Shifting Architectures of Knowledge through Community-University Engagement and the Future of Higher Education

May 16, 2022
12:30-2:30 pm CEST, Barcelona

Hosted by

UNESCO Chair for Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

(During the Higher Education Week 2022 held in Barcelona)

Background

The years since the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education have seen significant growth in what might be seen as a movement of community-university engagement. Beginning with practical student engagement models like service learning, community engagement in higher education began to explore new frontiers of diversity of knowledge systems after the 2014 GUNI World Report entitled "Knowledge, Engagement & Higher Education: Contributions to Social Change". Respectful inclusion of multiple knowledge systems through community engagement by students, teachers, researchers and the academic community as a whole has been further spurred by responses to the pandemic and increasing climate impacts.

As a consequence, it is being increasingly recognised that the new architecture of knowledge involving research, teaching and learning and active collaboration in community is a critical element in any roadmap towards reconstruction of a fairer world, including the goals of COP 26. This event brought together some of the key global leaders in the CUE movement to deliberate on what have we have learned from practice in diverse settings and what challenges lie ahead.

Duration: 2 Hours

Location of the event: Hybrid mode, physical event took place in Barcelona

Speakers

- **Rajesh Tandon**, Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia and UNESCO Co- Chair, Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education
- **Thomas Farnell**, Higher Education Policy Expert at the Institute for the Development of Education
- **Lesley Wood,** Research Professor, Faculty of Education Sciences, North West University, South Africa
- **George Openjuru,** Vice Chancellor, Gulu University
- **Irma Alicia Flores Hinojos,** Professor, Los Andes University (Colombia)
- **Madhura Yadav,** Professor & Dean, Faculty of Design, Manipal University Jaipur

Key Messages

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<td>We must embody the principles of CBR as individuals: inclusion, democratic decision-making, ethics of care, generosity, capacity building</td>
<td>We need to move beyond short-termism towards engagement as a long term partnership with local societal actors</td>
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<td>Engaged scholarship requires academics to become reflexive and grounding their practice in life enhancing work.</td>
<td>At the heart of this journey lie principles, vision, leadership. Our collective power is the most fundamental aspect of it all</td>
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Opening the discussion

Rajesh Tandon welcomed the guests and set the context for the theme: shifting architectures for community university engagement. He referred to the GUNi World Report titled Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change as transformative, since the community began to be recognised as a "site of knowledge."

The way we look at community members changed, and people acknowledged new perspectives and forms of knowledge production and sharing. The follow up report addressed global and local contexts in which knowledge is produced.

Teaching, research, and service missions are often siloed in Higher Education, and community or public engagement often "outsourced" by bringing in outside experts. So how can we support interactions between communities and universities, without this important space being ghettoed? This requires that engagement that is mutually respectful, and community knowledge and expertise is valued. We need to move beyond short-termism towards engagement as a long term partnership with local societal actors.

The conversations that happened in the last decades of Knowledge for Change Global Consortium (K4C) is how to operationalize, value knowledges and knowledge democratization. The UNESCO Open Science Recommendation 2021 contributes to this, where science is part of the openness to knowledge systems and to society. The question really is that what is community engagement approach, beyond traditional historical extensions, that can be used to make it an integrated phenomena in higher education.

Thomas Farnell provided a perspective of community engagement in Europe and how to move the agenda forward. In Europe the whole discussion about higher education has been dominated by business engagement and knowledge economy, and only recently the shift to European Union policy of broader idea of higher education with references to societal challenges, addressing civic issues, service to society are identified together as the fourth mission of universities.

The growth of citizen science led to development of a framework to support this work named "Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education" (TEFCE) in 2018 followed by the newer framework "Steering Higher Education for Community Education" in 2020. TEFCE definition of community engagement is about how universities address societal needs in partnership with their external communities. "Community" includes government, business, civil society, from local to global level to incorporate a broad range of stakeholders and also at different levels, while "Engagement" refers to mutually beneficial joint activities with external communities.

TEFCE toolbox is a self-reflection framework, using NO metrics and moving away from non-qualitative processes, so it can be used by any university in any context. It includes a participative process with folks that is not desk-based. It was only meant to be a European framework, but is now used as far away as New Zealand and a network of universities is growing using this framework.

At the policy level, the impact of the toolbox at local and national European levels includes the following results:
- EC / NESET study on community engagement in higher education
- EC to recommend TEFCE Toolbox for European universities
- New Eurydice report maps community engagement in Europe

In terms of the road ahead, it's a tough agenda, lots of work needs to be done, but the Working Group for the Social Dimension now includes community engagement focus. A new initiative Local mission of Higher Education will also work on this topic. Finally European University Association has placed civic engagement as one of 3 priorities for the next decade to 2030. Europe lags behind Latin America and other places in community engagement, but is working towards catching up.

Lesley Wood gave the South African context in stating that universities in South Africa are mandated to transform and move away from the traditional model to incorporate community engagement. She stated that research that is educational that changes both communities and researchers is a transformative paradigm.

She gave an interesting metaphor of sculptures of 5 bronze figures that she saw at a beach and compared them to higher education institutions (HEIs). She described them as being locked in a cage just like the 5 figures, not talking or listening to each other. They were heavy sculptures, it would be difficult to change or move them, just like HEIs, which are rigid and difficult to change. She eloquently asked- how do we move these statues (referring to HEIs) through research?

She referred to the work of Kemmis (2012) while speaking of practice architecture as being made up of 3 arrangements – cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political – that hang together to create an environment to either enable or constrain particular practices. To shift the architectures of knowledge production in higher education, we need to bring about change in these areas.

She then discussed how she shifted the architecture of community engagement in her institution in this climate. She advised that if you can get enough people, you can effect change as a person. First of all, we must embody the principles of CBR as individuals: inclusion, democratic decision-making, ethics of care, generosity with time, knowledge, risk taking, capacity building (material economic). Second is meeting expectations of higher education – funding, outputs, international collaboration, etc. Third is working within the system of entities (social political) to increase influence; once you are an entity, you will have power to bring about change. Fourth is networking to use one's voice to spread the word and speak up for CBR in networks like SAERA, ARNA, CARN, ALARA, K4C. Local and international networks must be tapped into.

The PALAR Process refers to Participation Action Learning adapted for community based research (CBR), especially for situations where participants are traditionally excluded or are marginalized. It requires to start with relationship building, and to change the researcher from within. The strands within the entity includes groups working in different fields.

Engaged scholarship requires academics to become reflexive and grounding their practice in life enhancing work. These principles are integrated and reflective in curriculum at different levels of student learning, and in different programs for academics in different faculties. In addition training NGOs and working with ethics committees to evaluate Community based research appropriately ensures research is done at high level of quality.

George Openjuru began his presentation by stating that community university engagement is not new in Africa. It was talked about in 1963 by Julius Nyerere, who made a plea to African universities to shake off their elitist colonial mentality and contribute to society. Gulu university is a new university grappling with idea of community engagement, served as the launch pad for advancement, which is reflected in the mission and motto of the university "for community transformation". As he became Vice Chancellor, his message and words began to be taken up by others.

Nyerere's philosophy drives Gulu University's work for actualizing his mission. Community engagement is not the 3rd mission, but ONE of three missions, with equal status with research and teaching: all work at university must be informed by all three aspects, and members of community must work with students and faculty and vice versa. Research is informed by the local community.

The University has a policy that guides and inform Community University Engagement. This makes engagement a core focus of the university. In the university's formulation COMMUNITY come first and not University because the university exists FOR the community and not the other way round.

The key areas for community university engagement at Gulu University include Tradition Medicinal Knowledge; Climate Change initiative through addressing the national energy challenges for domestic cooking in Uganda; Indigenous Knowledge Systems in tandem with the traditional Medicinal Knowledge; Conflict Resolution and reconciliation including Human Animal Conflicts, land conflict (including promotion of traditional justice system that focus on reconciliation and not the western retributive justice system); issues of mental health care at community level and improved farming practices.

In terms of pushing some of the work from Gulu to the national policy level, another researcher has been able to impact policies in South Africa through engagement work at the university, and Gulu University is working to replicate this impact in Uganda. At Gulu, they deliberately created a community-like setting next to the university, to create an environment that is familiar. For medical students who are training as traditional medic students, the university would be unsuitable and unwelcome for community knowledge holders and traditional healers. The community environment allows for doing traditional work in traditional context/setting (frying, boiling, stomping, etc.) and then transitioning to modern medicine setting within university. Covilix-1 was developed through community engagement, that acts as a remedy for COVID. This initiative was picked up by the media. Through the modern evaluation process, after random trials in community, the use of the medicine has shown effects.

Irma Flores began her presentation by speaking about Hub Colombia, a partnership between Universidad de Los Andes and Universidad de Ibague. The K4C Hub at the University has thought about how to respond to challenges of Covid-19, which reminded us how fragile human life is and how easily our systems can crumble. The idea that only universal knowledge is acceptable must be changed and other forms of knowledge must be recognized. We need more recent structures that allow students, administrators, teachers to co-construct with community members to co-develop solutions. This must be accompanied by new training processes that provide students with tools to engage with communities.
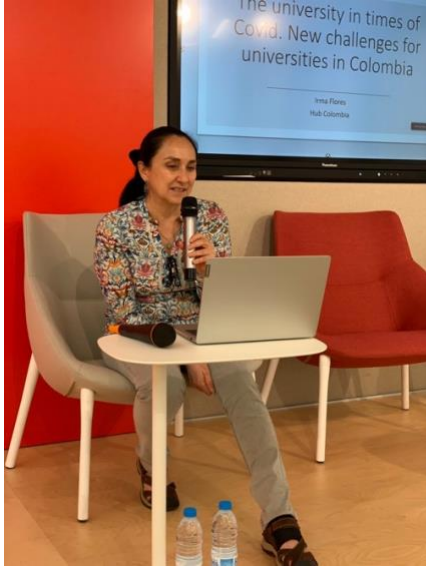
Universidad de Los Andes reflects on transforming structures of knowledge production, that will be more effective in the democratization of knowledge. Higher education must work to develop flexible structures to work with community partners on what knowledge democracy will look like. In March the University launched a course on community engagement in which the university staff will participate. They are also designing an internship program to find interdisciplinary solutions to everyday problems through conversations between community and the university.

Madhura Yadav discussed community engagement in the Indian context, to state that the National Education Policy 2020 by the Government of India encourages universities to focus more on community engagement, especially at the undergraduate level. Manipal University Jaipur (MUJ) works with civil society organisations and other societal actors to carry out community engagement practices. In the past popular practices within service learning activities involved "adopting villages" or "sponsoring computers for villages" but now they are using Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approaches in their work, where students are asked to access and interact with communities and co-produce solutions with the community. For eg, architecture students are working with local communities on waste management issues as well as beautification of the area.

Methods and tools of conducting CBPR include Arts-based methods, survey, institutional ethnography, photo-voice, case study, critical discourse analysis and narrative enquiry. CBPR is used as a seminar theme for fourth year architecture students. The Hub is also offering CBPR as an open elective course undergraduate students at the university. Workshops are held on CBPR and arts- based methods by external resource persons from organisations like Participatory Research in Asia.

The MUJ Hub is now part of Bridging Knowledge Cultures project for understanding the differences and similarities between the kinds of knowledge systems that exist in local communities, in comparison to universities and finding bridges between the two. Solutions are developed mutually in meetings with community members, often relying on the indigenous knowledge of community members in the creation of solutions that benefits the communities and the university.

The University has future plans to train community members via MOOC, and also offer certificate courses on community-based participatory research in regional languages for community members, seeking additional funding.

Group discussion

René Oosthuizen, Rhodes University, South Africa: At times I question the authenticity of community based policies that are emerging; how authentic are we when we say we do community based and engaged work. We still are the one's going "there" and "in" the community, arriving with all the resources and the funding. How authentic is this, when we appear as experts? Sometimes I grapple with these ethical dilemmas in my work. How worthy is it? Often we are also rushed in building the relationships and how can we be truthful about this, while ensuring that the research doesn't get jeapordised?

Zainal Abidin Sanusi, Universiti Sains Malaysia: One thing that we need is a type of a governance that can support the creation of a global, mainstream community based research agenda. On the point of authenticity we need to look at the empowerment level, that is a long-term goal. We may need to look at long-term student involvement, across multi-year projects at our institutions.

Anoush F. Terjanian, Human Rights Research and Education Centre (HRREC), University of Ottawa, Canada: The "extractive" problem offers high risks in doing community engagement. Our sensitivity is so important on this, as we are grappling with these issues. E.g. at SSHRC the question is how do we rethink this partnership model in a way to co-learn with the community. We are learning from our Indigenous hosts, and what's important is that all creation must take place in discussion, at all levels, and through inclusion.

Sonajharia Minz, Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Dumka, India: I represent my university, and I'm wearing my banner as Vice Chancellor not to show off, but to represent and bring Indigenous perspectives into the university. The question is - can there be a space for a university such as mine – to be mentored by a university that has practiced community based research for a longer time, even if such work is not (yet) represented in policy mandates, etc. We are looking at some of the international 'fore-runners' for doing some mentoring on community engagement, as well as to to build long-term relationships with communities.

Orfhlaith Ni Bhriain, University of Limerick, Ireland: It takes patience and time to build relationships; transformation can take place even if it doesn't get 'recognized' – the important work still gets done. To effect change and embed it in the system also takes time, but the aspiration has to be to always have 'workers' doing the work going forward, marching with the people up front. We need both the roots and the wings, and dream big.

Isabelle LeVert-Chiasson, Canadian Commission for UNESCO: How can we decolonize knowledge, how can we give value to the indigenous knowledges "outside" of universities, beyond the traditional formats? For sustainable development we must integrate and value community and Indigenous knowledges. Thinking beyond research publications, going wider to reach the general public and doing outreach to connect and show how our work matters and has an impact.

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, International Islamic University Malaysia: Let me relate my experience from the last few decades. The response initially was disheartening when trying to introduce CBPR, and one of the senior staff at the university even said "I will leave if I have to use this approach." However after meeting students, they took up the ideas and values of CBPR right away. Students are the drivers of change and introduction of community based research became easier when the students themselves took the lead. The students are the partners, the generation that we want to work with – their drive will also change the older faculty.

Second, we are learning by doing, by connecting with communities. We share the knowledge, and it exists everywhere, within the communities too, and we must accept that we are all contributing to the co-creation. The garden of knowledge and virtue should be shared with others; let's share our experiences about our different gardens. Impromptu creation and development is where change takes place, where authenticity occurs.

Community engagement is when we begin to talk and share knowledge. Community transformation is when the community becomes self-sufficient, no longer dependent on the university. The hand, the head and the heart: a full person transformation that fosters full community transformation is at the centre of this process.

Kevin Hall, University of Victoria, Canada: To really measure your work and progress, is to have your community assess your work and contribute to knowledge sharing. Hopefully next time we have this meeting, 50% will be from the community instead of having the majority on the side of the university.

Crystal Tremblay, University of Victoria, Canada: On changing institutional policies, she stated that the university has developed guidelines to assess this type of work. They had a recent workshop with deans at University of Victoria to reflect on progress done, including different formats on sharing knowledge.

Closing remarks by Paul Manners, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

At the Centre for Public Engagement, we tried to shift the architecture of how we do academic work, and how can we reimagine the delivery of our work. We work with 150 universities in UK and beyond. We think architecturally, as a blue print for the architecture for community university engagement. If you think about designing a beautiful building, the architect has a vision of the beauty, but they must also take into account functionality, plumbing, and other aspects of the building. Finally it is handed over as a simple paper to the craftspeople and over time this will develop into something beautiful. TEFCE is a beautifully designed program to imagine, criticize and evaluate universities' work; it allows for diversity and inclusion in producing and sharing knowledge.

K4C is another beautiful blueprint for change and partnership, almost like a franchise – but in the best way, in that they are all over the world- each representing the same core values and common principles, implemented in their respective contexts.

The leadership of an institution also really counts. Lesley's account reminded me of a story; someone said that "your problem Paul is that you want to design a cathedral; you start with a chapel and people will join, and from there over time it will become a church and then into a cathedral."

Vision and dreams contribute to change – George stated earlier that he wanted his university to be completely different, and he believed he had the power to implement different ideas and he executed them bit by bit. At the heart of this journey lie principles, vision, leadership. Our collective power is the most fundamental aspect of it all.

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