

## INTRODUCTION

This Report looks at critical dimensions in our understanding of the roles, and potential roles, of higher education institutions (HEIs) as active players in contributing to social change and the creation of another possible world.

The first aim is to look at our changing understandings about who the agents of knowledge creation are and how the creation, distribution and use of knowledge are linked to our aspirations for a better world. The Report offers us elements of a vision for a renewed and socially responsible relationship between higher education, knowledge and society.

The second aim is to provide visibility for and critically examine one of the most significant trends in higher education over the past 10–15 years: the growth of the theory and practice of engagement as a key feature in the evolution of higher education. Recent years have seen the emergence of concepts such as ‘engaged scholarship’ (Boyer, 1990), the ‘engaged university’ (Watson et al., 2011), ‘community-based research’ (Strand et al., 2003a, 2003b), ‘community–university research partnerships’ (Hall, 2011), ‘public engagement in higher education’ (NCCPE, 2010) and more. At the very least, all are related to the new considerations about the creation and use of knowledge in society, broadening the idea of its social impact. The concept of engagement is intended to be redefined here, with new and deeper content that goes further than what is often called the ‘third mission’ of universities. It is about valuing knowledge (Innerarity, 2011).

This 5th GUNi Report is thus focused on ‘Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change’. In exploring this contemporary theme, the Report will attempt to go beyond the narrow and compartmentalized approach to engagement within higher education. In the present formulation, institutions of higher education are expected to serve three missions: teaching, research and service. The mission of ‘service’ is seen as being independent of

teaching (or education) and research (or knowledge). In operational terms, primacy is attached to the teaching and research functions of HEIs; ‘service’ is undertaken afterwards. Many connotations of ‘service’ tend to assume that the knowledge and expertise available to HEIs will be transferred to communities and will thus help them to address their problems. No assumption is made that community engagement may, sometimes, actually contribute to improvements in HEIs, especially to their teaching and research functions.

In this Report, GUNi aims to approach the challenge of engagements by HEIs in the larger society in an integrated manner; it hopes to be able to explore ways in which engagement enhances teaching (learning and education) and research (knowledge production, mobilization and dissemination); it approaches engagement in ways that accept the multiple sites and epistemologies of knowledge, as well as the reciprocity and mutuality in learning and education through engagement. In this sense, this Report will call upon policy-makers and leaders of HEIs around the world to rethink the social responsibilities of higher education in being a part of society’s exploration of moving towards a more just, equitable and sustainable planet over the next decades. The Report presents experiences and ideas that suggest directions for transformation of higher education and its diverse institutions so that it will exercise its social responsibility to citizens and societies both locally and globally.

## THE CONTEXT: A TURNING POINT?

We are living in a significant historical moment, as Xercavins points out:

I share the view held by analysts who claim that the quantitative and qualitative level of discontinuous changes in scale (which are in general related to exponential growth at the stage at which the curve is steepest) with regard to a multitude of

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phenomena and phenomenologies (world population, world economy, environmental imbalances, social imbalances, knowledge and skills in science and technology, physical and virtual communication skills, etc.) is comparable, as a kind of macrostate, with the great revolutions in ways of living that have taken place on Earth, such as the agricultural and industrial revolutions from which new civilizational realities (in the most common and historicist meaning of the expression) have arisen. (Xercavins, 2008)

We write this Report in the recognition that there are many reasons indicating that our civilization paradigm is in crisis. Some of the characteristics of this crisis are the magnitude, acceleration, speed and interrelationship of the changes, and their quantitative and qualitative effects (Vitousek et al., 1997). Another is the interrelationships of the several crises that are currently taking place, including financial and economic ones.

The effect of the massive integration of the global scale that has taken place over the past two decades has made clear the interdependence of all areas of human activity. It has been shown that we integrate one lonely Earth ecosystem, which includes multiple ecosystems, and that the ways of organizing post-industrial political, social, economic and environmental issues do not work in this new order. We are living through a crisis of scale, a crisis that affects all systems and that requires a new understanding of reality, a new conscience and new ways of organizing the collective in all areas, overcoming the undesired affects of the old models.

The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2011), as well as the 2012 Global Risks Report (World Economic Forum, 2012), are some of the mainstream organizations reporting on the nature and depth of this global crisis. Klaus Schwab, founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, the gathering place of the global economic and political elite, has noted that:

As we begin the second decade of the 21st century, humanity is at a crossroads. We can either continue to work as lobbyists for our narrowly defined self-interests and keep doing the same old things that got us into the crisis in the first place. Or we can act together as true global leaders, with the long-term global public interest in mind and at heart. (Schwab, 2011)

The current crisis of civilization cannot be overcome by simply repairing the old engine. As Morin (2004)

points out, it is time to rethink civilization and to think about and prepare a new way, the way of hope (Hessel and Morin, 2012). The new paradigm of civilization must consider the whole world as a global community (Raskin, 2010), with a common identity and a shared destiny. 'In a world where material acquisitions and consumptions are becoming the dominant ethos, there is an urgent need to bring spirituality to the core of human endeavour' (de Oliveira and Tandon, 1994).

The citizens' uprisings around the world (from the Arab Spring to the American summer and the European fall) have thrown up a wide range of citizen movements that are questioning the present social contract between the citizen and the state, at local, national and global levels. This challenge will require new world structures (on different scales, including the global) and a post-cosmopolitan citizenship (Dobson and Bell, 2006) equipped with a social consciousness (Goldberg, 2009), that will act and participate with their agency, and together with other people, social stakeholders and organizations, in the construction of a new world order.

The crises of civilization at this juncture of human history are manifested in three distinct, yet interrelated, trends. First, the scale of material prosperity achieved by many households and communities is unprecedented in human history; material well-being, quality of life, longevity of consumption and accumulation of wealth have now reached mind-boggling levels. Yet such prosperity coexists with unprecedented and widespread deprivations; shocking as it may seem, deprivation within seas of prosperity can be found around all societies today. If humanity has the means to generate such wealth and material well-being for some, how come those means are not applied for the well-being of all?

The second trend in the crisis of civilization is manifested in the large-scale disturbance to the larger ecosystem in which humanity has thrived over the centuries, and civilizations have been built and nurtured. The almost irreversible changes manifest in ecological systems and networks due to the exploitation of natural resources threaten the very foundations of current human civilization. The restoration of that delicate balance requires the use of inclusive intelligence from nature itself.

Third, there is a growing disconnect between the aspirations of individuals and the responses of the institutions of governance in societies. As aspirations for collective and shared well-being increase, deficits in the design and operation of institutions in governing human collectives have begun to show. Deficits in democracy, as the most respected and accepted form of governance for society, have become all too obvious

even in those societies that have a longer tradition of democratic institutions.

In short, the challenge is not small. What is at issue today is the need for a new conception of human progress. We are on the verge of a change in the model of civilization, which cannot be built from the old paradigm of a system that has reached its limits (Escrigas, 2011). This changes the context of education, which has, in recent decades, been too focused on short-term instrumental performance within a socioeconomic system.

The way in which the world will evolve in the long term will depend on all of the responses that we will be able to articulate in the present and near future (Xercavins, 2008). In this respect, we consider knowledge to be a key element and HEIs to have a central role in its creation and in the promotion of its social use. It is important for HEIs to become, consciously and intentionally, analysts of the big changes that are happening and of possible initiatives in shaping, anticipating, intervening in and guiding these changes towards another possible world (Xercavins, 2008).

This cannot be accomplished with an educational model based on the old ways of thinking and values of an overcome order. As Einstein pointed out, problems cannot be solved from the same level of comprehension and conscience at which they were created. Thus, it is time to ‘review and reconsider the interchange of value between university and society; that is to say, we need to rethink the social relevance of universities’ (Escrigas, 2008).

## KNOWLEDGE, SOCIETY AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Knowledge is defined in several ways: the facts, feelings or experiences of a person or group of people, a state of knowing or awareness, and/or the consciousness or familiarity gained by experience or learning. Knowledge is created through research, through the experience of the wise, through the act of surviving in the world, and is represented in text, poetry, music, political discourse, the social media, speeches, drama and storytelling. Knowledge is linked to practical skills, to our working lives and to universal and abstract thought. Knowledge is created every day by each one of us and is central to who we are as human beings. Knowledge tells us who we are and who we are not. Knowledge tells us how the world is and how to interact with it, how to live and prosper, what to do in life and how to do it in order to succeed and be happy,

and is even at the base of what we have collectively accepted by being successful.

At this moment in history, where the perception of truth and the comprehension of what things are is largely given to science, replacing the religious and traditional cosmovisions, the knowledge we value and the knowledge we manage (just a small part of the knowledge generated), lies at the basis of how we understand reality and how we live.

During the last years of the 20th century, we saw a dramatic increase in the importance given to the role of knowledge. The main way in which knowledge and society have been linked has been in a much more instrumental, productive and money-for-value relationship. Peter Drucker uses the concept of a knowledge economy to express how we have moved from an economy of goods to an economy of knowledge (Drucker, 1969), where ideas and knowledge have an economic value and have become a fundamental driver of society. Scholars working on what was called ‘new growth theory’ strengthened the ascendancy of knowledge as a critical factor in economic growth. Romer noted that ‘knowledge is the basic form of economic capital, and economic growth is driven by the accumulation of knowledge’ (Romer, 1986, 1990). This relationship is also expressed by the World Development Report of 1999–2000, as follows:

For countries in the vanguard of the world economy, the balance between knowledge and resources has shifted so far towards the former that knowledge has become perhaps the most important factor determining the standard of living – more than land, than tools, than labour. Today’s most technologically advanced economies are truly knowledge-based. (World Bank, 1999)

National governments have, one after the other, taken up this language as they seek to build more skilled workforces, invest further in science and technological research and strengthen links between business and universities in the interest of global competitiveness. Higher education strategies around the world are often linked to the need to develop a workforce that would make a region or a nation more competitive within the global economy.

As Sörlin and Vessuri (2007) suggest, there is a ‘democratic deficit’ in the notion of a knowledge economy that they believe is overcome by the use of the concept of ‘knowledge societies’. The UNESCO World Report *Towards Knowledge Societies* (2005) defines this concept as follows:

Knowledge societies are about capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development. They require empowering social vision that encompasses inclusion, solidarity and participation.

Waheed Khan notes that 'knowledge societies include a dimension of social, cultural, economical, political and institutional transformation' (Khan, 2005). There is growing attention to extending the discussions about the complex role of knowledge in our lives beyond the notions of knowledge economy and the knowledge society. Conceptual work linking knowledge, equity, democracy and engagement can be found in the thinking of de Sousa Santos (2006), Gaventa and Bivens (2011), Sörlin and Vessuri (2007), Hall (2011) and Tandon (2008). De Sousa Santos argues that, 'Social injustice is based on cognitive injustice' (2006, p. 19). Gaventa and Bivens note that, 'without cognitive justice, which focuses on whose knowledge counts, the larger struggles for social justice will not be realized' (2011, p. 1). A term that is increasingly used to describe an active, engaged and values-based understanding of knowledge is 'knowledge democracy'. Knowledge democracy or cognitive justice (Van de Velden, 2004) is linked to the deeper transformations that our times appear to be calling for.

De Souza Santos provides arguably the richest conceptual approach to an inclusive understanding of knowledge. The global lines that he is referring to are those that separate the visible constituents of knowledge and power from those who are invisible. For de Souza Santos, the way forward lies in the concept of 'ecologies of knowledge'. An ecology of knowledge framework is centred on knowledge from the 'other side of the line', what others speak of as excluded knowledge.

Knowledge democracy is in part the idea that knowledge is to be measured through its capacity to intervene in reality and not just to represent it. An *intelligent society* must be ready to generate knowledge (ideas, instruments and procedures) corresponding with transnational knowledge societies and networks. The idea of an *intelligent society* recognizes that all human beings have the capacity to create knowledge in the context of creating a new way of living or a new society.

Now is the moment to widen the scope of knowledge in society and to move beyond creating socioeconomic well-being towards a true knowledge-based society,

through engagement with citizenry as a whole, at all scales of activity, to dealing with the problematic issues of the day and the global issues (GUNI, 2009). Knowledge must contribute to society's incorporation of sustainability shift paradigms. We need to connect different kinds and sources of knowledge and facilitate understanding between different cultures, forging links between knowledge and citizenship. This is necessary to breaking conformity of thought by proactively criticizing the world of ideas. The creation and dissemination of knowledge could contribute to transforming the paradigms and beliefs established in social, economic and political systems, and to moving forward to creative and innovative ways of thinking and imagining new realities.

Knowledge could also help in ethical awareness and facilitate the civic commitment of citizens and professionals. It is an important moment for looking more deeply at the ethical, social and environmental implications of the advance of knowledge, and to increase the resources invested in analysing the impact of science and technology in society. Knowledge is also linked with democracy, citizenship, inter-cultural relations, recognition of interdependence, new approaches to health and well-being, rights, mutual comprehension, peace-building and a deep understanding of life's dynamics.

Society needs to incorporate complexity and uncertainty in the way problems are analysed and assumed. We know there is a need to link multiple areas of knowledge that are complementary in the capacity to deal with complex problems and find solutions in the local and global context. Local needs require local proposals in global frameworks, and global challenges require global solutions that are locally acceptable. However, global solutions can come from local experience and vice versa. How we facilitate networking among a range of different social actors and levels of activity is also important. Coupling research, decision-making and development to inform political decisions that affect large segments of population is a key issue to tackle for the collective well-being (GUNI, 2008).

In the following section, we are extending the debate and making the case for HEIs and knowledge a playing central role in these new social needs. We suggest that our understanding of the creation and use of knowledge should move beyond the reproduction of society from generation to generation and beyond its link to the market and the economy, to an understanding of knowledge linked to values and active citizenship in a democratic knowledge society.

## WHAT IS COMMUNITY–UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community–university engagement is a multifaceted, multidimensional umbrella term that may be applied to a vast range of activities, as well as to a certain view of the role the university has to play in society that underlies these activities. In this view, universities move from the agenda of simply increasing the general education of the population and the output of scientific research towards a model in which university education and research should work towards specific economic and social objectives, by means of co-creating and exchanging knowledge and by sharing resources, skills and processes with the public good in mind. It is of course important to recognize that there are some important critiques and limitations to the community–campus engagement literature.

First of all, the literature on community–university engagement is drawn nearly exclusively from the perspective of HEIs themselves. Whether the approach is how to position the university in a changing and complex world from a leadership perspective or how to support greater involvement of students and academic staff in knowledge contributions to community needs, the literature is heavily biased towards the university side of the engagement agenda.

Second, for a variety of historical and linguistic reasons, the literature is based in favour of North American and European scholars, and within that an Anglo-Saxon flavour. Rajesh Tandon, for example, has written about the 8th-century Taxila University (located in today’s Pakistan), which had the motto ‘Service to Humanity’ (Tandon, 2008), but very little reference can be found in the dominant discourses of community–university engagement to the legacy of the Gandhian movement in India’s universities, the history of popular education and participatory research, which has been strongest in Latin America, the impact of ‘people’s education’ on post-secondary institutions in South Africa, or the community development work of the University of the West Indies in the 1960s and 70s. It is fair to say that the largest part of the world’s knowledge about how HEIs relate to communities remains, to use de Sousa Santos’s notion, ‘on the other side of the line’ or excluded. If we are to move beyond a narrow discourse of positioning universities in the global north to a broader movement re-examining the relationship of justice, democracy, knowledge, higher education and society, these limitations need to be addressed. We have attempted to address this gap in the literature through this Report by providing a full set

of examples and practices from the global south and from communities of the global north.

Having noted the limitations of the community–campus engagement literature, it is valuable to get a sense of what the dominant discourse looks like as that is the language that is driving much of the action in this area. The term ‘engagement’ can be defined as collaboration between the university and a targeted community (regional, national or global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. It started to gain currency within the world of higher education through the writings of Ernest Boyer, a former president of the Carnegie Academy for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. Boyer (1996) proposed four interrelated – and, according to Boyer, necessary – forms of scholarship: discovery, integration, application and teaching. Together, these have become known in the literature as the ‘scholarship of engagement’. During the 1990s, many universities used the term ‘outreach’ to signify their work that directly benefited external audiences. The activities conveyed by the term were defined as scholarly, reciprocal and mutually beneficial (Lunsford et al., 2006). However, many felt that the term ‘outreach’ implied a one-way delivery of expertise and knowledge, and suggested ‘ownership’ of the process by the university. Today, there is a clear tendency for the term ‘engagement’ either to replace or to be paired with the term ‘outreach’, as it is felt that it better conveys the idea of mutuality and the sharing of leadership. Some universities suggest a variation on the concept of engagement, calling for ‘civic engagement’, which Erlich defines as:

Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. (Erlich, 2000)

The practices and structures of engagement are rich and continually evolving. Some scholars speak of a community–university engagement movement (Talloires Network – see <http://www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork>), of service-learning (Campus Compact – see <http://www.compact.org>; McIlrath and Mac Labhainn, 2007), of community-based research (Strand et al., 2003a, 2003b), of engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1996; Fitzgerald et al., 2012), of community–university research partnerships (Hall, 2011) and of knowledge mobilization and its variants, such as

knowledge translation, impact or utilization (Levesque, 2010).

The strategies employed to reach these objectives are as various and creative as the objectives themselves. The most common engagement practices as seen from the university side of the partnership include: service-learning, in which students work in support of community groups; community-based research, participatory action research or engaged scholarship; knowledge mobilization or exchange; continuing education for community members; social advocacy (providing community groups with reliable information for interventions); community service-learning for students; business innovations or technological transfer activities; adaptive technology support for disabled individuals; and community-based programmes in support of specific communities such as indigenous peoples, unemployed youth, mothers returning to education.

National, regional and global networks have come into existence to support and promote various approaches to community–university engagement and knowledge democratization. Most of these networks are very new indeed, having been created within the past 10–12 years. They include such international networks as the Talloires Network, the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research (GACER – see <http://communityresearchcanada.ca>), the Living Knowledge Network, the Commonwealth Universities Extension and Engagement Network, the Latin American network CEBEM, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), the Ma'an Arab Universities Network, the Global University Network for Innovation, the Pascal International Observatory and more. On 23 September 2010, eight international networks supporting community–university engagement across the globe gathered to issue a call for increased north–south cooperation in community–university research and engagement. They called for ‘all higher education institutions to make a strategic commitment to genuine community engagement, societal relevance or research and education and social responsibility as a core principle’ (GACER, 2010).

Further evidence of these evolving global trends in community–university engagement can be seen in the Final Communiqué of the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education of July 8 of 2009, which states that:

higher education has the social responsibility to advance our understanding of multifaceted issues ... and our ability to respond to them ... It should lead society in generating global knowledge to address global challenges, inter alia food security, climate

change, water management, intercultural dialogue, renewable energy and public health. (UNESCO, 2009)

Civil society, including community service organizations, global advocacy networks and social movement formations linked to issues such as climate change, anti-child labour, food security or homelessness, is increasingly involved both in the co-creation of knowledge through partnerships with HEIs and in the independent creation of knowledge. The academic monopoly on knowledge creation, if it ever existed, has ended. It can be argued, for example, that substantial amounts of knowledge on how to tackle issues of environmental change are found now in the large and sophisticated global civil society organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund or Greenpeace. Non-governmental research centres such as the Bonn Science Shop in Germany, the Centre for Community Based Research in Kitchener/Waterloo, Canada or PRIA in India, are but a few of the thousands of civil society groups carrying out research and influencing policy at the local, national and international level.

We are acknowledging the knowledge-creating processes, sometimes ancient, as in indigenous and Earth-based knowledge, where meaning and explanation are created and passed down completely outside the structure of a modern HEI. Another type of knowledge creation relates to the kind and form of knowledge carried out in civil society structures or social movements in the context of acting on critical issues in communities or on a larger scale. For example, women's groups around the world have over the years created new knowledge about gender, power, violence and justice. On the global scale, large global civil society networks and organizations have created much new knowledge in areas of human rights, climate change, citizenship and democratic engagement and the solidarity economy. A recognition of the capacities and processes of knowledge creation by social actors outside HEIs is key to understanding a transformative role for HEIs as we move towards engagement in a new way of organizing ourselves in this world.

But, in addition, and very importantly for the discussions in this Report, is the understanding of the very many forms of partnership research, what we speak of as the co-creation of knowledge between community or social movement sectors and HEIs. Let us be clear that there are few limits to the disciplines or knowledge domains where co-creation of knowledge happens. The Living Knowledge Network of science shops, for example, offers a multitude of examples of co-creation of knowledge in a broad area of science subjects (see

<http://bit.ly/xjf8kj>). The Community-Campus Partnerships for Health network shares stories and techniques of the co-construction of knowledge in fields of health. In Canada, the partnership funding strategies of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council have seen a co-creation in areas of social economy, mental health, homelessness, food security, the revitalization of indigenous language and culture and much more.

The central principle in these kinds of community–university partnership is that the initial research question arises from the community or from the persons who are the intended beneficiaries of the research. Some issues regarding methodology of work for the co-creation of knowledge, and knowledge ownership, among others, must be clarified and negotiated from the beginning. The actual methodologies followed in community-based research are, however, as vast as both the scholarly and creative imagination. Keeping in mind that the methods should fit the purposes of the research, we can draw on the full range of quantitative and qualitative approaches and will provide further illustrations elsewhere in this Report. Before moving on, however, let us identify some of the main approaches to engagement by HEIs.

## TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES

Collaborative, participatory, action or other forms of community-based partnerships bring their own set of challenges. The knowledge-making cultures of the academic world and the diverse community settings are different. Community wishes, aspirations, imaginations, visions and opportunities for research are often needed for a specific application being studied or planned at the moment. In such cases, there is need for clearness of language and unambiguous evidence or knowledge. While it is dangerous in the extreme to essentialize something as diverse as academic research, it is very often driven by intellectual curiosity linked to extended scientific discourse and is often expressed in a cautious and careful manner, admitting to considerable uncertainty. Community-based research can help to bring the capabilities and aspirations of communities and universities together through partnership practices that integrate community–university interests.

Similarly, community movements and local agencies are often looking for students to work in specific social change settings. They may be service organizations or they may be activist and social movement organizations. The university’s role vis-à-vis students at this historical point is, however, to provide the best

possible opportunities for them to learn and make a contribution to society. Service-learning, a term commonly used by educational institutions, does not imply social action.

A third set of challenges relates to the relative importance of relationships. There are obvious tensions when a research relationship engaged in and nurtured over a period of years disappears when the external funding runs out. Aboriginal community members have often stressed the importance of building long-term respectful relationships consistent with local protocols and cultural values. Relationships such as these must take precedence over short-term granting conventions or publication needs. These are challenges that need to be taken up within a context of developing a respectful capacity for community-based research at any university. This is particularly relevant for institutions such as the University of Victoria that are located as neighbours within the territory of First Nations who have an active interest in being partners in research and learning that involves their people, culture, language and land.

If we take the idea of relationship at its deepest, it means understanding the way in which the university is inserted into the community in a fundamentally different way. The boundaries between the university and the community need to disappear. The walls that separate scholarly knowledge from the others forms of knowledge in the world need to be broken down just as the Berlin Wall was destroyed in 1989. It means taking the notion of de-colonizing knowledge within the university seriously.

The challenges of relationships are related to another challenge of differing approaches to knowledge claims. Community groups, social movements, trade union locals, volunteer fish hatcheries and land- and sea-based Aboriginal communities have been creating knowledge since time began. They have evolved systematic approaches for the creation of knowledge that is needed to survive and prosper. The specific knowledge about homelessness, for example, is learned and re-learned everyday by the homeless themselves and by the agencies that work with them. Persons who are not formally trained or who were formally trained in universities and are now working in community settings as researchers or administrators are creating new knowledge in non-university settings. Universities sometimes see themselves as the creators or generators of new knowledge, with the challenge being to disseminate or mobilize the knowledge so that it can be of greater use to those outside the academic walls.

The elements of a global knowledge democracy,

new and transformed HEIs and deeper expressions of social responsibility and social justice already exist in isolated institutions or on a limited scale. For example, the strategic plan of the Universiti Sains Malaysia (University of Science in Malaysia) includes a pledge that the USM commits its academic staff, students and resources to the challenge of making a difference to the 'bottom billion' poorest people in the world.

This same university held an international conference in June 2011 on 'Decolonising the University'. The organizers of this conference agreed that we have for far too long lived under the Eurocentric assumption – drilled into our heads by educational systems inherited from colonial regimes – that our local knowledge, our ancient and contemporary scholars, our cultural practices, our indigenous intellectual traditions, our stories, our histories and our languages portray hopeless, defeated visions no longer fit to guide our universities – and therefore would be better given up entirely. The organizers of Decolonising the University issued a challenge that could serve as a global challenge for a dramatic breakthrough in the relationship between knowledge, engagement and higher education.

The recovery of indigenous intellectual traditions and resources is a priority task. Course structures, syllabuses, books, reading materials, research models and research areas must reflect the treasury of our thoughts, the riches of our indigenous traditions and the felt necessities of our societies. This must be matched with learning environments in which students do not experience learning as a burden, but as a force that liberates the soul and leads to the uplifting of society. Above all, universities must retrieve their original task of creating good citizens instead of only good workers.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize three principal arguments. The first is the need to answer the call of the challenges of our time, while maintaining an eye towards the future. This means today actively supporting social change. The role of knowledge and HEIs in this is crucial. The second point is that we need to step back and look at our understanding of knowledge and its creation, distribution and use. It is necessary to break from the current conceptualization of our sense of higher education's role in the process of knowledge production. Facilitating socially engaged universities is paramount to the necessary creation of knowledge. We also see the collection and analysis of present community engagement practices as essential, both as a way

to share the efforts currently being executed by those in the higher education community, and as a platform for the evolution of these practices in responding to the challenges of the future.

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