

Hello and welcome to our Good Place podcast. It's run by good place innovators, a team of researchers, educators and student fellows passionate about transforming communities with an extra sensitive eye for our place, local context and through community needs. Our goal is to inspire educators to connect to their place and transform their curriculum. Enabling students grow into responsible citizens with curious minds and a greater sense of belonging.

My name is Radka Newton. I'm a senior teaching fellow in strategy and innovation at Lancaster University Management School. I'm also an education service designer and elite of good place innovators project. Funded by the Enterprise Educators UK, the project contributes to multiple priorities, themes, demonstrating the importance of wider understanding of enterprise, our social context. And with Lancaster's ethos of Civic University, and we look at our responsibility for communities. And also the importance of our place. And through this project we aspire to develop a design LED collaborative enterprise mindset in our students and introduce the concept of Co design to entrepreneurial learning.

In this episode. Today I speak with my colleague Sarah Reese, head of stakeholder relations at Lancaster University, an elite of the University Place based agenda. Fostering connections with community and enhancing our mutual and equitable engagement with our place. Sarah welcome.

Thank you.

So to start with Sarah, could you please share with us the context of your role and how it has evolved over the recent years?

Sure, so I'm as you say, I'm head of stakeholder relations at the university and I do have a particular focus on civic and community engagement, and that's about facilitating our relationships with a range of organizations,

locally, regionally,
nationally.
And building understanding and making
connections across the university to
really create that mutual benefit.
I also lead on the public and community
engagement perspective of the
National Knowledge exchange framework.
And that's about how we,
what we're doing,
how we're engaging with our
partners and transferring knowledge.
And I'm also the leader in our
participation in the Civic
Universities network,
and this is really all come from
the university's growing commitment
to engagement.
As one of our three priorities
alongside research and education.
And particularly,
since we appointed our first Pro
Vice Chancellor for engagement in ,
yeah, wonderful. And you know this.
This sort of I think many universities
they have now accentuated the
civic engagement, haven't they?
This commitment, the civic agenda?
And it's it's become so prominent and I.
I wonder what has sort of led
this agenda to become so visible?
And how does Lancaster sort
of engage with it and what?
What does it mean to us at the university,
sure? Well, there's been an increasing.
Focus on place nationally.
I mean,
we've seen that from the government
and we've we've got the development
of local industrial strategies.
We've seen things like growth
deals and town deals so very much
based in local places.
Of course, the levelling up gender,
we can't miss that that's clearly part of
the current government agenda and also the
development of devolutions for major cities
and and development of combined authorities.
You've also got health drivers as well,
so we've got an NHS long term plan changes
in the NHS which are going to be much more
place based and thinking about population.
South and of course in the
higher education sector as well.
We've got this new national
knowledge exchange framework.
We've got perspectives there looking at
local growth and regeneration, so again,

place lens and also public and community engagement and also from research funders. We're seeing some calls around actually research projects that are based on place, so, so I think that's some of that national context.

But we've also seen that thinking develop around.

What's the role of anchor institutions in their places?

So in the UK, the Health Foundation and the Kings Fund are thinking about that from a health perspective, and we've had the Civic Universities Commission, which reported in thinking about the role of universities in their places as well.

Hmm, and it's interesting.

I remember when I started how that you know the focus was so much on the global on the internationalization, so we were really focusing on engaging with our global partners.

Now we have this maybe a bit more local agenda.

And yet.

We are continuing with the global, so it's quite a challenge I think for the university, isn't it?

It is it?

It's really interesting, I think, and in terms of that, I think there's a couple of things. Clearly the pandemic has highlighted those really sort of deep seated inequalities, and we saw the impact of that on sort of different economic and social outcomes really, for communities through the pandemic.

And there's a need to think differently and respond differently.

I think to make changes, but there's also a thing about.

Actually, it's really important to remember where we're from.

And we can.

We can be both sort of a global institution, but also think about how we can harness that research and our education and actually think about the problems and challenges locally and make a difference local.

So I don't think it's an either or.

I think we can do both and we can do both of those things well.

And it's,

you know we we talk in this podcast
a lot about sort of how entrepreneurs
navigate their relationships with the place,
how they actually,
how they understand their place,
dynamics and the communities around them.

And we try to encourage.

Students you know to be really
mindful about the place.

How do we do it as a university?
ohh, good question.

So I I think in terms of
understanding the dynamics of place,
I think we we have to really
get out and talk to people.

We need to be open.

We need to be curious and we need to build
relationships. You know this sort of
back to being stakeholder engagement.

So connect with our community.

The university sits miles outside of
the city and so it can be disconnected.

So it's really important
that we build trusting.

Relationships with partners.

So with local authorities with the Fe
College with health partners and really,
that helps us understand the
challenges and the dynamics.

But also how we can work
together and make a difference.

Also, I think you know a lot of
our researchers are doing work
with our communities in our place,
whether that's about developing
entrepreneurial ecosystems or
understanding health inequalities or
understanding Community needs to inform
policymaking and decision making.

So I think we've.

We've got the opportunity to to
both build the relationships,
but also harnessing what we're
learning through our teaching and
our research to actually really
understand and and do that together.

Umm, and it is really about
building that trust, isn't it?

So what you said?

And we,
we've had this a lot from
our local entrepreneurs and
they really emphasized this.

Trust speaking to people.

But also, you know,
listening and understanding their needs.
That's very much an objective
of our research as well.

Yeah, and I and I think it takes time.
To build trust as well so
you can't do this overnight,
you have to.

It takes a long time to build
relationships and and to build the
trust that those relationships
will stay and that listening
points really important.

I think we we have commissioned a
couple of pieces of research to
really try and understand what
partners and communities need and
we we developed something called the
Lancaster University Exchange in ,
which is an interactive public
forum and that's very much about
members of the Community partly
hearing about what we're doing
because they want to know.

But also actually the opportunity
for them to ask US questions and also
for them to give us suggestions about
things we can we can do differently.
And we recently held one talking
about inclusive growth.

So we had a whole range of of people
there from the local council,
local businesses.

So we got a number of perspectives,
but a lot of it was about
communication and about relationships.
So it was interesting.

With that continues to come
through and it's great.

You know,
in a way.

So when I listen to I feel like
the university is really behaving
like our entrepreneurs.

And it's coming through our research as well,
so our very first episode,
where at Mckeeva really he inspired
us to really think about this
sort of aspect of cherishing the
place of our business.

And this is what he researched in his piece.

And I, I wonder,
you know,

from from what you say we are
already on that on that journey
of really cherishing our place.

Do we have any good examples that we
can already celebrate as a university?

Yeah, I.

I think we do actually,
so I think. We've got a really long
standing commitment to education

in our region and right from from
very early on we we had those
relationships with Edge Hill College,
now University and Saint Martin's College,
which is now the University of
Cumbria and that was very much about
working together to create the
skills and knowledge that we needed
in our region and in our place.
And we've also got a really long
tradition actually of working with
small and medium sized businesses
across Lancashire and Cumbria to
help contribute to economic growth.
And regional developments.
And so I think those are a couple
Of examples to celebrate.
Actually, Umm,
and I think you know from our point of view.
We do also a lot of community
days here on the campus.
So we we're also, I suppose,
trying to open the door of the
campus because like you said,
you know it's sort of three mile away.
Sometimes it can feel a bit
of an isolated place.
And I know sometimes for
local citizens it's almost,
you know they don't have.
Maybe the confidence to come to the campus.
so I think these community days.
Have been also wonderful when
people bring their families and
and celebrate that connection.
Yeah, I think that's really important
and you made the comment earlier,
didn't you?
About how we've also had that global focus
and and so I don't think we've always
remembered to cherish our place actually.
And so you're right that actually
things like the public lectures,
the community days and also the
university being in the city.
So we have space in the castle and and we
have a postgraduate study base in the story.
And I think it's really important that we.
Find those ways to stay connected
and and find ways for people to be
connected with the university as well.
Umm, and I,
I think that that space in the castle
is just such a wonderful example,
and I know how students love being there,
you know,
and taking them out of the compass and
being there in the historical surrounding,

it really means so much to
them and it's it is a space.
It's a lecture theater in a way,
but for them you know it really.
On on my module.
It changed really that the whole
ethos of the module for the students,
it's just anchored their belonging
to the compass,
so much so sometimes simple
things can mean a lot,
absolutely.
And I think the castle space is great
because it really celebrates the
whole history of the city and it.
And this is an old city.
You know, it goes back a long way.
And of course,
then we've got examples of of Moocs and
research around the castle as well.
So people can really learn about
the castle through the work that
our academics have done.
As well,
so as well as benefiting from
it as a teaching space,
we can find out more about it as well.
So that's that.
Plays as a resource for us that plays
as a resource for for our learning.
Yeah yeah. And I just wonder Sarah
now to look at the perspective,
maybe from a different aspect.
So taking the external perspective
perspective of our communities
of of the university. So how?
How does the community reach to us?
And maybe do you think
there are any barriers?
We sort of mentioned it a little bit as well.
With that distance from town,
but are there any other barriers that you
are aware of that maybe we can work on?
Sure, so I think one of them is
that you know the university is
a large and complex organization,
not just ours.
Actually universities are,
and so it can be really difficult
for people to know how to navigate
it and and to get in touch.
So we we need to try and make that as
easy as possible and find a really
easy way for them to e-mail us and to
make sure that if they do contact us,
we point them in the right direction and
help them find what they're looking for.

But I think the other thing that's also important is we know that universities can feel quite inaccessible to some parts of the Community, particularly those who haven't been to university or who might not think. It's for them, but we have all these fantastic resources that they could use and enjoy. so it's really important that we provide opportunities for people to come to campus and help overcome those perceived barriers, because hopefully, the campus is open and it's welcoming so many local families and community groups use the sports centre. For example, for swimming lessons and for other activities. And we also have the Green Lancaster initiative, which is fantastic. Sort of grassroots one developed by staff and students, and that has a whole range of projects which community members can get involved in around edible growing, so I think that's really important. And then back to your point. It's not just about expecting the community to come to us, I think it's also about the university being in the community as well, so being in the castle and being in the story, having those public events, sort of. Getting out and talking to people is also really important. Demystifying it for them absolutely, and you know, we talk a lot about sort of student being a bit transient so they come here. They stay here just stuff in this beautiful surrounding on campus and then they go. Some of them never really engage with the city, so I think it's also our responsibility to encourage you know that the staff engagement for the students and it was interesting they were telling me for the students, one of the main barriers is just the cost of the bus fare. Sometimes you know. Yeah yeah, absolutely. And I think finding opportunities for students to do that in a way that feels right for them as well.

So one of the great things I know about is light up Lancaster, the festival in the city.

We do support that because we think it's such a well. It's a. It's a really high quality festival. It's a great community festival, but many of our students actually volunteer to be stewards.

As part of that, and it's so it's a great way for them to meet people and be involved in the life of the city in a way that works for them as well, so that that's really good.

That's a great.

Example, because I bet it gives them a bit of pride as well.

And you know some of our students, you know come from different backgrounds. That confidence is well to engage, maybe with strangers.

And yeah, I did go to the festival and I did see some of our students as Stewart, so it was.

It's a fantastic example to see that stuff connection, isn't it absolutely?

And I think the other one was a couple of students, one of whom is from the management school actually who got together because they really wanted to help build on the festival festivities around Chinese.

Yeah, and created a whole festival programme this year which engaged both the students but also the local community and that really that history and culture for the Chinese and what it means to celebrate New Year for them.

so I think that was another great example of bringing the two communities together.

yeah, yeah, I guess we have so many resources maybe at the doorstep it's just maybe reframing our minds and knowing how to think about it.

Yeah, I think so.

Absolutely yeah.

So just thinking about the concept of place, and I know we had a fantastic.

Public lecture as well that I attended and you were there Sarah as well with our PVC for engagement.

Just think about that stuff.
The place based agenda.
How does the university think
about the place?
So what is what is the place?
That's a really interesting question,
so I think place can mean a lot
of things to a lot of people,
and I think partly places about where we are.
So for some people place is is local.
It is Lancaster.
It's the district,
but for others they might be working across.
For example,
the whole of Lancashire and and
South Cumbria or their place might be
the project they're working on in in Ghana.
Actually in West Africa.
So it's really important that that
we don't limit ourselves in terms
of of what we think of as our place.
But I think for Lancaster you know the
university has always been committed.
It was in our sort of founding mission,
really,
to to make a difference through the
corporate life of the university,
as well as our research and
our teaching and and,
you know, we wouldn't be here
if the people of Lancashire and
Lancaster hadn't lobbied government
to create a new university on this
hill outside Lancaster, actually.
And so I think it's so important that
we remember where we're from and and
make that connection back to our place.
As well, hmm, well well what a great
test of memory of the history as well,
because we are quite a young
university in a way.
But I know I think we started in town
in some of the town locations and then
moved later on to this wonderful location.
So what are what are the stuff
new initiatives or what is what
is in Lancaster's thinking about?
You know, how do we continue
fostering that relationship between
the place and the university?
What can we look forward to in the future?
Oh goodness.
Well, hopefully there are
lots of examples of that.
I think.
How could we not talk about
Eden Project North?
I mean it's it's been so many years

in the making and it really does feel like we're in the final stages and the bid to the levelling up fund is going in tomorrow is actually the deadline is the th of July and we really hope this is going to bring the public investment which will be the final piece of the jigsaw to make it happen. And I think it's so important because it shows how, when, when. Their partners in the place so the people who can sort of sort of bring influence and and bring the funding so the local authorities and the enterprise partnership and the university come together with the Community. With businesses with with a visionary business like Eden, and create that vision, then we can create something really extraordinary and I think it won't. It's not just going to be a visitor attraction for Morecambe it it's going to bring employment. It will. It will help us change how we think about the place and how other people think about the place. And then of course, there's a supply chain that's going to go with that. It will bring more people into our place, so I I think that's a fantastic opportunity and we're all. We've got everything crossed really, that that that will happen. And the other one I just wanted to mention, especially because we're talking about education and curriculum and enterprise and innovation is the more complete curriculum. Because this is a place based curriculum. It's it's called Morecambe Bay curriculum. It's about the Bay we're developing that with Eden. International, and Lancaster are more. In college, so a college which is really connected to our local place and together we're Co. Creating with schools with colleges, a curriculum which will be for nought to years. To help young people to think about the sustainable ways they can live in the future. The kinds of skills that they'll need and how actually that will

help to bring Eden to fruition, but also help to develop our green skills economy and think and be embedded in our place as well and. And these debates are really fascinating for me. You know that more curriculum is so important. And I, I really want to bring in more to the management school because that responsible management, responsible innovation, that thinking of our place. It's very much a you know something that the management school wants to achieve as well. So that's sort of the notion of the place based curriculum is something that we are really passionate about. And it's just such a fantastic opportunity for everybody, for the, for the tutors, for the lecturers, for researchers, but also for our. Students, absolutely, and I think as you said, that place based entrepreneurship and approach is just a really great way of looking at it. Because Eden comma real catalyst for change. And I think when we bring that together with the skills with the the passion and the enthusiasm of our students and our lectures we can we can make that real difference as well. Umm what what a fantastic subject you know. And I just feel so encouraged Sarah just talking to you and finally I ask all our guests and we're always curious. You know, uh, what is your place? What where do you feel placed? Where do you feel personally placed and happy? I think for me place is about people and community, so I will always be most placed and happy when I'm with in my community. I guess I've lived in Kendall for years and or in and around Kendall and it feels like a home. I have a community. I have a place and during the pandemic it was a real somewhere I could go and walk and enjoy the green spaces and and so for me. I think that's my place where I feel happy.

And then after that it's my garden
with my plants and my flowers.
And I can get lost in there and spend
hours and forget where I am or what I would.
What a wonderful.
I can just imagine your garden dude.
Do you do grow Eddie Brooks or no flowers?
I I I don't really do edibles,
I have a lot of flowers.
Oh that's wonderful.
Well thank you so much Sarah for your time.
It's been really fascinating
learning about the civic agenda,
the progress of the university,
and the relationship between the
engagement with the communities and
you're really becoming more mindful,
more sensitive, and you know.
Engage in more equitable way.
I think that's really important to us,
so that's all for today and I
hope you enjoyed our debate.
If you are interested in this topic,
stay tuned and we'll continue
our debate with other guests.
Offering a wide range of lenses
on this very important topic
of entrepreneurial processes.
Enacted in context well,
feel free to drop us a
message, comment,
or recommendation of a resource,
initiative or idea for our project,
and until next time take care.