SPACE
Supporting Professionals and Academics for Community Engagement

Mapping success factors in university-community partnerships:
Review of literature and assessment frameworks

Author: Thomas Farnell

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Publisher: Institute for the Development of Education (Zagreb, Croatia)

Author: Thomas Farnell (Institute for the Development of Education)

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Community engagement in higher education refers to how universities address societal needs in partnership with their external communities. Community engagement is emerging as a policy priority in higher education, reflecting increasing pressure on universities to demonstrate how they deliver public benefits. At the European level, the European Commission's key policy documents *Towards a European Education Area* features 'service to society' as the 'fourth mission of higher education', and there is increasing expectations for universities to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an expectation that is now reflected in a special university ranking for SDGs (the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings) (Farnell, 2020).

The project *Supporting Professionals and Academics for Community Engagement in Higher Education* (SPACE) is a three-year project (2023-2026) that aims to build the capacities of academics, professional staff, and community partners to strengthen community engagement in higher education across Europe. Funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ programme, the SPACE project is a follow-up to the successful projects *Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education* (TEFCE, 2018-2020) and *Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement* (SHEFCE, 2020-2023), whose results are gathered on the European web platform www.community-engagement.eu. The project is led by the Institute for the Development of Education (IDE, Croatia) and involves nine partners from four countries (Belgium, Croatia, Ireland and Spain). The project is also supported by four European-level associations and university alliances, as well as by two university networks from Catalonia and Ireland.

The SPACE project has three specific objectives:

1. To incorporate new methods and approaches to community engagement in academic practices at four universities.
2. To improve policies and practices of universities to establish sustainable and mutually beneficial community engagement partnerships.
3. To increase support from universities and stakeholders around Europe for mainstreaming community engagement in higher education.

One of central approaches the project to achieve these aims is listen to the perspective of community partners from all four countries on the success factors and obstacles to effective collaboration with universities, and subsequently to develop tools to assist universities in enhancing these partnerships. While we already possess a framework to assess community engagement through the previous project (the 'TEFCE Toolbox'), the focus in this project shifts towards establishing a structured approach to engage partners in dialogue about their own perceptions and to facilitate targeted improvements.

This project publication aims to provide the foundation for framing the discussions with community partners and for the subsequent tools. In particular, the aim of the analysis is to inform and structure the following activities and outputs of the SPACE project:

- **Survey and analysis of community partnerships at 4 universities in Europe:** based on the desk research, we will define what elements of partnerships should be analysed, and how the data collection could be structured (through a questionnaire and/or focus group protocol, depending on the chosen method).

- **Guidelines for successful university-community partnerships:** based on the desk research, we will make an initial proposal of what form the guidelines could take (e.g. a checklist, a set of indicators, a rubric, or a set of narrative guidelines) and its potential thematic structure.

To achieve this, we will examine existing literature on collaboration, both in general contexts and specifically within the realm of community engagement in higher education, and synthesise these insights to establish a thematic framework on success factors for partnerships. The publication will also examine possible methods and tools for capturing the identified themes through discussions with communities. The question underlying the analysis will be whether the SPACE project can use existing tools, adapt them to suit our specific needs, or develop entirely new ones.

2. METHODOLOGY

There is a broad range of literature analysing success factors for partnerships between universities/academics and community partners. Additionally, there is a broader field of literature that analyses mechanisms and factors that influence interinstitutional collaboration in a broader sense and/or in specific areas (e.g. partnerships between international development agencies and local communities; partnerships between public services and community organisations in childcare or healthcare). In the following publication we will analyse a sample of relevant literature, and provide a synthesis of the findings, with the aim of categorising possible approaches to framing such an analysis in the SPACE project.

The initial frame of analysis in approaching the documents is the theoretical framework developed by Gray's (1989) seminal work on collaboration in which three stages of collaboration were defined:

Element of analysis	Success factors to be identified in our review
Preconditions	Identifying institutional or other environmental conditions that lead to collaborators coming together to form partnerships.
Process	Identifying steps or stages through which collaborators interact, make decisions and take action in a partnership.
Outcomes	Identifying steps that collaborators take to assess the types of outcomes that have arisen the partnerships, both in terms of the benefit for participating organisations and for end users and/or on the topic being addressed in the partnership.

Source: Authors' definitions, based on Gray (1989)

Based on a synthesis of success factors, the authors will synthesise the findings and determine whether the SPACE project should use existing frameworks or tools, adapt them to suit our specific needs, or develop new ones inspired by the relevant previous work.

3. COLLABORATION SUCCESS FACTORS

3.1. Partnerships: collaboration, cooperation or coordination?

When scanning the literature, the initial question that arises is that of terminology and definitions of key concepts. The SPACE projects uses the term 'university-community partnerships', and frames such partnerships within the definition of community engagement in higher education, which is defined as universities collaborating external communities to address societal needs (Farnell et al, 2020).

According to the Oxford English dictionary, collaboration refers to 'working jointly on an activity or project'. When reviewing research literature on collaboration, however, Patel et al. (2012) note that 'for a concept so widely used in everyday language there is a surprising lack of a clear understanding of what it is to collaborate, and of how best to support and improve collaborative working' (p.1), and there are similar issues with defining what are considered as partnerships (Wildridge et al., 2004). Another level of complexity relates to whether partnerships are examples of 'cooperation', 'coordination' or 'collaboration'? The literature also does not provide a clear answer, indeed researchers have identified 'confusion over the meaning of collaboration, coordination, and cooperation' (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020).

To clarify some of these initial conceptual difficulties, we can turn to the seminal works on collaboration by Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey (2001), Hord (1986) and Gray (1989), whose definitions of these key terms have been summarised by Czajkowski (2007) as follows:

- **Cooperation** is considered as the most informal interorganisational relationship between organisations that undertake unified action, but without a common mission, structure or joint planning.
- **Coordination** is a slightly more formal relationship, involving recognition of mutual benefits, but still with a low level of joint planning and sharing of resources.
- **Collaboration** is the most formal interorganisational relationship involving shared authority and responsibility for planning, implementation and evaluation of a joint effort.

On the other hand, a separate and extensive literature review by Castañer & Oliveira (2020) led to different conclusions and a different set of definitions. Examining definitions of these key terms in a much broader set of literature (management literature from 1948 to 2017) according to dimensions of attitude, behaviour, and outcome. According to their review, the

- **Collaboration** refers to voluntarily helping others to attain a jointly determined common goal or a private goal.
- **Coordination** refers to attitudes, behaviours, and outcomes of joint determination of common goals.
- **Cooperation** refers to attitudes, behaviours, and outcomes of the implementation of jointly determined common goals.

The examples above demonstrate that there is no single way of defining the key terms related to partnerships and collaboration. On the other hand, the same examples do point to the fact that there is range of levels of mutual benefits and authenticity to partnerships – however we may choose to define those levels. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, in this report the term 'collaboration' will be used as umbrella term for interinstitutional partnerships, and we will also adopt the distinction adopted in Czajkowski (2007) that collaboration is the highest and most institutionalised achievement in terms of interinstitutional relationships, and that cooperation and coordination are less formalised types of relationships.

3.2. Success factors of interinstitutional collaboration

The seminal text identifying success factors of collaboration is *Collaboration: What makes it Work?* by Paul Mattessich and Barbara Monsey, first published in 1992 and updated and reissued in 2001 and 2016 (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001; Mattessich & Johnson, 2016). Their initial analysis was a literature review of the existing research literature (encompassing 133 studies) on factors which influence the success of collaboration to provide a supportive framework for those who want to initiate or enhance a collaborative effort. The scope of the search included health, social science, education, and public affairs fields. The definition of collaboration in their analysis was interinstitutional collaboration, defined as a mutually beneficial relationship among organisations for common goals (Mattessich and Johnson, 2016). The findings identified 19 factors that influence successful collaboration, and later revisions of the text increased the number of factors to 20, organised into six categories:

Table 1: Mattesich and colleagues success factors for collaboration

Categories	Success factors
Environment	1. History of collaboration or cooperation in community 2. Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community 3. Favourable political and social climate
Membership characteristics	4. Mutual respect, understanding and trust 5. Appropriate cross section of members 6. Members see their collaboration as in their self-interest 7. Ability to compromise 8. Members share a stake in both process and outcome
Process and structure	9. Multiple layers of participation 10. Flexibility 11. Development of clear roles and policy guidelines
Communication	12. Adaptability 13. Appropriate pace of development 14. Open and frequent communication 15. Established informal relationships and communication links
Purpose	16. Concrete, attainable goals and objectives 17. Shared vision 18. Unique purpose
Resources	19. Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time 20. Skilled leadership

Source: Mattessich et al. (2001)

The categorisation first developed by Mattessich and colleagues can arguably be considered the 'gold standard' of frameworks to analyse factors for collaboration, and other frameworks than have since been developed based on literature reviews share many similarities. We include three examples below by Marek et al. (2015), Wildridge et al. (2004), Czajkowski (2006), with a summary table show how the main categories of critical success factors echo the previous findings:

Table 2: Comparison of success factors for collaboration between four frameworks based on literature reviews

Mattessich et al (2001)	Marek et al. (2015)	Wildridge et al. (2004)	Czajkowski(2006)
1. Environment	Context	*(treated separately as 'driver')*	*(treated separately as 'precondition')*
2. Membership characteristics	Members	2. Trust	1. Trust and partner compatibility
3. Process and structure	Process and organisation	4. Effective decision-making and accountability 5. Managing change	3. Shared governance and joint decision making 4. Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities
4. Communication	Communication	3. Clear, consistent communication 6. Maintain partner commitment	5. Open and frequent communication
5. Purpose	Function	1. Shared vision	2. Common and unique purpose
6. Resources	Resources Leadership	7. Skills inworking across professional, organizational or other boundaries	-

Source: Author, based on analysis of references listed in table

To confirm the relevance of the framework developed by Mattessich and colleagues in practice, it is useful to examine not only academic research but also grey literature, such as frameworks and guides pertaining to partnerships. In Table 3 below, we analyse the extent to which the 20 success factors featured in the framework of Mattessich and colleagues feature in three different international frameworks developed by influential institutions:

- *The SDG partnership guidebook: A practical guide to building high-impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals,* published by the United Nations (Stibbe and Prescott, 2020)
- *Partnerships: A Guide*, published by the OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance (2006)
- The "Nuffield Partnership Assessment Tool", published by the UK's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Hardy et al., 2003).

The analysis shows that virtually all the six factor categories are reflected in these frameworks, and that the majority of the 20 key success factors are also directly reflected. Nevertheless, the frameworks are not identical and certain additional factors are highlighted in those frameworks, as highlighted at the bottom of the table.

Table 3: Comparison of success factors for collaboration between selected grey literature and Mattesich and colleagues

Success factor category (Mattesich et al, 2001)	Success factors (Mattesich et al, 2001)	Equivalent success factors in other tools		
		SDG partnership handbook	OECD LEED: partnerships – a guide	Nuffield Partnership Assessment Tool
Environment	1. History of collaboration or cooperation in community			x
	2. Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community			
	3. Favourable political and social climate		x	
Membership characteristics	4. Mutual respect, understanding and trust	x	x	x
	5. Appropriate cross section of members	x	x	
	6. Members see their collaboration as in their self-interest	x	x	x
	7. Ability to compromise	x		
	8. Members share a stake in both process and outcome	x	x	
Process and structure	9. Multiple layers of participation	x	x	
	10. Flexibility	x	x	x
	11. Development of clear roles and policy guidelines	x	x	x
Communication	12. Adaptability	x	x	
	13. Appropriate pace of development	x		
	14. Open and frequent communication	x	x	x
	15. Established informal relationships and communication links			
Purpose	16. Concrete, attainable goals and objectives	x	x	x
	17. Shared vision	x	x	x
	18. Unique purpose	x	x	x
Resources	19. Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time	x	x	x
	20. Skilled leadership	x	x	X
Differences:	• *Both the SDG and Nuffield framework include monitoring and evaluation as a separate success factor,* • *The SDG and OECD framework mention support of senior management within each institution as a separate success factor* • *The SDG framework specifically mentions the legal and management structure, as well as having a clear theory of change framework for the partnership.*			

Source: Author, based on Mattessich et al (2001) and analysis of OECD LEED Forum on Partnerships and Local Governance (2006), Hardy et al. (2003), Stibbe and Prescott (2020),

With the relevance of the framework by Mattesich and colleagues confirmed, in the next section we will consider to what extent the success factors (and/or success factor categories) could be applicable and useful in the field of higher education, with a specific focus on community engagement in higher education.

3.3. Success factors of university-community partnerships

In considering whether a framework designed for general interinstitutional collaboration could equally be applied within the context of higher education, and to university-community engagement in particular, it is useful to take note of some initial elements that we might expect could complicate such an application:

- Partnerships within higher education operate at multiple levels - encompassing interactions with university management, teaching/research staff, professional staff, and with students themselves. There are also significant differences between the capacities and approaches to partnerships of different university departments.
- Specific partnerships between universities and external communities can in most cases expect to see a major initial difference in power relations between a larger, better-resourced university and a smaller, lower-resourced community partner. These power differentials may also manifest in other forms, including in perceived "knowledge power" dynamics, where academics are often regarded as the custodians of official knowledge.
- University-community partnerships, as opposed to partnerships in other sectors, are more likely to be driven by intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation (such as policy priorities and funding opportunities).

In this section we will explore to what extent such specificities may influence the type of success factors for collaboration between universities and external community organisations. chapter will explore these conditions.

Success factors for community-based participatory research partnerships

The first example we will examine is a categorisation of success factors in long-standing community-based participatory research (CBPR) partnerships, developed by Brush et al. (2020). To develop the framework, the authors conducted a scoping literature review of . twenty-six articles, based on which they identified three key domains, seven subdomains and 28 underlying indicators of success. These are presented below, together with a column to check with success factors correspond to identical or similar factors in Mattesich and colleagues.

Table 4: Success factors for community-based participatory research, compared with Mattesich and colleagues

Domains		Indicators	Link with Mattessich et al. 2001)
Partner domain	Characteristics of partners	1. Diverse	
		2. Committed	x
		3. Willing to share power, risk, responsibility, and accountability	x
		4. Representative/appropriate	x
		5. Able to make decisions	x
		6. Actively engaged	x
		7. Stable and established	
	Relationship among/ between partners	8. Trust	x
		9. Mutual respect	x
		10. Openness and transparency	x
		11. Recognition of pressures, priorities, and worldviews	
		12. Embrace cultural differences	
		13. Awareness and attention to power imbalances	
		14. Conflict recognition, response, and resolution	x
Partnership domain	Partnership characteristics	15. Strong, shared, and trustworthy leadership	x
		16. Flexibility/adaptability	x
		17. Effective communication strategies	x
		18. Clear and explicit guidelines	x
		19. Structures to support processes	
		20. Mandatory evaluations	
	Partnership resources	21. Shared and fair allocation of resources	x
	Partnership capacity	22. Increase capacity for research	
Partner-ship outcomes domain	Partnership outcomes	23. Research moves to system and policy change	
		24. Pride and ownership in partnership work	x
		25. Knowledge transfer from partnership to community	
		26. Clear, concrete, and sustainable community benefit	
		27. Increased power sharing	
		28. Continued willingness/ability to conduct CBPR	

Source: Brush et al, 2020 and author's analysis based on Mattessich at al. (2001)

The analysis shows that there is significant convergence between the specific framework for CBPR and the general collaboration framework by Mattesich and colleagues. While the 'Environment' domain is missing in the CBPR framework, it is earlier acknowledged that all processes in CBPR 'are influenced by broader environmental factors and the socioeconomic and cultural context within which a partnership operates' (Brush et al, 2020). A notable difference between the frameworks is that partnership *outcomes* are considered to be success factors. This difference may simply be one of framing: the Mattesich framework may

aim define the success factors needed *in order to achieve* positive outcomes. But the inclusion of outcomes as a success factor itself is significant: it shows that reaching, acknowledging and evaluating positive outcomes is a critical factor for continuation and sustainability of partnerships.

There is one more notable difference. The framework by Brush and colleagues includes several success factors that are missing from Mattesich and colleagues and that appear to reflect the specific context of university-community partnerships. Namely, the framework includes several success factors specifically referring to power differentials ('power imbalances', 'share power', 'fair allocation') and a recognition of the different institutional cultures within the partnerships ('diverse', 'cultural differences', 'worldviews'). Other differences are less significant and can be explained by the specific focus on CBPR ('increase capacity for research', 'system and policy change').

Success factors for community-based learning partnerships

The next framework we will analyse is the Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES) in the context of service-learning, developed by Clayton et al. (2010). Beyond defining the success factors of service-learning, TRES is a tool that helps practitioners and academics to measure the extent to which these success factors are met in practice. TRES was developed based on an analysis of attributes of transactional and transformational relationships (Enos & Morton, 2003) and the relationships literature applied to civic engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

In 2020, TRES evolved into TRES II through the work of Kniffin et al (2020) with the most recent framework consisting of ten items related to various aspects of university-community partnerships in the area of service-learning. We present the framework in Table 5 below, and in the following Table 6 we compare the correspondence between the TRES II framework and the success factors identified for CBPR and for collaboration more generally according to Mattesich and colleagues.

Table 5: Success factors for service learning Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale ('TRES II)

Title of success factors	Description of success factor
1. Goals	The extent to which the partnership shares common, integrated and expanding goals.
2. Conflict	The extent to which conflict within the partnerships is successfully resolved by the partners.
3. Decision-making	The extent to which partners make decisions that adopted through means acceptable to the partnership as a whole, and that are acceptable to individual partners.
4. Resources	The extent to which partners exchange existing resources (e.g., material goods, time, expertise, funds) for mutual benefit.
5. Role of this partnership in each partner's work	The extent to which the distinct work of all partners is advanced through the contributions of others.
6. Role of this partnership in sense of self	The extent to which the sense of confidence, agency and voice of all partners is strengthened through the contributions of others.

7. Extent and nature of interactions	The extent to which interactions between partners are frequent and decided upon with contributions by all partners.
8. Power	The extent to which partners have the ability to have influence within the partnerships.
9. Outcomes	The extent to which the partnership enables all partners to attain outcomes that matter to them.
10. Satisfaction	The extent to which partners are satisfied with the partnership.

Source: Author's summary based on Kniffin et al. (2020)

What is notable about the TRES II framework is its concise nature – focusing on ten key success factors, rather than the more detailed frameworks for CBPR (28 factors) and collaboration more general (20 factors). As can be seen in Table 6 below, there is a close correspondence between the factors identified in TRES II for service-learning and both the CBPR partnerships and general collaboration factors presented earlier, with only two exceptions: the inclusion of the first time of how the partnerships impacts 'sense of self' of partners and a focus on level of partner satisfaction':

Table 6: Success factors for service learning Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale ('TRES II)

Title of success factors	Mattesich et al (2001)	Brush et al (2020)
1. Goals	x	
2. Conflict	..	x
3. Decision-making	x	x
4. Resources	x	X
5. Role of this partnership in each partner's work	x	X
6. Role of this partnership in sense of self		
7. Extent and nature of interactions	x	X
8. Power	..	X
9. Outcomes		X
10. Satisfaction		

Source: Author, based on analysis of Kniffin et al (2020), Mattessich et al (2001), Brush et al (2020)

Comparing the TRES II with the CBPR framework, what is notable is that there is a similar emphasis on issues related to power differentials – with themes such as 'power' and 'conflict' being more prominent than in Mattesich and colleagues. The addition of 'sense of self' in terms of how a partnership contributes to partners having a sense of 'confidence, agency, and voice', further contributes to this angle, while also adding a personal and emotional component missing from previous frameworks.

A key element of the TRES II framework that is not visible in the analysis above is that its application involves assessing the level of a given partnership for each domain based on a 'maturity scale'. This scale adopts a critical approach to partnerships by creating an assessment scale between exploitational, transactional and transformational relationships (based on Enos & Morton, 2003 and Bringle et al, 2009) Exploitational partnerships are described as those in which the community partner has significantly less benefit from the relationship than the university; transactional interactions are described as short-term tasks and mutual benefits without anticipating long-term change; while transformational relationships involve growth and change for both sides in the longer term, with more flexibility and openness to explore new directions. This scale enables stakeholders to identify both challenges and desired outcomes, which can in turn help to define actions to improve the partnership. A further discussion of TRES II, with a focus on the assessment methodology applied, will be in the next section of the publication.

3.4. Discussion and synthesis of success factors

Based on the analysis above, one key conclusion is that the framework developed by Mattessich and colleagues can be considered as highly relevant in practice, since the collaboration success factors it identifies are confirmed by other research, as well as by practical partnership tools used internally. The framework has also proven to be relevant in the specific context of university-community partnerships: the key domains of success factors defined in that framework are present in the analysed frameworks for community engagement in higher education. Thus the use of this framework as a basis for further discussion an assessment within the SPACE project could be a valid approach.

At the same time, the analysis of the community engagement frameworks did point to a specific angle that is less prominent in the general Mattessich framework, and that is an acknowledgement of the power differentials of relationships between universities and external communities. Other examples of differences include a focus on equity and diversity in the CBPR framework a focus on how the partnership affects partners on a more personal and emotional level in the TRES II framework.

The initial proposed analytical framework for this publication was the categorisation proposed by Gray (1989), distinguishing between the key elements of 'preconditions', 'process' and 'outcomes' of collaborations. In the following table, we reflect on how the findings of our analysis above fit into this framework, whether any of the findings go beyond this framework and to what extent those elements should be incorporated into the future frameworks and tools to be developed in the SPACE project.

Table 7: Elements of collaboration, synthesis of findings and link to SPACE project

Preconditions	An explicit link to this element is made in Mattesich and colleagues, with a specific domain relating to 'Environment', which includes a favourable political and social climate and prior history of collaboration. Similar elements are also reflected in some of the analysed grey literature. In the community engagement frameworks, preconditions are acknowledged but are considered separately from the success factors themselves, hence they are considered more as *assumptions* for quality partnerships.

	<u>Proposal for SPACE project</u>: **Since the European policy context and higher education area cannot be considered as having yet placed community engagement as a high priority, it is important to critically consider the preconditions for partnerships within the SPACE project, as it could be assumed that community engagement is based more on intrinsic rather and extrinsic drivers.**
Process	The following core domains proposed by Mattesich and colleagues are present in virtually all analysed frameworks, whether as domains or sub-dimensions. • <u>Purpose</u> (e.g. jointly defined shared goals) • <u>Membership characteristics</u> (e.g. trust, mutual respect, conflict resolution) • <u>Process and structure</u> (e.g. roles, guidelines, management) • <u>Communication</u> (e.g. trust, mutual respect, conflict resolution) • <u>Resources</u> (e.g. human, financial resources; leadership) **<u>Proposal for SPACE project</u>:** **As the central part of how collaborations are planned and implemented, all the domains featured above should be covered by any SPACE tools and frameworks.**
Outcomes	Interestingly, only the community engagement frameworks and the general collaboration frameworks mapped in the grey literature feature <u>outcomes (in terms of benefits to organisations and end users in the community)</u> and the <u>monitoring and evaluation of such outcomes</u> as a success factor for quality partnerships. Mattesich and colleagues do not include outcomes as a success factors, but rather as the end result of other combined success factors. **<u>Proposal for SPACE project</u>:** **The relevance of this element is evident. In practice, though, the SPACE project needs to critically reflect on how much emphasis should be put on the assessment and evaluation of outcomes in its framework, for two reasons:** • **If we accept that community engagement in higher education in Europe is taking place primarily as a peripheral rather than high-priority activity (Benneworth et al, 2018), with usually little funding and policy support, then it is questionable whether there should be strong focus on (and high expectations for) monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, but rather a more prominent focus on supporting the establishment and implementation of such partnerships.** • **There are also more practical obstacles: a robust evaluation of a partnership would involve considerable time and resources, to collect data, develop instruments and reach valid conclusions.** **At the same time, evaluation would clearly be beneficial for translating short-term collaborative initiatives into long-term ones. For this reason, the extent to which the 'Outcomes' element should be emphasised will remain a point of discussion among the SPACE project in the development of the tool.**
New dimension:	Based on the analysis, there is arguably a need to add an additional element to the framework, based on the specific context of university-community partnerships. Namely, the CBPR and TRES II frameworks both included critical

Ethos and principles	success factors that reflect value-based attitudes, approaches and aspirations as a basis for success partnerships. Based on the analysis we would summarise them as follows: • Openness to democratic power-sharing • Openness to alternative understandings of knowledge creation and knowledge creation • Awareness and inclusion of difference (e.g. socioeconomic groups, ethnicity and worldviews) **Proposal for SPACE project:** **Due to the specific power dynamics in university-community partnerships, this additional element would be a crucial one to include in the SPACE tools and frameworks.**

In the next section of the report we examine an equally important, but more practical aspect of interinstitutional partnerships: what methodologies and tools already exist for assessing such partnerships (e.g. questionnaires, rubrics, benchmarks, guidelines for focus group discussions) and could any of these tools be used or adapted by the SPACE project?

4. ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

The SPACE project plans to organise a survey and analysis of community partnerships at four universities in Europe, based on which tools will be developed to support such partnerships at the European level. The thematic structure of the dialogues **with local communities will be based on the findings of the desk research as presented in the last section.**

In this section, we will analyse examples of assessment frameworks focused on inter institutional collaboration in order to determine whether existing tools (or at least the methods that they apply) could be applied in the SPACE project when conducting such dialogues. To this end, we have selected five tools I will analyse to what extent the thematic dimensions, formats, application process, and outcomes could be relevant for the SPACE project.

4.1. Tool 1: Measurement Approaches to Partnership Success (MAPS)

Background and objective
Developed by the Detroit Community-Academic Urban Research Centre (USA), MAPS was a six-year study titled *Measurement Approaches to Partnership Success (MAPS): An Innovative Tool for Assessing Long-Standing CBPR Partnerships,* aiming to develop a clear definition of success in long-standing CBPR partnerships, a specific set of factors that contribute to it, and a practical tool for measuring those factors.

The objective of the MAPS tool was both to determine success factors based on robust research, and to help CBPR practitioners to assess and strengthen their own partnership efforts. While having broad possible applications, its development emerged from the field of community partnerships for public health.

Thematic dimensions

SECTION A: Equity in the Partnership
SECTION B: Reciprocity
SECTION C: Competence Enhancement
SECTION D: Partnership Synergy
SECTION E: Sustainability
SECTION F: Realization of Benefits Over Time
SECTION G: Achievement of Long-Term Partnership Goals/Outcomes

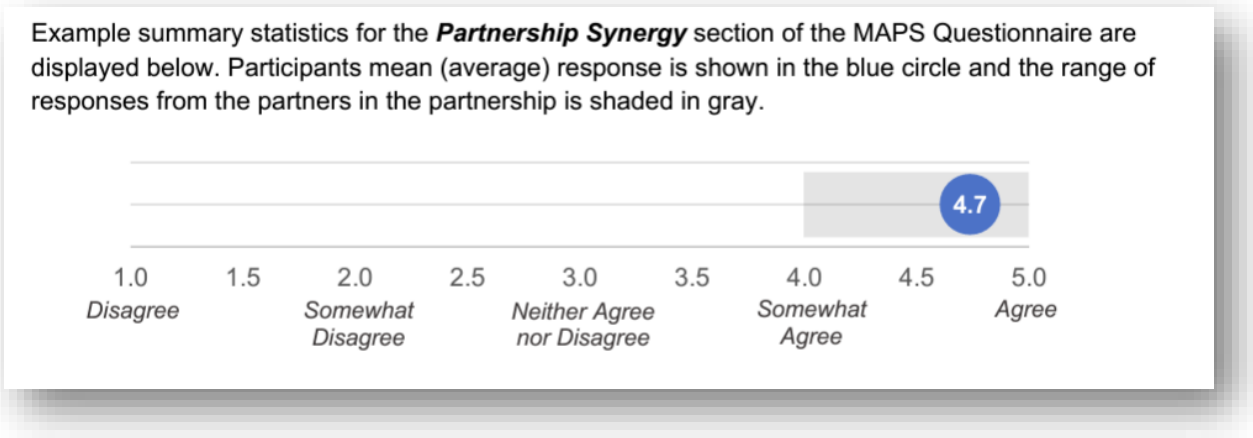
Application process
The MAPS questionnaire includes 81 questions that measure the seven key dimensions. In addition, 28 optional questions provide the opportunity for users to provide more background on characteristics to the partnership. The questionnaire is self-administered and respondents are asked to select one answer along a five-point Likert scale that asks them to “agree”,

"somewhat agree", "neither agree nor disagree", "somewhat disagree", or "disagree" with a given statement.

The MAPS tool has a 'Facilitation Guide' (MAPS, n.d.) that provides more detailed information on how it can be applied. The application is foreseen to be taken out anonymously by all partners within a given CBPR partnership (average time 35-40 minutes). The tool can be applied flexibly, whether in sections or in its entirety. The questionnaire is designed to provide a mean value on the items of a dimension (e.g., partnership synergy, reciprocity, realization of benefits over time), or the summative mean of all seven dimensions. Partnerships can record and summarise the responses and there is no specific software needed for generating and analysing results.

The Facilitation Guide goes further to suggest how partnerships can share, interpret, and use the findings of the MAPS tool, with a strong emphasis on flexibility and on applying a collaborative process that fosters equitable participation of all partners in discussions about results. An example from the Facilitation Guide shows how the results for a given dimension can be provided by showing both the mean score and range of responses.

Figure 1: Example of MAPS CBPR partnerships assessment



Source: MAPS (n.d.)

Outcomes/impacts of tool

The MAPS tool was tested in the USA with 55 partnerships with 563 partners, and the MAPS research team empirically validated that the tool provides a scientific, in-depth measurement tool that allows long-standing CBPR partnerships to evaluate their work toward achieving health equity (Lachance et al., 2024).

Limitations

No limitations are identified in the tool.

Conclusions: Potential for SPACE project

The benefits of the MAPS tool are evident: it has been empirically validated and has proven value in practice for reflections on partnerships, and can be used flexibly by partnerships, combining responses to a questionnaire and more flexible, participative reflections on results.

The potential challenges of the MAPS tool, in the context of its application within the SPACE project, are as follows:

- the tool specifically focuses on research partnerships (CBPR), so it would certainly need adaptation to fit in another community engagement context
- the tool specifically focuses on 'long-standing partnerships', while it is likely in the SPACE project that many of the partnerships will be emergent.
- the questionnaire is exceptionally long, with a total of 108 questions. In contexts in which the partnerships between universities and communities are still emergent and sometimes fragile, it is questionable what response there would be to such a high-barrier survey.

4.2. Tool 2: Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES)

Background and objective
As described in the previous section, the Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES II) was developed in the context of service-learning and acts as a tool that helps practitioners and academics to measure the extent to which these success factors are met in practice (Bringle et al., 2010; Kniffin et al , 2020).

Thematic dimensions
As described in the previous section, the TRES II examines ten thematic areas of collaboration in the context of service-learning:

1. Goals
2. Conflict
3. Decision-making
4. Resources
5. Role of this partnership in each partner's work
6. Role of this partnership in sense of self
7. Extent and nature of interactions
8. Power
9. Outcomes
10. Satisfaction

Format and scale of assessment
TRES II takes the form of a survey relating to the above items. Each of the ten items has five possible answers in the form of indicators of various levels of achievement. In this way,

TRES II follows a maturity model, differentiating 'exploitative', 'transactional' and 'transformational' forms engagement, as is illustrated in the example below:

Table 8: TRES II – example of indicators and assessment scale

1. *Goals*: a. The goals of some of the partners are not known and are hampered, and this causes harm. b. Only some of the partners' goals are acted on, but that is not harmful to anybody. c. The distinct goals of all the partners are important to and nurtured by the partnership. d. We share common, integrated, and expanding goals that are "our" goals (not "mine" and "yours" separately). **2. *Conflict:*** a. Conflict remains unacknowledged or is avoided, and this causes harm to the partners. b. Conflict is acknowledged and partly managed such that underlying issues are unresolved but neither the partners nor partnership is harmed. c. Conflict is successfully resolved by the partners. d. Conflict is embraced by the partners as a catalyst to generate new possibilities for the partnership.

Source: Kniffin et al. (2020)

Application process

Survey respondents are requested to indicate their impressions about the *actual nature* of partnership and one alternative answer that best represents the *desired nature* of the partnership from their point of view. The assessment can be completed by one individual, by both members of a dyad, by multiple individuals, by members of a partnership entity, or any combination of these.

The application process is currently not fully operationalised and it is left to users to apply and adapt, including by adding additional questions, and then by analysing responses and discussing their significance.

Outcomes/impacts of tool

TRES II is not a psychometrically validated scale, but it has proven to have content validity and the research by Kniffin et al. (2020) demonstrates that it has been applied in many different settings at U.S. universities and has to be proven useful for studying relationships, structuring reflection on partnerships, assessing attributes of relationships, conducting research, and guiding practice.

Limitations

The authors of the tool noted some limitations when the tool was implemented as a stand-alone in cross-cultural settings and with marginalised populations, with issues relating to the the use of academic jargon and complex concepts. The authors noted that alternative forms of administration (e.g., through conversations, focus group) may make the tool more accessible to certain target groups.

Conclusions: Potential for the SPACE project

The benefits of the TRES II tool are its concise nature, its flexibility and its proven value in practice for reflections on partnerships. The juxtaposition of 'desired outcomes' and 'actual outcomes' offers and interesting approach to analyse the results.

The potential challenges of the TRES II tool, in the context of its application within the SPACE project, are that some of the examined dimensions focus on aspects that may not seem so relevant for emerging partnerships (e.g. 'role of partnership in sense of self', and possibly even 'outcomes'), and the 5-level scale also places a high benchmark to achieve, which may be off-putting in partnerships that are still at levels 2 or 3.

The use of surveys may be challenge in university settings in which community engagement is an emerging topic, due to the small number of community partners. However, the TRES II offers the flexible possibility of applying the tool for individual users or small groups to reflect on their practice, and this may be of immense value for the SPACE project.

4.3. Tool 3: Nuffield partnership assessment tool

Background and objective

The Nuffield Institute at the University of Leeds was commissioned by the UK's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to provide a Tool that local authorities could use to assess partnership relationships and aid the achievement of successful partnership working. The tool draws on the research conducted by the Institute in the field of health and social care partnerships. The Tool was then adapted for wider local government service areas and with a focus on strategic partnerships (Hardy et al., 2003).

The purpose of the tool is to provide a simple, quick and cost-effective way of assessing the effectiveness of partnership working, enabling the identification of problem areas and for formulating remedial actions. It was thus designed as a developmental tool rather than as a means for external assessment of partnership performance.

Dimensions

The assessment tool is based on six partnership principles derived from research and fieldwork of the Institute:

Principle 1 — Recognise and accept the need for partnership.
Principle 2 — Develop clarity and realism of purpose.
Principle 3 — Ensure commitment and ownership.
Principle 4 — Develop and maintain trust.
Principle 5 — Create robust and clear partnership working arrangements.
Principle 6 — Monitor, measure and learn

Format and scale of assessment

The assessment takes the form of a survey containing a series of statements about the partnership, organised according to the each of the six principles. In total, the assessment contains 36 statements to be assessed, with respondents scoring their responses on a 1.to-4 scale as follows: Strongly agree – 4; Agree – 3 Disagree – 2 Strongly disagree – 1. Respondents may also add additional comments or observations in the final column. The following is an illustration of the scoring sheet.

Figure 2: Example of Nuffield partnerships assessment

To what extent do you agree with each of the following six statements in respect of the Partnership which is the subject of this assessment exercise as a whole?	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	Comments
• The way the partnership is structured recognises and values each partner's contribution.					
• The way the partnership's work is conducted appropriately recognises each partner's contribution.					
• Benefits derived from the partnership are fairly distributed among all partners.					
• There is sufficient trust within the partnership to survive any mistrust that arises elsewhere.					
• Levels of trust within the partnership are high enough to encourage significant risk-taking.					
• The partnership has succeeded in having the right people in the right place at the right time to promote partnership working.					
Scores					Total:

Scoring Key: Strongly Agree 4; Agree 3; Disagree 2; Strongly Disagree 1

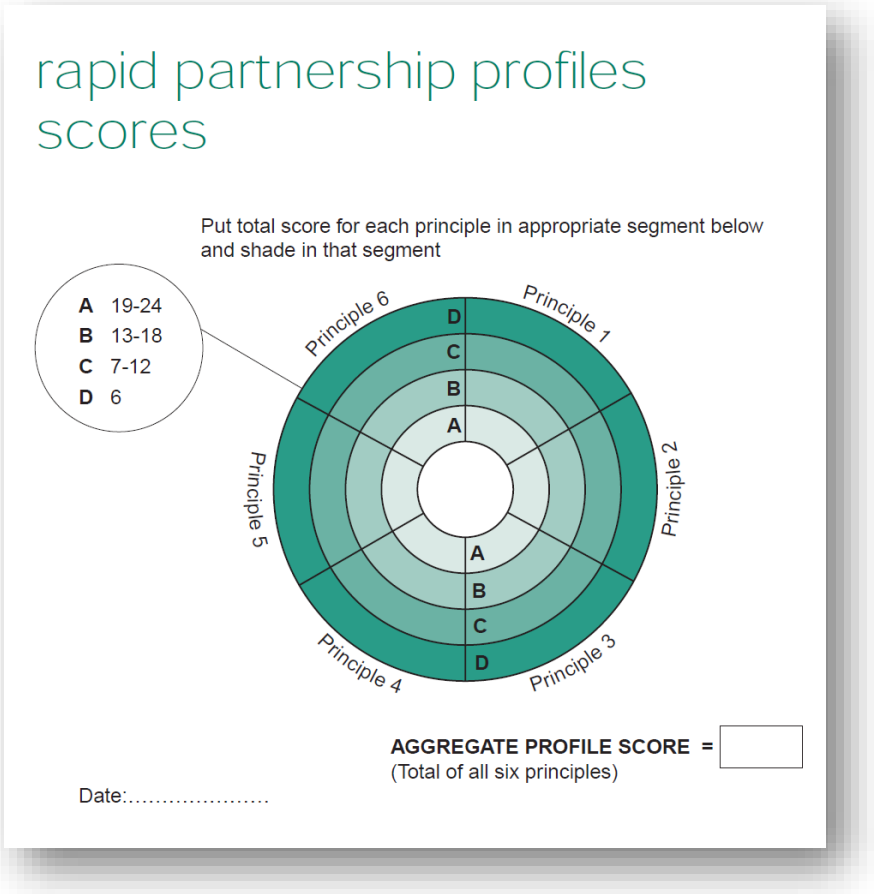
Source: Hardy et al. (2003)

Application

The assessment process relies on each partner identifying and expressing their perspectives on the partnership. This approach illuminates both areas of agreement and disagreement to delve into and opens discussions among partners about issues to be tackled. The outcomes of this assessment can be presented visually alongside explanatory text, providing partners with a shared framework for discussing ways to enhance collaboration and addressing perceived obstacles to improvement. The application of the tool is defined in the following four stages:

- Stage 1 – Preparation: Partners agree the reasons for using the tool, agree on individual contributions and decide how the exercise will be facilitated and actioned.
- Stage 2 - Undertaking the assessment: Partners familiarise themselves with the material and, ideally, agree on working with an independent facilitator from within the partnership. Partners can work individually on completing the questionnaire, although ideally partners are brought together for joint discussions and for jointly completing the assessment exercise.
- Stage 3 - Analysis and feedback: The next step in the process is the analysis of the responses according to a pre-defined 'scoring system' and the generation of a 'partnership profile' in the form of a radar chart showing the results.
- Stage 4 - Action planning for alternative findings: The results of the analysis can then be shared and discussed with partners in a workshop. This gives partners the chance to look in more detail at their assessments and their judgements about individual statements. At this stage action planning can be undertaken to identify and agree any remedial action.

Figure 3: Example of Nuffield partnerships assessment results chart



Source: Hardy et al. (2003)

Outcomes/impacts of tool

The Nuffield Partnership Assessment Tool has been applied across a range of UK public sector initiatives, particularly in health and local government settings. Its developmental, rather than evaluative, nature has proven especially useful for surfacing tensions, clarifying roles, and guiding constructive dialogue among partners.

Studies evaluating the use of the tool show that its greatest strength lies in promoting reflection and learning. Halliday et al. (2004), in their study on Health Action Zones in England, concluded that while the tool's quantitative scales were informative, their real value emerged when results were interpreted alongside a detailed understanding of the local context. The assessment process itself—through structured group dialogue—stimulated new ideas, revealed hidden dynamics, and encouraged shared problem-solving.

Importantly, the tool's emphasis on self-evaluation fosters ownership of results among partners, helping build trust and mutual accountability. As Freeman and Peck (2006) note, formal tools like Nuffield are most effective when embedded within a broader strategy of support and facilitation. Used in isolation, they risk producing superficial results; but when paired with qualitative insights and participatory discussion, they can lead to tangible improvements in collaboration processes and governance.

Nevertheless, some limitations have been reported. Sunderland et al. (2009) and Tsou et al. (2015) highlight that tools like Nuffield require adequate facilitation and a supportive culture to be successful. Without this, uptake may be limited—particularly in under-resourced settings or early-stage partnerships. Moreover, the visual presentation of results (e.g. radar charts) can be useful for identifying areas of divergence but may risk being misinterpreted if not accompanied by nuanced explanation.

Despite these challenges, the Nuffield tool remains one of the more accessible and practical instruments available for supporting partnership development. Its adaptability and focus on process-oriented learning make it a relevant model for the SPACE project, particularly in contexts where engagement is still emerging and where structured, participatory reflection is needed to strengthen collaboration.

Conclusions: Potential for the SPACE project

Although the Nuffield tool is not specifically focused on higher education, both its content and approach appear applicable to university-community partnership. The benefits of the Nuffield II tool are its highly concise nature (the shortest of the analysed tools so far, with only 36 questions), its proven value in practice for reflections on partnerships and its explicit focus on participative approaches to interpreting results and to defining follow-up actions. It also provides a useful scoring system and visualisation of results.

The potential challenges of the Nuffield tool are primarily linked to its emergence from partnerships between local government and other institutions, which may not completely reflect the nature of university-community partnerships.

Overall, however, the Nuffield tool provides a model that could be of interest to the SPACE project.

5. SYNTHESIS: ELEMENTS OF SPACE FRAMEWORK

Building on the comparative review of collaboration literature and existing assessment tools, this section proposes the key elements for the SPACE partnership framework. The aim is not to replicate existing tools, but to develop a context-appropriate model that supports university-community partnerships, particularly in their formative stages.

Key lessons from existing tools

- **MAPS** offers a comprehensive, empirically validated structure focused on long-term community-based research partnerships. While useful for mature partnerships, its complexity and length pose barriers to application in the European context, where partnerships may still be emergent.
- **TRES II** is concise and reflective, offering a valuable maturity scale that distinguishes between exploitative, transactional and transformational partnerships. Its structure encourages reflection on both actual and desired outcomes.
- **Nuffield** provides a lightweight and user-friendly approach with participative application. It may offer the closest model for inspiration, given its visual outputs and alignment with developmental (rather than evaluative) purposes.

Elements for the SPACE framework

Based on the analysis, five core elements are proposed for integration into the SPACE framework:

1. **Preconditions**
   Recognising enabling factors outside of the partnership's control—such as institutional culture or political will—is vital. Unlike some tools that assume a conducive environment, SPACE must engage explicitly with this dimension, acknowledging the emerging nature of engagement in many European contexts.

2. **Process Dimensions**
   These are the heart of the framework and align well with the common domains across all reviewed tools:
   - Joint goal-setting
   - Role clarity and shared decision-making
   - Communication frequency and quality
   - Conflict management
   - Resource equity
   - Leadership and coordination

3. **Ethos and Principles**
   Unique to university-community partnerships are value-based attitudes that must be made explicit:
   - Mutual trust
   - Openness and equity

- Recognition of difference (resources, language, power)
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Commitment

4. **Outcomes**
   Although many tools treat outcomes as external, SPACE should follow CBPR and TRES II in framing outcomes as an integral part of success. These include:
   - Mutual benefits for both university and community
   - Societal impact
   - Institutional sustainability

5. **Reflexivity and developmental focus**
   Inspired by TRES II's comparison of actual vs. desired states, the SPACE tool could include a self-reflective element allowing users to position themselves along a development continuum. This promotes honest reflection over formal assessment.

Recommended format and application

- **Format**: A concise rubric or reflection tool (max. 30 items) that can be applied via online survey or structured discussion.

- **Use Cases**: Should support both quantitative self-assessment and qualitative dialogue. Ideally, it could be applied at different levels:
  - Institutional (macro)
  - Departmental (meso)
  - Project-based (micro)

- **Process**: Should be co-facilitated by a neutral party (e.g., engagement officer or trained peer) to ensure openness and minimise bias.

- **Outcome**: The tool is not designed for ranking or benchmarking, but for generating shared understanding, identifying areas for growth, and guiding targeted improvements.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This desk research confirms that while several robust frameworks exist for assessing interinstitutional collaboration, none are fully tailored to the context of emerging university-community partnerships in Europe. Tools like MAPS, TRES II and the Nuffield Assessment Tool each offer valuable design features—ranging from structured self-assessment to participatory reflection—but also present limitations in terms of complexity, focus, or applicability.

The SPACE project is therefore well-positioned to develop a separate framework that draws on the strengths of existing models while responding to the specific needs of its institutional and community partners. Key elements of this framework should include preconditions for collaboration, core process dimensions (e.g. communication, shared goals, trust), value-based principles, and outcomes. Particular attention must be paid to power dynamics, mutual benefit, and adaptability for early-stage partnerships.

Rather than creating an evaluative instrument, the SPACE tool will support critical reflection and dialogue, guiding partners in strengthening their practices. The next phase of the project will translate these insights into a practical, user-friendly tool that can be piloted, refined, and scaled for wider use.

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