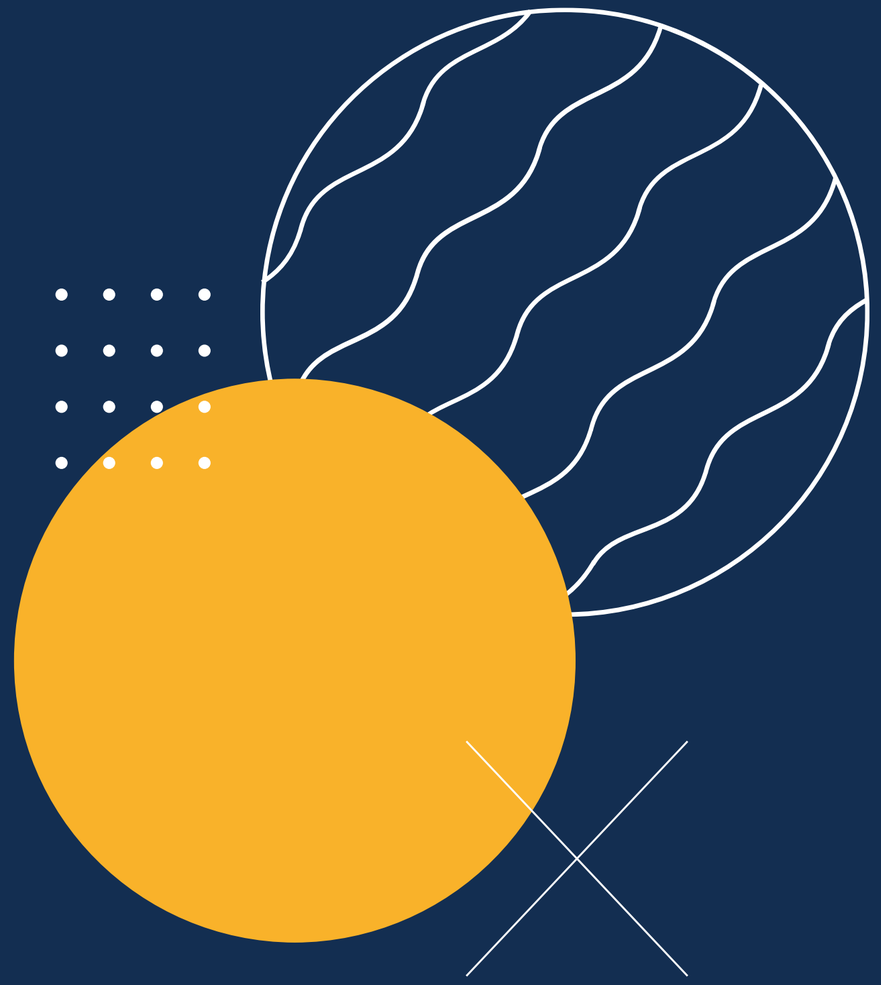
Hubs of Convergence (HoC)

Comber 2nd International Conference
29 – 30 November 2021

Presentation Title:

"The human experience of coordinating pandemic response projects while 'culturally translating' between various social actors to express and explore the notion of an engaged institution"



Team:

Dr Bruce Damons, Nicole Collier-Naidoo, Khanyi Manzini, Nandipha Ntenengenyana, Ntombovuyo Linda, Prof Enver Motala, Chanel van de Merwe, Dr Tinyiko Chauke

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Catalytic Moment

Vice Chancellor Inaugural Speech, Prof. Sibongile Muthwa (2018)

The Hubs of Convergence (HoC) endeavours to co-create **“physical spaces where the University meets the community to engage on common platforms to find solutions to problems that affect our immediate communities."**

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Engagement and Transformation Portfolio

Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof. André Keet

Nelson Mandela University has repositioned itself as a transformative, responsive university; in service of society. To achieve this ambition, the university established a new portfolio rooted in the interplay between engagement and transformation, and their interlinkages with research, learning and teaching. The core purpose of this portfolio is to provide intellectual and strategic leadership and oversee engagement and transformation in support of the vision and strategic objectives of the University.

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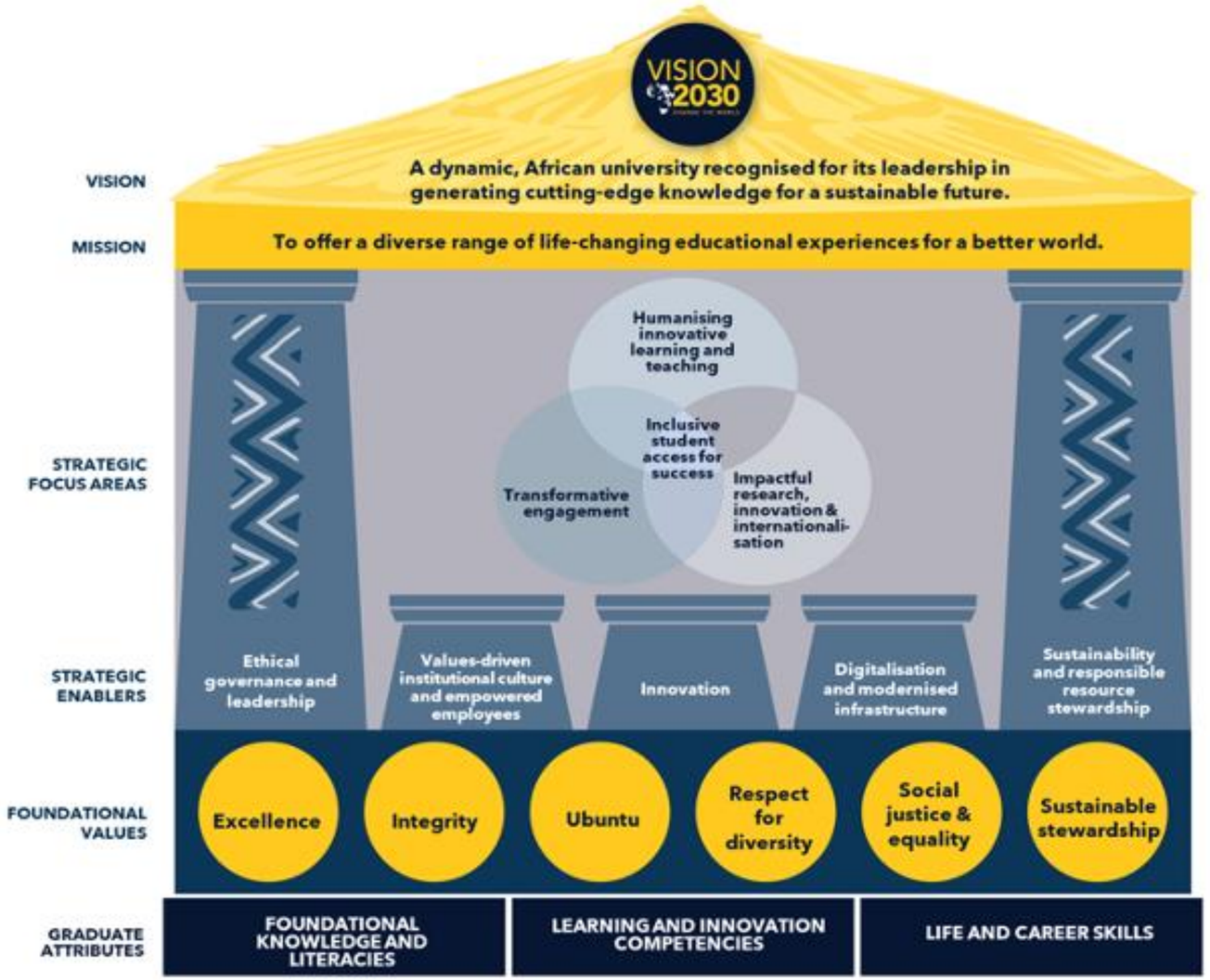
Vision 2030 strategic framework



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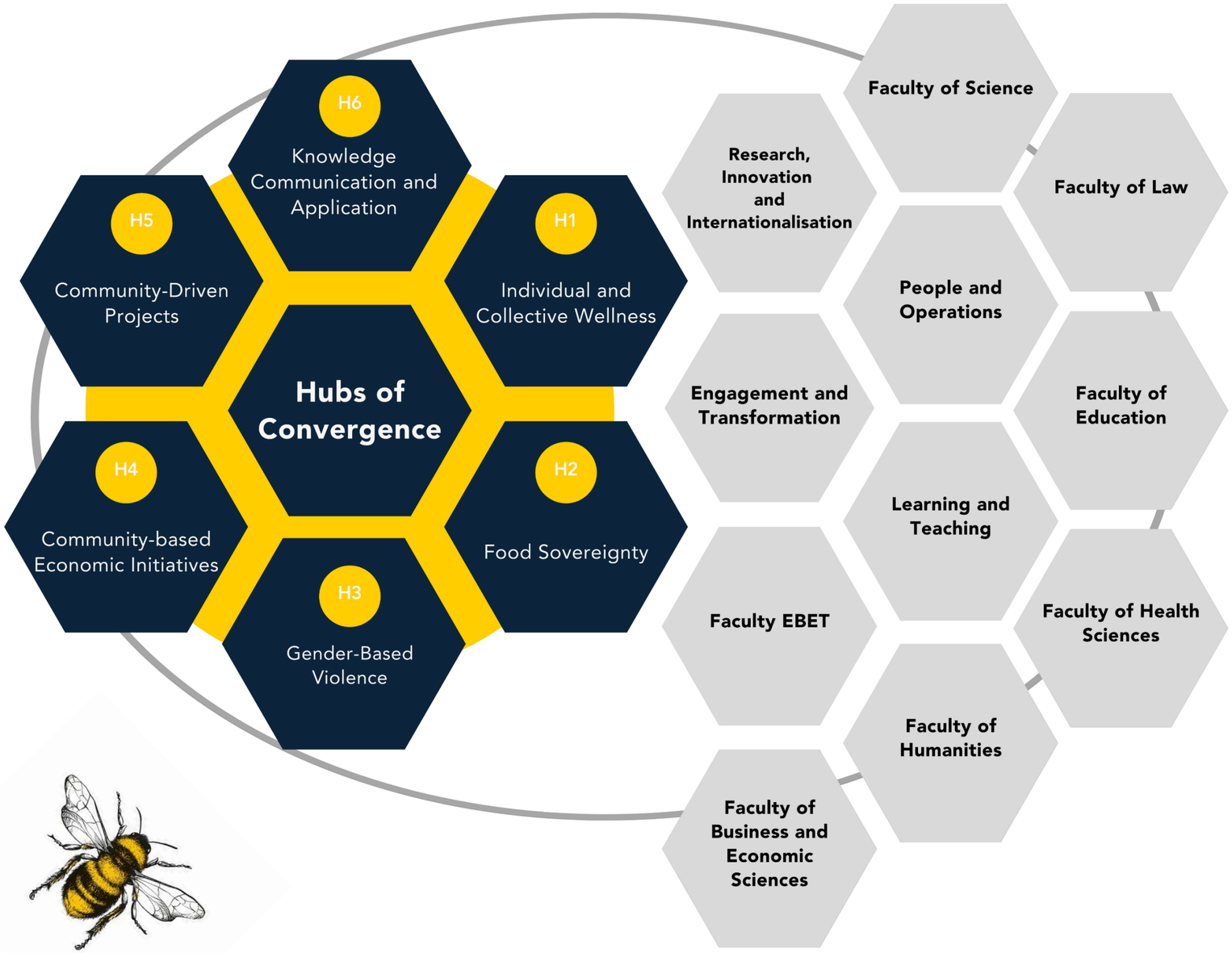
HoC as a Project

Beehive Model 2.0

Through organizing, facilitating, coordinating and managing the work of the CCW, a Beehive Model is emerging as an expression of our transdisciplinary collaboration and multi-stakeholder environment.

This Beehive Model encapsulates the convergence of the University with the community through the HoC's thematic hubs. The structure represents the project work of the HoC together with its related institutional nodes as a closely packed group of hexagonal cells (honeycombs) as a modality of university-community engagement.

The Beehive Model demonstrates the unique and elaborate disposition of the HoC as an apparatus of translating ways in which the University can become responsive to societal challenges. Like a beehive, the HoC provides an architecture for cocreation, participatory action and a philosophy of relationality.



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HoC Objectives: 2021-2025

To position the Hubs of Convergence within the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio as a physical and intellectual space of exploration to support the core purpose and outcome of Vision 2030.

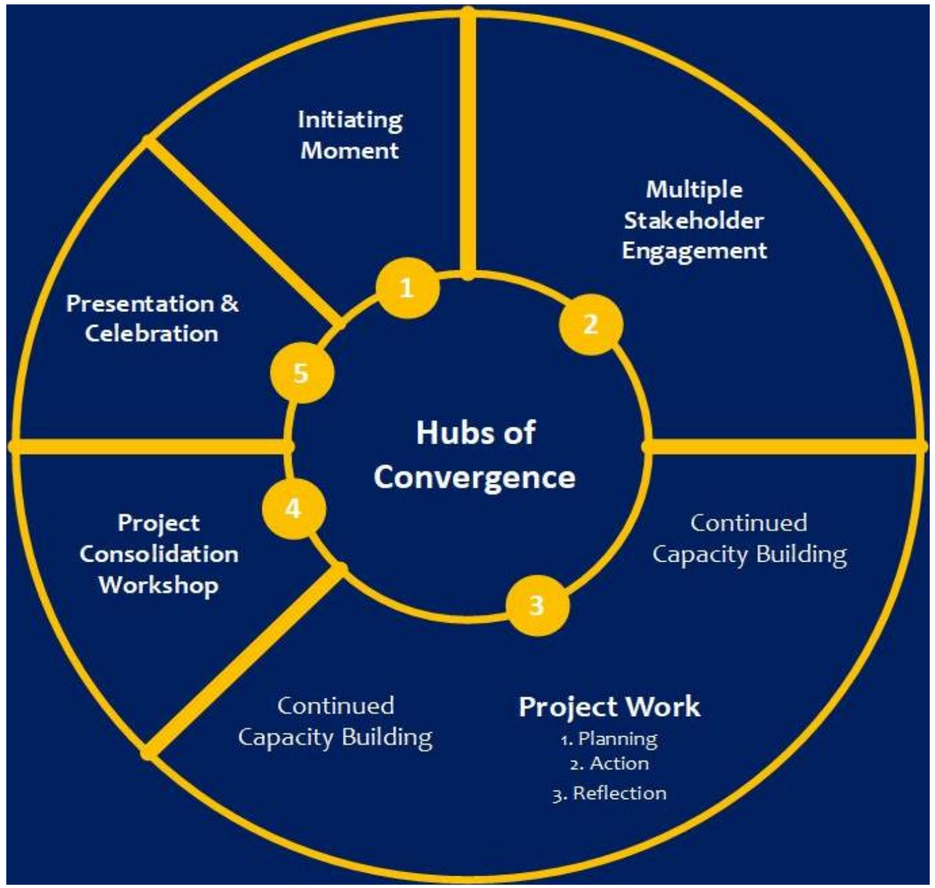
To **critically support** the interface of the four strategic focus areas to enable the University's positioning/re-positioning around its engagement and transformation agenda in service of society.

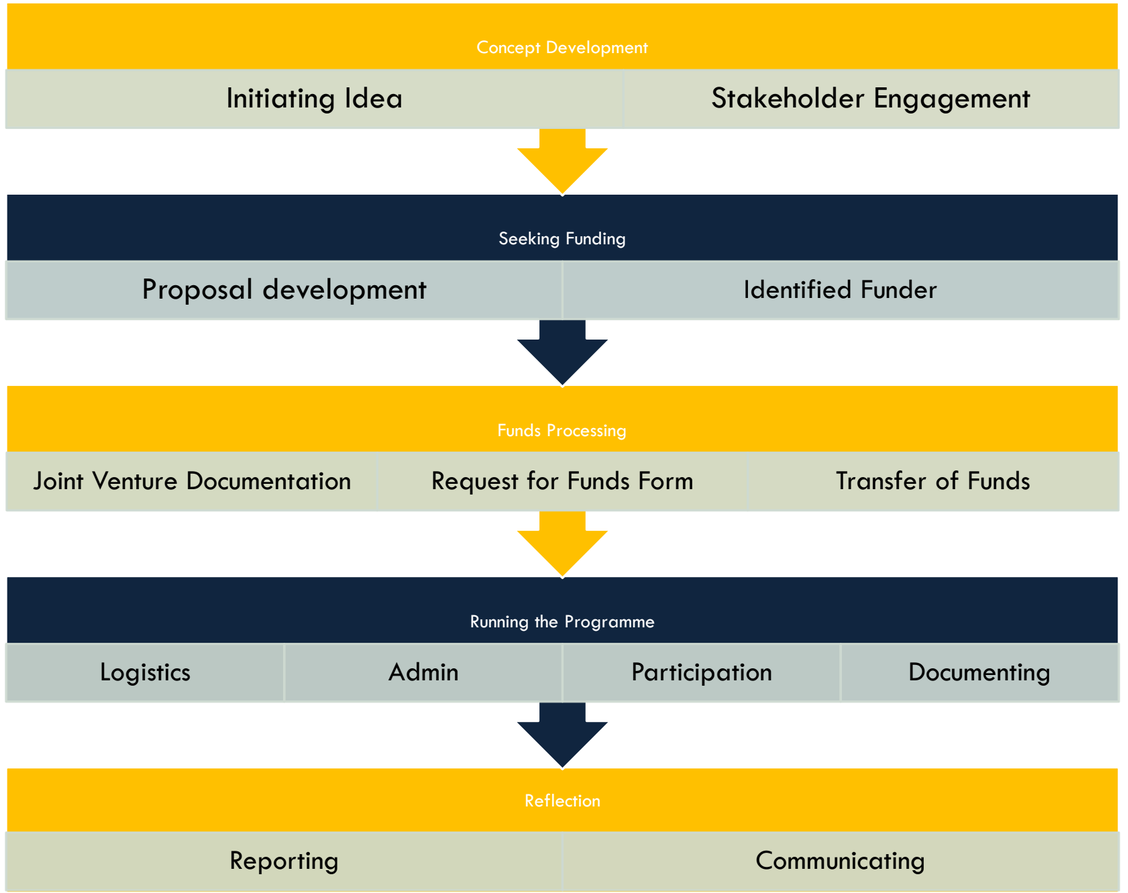
To expand our understanding and clarification of knowledge co-construction through **engagement and research** by actively engaging with university faculties, centres, and units, as well as 'community' groupings about the implications of research for supporting the development of university and 'community' programmes and actions that respond meaningfully to the historical and contextual challenges of our time.

To facilitate the integration of teaching and learning and engagement into university and 'community' programmes and actions, producing innovative, socially useful knowledge that introduces local knowledge systems and solutions to the global conversation.

To develop the conceptualisation, methodology and activities that facilitate the co-construction of knowledge through engagement to support, enhance, and demonstrate the attributes of a transformative, responsive university.

Method and Methodology





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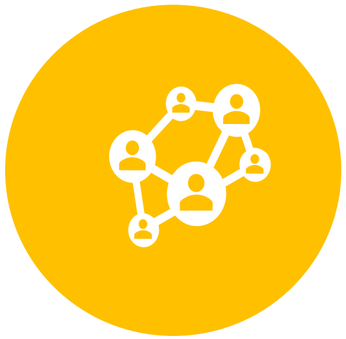
HoC Principles: Core Values

Convergence

The conscious effort of drawing together internal and external stakeholders to unlock the knowledge and praxis that enable us to better engage on grander issues that affect our society. The drawing together of these stakeholder communities recognises the voice and agency of all those involved in the engagement, which forms a vital element of a Humanising Pedagogy.



Reciprocity

The exchanging of co-created knowledge and resources through the principles of generosity, solidarity, co-creation, responsiveness, and inclusion for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders.

Multiple forms of outputs

Mindful that socially engaged scholarship is best derived from an authentic process of learning with others in practice; that it embraces the uncertainty embedded in 'not knowing'; and is supportive of multiple forms of knowledge output to drive social inclusion and cohesion.

Thematic Hubs

Milestones

Community Convergence Workstream

April 2020

Initiated in response to the pandemic

Projects took shape based on analysis and requests for support

Thematic Hubs Branching Out

Second half of 2021

Projects branching off, new funding emerging etc.

End 2020 – start 2021

Projects are evolving, taking more solid shape, growing roots for the longer term

CCW -> Thematic Hubs

Milestones

The Community Convergence Workstream

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Sewing Project

Community-based Food Systems | Abamelwane

Sustainable Food Relief

Hub 4: Community-based Economic Initiatives

Hub 2: Food Sovereignty

Ubuso Bethu

Hub 5: Community-driven Projects

Hubs of Convergence

Hub 3: Gender-based Violence

Community-based Food Systems | Abamelwane

Lima Gardening Project, KwaNobuhle

Makukhanye

Sbu in Wells Estate

NU2 Clinic, Motherwell

Helenvale House of Rastafarians

Yizani Sakhe, Wells Estate

Dora Nginza Hospital Garden

Booysens Park

Moeggesukkel, Kanega

Ikhala Trust

Booysens Park

Kuyga, Greenbushes

Harvest Projects, Jacksonville

Sustainable Food Relief

Hub 3: Gender-based Violence

Transformation Unit

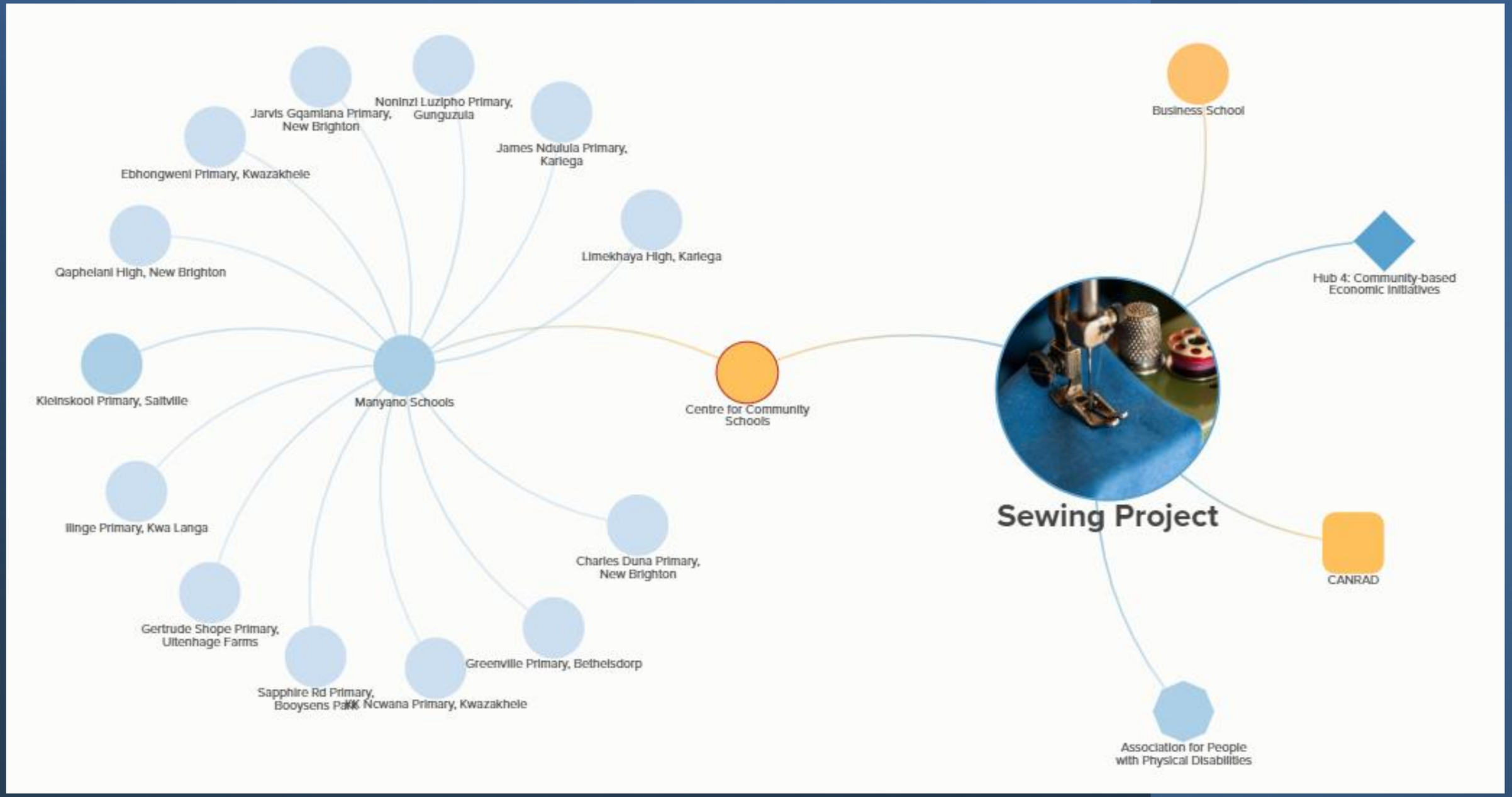
I Protect Me

OUT

GBV Forum

Doxa Family Care

Phaphamani Rape Crisis Centre


Jarvis Gqamlana Primary, New Brighton
Noninzi Luzipho Primary, Gunguzula
James Ndululu Primary, Kariega
Ebhongweni Primary, Kwazakhele
Qaphelani High, New Brighton
Limekhaya High, Kariega
Kleinskool Primary, Saltville
Manyano Schools
Centre for Community Schools
Business School
Hub 4: Community-based Economic Initiatives
Sewing Project
CANRAD
Association for People with Physical Disabilities
Ilinge Primary, Kwa Langa
Charles Duna Primary, New Brighton
Gertrude Shope Primary, Uitenhage Farms
Greenville Primary, Bethelsdorp
Sapphire Rd Primary, Booysens Park
KK Ncwana Primary, Kwazakhele

Support Centre for Land Change SCLC
Phambili, George
Hubs of Convergence
Ikhala Trust
Hub 2: Food Sovereignty
Community-based Food Systems | Abamelwane
Booysens Park
Kuyga, Greenbushes
Harvest Projects, Jacksonville
Moeggesukkel, Kariega
Yizani Sakhe, Wells Estate
Sustainable Food Relief
FireKilla Pilot Project
HoC Communication Team

Firekilla Pilot

HoC-DVPA collaboration

Lecturers willing?

Curriculum accommodating?

Students informed? Lens

Schedules

L&T Programmes

Community Partners

Is this useful/relevant to CPs?

Complement their work?

Collective sense-making?

Space for reflection & feedback?

Lens/approach

Institutional support

Funding

Communicating

Engagement

Research

CBPAR Methodology

Serendipitous connection!

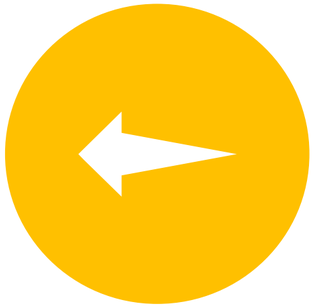
Multi-level Learning Community

Link to undergrad curricula?

Dr Busisiwe Lujabe’s workshop

Learning

Converging Lessons



PARALLEL:

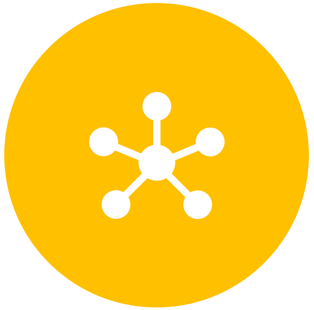
Arrangement and state of several operations being performed simultaneously and not necessarily consecutively.

This means to show, that we are operating in a space where a variety of tasks are taking shape at the same time, however, not necessarily following particular chronological/linear sequence.

CIRCULAR:

These concentric circles indicate movement, rhythm, rotation, and even fluctuation.

This means to say that our work is also constantly taking shape, evolving and shifting.



MULTIDIMENSIONAL:

The process of the hoc conceptualization is iterative, non-linear, messy, human and material resource-intensive, and contested. The HoC exists in a multi-dimensional space, multi-layered, multidirectional, multi-scale and intricate space.

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We are learning that…

Context

Great care must be taken to avoid preconceived ideas of how community systems and groups are likely to respond. These are often contextual and are constructed on historical, cultural, political, social and economic inferences.

Time

Further lessons for our work indicate that time must be given for complex responses to develop, and a wide range of approaches must be considered to ensure that all possible (maybe not all but relevant) key methods have been explored.

Operational

Institutional policies on engagement need to be developed and integrated to simplify administrative processes, tools and support. Often bureaucratic instruments are a barrier more than they are an enabler of CE.

How do we reconcile communities' need for immediate responses, relief and university check and balances?

Resources

Management, distribution, usage and exchange of human and material university and community resources is a layered exercise because i) power is not always shared, ii) capacity is varied, iii) trust is built overtime, iv) CE is not always prioritized as a significant university output.

Relationships

Relationships are not easy to establish, maintain and nurture where values, expectations, needs and interests diverge.

How do we reconcile differences in meaningfully constructive ways (not just at the metalevels, but with everyday interpersonal relationships)?

Co-construction of Knowledge

Language is not innocent; knowledge is not neutral, and systems are not apolitical. All these are relational to a set of historical, cultural, political social and economic environments.

How do we produce socially useful knowledge (in and for) a constantly changing society?

Communication

Universities need to articulate a rethink on the role of text, media and other forms of expression in communicating engagement work in universities.

How do we connect various communities across multiple platforms, in socially conscious and creative ways?

Engagement

We need to "… understand that to measure something indicates it is valued, but that not everything of value can be measured" Robert A. Scott. 2013

- In our praxis of community engagement how can we liberate ourselves from the pressures or expectation (institutional or societal) to measure that which we and others value and more importantly how can we make peace with the latter part of the quote "not everything of value can be measured"?

It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite. –Paulo Freire

- What have been your experiences with community engagement within your context/reality that would support or challenge this notion of 'maintaining hope'?

Borrowing from Freire, bell hooks, et al writing on liberal education/freedom-based education/democratic education…

- How do we conceptualize and practice 'liberal engagement' or 'democratic engagement' within the higher education context?

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