Sciences, Humanities and Education. CUT, originally known as Technikon Free State, opened its doors in 1981 with 285 students enrolled in mainly secretarial, art and design programmes. Currently, the institution has more than 15 500 students. CUT endeavours to serve as students' academic partner in earning their qualification and gaining appropriate work-integrated learning to prepare them for professional practice. CUT acquired the status as a UoT with the restructuring of the higher education landscape on 26 March 2004.

The university strives to attract high potential students with a view of supporting them to become employable and entrepreneurial graduates. Hence, the university sees her students as their primary responsibility. CUT is also keen on forging strategic partnerships with global organisations and these collaborations have resulted in many technological advancements. Partnerships in private and public sectors have promoted internationalisation of operations. CUT's strategic goals are further highlighted through the offering of relevant and effective academic, research and innovative programmes which include continuous curriculum transformation. CUT in its engagement strategy document affirms its position on the significance of social responsibility in higher education as follows (CUT, 2020):

Universities are called upon to demonstrate social responsibility and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes…A key objective is to promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students, of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes.

Although this vision exists at CUT, many academics and students are oblivious of this strategy as demonstrated by their responses in the results section.

DUT The Durban University of Technology (DUT) was formed in 2002 out of the merger between the ML Sultan Technikon, a historically disadvantaged institution and Technikon Natal, a historically advantaged institution. This merger was one of the first among HEIs in South Africa and formed part of government's national plan to transform the higher education landscape. DUT is a multi-campus university, with 6 faculties that spreads across 7 campuses, in Durban and 2 campuses in Pietermaritzburg, Indumiso and Riverside. There are approximately 33 000 students, most of whom are first generation entrants (the first in their families to enter higher education) in higher education and predominantly from lower socio-economic groups, highly dependent on government grants and loans.

DUT's Strategy Map 2030 has 4 key perspectives or focus areas namely, stewardship, systems and processes, sustainability and society. The four perspectives are scaffolded, starting with stewardship at the bottom, and progressing to society at the top, which shows the institutions ultimate aims and place of impact. The perspectives are focused on contributing to lives and livelihoods. The perspective 'Society' is centred on mutually beneficial collaborations, the practical application of knowledge and future-ready graduates. DUT aims to create an engaged university and to produce glocal citizens that establish mutually beneficial partnerships. It further aims to focus on innovation and entrepreneurship to leverage new knowledge and solutions for societal impact and to develop adaptive graduates with the acumen to initiate and/or respond to changes in society.

DUT aims to serve the needs of developing societies within a global context and to enable quality learning, teaching, research and community engagement by enabling quality educational and sustainable partnerships with community, society and industry. The DUT Community Engagement Cluster was launched in November 2018 with the main objective of facilitating collaboration between DUT staff, students, alumnus and the community for meaningful University-community engagements. The cluster was set up to strengthen existing community engagement projects and facilitate collaboration among staff and student agents for meaningful university-community engagements. The purpose of the cluster is

to create awareness, inculcate interest and voluntary participation from all parties including university staff, local as well as international community. It is to create an effective, meaningful and sustainable community engagement through socio-economic programmes, education, health, IT, environment and

cultural activities/projects towards the development of society (DUT, 2022a, b).

In light of the current global challenges and conditions, universities throughout the world are required to prepare students not only for the job market but educate them on a value system that will serve as a foundation for their ongoing participation in, and contribution to community development as global citizens. Higher education generally, and specifically in the South African UoT context, has a significant role to play in inculcating social responsibility in students. As a result, this research investigated how far UoTs have been able to integrate the culture of social responsibility while adhering to their mandate as well as contributing to creating knowledge societies.

Research Methodology

This study included research participants from CUT and DUT. The researchers adopted an interpretative, exploratory, qualitative research approach to understand how far UoTs have been able to integrate the culture of social responsibility while adhering to their mandate as well as contributing to creating knowledge societies. The advantage of qualitative research is that it enabled us to work with thick, in-depth description and gather a rich understanding of the culture of social responsibility among university staff and students.

Interpretivism is a search for meaning and understanding located within the data set and to understand the subjective world of human experience. In this study, the focus on words by participants through survey provided a means to understand their experiences on social responsibility in universities. This approach further provided a lens through which the researcher was able to learn from participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2014) and understand the meaning that influenced their responses on the culture of social responsibility in UoTs. Leavy (2017: 124) suggests qualitative methods enable the "robust" understanding of an area, topic or phenomenon and "unpacking the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, circumstances, people, and objects". A qualitative research methodology was employed to explore university transformation by promoting a culture of social responsibility among academic and student agents. The qualitative methodology was suitable for this study as it allowed for the generation of themes from the online questionnaires. The qualitative approach is most common in research within the interpretive paradigm, to explore and understand a particular phenomenon within its social, political and historical context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research sampling method employed was non-probability purposive sampling. The rationale for selecting purposive sampling was to ensure that by focusing on specific characteristics of the population, the researchers would be able to meet the aims and objectives of the study which included analysing USR among academic and student agents. In a non-probability sample subjects are usually selected based on their accessibility, or by the researcher's purposive personal judgement (Mugera, 2013: 1). The type of

non-probability sampling technique used in the study was convenience sampling due to the accessibility of the variables to the researchers.

A semi-structured interview schedule enabled a deeper understanding of how universities can achieve transformation by promoting a culture of social responsibility among academic and student agents. Open-ended questions enabled rich, in-depth data on UoTs ability to integrate the culture of social responsibility while adhering to their mandate as well as contributing to creating knowledge societies. Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014) indicate that open-ended and close-ended questions differ in that close-ended questions tend to limit the participants to the set of alternatives being offered, while open-ended questions allow the participant to express an opinion without being influenced. The open-ended questions enabled participants to express their views on the culture of social responsibility at their university.

Online questionnaires were administered to 200 students 30 academic staff from CUT and DUT. The student participants from CUT were second year cohorts while DUT students were sampled across a three-year diploma course. The ratio of male to female students and staff participants were 53:47 and 55:45 respectively. Registered students and staff were randomly sampled, and data was collected online using various software like ethuto learning management system and google forms. Data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the NVIVO software. All participants provided voluntary consent to participate in the study. Participants' names were not used; they are referred to using pseudonyms such as student participant 1 (S1), academic participant 2 (A2) etc. The information obtained during the study was kept confidential and secure and only the researchers had access to the data. The themes that emerged from the data will be discussed in the section findings and analysis.

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

Drawing on the work of Margaret Archer's Social Realism Theory (1995, 1996), particularly the concepts of culture, structure and agency, the paper expounds on and engages with data collected on USR. Culture, structure and agency will be discussed as key themes to understand how social responsibility has become embedded within the UoTs and how these universities 'educate' students to be socially responsible in a democratic South Africa? The perceptions of staff and student agents will be discussed using Archer's social realism framework. Discussions are located within this theoretical framework to explore whether UoTs have been able to integrate the culture of social responsibility while adhering to their mandate as well as contributing to creating knowledge societies and promoting the culture of social responsibility among staff and student agents. Archer's Social Realism framework refers to the nature of social contexts such as universities and enables us to see the social world as layered and understand who does what, where, in a university context. Archer's sociological theory can be described as having multiple layers including the studies key themes namely, structure, culture, and agency.

Theme: Structure

Structure refers to physical and social structures and in the higher education context structure includes university councils, committees, senate, classrooms, policies, faculty boards – all are examples of physical structures and social structures include gender, race, and class. Archer maintains that structures and 'roles' are relatively enduring and even change in these aspects takes time. One of the comments from academic staff suggested the importance of developing co-ordinated structures to promote community engagement and social responsibility in the university. Team building workshops could help to facilitate such initiatives as suggested some academic staff members:

A7 - Create team building workshops for staff in promoting diversification in learning.
A6 - open discussions in the form of workshops.

Students also expressed the need for interactive discussion spaces in the university community:

S47 - Introduction of innovative teaching ways, having group discussions and allowing students to be free and communicate.

Another comment foregrounded the role of universities in enhancing the lives of local communities:

A4 - Provide activities and educational programs aimed at making a positive impact by bettering the lives of the surrounding communities.

University structures play an important role in transformation and promoting a culture of social responsibility among academic and student agents. Staff agents suggested the following in terms of offering academic support programmes such as peer mentoring and supplementary instruction:

A5 - Offering academic support programs that are effective and responsive to students needs.
A10 - provision of open space for academic and intellectual engagements.

These programmes can help in identity formation and building communities of practice for the students. These structures can foster transformational ideas for social justice aligned to their learning outcomes.

Theme 2: Culture

Culture includes the ideas, beliefs, values, theories, ideologies, concepts – those are the things that make up a culture in a particular context. Culture is further

carried in language such as an institution's strategic plans. In this study, CUT and DUT have espoused a strong commitment to social responsibility however, neo-liberal policies have in most cases overshadowed the vision obscuring its value. Archer's (1995, 1996) framework affirms that culture can be an 'espoused culture' – the things we say and a culture 'in use' and sometimes there is a mismatch between these cultures. Archer further maintains that culture can be complex and embedded and transforming it can take time. In terms of new ideas that can promote transformation at universities, staff expressed the following:

A3 - Universities need to incorporate the Africanism in its teaching and learning policies. Accept students' cultural diversity.
A8 – We need to improve more diverse learning into our curriculum
A11 - Putting students first in making decisions that affect their learning.

Universities are diverse environments where students from different cultures and backgrounds converge and putting context in the curriculum can cater for these diverse students. This means changing the culture of 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum into catering for wide-ranging student needs. This is further buttressed by a comment by another staff member:

A2- community engagement work on a small scale where students participate through doing things/changing their behaviour where they have influence eg. recycling/clean- ups

Universities contribute to students developing ideas, gaining knowledge and talent. This leads to the holistic development of students that is much needed in society. CUT and DUT through their policies are committed to develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students and staff and contributing to social and economic development. In terms of the existing norms within university contexts that encourages social responsibility, academic staff highlighted the following:

A13 - the inclusion of community engagement projects using student talents as part of the curriculum (e.g. offering design services for free for non-profits)
A17 - reducing carbon footprint (switching off unnecessary electricity and reusing paper) participation in charity events, voluntary community outreach projects

Student's commented:

S23 - I think the curriculum should involve projects that engage with the community and the problems in the community.
S55 - By having practical programmes that enable students to engage in activities that promote social justice.
S58 - Avail opportunities for all and not only making opportunities available for top performing students only but also open it up for the underperforming and motivate them to engage in university social responsibility initiatives.

S14 - Foregrounding the significance of CoP in building a strong university culture.

These practices could help promote a life-long culture of civic mindedness and social responsibility (Lamdaghri & Benabdelhadi, 2021). Another important concept in the conceptualisation of community engagement is social justice. Community engagement enables the pursuit of social justice through its interaction and concern with societal issues, social justice and empowerment, and students should be taught what social justice and social responsibility are (Pelton, 2001). Some of the comments stressed the understanding of social justice as follows:

S15 - Focusing on societal issues and looking for African solutions for African problems
S12 - Social justice ensures equity and fairness throughout the higher education sector.
S9 - Assisting students with basic social skills as well as career development.
A1 - Expose students to new and diverse university cultures.

According to Inayatullah (2015) in as much as strategy and vision are important for transformation, culture plays a critical role in achieving the overall vision of the university social responsibility.

Theme 3: Agency

Agency relates to an individual's personal and psychological makeup in a specific context and in a higher education context it is important for those working in the academic project to reflect on their roles and strengthen their personal agency in their professional contexts. In a UoT context such as CUT and DUT, it is important to ask: who are our students; and are we engaging in programmes where people – students and staff can engage? In each of our universities we have discourses or dominant ideas that define or limit what is possible to do.

Williams (2012) proposes that the social realist theory (Archer, 1995, 2000, 2003) can be effectively employed to guide research on student learning in higher education so as to better understand students' needs. Biggs (2012) argues for an in-depth understanding of how students learn and affirms that education is about conceptual change not just acquiring information. This requires effort and an understanding of the importance of how teaching is designed and requires lecturers, academic developers, and support departments to reflect on their teaching and learning practice to identify ways to enhance the teaching and learning agenda. Williams claims that Archer's theory can be aligned to what has been considered an 'ontological turn' in student learning research. Furthermore, as discussed in the literature of this paper, Archer's approach also enables a focus on students 'being' and 'becoming' instead of just skills and knowledge (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007; Barnett, 2009). This is affirmed by Case who maintains "In the arena of higher education, we are centrally focused on the morphogenesis of student agency; we aim for students to leave higher

education with different knowledge and capacity for action than that with which they entered" (Case, 2015: 843).

Power imbalances between teacher and student often comprises the academic project and it is important to establish ways in which to enhance student's engagement, participation, promoting criticality and "crafting of voice." Some comments on ways in which to encourage ownership in learning and social responsibility are:

A19 - Negotiation of classroom rules, due dates of assessments, leniency to students from disadvantage areas and support programs for students with disabilities.
A21 - Flipping the classroom to enhance student engagement and participation
A27 - Students should be allowed to use their creativity allowing them independence to build their knowledge. Many students come from indigenous backgrounds and these skills should be used to integrate with the university curricula. Whenever university curricula changes, it must always take into account creative thinking from students. In fact, at DUT, we always emphasise critical thinking skills. We need to consider creative skills as well.

In his work Williams (2012) proposes that what is needed is an "analytically and ontologically stronger basis for understanding the person who learns" (p. 320). His research demonstrates that Archer's social realism theory is well suited to this task.

Another comment from a staff member highlights transformative, innovative teaching practices:

A25 - incorporating Africanism and Ubuntu(o)logy in my practice.

This comment is essential as it underlines ways in which lecturers can transform their practices. Students that enter university are searching for a sense of being, meaning and personal and social identity and lecturers have influence on the development of these identities. Case maintains that "the central role of human interaction in student learning must be recognised: both peer interaction and even more centrally the interaction with the lecturer" (Case, 2015: 848).

A social realist perspective leads to an alternative thinking on student success in universities. It enables a focus on student challenges and difficulties not just in isolation but locates students in the broader context and this can contribute to understanding students' needs better and building a more socially and environmentally responsible society.

Conclusion

Community engagement in South Africa has created the opportunity to transform higher education pedagogy and pave the way for a more democratic and socially just higher education system that would refocus higher education towards public good. This paper focused the drive for transformation and the promotion of a culture of social responsibility among staff and students in universities of technology in South

Africa. It unpacked the value of innovative developmental strategies and the enactment of new USR partnerships with various stakeholders. The study also discussed and built a case of how technical universities in South Africa can promote the social responsibility agenda.

Using the social realist theory, the institutional vision espoused by two UoTs in South Africa were critiqued and the deficiencies in social responsivity were highlighted. Furthermore, the voices of students and academics in the universities were reflected upon further exposing the discrepancies in their USR culture. Although, these universities and others in South Africa have drafted a social responsibility framework whereby students are encouraged to participate in local community projects and apply their education and technical skills, more deliberate and intentional efforts must be implemented on the ground.

The study affirms that universities of technology in South Africa are indeed able to achieve transformation and impact on local communities and society by demonstrating a stronger commitment to social responsibility via making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes. More so, there needs to be an understanding of how to ensure that the principles and values of social responsibility are reflected in the institutional culture and practices. Building a strong culture of social responsibility among staff and student agents will enable true agential morphogenesis and will require relatively significant structural and cultural change in universities and modes of pedagogy.

References

Amin, N. (2016). Undoing cognitive damage. In M. A. Samuel, R. Dhunpath, & N. Amin (Eds.), *Disrupting higher education curriculum. Constructing knowledge: Curriculum studies in action.* SensePublishers.

Archer, M. S. (1995). *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (1996). *Culture and Agency. The place of culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2000). B*eing Human. The Problem of Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2003). *Structure, Agency and Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ayyash-Abdo, H., & Sánchez-Ruiz, M. J. (2012). Subjective wellbeing and its relationship with academic achievement and multilinguality among Lebanese university students. *International Journal of Psychology, 47*(3), 192–202. Available: https://doi.org/10.1080/00207594.2011.614616

Badat, S. (2015). *Putting an end to causes of pain. Graduation Speech*. April: Rhodes University.

Badat, S. (2009). Theorising institutional change: Post 1994 south African higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 34*(4), 455–467.

Badsha, N., & Cloete, N. (2011). Higher Education: Contribution for the NPC's National Development Plan (unpublished paper).

Bhaskar, R. (1979). *The possibility of Naturalism. A philosophical critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*. Harvester.

Barnett, R. (2009). Knowing and becoming in the higher education curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education, 34*(4):429–440. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070902771978

Bernardo, M. A. C., Butcher, J., & Howard, P. (2011). An international comparison of community engagement in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Development, 32*(1), 187–192. Available: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.04.008

Boughey, C. (2019). *Overview of the history of academic development in South Africa. Presentation to PG dip HE for academic developers*. Rhodes University.

Biggs. J. (2012). What the student does: teaching for enhanced learning. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *31*(1):39–55. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2012.642839. Accessed 3 May 2021

Case, J. M. (2015). A social realist perspective on student learning in higher education: The morphogenesis of agency. *Higher education Research and Development, 34*(5), 841–852.

Cetindamar, D., & Hopkins, T. (2008). Enhancing students' responsibility towards society through civic involvement projects. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 45*(4), 401–410.

Council on Higher Education (CHE). (2004). *South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy*. CHE: Pretoria.

Council on Higher Education (CHE). (2016). *South african higher education reviewed: Two decades of democracy*. CHE.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

CUT (2020). *Central University of Technology (CUT) Engagement Strategy 2021–2025*.

Dall'Alba, G., & Barnacle, R. (2007). An ontological turn for higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 32*(6), 679–691.

Department of Education (DOE). (1997). *Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education*. Department of Education.

du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C., & Bezuidenhout, R. M. (2014). *Research matters*. Juta and Company Ltd.

DUT (2022a). Durban University of Technology (DUT) ENVISION 2030. Available: https://www.dut.ac.za/envision-2030/. Accessed 20 June 2020.

DUT (2022b). Durban University of Technology – Community engagement cluster. Available: https://www.dut.ac.za/engagement/dce/. Accessed 10 Mar 2021.

Gołaszewska-Kaczan, U., Grześ, A., & Kruk, M. (2017). Social responsibility of universities: The case of the faculty of economics and management, University of Bialystok. *Optimum Studia Ekonomiczne, 5*(89), 164–174.

Heleta, S. (2016). Decolonisation of higher education: dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa. *Transformation in Higher Education, 1*(1), 1–8. Available: https://thejournal.org.za/index.php/thejournal/article/view/9. Accessed 26 May 2017.

Higher Education Quality Committee, South Africa. (2004a). *Criteria for institutional audits*. Council on Higher Education.

Higher Education Quality Committee. (2004b). *Criteria for programme accreditation*. Council on Higher Education.

Inayatullah, S. (2015). Ensuring Culture does not eat strategy for breakfast: What works in futures studies. *World Future Review, 7*(4), 351–361.

Katrevich, A. V., & Aruguete, M. S. (2017). Recognizing challenges and predicting success in first-generation university students. *Journal of STEM Education: Innovations and Research, 18*(2), 40–44. Available: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1149413. Accessed 15 Apr 2018.

Lamdaghri, Z., & Benabdelhadi, A. (2021). A holistic overview on the implementation of socially responsible practices in higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Accounting Finance Auditing Management and Economics, 2*(5), 371–393.

Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. The Guildford Press.

Long, D. (2012). Theories and models of student development. In L. J. Hinchliffe & M. A. Wong (Eds.), *Environments for student growth and development: Librarians and student affairs in collaboration* (pp. 41–55). Association of College & Research Libraries.

Markus, E. D. (2021). CUT Dr Markus Elisha presents on how Universities of Technology in South Africa can promote social responsibility agenda at the USR MOOC Summit 2021. Available: https://www.cut.ac.za/news/cut-dr-markus-elisha-presents-on-how-universi. Accessed 17 June 2022.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage publications.

Mbembe, A. (2016). Decolonising the University: New Directions. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 15*(1), 29–45. Available: https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022215618513

Morrow, W. (1993). Epistemological access in the university. *AD Dialogues, 1*, 3–4.

Mugera, W. (2013). *Non-probability sampling techniques*. University of Nairobi.

Northedge, A. (2003a). Enabling participation in academic discourse. *Teaching in Higher Education, 8*(2), 169–180.

Northedge, A. (2003b). Rethinking teaching in the context of diversity. *Teaching in Higher Education, 8*(1).

Pelton, L. H. (2001). Social justice and social work. *Journal of Social Work Education, 37*(3), 433–439. Available: https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2001.10779065

Reiser, J. (2008). Managing University Social Responsibility (USR). Available: http://www.international-sustainable-campus-network.org/iscn-conference2007/view-category.html. Accessed 18 June 2021.

Suldo, S., Thalji, A., & Ferron, J. (2011). Longitudinal academic outcomes predicted by early adolescents' subjective well-being, psychopathology, and mental health status yielded from a dual factor model. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*(1), 17–30. Available: https://doi.org/10.1080/17439 760.2010.536774

Tanaka, K., & Mooney, P. H. (2010). Public scholarship and community engagement in building community food security: The case of the University of Kentucky. *Rural Sociology, 75*(4), 560–583.

Tuna, M. E., Yıldırım, J., & Çakmak, H. E. (2017). Subjective well-being and academic success of first year university students: A seemingly unrelated bivariate probit analysis. *Ekonomik Yaklasim, 28*(103), 23–46. Available: http://www.ekonomikyaklasim.org/?mno=243803. Accessed 18 May 2021.

Vorster, J. (2010). A social realist analysis of collaborative curriculum development processes in an academic department at a South African university. PhD dissertation, Rhodes University.

Waghid, Y. (2017). A university without ruins: Some reflections on possibilities and particularities of an african university. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 31*(3), 15.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning meaning and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015). Introduction to communities of practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses. Retrieved from: http://wenger-trayner.com/wpcontent/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf. Accessed 2 June 2021.

Williams, K. (2012). Rethinking 'learning'in higher education: Viewing the student as social actor. *Journal of Critical Realism, 11*(3), 296–323.

Zembylas, M. (2018). Decolonial possibilities in South African higher education: Reconfiguring humanising pedagogies as/with decolonising pedagogies. *South African Journal of Education, 38*(4), 1–11. Available: https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v38n4a1699

Elisha Didam Markus is an Associate Professor in the Department of Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology at the Central University of Technology

Nereshnee Govender is a Writing Centre Practitioner at the Durban University of Technology