

THE DATAFICATION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



SCAN CARD · 08

DESCRIPTION

Universities are under growing pressure to demonstrate the value and impact of their community engagement. Funders, policymakers and ranking systems expect evidence showing how engagement contributes to societal and institutional goals. Impact frameworks, KPIs, digital reporting systems and engagement dashboards are becoming more common across higher education.

These developments make engagement more visible and comparable, but also influence how it is organised and evaluated. Activities that generate measurable outputs may receive more attention than relational outcomes such as trust, reciprocity or social cohesion.

RELEVANCE

Data and measurement systems are shaping how universities understand, organise and communicate community engagement. They can strengthen accountability, institutional learning and visibility.

However, growing reliance on measurable indicators may prioritise what is easy to measure over relational outcomes — trust, reciprocity and social cohesion — potentially narrowing how engagement is valued.

NEED

Universities need evaluation approaches that support learning and improvement rather than focusing solely on reporting and compliance — frameworks that combine quantitative and qualitative evidence, recognising both measurable and relational impact.

Institutions also need clear governance for indicator selection, data quality and ethical use of engagement data. Without this, data-driven approaches may narrow what counts as engagement success, encouraging institutions to prioritise measurable activities over long-term relationship building.

CATEGORY

Tech · Political · Social

SIGNAL STRENGTH

Strong



SCANNING METHOD

Literature · Policy review

SOURCES

NCCPE Evaluating Public Engagement · OECD (2022) Reinforcing Democracy · Hart et al. (2010) Auditing Public Engagement · Furco & Miller (2009) Benchmarking Engagement