Community Engagement and Social Responsibility in Higher Education: Balancing the Global with the Local

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What do we mean by “Engaged University” and “Social Responsibility”?

The most important function of universities is providing with good and relevant teaching and research... But...

Should we change the way we provide teaching/learning? Should be change the way we do research? Should we change institutional strategies?
From an “Age of Changes” to a “Change of Age”

➢ **Powerful technical and scientific advances**
  ICTs, digital age, artificial intelligence, science revolution/new materials, etc.

➢ **Globalization**
  Economic interdependence. Severe environmental crisis.

➢ **Knowledge-intensive society**

➢ **World of work in full transformation**
  Robotization, economy platforms, precariousness, etc.

➢ **Social and political challenges**
  Poverty, increased inequalities, loss of rights and freedoms, populism and neo-fascism, etc.
Knowledge Society and the Role of HEIs

“The problems facing humanity today require a great mobilization of knowledge. (...) we must be able to generate a great deal of knowledge, which requires forms of organization and cooperation for which we are not yet sufficiently prepared. (...) In this sense: 1) The questions that are elucidated in the field of science are also matters of citizenship; and 2) The main problems of a democracy are less problems of political will than cognitive failures that we have to solve with a better knowledge of the complex realities that we govern.

(...) an intelligent society is not a society in which people are intelligent but a society whose rules, norms, processes and procedures are intelligent. The complexity of our societies, the density of interactions, interdependencies or shared vulnerability, all this makes it increasingly important that our way of organizing is intelligent.”


➢ The need to open the HEIs to society

➢ Growing expectations of society regarding HEIs

➢ The need for HE and science cooperation at global level

But... HEIs lose the monopoly of knowledge

But... HEIs still very much based at national/regional perspective and focusing in competition
Balancing the global with the local

GUNi Higher Education in the World Report 6

The Report deals with the dual responsibilities of universities at local and global scale, exploring the potential conflict, or intrinsic difficulties, in addressing both local demands of society based on the race for global competitiveness, and local and global demands to contribute to a more equitable and sustainable society.
A Renewed Emphasis on Responsibility and Engagement in Higher Education: What is Happening?

Increasing sense that universities should engage more and better with various kinds of communities.

The European Commission Communication *A Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education (2017)* identified community engagement for the first time as one of the desirable mechanisms by which European universities should seek to promote their societal purposes.

**Some responses:**
- Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI)
- Science with and for Society (SwafS)
- Open Science
- Citizen Science
- Participatory research
- Community-based learning
- Knowledge diplomacy
- Transdisciplinary teaching and research
- The 2030 Agenda!
A Renewed Emphasis on Responsibility and Engagement in Higher Education

Universities in the Last Decade...

Progressive institutionalization of Social Responsibility and Engagement in Universities (from marginal reports to institution wide strategies)

Progressive integration of SR in mission statements, strategies, programmes and initiatives

From a university that looks “inwards” to a university that looks “all around” ("think global, act local")
A Renewed Emphasis on Responsibility and Engagement in Higher Education

Teaching & Learning

➢ New curriculum – Emphasis on competences

➢ New pedagogy for engaged learning

➢ Transdisciplinary approaches – Beyond rigid academic structures
  (disciplinary/departments boundaries rigidly define curriculum)

➢ Incentivize societally-engaged teaching
A Renewed Emphasis on Responsibility and Engagement in Higher Education

Research & Innovation

Emerging concepts: Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), Science with and for Society (SwafS), Open Science, Citizen Science, Participatory research, Knowledge diplomacy, Transdisciplinary research

Looking towards the Future: the Agenda 2030

➢ International political agenda that seeks the transformation of the planet and people (all of them, not only developing countries)

➢ How to make it possible? 3 essential ingredients: political will, participation of all actors and knowledge

➢ We have an ambitious global project (Agenda 2030) but without political, economic or legal instruments!

➢ In the HE field, HEIs are becoming international but still without adequate answers and organized with “national perspective”. Are the networks of universities an adequate way? Can we tackle it with “global” universities? (not too successful so far)

➢ Tension: global problems but universities still focusing on local?
GUNi’s Work on the 2030 Agenda

- International Conferences on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
  - 1st edition “Actors and Implementation”. Barcelona, September 2017

- Projects and publications

- Group of Experts in SDGs and Higher Education
Some Final Remarks

➢ Social responsibility and university engagement as a growing strategic focus for HEIs – The Change of Age requires redefine HEIs

➢ Tension between local and global: only universities with ‘glocal’ vision and mission can resolve the tension

➢ A more engaged university requires new focus of higher education and research policies from governments and parliaments (financing, incentives, accountability/data,...)

➢ The Agenda 2030 as a real catalyst for HEIs at global level
IN MEMORIAM

Paul Benneworth