

# ahead<sup>7</sup>

Arts and Humanities  
Engagement and Dialogue

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## Ahead of the curve:

approaching inclusive growth  
in collaboration with arts,  
humanities and social sciences





# Contents

<b>Inclusive growth</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Four engagement opportunities with arts, humanities and social science research</b>	<b>4</b>
1. Context	4
2. Critique	4
3. Communication	5
4. Contribution	5
<b>Case studies from Manchester Metropolitan University</b>	<b>6</b>
People and Place: Microsimulation Modelling	6
Place: UNESCO City of Literature	6
Planet: Treescapes – Voices of the Future	7
People and Place – Ephemeral Masterplanning, Mayfield Depot	7
People, Place and Planet – Reshoring Fashion, The Robotics Living Lab	7
<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>

## Inclusive growth

**As we collectively attempt to come to terms with the post-pandemic period and grapple with the ongoing cost of living crisis, there is an increasing focus from our national politicians, local and regional governments, Local Enterprise Partnerships, and others, on productivity and growth. But the nature of that growth, and fundamentally how our economic model supports citizens, is crucial to ensuring our economy contributes to our wellbeing.**

When Kakwani and Pernia first talked about “inclusive growth” – framed in their work as “poor pro-growth” – there was a tendency for development and growth to be viewed in a specific way, adhering to the “trickle-down” economic model<sup>1</sup>. Over the past two decades, inclusive growth has become more mainstream and explored by a range of theorists as well as being utilised in local government.

At its most simple, inclusive growth is a form of economic growth which creates opportunities for all, where benefits are equally distributed throughout society. It’s an economic approach that recognises inequality puts all of us at risk, explores economic models that go beyond GDP, gives us all a stake in growth, and centres investment in people and places.

This briefing draws together the current landscape of national debate around questions of economic and inclusive growth, and identifies the critical contribution of arts, humanities and social sciences to such questions. Many researchers in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Manchester Metropolitan University are engaged in research that contributes to inclusive economic growth. In this briefing we highlight some of these projects and show the beneficial impact of taking a multidisciplinary approach to design and delivery of economic growth in service of an inclusive growth agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> Nanak Kakwani and Pernia, E.M. (2000). What is Pro-poor Growth? *Asian development review*, 18(01), pp.1–16. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1142/s0116110500000014>.

# Four engagement opportunities with arts, humanities and social science research

Contributions from those practising and researching the arts, humanities and social sciences offer the potential to improve the quality of the debate around economic growth and, ultimately, shape the progress we are all able to make. This has been categorised broadly as an intrinsic and instrumental potential of these disciplines<sup>2</sup>. The specifics of such intrinsic and instrumental roles are worth exploring further, and here we identify four points of engagement through the delivery of inclusive growth activities: context, critique, communication and contribution.

## 1. Context

By working with arts, humanities and social sciences we can better understand the context of inclusive growth initiatives. The RSA defines inclusive growth as enabling ‘as many people as possible to contribute and benefit from growth’<sup>3</sup>. Delivering on this ambition requires an understanding of – and response to – local and cultural contexts.

As the British Council explore in their report *Mobilising the humanities*, expertise from the arts and humanities can help leaders and the public to understand the world around us<sup>4</sup>.

**“Humanities play a really important role in translating what communities and people feel and think about their lives. They could also provide a really imaginative space for reimagining what life for people could look like.”**

**Dr Khawla Badwan,**  
Manchester Metropolitan University.

They draw on examples such as applied anthropology’s role in providing cultural understanding of gender dynamics when designing programmes aiming directly or indirectly to deliver economic growth.

Elsewhere, Global Higher Education reporting suggests that arts and humanities can accelerate economic innovation by supporting interventions to actively respond to cultural change and articulate ethical foundations for inclusive work<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Critique

These disciplines can also provide important insights to constructively critique the design or motivation of interventions to support economic growth. Much of the development in our understanding of economic growth has come from those exploring critiques and using these to push forward to a more inclusive model.

Dr Adi Kuntsman, Reader in Digital Politics at Manchester Metropolitan University explores the impact of digitisation on the environment, critiquing whether growth can be meaningfully inclusive when explored at the local and global level.<sup>6</sup> Looking at digitisation and the impact this has such as resource extraction, electricity demands, heat and carbon emissions, and e-waste, the research challenges the assumptions around “sustainable growth” and proposes to look instead into reduction, reuse, recycling and degrowth.

Similarly, McCartney, G., O’Connor, J., Olma, S. et al. argue that our current economic design is at the root of the crises we face, and in a subversion of traditional framings of growth, that by understanding culture as an ends of our economic model, not merely a means, we might move beyond current conceptions of growth<sup>7</sup>. It is these creative provocations and critiques that can push forward our understanding of how to deliver on an inclusive economy.

<sup>2</sup> Global Higher Education (n.d.). *Leading the World: the Economic Impact of UK Arts and Humanities Research*. [online] Available at: <https://globalhighered.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/leadingtheworld.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> the RSA (2017). *Inclusive Growth Commission: Making our economy work for everyone*. [online] The RSA. Available at: <https://www.thersa.org/reports/final-report-of-the-inclusive-growth-commission>.

<sup>4</sup> British Council (2014). *Mobilising the Humanities: the Development Perspective*. [online] www.britishcouncil.us. Available at: [https://www.britishcouncil.us/sites/default/files/humanities\\_report.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.us/sites/default/files/humanities_report.pdf) [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>5</sup> Global Higher Education (n.d.). *Leading the World: the Economic Impact of UK Arts and Humanities Research*. [online] Available at: <https://globalhighered.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/leadingtheworld.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Adi Kuntsman and Xin, L. (2024). *Digital Technologies, Smart Cities and the Environment*. Bristol University Press.

<sup>7</sup> McCartney, G., O’Connor, J., Olma, S., Hill O’Connor, C., Harroun, L. and Morel, K. (2023). Culture as an objective for and a means of achieving a Wellbeing Economy. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, [online] 10(1), pp.1–5. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02240-6>.

### 3. Communication

In their six-step 'How to do inclusive growth' review, the Centre for Progressive Policy place a 'shared, binding vision' as the first step towards success<sup>8</sup>. Explicitly explored here is the need for contribution from citizens to shape the local economic landscape.

Critical to enabling such contribution is the communication of ideas in a way which is accessible, relevant and easy to understand. MacLeod articulates that communication skills borne from arts and humanities disciplines help enable democratic processes and fuller participation<sup>9</sup>. In particular, they make reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the role of effective communication in moving these from technical aims to something which people feel relate to their lives and wellbeing.

Communication informed by arts, humanities and social science disciplines can also help to engage diverse communities around inclusive economic agendas. As the British Council explore, culturally informed communication, including translation, can help to ensure economic efforts are collaborative and participatory<sup>10</sup>.

The work of Professor Kristina Niedderer at Manchester Met uses design to communicate ideas about health and wellbeing but also enables people in a collaborative way to communicate about themselves to aid health and wellbeing outcomes. As design, health and wellbeing are all intrinsic to inclusive growth, creating an intersecting space that enables improved communication is fundamental.<sup>11</sup>

### 4. Contribution

Arts, humanities and social sciences hold the potential to deliver inclusive economic growth through cultural, creative and heritage sectors. The Centre for Public Policy's Inclusive Growth Network argue that culture and creativity have an instrumental role to play in driving an inclusive

growth agenda<sup>12</sup>. Whilst the quantitative case for cultural and creative industries in driving economic growth is well documented, the sector also has the potential to be instrumental in centring inclusivity in the delivery of this economic activity<sup>13</sup>. The RSA furthermore argue that this extends to heritage activity, which can play a role in centring new narratives and diverse communities in the stories of our local places and national heritage<sup>14</sup>.

**“..we're training the next Generations of thinkers and doers and that's obviously an incredibly important way to be involved the economy of Manchester.” –**

**Professor Toby Heys,**  
Manchester Metropolitan University.

The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre continue to explore how the creative sector might play the role of local anchor institutions to stimulate growth<sup>15</sup>. They draw on the Preston Model which deploys Community Wealth Building as a means of delivering an inclusive local economy, ensuring local growth benefits communities by democratising assets.

Digital innovation also provides a route to inclusion when factored into the design. Work within the School of Digital Arts (SODA) at Manchester Met centres on the deployment of digital arts to tell different stories, bring people into new digital and physical spaces and offer new ways of making creativity more inclusive. Here researchers Dr David Jackson and Dr Toby Heys ran workshops with young carers using 'emotion-sensing' technology to explore themes of loneliness and isolation<sup>16</sup>. Initiatives like this, which widen the entry points for participation, can help to enable a more inclusive approach to our economy.

<sup>8</sup> Centre for Progressive Policy (2019). *How to Do Inclusive Growth: a Six-Step Programme*. [online] Available at: [https://www.progressive-policy.net/downloads/files/IG-blog-series\\_How-to-do-local-inclusive-growth.pdf](https://www.progressive-policy.net/downloads/files/IG-blog-series_How-to-do-local-inclusive-growth.pdf) [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>9</sup> MacLeod, C. (2023). *How the Humanities Can Facilitate Our Pursuit of the SDGs*. [online] University World News. Available at: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2023072510220636> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>10</sup> British Council (2014). *Mobilising the Humanities: the Development Perspective*. [online] [www.britishcouncil.us](http://www.britishcouncil.us). Available at: [https://www.britishcouncil.us/sites/default/files/humanities\\_report.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.us/sites/default/files/humanities_report.pdf) [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>11</sup> All About Us board game. Manchester Metropolitan University MinD, University of Wolverhampton, the NHS, Alzheimer Europe & Relish

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, D. (2024). *Culture and Creative industries: a Catalyst for Inclusive Growth*. [online] Inclusive Growth Network. Available at: <https://inclusivegrowthnetwork.org/resource-hub/culture-and-inclusive-growth> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>13</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2023). *Creative Industries Sector Vision*. [online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64898de2b32b9e00ca96712/Creative\\_Industries\\_Sector\\_Vision\\_accessible\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64898de2b32b9e00ca96712/Creative_Industries_Sector_Vision_accessible_version.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Antink, B., Cox, E., Cooke, J., Stenning, S. and Locke, N. (2020). *Heritage for inclusive growth*. [online] Available at: <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/reports/2020/the-rsa-heritage-for-inclusive-growth.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Whyman, P.B., Wright, A., Lawler, M. and Petrescu, A. (2022). *Supporting the Creative Industries: the Impact of the 'Preston Model' in Lancashire*. [online] Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. Available at: <https://pec.ac.uk/research-reports/the-impact-of-the-preston-model-in-lancashire> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>16</sup> Find out more at <https://www.art.mmu.ac.uk/news/item-9389/>.

# Case studies from Manchester Metropolitan University

Any inclusive growth approach must include diverse thought and experiences to achieve meaningful impact. Universities are often approached and involved in research and policy development, but, too often, stakeholders may not fully appreciate where that involvement lies. As we have demonstrated, academics in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences have the potential to contribute significantly to the field of inclusive growth. Indeed, many already are actively doing this work. Conversations with practitioners in Manchester Met's Faculty of Arts and Humanities show a breadth of collaborative, multi-disciplinary and cross-cutting work bringing a valuable lens to the evolution of inclusive growth.

Below we explore five case studies from Manchester Met, spanning approaches to economic activity and growth which seek to design an economy that is inclusive of *people, places and the planet* more widely.



## People and Place: Microsimulation Modelling

The impact of budgetary decisions have long been explored at the micro-level but Manchester Met's Policy Evaluation and Research Unit have developed (and maintains) a microsimulation tool called the IPPR Tax-Benefit Model<sup>17</sup> that enables them to look at the fiscal, distributional and poverty effects of tax and benefit policy. This inclusive approach to modelling enables clear evidence at the place-based level of the impact of economic decisions on communities in those places.

The tool is widely used by a range of Think Tanks: Institute of Public Policy Research, Resolution Foundation, Centre for Social Justice, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, New Economics Foundation, Legatum Institute and Fraser of Allander Institute.



## Place: UNESCO City of Literature

Manchester's UNESCO designation as City of Literature has woven through it a commitment to inclusivity through creativity. It is underpinned by a commitment to inclusivity, namely **“celebrating the rich diversity of voices in the city, building on the strengths of Manchester's people and widening participation in literary activity”**<sup>18</sup>. The activity and commitments of the City of Literature status are the result of a collaboration between Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Manchester and Manchester City Council, each having equal contribution to the overseeing board alongside six community trustees.

Poetry has been a core creative discipline running through this partnership since 2017. Community engagement is at the heart of this work, from large scale initiatives like the Mother Tongue Other Tongue competition which garnered over 35,000 entries to the hyper local, like the writer in residence at Trafford General Hospital sharing untold stories from the NHS<sup>19</sup>. Across this gradient, initiatives place community wellbeing and civic pride at their core.

The City status shows how cultural and creative industries, and academic research in such disciplines, can contribute to local economic growth and centre inclusivity by design. From the collaborative design to the direct contribution to the local economy, the activity in support of the City status has inclusivity woven through it.

<sup>17</sup>MMU Policy Evidence and Research Unit (n.d.). *Economic Analysis & Modelling*. [online] MMU Peru. Available at: <https://mmuperu.co.uk/economic-analysis/> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>18</sup>Manchester City Council (2023). *Appendix 10: Manchester City of Literature Update*. [online] Available at: <https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s45965/Appendix%2010%20-%20Manchester%20City%20of%20Literature%20update.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup>Find out more at: <https://untoldstories.mmu.ac.uk/trafford-stories/>





## Planet: Treescapes – Voices of the Future

The pressing issue of biodiversity loss and climate change is being felt acutely across the globe. However, many of those who are making decisions today to address this will not be around to maintain these projects in the future. The Treescapes: Voices of the Future project is an innovative collaborative approach to work with children to explore how they can understand and manage the treescapes of the future that they will be responsible for as adults. Manchester Metropolitan University collaborates with a range of partners including other academics, third sector organisations and local schools, the project seeks to **“improve the futures of children and young people by improving their understanding, appreciation of and participation in shaping the future of their treescapes”**.<sup>20</sup> The project demonstrates how power and decision making can be more inclusive and participatory.



## People and Place – Ephemeral Masterplanning, Mayfield Depot

Large scale urban regeneration can often undertake tokenistic approaches to resident participation as well as have a tense relationship with sites that have historical and archaeological significance.

The Grit Walks took an adapted action research approach utilised creativity and ephemeral archaeology to create new mediums to engage local people at an early stage in the regeneration journey as well as raise new material that would build a deeper understanding of its history.

The project moved large scale urban development into a more inclusive space. From activity being done to local citizens to done with.

In addition, it created a new model that enabled a large scale regeneration project to be seen through to completion, while meeting the needs of private enterprise as well as those of public bodies with robust policy requirements, and local communities whose experience of regeneration can often be negative.



## People, Place and Planet – Reshoring Fashion, The Robotics Living Lab

Led by Professor Susan Postlethwaite, the Robotics Living Lab at Manchester Met aims to develop technology that can be used by small designer /manufacturer businesses in the UK to enable high value, low volume garment production using agile robotics technology. The use of technology to enable local SME businesses to thrive will address some of the significant environmental issues that the high-volume fashion industry causes.

The lab will enable smaller studios to thrive by aiding small businesses to train differently and newly skilled workers, creating agility in a model that is often challenged for lack of sustainable approaches. At the same time this model addresses the environmental consequences of cheap, fast fashion.



<sup>20</sup>Find out more at: <https://treescapes-voices.mmu.ac.uk/about>



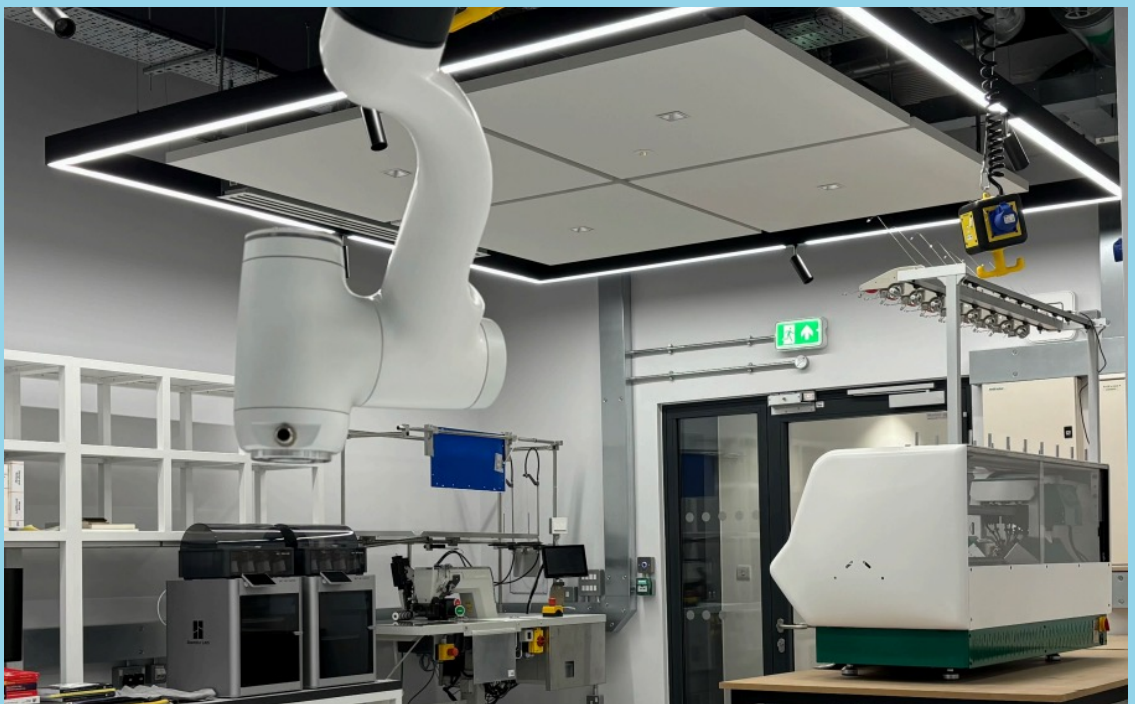
## Conclusions and Recommendations

Many local and regional governments have developed policies and frameworks to enable and support inclusive growth in their regions.<sup>21</sup> However, these approaches are not being enacted without attracting criticism. Climate change has shifted from an existential threat to a clear and present danger, and the idea of any type of growth has continued to be countered by new models that give primacy to principles of inclusivity, such as wellbeing economic models, degrowth and community wealth building.

Within this context, inclusive growth is increasingly recognised as a mainstream economic model, presenting a multi-faceted approach to addressing inequality whilst maintaining economic growth. Inclusive growth's centring of people and the places they live enables a deeply localised approach to economic growth. Whilst criticism of the approach can draw in the need to recognise the planetary impact of growth, the case studies explored from Manchester Metropolitan University in this briefing offer opportunities to think more about the environment in our approach to an inclusive economy.

More broadly, arts, humanities and social sciences can bring value to work on inclusive growth both through research and practical application, due to the cross cutting and multi-disciplinary approach deployed by many working in these fields. These disciplines are intrinsically linked to skills in communication and collaboration, both of which are essential to the delivery of meaningfully inclusive activity. They also offer a creative perspective compared to traditional economic thinking, offering both context and critique to drive forward our understanding of inclusive growth and how to apply it.

For many, discussions of "the economy" can feel exclusionary, even models that seek to enhance inclusion and improve outcomes for more citizens, particularly those most acutely impacted by inequality. As such drawing in more diverse thought, multidisciplinary approaches enable participation, diverse thinking and cross cutting models. By stepping beyond economics practitioners and including the diverse thought and experience offered by the arts, humanities and social sciences we can develop more inclusive practice and growth.



<sup>21</sup>For example Leeds, West Midlands Combined Authority, Teeside



**AHEAD is the public engagement programme of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Manchester Metropolitan University.**

Our work will highlight research from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Manchester Met, including english, history, politics, philosophy, sociology, criminology, applied social science, and arts disciplines spanning across architecture, design, fashion, fine art, performance and digital arts.

AHEAD presents a rolling programme of events and collaborations on a range of topics, disciplines and research areas from across the faculty and throughout the year.

Our research seeks to make a real difference to people's lives.



AHEAD: Cultural Action and The Performing Arts: Equitable Models of Economic Growth Symposium.

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