Big Tent Communiqué VI
Local Identities and Global Citizenship:
A Message from Catania and Challenges for Universities

The Sixth Big Tent Communiqué – where and why?

The Big Tent is a group of national, regional and global networks that share a focus on community- university engagement and social responsibility of higher education and have agreed to issue statements from time to time.

The first Big Tent communiqué, on community university engagement, had a focus on North-South cooperation and was issued in 2010. This new Communiqué arose from thinking about the location in Sicily of the PASCAL International Observatory Annual Conference on 7-9 October 2015 in Catania 'on the frontier of fortress Europe'. Its theme is *how cities and their regions are connected to their universities at strategic frontiers*.

The 2015 Context - a World in Disorder

Our theme partly echoes that of the first Big Tent communiqué in 2010: *Enhancing North-South Cooperation in Community-University Engagement*. What is happening in Europe today and in other North-South frontier situations globally is the antithesis of North-South cooperation.

There is rising uncertainty in many arenas of public and community affairs world-wide: environmental sustainability, peace, economic instability, exploding inequality, poverty, youth unemployment and lost identity, health and mental illness, ageing and the massive movement of peoples. The history of our world is a history of migration and movement. How do different generations, people and places adapt to what is and will be a continuing phenomenon?

Universities can play an important part in helping to address these huge challenges, both through collaborating to generate research that seeks to make sense of these complex processes, and through their role to support education – through their graduates, and through a wider role in supporting community learning. We applaud the significant initiatives being taken by universities in many parts of the world to address these major issues. We also recognise that some of the ways in which universities currently work perpetuate conditions that lead to social inequality, and exacerbate these problems.

We believe universities need to take a more active role in collaborating with civil society to generate powerful knowledge, and open up their work to much more fruitful interaction with wider society. Urgent attention should be paid to how universities prepare their graduates to play a role in building a more equal and fairer world, and how they support the wider challenges of empowering citizens to work together, across these deep divides, to build a better world.

A paradox

We confront a paradox. In democracies 'ordinary' people choose governments. We believe in active citizenship. But in the face of contemporary crisis, many people seek security by turning in on themselves. We see xenophobia and a lack of generosity towards displaced refugees. Divisive and contradictory divisions threaten the post-War 'European project'. This paradox threatens trust in the wisdom, decency, humanity and communal ethic on which participatory democracy rests. If hearts are closed, vision narrowed and shortened by fear, what does this mean for political devolution and local power-sharing engagement? Locally grounded xenophobia fed by hyperbolic media obstructs constructive regional engagement.

Where do different universities and systems stand? Inaction is a form of action. They are so much part of their societies that they cannot simply stand apart. Their political, historical and cultural circumstances however vary greatly.

Local identity for global citizenship

New peoples are joining a Europe whose history is one of invasions. New arrivals are often most feared by those most shielded from newcomers. The same is true of the newer 'Norths' of Australia and North America. Emigration northward from the South is a natural sequel to massive European colonial invasion and conquest, even without bloody violence engulfing especially swathes of the Middle East and Africa.

Southern governments and societies are failing to create the conditions necessary to keep their populations at home. Escalating civil wars arise from religious fundamentalism, political intolerance and lack of participation in governance by ordinary people. Shrinking national economies have led to rising youth unemployment. What more can universities do here: in their teaching, in their research and its use, in their local-regional civil society settings?

A balance must be struck between the needs of the local populace and those of immigrants and refugees. Governments and institutions must recognise and manage national needs, and also the regional and international needs that affect most countries.

Words, ideas and control mostly flow North to South, refugees mostly but not exclusively the other way. Internally displaced peoples also exist in their millions in Asia and Africa.

Some of these people have come to Catania where we meet. Those of us in higher education need to find a voice beyond the technical, managerial and narrowly economic, and look for a deeper way of hearing and acting on the concerns of ordinary citizens: refugees, unemployed, the homeless and those otherwise excluded. We are influential. We play a vital role by what and how we teach, as 'public intellectuals' and in the corridors of power.

How can the possibility of global citizenship driven by the youth of today be embraced? Nearly half the populations of Asian countries are young people below the age of 25 who have been hearing of globalisation since their childhood. They connect world-wide via smart

phones and the internet. What kind of 'internationalisation' do we play in our own universities and also civil society settings?

Young people have begun to share the global aspirations of One World. For them, movement from the villages to small towns to mega-cities of their own country, and beyond its historical borders, is one seamless aspiration. This generation is beginning to experience global citizenship. Yet 'host' communities and governments are resistant to this 'invasion of youth'. They fear change and are uncertain what future rising waves of youthful mobility and migrations bring.

What Can Be Done?

What is the role of the North, as movements of people increase? Can we better focus our research and engagement efforts to make more intelligent and humanitarian use of the new energies and resources brought by migration? Can we also contribute to strengthening conditions in other parts of the world, so that people will have equal opportunities where they are?

What is the solution for the South as they lose the youthful population that should be developing their own countries? Universities in the South, with their large numbers of youth, have a bigger role to play that will make life in the South acceptable as part of the global variety of ways of living. Universities in both North and South are key structures of transformation. There needs to be more emphasis on engagement in the global South, and on new forms of engagement in the global North.

Regions and localities

Regions should take responsible control of their own destinies through their governance and daily practice. They should contribute robustly to national debate and policy-making, serving as channels of local experience, knowledge and wishes to carry out with integrity properly deliberated and adopted policies. They should prioritise real-world needs, helping citizens and communities to be informed and actively to make their own destiny. Local knowledge is essential for sustainable local development.

By the way they govern and manage, local and central governments can help the applied learning of their communities, initiating and supporting greater levels of interaction between university researchers and community through participatory research. They can through regular dialogue seek universities' practical involvement in developing strategic vision and policy for cities and regions that are based in strong research-based evidence and address the immediate and long-term social, economic and humanitarian needs of their region and country no less than the economic.

New forms of networking can advance systemic reforms and essential cooperation. New forms of engagement mean multi-sectoral partnerships: universities and governments working with industries and NGOs. We can cooperate to support low income country universities and social movements. University-to-university partnerships embedded in city-

to-city and region-to-region partnerships will enrich university-to-university linkages, making them more robust intellectually and in other ways.

Transforming the Culture of Engaged Universities - A Call to Action

We call on all institutions of higher education urgently to undertake collaborative actions with municipalities, local governments, community groups and social movements to address the interrelated issues of migration, youth employment, peace and inequality.

This requires universities to take to heart as their primary mission the present and future of our inherited local and global world. A massive community learning campaign is needed, no less challenging than mass national literacy campaigns. We share a duty of care for the future of our young who have little work, little sense of belonging to anything anywhere. Within and beyond world university rankings we need awareness of critical local and global issues linked to transformed practices of engagement. This means respecting the co-construction of knowledge; linking with local governments, organisations and social movements; new reward structures for academic staff; and a change in the culture and language of institutions of higher education. High quality innovative engaged research can assist rather than weaken good ranking.

Finding answers needs abiding optimism; new, transformative, forms of individual and collective engaged lifelong learning; new pedagogies; public and community support for ethically-based learning; research for action. A good role model for senior university managers to foster courage, honesty, public service and humanity might be the nurturing gardener. For university staff, expert in

their fields of knowledge and disciplines, and capable administrators of complex knowledge organisations, the first duty is to do good for the wide and the local world.

Questions for Universities

Given the increasingly complex and contested context within which universities work, we end by offering critical questions, as prompts for people who work in or with universities to address in their own regions, and establish meaningful routes to take action in response to the global crisis.

- o What responsibility should universities take for the crisis? Their political, historical and cultural circumstances vary greatly.
- o How could universities' internationalisation strategies be adapted and work to build equality between north and south?
- o How can universities, both global North and South, express solidarity with refugees, economic migrants and other poor and desperate people, in each and every country, in practical ways?
- o How can universities strike a better balance between the huge pressures to compete in a global market and their shared core mission to be very good at doing good?

o   What promising initiatives by individual universities and with partners in other sectors are underway? How can the higher education community best support these efforts?

Undertakings by Big Tent Partners

We will work individually, institutionally and collectively for universities to engage with local and regional, ethnic and cultural, social and economic communities, as well as with global citizenry and destiny. We advocate strong university partnership with civil society making and using fitting language and knowledge to do so.

We pledge not to hide from political involvement, since making change means getting involved and politically committed. We call on educators and communities to engage to build a better, safer world for all.

We favour a well-balanced partnership between the State and civil society, believing that central and local governments should listen, devolve and share more than many do. We will work for more sustainable, people-centred development, shared globally and enacted locally.

We pledge to argue for and apply principles of good governance based on ecological and social sustainability, social justice, and opportunity for all.

We favour open society-wide political and civic debate that assists fearful citizens and their governments in managing their borders to respond generously to the plight of refugees, as well as addressing the deeper and longer-term causes of refugee flight. Governments should use the academic expertise in their countries through participatory action research projects to find answers. We do not know exactly what these are; we do see it as a vital duty to treat this as an applied, practical and urgent civil learning task.

Big Tent

The Big Tent Global Communiqués on Higher Education are an initiative of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education in partnership with the following partners. These statements are owned by all who find them useful in advancing their work.

Partners in this 2015 Big Tent initiative are:

- Asia Engage
- Asia Pacific University
- Community Engagement Network (APUCEN)
- Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinario
- Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario (CLAYSS)
- Community-based Research Canada (CBRC)
- Community Campus Partnership for Health
- East African Community University
- Community University Engagement Network
- Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research (GACER)
- Global Universities Network for Innovation (GUNi)
- International Association of Universities (IAU) Living Knowledge Network
- National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement in Higher Education (NCCPE)
- Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)
- PASCAL International Observatory
- Service Learning Asia Network (SLAN)
- Talloires Network (TN)
- UNESCO Chair for Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education