

Community-University Engagement in 2030: A Scenario

Perspectives from the "Big Tent" global dialogue on Community-University Research and Engagement of October 17, 2011

This is the second global statement¹ by the "Big Tent" group of international community university research and engagement networks. This statement has been facilitated by the [PASCAL International Observatory](#), and the [Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research](#), in collaboration with: the [Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinarios](#), [Commonwealth Universities Extension and Engagement Network](#), [Global Universities Network for Innovation](#), [Living Knowledge Network](#), [Participatory Research in Asia](#), [Asia-Pacific University-Community Engagement Network \(APUCEN\)](#), [National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#), and the [Talloires Network](#)

Background

Around the world, two phenomena have suddenly gained attention of political, economic and social leaders of our times. The first, of course, is the intensified, vocal, visible and powerful citizens' movement—from Senegal, Thailand, India, Tunisia, Egypt, UK, Chile and the USA—everywhere. At the base of these movements are youth—young people from all strata and spaces of society. The message from these citizen movements is clear—the young citizens want to be engaged in the democratic development of their societies and communities.

The second phenomenon is the increasing—rapidly increasing—demand for post-secondary education in all its myriad dimensions, forms and contents. Millions of aspirants are queuing up for enrolment, only constraints being cost, quality and delivery. Educational administrators, planners and policy-makers are yet to figure out how to respond to this surge and diversity of demands from all societies.

The Common element in these two phenomena— a citizens' movements and demands for post-secondary education—are the youth of today. Irrespective of the percentage of young people in a society's population, the young are a differently thinking, feeling and acting lot. Most existing institutions in modern societies—governments, businesses, universities & colleges—are not able to understand or cope with the aspirations of the young.

Is it possible to combine these elements in a manner that the young get opportunities for meaningful engagements in societies? This is where civic engagement by post-secondary educational institutions can make a difference through creative forms of civic engagement.

What does the future hold for Community University Research and Engagement?

¹ Details of the first statement are found [here](#).

Several interesting developments are happening at this time as we are writing. First, many national governments and policy-makers are beginning to think of devising appropriate supportive policies in this regard. The Planning Commission, Government of India, has just constituted a Task force to make recommendations to 'strengthen community engagement of Higher Education Institutions' for the 12th Five Year Plan. Similar initiatives have come lately from Malaysia and Tanzania.

The funders of research in the United Kingdom for example published a "[Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research](#)" in 2010, stating the clear expectation that UK Research Organisations make a strategic commitment to public engagement and that researchers be recognised and valued for their involvement with public engagement activities.

Several globally established educational institutions have also begun to convene dialogues and conferences on this and related theme of civic engagement of universities. Global University Network Innovations (GUNI) is planning its annual conference and book on this theme for 2012; the British Council is convening an international conference in March 2012 where this theme is centrally included. Universiti Sains Malaysia initiated a University-Community Engagement Conference on 23-26 November 2009. The second conference is co-organised by Thammasat University and will be held on 9-12 January 2012 in Chiangmai, Thailand with the theme "[University-Community Engagement for Empowerment and Knowledge Creation](#)". It provides a platform for staff of the university to share their work and experience.

Most importantly, several networks and alliances have emerged in recent years, which are exclusively and largely focused on community-university partnerships. The Talloires Network of university presidents began in 2005 with the intention of promoting civic engagements of universities; it now has more than 200 universities from 60 countries as its members. Its new publication—The Engaged University—is an excellent collection of community-university partnerships from around the world.

Another network is Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research (GACER) is just completing a book on the 'Knowledge Democracy Movement' where community-university research partnerships from around the world are analysed. The Science Shop movement in Europe began more than three decades ago where natural science and engineering departments interacted with the community to address practical problems faced by the community; its large European network is very active now—the Living Knowledge Network.

The PASCAL International Observatory is turning its attention of matters of particular resonance to young people. It has also conducted studies across the world of the role of universities in regional engagement including focused work conducted in Africa. A notable recent project supported by Pascal and funded by the European Commission is build community engagement capacities amongst six universities in Palestine.

The [Asia-Pacific University-Community Engagement Network \(APUCEN\)](#) was launched during the First APUCEN Summit on 13-14 July 2011. A group of council members were elected and the president is the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

The objectives of this regional network are as follows: -

- To promote and instill community engagement concepts and values to staff and students of institutions of higher learning.
- To create capacity building for university-community partnerships.
- To disseminate and share information, knowledge, resources and good practices in community engagement.
- To implement joint flagship projects.
- To collaboratively develop resources to support regional flagship projects

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A World of Knowledge Democracy

- There is nearly universal recognition of our communities as a source of knowledge production
- Respect for and recognition of knowledge contributions of all parts of the world and all linguistic groups, of Indigenous Peoples, the poor, those differently abled and those who were considered 'excluded' in the early 2000s
- A 'knowledge commons' of open access to all forms of knowledge representation now functions...all human knowledge belongs to all human
- The research and partnership capacities of community organisations has been dramatically strengthened for them to be effective partners
- The creation knowledge is based in its usefulness and pertinence according to social needs, a form of 'just-in-time-knowledge'
- The idea of an "Intelligent society" has begun, which is to say, we have passed from a society of intelligent individuals to an intelligent society capable of supporting resilience and well-being and that functions as a global/whole unit.

The Idea of the University

- The 'unreached' of the early 2000s are now included in our universities
- The Millennium Development Goals of the early 2000s have been met, but universities are still focused on remaining issues of inequality and justice for all
- Social responsibility is a universal element in the understanding of university functions
- Sustainability, fairness, respect for religious diversity, peace and non-violence are integrated into the full teaching and research functions of the university
- Community University Engagement is mainstream
- There are permanent clusters, ad-hoc clusters or complementary networks in which interdisciplinary partnerships can be formed for specific projects

- They have become post-cosmopolitan centers of social thinking renewal creating cultural and social capital and active citizenship

Structures and Models supporting Community University Engagement

- All universities have now invested in a full range of community university engagement
- Knowledge Mobilisation or Community-Based Research Units providing brokering support and action research engagement are part of the knowledge architecture of all universities
- All students have opportunities for engaged experiential learning in community settings
- All academic staff are now trained in principles of effective community engaged scholarship and civic engagement
- Large scale and on-going collaborative dialogue structures between community partners and universities on critical and complex issues facing our communities are now part of the way that we do business
- Excellence in CUE is recognized for merit and career incentives for students, academic staff and administrators
- There are national and international networks providing communities of practice and coordinated advocacy for CUE
- Journals showcasing theory and practice have proliferated and both university-based and community-based practitioners and scholars publish together

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