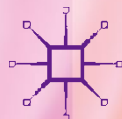


UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING

THE POROUS UNIVERSITY

JULIA
PREECE



University Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning

Julia Preece

University
Community
Engagement and
Lifelong Learning

The Porous University

palgrave
macmillan

Julia Preece
Durban University of Technology
Unit of Adult and Community Education
Durban, South Africa

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Durban, South Africa

Julia Preece

FOREWORD

It is a great pleasure for me to introduce readers to this excellent book, concerned with the community-engaged roles of universities in Africa. It resonates strongly in many ways with my own interests in this somewhat neglected field, and adds significantly to emerging debates about the wider societal contribution of higher education. Whilst Julia Preece tackles the topic largely from a perspective drawn from her work in southern Africa, where she has worked in the field of adult education and community development in Botswana, Lesotho and South Africa, she is able to also draw on her global connectedness, not least from her periods in the UK. Although we have not worked closely together on a day-to-day basis, we have for the last two decades intersected in many ways, and Preece refers to many organisations and initiatives within which we have played our parts. These include the PASCAL International Observatory, the European base of which I direct from Glasgow from the Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning (CR&DALL), which she helped to establish. PASCAL, along with a number of other networks, some national and others international, have made part or all of their focus, the missions of higher education that lie beyond mainstream teaching and research. As a result, there exists now a substantial movement mobilised by the UNESCO chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education that designate themselves as the 'Big Tent'. Nonetheless even though they represent collectively voices from many hundreds of universities, community engagement is seldom embedded into the core of higher education's work. Rather, it is part of a third, largely voluntary mission.

For many interested in alternative visions of universities' roles, the simple expression of 'third mission', which has albeit become a common parlance, says it all. Whilst interpreted in different ways in various parts of the world, the implication is that of activity relegated to the periphery. There are of course other rhetorics used around the world, which embrace concerns for a different focus in higher education. For example, as I write this introduction from the UK, I am deeply immersed in thinking about the impact of research in preparation of the next Research Assessment Exercise in the UK. Impact in this sense refers to changes that benefit wider society. Also within the UK, the concept of wider benefit of research is extended within initiatives of the Global Challenges Research Fund, with its focus on capacity strengthening of higher education within countries with low gross domestic product. Within the European Union, the concept of responsible research and innovation (RRI) is embedded in various strands of its H2020 research programme. RRI implies amongst many other things working with and for, rather than on, communities, the valuing of community knowledge and the construction of knowledge. It is interesting to note the strong research context for these initiatives, which contrast with what have been historically the dominant stands of engagement.

Prece in the early chapters of this book presents two longer standing strands of activity. One concerns how curricula in higher education have been developed to embed civic responsibility across institutions within a range of disciplines. She illustrates and analyses this theme in considerable depth through a focus on the specific example of integrating engagement within the curriculum through service learning, raising the important question as to whether such developments lead to transformative change in communities. The second pedagogically informed development concerns the offering of programmes in the subject of community development. A frequent theme within the book is the terminology that surrounds community engagement, and she usefully traces changes in terms, which she argues have occurred over a relatively short space of time. She points to a plethora of terms that have emerged as community engagement strives to gain a foothold in the core of university life. She argues that this has accompanied a change from a philanthropic role associated with service and outreach to an engagement role that focuses on partnership and collaboration. Here she is pointing to the likely greater success for activities that are based on response to demand as against those that are supply-led and less informed by dialogue with communities.

Preece could almost be referring to adult education and lifelong learning structures within universities, and the narrowness of its conception of role in many countries. The siloing of various forms of engagement within specific units whether of service learning, extra-mural studies or community development and suchlike inevitably leads to marginalisation. Her comprehensive overview of the (re-)emergence of the concept of learning cities points to the potential for whole university holistic contributions to regional challenges, which inevitably require an engagement approach based on a dialogic and co-constructive approach. Her case studies of Zindowe in Zimbabwe, and Edu-village in South Africa, provide readers with very interesting contexts within which engagement and the concept of the learning city are analysed in great depth.

Whilst in various points of the book Preece acknowledges attempts to develop positive constructions for community engagement in Africa, rather than that of activities subjugated to the two more valued core missions, she also points to the challenges of globalisation and competition that drive universities along more traditional paths. She expresses the concern that countries in the south are adopting some of the same reductionist managerialist approaches of higher education systems used in some parts of the north, and are dominated by an agenda of development that has emerged from the influences of a range of intergovernmental bodies. It has to be hoped that they do not import some of the more extreme approaches that have been adopted in some countries, which are less about driving up quality, and more about attracting income as the state withdraws its support for the higher education sector. However, there are also potential influences from the north that could be congruent with developing the engaged university: for example, a focus on social impact, responsibility, research and innovation, and collaborative capacity building linked to global challenges in turn associated with the sustainable development goals. In itself these developments are something of an antidote to marketisation, commodification and metrics, though we are yet to see how these new foci will shift behaviour in higher education in the north. The global south of course can also influence the north, and more than through lip-service as part of a bid for another major research grant. And Preece ultimately offers the model of the *porous university*, which has considerable congruence with these foci. She argues that universities should prioritise the building of relationships with communities, drawing on concepts analogous to the learning city connected with her core theoretical constructs of capabilities and asset-based community development,

in advance of other ambitions. She points out that whilst there is much literature concerned with the community engagement role of universities, there is little reference to these theories. She offers the capabilities approach as a way to emphasise purpose of community engagement, and asset-based community development as a practical means to achieve this purpose. The book overall offers not just African universities, from which the illustrations of practice are mainly taken, but all universities, new insights into how they might prioritise the communities in their localities. I have emphasised myself on many occasions that universities are of particular places and have a responsibility to the places where they are located. Of course, it would be foolish to think that they do not have other responsibilities that extend beyond their locality, but that local dimension for many institutions has been lost. Julia Preece reminds us in this book that this is possible, indeed vital, and there is no necessary contradiction with other missions and ambitions at any geographical scale. I commend the book to readers.

Director of Research and Chair of Adult
and Lifelong Learning
University of Glasgow
Glasgow, UK

Michael Osborne

PREFACE

The aim of this book is to introduce a conceptual rethinking of how university community engagement functions as a lifelong learning resource for communities, particularly in the South African context, but with implications for other African universities and potentially other universities which are concerned with their contribution to learning cities and regions. The focus of the book is the university's traditional third mission of community engagement. The purpose is to make an argument for the public good nature of the university in spite of current trends towards marketisation and commodification of higher education. But also, it is argued, in the context of community engagement, the university has a responsibility to contribute to and be a participant in regional and national development needs. In the context of South Africa, and 'developing country' contexts, this imperative is embedded in post-independence nation-building agendas whereby it has been historically argued that the university should be responsive to its people and not breed an elite population that is separate from the ordinary person (Nyerere 1967; Ajayi et al. 1996). This ambition has to be understood, in African contexts, whereby the university student population is a small percentage of those eligible for higher learning. Participation rates are in single figures for all countries except South Africa and Mauritius. These rates compare unfavourably with participation rates of more than 50% in many universities in the industrialised north. Because of this educational divide, universities in developing country contexts need to play a stronger role in working with their communities towards social development needs so their elitism does not alienate the general populace. If universities are seen to be actively engaging with their communities, this

scenario creates a potential breeding ground for raising expectations for higher education when massification becomes more tenable.

The global trend is towards massification and promoting higher education as a marketable product. South Africa in particular endeavours to position its universities within global league tables. However, there are counter-arguments that community engagement should be a measureable criterion for this global competitiveness. Such arguments were presented at the Talloires Network conference in Cape Town 2014, for example. Furthermore, recent student protests in South Africa are indicators of a student movement that seeks to speak with and on behalf of its broader community (e.g. some of the protests engaged with university management in order to in-source domestic and other ground staff rather than out-source them).

The book therefore seeks to address this wider agenda by challenging the commodification trend for higher education, drawing on relevant counter-movements such as those organised by the PASCAL International Observatory, the Talloires Network and GUNi (Global University Network for innovation). The book seeks to re-envision how community engagement is understood and practised so that it is seen as a more reachable resource for community learning and community participation within a broader notion of lifelong learning. The book positions itself within these counter-movements, which advocate for learning cities and learning regions. But the book seeks to go one step further to explore the possibilities for a university which turns its position of privilege into a resource for the common good, whilst still retaining its teaching and research missions to advance new knowledge. This will have practical implications for how university policy and management are structured but examples from existing exemplar structures, such as that provided by the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe, will be utilised.

This re-envisionment is premised on the following argument. Although community engagement is well articulated across the globe, it is nevertheless claimed that conventional university engagement in practice fails to completely capture its ideology of community empowerment and co-creation or sharing of knowledge. In reality, the university retains its power and dominance over the community learning agenda through a hegemonic discourse of equality and benevolence. In the South African context, for example, this power differential is reinforced through policy documents that mandate higher education institutions to redress the inequities of its apartheid history and encourage the student population

to work in and with communities of disadvantage. In the process, the community participants collude in the power differential and become recipients of university benevolence. This book endeavours to challenge these normative assumptions by suggesting a new model for community engagement—one whereby communities are able to access university resources on their own terms. In this new model, the boundary walls of the university become metaphorically ‘porous’ in that community members feel free to enter its premises and interact with its facilities and staff as equal members of society.

The book draws on a theoretical framework of **capabilities** and **asset-based community development** as well as the adult learning concept of **dialogue** in order to conceptualise the ideology and practicality of a porous university. The book starts by placing African universities in their historical post-independence context which positioned them as universities for nation building rather than the traditional European ‘ivory tower’ haven of knowledge. This context is posited as a counter-argument to the more modern concept of commodification and marketisation of higher education, which has received many critiques.

The introductory chapter also outlines the current South African policy context for post-school education and training, particularly in the light of current racial, socio-economic and xenophobic tensions. Chapter 2 offers the theoretical framework of capabilities and asset-based community development as a lens through which to examine the subsequent chapters on community engagement, service learning and learning cities. The analysis attempts to question and trouble the givens of public discourses around community engagement and what counts as valuable learning. The book builds on the global learning cities movement and draws on ideas relating to this movement from around the world in order to develop practical ideas that support the porous university model of community engagement. Such ideas have tended to build on collaboration models, often at a municipal level. But, particularly since the learning cities movement has been difficult to promote in African contexts, it offers suggestions for how universities can work together with communities and facilitate a more dialogic, organic and bottom-up process of engagement. The model of the porous university is offered as a potential approach that can be applied in other contexts, particularly where learning cities concepts are still only aspirational goals.

This is not an empirical study, although reference to empirical studies is made in order to critique the dominant models of university community

engagement and service learning and to reflect on the range of innovations that might point a trajectory towards the notion of the porous university. The focus of the new model is one of enabling community ownership over the engagement relationship through opportunities that do not necessarily follow linear or academic learning trajectories. Instead, the focus will be on enabling community members to feel they can utilise the freedoms (capabilities) of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value. The university's responsibility is to create an enabling environment for that to happen.

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I am grateful to my PhD student Loveness Museva for sending me her university's draft community engagement plan which is reviewed as part of the literature in relation to Midlands State University in Chap. 6. A very special thanks must go to all the members of Edu-village, who so willingly gave up their time and resources to explain and demonstrate the various features of this remarkable project during my two-day visit in December 2016. They are, in the order in which I met them, Heidi Morgan, Azette Swanepoel, Karen Venter and Anita Venter from UFS; the occupational therapy students Tania Goosen, Sarah MacBean, Nicky

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CONTENTS

1	Background Context for Universities and Community Engagement in Africa	1
2	A Capabilities and Asset-Based Development Approach to Community Engagement	25
3	Community Engagement and Its Evolving Terminology	49
4	Community Engagement Through Service Learning	75
5	Learning Cities as Community Engagement	97
6	Two Case Examples of Community Engagement	123
7	The Porous University in Action	145
8	Implications of the Porous University for Policy and Practice	167

Bibliography	185
Index	209

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1	Community engagement model drawing on the capability and asset-based community development literature (<i>Source</i> : Preece 2016, 227)	37
Fig. 3.1	University community engagement boundary spanning roles at public research universities (<i>Source</i> : Weerts and Sandmann 2010, 721)	61
Fig. 5.1	The UNESCO framework of the key features of learning cities (<i>Source</i> : UNESCO UIL 2015a, 11)	104

Background Context for Universities and Community Engagement in Africa

INTRODUCTION

I first came to live and work in Africa as a British academic in the year 2000. I left one of the most privileged higher education systems in the world, where email and internet were already freely available, and where smart boards and PowerPoint were popularly replacing blackboards and overhead projectors. Libraries were well-stocked on an annual basis and bookshops freely available. Library books were searchable online.

I came to the University of Botswana which was completing its new, state-of-the-art library building. Email was erratic and internet access was so slow that one would switch it on as a background activity while doing other tasks. Lecture times were usually prefaced by a hunt for desks and chairs. I learnt to use a blackboard or whiteboard as my main teaching resource. Botswana, I discovered, was relatively well resourced. Other African universities might have no computers or internet at all. Books and bookshops were almost non-existent in some states. The legacy of a run-down and under-resourced higher education system as a result of decades of structural adjustment policies was all too visible.

Yet, in contrast to the increasing managerialist context of universities in Britain, my discipline of Adult Education, along with other disciplines, actively participated in national development plans, research focused on national development priorities and students were engaged in seeking solutions to local problems. I met ministers, sat on government committees

and discussed how the university could contribute to local and national goals and aspirations. After a four-year spell in Lesotho, and by the time I arrived in South Africa in 2011, the agenda was already shifting. South African universities were fighting for competitive advantage and a place in the global league tables. Managerialism, the market and productivity units drove the momentum for change. Community and engagement are now in tension with the market.

The nature of university education has changed significantly over the past 20 years. Of most significance, particularly in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, is the massification and marketisation of university education. A new vocabulary accompanies these changes. Even the concept of a university has shifted from that of an elite, stand-alone institution. Sometimes it is included under the umbrella of tertiary education which may include a range of post-school education and learning provision. Universities are also often grouped together under the nomenclature of higher education. Higher education now comes in many shapes and sizes and universities are not the only providers. For the purpose of this book, the terms higher education and university will be used interchangeably, but the focus will be on university institutions.

Although many of the trends of the past 20 years were evident earlier than this,¹ the influence of globalisation and new neo-liberal discourses of lifelong learning have accelerated the market approach to learning. Globalisation, briefly summarised, can be understood as the acceleration of time and space as a result of greater connectivity across and between peoples and locations. Technology is the main driver of this acceleration and has affected travel, communication, the marketing and consumption of products, access to raw materials and environmental changes (Held and McGrew 2000; Jarvis 2007). Jarvis (2007) argues that Globalisation, as the driving force for change and consequential convergence of cultures, systems, goods and services, is controlled by a core substructure, which pervades all countries in the world and which is owned by the United States as the perceived most powerful force. Although there are potential competitors to this situation coming from China and India, it is a widely held view (e.g. Ibrahim 2013). Other nations are unequally distributed in proximity to the core substructure with consequences for their ability to influence or benefit from the core. The substructure is also where ownership of capital (intellectual, financial, cultural and political) lies. The substructure of capitalism has gradually become more universal as other forms

of governance, such as communism, have declined. Agendas are set by powerful institutions such as the World Bank, World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund who colonise words such as lifelong learning and provide economic interpretations of such concepts that are then hegemonically applied across society. The need to keep pace with this fast moving world and its capitalist intentions has become the driving force for lifelong learning agendas. Knowledge and information are now commodities to sell on a global scale.

The economic vocabulary of lifelong learning also has its own descriptors, containing words such as skills, competencies, knowledge society, learning society. What counts as valuable knowledge or information is decided largely by the global substructure. Governments have been encouraged to develop policies that comply with this new approach to learning in order to accommodate and respond to capitalism and the market. Universities are both beneficiaries and victims of globalisation discourses.

In order to increase their market, higher education modes of delivery have become more varied. The rapid advances in technology mean that universities can market and deliver their courses online anywhere and to anyone. Even the three- or four-year lecture-based, full-time undergraduate programme, once presented as an uninterrupted, singular course of study, has now become modularised. Courses are delivered more flexibly, through distance learning, online and multi-mode systems. Credit can be accumulated and transferred; learning can be interrupted and continued at a later date. Universities thus market themselves internationally and even set up satellite campuses in foreign lands. They function effectively as business corporates. All these activities are facilitated by international trade agreements, promoted by the core substructure. Some universities are completely private entities, others receive state subsidies.

Increased competition for places has resulted in criteria which help to define the 'best' universities in order to attract the 'best' students. Universities now compete for their place in one or more of the numerous lists of world rankings. This global, neo-liberal obsession with world rankings gained momentum during the 1990s, and is reinforced every year by a range of media outputs which publicise performance indicators in order to define what counts as a high university ranking. The ranking criteria are narrowly defined to reflect measurable outputs such as published research and numbers of postgraduate students. University websites strive to rank themselves as high as possible in the global higher education market place.

Although we will see later that there are many resistances to this dominant discourse, particularly in relation to culture and national identity, this is the global context within which many African universities are struggling to position themselves. Yet, in terms of influence, Africa is very much on the periphery of the globalised core substructure. This is evident in many ways, but especially in education. The OECD (2012, 14) report states that ‘virtually everyone in OECD countries has access to at least 13 years of formal education, and the average 5-year olds can expect to complete more than 17 years of education by the time they are 40’. The report estimates that up to 62% of young adults in OECD countries are expected to undertake higher education.

In contrast, literacy among the adult population aged 15 or over in Africa is only 58.9% and the population of adults with at least some secondary education is only 28.1% (UNDP 2014, 195). The gross university enrolment rates across Sub-Saharan Africa barely reach 14% (MacGregor 2014). Since South Africa takes a skewed slice of these figures (participation rates reached 17.4% in 2011), this means that participation in almost all other African nations is in single figures, with many countries barely reflecting a participation rate of 3% for all tertiary education (Friesenhahn 2014). These are the lowest participation rates in the world.

It is not surprising then, that Africa is listed as evidencing the fewest number of universities in the world that are ranked in the top 800 (Times Higher Education 2016). African universities have generally not benefited from globalisation. Alemu (2014) highlights how their colonial history still affects the university curriculum which is often an imperfect clone of the western system. This is described by Chinnammai (2005, 1) as a ‘new form of cultural imperialism’. Ibrahim (2013) talks about the loss of cultural identity for African nation states and the brain drain of Africans as a result of increased mobility. This is particularly true for the many African students who choose to study abroad and do not return. Ikeme (2000, 1) also laments the weakening of the traditional ‘social glue that held African societies in one piece ... Are there no elements of our indigenous knowledge and skills that are relevant to our present development effort?’

Although Teferra (2016) has recently argued that there are flagship universities across Africa in terms of university enrolment, in the above outlined context, South Africa stands out as the most ambitious nation to position itself as an international player. The South African government provides financial incentives to each university on the basis of research output, through a narrowly defined list of acceptable publication outlets,

and graduate completions, weighted increasingly towards higher qualifications. The consequence of this is that universities tend to chase doctoral cash flows and neglect undergraduate courses and other financially unrewarding certificates, irrespective of national development needs. Although university mission statements often make reference to social imperatives, such as access, these are often in tension with their subsidy seeking practices. For example, many South African universities compete with each other to attract postgraduate students including the use of financial incentives such as ‘fee waivers’ if students complete within a prescribed time frame. Their websites, in line with international examples, display rankings that advertise themselves as desirable locations for study or teaching. Universities strive to find ways to elevate their ranking in a way that outshines their contemporaries. So, for instance, although the University of KwaZulu-Natal is not positioned by the Times Higher Education as amongst the top three African universities² (Times Higher Education 2016), the university itself has found ways to repeatedly identify itself as ‘firmly in the number one spot’ in the ‘top 3%’ of world universities or ‘3rd in South Africa’ (www.ukzn.ac.za) by citing a variety of statistical sources.

This is the context in which advocates of a more responsive, socially engaged university movement are striving to operate. The ‘competition fetish’ is heavily criticised within academia itself (e.g. Brennan and Shah 2011; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). There are resistant discourses which argue that universities have a social responsibility to contribute to the public good. The public good nature of universities, on the one hand, means that the benefits of university education accrue to more than just the individual who is able to access that education. A university graduate is expected to be more committed to engaging in citizenship responsibilities and national development than someone who has not been to university (Howard 2014).

On the other hand, the public good role of universities extends beyond the students they admit to their degree programmes in the form of acting as an institutional observer to, and agent of, community development. Universities themselves have traditionally embraced a ‘third mission’, besides their focus on teaching and research. This third mission has gone through several phases of interpretation. The more recent terminology changes are the subject of Chap. 3. But, in brief, the third mission historically reflects the broader social purpose aspect of universities in addition, or as complementary to, their two core missions of teaching and

research. The third mission has been a core element of British universities and America, through its Land Grant institutions, although the two countries have interpreted these missions differently.

In Britain, the third mission was often relegated to an extra-mural department which provided ‘outreach’ programmes for adults who either did not qualify for mainstream programmes or were interested in studying for pleasure. This work originated in the oldest civic universities as ‘extension’ work. During the early 1900s, it often reflected a liberal socialist education project for the working classes in order to counter the perceived anti-establishment threats from communist factions (Fieldhouse 1996). During the late 1990s the British extra-mural departments transformed radically in response to new lifelong learning discourses so that many departments became centres of continuing education and distance learning for part-time credit-bearing courses. Nevertheless, the adult education arm of universities has often been a focal point for interaction with the surrounding community. More recently this original community outreach mission has become institutionalised as an engagement role, though in British universities it is only a prescribed mandate in terms of widening participation in higher education programmes.

Schuetze (2010) explains that the original establishment of American land grant universities had an explicit mission of service to the community. The introduction during the 1960s of non-university types of higher education in the form of community colleges also opened up a commitment to a more regional dimension of engaging with a local student population. In North America the third mission is understood to be a mandate of universities. It is explained as follows (cited in Schuetze 2010, 17):

Higher education is built on a theory ... (H)igher education is a stool, and the stool has three legs: research, teaching, and service. There is a reason it has three legs. The service is there because it keeps the teaching and research honest. It keeps them connected to everyday problems that people have to address. And that is part of what the role of an institution of higher education ought to be (Mason cited by Maurrasse 2001, 22).

We will see in Chap. 3 that the notion of service has migrated to a more collaborative notion of engagement. The reference in this citation to connecting to everyday problems (the public good or social purpose aspect of higher education) has implications for how knowledge is constructed and authenticated. Gibbons (2006, 28) is often

cited for his exposition of mode 1 knowledge (discipline specific and gaining its authority from laboratory testing and understood to be ‘reliable knowledge’) and mode 2 knowledge, which is problem based, and authenticated in context specific situations so that it is ‘socially robust’. The latter form of knowledge is associated with community-based knowledge, while mode 1 knowledge reflects the mainstream university research agenda.

The social purpose role of universities vis-à-vis their emphasis on mode 1 knowledge construction has always been a source of tension. This role sits especially uneasily with a marketisation approach because its focus is not for profit. Nevertheless, it has captured the interest of some global players. Organisations such as the Global University Network for innovation (GUNi), PASCAL International Observatory and Talloires Network have, in the past 15 years, turned this historical third mission into a social justice agenda for community engagement as a central priority for universities. Their goal is to strengthen higher education’s role in society within its varying socio-economic and cultural contexts. Community engagement, for these organisations, takes centre stage, whereby higher education institutions partner with their local or regional neighbours to produce a shared vision for development (GUNi 2014). Grau (2014, 3), the non-executive director of GUNi, argues that the university of the twenty-first century must also be measured by the extent to which it interacts with the socio-economic and cultural environment. He endeavours to rationalise the compatibility of the globalisation imperatives with a university’s more humanistic sense of service to society. In this argument the university’s interaction with the environment generates knowledge which can be transformed into: ‘economic value, productivity and competitiveness. In turn this creates jobs and wealth and helps to lay the basis of a balanced, advanced, just and sustainable society.’ Innovation, he argues is no longer the prerogative of universities:

Universities need to understand that they are fundamental to the process of creating knowledge but that they do not have the monopoly; they should recognise (and work with) the institutions involved in knowledge creation outside the sphere of higher education in all fields. (Grau 2014, 5)

These arguments hinge on our changing understandings about the creation, and ownership, of knowledge and the university’s role in distributing and using that knowledge for a better world.

There are many advocates at university management level of this alternative vision, as evidenced by MacGregor (2014) in her interviews with vice chancellors of Latin America, South Africa and Pakistan. The development context of many countries in the political ‘south’ creates new imperatives for the role that universities play. This is especially so in Africa, where universities cannot afford to remain aloof from their immediate surrounds. Kruss et al. (2012, 2) have argued, for instance, that the national resource base for African universities affects their focus for development:

A key difference is that the economies in many low and middle income countries remain strongly resource based, particularly focused on small scale and peasant-based agriculture. This means that there is a relatively small industrial base, and that the significance of university interaction with firms differs from developed economies. In a middle income country like South Africa, with a great socioeconomic divide and high rates of unemployment, the large informal and ‘survivalist’ sector, and community development initiatives, are significant features of the conditions within which universities interact. That is, the range of social partners with which universities should engage to play a role in development is wider than, and not restricted to, firms in industrial sectors ... What is required is a holistic focus on the university’s role in social and economic development ...

African universities have historically embraced this latter agenda, and have experienced a different trajectory of development compared with those of their colonial masters in Europe. This chapter outlines that trajectory for Anglophone Africa, culminating with a focus on the current South African policy context for post-school education and training, where community engagement features as a springboard for exploring the book’s ideas in more detail.

UNIVERSITIES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA: THE AFRICAN VISION

The oral tradition of learning in Africa has been well publicised. It is embedded in a communitarian and holistic philosophy, whereby scholars of wisdom in medicine, science and religion would share their experiences and train identified community members as apprentices in a particular field of work (Fordjor et al. 2003; Amutabi and Oketch 2009). This source of

indigenous knowledge is gaining credence but was suppressed during the colonial period. In contrast, university education is discipline specific and removed from context.

Zezeza (2014) claims that Africa is host to some of the oldest universities in the world and Ajayi et al. (1996) cite the Alexandria Museum and Library in Egypt as one example. However, the majority of universities in Africa were introduced by the colonial masters during the nineteenth century, whereby small elites were recruited from the indigenous population to study subjects that served their colonial administrations. Although francophone and lusophone African universities were sponsored by their respective colonial systems, the British government followed its own tradition and developed university colleges as extensions of their British counterparts. A number of commissions were formed with this aim. The De La Warr Commission of East Africa in 1837 was followed in 1923 by the British Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies. By 1945 two further commissions (Asquith and Elliott) and the Oxford Delegacy for Extra Mural Studies resulted in the establishment of extra-mural departments in West Africa, closely followed by similar departments in other parts of the continent. These initiatives adopted the British tradition of outreach and extra-mural work as part of the university's mission to educate the wider public. Such universities were very small in size and number. It was only after independence that African governments embarked on an expansion of all aspects of their formal education systems.

The most progressive phase of university expansion and development occurred during the 1960s and 1970s when African leaders embraced the notion of nation building with a particular vision for Africanisation of university education. This process has been documented by Preece et al. (2012) and Ajayi et al. (1996), amongst others, and is reflected in a number of UNESCO reports. In essence, UNESCO played a key role in supporting the development of African higher education plans with a focus on enrolment expansion and social and economic reconstruction. In view of the limited resources available across the continent the Association of African Universities (AAU) was formed in 1967 to encourage collaboration, the Africanisation of university curricula and a redirection of university missions towards national development needs. In spite of their dependence on international aid, there was evidence of a concerted effort within Africa to formulate a vision for higher education that would build national identity and develop an African knowledge base. This is reflected

in the final commitment of the 1962 UNESCO conference on the development of higher education in Africa:

Far from being ivory towers detached from the society in which they are situated, higher education institutions in Africa must be in close and constant touch with society, both through their extra-mural departments and through all those activities which can contribute towards preserving the African heritage. (UNESCO 1963, 12)

Similar statements followed a decade later, as articulated at the AAU conference, *Creating the African University*, in Accra in 1972. Ajayi et al. (1996) quote from the AAU report:

The truly African university must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment: not a transplanted tree, but one growing from a seed that is planted and nurtured in the African soil. (cited in Ajayi et al. 1996, 91)

From this position, there were a number of efforts to define a distinctive role for the African university that would make it accountable to the wider populace and directly work towards social transformation of the nation. In other words, (as articulated above by Kruss et al. 2012 in today's context) the western, liberal ideology of pursuit of knowledge for its own sake was deemed not sufficient in a development context. In Africa higher education was articulated very much as a public good. The seeds of university community engagement as we know it today were already planted. There was evidence, during this period, of concerted efforts by socialist national leaders to realise this vision. Some examples stand out. Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana developed the People's Education Association during the 1950s and 1960s which focused on community improvement programmes connected to universities. More well known are the *ujamaa* development goals of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, articulated in his Arusha Declaration of 1967. Nyerere insisted that a condition of university graduation was the completion of a placement in a rural village, whereby village leaders would contribute to the student's final assessment. Similar initiatives took place in Uganda at Makerere University through its Department of Extra Mural Studies. Indeed, the concept of 'community service', although evident to varying degrees in British and American university missions, has often played a strong role in staff assessment at a number of African universities. For instance, it remains an evaluation feature for staff promotion at the

University of Botswana. Zimbabwe also enshrined community engagement in its higher education policy at the point of independence in 1980 (Nziramanga 1999).

THE AFRICAN VISION IN CONFLICT

However, in spite of significant progress during the first two decades of African independence a number of factors contributed to a change in fortunes. Political instabilities, a crisis in the oil price and growing debts from nations in receipt of financial aid finally led to a withdrawal of funding support for education services and higher education in particular. The justification from the dominant donor communities for this was that higher education could no longer be classified as a ‘public good’ but was now deemed a private good whereby the educational returns were seen as only serving the individual rather than the nation (Preece et al. 2012). Structural adjustment policies followed with devastating consequences for many countries, including a drastic decline in the quality of and resources for higher education. While the rest of the world geared up during the 1990s for lifelong learning, the new international aid policies, reinforced during the Millennium Development Goal era, emphasised vocationalism, privatisation and a focus on basic education alone for Africa (Preece 2009). African development plans struggled to accommodate the new vocabulary of the market, in order to attract international aid.

There are many examples of how those development plans reflected national efforts to negotiate their responsiveness to the funding agendas, while at the same time attempting to cling to their national and cultural identities. The texts of different national and educational plans in Lesotho and Tanzania, for example, show how those tensions are expressed. They are discussed in detail through a discourse analysis and postcolonial theory perspective in Preece (2013). But some highlights of that discussion show, for instance, how Nyerere had in 1967 outlined his vision for education as follows:

It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic role and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in terms of human well-being. (Nyerere 1967, 6)

After structural adjustment interventions, and in order to attract new funding, the post-Millennium Vision 2025 document (Planning Commission 2002) openly dismisses the former socialist ideals of Nyerere and consistently and repeatedly mentions competitiveness as the overall focus.

We are standing at the threshold of the 21st Century, a Century that will be characterised by competition, ... advanced technological capacity, high productivity, modern and efficient transport and communication infrastructure... we must, as a Nation... withstand the expected intensive economic competition ahead of us. (Planning Commission 2002, Foreword)

Yet its internal Education Sector Plans (e.g. Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2008) focus more on social development needs in the context of adult and non-formal education, drawing on Nyerere's communitarian heritage of village committees. Its literacy plans include:

the acquisition of reading, writing and numeracy skills in the development of active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods and gender equality. (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2008, 48)

These nuances of text reflect a tension between cultural ideals and enforced policy demands of conditional aid. These tensions are reflected in Lesotho's post-millennium development documents but with less effort to comply with the vocabulary of the market. Lesotho's Vision 2020 (Government of Lesotho (GOL) 2001, 1) clings more tenaciously to its social and cultural ideals of 'cherished norms and values that will enhance a sense of belonging, identity and pride in every Mosotho... common cultural heritage... political tolerance... state of unity'. The document more openly articulates the conflicting interests between funding agendas and national aspirations, referring to 'donor conditionalities' as potential 'threats': 'It is a challenge for Lesotho to sustain internationally accepted prudent levels in terms of debt service ratio' (GOL 2001, 16).

The effects of the structural adjustment constraints across the continent were long lasting. Sub-Saharan Africa still has one of the lowest human development index values, health and education inequality rankings in the world (UNDP 2014). Poverty is rife and diseases such as HIV and AIDs, tuberculosis and malaria are at epidemic proportions. The UNDP Development Report (2014) highlights several ecological challenges ranging from desertification to pollution. No less challenging is the political picture of uneven democratic participation, conflict and displaced persons. In the face of a

growing realisation among OECD and other countries, who were keen to expand their trade opportunities, that such challenges are detrimental to those aspirations, there has been renewed interest in Africa's revival, as witnessed, for example, in the Commission for Africa (2005) Report from Britain. Since 1994, following the political demise of the apartheid regime, South Africa has also entered the arena for this new development agenda.

Throughout the period of intensification of market ideology, UNESCO has consistently endeavoured to include an expanded vision for higher education. It has sponsored the Conference of Ministries of Education for African Member States (MINEDAF) since 1998 with a view to positioning education as a lifelong process 'which transcends schooling systems and which focuses on the building of a learning society' (UNESCO 1998, 29). This position has been linked specifically to higher education, especially at the African Regional Conference in preparation for the second UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (UNESCO 2009). The African Regional conference statement concluded with a need for higher education to focus on 'priority needs':

including African indigenous knowledge ... for ensuring that values of peace, conflict prevention and resolution are taught, for fostering a culture of ICT, for promoting democratic values, sustainable development ... and for strengthening higher education governance and management. (UNESCO 2009, item 2)

UNESCO thus firmly positioned higher education as a development agent and once more reinforced the notion of higher education as a public good. In support of this more humanistic discourse, substantial lobbying took place during the international consultation process leading up to the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly from the adult education and lifelong learning sector. Some key players were the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and contributions by Hoppers and Yekhlele (2012) to the Association for Development of Education in Africa. As a result, the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have adopted one goal (goal 4) that embraces lifelong learning. Although the targets are heavily weighted towards vocational skills learning, one target provides a more holistic vision:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through

education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (UN 2015, pages unnumbered)

These windows of opportunity create discursive spaces for a humanistic approach to learning. Some African governments are now developing adult and lifelong learning policies, often linked to sustainable development goals. Their national policy documents are posted on the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning website. There are also fragmented seeds of interest in the role of African universities for regional development. Ntseane (2012), for instance, outlines a comprehensive consultation process between the University of Botswana and its capital city Gaborone to build a learning city. Raditloane and Chawawa (2015) discuss various university engagement initiatives to stimulate growth and independence among remote communities in Botswana. Similarly, Openjuru and Ikoja-Odongo (2012) articulates capacity building initiatives in partnership with local governments to develop model villages for service delivery and agricultural sustainability. The Midlands State University (2001) in Zimbabwe adopts a similar institutional approach to community engagement. The University of the Free State in South Africa is developing the notion of an Edu-village consisting of a virtual partnership of agencies that will serve a designated rural community in its province (Morgan 2015).

University community engagement as a concept, however, as subsequent chapters will illustrate, has undergone many transformations. The chapters reveal a substantive literature that explores and critiques various forms of engagement. Without wishing to pre-empt that literature, it is worth pointing out some of the concerns that have moved the discourse from one of 'community outreach' to that of a 'learning city' or 'learning region'. Briefly summarised, the early initiatives for outreach were premised on a top-down, enlightenment ideal which endeavoured to bring the university to the masses. Elaborations of that ideal were often premised on a benevolent and philanthropic concern with giving disadvantaged people the benefit of university expertise in order to better their lives—a service to the community.

More recent discourses have endeavoured to engender a partnership relationship with communities and their representatives. In many cases this has involved university students undertaking placements in

community-based settings. The more sophisticated version of these initiatives has been labelled service learning, whereby students are assessed as part of their coursework on the learning they have undergone as a result of their community placement. Often these placements are small scale and of limited duration in order to fit in with the modular programme of university studies. As a result, community engagement has often been fragmented, uncoordinated, of short term and with limited opportunities for development (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2013).

In the same vein, the term ‘community’ has been interpreted to mean anything from a non-profit organisation to a residential space, a school or other form of institution. The extent to which universities and their communities are able to co-create knowledge in these engagement projects has varied widely. Similarly, the extent to which community and university members have witnessed concrete evidence of sustainable development is limited.

Although the above examples from selected African countries indicate that a more collective notion of community engagement is emerging, Africa generally has been slow to develop scenarios that include universities as collaborative partners in a broader vision for learning cities or regions. Learning cities and regions are characterised as being better able to interact and understand the complexities of a fast changing global and knowledge economy (Duke et al. 2013). One possible reason for this slowness of pace is the fact that university participation rates remain pitifully low, so that its students hardly represent the communities within which the universities are situated. Duke et al. (2013, 40), for instance, claim that ‘engagement with a region is more likely when large numbers of students are part of the regional economy and its communities’.

In the context of South Africa’s post-apartheid reconstruction agenda participation rates in university education have increased, particularly in relation to inclusion of the formerly marginalised black African population. There have also been consistent attempts to weave a path between responding to the market ideology of globalisation and the practical development concerns of a population in crisis, including high rates of unemployment, poverty, crime and the ravages of HIV and AIDS. Its context, therefore, provides rich opportunities for exploring how universities might position themselves as porous, rather than ivory towers for community engagement. We now turn to South Africa’s policy environment as a starting point for pursuing this debate.

SOUTH AFRICA'S PLANS FOR POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

South Africa's apartheid past created settlement patterns on racial lines which translated into a hierarchy of housing, education and health services. Movement across the country was restricted for 'non-whites' and the rural homeland areas of black Africans were the most deprived of resources. Since 1996 a series of policy documents and development plans have articulated measures of redress to counter these inequities. South African universities are expected to play a major role in this respect. Bundy (2006, 13) refers to the first two documents, the *National Commission on Higher Education* Report of 1996 and the 1997 White Paper, *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. He outlines some of their expectations in terms of increasing participation and attending to the needs of first generation students, with greater responsiveness to social issues 'inculcating democratic values of tolerance, citizenship and the common good'. He points out the double challenge that universities were also expected to catch up with the rest of the globalised world in terms of research excellence, competition and internationalisation among other demands. So while the United Kingdom, for instance, discusses the merits of a diversified system which either competes on a global scale, or takes cognisance of social issues (Singh and Little 2011; Bundy 2006), South African universities, in the context of expectations for redress across the system, are potentially uniquely positioned to illustrate how it might be possible to do both. The Department of Education (DoE) (1997) White Paper succinctly outlines this challenge:

[T]he South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance ... Simultaneously, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid. (DoE 1997, sections 1.9 and 1.10)

Bundy pessimistically stipulates that there are already indications that those institutions which are most concerned with social redress and responsiveness to their communities are least likely to obtain a high ranking in global

league tables. Moreover, he claims that the scales of change have tipped towards the globalisation agenda rather than transformation of the social order. He points out that the National Plan for Higher Education in 2001 indicates a preference for enhancing its international profile, stressing efficiency, globalisation and the knowledge economy.

In spite of these cautionary observations, the 1997 White Paper makes explicit reference to community engagement, resulting in a series of subsequent policy commitments to the social purpose role of higher education:

Higher education has an unmatched obligation, which has not been adequately fulfilled, to help lay the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests. It has much more to do, both within its own institutions and in its influence on the broader community, to strengthen the democratic ethos, the sense of common citizenship and commitment to a common good. ...there is still insufficient attention to the pressing local, regional and national needs of the South African society and to the problems and challenges of the broader African context. (DoE 1997, section 1.4)

This statement constructs higher education as a 'common good' resource for stimulating interaction with South African society at all levels. It is an aspirational statement which requires implementation plans. As a first step the White Paper proposes practical projects including 'feasibility studies and pilot programmes which explore the potential of community service to answer the call of young people for constructive social engagement' (section 2.36). Several policy documents and frameworks have supplemented these papers, including the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC 2004) Criteria for Programme Implementation and Institutional Audits, thus ensuring that community engagement and its pedagogical counterpart, service learning, are reflected in institutional activities.

Following these commitments, a number of initiatives and national debates have explored different perspectives for community engagement, including the Community Higher Education Service Partnerships initiative (Council for Higher Education [CHE] 2008). In 2012 the National Research Foundation (NRF) established an annual, competitive research funding instrument 'for research that contributes both to knowledge production within the ambit of community engagement ... as well as research

on the processes and dynamics of engagement from the perspective of the higher education sector' (NRF 2016, 3).

More recently this social purpose element of higher education has been incorporated into a lifelong learning framework within a broader notion of post-school education and training (DHET 2013, 39). Reference is once more made to the role of university community engagement:

What has emerged is that community engagement, in its various forms – socially responsive research, partnerships with civil society organisations, formal learning programmes that engage students in community work as a formal part of their academic programmes, and many other formal and informal aspects of academic work – has become a part of the work of universities in South Africa.

The paper is critical of the ad hoc nature of community engagement, however, and emphasises that it must be directly linked to teaching and research. Although this endeavour ensures that such activities are integrated within mainstream university activities, it fails to recognise the time and cost implications of work that requires extensive dialogue and communication within and beyond the university. Apart from the above-mentioned competitive research resource, for instance, there are no government funds to support this work.

Of particular relevance to the purpose of this book, however, is the White Paper's articulation of an integrated post-school education system, including the contribution of non-formal, community-based learning and the introduction of a community college concept—a borrowed term from the United States, but with a particular focus on the adult learning and development needs of a country where not all its population has received formal schooling. The community colleges are expected to provide formal qualifications in adult education and vocational programmes, but also they are mandated to 'draw on the strengths of the non-formal sector' which focuses on 'citizen and social education in order to strengthen and expand popular citizen and community education' (DHET 2013, xii). Although the relationship between universities and community colleges is not made explicit in the White Paper, a subsequent document, which outlines a pilot project for a location in KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, refers to the university as a central player in a proposed *Imbali Education Precinct* (DHET 2014).

The education precinct initiative, at the time of writing this chapter, is a conceptual vision, rather than a reality. But its ethos straddles the necessary vocational needs of a population that is without access to training, employment or education as well as a society that suffers some of the highest crime, health, cultural and socio-economic challenges in the world. The precinct concept, therefore, embraces many of the conceptual ambitions of the learning cities and learning regions literature:

The precinct is intended to be an integrated and sustainable education delivery system that is incorporated into the social, economic and intellectual development of the immediate community, the city and the province. It will provide accredited and non-accredited learning programmes for children, young people and adults in a range of fields. It is envisaged that the precinct will enable maximum access to learners wishing to develop high level skills and contribute to the economic and cultural development of the city of Pietermaritzburg and its communities. (DHET 2014, 8)

A campus of the Durban University of Technology is situated within the proposed geographical boundaries of the precinct and one of the country's community colleges will also be positioned within this space. These policy ideas in the South African concept have yet to be translated into reality. But they provide a contextual starting point which can be compared with the more global learning cities literature and create a discursive space for exploring how a 'porous university' in a less developed industrial economy might facilitate the vision for a sustainable education delivery system and enable maximum access to learners.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has endeavoured to provide a contextual introduction to the focus and purpose of the book, which is to move the community engagement and learning cities debates forward in terms of how universities engage with their communities. The purpose is to make an argument for the public good nature of the university in spite of current trends towards marketisation and commodification of higher education. But the way in which universities do this is central to the ensuing chapters. Do they remain aloof ivory towers who condescend to interact with their neighbours or do they become truly a part of their neighbourhoods? Indeed,

for some universities, their students increasingly come from the very neighbourhoods within which the universities are situated, as is the case for the Durban University of Technology (MacGregor 2014). This book argues that this situation should be seen as an opportunity for embracing community engagement. The remainder of this book unpacks the different stages and ideas for university community engagement, its evolution into the concept of learning cities or regions, and how some of those ideas are evidenced in selected African contexts. But in order to frame the idea of a porous university as an extension of these concepts, a theoretical framework is offered. The next chapter, therefore, discusses how the role of higher education for lifelong learning is explored through a capabilities perspective. Capabilities are defined as ‘what people are actually able to do and be’ (John Walker 2006, 180) in terms of freedoms to lead the lives they have reason to value. The lens of capability will then be used to explore the role that universities can play in communities in addressing any sources of ‘unfreedom’ that might constrain genuine choices and how diverse individuals are affected. In addition, since ‘community’ is central to engagement, the chapter will also reflect on the relationship of the capabilities literature to asset-based community development theory which argues that communities already have resources and assets which need recognising and strengthening as a means of retaining ownership over their own development agenda:

Too often when approaching community improvement, people focus on what is wrong and requires fixing. Now there is a better way. Instead of occupying themselves with a community’s deficits, forward thinking organisations are identifying and building on local assets. After all, even the most troubled community has strengths. Once people’s eyes are opened to community assets, a positive energy takes over. (Walker 2006, 25)

The chapter will look at the role of dialogue within these frameworks as an engagement and empowerment strategy for capabilities and community development. In other words, community engagement must focus on consultation and collaboration in order to facilitate shared ownership of change. The framework then provides a critical lens through which the concepts of community engagement, service learning and learning cities are discussed. It is then used as a tool to analyse particular case studies of universities in Africa that have attempted to embed themselves as partners within specific communities.

NOTES

1. African academics (e.g. Alemu 2014) have argued, for instance, that African universities were internationalised since colonialism and globalisation is simply part of that continuum which has accelerated internationalisation as a result of enhanced technological advancement.
2. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2015–2016 only ranks 14 African universities in the top 800, while Europe has 345, the United States 174, Asia 203, South America 27 and Oceania 38 in the top 800.

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A Capabilities and Asset-Based Development Approach to Community Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Many decades ago, I initiated a community project in an inner city, council-owned, housing estate in Birmingham, England. I was a youngish probationary teacher and had previously worked voluntarily on a community project the other side of the city. Unemployment levels at this time were high, and the housing estate was relatively new, with few amenities apart from two primary schools, a church and a handful of shops. A large expanse of waste ground lay opposite the primary school where I was employed. It looked perfect for an adventure playground. After some negotiations with the City Council, a meeting with the school's parents and a larger public meeting organised by the church, we started a residents' association and made formal requests to take over the waste ground. A businessman from a neighbouring industrial area offered to give us a pre-fabricated warehouse if we could dismantle it ourselves and transport it to our site. My job, as secretary of the residents' association, was to raise money for this venture. The idea captured the imagination of local parents, several of whom were unemployed labourers, carpenters, bricklayers and the like. Over a period of 12 months, we collectively dismantled and rebuilt the warehouse, installed electricity and started to landscape the surroundings. Over the next five years the site became a flagship community and play centre for Birmingham. The grounds were organised as a large outdoor classroom, with nature area, garden plot, den-building workshop, sports ground and a designated area for the under-eight-year olds. The children,

teenagers and school leavers, who had designed and built the play structures as part of their school assignments, fiercely protected the centre from intruders or vandalism and the parents used the premises for their own self-managed sewing and keep-fit classes, among other things.

The point of this story? The community possessed a plethora of assets in terms of skills, knowledge and motivation. But the assets needed to be harnessed. Generally, community members had felt they were not important and had few aspirations. Shortly after the project started, one of the women told me that by watching me, as an educated woman, do things, she had begun to realise that she, too, could perhaps do things. This woman had hidden talents of her own. Although she had no formal school qualifications, she became the project treasurer and, as the project grew, she managed the salary payments of its workers because she was excellent at maths. Eventually she took an access course and became a teacher herself. Another resident undertook similar adult learning classes to become a qualified youth worker. Others attended part-time community work courses and many attended our own project-designed summer playscheme training courses so they could earn some money and become assistant play leaders at the centre.

As a teacher and resident, I was a mediator between the schools, council officials and the residents, but the achievements were community-led. As a result, community members broadened their own visions of the lives they had reason to value, raised their expectations for their children and their entitlements to lead a 'good life'. Their voices became stronger and they began to ask more from their local schools in terms of access to resources and what their children should be achieving. They also began to make demands on the City Council to repair their houses in a more timely and effective way, so that ultimately they were given their own housing repair budget which they managed from within the housing estate. Gradually the estate became cleaner and healthier and safer, thus increasing the residents' freedom to make decisions about how they wanted to live. The schools, the community centre and other neighbouring resources (police, factories, shops) began interacting as partners with a shared vision to create a vibrant community. Carnivals, mini-Olympics and other activities followed.

Although no university was involved in this project, its practical illustration of collaborative, community-led engagement inspires me to draw on two complementary theories as an argument for re-envisioning university-community engagement. The schools in this community project, for instance, represented the formal educational institution. But the schools

were not in charge. They worked in partnership with the community project and its offshoot activities for mutual gain. The potential for universities to play a part in this scenario can be imagined.

CAPABILITIES PERSPECTIVE

During the past 15 years, the capabilities perspective, or approach as it is sometimes called (fostered largely by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum), has captured the imagination of many disciplines. A particular proponent of the capabilities perspective as a means of advocating the ‘public good’ role of higher education is Melanie Walker. Her focus has been to develop a higher education curriculum that nurtures a sense of social justice and responsibility towards society among higher education students. Her research and arguments will therefore be discussed in this chapter, particularly in view of their South African context. But Walker’s analysis to date does not sufficiently capture the ‘community’ perspective in terms of exploring community engagement as a collaborative and partnership relationship. Furthermore, the capabilities literature emphasises that the capabilities approach in itself is not a complete theory and needs to be aligned with, or enhanced by, additional theories in order to apply its understandings to a particular concern. This chapter therefore builds particularly on Sen’s arguments but supplements those discussions with reference to asset-based community development (ABCD) theory which speaks directly to the community voice. It starts by outlining the capabilities perspective, its potential as an analytical tool to critique the community engagement literature in relation to universities and its potential as an evaluative tool to explore how universities might interact with their communities.

Amartya Sen (1999, 2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2000) come from different disciplinary backgrounds. But during the same decade they have both envisioned a more humanitarian way of exploring how human life should be evaluated from a social justice perspective. Their disciplines and rationales have influenced their arguments and areas of focus, but they overlap in terms of the core concern that human development rests on the degree to which individuals have access to a range of freedoms to lead the life they have reason to value. From Sen’s discipline of economics, the challenge has been to influence the way in which development is conceived and measured across the globe. He has thus tried to expand the concept of development beyond its more utilitarian emphasis on Gross

National Product or household income as a measure of poverty. His focus has been on encapsulating the idea of development as a process of expanding people's freedoms or capabilities. From Nussbaum's discipline of philosophy, and a particular feminist concern with gender justice for women, she has argued for a universalist position of human rights which can be demanded of governments in the form of a threshold level of capabilities which are listed and justified from a social justice perspective. Nussbaum (2000) dedicated considerable energy to consulting widely in order to produce a universal list of capabilities. Capabilities are often understood in terms of 'opportunities' in Nussbaum's work. She has critiqued Sen for not compiling such a list, claiming that without such a list there can be no threshold set of demands that one can make on nation states for humankind. Sen, however, while claiming that such a distinct set of capabilities can only be determined in context, does, in fact, provide us with a core set of benchmarks in the form of 'five distinct types of freedom', which are 'political', 'economic', 'social', 'transparency guarantees' and 'protective security' (1999, 10). For him, capability deprivation can be explained as 'unfreedoms' (ibid, 11).

These differences have been explored at length across disciplines by a number of writers (e.g. Nancy Fraser in terms of gender equality; Tikly and Barrett 2011 and Saito 2003 in relation to education; Robeyns 2003, 2005; Walker 2006, 2010, 2012; Boni and Walker 2013 amongst many others in relation to higher education as well as schooling and gender). Several of these authors have compiled their own lists of preferred capabilities for specific contexts and purposes. The lists have now become so multifarious that they have the potential to detract from the core principles of what can be understood, and what I want to advocate, as a capability perspective for community development. The respective authors and their lists will be referred to wherever relevant in this chapter. However, in the context of community engagement and the notion of development as freedom, I prefer to focus on Sen's position. His argument provides greater evaluative scope for a more general understanding of the (community) development implications of thinking about capabilities as freedoms to lead the life one has reason to value. Although gender is an important dimension of this, and although many of Nussbaum's listed capabilities clearly highlight a range of human rights concerns that impact human dignity, they extrapolate a level of individual detail which sits uneasily with my broader concerns to build on community assets and needs as a collective project.

Having sketched out some basic disciplinary and philosophical differences, I now turn to the more substantive elements of Sen's argument, before reviewing supporting literature and integrating this argument with ABCD theory.

Sen has expanded the economic understanding of poverty as simply an insufficient income. His emphasis on the human and psychosocial effects of poverty has had significant influence on the way that human development is now measured by the World Bank and others. Income, Sen argues, can be seen as a *means* to expand human freedoms, but income is not the *end* goal for freedom. One can have income but still not be free to lead the life one values. Similarly, income which is reflected at the household level does not mean that everyone in that house has access to, or will benefit from, that income. In other words, people's freedoms include their entitlements but also their sense of agency to make choices about how to use their entitlements. In this sense, from a social justice perspective, it is not sufficient to apply a principle of equal distribution of goods and services because people do not have equal experiences or assets from which to draw. So, for example, a person with disabilities may need more income and space than others in order to have the freedom to make decisions and participate in society in the way that their neighbour, without disabilities, has the freedom to do. Similarly, a person with disabilities may require more access to health facilities than someone who has no chronic ailments. Sen is concerned with how 'unfreedoms' (1999, xii) restrict or constrain one's ability to convert available resources into achievable functionings or outcomes. At the level of my aforementioned community project, the unemployed residents were capability-deprived while they did not have the freedom to use their assets for community benefit. Once those assets were converted into freedoms to build and sustain their community centre, they realised an increased sense of agency and were able to function in ways that realised these freedoms. Sources of unfreedom in Sen's development terms include tyranny, lack of economic opportunities, social deprivation, insufficient access to social facilities such as education and health provision and deprivation of civic and political liberties.

The five freedoms mentioned in the preceding paragraph are seen as complementing each other in advancing the general capability set of a person. Sen (1999) explains, for example, how political freedoms such as free speech and opportunity to vote in an election help to promote economic participation in trade and production, which in turn facilitates the provision of resources for social facilities. Freedoms are therefore understood

as ‘processes’ (p. 17) that enable actions and decisions to be taken, and also as ‘opportunities’ that people have, ‘given their personal and social circumstances’ (ibid). Thus the legislative and socially acceptable process of ensuring gender equality enhances a woman’s opportunity to exert individual agency and her ability to bring about further changes. But true freedom only comes about when her social environment allows her to take advantage of her entitlements. Capability deprivation therefore equates with poor development as a result of ‘unfreedoms’.

In terms of community engagement, one might argue therefore that university interactions with the community which do not facilitate collaborative processes of decision making are denying community members their opportunity for agency to influence how the university supports their social or other needs and desires to lead the lives they have reason to value. At a very basic level, a university, for instance, which fails to recognise cultural concerns to respect Islamic prayer times by organising a meeting date for Friday lunchtime is restricting the freedoms of Muslims to attend the meeting. The Muslim community therefore is unable to convert the availability of a meeting into the function of actually attending the meeting.

At a more macro level, Sen points out that poverty is an expression of the deprivation of many basic capabilities beyond the aspect of income. Unemployment, for instance, impacts the individual psyche at a level of confidence, self-esteem and agency. Poverty is often also connected to other capability deprivations in terms of access to nutrition, life expectancy, literacy levels and health services. At a community level, these capability ‘unfreedoms’ can be expressed through violence and anger which impact on the capability freedom of protective security and transparency guarantees. Such expressions are often evident in South African communities through protests at government failure to provide basic services such as electricity and water.

Development therefore is the ‘process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy’ (p. 36). Education is a basic capability freedom which impacts on all other capabilities and freedoms because education enables people to make informed choices about the lives they have reason to value. The university, as a public good, has a responsibility to contribute to that process (Boni and Walker 2013). Capability freedoms include having suitable levels of literacy and numeracy, being able to avoid starvation or escape premature mortality and being able to enjoy participation in democratic elections. Freedoms therefore are both instrumental – a *means* to development – and evaluative – an *end* goal of development.

A ‘capability set’ is the combined set of freedoms that enables people to convert their assets into ‘functionings’ (ibid, 75) or achievements according to what they want to achieve. In this respect, Sen argues that there is not one universal capability set which will suit everyone. People’s circumstances and life aspirations are different.

At the same time, he cautions (as does Nussbaum) that in contexts of extreme deprivation it may be that a person may choose to live a restricted life because their opportunity to envision an alternative life has been curtailed. Both Sen and Nussbaum therefore caution against situations of ‘adaptive preference’ (Nussbaum 2000, 139) where people may demonstrate a ‘quiet acceptance of deprivation’. It is important, therefore, to ensure that the capability of education is fully realised in order for people to make informed choices. The contribution of education to expanding choices and preferences was evident in my above-mentioned example of the community project in Birmingham. However, a fully educated individual who decides to reclude him or herself from society because they want to live a life of seclusion and celibacy even though they are in possession of a full capability set of political economic, social and protective and transparency opportunities, has the right to lead the life they have reason to value. But this choice is made as a result of reasoned reflection and without constraints on their freedom to choose.

Sen’s focus on capabilities and the idea of a ‘capability set’ of freedoms has revealed the interdependent complexity of deprivation which impacts health, civil liberties, social inequalities and income. A focus on human capabilities highlights issues of well-being and freedom, opportunities to influence social change as well as the more narrowly defined human capital perspective which focuses on economic production. Sen (2002) emphasises that this approach to development enables us to address deprivations even in so-called rich countries because its emphasis is on what entitlements people may have and what opportunities they have to achieve what they have reason to value.

From a justice perspective he argues that this also means we are able to assess the freedoms to choose, not just the utility that we have access to. In this respect, our freedom to choose means we have power to choose, but we also have the responsibility to be accountable for our choices. For this reason, Sen (2009) critiques the Rawlsian notion of justice because John Rawls focuses on justice in terms of what primary goods are available. Sen argues that Rawls relies too heavily on the idea that justice institutions will ensure just distribution of those primary goods. Sen argues that

people have differential needs and freedoms to access the same primary goods. Furthermore, just institutions alone do not guarantee that societies will act in a just way. The capability perspective focuses on context and whether people make choices as an option or because there simply is no choice. For instance, a woman or person with a disability who chooses to stay at home because he or she has no freedom to take up employment outside of the home is capability-deprived. But a woman or person with a disability who experiences no restrictions in terms of employment or education opportunities is free to choose to live at home if his or her capability set enables him or her to do so. The emphasis, therefore, is on a person's true freedom to choose.

Sen (2009) defends his position in the face of criticisms that the capability perspective is too individualistic and does not take account of communities as collectives. He argues that although individuals make choices about their lives, they always do so within a social context. People belong to many different groups and are always connected to their society. (Even if they choose to 'opt out' it is still in the context of a response to existing social arrangements.) This argument is important for this book's community engagement context since 'communities' are what universities engage with, rather than with isolated individuals, even though individuals may represent their social groups when interacting with university representatives.

The capability perspective has captured the imagination of many academics and there is now an extensive literature on this topic. A few relevant publications are mentioned in this chapter. Clark and Fennell (2014), for instance, discuss Sen's capabilities in relation to the practice of deliberative democracy and its relevance in the part that public reasoning plays in electoral democracies. Robeyns (2003, 2005) supports Sen's resistance to compiling a definitive list of capabilities, but proposes that if context-specific lists are formulated then they should meet certain criteria. The list should be 'explicit, discussed and defended' (2003, 70). Furthermore, the list should be addressed in two stages, moving from an 'ideal' list (p. 71) to one that is tested in the field. Although Robeyns does produce a 14-item list for gender equality, she claims to only present these items at an abstract level, so that they can be interpreted more specifically within particular social situations. She also suggests there are three types of capabilities. The first type relates to physical concerns in terms of health and security; the second relates to institutional aspects of education, religion and mobility; while the third addresses more abstract concerns with social relations, civil

liberties and employment. She (Robeyns 2005) also suggests there are three types of conversion factors that facilitate or influence the translation of freedom as a form of social good into functionings. These are identified as personal (such as intelligence, physical well-being), social (such as social norms, public policy) and environmental (such as climate, geography). To this, one might add that power relations are a cross-cutting conversion factor of these personal, social and environmental contexts. Robeyns highlights once more the contextual nature of capabilities: ‘therefore we need to know much more about the person and the circumstances in which he/she is living’ (ibid, 99) before we can be sure that the circumstances within which people make choices are truly enabling. These conversion factors are a useful evaluative tool to examine people’s capabilities and subsequent functionings in university-community relationships.

The part played by education as a capability is under-explored by Sen, who rarely talks about education beyond its basic form of literacy and numeracy. Saito (2003) addresses this gap by exploring the roles that education might play in enhancing freedoms. He highlights two contributions of education – first as a means to expand other capabilities and second as a values-based contribution to how capabilities should be used. This latter point relates specifically to the idea that one may well have freedoms to lead the life one has reason to value, but one may not necessarily choose to lead that life in an ethical or moral way. This was a concern that prompted Nussbaum to define a threshold level of capabilities within a social justice framework. Saito’s concern that education should have a social justice values base is something that is taken up by other educationists. Tao (2013) for instance draws on this perspective to show how teachers’ values in Tanzania are often constrained by their environments. In other words, often the teachers’ own personal, physical and environmental conversion factors impacted their abilities to nurture the capability sets of their learners. This point refers directly to the issue of educational quality, which Tikly and Barrett (2011) also address. They heavily critique the human capital approach to education which focuses on its instrumental rates of return, rather than its broader social justice potential to either reproduce existing inequalities or expand learners’ critical thinking capacity to consider power relations and other structures that help to perpetuate disadvantage. Increasingly, these issues are being taken up in other African countries. For example, Tumuheki et al. (2016) study the conversion factors that enable university students to overcome earlier disadvantages to enhance their capability set.

In the South African context Melanie Walker and her co-authors have dedicated considerable energy to exploring how universities themselves can contribute to developing social justice values in professional disciplines, such as health and education, through a capabilities perspective. In 2006 Walker began to publish what has become a substantive literature on the role of education and its contribution to expanding human freedoms. She discusses a number of capability lists and initiates an ideal-theoretical list of capabilities that should be nurtured in educational contexts. These include freedoms such as social relations, knowledge, autonomy and voice as well as bodily integrity, such as freedom from harassment (Walker 2006). From there she moves more explicitly to the role of South African universities as a public service towards disadvantaged communities (Walker et al. 2009). The focus of this and subsequent papers is on how professional education programmes might expand the capabilities and functionings of students who would in turn pay attention, through their professional work, to expanding the capabilities and functions of disadvantaged communities. This interest is based on the social justice argument that those who have the advantage of higher education have obligations to benefit those who do not have that advantage. This rationale is also embedded in South African higher education policy as a core concern for addressing the inequities and legacies of the country's former apartheid regime (DoE 1997; Ministry of Education 2001; DHET 2013).

A key feature of Walker's research mission has been the development of a professional capabilities index that is built on the principles of developing capability among students to be agents of change through applying 'pro-poor' professional values. This goal is embedded in the notion that universities are connected to society 'and society in turn is connected to the university' (Walker et al. 2009, 571). Walker and colleagues have expanded this concept of a professional capabilities index by firmly embedding it in the rationale that universities are a public good (Walker 2010, 2012; East et al. 2014). In Walker's argument, universities have a responsibility to educate their professionals with an ethical vision for public service. Her argument is that the 'public good', in contrast to the private good, is freely available as a public service. In this respect, services such as government-funded health care sectors are public goods. Professional skills learned in universities, therefore, are 'an essential contribution to the public good' (East et al. 2014, 1619). Through that public service professionals contribute to expanding the capabilities of individuals they serve as a contribution to their capability sets. Although Walker also resists

Nussbaum's universalist position, she nevertheless compiles a list of capabilities that would apply to the professional education of university students. She consistently argues that the neo-liberal focus of globalisation trends for universities fails to capture the essence of a human development approach to university education: 'human development can give us arguments to reinterpret the three core missions of university – teaching, research and social engagement' (Walker 2010, 492). She cites Alkire and Deneulin (2009) in defence of a concern for human flourishing for the purpose of economic growth.

The role that students play in university-community engagement is often reflected through a service learning curriculum, whereby they are required to reflect on their learning as a result of working within communities for a specified period of time. This aspect of community engagement is discussed more fully in Chap. 4. Service learning is an important contribution to expanding the capabilities of communities but it does not fully capture the essence of how the university as a public institution should be a capability resource in its entirety for community development. Its focus tends to be more on expanding the capability awareness and civic responsibilities of the students themselves. In essence, it often means that community members rarely, if at all, step inside the university premises, thus creating a symbolic power divide.

Amongst the items on Walker's proposed professional capabilities index is a particular focus on capability functionings as evidence of the ends of capability expansion. These include outcomes such as recognising the full dignity of individuals, a commitment to act against injustice, making sound professional judgements and working with others to expand the capabilities of disadvantaged individuals (McClean and Walker 2012). This index has been explored for its applicability outside of South Africa – for instance, as a framework for the training of Turkish female teachers (Cin and Walker 2013).

Vaughn and Walker (2012, 499) produce a diagram to articulate the complexity of how capability sets, as freedoms to achieve, are influenced by social contexts and environmental factors, people's personal histories and what resources they have to convert their assets and services and, ultimately, how individuals make choices to achieve certain functionings. In other words, the means to achieve (capability inputs) can be affected by context which influences opportunities and freedoms to make choices for particular functionings (the achievements or ends). A possible translation of this diagram into a community engagement context could thus be

described as follows (see Fig. 2.1). The university as a social institution in a working-class community has potential resources such as sports facilities, computer classrooms and individual staff and students with disciplinary expertise. If community members are given access to those resources, they may be able to convert these resources (new knowledge, additional skills and people, new understandings) into a set of freedoms or opportunities to impact on an identified need or problem such as insufficient electricity or limited childcare provision. The achieved functionings – perhaps solar powered lighting or a community crèche – will be the outcome of decisions and choices based on an expanded capability set (freedoms and opportunities). In this respect communities acquire increased agency and the university performs a public good function. Walker, however, does not take her diagram and approach into the community dimension. Her focus is on the development of university students rather than on a direct capabilities relationship between universities and communities.

Moreover, this model falls short of recognising that communities may already have resources that could be harnessed to solve their own problems. In addition, the power relationship between universities and communities is underdeveloped in the capabilities literature, even when the public good role of universities is well articulated, as it is by Walker (see also Walker and Loots 2016 in relation to the role of universities in developing citizenship responsibility). Boni and Walker (2013) argue vehemently, for instance, that ‘the university should not be distant from the tremendous problems the world faces nowadays ... it should have an active role, engaged in local and global spaces, to foster and support a just and sustainable society (ibid, 2) ... universities can have a role as a place of interconnectivity in society’ (ibid, 6).

An important consideration, therefore, is the sense that a capability set is also a power set, which in turn requires responsibility and obligation to use that capability responsibly. Sen does not elaborate too much on this latter concern. He merely states that ‘capability is ... only one aspect of freedom, related to substantive opportunities’ (2009, 295) and that ‘capabilities are the characteristics of individual advantages ... [which] fall short of telling us about the fairness or equity of the processes involved’ (ibid, 206). It is this ambiguity that Nussbaum and other feminists are concerned with and which prompted Nussbaum to define more specifically a universalist set of ten capabilities in the context of a concern for social justice. In relation to university-community engagement, it could be argued that there is an implicit assumption that the university as an

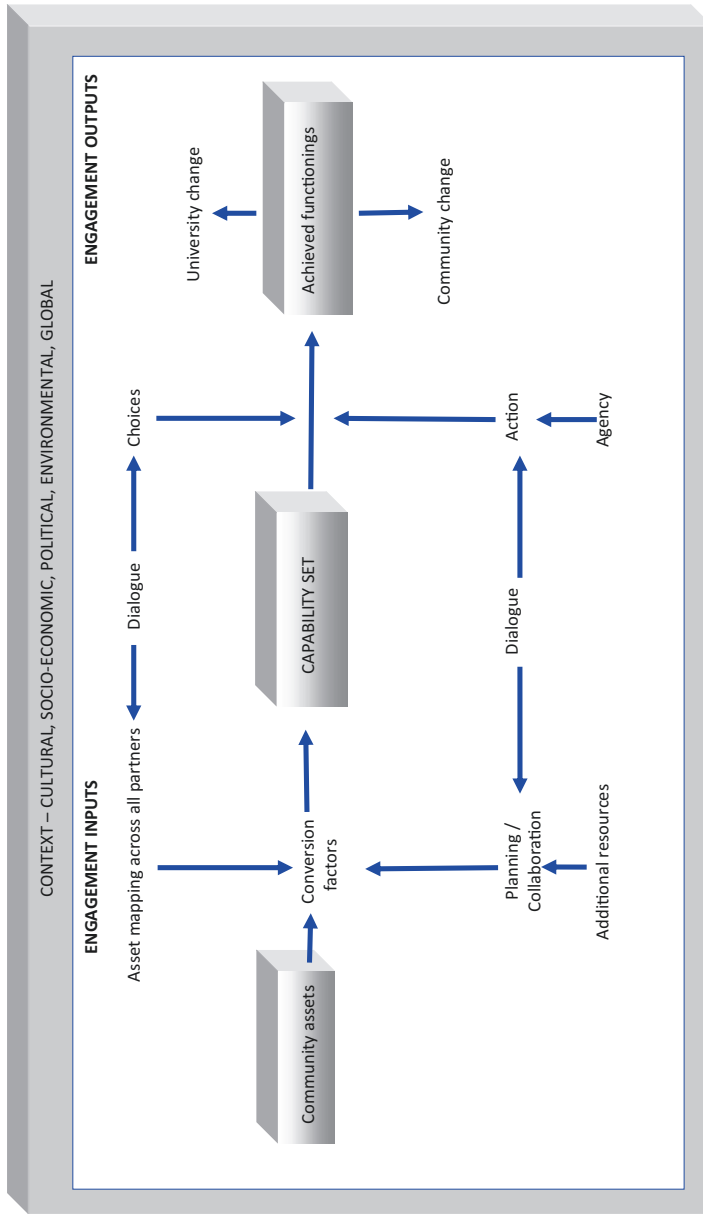


Fig. 2.1 Community engagement model drawing on the capability and asset-based community development literature (Source: Preece 2016, 227)

institution has a moral responsibility to engage with communities with a concern for social justice and fairness. University-community engagement might, therefore, encourage communities to make informed choices about how to claim their rights to service delivery deprivations, but at the same time that engagement relationship would also be concerned with the full capability set that includes transparency, and security and, therefore, respect for life.

As mentioned above, however, the capabilities literature in relation to addressing student civic responsibilities, does not discuss the extent to which communities may already have capability sets or how those capability sets can be developed as community assets. The engagement relationship, therefore, should also be concerned with encouraging communities to recognise and build on their own assets or capability sets in order to minimise their ‘adaptive preferences’ (Nussbaum 2000, 139) in the context of partial freedoms. These latter concerns mean that we need to look beyond the capabilities literature in order to complete our potential community engagement model. At this point it is useful to draw on community development literature, in particular that which focuses on ABCD and the role of dialogue.

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The literature on community development emphasises that this is a contested term. First the concept of community itself is fraught with definitional variations. The two most common distinctions are community as a place and community as a social construct which reflects shared interests or circumstances (Bhattacharyya 2004). Development also can be understood as a process or an outcome. For the purposes of this chapter, and book, development can be defined as an end goal of agency: ‘the capacity of people to order their world, the capacity to create, reproduce, change and live according to their own meaning systems’ (Bhattacharyya 2004, 12). Bhattacharyya makes the connection in this definition to Sen’s notion of freedom.

Community development is the process of enabling this to happen. In Vincent’s (2009, 63) terms it is a ‘process through which people learn how they can help themselves’. Bridger and Alter (2013, 73) provide a more nuanced definition. They refer to the ‘community field’ as a collective set of relationships which is constantly changing in any context. The role of community development is to ‘constantly find points of intersection that

enhance local capacity'. Community development can then be seen as a collective approach to enhancing human agency. Agency can be described as 'the capacity of people to manage, utilise and enhance those resources available to them' (Brennan and Israel 2013, 86). Nevertheless, community development is usually characterised by some form of professional involvement that serves to stimulate, organise or harness the community field.

ABCD is one approach among many. It was developed in the United States during the early 1990s as an alternative to deficit models of community development. The approach has gained momentum during the past 15 years because it challenges the needs-based philosophy that focuses on community problems whereby external agencies intervene with a view to 'fixing' community deficits.

The main proponents for ABCD were Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), through their book called *Building Communities from the Inside-Out: Asset-Based Community Development*. More recently, Cunningham and Mathie (2002) and Mathie and Cunningham (2003) have popularised it further. These above authors are widely cited when describing the approach as 'a set of strategies for identifying and mobilising community assets for change' (e.g. Boyd et al. 2008, 191). Assets can be at individual level (such as vocational or practical skills), at organisational level (such as social networks and financial or physical resources) or externally controlled institutional resources that are geographically located within the community field (such as schools or clinics) (Ennis and West 2010). Essentially, the argument is that all communities have assets and strengths which can be harnessed for change. If communities are not fully engaged in identifying and finding solutions to their own problems or motivating for change, then externally imposed interventions can only serve to undermine communities and their own capacities. If communities feel a sense of ownership over their own destiny by drawing on existing assets and strengths as a resource for change, then their members are more likely to accept external agencies as partners in the development process. In African contexts the spirit of collectivism which characterises the ABCD approach is an essential feature that acknowledges Africans' communitarian history (Chirisa 2009). Chirisa emphasises that the approach is more than a set of strategies. It also requires relationship building and engaging with the social and environmental nature of particular contexts.

Cunningham and Mathie (2002, 1–3) identify a set of six principles which underpin ABCD. The first is that any engagement should focus

on recognising what already exists in terms of social, human and practical resources in a community setting. Secondly, the development goals should be community-led. Thirdly, an appreciative enquiry approach is required; that is, to understand, from the community perspective, what previous success stories can be built on. The fourth principle is that the development process must be participatory to ensure community ownership over decision making. Closely connected to this is the principle that the development process must be collaborative. Finally, in order to enhance the collective process, civil society and other community-based organisations need to be involved in leveraging both their constituent members and external resources. There are examples of this approach in developing country contexts. For example, Hipwell (2009, 294) describes how the ABCD approach became part of a 'post development practice' for indigenous development in Taiwan which included attention to cultural assets such as language and spirituality as a means of community empowerment. Similarly, Yeneabat and Butterfield (2012) used the approach as an alternative strategy for development to the top-down initiatives in rural and urban Ethiopia. They highlight the successes (collective action by some core participants) and failures (lack of wider community involvement) of such participatory engagement with community members. A number of small-scale projects highlighted the value of connecting ideas and trust building between people which resulted in bottom-up development. Yeneabat and Butterfield also report on the mutual challenges of involving the university in this approach: 'In the eyes of communities, universities in Ethiopia are bastions of knowledge and power. During the initial stages of engagement, communicating the sincere interest of faculty members to work in partnership with was difficult' (ibid, 148). Since the ABCD approach is relatively under-used and under-researched in African contexts, particularly in relation to university engagement, the ensuing chapters of this book provide an analytical window to explore some of the potential tensions and opportunities for expanding these observations.

Mathie and Cunningham (2005) identify a range of methods for realising the ABCD principles. These include collecting stories of successful endeavours from individuals and groups in order to capture the depth of community wisdom in providing solutions to their own problems; applying asset-mapping strategies to capture an inventory of what exists in a given community; mobilising a core group of people with organising capacity; initiating an initial plan of action that can be achieved easily and without external assistance; building on the confidence of that success

story to mobilise internal and external links and networks for more ambitious activities and then identifying external resources as further investment in the community's self-driven initiatives. This process, it is argued, facilitates community empowerment and sustainability. It is a process that was largely utilised intuitively in the community project outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Mathie and Cunningham (2005) emphasise that a key feature of asset building is to identify the existence of the social capital, the name commonly given to the bonding relationships of trust and networking links among members of associations or communities who live or work together. Building a collective picture of such assets, thus, fosters confidence and motivation to take positive action for change. In terms of how the ABCD approach is a practical extension of the capabilities concept, ABCD could be construed as capabilities building – enabling people to identify their freedoms and articulate how those freedoms could be converted into functionings. Ssewamala et al. (2010) reflect on the potential effectiveness of this relatively under-studied approach in Sub-Saharan Africa. They specifically link ABCD to Sen's concept of capabilities as a contribution to enabling individuals and their communities to take more control over improving their lives within specific contexts. They stress that this approach needs further testing and revising in the field.

The use of dialogue and discussion is seen as central to enabling people to 'map, analyse and assess what assets they have or would like to have' (Westoby and Dowling 2013, 3). Fisher et al. (2009), among others, refer to the role of dialogue in the nurturing of social capital and Ennis and West also discuss how dialogue can be used by empowered communities to negotiate with government departments to share and participate in the community's vision for itself. Rule (2015) points out that dialogue, at its most basic, is a reciprocal exchange between two or more people. He describes it as a relationship framed by context and meaning making. As such it is a resource for teaching, learning and knowing. In community development contexts it is also a space for challenging power relations and building shared understanding (Westoby and Dowling 2013). Dialogue, therefore, is neither a safe space nor a space without power. But if the goal of community development or community engagement is collective action for change, dialogue is a positive tool for a 'committed relationship with the marginalized' (ibid, 12) in the spirit of solidarity and co-investigation. Dialogue is thus a 'sense-making' process (ibid, 17). From a pedagogical perspective it draws on Freirean notions of emancipation of the oppressed, whereby teachers and learners engage in mutual listening as co-learners.

Dialogue for Freire (1972) is a space for questioning the status quo and stimulating critical awareness which can lead to action for change. A key aspect of Freire's approach for educators (which we can interpret for the purpose of this book as university educators) is that they must first familiarise themselves with the learning context and act 'as sympathetic observers with an attitude of understanding what they see' (ibid, 82). From this position of observer, the educator can reflect back the community participants' perspectives with a view to encouraging them to revisit their context in order to help them 'perceive reality differently' (ibid, 86). This process becomes a process of meaning-making as a shared endeavour – one of 'cooperative and reciprocal inquiry' (Gravett 2001, 20). An essential feature of this relationship is the building of trust and credibility, and a non-judgemental attitude. It is an aspirational, ideological position which requires hard work from all participants. It also, for university-community engagement purposes, arguably entails a process of familiarisation by the community of the university environment. This is an observation that is rarely made in the literature (Bruning et al. 2006).

Critiques of the ABCD Approach

Ennis and West (2010) highlight some of the criticisms of ABCD. These include, as suggested in the preceding paragraphs, that there is a limited evidence base for this approach, it is poorly defined conceptually and by itself lacks theoretical depth. Further, it pays insufficient attention to the power relationship challenges of complex internal community structures or the wider 'non-local' origins of disadvantage that derive from globalisation and capitalism (ibid, 407). One of the major concerns about ABCD is that it focuses too closely on micro-level empowerment strategies with insufficient attention to the macro-level issues related to disempowerment which are much more difficult to address, particularly in community engagement initiatives. For instance, poor governance structures at policy level and inadequate external structures that facilitate development at an infrastructure level can hinder the sustainability of micro-level initiatives. So, for instance, if local communities manage to build community-led market garden projects which are not supported by Council or Municipality initiatives to build link roads between rural and urban communities, then the potential for income generation and poverty reduction is lost. Ennis and West, therefore, argue that in order to avoid reducing ABCD to a communitarian feel-good exercise it is essential for communities to enter

into dialogue with the macro-level political, economic and other institutional structures. This latter aspect will be discussed in relation to the learning-city movement which is the subject of Chap. 5 and which endeavours to promote a top-down/bottom-up synergy of relations.

Additionally, Peters et al. (2011) discuss some of the methodological challenges of measuring an ABCD approach to development which relies on purely qualitative, insider perspectives for asset mapping. They highlight that community changes are often unpredictable and intangible. They suggest that one way of validating the benefits of ABCD processes might be to involve an external evaluator and compare findings with ‘non-ABCD groups to determine if they are perceived to be different from the viewpoint of a “knowledgeable outsider” (ibid, 19).

In spite of these caveats to the ABCD approach, it reflects a practical, community-led notion of development that supports the capabilities perspective for mobilising people at grass-roots level to envision and realise their freedoms to lead the lives they have reason to value. I suggest a model of university-community engagement (Fig. 2.1), whereby the university becomes a participatory listening agent, as opposed to an interventionist. In this model, it is argued that a combination of asset mapping through dialogue and collaborative planning can facilitate the conversion of community assets, as combined capability sets (freedoms and opportunities), into community-led choices for action. The process of identifying and validating those assets through action planning within specific cultural and social contexts can build agency (self-determination) which can result in enhanced development outcomes (achieved functionings). The dialogic process within this model is essential to address underlying power relations at macro and micro levels. The following model is suggested as a potential guideline for drawing on ABCD as a means of realising the capabilities perspective through university-community engagement. But the additional factor, for the porous university, is for the dialogic process of familiarisation of each other’s environment to be taken literally.

In this conceptual model the community assets may be human skills, cultural knowledge, economic resources, social capital or physical resources such as buildings. The university’s participation will be to engage in dialogue with the community (of place, interest groups and other institutions) and facilitate mutual asset mapping, including discussions on how those assets can be converted into freedoms and opportunities to lead the lives they have reason to value. This will entail action planning and possible inclusion of additional resources or institutional assets. The dialogue

will explore the potential conversion factors within the community and university, in terms of their personal (such as health and well-being), social (such as cultural norms and policies that might affect what men, women and marginalised groups can do) and environmental (such as the geographical terrain and weather conditions which might affect what can be grown or planted) contexts. The cumulative assets and their conversion potential will provide the capability set of freedoms and opportunities (political, economic, social, transparency guarantees and protective strategies). This capability set will then determine the choice that individuals and groups feel they can make in order to take action. The achieved functionings will be the outcomes of those actions. Such community outcomes may, for example, be enhanced qualifications, increased income generation activities or a new school or safe play space for children. University outcomes may be a revised curriculum or timetable or use of university facilities.

The literature has emphasised that the community field is a constantly changing set of relationships. This model illustrates an iterative process which also has to negotiate power relations within communities, universities and across all interactions between the two, along with the tensions and struggles that that entails. Dialogue is therefore a cross-cutting feature of all stages of the engagement relationship. The engagement process may be initiated by a community interest group or any individual and may not necessarily be initiated by the university, depending on the nature of the asset-mapping process. Nevertheless the ensuing chapters explore the extent to which the different forms of university engagement (including community outreach models, service learning and learning cities initiatives) are able to capture the concept of asset mapping and facilitating capability enhancement. The ultimate aim is for boundaries between university and community to become porous, whereby both university and community gain new understanding for change and interact fluidly as neighbours.

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Community Engagement and Its Evolving Terminology

INTRODUCTION

During 2009 I was working at the National University of Lesotho. The PASCAL International Observatory invited this university and the University of Botswana to participate, as the only African university partners, in a new project that would explore how universities could contribute to regional engagement. In one of those serendipitous moments of synergy, I had just completed a research partnership with Botswana, Malawi and the University of Calabar in Nigeria. At the same time the Association of African Universities sent out a call for African partnership proposals. We utilised our existing network to obtain funding for a community engagement action research project that would feed into the PASCAL initiative, thus indirectly extending PASCAL's own agenda. Although the focus was slightly different, community rather than regional engagement, a PASCAL conference in Botswana in 2010 provided a platform to explore and present some of the challenges and possibilities of initiating a community-led approach to university engagement. The universities were at very different stages and experience with this kind of work. Malawi, Lesotho and Nigeria all ranked in the bottom 20% of the United Nations development indicators while Botswana was classified as a middle-income country.

Eight, small-scale projects were initiated, involving a number of external agencies and university disciplines. The projects themselves were context specific and typical of many initiatives around the continent. They ranged

from a ‘market stall’ of health, crime prevention, gardening and savings activities in the grounds of a rural post office for a monthly group of pensioners waiting for their pension money to arrive from town, to an alternative income generation and HIV awareness training programme for urban sex workers. While the projects remained stand-alone activities in the context of their universities, and in two institutions were the first of their kind, the outcomes generated a change of mind-set amongst staff, students and grass-roots community members who took part. They also revealed that significant outcomes could be achieved with good will and few resources, highlighting how universities tend to operate in parallel with, rather than in tandem with their surroundings. These projects did not feed into the university curriculum, though students identified that they were able to put into practice what they had learned from their studies. However, because the range of mediating non-governmental organisations is smaller in low income countries, the nature of these projects meant that university staff were in direct contact with grass-roots community members and the community voices directly influenced the university activities. It is evident that South Africa in particular has moved beyond such isolated initiatives, and universities across the continent can cite whole institutional approaches. Yet there are often tensions of ownership over knowledge and decision making, especially when communication has to navigate several layers of community agents. This chapter discusses some of these tensions. It is perhaps important to mention that even if a project or activity can be critiqued in terms of this book’s theoretical framework this does not mean the activity is unworthy. There are many, many examples of short- and long-term initiatives that can illustrate beneficial outcomes and which are of intrinsic worth to the participants involved.

ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS OVER TIME

There is no shortage of literature on community engagement. With the exception of South Africa’s burgeoning literature on service learning, which is the topic of Chap. 4, the vast majority emanates from the global north (Australia, Canada and the United States, the United Kingdom and, more recently, wider Europe). There is also increasing literature from Latin America, as cited by Hall et al. (2015). The term itself has a wider currency than the application of university-community relationships. The health sector, for instance, frequently uses the concept in relation to raising awareness about health concerns and with the aim of involving communities in disease prevention mechanisms. Indeed there is

a publication by the National Institute of Health (2011) in Washington, titled *Principles of Community Engagement*, which addresses collaborative efforts between communities, non-profit organisations and public health providers in relation to contemporary health challenges. Whilst acknowledging this additional literature, the focus in this chapter will be on connections between university and community.

Watson (2007, 12) argues that historically universities have ‘progressively re-invented themselves’ and what they stand for. These perspectives have included, at different times, a liberalist emphasis on self-actualisation, a more vocational focus on development of the professions, and a Humboldtian knowledge focus on research. He emphasises (ibid., 85), however, that an enduring feature of university work is its commitment to ethical values, ‘scientific honesty’ and openness to new ideas. In other words, universities have always aimed to ‘do good’ and exhibit a certain moral compass. The nature of such values, of course, changes over time and is often affected by funding and relationships with the nation state. The current, competing, contexts of managerialism, the market and public service are the most recent, adaptive phase for universities.

Nevertheless, although the academic literature on community engagement barely stretches back further than 20 years, proponents of community engagement across different continents are able to give it a much longer pedigree, as Chap. 1 indicated. In the United States, for instance, the Morrill Act of 1862 paved the way for the Land Grant universities with a mandate to serve their communities. In 1910 community service became a mandate of all universities in Mexico. In 1913 the Association of Commonwealth Universities launched its University Extension and Community Engagement Network (Puig 2014). In the United Kingdom, Watson (2007) highlights how large civic universities were established during the nineteenth century, often with a specific, ordained intent to ‘service’ the development or industrial needs of the district. In African countries, aside from their oral traditions of holistic community education, post-independence agendas firmly positioned their universities throughout the 1960s and 1970s for social and economic reconstruction, as evidenced by UNESCO (1963) and Ajayi et al. (1996). These early beginnings have been slowly reinforced through the establishment of networks, agreements and statements such as the Campus Compact in 1985 in the United States (resulting in a network of over 1000 higher education institutions) and an international conference of University Leaders in Talloires in 1990. The latter resulted in the *Talloires Declaration on the Civic Roles and Responsibilities of Higher Education* (Talloires Network 2005). UNESCO

has played a large part in supporting this agenda through such events as the *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century* in 1998. Other national and international networks have emerged since the new millennium, amongst which are Engagement Australia, established in 2004, and the PASCAL International Observatory, founded in 2002. In 2009 the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum was launched.

The terminology, and therefore focus, of community engagement has followed an interesting trajectory during the last two decades. The rationale for its apparent revival, as suggested in Chap. 1, is premised on the following argument. In the context of an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, universities are no longer seen as the primary knowledge producers. As such they must connect more collaboratively with other knowledge producers and other sources of knowledge. Hazelkorn (2009) argues, for instance, that there is a growing understanding that the world's challenges require collaborative solutions. As such, universities must partner with other knowledge providers. Similarly, the trend towards massification of higher education means that universities cannot distance themselves from society. In the drive for lifelong learning and widening participation universities can no longer embrace their stereotypical 'ivory tower' image. In addition, on a more economic note, universities need to diversify their funding base. This may mean partnering with the business world. The OECD agenda for advanced industrialised countries has emphasised engagement in terms of human capital and entrepreneurship (OECD 2007). The engagement imperative, in emerging economies, is often linked more closely to the need to advance democracy, address inequalities and social justice. As a reflection of this argument, the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education emphasised that universities have a role to play in the development of responsible citizens.

This vision for higher education as a development agent is also reinforced through the new Sustainable Development Goal 4 for lifelong learning. Goal 4.7 is stated thus:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (United Nations 2015)

In the broader African context, Uganda's Makerere University (2007) highlights that the African Union, through its New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), calls for African universities to strengthen their contribution to African Development. In South Africa the impetus for a social purpose role of higher education was clearly stimulated by the post-apartheid transformation agenda since 1994. It also played a strong role during the years leading up to this date in the struggle against apartheid. This, in turn, contributed to a nuanced, if grudging, recognition by influential global funding agencies such as the World Bank, of the public good, or civic responsibility, role of higher education and the need to position universities in emerging economies with a social as well as economic development agenda (Preece et al. 2012a).

These arguments, in brief, have contributed to widening the discursive space for engaged universities. The changing scenarios in which universities find themselves have also contributed to a recognition of the need to reposition the way in which their traditional third mission is understood. The conceptual movement is from one of 'service' to the community to one of 'engaged scholarship' as an integral element of teaching, research and knowledge production, embracing the interdisciplinary, problem-based and experiential concept of mode 2 knowledge which is embedded in the external community environment.

Terminology Changes

There has been a remarkable paradigm shift in terminology in a relatively short space of time. Although Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation, introduced the term 'engagement' as a substitute for 'service' as early as 1990, it did not gain common currency for almost two decades. The titles of books during this period, for instance, are significant indicators of a changing perception of how the university's third mission should be interpreted and enacted. In 1998, Perold (1998, 31) was still describing the notion of community service in South African higher education as essentially a volunteering activity: 'Participation in community service usually involves a degree of personal sacrifice in terms of time, remuneration and convenience.' Similarly, although Lulat (2005, 262) endeavoured to embed this third mission as a more institutionalised activity: 'improving the quality of life of the community and which is effected through a university model in which community service is integral to all aspects of the university', both definitions reflected community

service as a largely philanthropic endeavour. Another common term during this era was the notion of ‘outreach’ (Openjuru and Ikoja-Odongo 2012) which denoted the extra-mural tradition of reaching out to the populace beyond the university walls to provide short courses and programmes.

Within the next five years, however, a substantial shift in commitment and approach, signified a notable drive to professionalise this mission and recognise it as a distinctive contribution to university, as well as community, purpose. Schuetze’s definition (2010, 25), for instance, stated that:

Community engagement is defined broadly, namely as the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

Variations of ‘engagement’, as opposed to the ‘third mission’ and ‘service’, have materialised into an academic methodology with its own research approaches and pedagogical contributions to new knowledge domains. The word ‘service’ is no longer included in the titles of more recent publications. Even the idea of a separate mission is discouraged as engagement is increasingly promoted as an integral aspect of teaching and research (e.g. DHET 2013).

The fact that so many variations of community engagement are in circulation is an indication of the shifting sands upon which proponents are endeavouring to justify its function and purpose. Each concept offers a slightly different meaning as the discourse struggles to gain credence and authenticity in the higher education world. Nevertheless, there is now a consistency of effort to envision the university-community relationship as a two-way process for mutual benefit, rather than a philanthropic exercise on the part of the university. Some of the current terms in use are ‘community engagement’, ‘social responsiveness’, ‘community interaction’, ‘academic engagement’, ‘civic engagement’, ‘university-society engagement’, ‘social responsibility’ and ‘scholarship of engagement’ (Kruss et al. 2012, 9). Others include ‘research based community engagement’ (Bednarz et al. 2008, 92), ‘community based research’ (Hall 2009, 11) and ‘community-based participatory research’ (Puma et al. 2009, 34). Engagement is also linked with other institutional agendas such as volunteering, widening participation or citizenship (Hart and Northmore 2010). As mentioned earlier, the associated activities of service learning and learning cities will be discussed in subsequent chapters but both these latter terms have

generated a substantive literature of their own under the broader umbrella of community engagement.

Two definitions stand out as having gained currency in the current discourse. The first stems from Boyer's (1990, 1996) efforts to intellectualise engagement in the academy. Lazarus et al. (2008, 60–61) interpret Boyer's now well publicised 'scholarship of engagement' and his four constitutive elements:

The first and most familiar element in Boyer's model is termed 'scholarship of discovery'. It closely resembles the notion of research and contributes to the total stock of human knowledge. The second element is referred to as 'scholarship of integration' and underscores the need for scholars to give meaning to their discovery by putting it in perspective and interpreting it in relation to other discoveries and forms of knowledge. This means making connections across disciplines and interpreting data in a larger intellectual and social context. The third element is labelled 'scholarship of application'. It makes us aware of the fact that knowledge is not produced in a linear fashion ... The final element in Boyer's model is referred to as 'scholarship of teaching'. Within the framework of a scholarship of engagement, the traditional roles of teacher and learner become somewhat blurred. What emerges is a learning community.

In other words Boyer is arguing that the scholarship of engagement encompasses a unique set of interrelated activities which equate with the core principles of university purpose—community-based discovery as 'research', integration as the process of meaning making or 'critical analysis', while application and teaching reflect both the testing and dissemination of new forms of 'knowledge' discovery as a collective endeavour. Hall et al. (2015, 2) refer, for instance, to 'knowledge democracy' as an extension of the notion of a 'knowledge society' (which refers to the strengthening of participatory decision making) or the 'knowledge economy' (which emphasises competitive skills development), thus emphasising the multiplicity of knowledge and its sources, including from indigenous peoples. An expansion of this knowledge agenda is articulated in the context of knowledge democracy and cognitive justice (Gaventa and Bivens 2014; Hall 2015). Here it is argued that knowledge is embedded in power relationships and defined by who has authority to know. The struggle to overcome dominant forms of knowledge has come to be articulated 'as the struggle for cognitive justice' (Gaventa and Bivens 2014, 70). These concerns are particularly relevant for community-based knowledge.

As a reflection of the influence of Boyer's term, the 'scholarship of engagement' is formally recognised in South Africa as a fundable and distinctive field of study by the National Research Foundation (NRF 2016).

The second definition which is widely used stems from the Carnegie Foundation itself (carnegiefoundation.org) which introduced the term engagement as a substitute for the now less popular notions of service and outreach and defined it as:

The collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. (undated, 1)

A third definition—in relation to community-based research—endeavours to position the community-university relationship as a direct and ethical contribution to knowledge creation within a social justice framework. Hall (2009, 17) cites Strand's (2003) definition, whereby:

Community based research (CBR) involves research done by community groups with or without the involvement of a university. In relation with the university, CBR is a collaborative enterprise between academics and community members. CBR seeks to democratise knowledge creation by validating multiple sources of knowledge and promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination. The goal of CBR is social action (broadly defined) for the purpose of achieving (directly or indirectly) social change and social justice.

Wade and Demb (2009) explain that the distinctive nature of community-based research is the fact that it is an applied, action form of research which directly aims to contribute to the welfare of community members. Community members may become co-researchers but at the very least are involved in the design and planning of the research process. The academic in this case may be a facilitator of the research process and the data collection methods employed will be interactive, rather than survey focused (Puma et al. 2009).

A multitude of elaborations on these definitions have followed, some of which are documented by McIlrath (2014). But they commonly highlight notions of collaboration, reciprocity, partnership and exchange or co-creation of knowledge. Of particular interest to this book is the commentary by Escrigas et al. (2014) in their editorial introduction to the Global

Universities for Innovation (GUNi), whereby they collate international perspectives on community-university engagement. Here they say:

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 other forms of knowledge in the world need to be broken down ... It means taking the notion of de-colonising knowledge within the university seriously. (Escrigas et al. 2014, xxxvii)

This is a challenging rhetoric for the community-university-community relationship, but is one of the few instances whereby the idea of breaking down boundaries emerges as an aspirational goal. Interestingly, Bruning et al. (2006) provided an evidence-based argument that community members who had taken part in activities on university premises were more likely to have a favourable impression of university institutions than those who had only engaged from outside the campus. The emphasis on deconstructing the physical barriers between ‘town’ and ‘gown’ has become a feature of some of the more recent literature which envisions new common spaces of interaction. Van Deventer Iverson and Hauver James (2014, 99), for instance, refer to a ‘university without walls’ as part of their feminist contribution to the debate.

The extent to which community engagement in practice generates co-creation of knowledge, and is collaborative or reciprocal has fuelled much debate. The literature is frequently criticised for being under-theorised (Kruss et al. 2012). Others argue that the practice of community engagement has inadequate assessment tools (Hart and Northmore 2010). Since the literature is so extensive it will be necessary to ‘cherry-pick’ some of the key dimensions that reflect theoretical ideas and concerns as well as examples of good practice.

MODELS AND TYPES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In general, two kinds of texts on community engagement have emerged—reflexive or descriptive, and theoretical or conceptual. Some describe institutional approaches to community engagement, often as edited books providing examples of good practice or reflexive critiques of the challenges and achievements of community-university engagement. Fewer texts concentrate on devising models of community engagement or analyse a

particular practice through a theoretical lens. Many conclude with a set of principles that are required for embedding such work into the university infrastructure. These recommended principles are remarkably consistent across the literature and, as stated, will be discussed in the final chapter. Almost all the literature emanates from academia, although Erasmus and Albertyn (2014) in their book on engaging with the ‘third’ NGO sector do include authorship from outside the academy and a number of health-related texts are written in collaboration with health providers (e.g. Lavery et al. 2010).

Kruss et al. (2012) sought to conceptualise and distinguish at a macro level the range of engagement relationships that universities are likely to adopt for different purposes. The authors present a quadrant diagram to show different forms of university interaction. On the one dimension partnerships have primarily financial motives and range from entrepreneurial relationships with industry to traditional forms of sponsorships or consultancies; on the other dimension partnerships have primarily intellectual motives, ranging from knowledge flows to businesses to networked forms of collaboration with social partners. Business models, through consultancies or research, clearly generate opportunities for co-creation of knowledge. Such relationships are premised on a basis which is likely to recognise a relatively equal power relationship. Each side is ‘purchasing’ something of contractual interest. Examples of university business partnerships are documented in a recent book edited by Field et al. (2016) whereby, in European contexts, partners are co-producers of knowledge and innovation.

There is a tendency in most of the academic literature, however, to equate engagement with addressing issues of disadvantage (Boyer 1996) and the related need to develop students into responsible citizens (Millican and Bournier 2011). In these scenarios communities are neighbourhoods or non-profit organisations requiring action to address a community need. In other words, there is an implicit understanding that when universities ‘engage’ with their communities they are doing so within an already unequal power relationship. This is the challenge which the literature struggles to accommodate in an effort to maintain trust between all actors, sustainability of relations and outcomes and to facilitate co-ownership of knowledge creation.

There has also been much debate around the extent to which the higher education institution embeds community engagement within its core business. The resultant analysis is that there is potentially a continuum of

involvement. The South African Higher Education Quality Committee (2007) (also referred to by Bender 2008, 81), offers three models to articulate the different points along this continuum. They start with the ‘silo’ approach whereby community engagement is essentially a stand-alone activity which is disconnected from teaching and research. This reflects the traditional philanthropic, or volunteer, status of community service. A more common approach is the ‘intersecting’ one where certain departments or individuals incorporate their engagement activities into either their teaching or research programmes or both. In these scenarios there may be a specific course or research project which engages independently of institutional policy or strategy.

Finally, the ‘infusion’ approach reflects a whole institution strategy of embedding community engagement as a cross-cutting issue with teaching and research. Such initiatives cut across many disciplines. Two case examples in the latter part of this chapter show how this can manifest itself. Bernardo et al. (2012) identify nine dimensions of engagement that may occur in these approaches. These are teaching and learning, curriculum design, policies, research, external relations, social and cultural engagement, partnerships with school and educational providers, economic engagement and organisation and participation of students.

Bruning et al. (2006, 126) offer two strategies which reflect a form of student teaching. These strategies may materialise as internships or volunteer opportunities to learn ‘valuable “real world” lessons’. They may aim to provide expertise to the community through technical assistance, economic development and training or enhancing public life through education or recreation programmes.

In most cases engagement entails the university reaching out to the community. If there is no established relationship this is an inevitable starting point and it is incumbent upon the university body to do so sensitively. Sometimes this may be through an initial process of action research, as described by Scull and Cuthill (2010) in their efforts to widen participation in higher education with a view to listening to and learning from the community about issues affecting their educational ambitions. It may include a desire to raise awareness about climate change by using imaginative and participatory methods to help the general public make sense of technical jargon and take action that contributes to decision making (Sheppard et al. 2011).

The goal for many protagonists, however, is to create a ‘two way street’ (Weerts and Sandmann 2008, 73) whereby ‘community partners play a

significant role in creating and sharing knowledge to the mutual benefit of institutions and society'. Weerts and Sandmann draw on boundary spanning theory to explain how to build bridges 'from campus to community' (2010, 706). The primary strategy is to embed an experienced, community sensitive individual from within academia into the community environment in order to mediate communications between the various layers of power across the partnership relationship: 'community based problem solvers broker relationships between the community and university' (ibid., 713). Weerts and Sandmann offer a somewhat different quadrant model of community engagement and boundary spanning (ibid., 721) from that identified above by Kruss et al. (2012). In this case the vertical axes are community and institution and the horizontal axes cover technical, practical tasks at one end and socio-emotional leadership tasks at the other end of the continuum. The model therefore places a strong emphasis on relationships as central to the engagement activity. In one quadrant the focus may be on site-based partnership development through resources of problem identification. The key individuals are community-based problem solvers from the academy. Another quadrant focuses on networking links with 'champions' such as directors or deans. The third quadrant focuses on the activity itself, drawing on technical academic experts, while the fourth quadrant focuses on the appropriate facilitative institutional infrastructure within the university for building campus capacity for engagement. The weighting of any quadrant may shift, depending on the task orientation of an engagement initiative. The authors stress that the model reveals the complexity of community-university relationships and the challenging need for all sectors of the quadrant to be working in harmony. This is a useful model for highlighting the interconnected nature of community engagement work, and the need for a wide range of key players across the university. It perhaps is less clear on who the community partners may be within the community itself and to what extent communities may span boundaries (Fig. 3.1).

The role of civil society as a knowledge enabler is also a common theme across the literature. Civil society organisations themselves are often boundary spanners, acting as mediators between their community constituents and university contacts. Onyx (2008) describes how civil society organisations often stimulate the impetus for community engagement with universities. The nature of their stakeholder position as agents for change means they are better placed to approach the university for assistance or involvement in a particular project. Cloete (2014) uses social

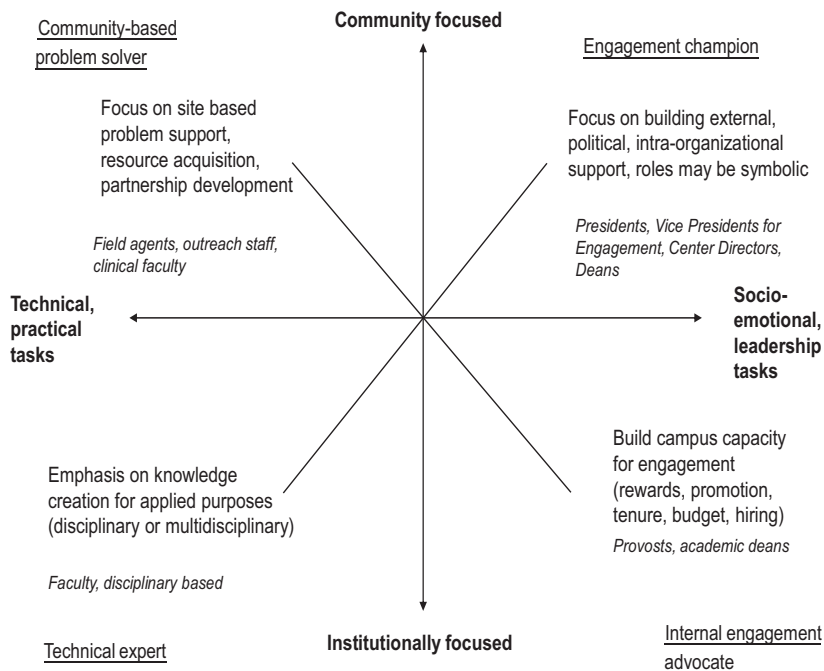


Fig. 3.1 University community engagement boundary spanning roles at public research universities (*Source: Weerts and Sandmann 2010, 721*)

network theory to analyse how universities and ‘third sector’ organisations can contribute to the co-creation of knowledge. She uses the example of the School of Nursing in the University of the Free State working with three community partners to develop a nursing postgraduate module. Social network analysis enabled her to examine the extent to which all participants were engaged in the curriculum development process.

These selected references are just a snapshot of how community engagement can be modelled or theorised. It would be illusionary, however, to believe that university-community engagement, or community-university engagement as it is sometimes called, is a popular notion in higher education, in spite of its increasing credibility. Aside from the political challenges of recognising engagement work alongside managerialist agendas for productivity and the market, even its strongest advocates highlight that community engagement is a messy business. Imbalances of power across and

between the multiple layers of actors are difficult to manage. Community partners frequently are marginalised by university agendas for students. Community rhythms and university rhythms rarely coincide so that when students have to meet exam or other assessment or learning targets this can interfere with their commitment to their community role. The academic language of scientific knowledge sits uneasily with local, experiential knowledge and universities are often accused of extracting community-based knowledge for the benefit of researchers, without bringing it back to the community. Community perspectives on the engagement relationship are often not heeded by universities, and the university's enthusiasm to utilise already acquired money often means that decisions have already been made before community members are consulted. Furthermore, in African contexts, it can be difficult to integrate the diversity of indigenous cultural heritage into a curriculum that still carries the legacy of its colonisers (Bruning et al. 2006; Dempsey 2009; Bernardo et al. 2012; Walters and Openjuru 2014).

There are, nevertheless, some extraordinary examples of boundary breaking and ground breaking initiatives, some of which will briefly be discussed here, with a view to exploring to what extent there is recognition of community assets as a contribution to knowledge, evidence of sustainability in the engagement relationship and to what extent the university has managed to erode its borders. Two emanate from the global North, others come from within Africa. Other examples will be discussed in future chapters particularly in relation to community engagement's service learning and learning cities agendas.

CASE EXAMPLES

One of the most remarkable whole institution approaches was documented in the United States some ten years ago at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Here the Vice Chancellor Nancy Zimpher envisioned 'a truly engaged, truly democratic kind of university' (Harkavy 2006, viii) which involved several years of working within the university and within the university's surrounding communities to develop a partnership approach to learning and living collaboratively together. The Vice Chancellor herself became a recognisable and visible personality within those communities. Several years of dialogue resulted in a menu of activities, formal agreements and curriculum partnerships across a number of university disciplines. Successful outcomes included the establishment of community schools,

a community health promotion and disease prevention centre, a graduate certificate in non-profit management offered in partnership with other agencies and other non-credit programmes according to community identified need. The community partners consisted of other education providers, non-profit organisations, consultants and a central steering committee of community and university representatives. The publication of this story (Percy et al. 2006) highlighted that the project was ‘work in progress’ and that issues of accountability, trust and ownership over decision making continued to plague the vision. Ongoing areas for improvement included the need for ‘a clear process that ensures the community access the university and brings members of both groups together as equals. ... getting rid of the silos within the university and actually transforming it into a multidisciplinary, engaged university – we are not there yet’ (Fagan 2006, 50–51). Nevertheless the initiative, actioned at vice chancellor level, pre-empted many subsequent learning city approaches around the globe (the subject of Chap. 5).

The publication is an analytical critique of practice. Almost no mention is made of community assets or what they may bring to the university table. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the university resources (human and social) have enhanced the capability set of distinctive groups and institutions, resulting in new community functionings and institutional change. Perhaps less evident is the way in which the university is seen as a community neighbour, rather than the more conventional vision of the university as a resource for community development.

An example of an institution-wide approach within Africa has been documented by Openjuru and Ikoja-Odongo (2012). Makerere University in Uganda adopted the ‘knowledge-transfer paradigm’ as a rationale for developing institution-wide structures to facilitate collaboration between different parts of the university and the wider community. Again, the authors do not pretend that they have achieved full integration of community engagement activities and some are still identified as ‘outreach’, or the ‘deployment of scholarly resources for the benefit of communities outside the university’ (2012, 162). Core activities are research, continuing education or community intervention schemes. A lead department in this respect is the traditional Extra Mural Department which has now transposed into a Department of Community Education with a network of nine regional learning centres where workshops and short courses are run, following the long-standing tradition of, literally, extra-mural work. Its distance education degree programmes are also a feature of many

universities which provide opportunities for higher level learning amongst people who would not normally be able to adopt more conventional modes of study.

The university adopts an entrepreneurial approach to enabling knowledge transfer. This includes engaging with the private sector which has resulted in business incubation centres and model villages. External partners collaborate in developing the university agenda, including curricula, organising and supervising student internships, while the university in turn commits itself to be responsive to community requests for technical expertise. Short courses are run for out of school youth, the police, the military and local schools. Some activities are funded by international donor agencies, particularly in relation to research for regional, socio-economic development. Social Sciences, Medicine, Agriculture, Technology and Health Sciences are lead departments in this respect, exploring community friendly ways of building on indigenous practices with a view to reducing poverty in urban and rural areas. One example of such work is described as:

the collaboration between the faculty and Kakira Sugar Works, Dairy Development Authority and Kakira Outgrowers Rural Development Fund. This has focused on development of molasses urea blocks with local feed-stuff for improved cattle productivity in the dairy farming communities in Busoga Region and Mukono District. Through this project, the dairy farmers have been linked to the agroprocessing industries to improve the nutrition of their dairy livestock. (ibid., 168)

Even the Makerere University library staff are involved in working with local schools and other institutions to develop their databases and libraries. The Faculty of Law operates a community-based clinic for refugees to facilitate access to legal advice and settlement options. A more unusual project is a multidisciplinary ‘model village’ idea which works with local government and different departments to mobilise groups of community members, train extension officers and ‘peer’ farmers to develop model agricultural sites and technologies, from which the wider community can learn, emulate and develop.

Many such activities can be identified in other institutions across Africa. Examples of initiatives at the University of Botswana, Malawi and Calabar in Nigeria are documented in Preece et al. (2012b). Departments and Schools in the University of KwaZulu-Natal and other universities in

South Africa can also document similar initiatives across the Humanities, Agriculture and Sciences. But perhaps the distinction for Makerere is the high number of projects and the fact that these activities are supported by a number of structures within the university itself which have been coordinated under the nomenclature of ‘Innovation at Makerere (code-named I@mak)’ (Openjuru and Ikoja-Odongo 2012, 170). A comparison of this description with that of the US example provides good evidence of the context specific nature of community-university engagement endeavours. In many respects both the Ugandan and US-based universities have reached out far into different community locations. The nature of international funding influences the sustainability of Makerere’s projects but the picture generated is one of lively interventions which contribute to new, context relevant, co-production of knowledge between university participants and external agencies. The development focus of the engagement partnership is generally outwards, though there are implicit indications of curriculum change as a result of various community interactions.

It is difficult to gauge, from these largely descriptive publications, to what extent an institutional approach, which is primarily determined by the university reaching out to its communities, has managed to break down the concerns identified by Fagan (2006) that the community members themselves may still feel excluded from entering the university premises. In other words, how far do these examples create opportunities for reciprocal knowledge creation or a sense of equal partnerships? How much have the university walls become porous? Who is holding the balance of power? How far has the engagement enabled the participants to enhance their capability set to lead the lives they have reason to value?

It is sometimes easier to obtain insights into the relationship nuances of community engagement by examining the experiences of a specific department or project in detail. One UK-based project stands out in this respect. Mark et al. (2016) discuss a project with older adult learners in the University of Strathclyde in Scotland. The University’s Centre for Lifelong Learning, a former Continuing Education department, launched a new Learning in Later Life programme ‘through a simple newspaper advert’ (2016, 193) which invited adults aged 50 or over to a public meeting in the university to discuss their interest in a range of open access classes. There is no information about the cost of these classes, but adults attended in large numbers and subscribed to a range of practice-oriented programmes that covered modern languages, information technology, health-related courses and video making. Initially these classes followed

the extra-mural tradition of weekly meetings during the academic year. But the participants began to make their own demands on the programme, gradually transforming its curriculum to include workshops, study trips and summer courses amongst others. This age group consists of adults across the social spectrum and it is likely that the mixture of educational backgrounds enhanced their own voice in the institution. The more remarkable element of this programme emerged over time as the learners took over the ethos of the programme and transformed it into a social network that interacted with lecturers.

The Centre responded by building in social interaction time into the lecturers' employment contract. The learners began to foster their own social programme around the formal classes which included an exchange visit by the French class with an older adults' group in France, volunteering to assist with administrative tasks in the university departments, and organising their own social membership club with special interest groups. The university thus became a drop-in neighbourhood whereby social activities ran alongside formal classes and members of the club would take responsibility for exhibitions, publicity activities and acted as public relations officers to visitors and new learners. In return, academic staff engaged the learners in research, either as co-facilitators or as research subjects, to facilitate better understanding of learning needs and styles amongst older adults. The learners thus contributed to new knowledge about learning in later life, particularly in relation to the neurosciences, but also became fellow actors within the university community itself.

This story seems to be unique in the community engagement literature. It is bound by a socio-cultural and demographic context, whereby Scotland is amongst the nations experiencing an ageing population and where traditional schooling would have ensured a high level of initial education for the majority of participants in the programme. It is also embedded in a policy context which promotes the preservation of potential mental capital of an ageing population. The writers give no information on the participants' socio-economic backgrounds, so it is difficult to assess how far the participants are representative of the local population. Nevertheless, it provides a snapshot of what a porous university might look like, given the political will and flexibility of an institution. It is also significant that this relationship functions primarily from the Centre for Lifelong Learning which has fewer demands on its timetable and curriculum than some of the more mainstream sectors of the university. There were indications, however, that the participants were infiltrating other academic departments

as volunteers. So the community assets were defined by the community participants and converted into capability sets that enhanced their own well-being as well as that of the university lifelong learning infrastructure. Community, in this example, was a community of identity rather than a community of place. The question remains, therefore, to what extent could such a model of interaction translate into communities of place, especially those that may not already bear the label of privilege?

The final case example comes from a vastly different context. It focuses on a community non-governmental organisation (NGO) partnership with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and funded by the Embassy of Finland. The project took place in some of the poorest and most vulnerable rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal during the aftermath of post-apartheid democracy building. The majority of grass-roots participants were rural women with little or no education who had grown up in the violence of the apartheid regime and ensuing struggles for democracy.

The project is documented by Memela and Land (2006) and more extensively by Vaughn John, initially in his PhD thesis (2009), but also other publications (e.g. John 2016). The example cited here built on existing community–NGO relations and existing NGO–University relations in the University’s Centre for Adult Education. The NGO was an established adult education provider in the rural communities, where it managed a number of learning centres, and trained local community members to become literacy educators and develop the skills to manage small income generating projects. The programme which was ultimately called Human Rights, Democracy and Development was led by the NGO but the university contributed with training and development of literacy resources. The Centre for Adult Education produced easy to understand materials that addressed a range of relevant community development concerns and a newspaper *Learn with Echo* which provided relevant information on a range of topics in both isiZulu and English. These materials were frequently used in the province’s under-resourced adult learning centres as literacy resources. The project operated over two phases, starting in 1999 in the wake of the apartheid regime of political and economic oppression. Memela and Land (2006) document the tensions and struggles of attempting to ‘empower’ rural impoverished community members by providing ordinary residents with the skills to become adult educators of their communities. They also highlight the challenge within this context of negotiating ‘a thin, easily crossed line between paternalism and

partnership' (ibid., 59) in efforts to facilitate community-led responsibility for solving their own problems.

John (2009, 2016) describes the second phase some four years later when some community members approached the NGO for a particular kind of literacy programme that would enable them to 'participate more meaningfully and actively in community development initiatives' (John 2009, 180). John's (2009) thesis was an in-depth study into the programme's history and the experiences of both educators and learners. John (2009, 369) emphasised that the project took place in a post-conflict society:

Past power struggles in the province were devastatingly violent. Current power struggles, although not as violent, create a development context characterised by tension, fear and fracture. Gaining legitimacy to participate in or lead development activity in this context requires frustrating and skillful negotiations of local webs of power. Development action and citizenship agency appear to be constantly entangled in patronage rituals and local hegemony.

In this example, the focus was on dialogue and learning by doing as a shared endeavour, learning to recognise individual resilience and strengths that would contribute to new visions for leading a life worth living. This project provides a clear example of the benefits of collaborative work in a situation that exposes huge and multi-layered power differentials between the different actors. Community engagement operated at two levels. On the one hand as a partnership with a community-mediating NGO and on the other hand as a research base to examine the programme itself. The research findings provided important insights, including new knowledge for understanding context specific learner needs and educator roles. The reflexive nature of the qualitative study enabled community educators to articulate new understandings of how and what to teach. From the capability perspective, the programme endeavoured to build on existing assets within the community and expand their capability set to take action to lead the lives they had reason to value. But it was evident that this was a tortuous process that competed with social, individual, environmental, political and cultural contexts. The engagement inputs enabled some community members to convert their assets into more enhanced capability sets. Memela and Land (2006), for instance, discuss how one group of community members shared their newly acquired knowledge on chicken

production but within a context where community members had already adopted ‘adaptive preferences’ (Nussbaum 2000, 139) for the lives they had reason to value. It took four years for the participants to ‘reconstruct their habitual ways of seeing themselves in relation to the world’ (Memela and Land 2006, 52). The outcomes produced some community change as well as university change because the university now had a set of new understandings for how to approach learning needs of impoverished communities that could inform adult education policy and adult education training. For example, John (2016, 1) highlighted the essential nature of ‘adult educators’ emotional and relational bonds with learners’ in contexts such as these, which he coined ‘adult education as care work’ (ibid., 2): ‘In recruiting learners and trying to overcome the obstacles preventing learners from participating, educators began to see that an important part of their work lay outside of the classroom’ (ibid., 9).

To what extent was the university porous in this instance? The NGO as a community contact would cross the threshold of the university premises, but although some community members attended the university, practicalities meant that most of the training occurred within community locations. Their direct relationship to the university was perhaps more distant as a result of the NGO acting as a mediator. Furthermore, as with many projects of this nature, the programme was time limited. It is likely, therefore that the boundary dimensions between higher education institution and community as place were stirred but in terms of building engaged and sustained personal relationships a different kind of timeframe would be required.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has outlined some of the key dynamics and conceptual trends for community engagement over the past 20 years. It has articulated a paradigm shift from philanthropy as service and outreach to engagement as partnership and collaboration. The resultant focus is on institutionalising engagement as a feature of teaching and research. The aspirational goal for academia, in order to justify such work, is co-creation of knowledge. In some cases there is motivation to make the walls porous in order to change power dynamics and generate space for a new kind of ‘socially robust’ knowledge that emanates from the experiential space of communities that originate from outside of the university. Such initiatives are, however,

isolated and, with a few exceptions, examples of good practice are relatively under-theorised.

In the South African context, community engagement is most frequently understood as service learning, a strategy which poses as many challenges as it offers benefits. The next chapter is dedicated to reviewing this phenomenon.

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Community Engagement Through Service Learning

INTRODUCTION

In the latter part of 2011, I was appointed at a South African university, with a remit to undertake community engagement. Service learning, as one form of community engagement, is a popular concept in South African higher education institutions and a meeting was arranged with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to discuss how we could work together, using our students as a useful resource. Six or seven NGO representatives attended the meeting, but all of them were unenthusiastic at the prospect of hosting our students. Drawing on their past experiences they argued that the students were more of a burden than an asset; they took up valuable staff time and, to put it bluntly, were ‘more trouble than they were worth’. It was clear that the NGOs felt they had little ownership over how the students could contribute. It took some time before the participants in the meeting would begin to think more positively about trying a new approach to service learning arrangements. Finally, we arrived at a list of possible needs or activities that the organisations felt they could benefit from and to which students could potentially contribute.

Over the next two years, I obtained funding for two successive action research projects, in partnership with other disciplines and institutions, to develop small-scale case study activities with local NGOs. Each NGO would provide a specific task that they wanted assistance with. Some examples included archiving video materials; English writing classes for isiZulu

first language speaking staff; assisting with child development activities in a rural township; preparing publicity materials for a disability advocacy organisation; recruiting students to train as facilitators for awareness raising workshops on sexual orientation issues and helping a human rights film crew to interview local residents in their first language of isiZulu.

The menu of activities, including details of their timeframes and required number of students, were offered to university classes which ran service learning modules and also to classes which were more discipline specific, such as Media Studies and Library and Information Studies. In this way, students were recruited on a volunteer basis to match, as far as possible, the focus of need or knowledge requirements of the NGOs. Some of the NGOs acted as community mediators to facilitate direct interaction between the students and grass-roots community members. Other projects served the NGO administrative or creative needs more directly. Project participants provided interview responses to the activities as a result of the research component and we organised feedback workshops on university premises at the end of each phase of the action research. These workshops were attended by staff, students and the NGOs. Although the NGOs were invited to include them, grass-roots community members generally did not attend, largely for logistical reasons of distance and transport.

The outcome of, and reflection on, issues raised in these case studies has been published in a number of journals and books (Preece 2013a, b, 2016a, b; Hlalele et al. 2015; Preece and Manicom 2015). Their relevance to this chapter is twofold. First, this relatively simple initiative to engage the NGOs more directly in deciding how they wanted to involve the university's students appeared to be innovative. Secondly, the experiences of undertaking these projects as a funded activity with a research-led feedback component highlighted issues of control, power, knowledge, voice, communication, sustainability and practicalities of interfacing community and university rhythms of working and also how to embed such an engagement relationship as an institutionally supported activity, academically, financially and operationally. All these issues resurface in the expansive literature on service learning, particularly in South Africa. Of interest for this book is how service learning, in the format that it is commonly practised, can contribute to sustained, and 'porous', university-community relations. The additional theoretical concern is the extent to which a capabilities and asset-based community development lens can enhance our understanding of how to maximise the potential of service learning to contribute to people leading the lives they have reason to value.

However, at the time of writing this chapter, South African university students were at the centre of the most expansive and violent protest actions that the country has seen since the end of apartheid. The unfolding reactions from academics are recorded through an online newspaper *The Conversation Africa* (<https://theconversation.com/africa>). Of the country's 23 universities at least 17 were involved in this mass protest action. The protests were sparked by student anger at government drives to increase fees and the impact of such increases on the majority poor in South Africa. The protests resulted in campus shutdowns and impacted on the academic calendar. The students were demanding free higher education in the face of broken government promises and evidence of widespread corruption. But they were also challenging the legacies of their apartheid past whereby universities are still perceived to be privileging the white minority in curriculum, pedagogy and racial participation rates. In view of the Department of Higher Education's policy drive to use service learning as a response to engendering a sense of civic responsibility, particularly in relation to addressing disadvantage, the prevailing context influenced my reflections for this chapter.

SERVICE LEARNING AND ITS SCHOLARSHIP EVOLUTION

Although the term service learning was purportedly coined in the United States in 1967, it gained popularity in the 1990s and was introduced at the end of that decade into South Africa in the form of a partnership initiative between South Africa's Community Higher Education Service Partnerships (CHESP) and the Joint Education Trust (JET), funded by the Ford Foundation and WK Kellogg Foundation (Le Grange 2007; Erasmus 2011). The literature on service learning as a particular kind of community engagement has exploded since the new millennium. A literature review revealed over a hundred publications, mostly from the United States and South Africa. Other contributions emanate from the wider Americas and Australia, with a smaller contribution from the United Kingdom and other parts of Africa. In this literature, service learning is sometimes written as service-learning to highlight the 'learning' component of service. Since this lexical practice is not consistent, I only include the hyphen for direct quotes or when an author makes particular reference to it.

It is interesting that, in spite of the wider community engagement literature's efforts to eradicate the label 'service' from its nomenclature, the concept has crept back in through this feature, along with all its ambiguities

and undesirable relationship connotations between ‘server’ and ‘served’. As with the term ‘community engagement’ there are several variations of the label as people endeavour to position it within a theoretical and values base that more closely resembles the notion of a reciprocal community engagement relationship. It will be argued that recent literature attempts to steer the concept further away from its philanthropic base to a more critical and emancipatory focus.

Service learning has been described as a philosophical approach, a pedagogy and a form of inquiry. In the United States its origins were philanthropic and largely embedded in the concern to inculcate a sense of civic responsibility in the nation’s youth (Bringle and Hatcher 2005). Service learning in the United States is therefore an activity that is conducted at school as well as tertiary level. It is a class-based, credit-bearing programme which requires students to contribute to a time-limited activity in a community setting and demonstrate what and how they have learned from the experience in the form of an assessed assignment. The emphasis is on student reflection and ability to interpret what they have experienced to enhance their understanding of course content. The most quoted definition for service learning is the one by Bringle and Hatcher (1995, 112):

[A] [...] course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.

Its pedagogical base is premised on constructivist concerns (emanating from theorists such as John Dewey and Leon Vygotsky) with the link between knowledge and experience. The pedagogy most commonly draws on Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle which emphasises the interrelationships between concrete experience as the basis for reflective observation which can be assimilated into abstract conceptualisations and which lead to further active experimentation (Bringle and Hatcher 2005; Gerstenblatt and Gilbert 2014). In service learning programmes the ‘service’ is carried out by students in response to an agreed community context of need. The student is expected to reflect on the ‘service’ experience and link that reflection to theoretical concepts learned in class. A mark is awarded on the basis of how effectively that reflection is articulated. Service learning is distinguished from volunteering or other forms of

internships because this element of student reflection is a required component of the course.

The philosophical aim, also drawing on John Dewey's interest in education for democracy (O'Brien 2005), is to bring about an enhanced sense of civic responsibility and understanding about the applicability of theoretical knowledge to real world experiences. The implications, therefore, are that the student possesses an element of expertise which will be of value to a defined community problem within a specified time frame. As a form of inquiry, the student may undertake research to address the community need. The community is expected to benefit from the volunteered expertise and the student's enhanced awareness of community issues contributes to developing their maturity of mind and attitude to issues of social concern. The literature suggests that this experience frequently enhances a sense of civic responsibility in students (Berle 2006; Bringle and Hatcher 2000). Although there is limited research into the long-term impact on student attitudes, the evidence suggests that a positive, awareness raising experience of service learning can have a lasting effect on attitudes towards social responsibility (Bringle and Hatcher 1996; Mitchell 2015).

Service learning placements are most commonly organised as one semester courses, requiring between 20 and 40 hours of student time within their communities. Professional degrees, such as social work, teaching or the health professions often adopt an extended placement approach whereby students may take up residence in a particular location as part of their training. Other variations may be discipline specific modules, whereby a class of students responds to an identified community need. Sometimes, the service learning is one component of a larger community engagement project which may extend over several years with a view to addressing concerns of community sustainability and growth (Fourie 2003). A popular addition to these models is known as International Service Learning, whereby students from one country spend a designated period of time in a different country. Often this model is adopted by economically advantaged institutions who partner with institutions in less advantaged contexts with the expectation that both 'server' and 'served' will benefit from wider exposure to different cultures (Curtin et al. 2014; Hamby and Brinberg 2016).

All these models have generated critiques and concerns about power differentials between academia and the wider community, questions of reciprocity in terms of who is contributing what to whom, and the nature of collaboration or participation as an equal relationship. Furthermore, it

has also been argued that the students who demonstrate increased civic responsibility are most likely to be those students who already harness such concerns. Service learning is normally a voluntary elective in university programmes and only those who want to undertake community activities show such outcomes. In the study undertaken by myself and other colleagues, the extent to which students took responsibility for community issues, as opposed to merely viewing their task as a work experience opportunity, would vary. For instance, when we recruited students from their discipline specific courses, rather than those who had elected for a service learning module, it was evident that not all students were equally concerned with either the philanthropic or social purpose of their contribution (Preece 2013b). Similarly, there is evidence to show that for some students, the experience of working in communities of ‘disadvantage’ could reinforce negative stereotypes about culture, lifestyles and a sense of ‘the other’ (Stoecker 2016). A growing critique is the fact that the main focus of research into the outcomes of service learning projects has been on the benefits accrued to the participating students. This has provoked questions about the sustainability for communities of small-scale service learning interventions, whether the activity reinforces ‘charity’ rather than emancipatory goals and whether service learning itself contributes to real social change either in the university or in the community (Fourie 2003; Mitchell and Humphries 2007; Mahlomaholo and Matobako 2006; Stoecker 2016). Marais and Botes (2005, 183) suggest that the role of universities in partnerships should be limited and that it is not always appropriate for them to play the lead role. This scenario simply reinforces ‘the perception that poor communities are helpless’. A key question that is often asked is—for whose benefit is the service learning undertaken? A further concern is the extent to which service learning is embedded in the institution as a desirable and academically recognised activity in its own right (HEQC 2007; Bender 2008).

Subsequent definitions have attempted to enlarge the focus of service learning to include a greater recognition of ‘community’ and ‘knowledge’ as central to the collaborative exercise. In South Africa, for instance, concerns were expressed about uncritically transferring an American model of service learning into a South African context which grapples with some of the highest inequalities in the world and which is still trying to undo the damage of its colonial history, including issues of recognition of indigenous knowledge. So, definitions of service learning have evolved to highlight the importance of collaborative partnerships, community ownership and reciprocity,

with a recognition that knowledge does not reside solely in the university, and a shift from service learning's emphasis on pedagogy to a broader investigation of its contribution to social issues (Erasmus 2005, 2011). The Universities of the Free State and Stellenbosch share similar definitions of service learning. Stellenbosch's version (2009, 2) reads as follows:

An educational approach involving curriculum-based, credit-bearing learning experiences in which students (a) participate in organised, well-structured and organised service activities aimed at addressing identified service needs in a community, and (b) reflect on the service experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the linkage between curriculum content and community dynamics, as well as achieve personal growth and a sense of social responsibility. It requires a collaborative partnership context that enhances mutual, reciprocal teaching and learning among all members of the partnership (lecturers and students, members of the communities and representatives of the service sector).

As a further dimension to this definition Hatcher and Erasmus (2008) emphasise that in the South African context Julius Nyerere's philosophy of social responsibility as a politically collective endeavour provides a more social focus to the Deweyian, more individualistic notion of service learning for civic responsibility.

There has also been a sense that the 'third sector' or not-for-profit organisations, such as NGOs, play a larger part in service learning programmes in South Africa because they offer a mediating role between communities of extreme deprivation and the university hierarchy. Furthermore, they help to ensure continuity of support for grass-roots community contacts in the face of potentially disruptive short-term interventions by the university (O'Brien 2005). So, Erasmus talks about a 'triad' relationship between university, community members and 'representatives of the service sector' (Hatcher and Erasmus 2008). There are indications of similar concerns in other 'southern' or indigenous contexts. In Argentina, where university community engagement is now a national policy mandate, service learning is linked to the idea of 'solidarity' and participatory research. Some universities have established institutional centres to liaise with different community actors to improve a two-way process of knowledge production (Lepore and Herrero 2015). In the Canadian context, Brown et al. (2015) refer to the rise of indigenous research community partnerships which link community controlled research agendas with students' experiential learning in communities. These approaches point to a shift in

understanding about knowledge dimensions and of communities as asset-based resources, rather than deficit-burdened (Hall et al. 2015).

In response to criticisms that the concept of service learning takes insufficient account of the desired reciprocal relationship between the university and its community, a number of alternative labels are used. The most common are academic service learning, community service learning, community-based service learning and service-learning. In response to concerns that the practice is under-theorised there have been a number of attempts to elaborate on the above pedagogical focus of experiential learning. In the United States there are dedicated journals such as the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. In South Africa a number of special issues, such as *Acta Academica* (2005) and *Education as Change* (2007), have provided opportunities to articulate philosophical, empirical and conceptual understandings that inform our understanding of service learning. Although some American outputs have enabled South African authorship in view of the shared relationship on this topic between the two countries, there is generally very little recognition outside of South Africa of studies within South Africa. So, for instance, Deeley (2015) argues that the motivation for publishing her book was because of the dearth of literature which provided guidance on how to do service learning and that the emphasis in existing work is on quantitative studies. In fact the majority of (African and) South African empirical research is qualitative in nature and there are specific publications which focus on 'doing service learning'. One such publication is South Africa's *Good Practice Guide* (HEQC 2006). Another is the recent text book by Osman and Petersen (2013) which provides theoretical foundations for service learning, a consideration of the practicalities for service learning and a focus on integrating the community voice into service learning. While Deeley's publication expands the theoretical basis of experiential learning to include critical pedagogy and transformative learning, the concept of power is not indexed (although it is implicit in the notion of critical pedagogy)—a factor which the South African literature in particular (as well as more recent international literature) takes cognisance of.

CATEGORISING SERVICE LEARNING STUDIES

Studies on service learning cover a wide range of disciplines beyond those most closely associated with the professions. They can be broadly divided into four categories. Practice-based studies address the constraints and

practical realities of initiating and managing service learning projects. For instance, Naidoo and Devnarain (2009, 938) in a study across five university sites in South Africa highlight that students have time constraints and often lack confidence in ‘working with communities and issues with which they are not familiar’. Equally, there is often inadequate institutional support in terms of finances, transport, preparation and training of students and their supervisors. Some of these studies explore the policy implications and assessment demands of service learning. Nduna (2007), for example, lists a number of planning procedures that are necessary to ensure adequate implementation of projects, such as clear guidelines, providing all community partners with student timetables, setting clear expectations and building in regular communication channels. Deeley (2015) dedicates a chapter to identifying assessment methods that most aptly capture the reflective learning and critical thinking required of students. Daniels et al. (2013) also list a number of assessment methods that are deemed appropriate for capturing student learning from the service learning experience, such as reflective journals, peer assessment of presentations and an opportunity for placement-based, on-site supervisors to contribute their opinions about student behaviour.

Others draw attention to common conceptual issues such as reciprocity, power, community voice, collaboration and sustainability. There is now a growing body of literature that explores how power differentials between communities and higher education institutions can impact on student interactions at an individual level with implications for preparation, planning and the role of dialogue in this process (e.g. Camacho 2004; Osman and Castle 2006; O’Brien 2009; Preece 2016a, b). Keith (2005, 16) suggests that in relation to the discursive aspirations for reciprocal relationships a more appropriate aim might be ‘interdependence’. She argues that reciprocity reflects a liberal view of society that is not always relevant in community engagement relationships: ‘Were a relationship of interdependence established, we may hear instead, “I was born with certain privileges and I now understand that the other side of privilege is oppression. Because I recognise myself in the other, I cannot stand by and allow the inequity continue [sic].”’ A related concern in this category of publications is the question of whether service learning contributes to transactional (instrumental and short term) or transformative (life-changing and more sustainable) relationships. Some American studies draw on the SOFAR relationship model which analyses how different sets of people interact in different kinds of relationships in this respect (Bringle et al. 2009;

Clayton et al. 2010). SOFAR stands for ‘*Students, Organizations* in the community, *Faculty, Administrators* on the campus, *Residents* in the community’ (Clayton et al. 2010, 6). These represent the different actors in community engagement relationships. The exploration of how these relationships interface in service learning is based on the following argument:

The differentiation of community into Organizations and Residents acknowledges that persons in these two groups often have different cultures, goals, resources, roles, and power and that they do not necessarily represent one another’s views; it also encourages investigation of the relationships among the various types of individuals that comprise ‘community’. (Clayton et al. 2010, 7)

Pedagogical studies address ways in which the curriculum is influenced by or influences service learning activity. A number of these studies explore pedagogy related theories such as Wenger’s communities of practice (Kinloch et al. 2015) and Bernstein’s classification and framing theory (Hlengwa 2010). Included in this category are studies related to pedagogy of dialogue, learning spaces (Preece 2016a, b; Preece and Manicom 2015) and the nature of knowledge. Le Grange (2007), in particular, suggests that the concept of rhizomatic knowledge, which recognises the diversity of knowledge sources, as opposed to western-based ‘arborescent’ thinking about knowledge as stemming from one source, opens up possibilities for recognising the place of indigenous knowledge in academia. Gibbon’s (2006) argument for recognising the experientially based Mode 2 knowledge fits in with this thinking and is also associated with the African democratic renewal ideas of Julius Nyerere (Erasmus 2011). Similarly, Bivens et al.’s (2015, 9) reference to ‘knowledge democracy’ includes the use of indigenous knowledge to strengthen ‘participation in decision making’.

A particularly interesting service learning project which engages with the challenges of incorporating African indigenous ways of knowing and learning into higher education systems is reported by Hlela (2014), within a postcolonial theoretical framework. What is unusual about this project is that the part-time student participants were members of the same marginalised communities that service learning projects tend to target as ‘beneficiaries’ of service learning. The students were lay workers at pre-university education level, caring for children in difficult circumstances across eight African countries and participating in a distance learning professional development programme. The last module of the programme

was a service learning module requiring the students to undertake a five-week placement in a host organisation of their choice which was providing psychosocial support for vulnerable children. Hlela (2014, 369) highlights features of the students' learning journey that are premised on African humanism. These include reflections on 'learning as a communal activity', 'learning as a practice of caring' and 'learning as problem solving'. The theme of 'caring' within African contexts of vulnerability is one that is taken up by John (2016, 2) in terms of 'education as care work' which once more highlights the social and collective dimension of service learning. Hlela (2014, 372) challenges the higher education system to acknowledge and incorporate these aspects of learning and knowing into its regular curriculum:

This study demonstrates how service learning is potentially a gateway into African Indigenous Learning underpinned by an Afrocentric paradigm. Through this process not only learners but the academia through learners' work are reintroduced into local community forms of meaning making as well as indigenous knowledge systems. This raises the question: Does the academia value lessons from communities?

Similar concerns have recently surfaced in Australian literature. Bennett et al. (2016) refer to an arts-based project with indigenous communities and the need for drawing on multiple stakeholders to foster academic legitimacy of including such work into the university curriculum.

A more diverse range of theoretical studies explores the *how* of service learning, either as an experience or as a relationship. So theories such as critical education theory (Osman and Castle 2006), activity theory (McMillan 2001), adaptive leadership (Stephenson 2011), Foucauldian notions of power (Osman and Attwood 2007) and the African concept of *Ubuntu* as an ethics of care (Maistry 2011), all contribute to the growing theoretical base for this topic. In addition, some studies advocate a grounded theory approach which will allow new themes to emerge inductively from research findings (O'Brien 2005; Stewart-Sicking et al. 2013). The essence of all these studies is to question the normative assumptions about benign university community relationships and the hegemonic discourses that continue to define the community as 'other' and in need of rescuing by the academic endeavour. At the same time, in societies of extreme disadvantage which prevail in South Africa and similar contexts, the different levels of capability sets (freedoms and opportunities)

to function in ways that people have reason to value require supportive resources such as universities to contribute in ways that enable those societies to convert their assets into valued outcomes. It is this issue of inequality which, whilst not articulated as a capabilities perspective, captures the concerns of many academics when they seek to find ways of levelling the playing field in their working relationships with communities and building in a more social justice focused agenda. This latter point takes us to the fourth category of studies.

The fourth category of empirical work relates to research methodologies which are deemed most appropriate for capturing the experiences and relationship challenges involved in setting up projects and engaging communities in mutually beneficial and participatory ways. The overriding concern among these writers is that research paradigms need to be participatory to allow for a plurality of perspectives and that all participants should be involved in contributing to the research design (Erasmus 2005; Mitchell and Humphries 2007; Ringstad et al. 2012, Hall et al. 2015). Recommended methodologies are primarily qualitative, often premised on an action research approach. Variations within this perspective are based around the notion of community-based research as a basis for participatory methodologies. Chapter 3 indicated that this form of research is becoming more popular in the broader understanding of community engagement. Community-based research is described as:

Research that is responsive to societal needs, that is carried out in a community setting, where the process involves the community and the results promote social equity. (Daniels et al. 2013, 156)

Participatory research, of course, suffers similar challenges to that of community engagement itself. It is time consuming, resource and labour intensive and requires sensitivity to context. It also carries less academic authenticity than more mainstream methodologies for constructing new knowledge. The approach, however, points to a shift in understanding about knowledge dimensions and of communities as asset-resourced rather than deficit-burdened. There is a sense in recent literature that the American introduction of service learning as a discrete activity with philanthropic goals to develop responsible civic behaviour amongst its students is metamorphosing into a distinctive, but more integral feature of the wider community engagement endeavour of community empowerment. Critiques of service learning which expose its questionable sustainability

for communities have paved the way for a model that incorporates service learning activity into a more encompassing community development approach to engagement which recognises communities as partners in the co-creation of knowledge. Nevertheless, the service learning literature makes very limited reference to asset-based community development theory. With the exception of Erasmus (2005), reference to community assets appears more in recent publications such as those by Ebersöhn et al. (2010) and Preece (2013a). Gerstenblatt and Gilbert (2014) refer to a community-based approach to exploring community assets in their social work. These relatively recent considerations indicate that attitudes to, and values concerning, service learning are moving away from its initial philanthropical interests to a more radicalised focus on social justice.

The more sophisticated that the service learning concept becomes, however, the more sophisticated become the demands on students to ‘step up’ their understanding of the complexity of community engagement.

PROGRESSION OF IDEAS WITHIN SERVICE LEARNING

Although a recent article by Hatcher and Studer (2015) continues to advocate the benefits of philanthropy in service learning and its contribution to engendering a sense of civic responsibility, the trend in terminology is now moving towards notions of ‘critical service learning’ (Ringstad et al. 2012). Theoretical concerns place more emphasis on power and privilege, the notions of ‘radical’ and ‘transformative’ community service learning (Gerstenblatt and Gilbert 2014; Sheffield 2015). This new pedagogical concern for service learning students is to destabilise their common assumptions so that learning emerges ‘from the emotional *disequilibrium* found in lived experience’ (Sheffield 2015, 48). Out of this disorientation, students learn to see community issues from new perspectives and are able to contribute to solutions in collaboration with, rather than in service to, community members.

What is not apparent, however, is whether writers have grappled with the thorny concept of how to move such a service learning curriculum beyond its framework of critical reflection and into the realm of community development. In support of the apparent trend towards community and social change, Stoecker (2016) argues that service learning needs a different set of theories that move beyond the dominant focus on pedagogy and student development. Butin (2010, 2015) is the most prominent critic of this issue. He offers four views of service learning (Butin, 2010, ix) which

he classifies as ‘technical’ (focusing on development of professional skills), ‘cultural’ (focusing on individual meaning making), ‘political’ (a concern with whose voice matters) or ‘antifoundational’ (challenging taken for granted assumptions). The first two are the most prominent, but they lack a critical perspective. The third addresses power relations and the fourth encourages us to question our own value bases. He recommends that service learning should pay more attention to the latter two classifications. But in order to give the project the attention it deserves, service learning should be given its own discipline home in the same way that women’s studies became a discipline identity in many universities. From this theoretical base, he argues, it would be easier to infuse service learning as a cross-cutting exercise into the broader curriculum. This, he argues, is what has happened with much of the women’s studies feminist literature. Indeed, van Deventer Iverson and Hauver James (2014, 99) in their book on feminist community engagement, give support to Butin’s argument and strongly urge for a more transformative approach to service learning:

it makes a profound difference for students, as well as for members of the community, when students understand what they’re doing as *activism* and not simply as the more ‘neutral sounding’ community service or civic engagement.

To develop this case further, I refer once more to the capabilities approach which remains almost completely absent from the service learning literature, even though Walker and others have advocated for some time for a ‘capabilities friendly’ approach to the curriculum of undergraduates, particularly those studying in the professions such as Law, Health, Education and Social Work (Walker 2015, 279). My argument for pursuing this theoretical window of opportunity is premised on a need to find a curriculum approach which privileges the community as much as the student. While credit-based assessment of student critical reflection addresses student growth, it does not provide a tool for evaluating or engaging with community growth or social change.

Although Walker has never referred to the service learning literature or the concept of service learning in her publications, she nevertheless argues strongly for ‘higher education’s role in advancing transformative human development’ (2015, 281) in her concern for producing civic minded professionals with a sense of social justice and commitment to the good of others. Although Walker’s approach focuses on capabilities for student

well-being, her concern to do so implicitly stretches to a concern for ‘the well-being of those beyond the high fences and guarded gates of the university, those whose flourishing could be enabled by graduates’ (ibid., 292). In this recent publication, Walker suggests four capability goals which would be relevant to social justice educational aims. Capabilities as freedoms are a combination of entitlements and opportunities for personal agency in order to achieve the functionings to lead the life one has reason to value. A set of entitlements or assets without the opportunity or, in some cases, awareness of, opportunities one should be entitled to, mean that people either resort to ‘adaptive preferences’ or—in the case of many contexts of extreme inequality—violence to make their voice heard. The role of service learning participants therefore, could be to develop, explore or identify conversion factors (personal, social, environmental resources) that can enable people to achieve their functionings. Part of the service learning curriculum, therefore, could be to help students and communities identify what capabilities can lead to greater human dignity or social justice for a decent human society. If students and community organisations identify the capabilities they value for themselves, they are in a stronger position to help the community members they are working with to develop capabilities that have meaning for them in different contexts.

Walker (2015, 290), drawing on her own previous lists, and Nussbaum’s (2000) ten universal capabilities, offers a desired capability set for undergraduate professionals in the context of South Africa. The first capability of affiliation embraces a broad range of functionings, cited by Nussbaum (2000) as follows:

Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings to engage in various forms of social interaction: to be able to imagine the situation of another. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation: being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. (Nussbaum 2000, 79) [sic]

If this capability is translated into a service learning context, it addresses many of the concerns in the service learning literature regarding power relations, participation and respect.

Walker (2015, 291) suggests a second capability as the ‘opportunity to develop critical capacities’ which in turn would result in the following functionings: ‘acquisition of higher knowledge, engaging critically with that knowledge, relating knowledge to action’.

She suggests that it is important to build self-confidence in students through the ‘pedagogical relationships’ (ibid.) so they are able to engage with knowledge in this way. In terms of recognising experiential knowledge in communities, this process can be reversed so that students draw on the Freirean pedagogy of emancipatory dialogue to build confidence among community members of their critical capacities and ability to relate their knowledge to appropriate action. This capability, therefore, would address the question of whose knowledge is privileged and which knowledge is ‘socially robust’ (Gibbons 2006, 28).

Walker’s (2015, 292) third capability is ‘ethical citizenship’. Part of this capability leads to functionings that generate ‘obligations to others’ and an awareness of the extent to which others have the opportunity to reflect on what is worthwhile or morally good. In other words, to what extent is the university curriculum nurturing a social consciousness towards others? This capability addresses concerns of participation and collaboration in the service learning relationship.

This set is not exhaustive in the context of service learning and other capabilities from the extensive range of capability sets could also be included. But the argument here is that a capabilities approach to service learning has the potential to expand the curriculum base of the topic in a way that can be cross disciplinary. It can be used as a basis for discussion and reflection regarding the student’s sense of purpose and role in the service learning relationship and a means through which to evaluate community responses to their service learning experience. It also creates a dialogic and practical space for service learning to take on a social justice perspective.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an overview of service learning literature which has been published primarily during the new millennium. It is an evolving field of study. In spite of a substantive literature base which discusses different theoretical perspectives for curriculum, learning and even the process of service learning, conceptual understanding has remained relatively fragmented. In other words, the theories tend to be ‘stand-alone’ and do not build on each other to develop an argument. However, there are indications in recent literature of a more coherent trend towards redefining service learning in the context of its parent concept of community engagement. From a liberalist, philanthropic notion that students should

learn to be good citizens as a result of their experience of 'service' to communities a more focused, critical approach is emerging. This new focus is more demanding of the student and more challenging to the institution. Although American literature is also addressing this focus, it, arguably, has been informed by the realities of highly unequal societies such as South Africa where civic responsibility has to be tempered with a more critical urgency to address social justice issues.

Theoretical frameworks which provide analytical tools to explain and address such injustices in a civically responsible way are urgently needed. The violent student protests in South Africa, and the country's pattern of violent service delivery protests in marginalised townships, provide evidence to this effect. Service without participatory engagement prevents the 'served' from having any sense of ownership over what happens to their lives. At the same time, the social justice agenda requires intervention mechanisms that can employ dialogic, as well as physical engagement. These skills and strategies have to be learned and practised. Service learning, as a contribution to community engagement, is one way to nurture such understanding. A capabilities perspective within the context of community development theory, and participatory research, is perhaps one way forward. But the demands, in terms of training staff and students, institutional infrastructure support and political will at decision-making levels have yet to be realised.

I make a final note, in reference to the aspiration for universities to be 'porous' for their communities. Universities may be porous to the extent that service learning activities are recognised by the institution as a legitimate means of establishing two-way relationships that deal with issues of ongoing concern for communities. A porous university therefore would require access points for community agency interaction. As the literature suggests, for service learning to contribute to this holistic vision for university-community relations, a 'best-fit' would be for service learning to be part of wider community engagement activities. Furthermore, as Marais and Botes (2005) implied in this chapter, universities do not necessarily have to be lead players in partnerships. There is a growing global trend in this respect to envision universities as partners in a network of organisations that work together for a common purpose. The idea of learning regions or learning cities is a feature of this trend. Whilst slow to emerge on the African continent, this is nevertheless a growing trend elsewhere. This concept is the subject of Chap. 5.

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Learning Cities as Community Engagement

INTRODUCTION

When I moved to Lesotho in 2007, I became an associate member of the PASCAL International Observatory, an organisation established in 2002 with help from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that is concerned with fostering learning regions. The National University of Lesotho, where I then worked, participated with the University of Botswana in PASCAL's 'PURE' project (PASCAL Universities and Regional Engagement). The PURE project was a global initiative to explore the opportunities and challenges of developing learning regions or learning cities. It was stimulated by an earlier OECD comparative study of how issues relating to higher education institutions and their engagement in regional development were addressed in 12 OECD countries. The OECD study focused on learning initiatives that promoted competitiveness and economic benefits. The PURE project widened this brief to explore the contribution that universities in a more extensive set of countries could make to a range of development needs, with particular acknowledgement of different policy contexts and challenges.

The University of Botswana had already initiated a consultative forum with government and non-governmental organisations in its capital city of Gaborone. The aim was to see how the university could work with key stakeholders in the city as part of a collective approach to its development needs. The PURE project provided added impetus to a wide ranging

consultation which resulted in a substantive report (Ntseane 2010) and a number of book chapters (e.g. Ntseane 2012; Molebatsi 2012). The consultation was highly organised and divided into cluster themes to explore issues related to culture, environment, planning and employment issues. Although a number of ideas emerged from this process, the impetus subsequently faded and it appeared that the opportunities to collaborate did not materialise.

At that time I endeavoured to respond to the PURE project at a more rudimentary level in Lesotho. In addition to the funded research project, mentioned in Chap. 3, I worked with university colleagues to emulate the University of Botswana's approach with a similar discussion in Lesotho's capital city of Maseru. We invited government representatives, institutions and non-governmental organisations to a meeting where PASCAL's PURE team explained the nature of the project. Individual institutions presented their missions and activities, but the meeting did not generate wide enthusiasm, primarily because there was no funding to motivate them. A member of the National University of Lesotho's Philosophy department did, subsequently, however, produce an idea which captured the imagination of a wide range of stakeholders. The idea was to produce a core curriculum of African values that could be developed as a course or programme for adults, children or university students, or all three. A number of meetings with representatives from the police, schools, relevant academics, churches and traditional leadership were held. We discussed the International Declaration of Human Rights and how this declaration sometimes contradicted cultural values and concerns. The meetings generated wide ranging discussions about how to move forward. This initiative also faded. The academic who had originally stimulated the idea moved to another country and other academics became embroiled in more pressing concerns within the university. I was occupied with my own research project and did not have the expertise to lead this initiative to its conclusion without the support of the Philosophy Department.

An even more abortive effort in South Africa to engage multiple stakeholders in the idea of a learning network was initiated after the completion of my service learning research projects in KwaZulu-Natal. Although we ran a well-attended, consultative feedback workshop after completion of the final service learning research phase, attendance at a follow-up meeting to discuss how to build a learning network was negligible.

These examples are typical of other initiatives on the continent that never quite fulfil their ambitions for implementation. For instance, Walters

(2009) documented a research project to develop learning region indicators in the Western Cape but this momentum also faded. These examples indicate that several champions are needed who have sufficient energy and commitment to simultaneously maintain networks and links in resource-starved contexts to work on a shared vision of how to nurture collaborative learning opportunities. Without earmarked funding, and without a support system that has managerial, as well as grass-roots involvement, how does one progress from small-scale community engagement activities into a learning region or a learning city?

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LEARNING CITY CONCEPT

Longworth (2011, 1) describes a learning city as:

A Learning Community is a City, Town or Region which mobilises all its resources in every sector to develop and enrich all its human potential for the fostering of personal growth, the maintenance of social cohesion, and the creation of prosperity.

The literature on learning cities introduces us to a whole new vocabulary. Its impetus has captured the attention of national and international policy makers. Up till now the university community engagement idea has remained largely focused around individual higher education institutions and their strategic plans. Although there is a strong academic rationale to justify university community engagement, the concept has remained largely disconnected from the discourses of other sectors. The University community engagement and service learning references to lifelong learning are not necessarily central to the argument.

The learning communities or learning cities notion, however, is driven by global ideologies and frameworks which are premised on lifelong learning discourses and packaged as a response to broader international development concerns. So, for instance, the rationale for learning cities makes reference to the United Nations (UN 2015a) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) and findings of the UN Habitat State of the World Cities Report (UNHABITAT 2012). The UN Habitat report highlights the changing nature of the world's cities, such as the increasing urbanisation of national populations, the impact of climate change, migration and family patterns on economic, social and cultural ecologies which have resulted

in new inequalities and social exclusions. The discourse has identified with, and made links between, two SDG goals—Goal 4 ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UN 2015b) and Goal 11 ‘make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ (UN 2015c). An overriding rationale for learning cities is that the world’s problems are converging and it is no longer possible to attempt to address them in isolation. The urgency is premised on the understanding that by 2030 more than half the world’s population is likely to be living in cities (UNESCO UIL 2014b). Perhaps the best summary of this new discursive rationale is captured in UNESCO’s latest Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (UNESCO UIL 2016, 137). Adult learning is understood as a core feature of lifelong learning:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has made it clear that different policies and practices can no longer be discussed in silos. . . . stakeholders need to learn how different policies interact with one another, and to understand how to best combine them to achieve lasting impact. . . . ALE needs to be seen as part of a larger set of social, cultural and economic practices.

Two major organisations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UNESCO, are widely accredited as being the main drivers for the learning cities movement. The UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities is closely shadowed by international networks such as the PASCAL International Observatory which has organisational hubs in Europe, Australia, America and Africa. Other regional networks include the International Association of Education Cities (IAEC) which started in 1994 and the Australian Learning Communities Network which started in 2001.

The ideologies of these different players have influenced the trends and direction of learning cities agendas. While the OECD impetus was economic competitiveness and the knowledge economy, the UNESCO focus is on a humanistic notion of lifelong learning and the learning society. PASCAL’s additional interest refers to notions of place and social capital as key features of learning cities. Social capital, in brief, can be described as the resource of social networks, based on trust and reciprocity among a defined group of people with shared values and cultures (Field 2005). All of these organisations, and others, encourage international debate and sharing of experiences and contexts for mutual learning. Officially designated

learning cities are members of one or more of these wider networks. The overriding argument is ‘think global, act local’. With a few exceptions, the literature is practical and strategic rather than academic or theoretical. Equally, with the exception of African literature, the emphasis is on government driven lifelong learning agendas and intersectoral partnerships between NGOs, government departments, schools, clinics, businesses and other organisations. The partnerships provide training or community sensitisation on entrepreneurship, environmental or health issues, for example. Universities are often relatively minor players, included only as research partners. I will argue later, however, that the university has the potential to be a more strategic partner in some contexts.

Although brief reference is made to the origin of the learning city as emanating from Greece some 2500 years ago, most literature highlights that the 1970s, with the incoming discourse of lifelong learning, were the starting point: ‘The modern concept of a learning city/region originated from that of a ‘learning society’ (Osborne et al. 2013, 409). Numerous reports are accredited to building this policy momentum. Among the most prominent is the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education to UNESCO—*Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Fauré et al. 1972). This report introduced the learning society concept, arguing that all agencies should be providers of education. The second report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century was titled *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors et al. 1996). This report expanded on the learning society concept, identifying four pillars that underpin its key features—learning to do, to know, to learn and to live together. Alongside these reports the OECD produced its own initiatives in 1973 and 1992 to promote the idea of a learning city, whereby communities learn collectively to improve their futures. This resulted in a publication *City Strategies for Lifelong Learning* (Hirsch 1993). The OECD’s project on learning regions across five OECD countries in 2000 (OECD 2000) was followed by a number of European funded initiatives which have added impetus to what is now estimated to be over 1000 learning cities around the world (Yang 2012). The latest of such projects, called EURO Local, addressed themes of

finance, heritage, innovation and creativity, international cooperation, festivals, learning organisations, active citizenship and community development, communication and consultation, all of them, and more, representative of what we call a learning city. (Longworth 2012, 2)

Learning activities or festivals often operate in isolation. A learning city would coordinate these activities and promote the idea that learning takes many forms. For example, many countries celebrate national heritage days to demonstrate cultural dancing, costumes and inform the general public about their cultural history. Similarly NGOs may run sporadic workshops on civic education and human rights; women's organisations will organise awareness raising days on the state of gender violence and child abuse and how to combat such violations. A learning city would have an overarching structure to coordinate, publicise and motivate the public within a defined geographical region to attend such functions as part of a wider programme of learning opportunities. Perhaps the public would be invited to learn new craft skills on heritage day or sign up for a range of activities which could improve their physical health or extend their knowledge about environmental concerns. Through publicity and coordination across a range of existing initiatives and resources, the idea of learning would be made more visible.

Not all of the European funded learning city initiatives survived their time-limited funding injections, and the influence of UNESCO and the OECD means that Europe is by no means the centre of the learning cities movement. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO UIL) in particular has taken up the baton. It convened international conferences in 2013 (hosted by Beijing) and 2015 (hosted by Mexico) and has published substantial guidance on how to build a learning city (UNESCO UIL 2015a). The PASCAL Observatory now manages a Learning Cities 2020 programme which is essentially a platform for international exchanges and showcasing of learning city initiatives. This new lifelong learning momentum, therefore, is unprecedented. It has been reinvented under the nomenclature of learning cities and learning regions.

So what is a learning city or learning region? As with the term community engagement, there are many variations on these words and they do not always mean the same thing in different contexts. Lee (2003), for instance, highlights that the notion of 'learning community' in Canada refers to learning structures within educational institutions, whereas the European literature focuses on the geographical nature of community which can reflect a village, town, city or region. So 'learning community' is often interchangeable with 'learning city' or 'learning region'. Hamilton (2016) explains that in the Limerick context in Ireland, the notion of a learning city progressed to learning region as a result of changed political

governance structures which merged the city of Limerick into the broader geographical area of Limerick as a county. So there is a sense that ‘region’ is bigger than ‘city’ which in turn is bigger than a village ‘community’. But the principles behind intersectoral partnership building of learning communities working together remain the same. An associated term, ‘smart cities’, has a slightly different focus. Smart cities are cities which focus on a networked infrastructure of technologies for sustainable development, often with an emphasis on business development, but also as a resource for citizens to access information about the city itself (Laitinen et al. 2016).

Lee (2003, 1) summarises that ‘learning communities place lifelong learning at the heart of community development, growing outwards to encompass the entire community’. There are multiple definitions, each of which takes its own national or cultural flavour and focus but the trend is increasingly to widen the scope of what a learning city, region or community can do so that it becomes more embracing of life’s challenges beyond its initial, economic focus. Lee, among many others, offers some national definitions of a learning city or learning community. She summarises that there are four principles that appear to underlie all the definitions. These are that they aim for integrated working together of different sectors, the emphasis is on communities finding their own solutions, the process is through building partnerships, and that the process requires constant renewal. Since there are so many definitions, it is useful to draw on the generic UNESCO description which is supported by substantive practical guidelines on how to build learning cities. UNESCO (UIL 2014, 23) states that:

A learning city mobilises human and other resources to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; it revitalises learning in families and communities; it facilitates learning for and in the workplace; it extends the use of modern learning technologies; it enhances quality in learning; and it nurtures a culture of learning throughout life.

Thus a learning community, city or region consists of a network of agencies, including government, the public and private sector, whose aim is to foster a culture of learning within a specified geographical boundary. It will be seen from the many examples that government policy and representation on an overarching planning committee are central organs

for promoting the learning city idea. This, perhaps, is the feature that most distinguishes the concept of a learning city from the concept of university community engagement. So it will be seen that, while community engagement discourses talk about a ‘triad’ relationship between university, community and civil society, the learning cities notion talks of a four helix model of government, business, civil society and education providers.

The majority of literature on learning cities is practitioner or policy based and often celebratory in nature. Much of it is now driven by UNESCO’s organising principles. On page 28 of the UNESCO UIL Conference Report of its first Learning Cities conference in Beijing, the UNESCO logo (Fig. 5.1) is used as a framework for explaining how learning cities are built. The logo identifies its pediment (the roof of the logo) which articulates the wider benefits of learning cities, underpinned by columns as the major building blocks, and foundational steps which are the basic conditions for developing learning cities as—follows:

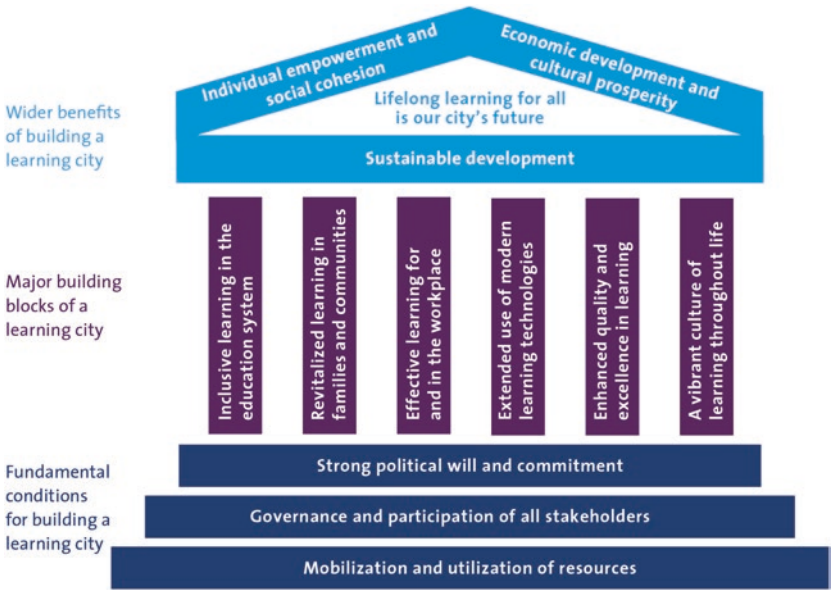


Fig. 5.1 The UNESCO framework of the key features of learning cities (*Source: UNESCO UIL 2015a, 11*)

The Pediment—three areas of focus reflect the wider benefits of building a modern learning city, broadly defined as:

- (1) Individual empowerment and social cohesion;
- (2) Economic development and cultural prosperity; and
- (3) Sustainable development.

The Columns—six areas of focus reflect the major building blocks of a learning city:

- (1) Inclusive learning in the education system;
- (2) Revitalised learning in families and communities;
- (3) Effective learning for and in the workplace;
- (4) Extended use of modern learning technologies;
- (5) Enhanced quality in learning; and
- (6) A vibrant culture of learning throughout life.

The Foundational Steps—three areas of focus reflect the fundamental conditions for building a learning city:

- (1) Strong political will and commitment;
- (2) Governance and participation of all stakeholders; and
- (3) Mobilisation and utilisation of resources. (UNESCO UIL [2014b](#), 28)

This framework has been translated into guidelines (UNESCO UIL [2015a](#)) that emphasise six generic areas of action that are expected to be adapted to national and cultural contexts. These are summarised as follows:

- Develop a plan for becoming a learning city
- Create a coordinated structure involving all stakeholders
- Initiate and maintain the process with celebratory events
- Make sure that learning is accessible to all citizens
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation process
- Ensure sustainable funding

There are numerous examples of how cities have responded to these guidelines. The PASCAL International Conference Report (PASCAL International Observatory [2016](#)) offers some showcase exemplars.

As an illustration of planning, the city of Melton in Australia is cited as having a Community Learning Board through which regular development plans design and oversee learning strategies. The Learning Board is chaired by a politically elected head.

Sorocaba in Brazil is offered as an example of coordinated stakeholder involvement of representatives across the four helixes of business, not-for-profit organisations, government and public education providers, through an ongoing process of dialogue and consensus.

The Cork Learning Festival in Ireland illustrates one way in which learning momentum is maintained through an annual celebration of learning whereby an extensive range of providers and civil society organisations publicise learning opportunities and taster sessions over a week-long period, with the emphasis on capturing the idea of learning as an enjoyable experience.

In terms of ensuring learning is accessible, the general approach across all initiatives is to ensure there is a designated learning centre in which many learning activities can take place within a 10- or 15-minute walk from wherever residents might be. Finland is an illustrative example of how programmes that cater for early childhood through to university level are made available to families, marginalised populations, older adults and so forth. Their strategy is to transform abandoned venues into functional learning spaces. Yang and Yorozu (2015) also describe how Japan has developed 'citizens' universities' for older people, whereby the citizens are now managing the universities themselves and recruit their lecturers and teachers as volunteers from the local community. This example is similar to what is called the U3A (University of the Third Age) across Europe (Ludescher 2015) and other parts of the world, including South Africa. In other words, older adults voluntarily organise themselves into a collective where they pool and share their combined skills and knowledge as learning resources which can be imparted to other adults within the same age bracket. The learning topics may range from car mechanics to art or theoretical physics. U3A groups operate as small networks within a defined geographical area, but network with groups in other areas to form a wider resource of knowledge and skills which can be shared through mutually arranged visits or exchanges.

Monitoring and evaluation is identified as a crucial element for sustaining momentum and ensuring programmes have contemporary value and relevance. Published evaluation indicators are often complex and elaborate. Osborne (2014, pages unnumbered) more explicitly identifies key

benchmark questions that emerged from a large scale OECD study in 2013. These are listed as follows: ‘How is my city performing? And what are the trends? Are we doing a good job in connecting learning with its application for innovation, and economic and social development? How do we compare with others? What could we do better to improve things? What will be the likely consequences if we continue as we are? How can we get government, business, educators and civic society to work together?’

Finally, since funding is directly linked to sustainability, the emphasis is on encouraging multiple sources of funding through public private partnerships. The Government of Balanga in the Philippines is offered as an example of achieving funding through multiple project initiatives. They adopted a cost sharing approach by developing multi-stakeholder funding partnerships with businesses, charitable organisations and international partners (Wang et al. 2016).

It must be emphasised, however, that the learning city concept is not in itself new. It is a repackaging of many community development behaviours and the natural behaviours of indigenous communities. Lee (2003), for instance, acknowledges that the principles follow aboriginal traditions in Canada. Similarly Biao et al. (2013) point out that traditional African societies functioned very effectively through an integrated approach to learning. Even the fact that the learning city movement is reflected as a formally derived arrangement between political structures, business, community and the non-governmental sector is not new. The Indian province of Kerala, for instance, has a well-organised and cohesive lifelong learning system of devolved governance of community learning systems and centres (Preece 2009). This means that the province effectively operates as a learning region without the label. Nevertheless, the scale at which some learning cities are operating, bolstered by coordination committees and formalised agreements, each of them adopting their own particular flavour, has captured the imagination of many, with the expectation that collaborative approaches to learning are now a key resource to address the complexity of challenges in the twenty-first century.

CHALLENGES IN BUILDING A LEARNING CITY

Although the majority of showcases are celebratory in nature, Preisinger-Kleine (2013, 521) specifically discusses some ‘pitfalls and constraints’ which are seen as impacting on the promotion and benefits of learning city initiatives. One particular concern which he raises is the amount of policy

rhetoric of sustainable development and social cohesion which surrounds the publicity for learning cities. It is harder to pinpoint the actual benefits that accrue to individuals who take part in learning city provisions, which in turn makes it difficult to attract funding support: ‘Most prominently, learning cities and regions manifest serious difficulties in rendering transparent the surplus value they generate’ (ibid.). Thus, the need to devise suitable evaluation mechanisms remains paramount.

Yang (2012) highlights some political concerns. Projects often flounder when political will is weak or when there is a change of government or leadership. It will be seen later that these challenges have impacted on a number of African efforts. Associated with weak political leadership is the problem of leadership status for those who endeavour to steer learning city initiatives. Without dedicated, usually political, authority to coordinate agencies and their constituencies, it is difficult to maintain motivation or commitment. This results in fragmented efforts that do not benefit from the sum of their parts. Similarly, if insufficient ground work is given to ensuring ‘conceptual clarity’ of what a learning city means for a particular context, it is hard to obtain the necessary multi-sectoral consensus for coordinated development. Yang also highlights that localities can be resistant to change or controlled by powerful individuals or organisations who are not interested in broader social concerns for their region, and whose interests are well served by existing systems and unequal power relations.

EXAMPLES OF LEARNING CITIES AROUND THE WORLD

The majority of showcase initiatives can be classified into five domains. The original domain was business oriented. Laitinen et al. (2016) compare smart city practices in Helsinki, Finland and Catania in Italy. The report documents how a strong, networked infrastructure contributes to building strong human and social capital for business innovation. The emphasis is on sharing data and a people-centred approach to change through appropriation of digital technologies. However, the authors acknowledge that the potential of ‘smart’ technology is heavily dependent on the training, skills and human capital resources needed within a city environment in order to overcome resistances among ordinary citizens. The challenges of using technologies in smart cities, therefore, include the extent to which IT skills are available which can develop e-government services.

A popular category of learning city activity is what I have called the marketing domain. This reflects the UNESCO UIL’s third generic key

area for stimulating learning cities and regions. Cork's Lifelong Learning Festival (UNESCO UIL [2015b](#); PASCAL [2016](#)) has received considerable acclaim for its promotion of learning through a week-long festival of learning which has successfully attracted 'hard to reach' areas of social exclusion through a coordinated, city-wide partnership across public service sectors and civil society organisations under the aegis of Cork City Development Board. The City Council declared itself a learning city in 2002 and the learning festival celebrates and publicises learning opportunities as a strategy to reduce social inequality and exclusion. Under the overall development title, 'Imagine Our Future' (UNESCO UIL [2015b](#), 29), a City Learning Board, with stakeholder membership from education providers, trade unions, the private sector and policy makers, coordinates a range of learning opportunities that are advertised through the annual festival. Cork engages in year round community projects for all ages and sectors of society. These projects come together with other organisations to help organise the festival, promoting and celebrating all forms of learning, through approximately 500 events. The events include taster classes, demonstrations and workshops which take place throughout the city. The festival is largely government funded, with support from various private donations. The festival organising committee oversees and evaluates each festival.

There are examples of similar partnership activities which have a more grass-roots flavour, albeit still supported at governance level. I have called this the community village domain. The Hume Global Learning Village perhaps reflects a more conventional 'community feel' whereby the focus is on education providers working together with their community members to develop interest in learning. The project is documented by evaluation reports from the organisation Adult Learning Australia ([2005](#)) and Normal Longworth ([n.d.](#)), a long standing promoter of learning cities. In addition Hume City Council ([n.d.](#)) provides its own learning strategy paper called *Learning Together*. The strategy was developed by the City council during 2004 in consultation with community focus groups, an open discussion forum and the village committee. A total of 56 strategies were identified, clustered under eight themes. They essentially promote a concept of seamless learning throughout life. The first theme aims to inspire a desire to learn. For example:

Every person will be given a free postcard, and on a set day, all are asked to write on it 'I would like to learn ...' and send it to the Hume Global Learning Village. (Hume City Council [n.d.](#), 8)

Theme two promotes the value of pre-school programmes through awareness raising initiatives of the value of pre-school education and providing transport to enable visits to pre-schools. Other aims are to keep school leavers engaged in learning during their transition to work (theme three), encourage community-based learning for all ages (theme four), support literacy learning (theme five), encourage uptake of IT usage (theme six), ensure a constant flow of learning information (theme seven) and promote networking (theme eight) of learning communities and organisations. Within these themes, the learning village follows UNESCO UIL's six key areas of action to generate planning, evaluation, publicity, participation in decision making and rewards for learning. Although the focus is on non-formal and formal learning activities and exchanges, small business development is part of theme three. Longworth (n.d., 2) states that the village project is managed by a committed network of some '200 members'. The advisory board is chaired by the former Premier of the Province of Victoria and supported by the Mayor of Hume City Council, thus giving it the political authority necessary to sustain its credibility.

It has been emphasised that each region or context defines what is valued for a learning region or community. One interesting example of how learning cities take on a specific cultural flavour can be seen in projects that emanate from East Asia. This, I have labelled the Confucian or communitarian domain of learning city examples. Hee et al. (2013, 443) narrate how learning cities emerged in Japan, Thailand and China since the 1980s, partly in response to various global crises and 'post-industrial uncertainties'. They emphasise that the East Asian model offers a distinctive 'community relations model' in contrast to the more western 'individual competence model'. Although China did not develop its learning city approach till the new millennium, the initiatives in each country are framed by lifelong learning policies which were concerned to counteract the global predominance of economic competitiveness. The focus in these countries has been on cultural and liberal learning through community building. The emphasis is on addressing social complexity and collective identity rather than the 'technical rationality' of lifelong learning systems per se that are seen to characterise western models.

Hee et al. (2013, 451) explain that the Confucian tradition focuses on human development as 'social cultivation'. Community identity is more important than individual self-actualisation so that:

a person is being pressed to accept the identity of, as well as an obligation to, the community that goes beyond one's personal life space ... Leaders work

for local citizens, appreciating their merits, and citizens support the leader by engaging themselves in the improvement and development of local life. Citizens are closely engaged in others' lives and develop caring relationships in this process. Thus a self-governing and living relationship gathers momentum ... The renewal of a city or a local organisation is possible by the connections between the communities of mutual interest, not the administration, as the locus of control and protection. (ibid.)

The focus here is on community activities, the development of social capital and cultural identity through an underlying sense of connectedness. Through this experience of doing things together with a common purpose, one learns. This philosophy is encapsulated in a project in Thailand called the 'Happy Farm', where community members take pride in working together to develop a working urban farm as an environmental resource and educational tool to build community awareness, sharing and learning together. From this, other social activities develop. As a result, the communities self-regulate and self-manage:

Communities leverage their fiscal self-reliance in strengthening their autonomy by attracting donations from local companies ... Although the government still directs communities in principle, the main characteristics [of the project] are gradually changed to a sort of social welfare institution combined with resident organisations like NPOs and NGOs in strengthening communities as independent organisations for people. (ibid., 464)

There are philosophical similarities in this Confucian model to those articulated in traditional African contexts and the organisational structure of these East Asian learning city initiatives is a potential learning resource for Africa.

Different service sectors have used the learning city notion to promote particular human development agendas. There are now promoters of Healthy or Green cities. Kearns (2012, 4) has encapsulated these initiatives as 'EcCoWell cities', my fifth category of domains:

There is a new generation of Learning Cities that reach out and connect up to address environment, health, cultural and well-being issues while continuing to address the lifelong learning, social justice, equity and community building initiatives that have been the traditional territory of Learning Cities.

Osborne et al. (2013) explain that the term EcCoWell captures four areas of concern: Ecology and Economy; Community and Culture; Well-being;

and Lifelong Learning. The Healthy City focus is given added impetus by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Healthiness encompasses more than biological fitness. It includes psychological and social health factors which include living in harmony, childhood development and social protection, solidarity and friendship. Indeed, there is much literature that has identified well-being among the wider benefits of participating in learning (e.g. Schuller et al. 2004).

The Green City is given similar global impetus by the European Union and OECD in the form of awards and guidelines for ‘green growth’ (Kearns 2012, 7). Respect for the environment is linked to economic benefits and quality of life and is regarded as a means of building ‘natural capital’. The cities of Stockholm, Copenhagen and Hamburg are listed as good practice models of green cities.

SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are relatively few publications which take a theoretical lens to examine the processes and relationships of learning city development. Often the issues that attract theoretical learning city debates are addressed in articles that do not necessarily make the link with the practitioner learning city discourses. So, for instance, Button et al. (2013) discuss issues of climate change and its impact on a small city location in the Philippines in the context of participatory development theory and climate change governance. They critique the rhetoric of participatory development as potentially over-simplifying solutions to complex situations.

Fitzgerald and Zientek (2015) are among the few authors who make a direct link between community engagement scholarship and learning cities. They use systems change theory to explore the role of service learning and community engagement to derive evidence to inform and contribute to practice. They explore the relationship between the four helixes of learning cities systems in a community engagement framework—higher education, civil society, business and government—and seven characteristics of community engagement scholarship. The characteristics include notions of innovation, risk taking, knowledge and evidence. They also discuss how community-university partnerships can increase the asset base for addressing complex problems through community-based participatory research. They specifically refer to the contribution of community knowledge to the sustainability of community solutions within an interdependent learning city context. In this way, the authors position universities as key players in

learning city partnerships whereby they not only contribute to building a culture of teaching and learning but also provide research expertise that engages the network of partners in a mutual learning process.

Hibbler and Scott (2015, 73), in the same journal issue, address the role of leisure as a humanising contribution to learning cities. They argue that leisure is 'a powerful agent for social change' and refer to the Chinese practice of using leisure as a teaching tool for 'life balance'. They draw on social network theory to explain how leisure activities can build social networks and contribute to enhanced productivity as a result of increased citizen well-being. Similarly, Howard et al. (2015) discuss the theoretical aspects of the health belief model as a means of structuring health education and strategies for health reform in cities. However, they argue that the effectiveness of any model depends on the availability of resources and infrastructure support to enable public health agencies to achieve the necessary networking and relationship building across different sectors. This 'community of practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, 1) approach to healthcare and behavioural change is a common feature of many African initiatives in relation to supporting people affected and infected by HIV and AIDS (Mosuo 2016).

A community of practice is normally understood to be a network collection of individuals who come together to share and learn from each other in relation to a particular topic. They use their social network connections to gather new learning and bring it to the collective membership for discussion and mutual learning. Although communities of practice often represent a relatively small number of people who form themselves into an identifiable cohort to address a particular concern or interest, the same principles of sharing, trust building and networking can be seen to apply to the learning cities notion, albeit on a somewhat grander scale. Learning cities are effectively networks of networks, and the learning that emerges through dialogue and interaction is necessarily complex. Countries are now devising innovative accreditation systems to recognise and give credit to the different ways in which people have learned informally or non-formally (see, e.g. the Korean credit bank system described by Youngwha 2015). The theoretical literature cited above shares similar ideas with the practice-based learning city literature. This embraces participation, interaction, knowledge sharing and dialogue amongst people and organisations who would not otherwise have come together for mutual learning: 'In a learning region, regional actors engage in collaboration and coordination for mutual benefit' (Simmie 2012, 427). There is a sense that this

movement, albeit originally instigated through an economistic agenda, has taken a life of its own and is recapturing the aspirational essence of lifelong learning, as envisioned some 30 years ago in the Delors report (Delors et al. 1996). Learning in learning cities is more than formally accredited learning. It is also about learning how to interact differently.

This chapter started, however, with the realisation that learning cities do not appear to have functioned sustainably in African contexts. On the assumption that learning cities are a good idea, it is worth looking in more detail at some of the identified challenges on the continent, and what role the university might play to give greater momentum to this phenomenon.

THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Very few countries in Africa have lifelong learning policies. Of the nine countries identified by UNESCO UIL (2014a) who have any adult learning policy at all, only seven actually refer to lifelong learning. Of those that do refer to lifelong learning, some only refer to it in terms of post-literacy (Aitchison and Alidou 2008).

The African participants' responses in both the UNESCO learning cities conference reports emphasised the scale of illiteracy and poverty challenges on the continent. Indeed, Sub-Saharan Africa has some of the lowest literacy rates, the highest early school leaving rates and lowest higher education participation rates in the world (Friesenhahn 2014). Other issues raised at the two conferences included a concern that in most African nations the majority of people, especially the poor, still live in rural areas and the dynamics between rural and urban areas need to be included in learning region plans. Finally, the need to take a community level approach to building learning motivation and the relative importance of universities as collaborating partners were also highlighted (UNESCO UIL 2014b, 2015b).

One of the most comprehensive reviews of the state of learning cities in Africa is discussed by Biao et al. (2013). The authors explain that colonial regimes effectively destroyed the continent's ancient city states and communitarian indigenous learning patterns, replacing them with formal, segmented education systems. African cities have grown out of all proportion to their planned infrastructure, resulting in informal 'slum' dwelling conditions, poor communication and service delivery systems and high crime rates. They emphasise that the learning city concept was born out of a European, industrialised and knowledge economy, even though the

‘wealth in indigenous Africa was of the social type’ (ibid., 476, citing Ayittey 2008). In order to make the learning city concept work in African contexts, it must address the causes behind, and realities of, the current ailments of each city. Since African urban dwellers often retain strong ties to their rural origins, both practically and spiritually, African learning regions need to take account of such rural linkages.

Biao et al. (2013) suggest that the core inhibitors to learning cities on the continent include a conflict of interest between academics and politicians. A further challenge is the instability of tenure of key government and academic champions so that there is no continuity of leadership. The Botswana initiative cited in the introduction to this chapter was premised on widespread consultation and needs analysis (Ntseane 2012; Molebatsi 2012) which ultimately failed to materialise due to changes in leadership in the university and local government. The lack of political will and long-term vision were also cited by Walters (2011) as inhibitors to maintaining sufficient momentum to generate a learning region in the Western Cape in South Africa.

Indeed the timespan of the good practice examples cited above can stretch across five or more years before the cities are able to provide strong evidence of changed behaviours or attitudes to learning. Other reflections on why it is so difficult to implement learning city plans emphasise the widespread poverty rates of illiteracy and unemployment which make it difficult to create a solid enough foundation from which to build new learning partnerships (Mwaikokesya 2012). Biao et al. (2013) also suggest that the absence or weakness of strong lifelong learning policies, along with limited human and financial resources, contribute to distancing the African context from models adopted in highly industrialised countries.

Nevertheless, the two examples of Botswana and the Western Cape did generate collaboration and interest in working together. Their common denominator was that the university played a major coordinating role in addition to its role as a research partner. In resource-starved contexts, the university may be able to provide additional infrastructure and material benefits that contribute to the coordination and organisational needs of partnership building. Indeed Mwaikokesya (2012) reminds us that one of the most successful learning region initiatives emanated from Tanzania during the presidency of Julius Nyerere in the 1960s and 1970s. Here the university contributed through its students to village development on a grand scale, resulting, at the time, in massive gains in school attendance and literacy levels.

A key ingredient that seems to emerge from other examples across Africa, notably West Africa and Ethiopia, is the attention that is paid to recognising localised or indigenous knowledges. This includes listening to the urban population's views about their own context specific vulnerabilities and strengths, so that they are involved in contributing solutions to their own identified problems. It also includes a strong leadership role from universities which both promote dialogue and develop evidence-based information about local conditions (Silver et al. 2013; Valdes-Cotera et al. 2015). Silver et al. refer specifically to issues of climate change and its impact on urbanised environments in West Africa. Valdes-Cotera et al. refer to an embryonic community learning programme spearheaded by Bahir Dar University in Ethiopia. The university in this instance is engaging with a range of stakeholders to develop relevant lifelong learning policies as well as act pragmatically to research and provide community services (Valdes-Cotera et al. 2015). In other words it seems that learning city movements in many African contexts need a strong community level foundation so that community building is bottom-up and steered by institutions which already have grass-roots connections. While the university as an entity may not appear to have such connections, it has the authority to make connections with those who do, such as civil society organisations and through staff and students who may live within the university catchment area.

Alternative models of learning city movements do exist on the continent. In the Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa, the Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE) has, since 2009, been functioning as a government led partnership to build capacity of local government professionals in the wider African region and beyond (www.mile.org.za). The focus is strongly on local government functions and providing workshops that provide local government officers with the skills to interact more effectively with their communities and perform relevant local government functions. The initiative is internationally funded and not directly focused on Durban City, although the province's two universities (Durban University of Technology and University of KwaZulu-Natal) are identified as partners who contribute research inputs into the planned training workshops. Although MILE functions as a collaborative partnership which includes civil society, it operates as a focused training organisation and does not engage directly with communities or move beyond its local government training brief. As such, although it purportedly is a member of a South African Cities Network, it was not possible to obtain

further information about such a network through a Google search. A more productive search link was made with South Africa's department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). This organisation focuses on learning exchanges between municipal practitioners regarding more effective use of public open spaces. These initiatives are indicators of learning networks in the form of communities of practice, but they seemingly do not share the same vision of a holistic, participatory learning culture that the wider learning cities movement addresses.

An example, in the same province of KwaZulu-Natal, of something more akin to the Confucian notion of learning cities was mentioned in Chap. 1 of this book. It has emerged in the form of a government plan for an 'Education Precinct' in one of the province's more marginalised geographical spaces on the outskirts of the city of Pietermaritzburg, some 80 kilometres north of Durban. This community region is called Imbali and it envelopes a university campus, further education college and other educational institutions. As yet, it is simply a plan (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2014), but is an opportunity for speculating on how a porous university might operate within a formally designated learning region or community. This will be referred to in Chap. 7. For now a reflection is offered on how the African university might contribute to the learning city movement as a whole.

LEARNING FROM THE LEARNING CITIES LITERATURE

The learning cities discourse expands the notion of university community engagement because it is premised on an ever expanding network of partnerships and aspirations to make learning visible, relevant and enjoyable. It is intersectoral and usually formally supported at a political membership level. It is also linked to global networks and agendas for wellbeing and change. Universities are rarely central in the international examples but in African contexts they are often lead players. Learning cities are unique to their context. The extent to which they contribute to developing a new learning culture, contribute to economic development, or build social cohesion and social capital depends on how they are sustained and how they are evaluated. As yet, there are few theoretical models for analysing the partnership relationships and processes of learning cities. Do the capabilities and asset-based community development perspectives provide further insights into how they might or do operate? There are few references to these concepts in the learning cities literature. Fitzgerald

and Zientek (2015) identify community assets as a resource for addressing complex problems. Kearns and Ishumi (2012) refer to Sen (2001) in terms of the holistic aspirations to increase people's freedoms and sense of well-being. The African examples position universities in a steering role as well as in their more technically associated research role. Fitzgerald and Zientek (2015), in the context of community engagement scholarship in the United States, position higher education as the fourth helix in the learning cities partnership framework. They specifically mention the contribution that students can make to the co-creation of knowledge through community-based participatory research. But in the Confucian model of learning cities the majority of players are ordinary citizens.

It is suggested that, in view of Africa's colonial history and experience of colonised ownership of knowledge, grass-roots community relations must be the starting point for building learning communities. Without trust and a sense that ordinary people have a voice, it is difficult to envisage how learning and its potential benefits can be a tool to build social capital and social cohesion. Universities, as the metaphorical control towers of knowledge, have to be visible partners in that trust-building exercise. So, a capabilities-focused evaluative exercise that explores the extent to which people have acquired new freedoms to lead the lives they have reason to value—including the extent to which their adaptive preferences have been challenged, would, I believe, contribute to this new vision for community engagement. The next chapter examines in more detail two African initiatives that have applied some of the learning city ideas in efforts to make their university boundaries more porous.

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Two Case Examples of Community Engagement

INTRODUCTION

In Chap. 5 I highlighted that the principles behind the learning cities notion of a networked learning culture that embraces a specific geographical boundary appear not to have captured the imagination of African countries in the same way that they seem to have done so in other parts of the world. Furthermore, European models in particular have strong political leadership and universities play different partnership roles in these learning cities.

I also noted that, in Africa, rural populations still outnumber urban populations. There is often a particular dynamic between urban and rural dwellers in many African states. Urban dwellers retain strong family ties with their rural roots. When I worked in Botswana and Lesotho, for instance, university staff would frequently travel back to their home villages at weekends and for holiday periods. Their rural connections would include a physical residence, perhaps some farm land, and, of course, other relatives.

I also showed that where learning city initiatives did develop in African contexts, universities invariably played a leadership role. Historically, African universities have embraced a nation building focus, as exemplified most coherently in the Tanzanian context during the regime of Julius Nyerere. In the 1980s, therefore, university students in Tanzania would contribute to the development needs of rural villages and would only

graduate on completion of a report by the village chief. The most relevant contemporary model of learning cities in the literature that I reviewed in Chap. 5 suggested that a Confucian, grass-roots-led model, which emerges organically through ever expanding networks with strong community representation and a focus on caring, might be the most appropriate for African contexts.

However, African universities are usually located in urban centres. Compared with their European and other global counterparts, they are few in number and more scattered. The extent to which African universities can become ‘porous’ to communities which may be several 100 kilometres away from the institution, therefore, challenges the neighbourhood model which was a potential feature of my own diagram in Chap. 2 (Fig. 2.1). Moreover, it is possible that African universities do function as learning region hubs without giving themselves the nomenclature that encapsulates the global literature on this topic. For instance, the Makerere University engagement relationships, which I briefly described in Chap. 3, share many principles of a learning region.

It seems that learning networks do exist on the continent along geographically defined boundaries where the university plays a lead role in ensuring continuity, promoting formal agreements and networking opportunities. The geographical spaces and populations are likely to be smaller than some of those identified on a global scale, and the network of partners may be less politically connected. Nevertheless, they represent dynamic efforts to transform attitudes to learning in contexts of starved resources and extreme deprivation. At the time of writing this chapter, my PhD student, Loveness Museva was in the process of studying the MSU project for her doctoral thesis. She provided me with the university’s community engagement plan and I obtained other information from the internet. With her permission I drew on some of her own communications concerning her collected interview data for clarification of some of the literature, but for ethical reasons, and to avoid infringing on her own study this information was used sparingly. For the UFS case study I spent two days on a study visit to the university and some of its engagement sites, with the assistance of one of its champions, Heidi Morgan. I spoke to key stakeholders and obtained information about its evolution and operations. This constitutes the main part of this chapter since the information was obtained first hand. Together they provide a basis for examining some challenges and opportunities for universities that wish to foster a culture of learning which leads to community empowerment through community engagement.

ZIMBABWE

In 2014 Zimbabwe's Human Development Index ranking was 155 out of 187 countries (countryeconomy 2015). With a population of 15,602,751 it is a landlocked country situated in Southern Africa. It obtained its independence from colonial rule in 1980. Approximately 60% of the population is rural, where 70% of women are smallholder farmers (Chiroso 2013). In 2016 the country is recorded as having an adult basic literacy rate of 86.4% (countrymeters.info/en/Zimbabwe), although this is lower in rural areas. However, only about 4% of males and 3% of females register for tertiary education in the country (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency 2014). Similar to South Africa, community engagement was enshrined in national policy through the Zimbabwe Education Act of 1991 (Government of Zimbabwe 1991). There are a total of 15 universities in the country and the MSU was established in 1999 in Gweru as the fourth of nine government financed universities. It has a satellite campus in the mining town of Zvishavane and other campuses located in Gweru itself. The university has nine faculties (Agriculture, Arts, Commerce, Education, Engineering, Law, Science, Social Sciences and Medicine) with a centralised university community engagement policy and structure which involves all faculties. Its community engagement strategy, as guided by the university mission (Midlands State University, n.d.-a), is to lay a future foundation for community development sustainability.

The first three objectives of the university's community engagement terms of reference (Midlands State University n.d.-b, 8) are as follows:

- (a) To assist in the transfer of knowledge generated through theory, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and research in the university for the benefit of urban and rural communities in Zimbabwe.
- (b) To periodically review, document, approve and supervise projects and activities of departments in various communities.
- (c) To carry out due diligence on all applications for partnerships from internal and external stakeholders and submit recommendations to the work-related learning committee.

These objectives reflect a knowledge transfer model which positions the university in a leadership role whereby knowledge transfer is essentially a uni-directional activity. Indigenous knowledge in this model implicitly is implicated in research rather than a knowledge exchange relationship. Further reading of the community engagement plan indicates that the

community is also regarded as a work experience resource for the university students (Midlands State University [n.d.-b](#), 3). Therefore, although the objective of community engagement is to work in partnership for the benefit of communities, the notion of reciprocity is not evident as an ideal goal. Indeed the word does not appear in the document. There is a sense then, that communities are needy, the university has resources, skills and knowledge, and these resources can contribute to community development. The university can benefit from the relationship because students may gain work experience and there are possibilities for communities to become laboratories for research and knowledge generation. This does not negate the value of the community engagement work for community members, but it does create a relationship dynamic that, as written in the community engagement vision, privileges the university as the lead partner.

The formalised structure for community engagement throughout the university is well-organised and supported at senior management level. The formal community engagement committee is a subcommittee of the work-related learning committee which is answerable to Senate. This structure also indicates that there is an underlying assumption that community engagement has specific value in terms of student experience. All students at MSU undergo a year's work-related placement. Community engagement placements are one work option that can be offered to the student. The community engagement committee is chaired by an Executive Dean, appointed by the Vice Chancellor. Its membership consists of the Vice Chancellor, Deans and Directors of various aspects of the university, such as student affairs, estates, work-related learning, faculties, student representative, department representatives, finance, ICT, information and public relations. The community engagement committee fosters several subcommittees such as a committee to assess the feasibility of new partnership proposals and faculty level committees. Monitoring and reporting systems are in place as an internal control mechanism, and the university committee structure does not include external membership.

A community Advisory Board, however, to oversee community engagement matters, is 'made up of representatives of community members, MSU academic and support staff, government, civil society, business, funding agencies, traditional leaders, and undergraduate and postgraduate students' (Midlands State University [n.d.-b](#), 12). This, therefore, is the committee which allows interaction with the public and space for exchange of ideas.

The overall objective is encapsulated as capacity enhancement of communities through partnership relations and deployment of students on work-related learning placements and staff as disciplinary experts. The goal is to address 'life improvement issues' (ibid., 12) and ensure co-ownership and 'mutually agreed terms' to guide partnerships (ibid., 5). This latter statement is one of the few instances in the community engagement strategy which offers a dialogic space for decision making. A further opportunity for community voice is in the structure for student placements supervision which follows the Nyererean ideology mentioned earlier. Student placements are supervised by a community chief or headman or other appointed person from within the community. Since poverty is a core feature of rural communities, many projects include an income generation component.

Funding of community engagement is based on an interesting formula which allows for institutional commitment to this work. Fund-raising for community engagement is encouraged, along with volunteering training or teaching, and development of income generation opportunities. A community engagement budget therefore derives partly from the student's payment of work-related learning fees, partly from agreed community generated income and partly from the central university funding allocation. Research, interpreted as engaged scholarship and the development of indigenous knowledge, is a central plank to legitimise community engagement activity within the university. Within this overall framework, community projects develop as informal or formal partnerships between the university, the community and, where relevant, other organisations such as local government agencies, non-government agencies or businesses. The establishment of community engagement centres or projects within particular geographical regions is encouraged. One such region is Mberengwa District.

Mberengwa District

Mberengwa is in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe and located between 130 and 200 kilometres from the MSU. It has a population of approximately 180,000 people (Dube 2013). The main languages are Shona and Ndebele and the religion is largely Christian. It is over 1500 metres above sea level and as a result of climate change is now a drought prone area. It is one of the poorest areas of the country. Livestock rearing and rain-fed subsistence agriculture are the main livelihoods, though other

activities include illegal mining from local mines, brick moulding, craft making and gardening. The male household members are likely to move further afield, including border crossing into Botswana or South Africa to obtain work, leaving many households as female headed (Chiroso 2013; Dube 2013).

Zindowe village has approximately 38 households in Ward 19 of Mberengwa (Dube 2013). It has been particularly susceptible to climate change, resulting in the drying up of rivers and lack of access to clean water. Hunger and starvation have contributed to inability to pay school fees and falling school attendance. Villagers have resorted to compensatory measures such as digging wells near the river bed and growing only drought resistant small grain crops such as sorghum and cash crops such as cotton. Non-governmental organisations commonly provide assistance with food and water but Chiroso (2013) states that this has contributed to developing a dependency syndrome among the villagers.

The MSU embarked in 2010 on a climate change adaptation programme to help the Zindowe community diversify their livelihoods. It built a multidisciplinary training centre that serves approximately six village settlement or grazing areas. The foci are food security and the training of youth and women. Projects such as bee keeping, gardening and poultry have been introduced alongside planting of indigenous trees, with a view to encouraging use of indigenous knowledge systems which contribute to predicting seasonal changes and improving harvests. Community members are encouraged to draw on indigenous fruits and vegetables for sources of nutrition. MSU staff and students have assisted local government initiatives to drill boreholes and NGOs are encouraging villagers to do work in return for supplementary feeding programmes as a way to avoid passive acceptance of hand-outs. The community also worked together to build a dam (Chiroso 2013). At the time of my student's 'transect walk' through the village in 2016 (an interactive walk through Zindowe with key stakeholders) there were two dams within a space of 22 kilometres, serving the six grazing areas and two primary and two secondary schools. A church, business centre, clinic, a few shops and government offices were situated at one side of Zindowe while the project training centre was more central (Museva forthcoming).

The engagement project was initiated by a university staff member who had land and family connections in Zindowe. He took part in a meeting with village heads that had been called by a local councillor to discuss the village's challenges. He raised the idea of university participation in

developing the area and returned the following week with a multidisciplinary team from the university to listen to the community's needs and priorities. A community committee was established and the staff member dedicated some of his land for the site of the training centre (Gumbo and Nyawo 2014). Gumbo and Nyawo (2014) indicate that the training centre is substantial, with plans for expansion. The site includes premises for students' residences while on placement and plans for a vocational skills unit with library and sports facilities. Community members contributed to the construction of the training centre and nearby dam. Students served as resources for conducting needs analyses and also some of the practical stages of developing income generating projects such as poultry and honey making. Literacy classes for adults took place in the primary schools. In-service training workshops were also provided to local teachers to help improve school examination results (*ibid.*). The village thus acted as a mini learning network with ideas generated from within the community itself and additional ideas provided by university staff, with expertise support from students. Government extension workers and NGOs contributed within the partnership arrangement, but the university retained a strong controlling presence.

The positive outcomes of this initiative include enhanced income generation at community level. Families are now able to afford school fees, there are working subcommittees at grass-roots level and food security has been enhanced. Gumbo and Nyawo's (2014) claims were substantiated and elaborated on by my student's own data. The proceeds of the introduced income generation projects and the accessibility of water from the dam had clearly enhanced the quality of life for some. My student's interviews with some of the women indicated that there was an increased sense of ownership over indigenous practices which were now contributing to crop production through, for instance, the community's decision to use animal manure and vegetable waste instead of expensive commercial fertilisers (Museva forthcoming).

However, Gumbo and Nyawo (2014) also referred to some power struggles at community level, challenges of motivation among university staff towards the concept of community engagement and concerns that the community perceived the university's role in the form of a donor rather than facilitator. The transition from dependency to self-reliance, therefore, was fragile. My student's data, collected in 2015 and 2016, confirmed that these power struggles were connected to the fact that the university staff member's ownership of the donated land had created tensions over

decision making at grass-roots level and confusion amongst community members as to how much control they had over the project as a whole (Museva forthcoming). One solution had been to develop local subcommittees (Gumbo and Nyawo 2014) and my student's data indicated that a reorganised committee structure which no longer allowed the landowner to chair the project had broadened community interest in the project. Others were organising themselves into self-help groups to manage local initiatives, thus indicating that there were signs of community agency on a small scale. There was also evidence among the female community members in my student's interviews with them that the women felt their voices had been heard as a result of consultations with MSU staff. Furthermore, since the women were now generating income they were becoming less dependent on MSU resources, such as diesel, to drive the water pumps (Museva forthcoming).

After five years of targeted and focused intervention from the university and participating NGO and government workers within this drought stricken and impoverished location, there were signs that villagers were beginning to regenerate a sense of purpose and pride in their own destiny. But even in such a geographically confined location as Zindowe, the process of developing community ownership required constant dialogue and review in the face of internal power struggles and confusion over who was making decisions.

The project is a considerable distance from the university. This means that university visits to the site are infrequent and transport is costly. Community issues at grass-roots level inevitably have to be resolved by community members. My student's data indicated that there were opportunities for Zindowe's leaders to attend Advisory Board meetings at the university but the extent to which this happened depended on availability of transport and time. There was little evidence of systematic monitoring, as illustrated in the paucity of publications about the project. My student's own PhD study intends to fill the gap in understanding of the day to day processes and relationships between university, local government and community.

To what extent does this project address the capability concerns for development that enables people to lead the life they have reason to value? To what extent are community assets realised and utilised to their maximum possibility? Finally, to what extent can this project be understood as a learning region? One solution for making the university accessible to the community is to take the university to the people. This is a common

community engagement strategy. The availability of student residences within the university supported training centre effectively create an on-site learning resource for the university and the community. Learning activities are targeted and focused on immediately identified needs, primarily the development of new income generation activities and economic management of them. Government ministries and extension workers have been involved in working with the university in building dams, planting indigenous plant species and maintaining new crops; school teachers have benefited from further training which in turn has improved the pass rates of local learners. Women who were previously not attending literacy classes are now learning; many have learned new income generating skills and committee management skills. Learning, therefore, has evolved organically through ideas that were generated by community members. After five years there are signs of enhanced quality of life.

But the university goal for the area to be self-sufficient and self-sustainable is not yet realised. In communities that are ravaged by poverty and hunger, progress is inevitably slow. Without basic survival resources, as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1970) has shown, it is difficult to reach the self-actualisation goals that include freedom to lead a sustainable life. The capability perspective and asset-based community development theory are premised on first recognising assets that are already embedded in communities and then exploring how those assets can be converted into freedoms and capabilities. The university can be a facilitator in this process, but should also be seen as a learning partner. The learning city notion is premised on nurturing a learning culture through networks and collaborations that together are more than the sum of their parts. The community engagement philosophy tends to concentrate on similar aspirations but on a smaller scale and often with time-limited goals. The project, therefore, contained elements of learning city ideas, but functioned more as a community engagement development model on similar lines to the Makerere University project in Uganda that was described in Chap. 3. There were signs that networks were forming at community level, and there were also signs of conversion factors such as training opportunities that translated into enhanced livelihoods and therefore a greater sense that people were leading lives that gave them a sense of pride in their achievements. Perhaps the university could do more, however, to raise expectations that stretch beyond subsistence level sustainability. Similarly, perhaps the university could encourage community members to believe that they have something to contribute to university understanding: for instance,

about cultural values, leadership models or factors that reflect community resilience. Perhaps these ideas might emerge over time when the community's basic gains show evidence of long-term sustainability.

The South African case study offers a differently structured and less established model of engagement.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa covers the southern tip of the African continent with a population of just over 54 million. After generations of divisive and oppressive apartheid rule, the country secured its first non-racial democratic election in 1994. Drawing on the racial categorisation of its apartheid regime, which is still used today for equality monitoring, the population consists of 80.2% 'black' Africans, 8.4% 'white' people, 8.8% of mixed race who are categorised as 'coloured', with 2.5% of the South Asian and Chinese population classified as 'Indian' and 'Asian', respectively (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] World Factbook 2016). There are 11 officially recognised languages, including English. The majority of the country consists of Christian denominations, with a small percentage of 2.5% who are Muslim. South Africa is more multiracial and heterogeneous than its neighbouring countries and regularly receives refugees and economic migrants from the rest of the continent. The population that is identified as literate is 94.3%. Sixty-five per cent are estimated to occupy urban areas. The country is ranked 116 out of 188 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index for 2014 (UNDP 2015). It is regarded as a middle-income country although, as has already been highlighted in earlier chapters, inequalities are among the highest in the world; rural areas are extremely poor, often with untarred roads, poor electricity and water services and dysfunctional education provision.

The higher education system underwent substantial reorganisation following the democratic elections of 1994 and many historically 'black' universities were merged with historically 'white' universities. Participation in higher education is currently 19% of the eligible population, although only 16% of students are identified within the South African category as black Africans, with a disproportionate percentage of 56% registered as white (Friesenhahn 2014). The UFS is one of 23 government-funded universities in the country. Many universities now have multiple campuses. The UFS has a campus in the rural Qwaqwa region in the east of the Free State province while its main campus is

in Bloemfontein. It also has a small, satellite campus including student and staff residential accommodation in the rural town of Trompsburg some 120 kilometres south of Bloemfontein, serving a similar role to the satellite Zindowe campus in Zimbabwe. Afrikaans is widely spoken in the Free State. However, approximately 60% of the population are Basotho in origin with Sesotho as their first language. The University has taken its community engagement mandate seriously, with a website dedicated to promoting its community engagement policy, strategy and activities, in which service learning plays a large part. The community engagement policy was approved in 2006 under the name ‘community service’ (UFS 2006) although the policy itself subdivides into different forms of community service which include a definition of ‘community engagement’, as:

Continuously negotiated collaborations and partnerships between the UFS and the interest groups that it interacts with, aimed at building and exchanging the knowledge, skills, expertise and resources required to develop and sustain society. (UFS 2006, 9)

The UFS definition and policy statements provide an interesting contrast to the MSU wording. The UFS highlights aspirations of cooperation and collaboration while the community engagement site emphasis is on developing ‘social responsibility’ among its students and enhancing the ‘role of higher education in social and economic development’ (UFS 2016, pages unnumbered). The emphasis on the university website, surprisingly is on ‘empowering our students’ rather than empowering the local community (ibid.). Thus the UFS positions itself in similar fashion to the MSU in that the university is identified as a staging ground for ongoing community interaction. Perhaps the most distinctive policy departure from the MSU approach is that the UFS sees the community engagement relationship as one which aims to ‘exchange knowledge, skills and resources’, thus paving the way for a more reciprocal arrangement with potential partners. Indeed the policy (UFS 2006, 7) focuses on ‘mutually beneficial services to communities within a concept of reciprocal engagement and collaborative partnerships’ and the ‘mutual search for sustainable solutions’. In this respect there is a greater sense of shared vision building in engagement partnerships. ‘Reciprocity’ (ibid., 13) and recognition of indigenous knowledge and the value of community ‘social capital’ (ibid., 16) are included in the text.

A coordination structure is outlined through a Chief Directorate for community service, within a department for community engagement which reports to the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs. There are devolved committees at faculty level. Service learning is identified as the resource for embedding community engagement into the university curriculum and this becomes the main rationale for allocating centralised budget support alongside research related activity, while project initiatives are also expected to raise their own funds for targeted projects. Significantly, however, there is a community engagement transport fleet. Included among the goals of community engagement research is that community members themselves are ‘empowered’ to acquire research skills (ibid., 20).

Community engagement is thus an embedded activity within the university and there are many examples of flagship projects which are established partnerships involving different disciplines. The Edu-village project is one of the more recent initiatives, designed as a multidisciplinary project, but championed within the Health Sciences faculty. Distinctive from Zindowe, however, Edu-village comprises a non-hierarchical and informal network of partners who are ‘made up of community members, existing private, public and third sector organisations/structures and volunteers’ (Morgan 2015, 1). Their geographical space is less defined but mostly focuses on the Bloemfontein area and southern Free State in the region of Trompsburg.

Edu-Village

The aim of the Edu-village is to design universal pathways across these existing stakeholder partnerships and initiatives enabling skill development and transfer. The universal pathway is an inclusive and individualised skill training internship (e.g. Eco-building or Edu-care) for marginalised individuals which supports the development of self-sustainability, unified growth and transformation. (Morgan 2015, 1)

There are four guiding principles for Edu-village learning. These are ‘Interdependency’ (reciprocal learning), ‘Access to expertise’ (an ecological approach to learning as a continuous cycle of knowledge transfer), ‘extended learning platform’ (opportunities for graded enhancement of skills, knowledge and understanding) and ‘progressive education’ (on-site training with immediate practical application) (ibid.). The Edu-village concept symbolically captures the notion of a village domain of people

who know each other and interact in a collective space as and when it is appropriate for particular individuals and groups. The village in this context, however, is a virtual location, covering a disparate set of organisations, individuals and places but connected through communication networks that are largely sustained through technology such as mobile phone text messages and phone calls, email, WhatsApp and social media such as Facebook. A database of individuals and their contact details is held at the UFS, although this constantly needs updating as the circle of contacts ripples outwards. There is no formal membership, and no formal structure. The network of organisations is held together by social capital concepts of shared vision, mutual trust and reciprocity (Mathie and Cunningham 2005) and founded on the South African concept of *ubuntu*, roughly translated as humanness, caring and sense of ethical responsibility towards one another (Maistry 2011). Waghid (2014, 267), for example, claims that *ubuntu* as a moral concept is ‘aimed at developing a conception of education that can contribute towards imagination, deliberation and responsibility’:

By provoking students towards imaginative action and a renewed consciousness of possibility, they will learn to acknowledge humanity in themselves and others; by encouraging students to work cooperatively through sharing, engagement and remaining open to the new and unexpected, they will contribute towards cultivating learning communities. (ibid.)

The communitarian nature of *ubuntu* shares similar I/we philosophical foundations to the Confucian values that were articulated in the Taiwan learning city project, which I discussed in Chap. 5. These values were articulated as citizens engaging with each other and developing caring relationships, with connections forming between communities of mutual interest rather than an administrative structure as the locus of control. The emphasis on caring is central to both philosophies.

The Edu-village has evolved organically through ‘bottom-up’ connections and includes a strong NGO presence. It now consists of a ‘crew’ of grass-roots community members and connections to local government employees (such as teachers, occupational therapists), NGO leaders and individual academic UFS staff members from Occupational Therapy (OT) and Economic Sciences. Students from OT constitute a regular core of human resources in the form of volunteers but also in terms of service learning placements as part of their own professional training. The OT

involvement is significant because the OT goal is to ‘help people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations)’ (American Occupational Therapy Association 2016, pages unnumbered). There is, therefore, a strong, practical skills building focus in Edu-village activities. The learning ‘spaces’ and activities are scattered across the province but tend to centre around Bloemfontein and the rural town of Trompsburg. In addition, the Edu-village partners foster national and international connections in order to expand their human resource network but also as a means of securing new learning opportunities.

Learning Programmes and Initiatives

The learning initiatives operate in several ways. On the one hand, OT students undergo their own reflective learning during project placements, as a feature of the service learning component of their studies. The students provide, share and learn about skills development within schools, libraries, and NGO organisations catering for vulnerable or marginalised populations with a view to enabling personal growth and independent living. Since the OT training itself aims to develop skills for independent living, the community engagement placements are a natural resource for the academic programme.

On the other hand grass-roots community members (known as the ‘crew’) have been trained in eco-building skills by an NGO called Start Living Green, managed by an academic staff member, Anita Venter, in the Department of Economic Sciences. This training intentionally merges indigenous knowledge practices (use of traditional building materials) with more technically tested building principles and includes the use of contemporary waste resources such as tyres and bottles. These community members then cascade their skills to other community members both formally and informally and serve as a knowledge resource within their township settlements as well as contributing to projects that the service learning students participate in. The building trainees are given an informal certificate of skills acquisition after completion of their learning pathway by Anita, who is also qualified in eco-building. The training sites are situated within existing projects or township settlements so that people work together to construct a real building or residential home. Community members, alongside UFS students, work together as volunteers or trainees as action learners in the building programme. Thus, the learning is made available to the surrounding residents as they watch and take part in the construction process.

Two other forms of learning are included in the expanding Edu-village team of participants. An annual, three-day *Indaba*, which closely resembles the learning cities concept of learning festivals, takes place within the University premises in Bloemfontein. There are plans to extend the *Indaba* to Trompsburg. The *Indaba* was initiated by an NGO, Bloemshelter, and consists of an opportunity to display and sell various crafts and skills that have been learned by the different communities in and around Bloemfontein. It is also a space for NGOs and other education providers to offer taster sessions across a range of skills and crafts. The *Indaba* is the main open learning space in which the general public can participate. It thus serves as an advertising resource for expanding the Edu-village membership but also for people to acquire the idea of learning as an aspiration and achievement for its own sake. Participants can acquire certificates of skills achievement during these three days from the various organisations that take part.

Although many of the informal learning pathways are not accredited, a more formalised learning opportunity takes place through a global learning initiative called Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL 2016). GULL is an online resource that operates through affiliated NGOs and ‘provides access to lifelong learning for people in communities and for workplace organisations around the world. ... [It] uses self-directed action learning to help individuals, communities and organisations to sustain learning and apply the outcomes’ (gullonline.org). This is a staged and certificated reflective learning programme for personal development which encourages participants to cascade their learning to new participants, thus promoting the four principles of Edu-village. The GULL programme can be accessed at a multitude of levels and requires no formal entry qualifications. A university staff member was taking part in the programme, as were community beneficiaries of an NGO for abused families. The potential for GULL certificated programmes to expand across the Edu-village concept was already under discussion during my visit.

The Edu-Village Sites and Partners

I visited a number of NGOs and met several students and community members who had taken part in one or more of the above initiatives. The focus of Edu-village’s work is to contribute to the personal and skills development needs of the most marginalised sectors of society. This includes people with physical and/or learning disabilities, children and adults infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, families and individuals

in distress, such as women and children escaping abusive circumstances, homeless men, orphans and vulnerable children. Many of the projects are situated in rurally isolated settlements with very limited access to industry, essential services or conventional building materials. Water is often in short supply and available only via standpipes which serve large populations of shack dwellers. The most accessible resources are discarded plastic packaging, bare soil and sunlight.

The project activities include building eco-friendly houses, the use of eco-building techniques to build a play park, a skate board park, constructing furniture and crafts out of waste material, organising a health fair and contributing to the *Indaba* events. The emphasis in all projects is to build on what people already know, the transfer and sharing of knowledge and the cascade effect of passing on new learning to other community members by community members themselves. The Edu-village participants, therefore, also operate in several collectives, and through their organisations, as intersecting communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). While a core membership of university, community ‘crew’ and NGO staff maintain the network of resource and skills sharing, others, such as the students or other organisations, filter in and out as and when the need for connection seems appropriate.

An overriding philosophy that guides the Edu-village concept is that all individuals and communities have assets which can be developed and contribute to the learning of others. The students who had participated as part of their training emphasised how they had learned from the community to adapt their training to suit the context of people’s lives. Their own participation in building projects meant that they had to contextualise their occupational skills training and development role within real life contexts where people were encouraged to utilise newly acquired skills for practical construction as well as entrepreneurship. They highlighted that working with the ‘crew’ had informed their own practice and taught them to respect the assets of community members to inform their own understanding of OT in context specific situations. Similarly, the university staff emphasised that the Edu-village relationships had informed and changed the university curriculum and the way in which service learning operated in the OT programme.

It is not unusual for community members who acquire new skills and sense of self-esteem to decide to move away from their grass-roots locations into ‘greener pastures’. It was significant, therefore, that the people I spoke to—both ‘crew’ members and residents in the shelter for abused

families—stated that their goal was to give back to their communities, to transfer their newly acquired knowledge with a view to improving the lives of others. A former taxi driver, for instance, who had recovered from a stroke and achieved eco-building qualifications, stated that although he could go back to taxi driving, he did not want to. He would rather contribute to the learning needs of others in his township settlement and earn his meagre stipend to contribute to further eco-building projects as and when they arose through Edu-village.

In a similar vein, it is not unusual for universities to experience power tensions with community members. In this project, the lack of a hierarchical or formalised structure means that participants rely on their social capital and *ubuntu* ethos to maintain a working relationship through the shared goals of community and individual empowerment. The manager of the NGO for abused families, for instance, stated that he had been looking for a venue for hosting the first *Indaba*. He was nervous of entering the university but a mutual contact encouraged him to speak to Heidi Morgan about using university premises. He emphasised that he had been made to feel welcome in the university and this experience had also helped him revise his own perceptions about the institution. One of the crew members expressed similar trepidation about the university as ‘holy ground’ but confirmed again that once she had attended the *Indaba* she felt ‘at home because of the manner in which we were treated’. Although I asked others about how they felt about the university as an entity, there was a sense that the university was seen as just one partner among many. The set of skills resources within the network was the focus for sharing and developing new ideas. Each project became a spring board for new projects.

It must be noted, however, that the underlying power differentials are substantial in this project. All professional staff, including NGO leaders, are white. All the programme participants are black African and the majority are multiply marginalised by virtue of their socio-economic circumstances, in addition to which some have physical or learning disabilities. The onus is on the advantaged white population to manage this power differential.

To what extent does this project have political support, both within government and within the university itself? To what extent do community members who benefit from the Edu-village interventions manage to convert community assets into a capability set to lead the life they have reason to value? What evidence is there that communities are making expanded choices and demonstrating an enhanced sense of agency?

As an entity the university institution is battling to overcome its heritage of apartheid settlement patterns and behaviours. Community members have to overcome their own resistances and suspicions of the minority white population in highly unequal contexts. With such distinctive power dimensions already embedded in the learning pathways, it is perhaps a strength that the project operates informally and there are no hierarchical structures to intensify these differences.

The national higher education policy guidelines, and government mandate, for community engagement provide political legitimacy to the activities, particularly as they are embedded in teaching and learning practice and the OT curriculum. The economic scientist Anita Venter, undertakes research into eco-building which also legitimises her participation as a practitioner researcher. Heidi Morgan emphasised that the academic programmes were meeting SDG and WHO targets and students were achieving their qualifications. The government departments of Health and Education and the national Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF) were seen as partners of the Edu-village concept and therefore further helped to legitimise its activities.

In relation to evaluating community outcomes, the project, at the time of writing this chapter, had only been operating for approximately one year. Empirical evidence of outcomes and sustainability had not yet been collected. Individual community learners presented personal stories of increased sense of self-worth and hope for the future. It was harder to find evidence of organised community ownership in terms of maintaining or sustaining the learned outputs or products within the learning sites. There was a sense that the university OT programme and the community crew were the main source of continuity rather than community members themselves at each site where the learning activity had taken place. Compared with the MSU project, therefore, there appeared to be no self-identified committees to oversee maintenance of the community constructions. The fluidity of this network relationship reflects the Edu-village concept itself. While the university is clearly a key player in ensuring the evolution of Edu-village learning pathways, the main proponents emphasised the advantages of a horizontal project structure that relies on dialogue and shared understandings to get things done. There is no overall coordinating committee, a preferred arrangement by the key players. This administrative fluidity, whilst a strength for breaking down power barriers, could also be seen as a weakness at community level because it demands no overall agency or authority to take charge. There were signs, therefore,

that while individuals had gained an enhanced sense of self-worth against considerable odds, they had not yet begun to organise themselves for sustainable livelihood development. But this project was only one year old.

There are ways in which the project might evolve. For instance, perhaps a stronger research element would help to embed wider university support for such a networked approach to community engagement. While the ideas of community-based research and community research partnerships were under discussion, these are areas which are as yet undeveloped and which could provide valuable evidence to inform policy. While Edu-village's fluid administration structure has so far been a strength, it might need, at some point, to become more formalised. Without a clearly defined constitution and headquarters database there may come a time when the informal social capital relations become too unwieldy and potential funders may find the structure too intangible. Equally, the absence of formal accreditation structures for learning among people who are striving to develop themselves may, for some individuals, inhibit aspirations to lead a life that would enable them to enter the world of their professional counterparts. There is also potential for the Edu-village concept, through an extended *Indaba*, to be utilised to reach a broader range of community participants so that the provider-beneficiary differences might be blurred more effectively.

Nevertheless, the Edu-village concept has captured the imagination of a wide range of services and there is evidence that the university has managed to facilitate entry into and out of the university in a way that has opened up new possibilities and reciprocal partnerships around the concept of learning. It serves as a strong advocate for asset-based development theory and contributes new ideas for how a capabilities model of development can maximise the use of partnerships through dialogue and accessible communications technology. Most significantly it encapsulates an Africanised notion of learning as a collective endeavour founded on the *ubuntu* principles of trust and humanness and a 'renewed consciousness of possibility' (Waghid 2014, 267).

REFLECTIONS ON THE CASE EXAMPLES

Community change is a long-term goal of any community engagement relationship. The dialogic process of facilitating community agency on a collective scale, particularly among populations that have experienced marginalisation and disempowerment on a massive scale, takes time.

Both these case examples demonstrate what can be achieved in contexts of extreme deprivation. Both have differently articulated goals for self-reliance and community empowerment. If the community engagement and learning cities concepts were to be placed on a continuum, these two cases would fall somewhere in between. The MSU project leans more towards a community engagement model of adopting a village community and pouring a range of resources into that one space in order to facilitate, in a structured way, self-sufficiency. Nevertheless it adopts the learning cities model of developing a plan, and utilising a coordinated structure of all stakeholders. Power dynamics in the formalised structure both contribute to ownership challenges and create opportunities for changing forms of ownership through a process of ongoing monitoring and dialogue as the project evolves. The village-centre model reflects the model village approach of Makerere University in Uganda which might be a further learning resource for MSU.

Both projects use satellite campuses to bring learning closer to their communities and make use of local premises in order to make learning accessible. Both projects experience the additional challenge of maintaining links with locations that are several kilometres away from the central campus and transport issues are managed by different funding models, according to the financial resources of each institution.

The UFS project leans more towards the learning cities model in terms of maintaining celebratory events through annual *Indabas*. It also takes a regional approach in that projects and learning opportunities travel across the province via the network of trainers and providers. An expanded network of people, organisations and institutions communicate and share ideas and resources. The grass-roots-led skills development focus is a potential resource for self-sufficiency and there is evidence that this is achieved at an individual level for people who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to lead independent lives. The UFS project does not have a central learning community or organised committee structure. The potential weakness of this means that there appears to be a less collective vision for community empowerment or self-sufficiency but it is also an organic, evolving project that is still in its infancy. There is a sense that the MSU project objective is economic empowerment, while the UFS project objective is enhanced well-being and self-esteem, thus reflecting its *ubuntu* philosophy. The Confucian-based Happy Farm example, cited in Chap. 5, might be a potential model that Edu-village would relate to.

The next chapter seeks to draw on the extensive range of examples and approaches that have been reviewed so far in order to expand on the conceptual vision and model that was outlined in Chap. 2.

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The Porous University in Action

INTRODUCTION

It is significant that recent documents on lifelong learning, education and training from across the globe identify increasingly converging challenges. Europe, UNESCO, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and South African documents all highlight concerns of racial tensions, integration of refugees or other migrants, conflict, xenophobia, unemployment, cultural diversity, security, governance, citizenship values and the skills deficit for a changing labour market (European Commission [EC] 2015a, b; UNESCO 2015; NEPAD undated; Office of the Special Advisor on Africa [OSAA] 2016; Wedekind 2016; Department for Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2013).

It is often a question of scale rather than priority that drives the different development agendas. For instance, while the EC talks of 20% of 15-year-olds with poor reading scores and 20% of adults with low literacy levels, South Africa refers to 32% of young adults age 15–24 who are not in employment education or training, while up to 17% of adults are completely illiterate. While the EC is concerned that 11.1% of the population are early school leavers, South Africa highlights that early school leavers constitute 60% of the age-relevant population. There are differences in emphasis about how to address these challenges. The EC is concerned with competitiveness and productivity with a focus on skills and credit transfer systems; UNESCO highlights the complexity of living on a planet

under pressure. This includes recognising the role of knowledge and education as a common good and taking a shared responsibility for a common future. The EC and UNESCO documents each promote the inclusion of civil society in addressing socio-economic problems, but while the European Commission focuses on developing a sense of belonging within Europe, UNESCO emphasises the need to recognise our global interconnectedness. All documents focus on the need to widen and broaden participation in secondary and tertiary education.

It can be seen, therefore, that the concerns of Africa are the concerns of global society. Inevitably this begs the question that if the prevailing commodification, marketisation and instrumentalist approach to education and training is not working in Europe, then perhaps it is time to take a more holistic approach to our global development needs. A window of opportunity has been created through the Sustainable Development Goals. Target 7 of Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), for instance, embraces many of the above-mentioned concerns but with the added emphasis on sustainability:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (UN 2015a)

Although knowledge is mentioned, there appears to be no recognition in any of the goals or targets of indigenous knowledge as a contribution to sustainable solutions. Yet there is evidence to show that indigenous knowledge systems can contribute to the planet's sustainability needs in a number of ways (Odora Hoppers and Richards 2012; Ntuli 2004).

Goal 11 (Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) also talks directly to the wider learning cities movement and provides further space for exploring how institutions and organisations can contribute to the complex challenges of contemporary society (UN 2015b).

What is less clear, however, is how the university as an institution of higher education should play its part. The university, as Watson (2007) and Barnett (2013) among others highlight, has reinvented itself many times in response to changing societal contexts. Barnett (2013, 1) states

that the university has transmogrified over time from an essentially ‘metaphysical university’, concerned with humanity’s spiritual relationship with the world, to a research institution and more recently to an entrepreneurial university as a source of innovation and knowledge production. Watson (2007, 13) categorises the major changes as emanating from a more liberal theory of ‘self realization and social transformation’ to a more vocational, professionalisation focus and the university’s role as a ‘research engine, allied to regional and national ambitions for economic growth’. Zomer and Benneworth (2011), in defence of community engagement, identify four major shifts in the twenty-first-century European university which have led to a revisioning of its third mission of engagement. While the earlier focus of the university’s societal role was to develop ‘critical, democratic citizens’ (2011, 90), the first stimulus for change was the growing funding crisis of how to fund higher education. This resulted in more commercialised activities in order to attract business sponsorship through consultancies or business-linked scientific research. The second influence was the rise of neo-liberalism, the role of the market and competitiveness alongside managerialist approaches to governance, regulation and accountability. This resulted in incentive driven productivity targets. The third has been the changing role and content of knowledge itself. In response to more diverse and complex problems, knowledge has become a commodity to sell and use by people from outside the academy. Finally, but connected to this latter influence is the rise of the knowledge society and the expectation that universities must collaborate with a range of stakeholders to produce new kinds of knowledge.

However, these trends have motivated the higher education system towards entrepreneurial engagement rather than civic engagement. Kwiek (2013), for instance, emphasises that the European response to globalisation resulted in massification of higher education. This has meant dealing with a more diverse student body which has different expectations and demands than participants in the traditional elitist model. Furthermore the growth in knowledge-driven economies has created a new dynamic between higher education institutions and the state and other agencies. Universities are now big business, competitive economies in their own right in order to attract funding and ownership over knowledge as innovation. While the traditional model of state sponsorship prevails, many universities are now private entities in their own right.

Higher education, therefore, can respond to the lifelong learning and engagement discourses in two ways. On a global scale the trend is

to respond through an instrumentalist, competitive advantage pursuit of knowledge for commercial gain. The challenge for this book is to encourage universities to respond through a socially responsive concern for humanity and protection of the planet in all its forms. If one can find common ground in the core purpose of universities, it should be possible to make the case for socially responsive engagement that does not detract from managerialist agendas.

Universities still share some common core purposes. Our interpretation of these common purposes or roles is the means to position the university as an engaged university with a commitment to sustainable development and social purpose. Two of the most frequently cited goals of the university are the pursuit of truth and knowledge (Barnett 2013; Schoole and de Wit 2014). Hussey and Smith (2010, 76–78) add that universities are ‘sources of innovation and invention’ through research, and ‘reservoirs of knowledge understanding and skills’ expressed through scholarship. They also have a commitment to ‘critical evaluation of society’ and a responsibility to disseminate their knowledge to the wider community. Furthermore, they are the protectors of the professions such as law, medicine, management, teaching and so forth. In this context, it is strongly argued that universities have an ethical responsibility to prepare their students for active citizenship (e.g. Walker and Loots 2016).

However, as Makgoba and Seepe (2004) argue, in the context of African universities, there are many forms of knowledge and truths. An ongoing concern across the African continent is that its western imposed curricula and pedagogies are so entrenched in African academia that the African identity is lost (Crossman 1999). Makgoba and Seepe (2004, 21) refer to Yesufu’s statement that ‘an African university must not only pursue knowledge for its own sake, but also for the ... amelioration of conditions of life and work of, the ordinary man and woman’. Thus, they argue, universities must ‘engage with and reflect the identity of their people’ (ibid.). To do this, the university, therefore, must engage in dialogue with its neighbours and its communities. Indeed, as Ntuli (2004, 175) argues, ‘A university system that eschews local knowledge limits its competitiveness in a global world.’ In other words, the very essence of the African university’s marginalised position in the world is its retention of the colonial systems that continue to define an impoverished and resource-starved clone of their colonial masters. The potential for African universities to flourish as contributors to the broader knowledge society lies in their African identity—which currently surrounds, but rarely infiltrates the university itself. Ntuli

(2004, 176) lists a range of local or indigenous knowledge practices that could be accessed as the basis (not substitute) for developing new forms of knowledge or ways of working. These include exploring ‘traditional management methods ... conservation ... local hydrography, mapping, fishing methods and technologies’. Waghid (2014a, b), on a philosophical level, adds a moral dimension to this argument. In the light of ongoing conflicts and social injustices, he argues that students must be encouraged to assimilate the African concept of *ubuntu* as a humanistic concept that cultivates respect, cooperation and compassion for others, with a greater commitment to humanity’s interconnectedness and interdependency. Similar arguments are frequently being heard from authors across the globe, particularly where indigenous peoples or minority communities have been traditionally excluded from public discourses (Escrigas et al. 2014). It can be argued, therefore, that a model of university engagement that is suitable for Africa is a model that can be applied in wider societal contexts.

The promoters of university community engagement provide two positions. On the one hand, it is argued that universities need to rethink their social relevance in the light of the crisis of contemporary civilisation (e.g. Hall et al. 2015). Waghid’s (2014b) exposition of *ubuntu* and Walker and Loots’ (2016) reference to a capabilities curriculum for student professionals are contributions to this social purpose agenda. In other words, it is not sufficient to focus on knowledge and research for individual or economic gain. The world’s challenges require educating people for a critical and ethical citizenship including a sense of moral responsibility towards sustaining the planet.

On the other hand, universities can competitively market their knowledge about how to address complexity by finding solutions in local contexts: ‘Global solutions can come from local experience and vice versa’ (Escrigas et al. 2014, xxxiv). As was articulated in Chap. 1, Grau (2014) argues that the university’s interaction with its environment is a potential source of knowledge that has competitive economic value. In both positions the core argument is that in order to find innovative solutions to development, interplanetary and nation building concerns, universities must develop a deeper understanding, through mutual engagement, of their local, regional and international contexts. Through this engagement, new knowledge, new forms of research and new pedagogies will emerge in the form of publications and scientific discoveries. Knowledge cannot be separated from the people who use it. In order to ensure that

such knowledge is useable and contextually relevant to cultures, value systems and beliefs, it must be developed in collaboration with relevant populations. The new Sustainable Development Goals have created a policy space to pursue this agenda, even for the ‘Ivy League’ university cohort. Indeed, Watson (2007) cites the University of Pennsylvania in the United States as an Ivy League university that is committed to community engagement.

By reflecting on the previous chapters which embrace the notion of asset building, and how to engage with communities in order to ensure community ownership of ideas and knowledge, this chapter envisions some of the practical ways in which the university can become porous. The core argument for this chapter, however, is that the porous university, which has aspirations for nurturing community engagement and learning cities, will need to prioritise community relationship building before it realises those aspirations in a way that highlights university benefits. In other words, there may be no recognisable university outcome in terms of new knowledge or skills in the early stages of relationship building. The community engagement process is an investment for sustainable development. The focus needs to be on dialogue, building trust and sharing of resources. The learning gain, at first, may be more on how to build relationships and address power differentials rather than how students can apply their curriculum-based knowledge in specific contexts. The research benefits may initially be more on how to develop methodologies that empower community members to conduct their own data collection and analysis, rather than an increase in research and publication outputs. The economic benefits may be negligible while relationship building focuses on breaking down communication barriers and learning to negotiate on community terms. But the justification for such an approach is contextualised by the need to build emotional bridges across divided societies and nurture an ethics of care (Waghid 2014b) as the basis for future collaboration. These arguments sit uneasily with a managerialist perspective for higher education but must be defended as an investment for the process of seeking new knowledge.

The challenge now is to imagine how the university can reinvent itself, in a climate of fiscal austerity and without losing its core purpose of the pursuit of truth and knowledge, and development of the professions that serve society. Teaching and research are essential elements of the scholarship of community engagement. For some universities, this requires a leap of faith and a willingness to adopt a long-term vision. In order to suggest

a way forward, this chapter draws on the South African context, but as stated earlier, the arguments and ideas have potential applicability in many contexts.

The porous university concept draws on the UNESCO learning cities model but with a focus on the capabilities and asset-based community development theories and the role of dialogue as outlined in the theoretical framework. This chapter offers a set of guiding ideas and associated concepts for the porous university. It must be stressed that there is no one, fixed, way for university community engagement. The perspective therefore is a broad concept built upon the principles that universities are a public good and that engaging with communities will contribute to excellence in the core activities of the institution itself as well as contribute to community empowerment (Stanton 2012). The final chapter (Chap. 8) will discuss the more practical issues and policy implications for implementing this vision.

THE UNIVERSITY AS A NEIGHBOUR AND RURAL CONNECTION

Although there has been a recent increase in the number of private and publicly funded universities on the continent, it remains a challenge in African contexts that universities are relatively fewer, with wider catchment areas than, for example, their European counterparts. While an urban conurbation may host a university campus or two, there are many areas where university premises are not physically accessible to the general public because of distance, poor transport or limited road infrastructures. So we have to envision two kinds of porous universities—one that is a neighbour within its community, the other that reaches out to remote regions.

The Neighbourhood University

Let us take a particular scenario. The Durban University of Technology (DUT) has a campus situated in a historically ‘black’ township, Imbali, on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg in the Eastern province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Imbali is the subject of the government’s aspirational Education Precinct with a view to developing a range of formal and non-formal learning pathways in collaboration with relevant institutions.

The total population of the township is approximately 79,115 (DHET 2014) in an area of approximately 23 square kilometres which is divided into several council wards. The main languages spoken are isiZulu as the first language and English as the language of instruction. In the province as a whole only 18% completed secondary school and there is an estimated 5.5% of adults who have received no schooling at all. As an indicator of the poverty levels in the province at the time of the report only 51.6% had a flush toilet and 61.8% had no access to the internet.

The university campus hosts departments of engineering, education, health and sports sciences. Immediately next door is a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college. Almost opposite are the offices of one of the ward councillors. An embryonic, early childhood development centre, along with health clinics and a library are also within the Imbali catchment. Politically, the precinct is an ANC (African National Congress) ruling party stronghold. There are secondary and primary schools, including a school for children with special needs, and plans to situate a community learning centre (to be named a community college) in the university premises. There is a recently installed outdoor gym and park, both of which are reputedly well used, including by the elderly. The area has a reputation for crime, although the ward councillor opposite the tertiary institutions recently received a ‘best councillor of the year’ award (News 24, 2015). DUT’s students are almost all first time university entrants and most will have been brought up in local townships, though not necessarily Imbali. DUT is not a high ranking university in terms of research outputs but it has an ethos of supporting community engagement. This particular campus is relatively new and has only recently initiated a unit for adult and community education. The staffing profile is mixed, with a number of African and Indian academic staff, although none live in Imbali itself. The ground staff are very likely to emanate from the Imbali township or neighbouring areas. The local councillor was brought up in Imbali, is keen to make links with the university and was instrumental in establishing the outdoor gym and play park.

The university is geographically well positioned to engage with its neighbourhood. As yet, however, there are limited connections, so this scenario is speculative. It has also been a site of violent student protests regarding university fees. So how does one begin to embrace the capabilities approach to engagement in such a context?

The purpose of a capabilities approach is to focus on the freedoms or opportunities from which people have the power to choose in order to

lead a life they have reason to value. These freedoms, or capability sets, will differ according to experience, preferences and ambitions. The preferences a person might adopt may already have been curtailed as a result of cumulative disadvantage. So part of the facilitator's role is to ensure that horizons and expectations are expanded by opening up new possibilities. This may entail contributing resources that can be converted into new capability sets. In order to do that one needs to find out what lives people already lead, how they use their existing capability sets and what ambitions or expectations they have for themselves or their communities. The actual functions (activities or achievements) that individuals pursue, and their explanations for those functions, will be an indication of the extent to which they are leading a preferred life. A comprehensive capability set will differ for each person, but it should include, according to Sen (1999), political, economic, social and security freedoms and access to transparency guarantees. The university's role is to be responsive to new understandings as a result of its engagement with the wider community and then translate those understandings into a more relevant curriculum and educational experiences for its students. The asset-based community development theory provides a framework for exploring with community members what capabilities already exist in the form of collective and individual community assets.

The obvious engagement starting point in Imbali is with the ward councillor. He is well respected, and has demonstrated commitment to the development of his community. DUT's adult and community education unit has meeting rooms and classroom space for interaction. The campus has sports facilities and computers. The scenario might go something like this. The councillor, perhaps together with his ward committee, is invited to discuss how he works in his community and who he works with. He is invited to discuss the committee's plans for their community and asked to introduce us to some of his constituents. We must be careful, however, to find other contacts, for fear of marginalising or alienating people who are not part of the councillor's coterie. A discussion with some of the cleaners and ground staff who work in the university may provide further contacts. An area of mutual interest might be the flagship outdoor gym and play park. This seems to be used by all ages. How do people use it and how can this resource be enhanced? We can ask what happens when it rains or when it is too cold. What about team sports or activities that are more specialist, such as judo or karate? We take a walk around the ward with some residents and invite them to explain how they spend their time, what they

like about their location. Perhaps there is a sense of community support among residents, perhaps some residents have started up their own informal activities or there are talents and skills that they share in order to make a living. We invite them to feel proud about what they have achieved and what they do in spite of meagre resources. For example, there may be thriving faith groups or cooperative ventures such as stokvels (savings clubs) and burial societies. We then invite them to dream about how they would like to live the lives they have reason to value. Perhaps they would like something more for their children during the school holidays, perhaps they would like to learn how to use a computer, to run a small business more efficiently, to know how to improve the soil so they can grow more food products, to reduce the number of hijacking or other incidents of crime, to support each other in the fight against HIV and AIDS. We might encourage them to sit together and start to prioritise their concerns whilst also pooling their combined skills, knowledge and strategies for sustaining their lives. We make a record of these discussions, using photographs and written summaries that we share with the participants.

We then suggest that the residents and councillor ask their neighbours to attend a meeting in the university premises, to discuss some identified ideas for the neighbourhood. The participants in such a gathering (some new faces, some old) will be reminded of the earlier 'walkabout' and summaries of community strengths, priorities and concerns. We explain that our role is to facilitate opportunities for learning, interaction with other providers and provide a space for dialogue in order to develop the community's own strengths. We cannot provide financial resources but we do have spaces, students and facilities that could be offered. One possible contribution would be to provide indoor sports facilities that can enhance the resources already available in the outdoor gym. Maybe we can help people develop particular fitness-building exercises, or maybe individuals can show us how they have learned to develop such exercises themselves. Perhaps they could work with the special needs school to facilitate better use of the play space by the school and so on.

Progress will be slow, particularly at first; trust needs to be built and tangible outcomes need to be seen very quickly once relationships are established. Over time, it may be seen that the engineering students can develop skills among community members to maintain their new play park. The sports sciences students can work with community members to organise sporting activities, the elderly may assist health sciences students in realising how they manage their health needs in spite of resource

constraints. Residents may attend organised computer classes which are run by the education students. Teacher trainees will work in the local schools and help the schools develop their own community activities. The TVET college students may assist residents to start micro businesses. Community members will provide evidence of how they learn from each other to keep themselves safe, with a view to informing the local police about how they might collaboratively develop a neighbourhood watch scheme. A local support group for people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS may begin to meet in the health sciences premises. The group will be managed by the residents as a self-managed community of practice but they will draw on the expertise of the health sciences faculty and also the professionals working in the local clinic in order to discuss particular technical issues that require medical expertise. The health sciences students will work in local schools and clinics, attend local meetings and become a resource that residents can approach as and when they need to, on similar lines to the way occupational health students engage in health fairs in the Edu-village project, as described in Chap. 6. Perhaps a health surgery, staffed by students and professional experts, can be organised on the university premises and other community ‘hot spots’ around the Imbali area.

Eventually other councillors will become involved and the multitude of communities of practice will ripple outwards. Meanwhile, as trust strengthens, more formal agreements and structures will evolve. A committee of local residents, on similar lines to those that emerged in the Mberwengwa project outlined in Chap. 6, can organise regular meetings, produce local newsletters, using the councillor’s offices or other premises as and when appropriate for publicity material. The committee will hold its own public meetings for particular concerns in order to generate a continuous flow of new members and ensure they are accountable to the wider populace. Residents may come into the university with suggestions for how to work together on specific projects; they may volunteer their services in the university itself on similar lines to those that were outlined in Chap. 3 regarding Strathclyde university’s older adults. The university may be invited to undertake regular evaluations of community projects, but in doing so they must involve local people so that the evaluation skills generated are shared and cascaded outwards.

Of course, there will be suspicions and internal power struggles during this development process. These must be monitored and shared solutions found to address them before harmony erupts into chaos. A

core team of community engagement liaison staff selected from across the campus disciplines will constitute the internal committee that acts as a liaison point for the various individuals and organisations that contribute to projects and activities. At all times records will be kept and permissions sought from participants so that community relations are maintained and publication outputs can be generated. Meanwhile the resource of local knowledge is given full recognition through newsletters and other more informal outlets. The aim will be to function through an ethics of care, in the spirit of *ubuntu* and the practice of participatory democracy. The focus will be community ownership over decisions. The university is a neighbour to whom the community can turn when they require assistance and the university can identify key community contacts when they require advice, assistance or further understanding about issues of research interest. The curriculum and teaching will be adapted to accommodate community perspectives and contexts so that theory engages with practice. Through informal and more formal interactions the dialogue will centre on issues of concern to the community and ideas for making the community a happier, safer and healthier place to live. Sometimes working together will translate into more public activities, such as annual community carnivals or festivals. The university's aspiration for 'excellence' will emerge as an exemplary flagship for community engagement which is an integral feature of teaching and research, but premised on a notion of participatory pedagogies and community-informed curriculum. The research will be responsive to the sustainable development goals and publication outputs will be evaluative and driven by community-based research methodologies.

The centrality of the university campus within the township and its proximity to the councillor's offices and other education providers lends itself to the notion of a neighbourhood. But the township is surrounded by rural villages which will not have the same sense of connectedness to institutions of higher learning. The following scenario takes lessons from the case examples in Chap. 6, with an emphasis on asset-driven community ownership.

The University as a Rural Connection

Hopewell is a rural village some 20 kilometres from DUT. It shares similar characteristics to many rural villages. Transport is limited to mini-bus taxis, some houses have electricity and water, some do not. One

councillor serves Hopewell village and the neighbouring rural township of Thornville, some 3 kilometres apart from each other. (Although rural areas normally have a traditional chieftainship structure that runs parallel with the elected ward councillors, it was not apparent that such a structure existed in these villages when I visited.) The area is drought prone and water often scarce. Hopewell is approximately 3.3 square kilometres with a population of just over 11,000. There are two primary schools, some private crèches, a few small shops, three churches and a secondary school in the village. Thornville is also only 3.37 square kilometres with a much smaller population of approximately 500 people. Although the majority language is isiZulu about 20% in Thornville have isiXhosa as their first language (Wikipedia 2015a, b). Thornville has a police station, petrol station with two convenience stores, two primary schools and a small restaurant which doubles up as a butcher shop. Both villages are surrounded by farm land. Housing and service conditions, including electricity and water, are similar in both locations, though there is a tendency to use more traditional housing material in the smaller village of Thornville. Both villages have good cellphone connections, although internet use is scarce, unreliable and available only through purchased bundles. A school teacher in one of the primary schools is keen to contribute to the village's development needs. She acts as a point of contact for the ward councillor and lives in the village. She knows many of the children in Hopewell since their parents often send them to Thornville, thus helping to sustain the school's own enrolment figures and keeping a connection between the two villages. More formal businesses that employ local people include a juice factory, a chicken factory and sawmill.

The process of getting to know people in these communities will take a similar pattern to that of Imbali. Both councillor and teacher can provide access to active members of their communities. However, transport is an issue. The teacher walks to work, mostly along unpaved dirt tracks. Mini-bus 'taxis' operate between villages and transport children to school as well as workers to various locations. Many have no formal work but may make and sell or exchange items from their homes. Some Imbali residents travel into the villages to work. The school is a potential meeting place, as is the petrol station which has a small shop and where residents naturally congregate. There are likely to be regular cycles of interaction such as, for example, when children are collected from school or people congregate for church services. These can serve as potential meeting points to engage

with residents. Since there is no university building, the university's visibility may remain hidden at first. But since the communities are small, word will get round fairly quickly when new people start entering the area.

Village communities are traditionally suspicious of strangers. It will be important to establish credibility through local contacts and follow any traditional customs or dress codes. Allowing the community to demonstrate how they sustain their livelihoods and support each other can be a starting point for discussion. In the process, it is important not to raise expectations beyond what is achievable. If a small project need, such as developing a library system for the school, can be addressed fairly quickly, then small achievements will build trust and community cohorts can evolve through networking. It might be possible for the Imbali residents to show the Thornville and Hopewell villagers how they built their outdoor gym and play park. Village visits to the Imbali play park could entail a discussion in the DUT premises on how to develop such a facility in their own rural communities. University engineering and TVET students can be invited to learn from Imbali residents and help to transfer some of the building and fund-raising techniques to the two villages. In this way, networks will expand and ideas can be shared. An alternative model might be to consider the eco-building example of Edu-village as outlined in Chap. 6. In this way, locally available materials might be employed as an adaptive strategy to encourage community participation in, and ownership of, their play park.

It is likely that the villagers will have farming expertise that can be shared with Imbali residents who may be able to cultivate a piece of land for agricultural products. The university's practical contribution may primarily be to provide transport to enable these exchanges to take place. Eventually, perhaps students and staff from DUT and its neighbouring TVET College might take turns to provide a skills surgery in the offices of the school or even police station on a rotational basis. This would have to be established in consultation with the local councillor to ensure his support and to ensure the facility complements rather than threatens his own services. Perhaps the tertiary institutions' logos can be installed as a landmark to encourage awareness of their collaborative presence.

Over time, these activities will become regular features for each location. Formally constituted agreements with elected committees will facilitate sustainable communication links. As confidence grows within the communities, requests for learning opportunities will emerge and the educational institutions can collaborate to make resources available so that

learning can take place within easy reach of residents' homes. One possible example might be the development of a set of networked computers so that residents can undertake online or distance learning courses either for personal satisfaction or with a view to gaining qualifications that might lead to further study. Certification, on the lines provided by Edu-village in Chap. 6 can boost self-esteem and raise aspirations for further education.

Both the rural and neighbourhood models will require a coordinated effort and commitment from the education providers. The university may initially take the lead but need not claim ownership over the entire process. It will, however, ideally be supported by a campus university community engagement committee, which is supported within the broader hierarchy of the university. The campus committee will have representation at community level and community subcommittees will have representation, where relevant, from institutional partners on similar lines to the structure in the Midlands State University as explained in Chap. 6. Within the university itself, these activities will be supported by an incentive pay structure for staff in the same way that other programme coordination roles are incentivized in the university. Cross committee coordination will entail representation within the university at curriculum development meetings to ensure that what is learned in the community is also fed into formal programmes. Funding support may be generated through research funds but also, perhaps, as a result of shared ownership over community business ventures. This could be, for instance, through commercialising egg production in partnership with village communities and sharing responsibility for their care and marketing by taking the produce into Imbali. Drawing from the learning cities initiatives that were outlined in Chap. 5, an annual carnival or community learning festival may ultimately stretch across both urban and rural locations as networks and connections evolve and their respective resources are seen to complement each other. Many other projects might emerge over time.

The wider rural environment of several 100 kilometres will also need attention. Space prevents a detailed outline of potential scenarios, but, in brief, Pietermaritzburg hosts a sister DUT campus and a campus for the University of KwaZulu-Natal. A collaborative knowledge exchange partnership might be developed between these universities and campuses. Watson (2007) describes such an arrangement between the University of Brighton and the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

So, the engaged university might apply some of the basic principles of a learning city or learning region, as outlined in Chap. 5, but in a more

organic way. The political idea for an Education Precinct is already in existence for Imbali. However, there is no concrete plan. The plan will evolve as community members (organisations and residents) become more aware of their assets and capabilities. Similarly the coordinated structures for involvement will emerge over time as and when they seem appropriate. Celebratory events can occur at different stages when the community perceives there is something to celebrate. Such events can also serve as community engagement strategies in their own right. The engagement of students may be project focused, rather than service learning focused, although certain regular activities such as holiday play schemes or sports activities may be built into a service learning curriculum. Students will be encouraged to view their own learning in terms of their contribution to enhancing the capability sets of community participants, but also in terms of their increased understanding of how local knowledge and resilience can inform their professional practice and understandings of a valued life. The knowledge focus, therefore, is on ‘socially robust knowledge’ (Gibbons 2006, 28). Sustained involvement will enable a more integrated approach to theory, knowledge construction and application as projects take on a life of their own and project requests become demand-led from within community structures. The evaluation process will be guided by the theoretical perspective that frames this book.

APPLYING THE CAPABILITIES AND ASSET-BASED THEORY TO THIS MODEL

The essential elements to this process of community engagement are patience, a commitment to dialogue and a willingness to listen. In the spirit of Freirean philosophy (Freire 1972, 64) the professional educator is a mediator of, and participant in, the learning process. The aim is to create a ‘horizontal relationship’ and ‘mutual trust’ between all participants in order to develop a sensitised understanding of context as the foundation for dialogue. By ‘seeking out reality together’ (ibid., 80) the professional must observe and learn. By feeding back what they understand from what they observe, the community participants are enabled to critique their own context, and seek solutions to their own concerns.

The capabilities literature, as outlined in Chap. 2, emphasises that capabilities are freedoms in terms of opportunities and processes that enable decisions and actions to be taken. In order to convert assets and opportunities into freedoms attention must be paid to power relations and the personal,

social and environmental realities. If the climate is prone to drought, for instance, the opportunity to plant crops cannot be converted into a freedom to do so unless there is an adequate irrigation system in place. Similarly if personal inhibitors such as physical or mental capacity, confidence, sadness or dependency syndrome are not addressed in terms of providing conversion factors such as relevant training or social support, then motivation to try new ideas cannot be enabled. Education in this context may in itself be a capability freedom but it is also a potential conversion factor. The ultimate aim is to eliminate the constraints on individual and collective freedoms to choose to lead the life people have reason to value. The intended outcome will be new and enhanced 'functionings' (Sen 1999) or achievements, such as producing sufficient crops to not only address hunger but also create income for purchasing additional resources. The additional resources may be converted into advanced learning opportunities or better living accommodation. As a result of those new functionings (e.g. increased income generation, provision of holiday play schemes) the university may change in a number of ways. The university curriculum may evolve as a result of research-led evaluations of how community assets are facilitated by interventions to convert their existing assets into a wider set of capabilities that lead to new choices and sense of agency to achieve. The curriculum will thus become more relevant and practice based in relation to theory. The pedagogy will use more interactive techniques, knowledge will be more context specific and the university's pursuit of truth will include a recognition of multiple truths.

The asset-based community development literature emphasises that community engagement means recognising what already exists in terms of strengths and opportunities within the community, enabling development goals to be community-led and participatory. The process of mobilising and asset mapping should lead to action planning. The role of the university, in collaboration with other service providers is as an enabler and facilitator of this process through an iterative cycle of constantly fostering revised aspirations and sense of well-being through a cycle of personal and collective development. For the case scenarios outlined above, this will entail working through people who already have credibility within their communities, drawing on *ubuntu* principles of humility and respect for community resilience, fostering in people a sense of their potential to do and achieve more and realise their dreams. The distinctiveness of this engagement model lies primarily in the evaluative process of using the capabilities perspective to explore how capability sets in terms of political, social, environmental, security and transparency

guarantees are fostered—for university students who are the future professionals—and for community members who should increasingly feel empowered to make new choices and decisions about their lives. The asset-based approach provides the tools to ensure the process is community grounded and community-led, although this latter feature may initially be an aspirational goal along a continuum of university-community relationship building.

These are, of course, ideological goals. The literature in this book provides several examples of community engagement initiatives that lead to enhanced community outcomes. Occasionally we have also seen examples of community-informed curriculum development. What is less apparent is an evaluative assessment of how capability sets are developed and how their outcomes can be traced as a result of specific conversion factors and choices that are made. The community engagement model that was outlined in Chap. 2 is offered as a broad framework for engendering an appropriate and systematic enquiry process for that purpose.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has argued that the benefits of community engagement, through the concept of a metaphorically porous university, can provide added value to the dominant discourses of marketisation and commodification of university learning. On the one hand, community engagement can be justified within this framework as a scholarly activity. Alternatively, one can argue that this kind of community engagement can provide the value-added evidence that contests a neo-liberal model of development through the demonstration of values and practices such as cooperation, sustainability and *ubuntu*. This alternative perspective should be defensible in a university space which is open to competing ideas and interests as a potential resource for new thinking and change. The chapter has argued that the porous university creates new learning spaces for research, publications and new markets, but in a way that addresses the overwhelming convergence of global challenges that are articulated in lifelong learning documents such as those recently published by UNESCO and the European Union and in the context of the new Sustainable Development Goals. The process of building community engagement relationships is labour intensive and time consuming and the university must be prepared to embrace a long-term vision for sustainable development. Community engagement, however, is a multi-stakeholder project and the university

should see itself as a partner among many in the community development and knowledge construction process. The final chapter will look at some of the policy implications and strategic requirements for establishing such an engaged and porous university. It will reflect on the political, practical and organisational challenges of this concept with a view to exploring its applicability across a range of contexts.

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Implications of the Porous University for Policy and Practice

INTRODUCTION

The justification for this book is premised on the following arguments. If one of the core, enduring constants of a university is the search for truth, this must mean tackling difficult questions. There can be few more difficult questions for society than how to eradicate poverty, hunger, crime, conflict, social malaise, prejudice and intolerance, and how to contribute to enabling environments for self-reliance, social harmony, peace and well-being. Community engagement is a response to those difficult questions. Higher education institutions can become centres of excellence in community engagement by adopting and refining new, participatory research methodologies, practising dialogic teaching in new spaces and disseminating new understandings about community development. As such they are fulfilling their core missions of teaching, research and learning, whilst also fulfilling the traditional, third mission of service. Since community engagement and associated terms are of international interest, there is no reason to confine a community-engaged university to its local context. Community engagement contributes to course programmes, international research agendas and global networks. But—as is the case for many of the mainstream disciplines—it is labour intensive, time consuming and resource expensive. If scientists can justify capital outlays for equipment and ongoing expenditure on other resources, it should be equally possible to justify capital outlays for transport and liaison staff who are qualified

in the relevant human skills necessary for community engagement in the name of knowledge construction.

The book has demonstrated that there is an uneven, but growing, enabling policy environment for community-university engagement. There is evidence of both aspirational and practical examples of universities which embrace the notion of a university without boundaries, which is metaphorically porous and neighbourly to its surroundings and other organisations. The process of co-creating knowledge in these engagement relationships also means the university is intellectually porous in allowing knowledge to be socially defined. There is evidence of a growing interest in the role of participatory research methodologies for community empowerment and as a basis for producing new forms of knowledge. There is less evidence of a theoretical framework that supports this idea and its activities. Surprisingly, there is hardly any reference in the university community engagement literature to community development theory, even though this theory espouses asset mapping through dialogue and collaborative planning. Perhaps even more surprisingly, the capabilities literature, whilst espousing the value of a capabilities perspective for the professional development of its university students, almost never extends this perspective to the function of university engagement as a lifelong learning resource for its communities.

The main aim of this book, therefore, is to offer an under-used theoretical framework which draws on capabilities and asset-based community development theories to present an organisational and evaluative model for, and add substance to, the argument for university involvement in the enhancement of community life. A secondary aim is to envision how such a framework can be applied across a range of contexts, with particular emphasis on African development needs, but with a view to showing its applicability elsewhere. In order to do this, it is necessary to explore how policy and practice can inform each other and what are the practical implications for a university that wants to keep its gates open to the general public.

This chapter briefly reminds us of the key lessons learned in the literature related to community engagement, service learning, learning cities and practical examples of universities that have pursued a holistic agenda for community engagement. We then look at discussions concerning the practical and policy implications for universities in undertaking this work.

Chapter 1 highlighted how the university's third mission has evolved over time from one of philanthropic service to a notion of shared knowledge

creation, mutual learning benefit and an activity of direct benefit to the teaching and research missions of the university. It also discussed the tensions between the widely marketed global university that is ranked in terms of research output and postgraduate study and its social responsibility to contribute to the public good. These tensions are to some extent reconciled in the recognition that universities are no longer regarded as the sole repositories of knowledge. While knowledge in itself has now become a commodity to sell, it is also a context specific resource found in communities in the form of mode 2 or ‘socially robust’ knowledge (Gibbons 2006, 28). This knowledge, too, has ‘economic value’ (Grau 2014, 3) because of its potential to create jobs and contribute to a sustainable society. In African contexts, the university performs an added function of nation building or social redress for past colonial inequities. In the context of nations where participation rates in higher education are a small minority of the population there is a need to give back to the wider community. Equally, it can be argued (as is increasingly the case in South Africa historically ‘black’ universities and countries where participation rates are more than 50%), in contexts where the majority of students emanate from the very communities which surround them, the university has a responsibility to foster a sense of ethical citizenship in students towards their environment. On an international scale UNESCO has long supported the role of higher education as a development agent. There are also signs of political support at national level in selected countries. In South Africa, for instance, there is a policy mandate for university community engagement through a sequence of higher education white papers since the end of the apartheid regime. Other countries, such as Zimbabwe, illustrate similar government directives to support this work.

Chapter 2 outlined the main concepts for a combined theoretical framework of capabilities and asset-based community development. Walker (2015) has eloquently argued that higher education should be expanding the capability sets of students so that they are enabled to achieve as full a range of opportunities as possible, with a social justice concern that the expansion of student capabilities will nurture a social justice commitment towards the development needs of others. She highlights three capabilities of affiliation, critical capacities and ethical citizenship that the university curriculum should foster so that graduates can lead a life they value, which includes contributing to the needs of others. This argument follows Waghid’s (2014) commitment to the South African concept of *ubuntu* through an ethics of care. However, although both debates suggest that

students should become change agents as a result of their enhanced capabilities, the theories are not linked to service learning or community engagement literature.

This book argues that higher education should work in partnership with others to foster a similar set of capabilities in communities themselves through community engagement. While this book does not prescribe what capabilities these should be, it refers to Sen's (1999) benchmark types of freedoms in terms of political (such as free speech), social (such as gender agency), economic (such as access to credit), security (such as safety to walk the streets) and transparency guarantees (such as open democratic processes). Under these generic terms, we can extrapolate more explicit freedoms, of association, access to education, care for others and so on. These are freedoms only if an individual is able to make choices to lead a life they have reason to value. An individual's or community's social environment, personal circumstances and geographical context may impact positively or negatively on their ability to convert capability concepts into freedoms and also their 'adaptive preferences' which may curtail what kind of life is valued (Nussbaum 2000, 139). The role of higher education, in partnership with other agencies is to expand, through relevant interventions, potential conversion factors, which can build capability sets that are deemed worthwhile for those concerned. But, since the capabilities perspective is not in itself a comprehensive theory of development, asset-based community development theory, with its focus on dialogue as a co-investigative, sense-making process for capacity building, is added to the mix. Asset-based community development theory starts from the premise that all communities have assets on which to build. In this respect, no community is devoid of some capabilities. Equally, the university, whilst possessing technical expertise, must be committed to keeping its curriculum relevant in a constantly changing society. The model (Fig. 2.1) in Chap. 2 provided a framework for building on the assets of all partners with a view to achieving new forms of agency, new choices and actions which will contribute to change in the university and community.

Chapter 3 then explored in more detail the evolution of community engagement discourses across different national contexts and the formation of international and global networks that now promote a new vision for the public good role of higher education as an integral feature of teaching and learning. The literature offers many critiques around the ideology vis-à-vis the practice of community engagement, particularly in terms of power relations and the sustainability of engagement relations.

Engagement is now justified as scholarship work, connected to new forms of knowledge production and new research methodologies. The argument is strengthened by global development agendas such as the recently ratified Sustainable Development Goals which feature lifelong learning, sustainable lifestyles and sustainable cities as targets and goals (United Nations 2015). The new engagement discourse privileges the notion of knowledge democracy and cognitive justice (Gaventa and Bivens 2014; Hall 2015), whereby community-based knowledge now contributes to knowledge creation as a shared endeavour through the medium of community-based research or other participatory methodologies.

The emphasis throughout the community engagement rhetoric is on partnerships, collaboration, co-creation of knowledge and reciprocity. Some examples of holistic, participatory, collaborative initiatives are offered. Makerere University, for instance, showcased a multidisciplinary model village approach whereby multiple stakeholders work together to provide different forms of training and learning pathways in a defined geographical area. The university also demonstrated a strong institutional administrative support structure to facilitate partnerships. The American University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee project is one of the earliest examples of a whole institutional approach to establish a highly visible community presence with a wide range of partners to address a range of development agendas. These and other examples demonstrated the potential outcomes of long-term commitments but they did not theorise their approaches, which makes it difficult to critique them in terms of assessing the community development processes and outcomes.

The service learning literature, the subject of Chap. 4, is extensive and does offer a range of theoretical insights. The common theoretical thread of service learning is its experiential nature and affinity to constructivism and David Kolb's experiential learning cycle with an emphasis on assessing student growth. Additional theoretical insights range from use of actor network theory to adaptive leadership and classification and framing theory. Service learning as a stand-alone curriculum activity, however, is heavily criticised for its failure to address power or sustainability issues and also its fragmented contribution to community development needs and attention to community growth. An evolving approach is to embed service learning within other community engagement activities and partners and in the process adopt more participatory research methods that work with communities to identify their assets as the starting point for service learning. More recent discussions attempt to shift the

largely experiential, reflective learning aspect of student involvement into a more transformative or activist concern with social justice and exploration of the underlying issues behind disadvantage that often contextualise service learning activities. This more critical and participatory approach to service learning has implications, of course, for how students are prepared for their engagement activity and for how the university itself manages its curriculum.

A review of extended partnership approaches to community engagement leads us into a new set of literature that addresses the concept of learning cities or learning regions as a collective, mobilising initiative to foster lifelong learning across a defined geographical area. Chapter 5 highlighted that Africa has been slow to adopt this extensive brief, although it has become a popular political agenda on almost every other continent. Some of the suggested reasons for this are that Africa has a small industrial base, its university participation rates are low and lifelong learning policies across the continent are few and far between. In other words, there is not a strong national policy drive to support the necessarily multi-sectoral mobilisation of institutions for promoting a learning region. The majority of learning cities or regions around the world are not university-led, although universities may be partners in the overall lifelong learning agenda. In Africa, learning city initiatives are almost always university-led, although not necessarily supported at government level, and as a result they often fade after an initial spurt of enthusiasm. The learning city movement is an essentially political agenda, with strong support from global policy drivers such as the OECD and UNESCO, albeit these organisations adopt different economic and social purpose goals respectively. There is a burgeoning literature on this topic and many opportunities to follow benchmarks or frameworks for building and monitoring a learning city. The aim is to nurture a ‘culture of learning throughout life’ (UNESCO, UIL 2014, 24). Once more, however, the literature is largely descriptive and under-theorised. Nevertheless, some examples, cited in Chap. 5, provide ideas that inform and build on the community engagement concept and which, with sufficient political leverage, could be developed in Africa. In this respect, two African case examples are explored in more detail in the ensuing chapter.

Chapter 6 specifically identified two different case examples that adopt some features of the learning city movement but centre round university-led partnerships for community engagement. The Zimbabwean model is highly structured within a clearly defined institutional framework which

cascades down to community managed subcommittees in a defined rural area several 100 kilometres from the university itself. The focus is on poverty and hunger reduction and partners are limited to those who function in that geographical area, including government agencies. A university satellite campus provides a visible presence within the rural village. Students and staff contribute through a range of placements and projects. The South African example also has a strong university administrative structure for community engagement which is additionally supported by a transport fleet to facilitate partnership building and practical participation by students and staff. This Edu-village model is distinctive in that the community partnerships are informal and hang together through a virtual social capital network that communicates through various technologies and operates in responsive mode to areas of need identified by non-governmental organisations or schools. This initiative follows the learning city approach in terms of developing learning pathways across a wide geographical expanse and also hosting annual festivals of learning where all partners converge to provide taster sessions and workshops for the general public. In this way the idea of learning itself is foregrounded. While the South African Edu-village model follows a theoretical, participatory inquiry approach, drawing heavily on occupational therapy principles of enablement, the Zimbabwean model appears to be practice-based and largely university-led.

An opportunity to merge the more politically driven learning city concept with the capabilities approach to community engagement exists in principle in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Chapter 7 provided a speculative scenario for a government driven plan to develop a learning precinct in a historically disadvantaged township on the outskirts of the main city of Pietermaritzburg. The plan proposes that a range of educational providers—from early child development to schools, vocational education college, non-formal adult learning centre and university—should form partnerships that develop the learning potential, skills and income generation of its residents. The speculative scenario in this chapter identified potential starting points for an asset-based approach to community engagement, with a view to creating learning pathways, both formal and non-formal, that would enable people to enhance their capability sets to lead lives they have reason to value and raise aspirations for what values should enhance those lives. The chapter highlighted that on a global scale the engagement/learning city discourses follow the same dichotomies between economic and citizenship goals as do the

global lifelong learning discourses. That is, we can interpret learning and university community engagement as an instrumentalist, competitive pursuit or we can seek opportunities to take a more social purpose, citizenship oriented route. Since the core purpose of universities is the pursuit of truth and, as Watson (2007, 86) states ‘to make the world a better place’, we can argue, in the context of the sustainable development goals, for a university that can competitively market itself for its contribution to new knowledge which engenders citizenship responsibility for sustaining the planet. In other words, there is no reason why universities cannot use the community engagement agenda to market themselves in terms of academic excellence.

While Chap. 7 offered the utopian picture for creating a neighbourly university, this chapter takes a reality check. What are the implications for this in the context of fiscal austerity, and institutional pressures to comply with bureaucratic atmospheres of managerialism in the wake of protests by impoverished students and angry communities who struggle to make ends meet on a daily basis? We start with the idea of an enabling policy environment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY

Bivens et al. (2015) state that there are two distinct levels of policy—the national and institutional level. Arguably there is a third level—that of international agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals. There is inevitably a layered interpretation of these different policy levels so that national policies will differ according to context and institutional policies will once more reflect an interpretation of the national policy. Furthermore, as Wu et al. (2012) point out, implementation or operationalisation of policy is also open to interpretation and requires enabling factors to facilitate that activity. Wu et al. point to a number of factors that affect implementation, such as funding, management structures, coordination, implementation incentives and political will. A USAID-funded Health Policy Project (2014) adds to this list issues of clarity on operational guidelines, roles and responsibilities of implementers and synergy with other policies. Increasingly, it is recognised that policy formulation requires consultation with the larger populace (Torjman 2005), which ideally can help to mitigate some of the implementation challenges.

In the South African context the policy guidelines for service learning (HEQC 2004) and the latest policy on post-school education and training (DHET 2013) were subject to wide consultation. Nevertheless, policy formulation and implementation at institutional level have been uneven and subject to a number of conceptual as well as practical challenges. Of primary concern is the fact that the latest policy on post-school education and training promotes the idea of community engagement but openly admits that it remains an ‘unfunded policy mandate’ (DHET 2013, 39). Although South Africa does provide a dedicated competitive funding budget for research into community engagement, this lack of administrative funding, or a national coordinating body, is a major obstacle to implementation. Other countries have established parastatal entities that influence policy impact at operational level, such as the National Coordinating Committee for Public Engagement in the United Kingdom and, in India, a national planning sub-committee on Strengthening Community Engagement in Higher Education (Hall et al. 2015). Government monitoring criteria could include, for instance, reporting mechanisms that require information on internal university processes. Kruss et al. (2012), however, highlight that insistence on policy compliance for the sake of compliance can also be counterproductive if it simply provokes a bureaucratic response.

The recommendations for policy and structures at institutional level are very similar across all publications (e.g. Watson 2007; Kruss et al. 2012; Percy et al. 2006; Lazarus et al. 2008; HEQC 2006 among others). Bivens et al. (2015, 19) outline some of the overarching policy needs for community engagement. They include a commitment to community engagement in university mission statements and strategic plans, alongside a recognition of ‘the existence and value of multiple types and forms of knowledge, within and outside of the university’ and legitimisation of methods for co-construction of knowledge. Lazarus et al. (2008) emphasise the need for dedicated senior academic and support staff, supported by faculty based committees for community engagement. Bivens et al. cite Sandmann et al. (2009) in arguing for relevant assessment and monitoring structures to oversee community engagement activities. Other institutional measures include the provision of a help desk for community liaison, although the centralisation of community engagement in this way is sometimes challenged as potentially inhibiting the progress of individual initiatives (Mitchell et al. 2005). Associated with the help desk is the need for dedicated staff who are able to liaise with communities and also academic staff.

Bivens et al. (2015) suggest that there should be institutional readiness to recruit professionals from the community to serve this role.

Other common recommendations include the need for a staff incentive or reward system that recognises community engagement activity and publications in its promotion criteria. Furthermore, funds and resources are required that are dedicated to community engagement research and practice. Universities should embrace a collective vision for community engagement as a result of wide institutional consultation, followed by training and capacity building for academic, administrative and support staff regarding community liaison and student involvement. Training and capacity building would include building an understanding of relevant research and teaching methodologies, and how to create welcoming spaces within the campus where community members and staff can interact. In addition to creating an atmosphere of trust between the institution and general public, informal and formal interactions can contribute to promoting a common understanding of the purpose of community engagement and value of interdisciplinary work. This, of course, entails building trust among various actors within the institution itself as well. As an expression of support for community actors it is recommended that administrative structures for reimbursements or funding for non-university staff are simplified. Watson, (2007) among others, also highlights the need for institutional flexibility in terms of synergizing teaching timetables with community project needs. An overriding concern, amongst the many promoters of community engagement, is that there is a need to inculcate an institutional value base that embraces diversity, respect for alternative knowledge systems and a commitment to working together in a spirit of mutuality and sharing (Percy et al. 2006). This would also include the formulation of formal advisory bodies with community representation.

Finally, Watson (2007, 77) outlines a list of benchmarking questions that the Association of Commonwealth Universities devised in 2004 to examine the extent to which universities were engaged in their region. These are summarised as (does the university have):

1. University Mission [which] includes local/regional community support
2. Structured/comprehensive external advice on curriculum
3. ...student placements ...Shared facilities...
4. Structured business advice services ...including for voluntary sector
5. Outreach incentives for staff

6. Regular public events
7. ... public service/local authority contracts,
8. ...contributions to local schools,
9. Industry clubs or equivalent,
10. Supported student volunteering
11. A balance sheet.

The reference to a balance sheet in this instance can perhaps be interpreted to refer to a relevant budget for community engagement expenditure. Bivens et al. (2015) add that in the spirit of knowledge sharing, university knowledge resources should be made available to the wider public through open access publications and digital spaces which make such knowledge freely available in downloadable forms.

While these are the commonly understood policy enabling factors for university engagement, there are many challenges to their implementation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Kruss et al. (2012) summarise some of the obstacles at an individual level within academia. These include a lack of fit between the goals of community engagement and academic identity. In other words, academics identify their role as producing knowledge for its own sake or knowledge that has a different purpose to addressing social needs. A common concern for staff is lack of time and resources, and the ever growing demands of an increasing number of students without parity of staffing levels. Percy et al. (2006) highlight how staff may be unwilling to adapt their timetables to accommodate the more fluid working demands of community activities. Furthermore, students may be ill-informed and unwilling to commit to working with communities, and people from within and outside the university may feel left out of consultations. The lack of a shared definition of community or engagement can also lead to fragmented support for work that appears not to address the scholarship demands of a particular discipline. In other words the skills for community engagement need to be learned within the university as a learning organisation. The value of community engagement outcomes in terms of scholarship also have to be evidenced. Equally, the absence of the above outlined enabling environment in itself will demotivate staff and students to take risks that challenge their traditional understanding of teaching and research.

Alperstein (2007) identifies a number of challenges in relation to developing a service learning curriculum, for instance. These include insufficient allocation of time for the necessary trust building and planning with communities. Ethical issues can arise in relation to supervision by people outside the university. It is also a challenge to conscientise students about community dynamics and power relations. She too raises the issue of lack of flexibility in curriculum timetables which do not meet the working rhythm of community organisations. She also highlights that lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities of the various academic and community participants can damage the potential beneficial outcomes of placements. Naidoo and Devnarain (2009) add that staff and students are often fearful of working with communities in unfamiliar territories and contexts.

Swanepoel and de Beer (2011) emphasise that communities themselves can present obstacles that need to be overcome. There are potentially competing power structures, for instance, between elected and traditional leaders in African communities, with different power struggles between groups in the wider social environment. Cultural values, traditions and taboos may inhibit liaison until they have been incorporated into working arrangements. Similarly, the impact of poverty and previous experiences with authorities can manifest as fear, suspicion, mistrust, apathy and lack of self-esteem during liaisons and partnership discussions.

Equally, the same authors identify what it takes to make community-university engagement a rewarding experience with mutual gains. All of them emphasise that community engagement for sustainability requires a long-term vision. A truly engaged community may take five years or more to evolve. When all the enabling systems are in place, what is left are largely attitudinal concerns. The university must, at all times, be aware of its inherent power status when working directly with community organisations. The onus is on the university, therefore, to be flexible and responsive to community concerns. De Beer and Swanepoel (2011) articulate, from a community development perspective, that it is important to ensure community ownership over decisions, however long that takes through the process of meetings, discussions and ongoing clarifications. This does not mean one cannot offer ideas, but the ideas must be in response to community felt needs and contexts. Ongoing dialogue and feedback opportunities are essential, with a readiness to adapt to changing circumstances. Some core values include respect, tolerance, compassion, adaptability and a focus on ensuring clarification of potentially competing goals and values.

Watson (2007, 60–61), citing Hart and Wolff (2006), lists some practical advice in this respect:

- Establish a language that you can all use to talk about processes and structures;
- Work with those who want to work with you;
- Secure funds to buy academics and practitioners out;
- Strategically set up links that go with the strengths of the university;
- Emphasise ‘practice’ rather than organizational form or structure;
- Take spatial issues seriously (they focus particularly on how community partners are welcomed in the ‘spaces’ of the university, such as libraries and recreational facilities);
- Do not let definitional problems stop you in your tracks;
- Emphasise the positive;
- Use community-university brokers who can work across different cultures and in different languages;
- Enjoy the relationships; and
- Find creative ways around the normal university process as what you need to do will often not fit the standard mould.

Since community engagement is so time consuming and demanding, why should one bother at all? The reasons for bothering lie within the very challenges that community engagement is trying to address. It is widely recognised in community development literature (e.g. Swanepoel and de Beer 2011; Ferreira and Ebersöhn 2012) that alienation results from a sense that one is not being heard. Alienation breeds distrust, resentment and in many cases, violence. In South Africa this cycle of alienation and violence is all too evident. Yet it has been proven that community involvement in decisions that affect their lives, and recognition of their own sources of wisdom transforms communities (Ferreira and Ebersöhn 2012). Waghid (2014) argues that the aspirational concept of *ubuntu* is a process of becoming which also has to be learned. If our universities cannot contribute to these needs for societal renewal, what is the point of the university knowledge?

If we are to break down the cycle of alienation in our communities, then we must enable them to have a sense of ownership over decisions that affect their lives. Students who participated in the violent protests of 2015 and 2016—and most probably during 2017—were, in part at least,

protesting about their own sense of alienation from a university system and curricula that seemed not to connect with their culture and experiences (Heleta 2016).

Since universities no longer have a monopoly over knowledge and since communities are repositories of local, experiential, socially robust and indigenous knowledge, we have to find ways of communicating and working with those forms of knowledge so that it contributes to our understanding of how to build more socially responsible, resilient and caring societies.

It can be argued, therefore, that just because a task seems difficult this is not a reason to avoid it—especially in higher education. Community engagement is an investment in the future. The policy environment, however, has to make that investment possible. This means governments must fund institutions and institutions must find ways of creating their own enabling policy environments through partnership building and investing their resources. In South Africa the cost of not doing so is already evident in communities and universities across the land. This position reflects the public good role of universities, as argued in Chap. 1.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The capabilities perspective, combined with asset-based community development theory and its focus on dialogic interaction, can provide an overarching framework to justify, process and evaluate community engagement as a multidisciplinary contribution to knowledge and the common good of university teaching and research. The capabilities perspective focuses the purpose, while the asset-based community development theory focuses the methodology to achieve this purpose. The outcomes will be context specific. This framework also positions the university as a partner, and not necessarily a lead player in community development, depending on context. If the focus of engagement is on developing the capability sets that people have reason to value, then the focus remains committed to the community setting their own agenda. If this focus is supported by asset-based community development theory, then the goal is to seek out what assets the community already has, thus recognising that all communities have resiliences and strategies for coping. If these can be harnessed through participatory methodologies then there is a higher chance of ensuring community ownership of their agendas, whilst making space for facilitating new meaning making and fostering enhanced ownership for

change that can grow from within the community itself. These aspirational goals will be tested by context specific environments, competing power struggles and resource constraints. But the theoretical framework positions the engagement activity as community-led. Such a position, it has been argued, may be aspirational during early stages but is the end goal of the continuum for community engagement relationship building. The university therefore, must see itself as part of the community. In the search for new forms of truth the university must be prepared to adopt new forms of inquiry in the spirit of *ubuntu* and humility.

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INDEX¹

A

adult education, 1, 6, 13, 18, 67, 69
Africa, 1–21, 62–4, 77, 100, 111, 115, 116, 123, 145, 146, 149, 172
 Sub Saharan Africa, 4, 12, 41, 114, 118
African humanism, 85
African universities, xi, xiii, 1, 2, 4, 5, 8–10, 14, 16, 21n1, 21n2, 34, 49, 53, 123, 124, 148
agency, 29, 30, 36–9, 43, 68, 89, 91, 125, 130, 132, 139–41, 161, 170
America, 6, 8, 21n2, 50, 100
apartheid, xii, 13, 15, 16, 34, 53, 67, 77, 132, 140, 169
asset-based community development
 ABCD, 27, 38, 39, 41, 43
 asset building, 41, 150
 asset mapping, 37, 40, 43, 161, 168
 asset-resourced, 86

Association of African Universities (AAU), 9, 10
Australia, 50, 52, 77, 100, 106, 109

B

Bloemfontein, Trompsburg, 133, 134, 136, 137
Botswana, 115, 123, 128
 University of Botswana, 1, 11, 14, 49, 64, 97, 98
boundary-spanning theory, 60
Brazil, 106
Britain, 1, 6, 13

C

capability
 adaptive preferences, 38, 89, 170
 capabilities perspective, 20, 27–38, 43, 86, 91, 161, 168, 170, 180

¹Note: Page numbers with “n” denote footnotes

- capability (*cont.*)
 capability set(s), 29, 31–8, 43, 44,
 63, 65, 67, 68, 85, 89, 90,
 139, 153, 160–2, 169, 170,
 173, 180
 conversion factors, 33, 37, 44, 89,
 131, 161, 162, 170
 freedoms, 30, 161
 functionings, 35
 unfreedoms, 20, 28–30
 Carnegie Foundation, 53, 56
 challenges, 12, 13, 17, 19, 39, 40, 42,
 43, 49, 51, 52, 57, 61, 70, 84–6,
 97, 103, 107–8, 114, 124, 128,
 129, 142, 145, 146, 149, 162,
 163, 174, 175, 177–9
 civic responsibility, 53, 77–81, 91
 civil society, 17, 18, 40, 60, 104, 106,
 109, 112, 116, 126, 146
 collaboration, xiii, 9, 20, 54, 56, 58, 63,
 64, 69, 79, 83, 87, 90, 113, 115,
 131, 133, 150, 151, 161, 171
 community
 community-based participatory
 research, 54, 112, 118
 community-based research, 54, 56,
 86, 141, 156, 171
 grass-roots community, 50, 76, 81,
 118, 135, 136
 community development, xiii, 5, 8, 20,
 27, 28, 35, 37–44, 63, 67, 68,
 76, 87, 91, 101, 103, 107, 117,
 125, 126, 131, 151, 153, 161,
 163, 167–71, 178–80
 asset-based community
 development, xiii, 20, 27,
 37–44, 76, 87, 117, 131, 151,
 153, 161, 168–70, 180
 community engagement
 case examples, 59, 62–9, 123–43,
 156, 172
 definition, 38, 54, 78, 81, 133, 177
 models and types, 57–62
 process, xiii, 7, 14, 18, 28, 30, 36,
 38, 41–3, 54, 55, 59, 61, 63,
 68, 81, 83, 86, 90, 112, 117,
 131, 136, 141, 142, 150,
 159–62, 168, 170, 171, 175,
 178–80
 community of practice, 113, 155
 community service, 10, 17, 51, 53,
 59, 82, 87, 88, 116, 133, 134
 community-university engagement,
 57, 61, 65, 168, 178
 conversion factors, 33, 37, 44, 89,
 131, 161, 162, 170
 Cork, 109
 curriculum, 4, 27, 35, 44, 50, 59,
 61, 62, 65, 66, 77, 81, 84, 85,
 87–90, 98, 134, 138, 140, 149,
 156, 159–62, 169–72, 176,
 178
 relevant, 153
- D**
 development, 1, 25–44, 49, 76, 97,
 123, 145, 167
 dialogue, 18, 20, 37, 38, 41–4, 62,
 68, 83, 84, 90, 106, 113, 116,
 130, 140–2, 148, 150, 151, 154,
 156, 160, 168, 170, 178
 Durban University of Technology
 (DUT)
 Hopewell, 156
 Imbali, 117, 151
 Thornville, 158
- E**
 East Asia, 110
 Edu-village, 14, 134–42, 155, 158,
 159, 173
 engaged scholarship, 53, 127
 England, 25
 Ethiopia, 40, 116

European Commission (EC), 145, 146

F

Finland, 67, 106, 108

freedoms, 20, 26, 27, 29, 31–6, 38,
41, 43, 44, 85, 89, 118, 131,
152, 153, 160, 161, 170

unfreedoms, 28–30

functionings, 29, 31, 33–6, 41, 43,
44, 63, 89, 90, 161

G

gender, 12, 14, 28, 30, 32, 52, 102,
146, 170

Ghana, 10

globalization, 2–4, 7, 15, 17, 21n1,
35, 42, 147

Global University Network for
innovation (GUNi), xii, 7, 57

H

higher education

common good, xii, 16, 17

public good, xi, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 19,
27, 53, 180

social purpose, 6, 17, 18, 53

Hopewell, 156–8

human rights, 14, 28, 52, 67, 76, 98,
102, 146

I

Imbali, 152, 153, 155, 157–9

Imbali Education Precinct, 18, 117,
151, 160

Ireland, 102, 106

J

Japan, 106, 110

K

Kerala, 107

knowledge

co-creation, xii, 56–8, 61, 69, 87,
118, 171

community based knowledge, 7, 55,
62, 171

indigenous knowledge, 4, 9, 13, 80,
84, 85, 116, 125, 127, 128,
133, 136, 146, 149, 180

knowledge democracy, 55, 84, 171

knowledge economy, 15, 17, 55,
100, 114

knowledge society, 3, 55, 147, 148
mode 2, 7, 53, 84, 169

reliable knowledge, 7

rhizomatic, 84

socially robust knowledge, 7, 69,
90, 160, 169, 180

L

land grant universities, 6, 51

Latin America, 8, 50

learning cities

African context, xiii, 20, 111,
114–17, 123, 124

challenges, 19, 97, 103, 107–8,
114, 115, 142, 146

community of practice, 113

confucian, 110, 117, 118, 135

definition, 103

EcCoWell, 111

evaluation, 105, 106, 108–10

Happy farm, 111, 142

learning community, 55, 82, 99,
102, 103, 142

learning festival, 106, 109, 137, 159

OECD, 97, 100–2, 107, 112, 172

political will, 108, 115

smart cities, 103, 108

UNESCO, 14, 100–4, 114, 151,
172

learning community, 55, 82, 99, 102, 103, 142

learning region, xii, 19, 91, 97, 99, 101, 102, 107, 110, 113–15, 117, 124, 130, 159, 172

discourse, 14

learning society, 3, 13, 100, 101

Lesotho, 2, 11, 12, 49, 97, 98, 123

lifelong learning, xi, xii, 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 18, 20, 52, 65–7, 99–103, 107, 111, 112, 137, 145–7, 162, 168, 171, 174

lifelong learning policies, 14, 110, 114–16, 172

literacy, 4, 12, 30, 33, 67, 68, 110, 114, 115, 125, 129, 131, 145

M

Makerere University, 10, 53, 63, 124, 131

model village, 64, 142, 171

Malawi, 49, 64

managerialism, 2, 51, 174

massification, xii, 2, 52, 147

Midlands State University (MSU)

Mberengwa, 127

Zindowe, 128

N

National University of Lesotho, 49, 97, 98

Nigeria, 49, 64

non-governmental organization

(NGOs), 50, 58, 67–9, 75, 76, 81, 97, 98, 101, 102, 111, 128–30, 135–9, 173

Nyerere, M.J., 10–12

O

Organisation for Economic
Co-operation and Development

(OECD), 2, 4, 13, 52, 97, 100–2, 107, 112, 172

outreach, 6, 9, 14, 44, 54, 56, 63, 69, 176

P

partnerships, 14, 18, 27, 40, 49, 54, 56, 58–60, 62, 63, 65, 67–9, 75, 77, 80, 81, 91, 101, 103, 107, 109, 112, 113, 115–18, 123, 125–7, 129, 133, 134, 141, 159, 170–3, 178, 180

PASCAL, 49, 97, 98, 100, 109

Philippines, 107, 112

policy

enabling policy environment, 168, 174, 180

implications, xii, 83, 151, 163, 167–81

porous university, xiii, xiv, 19, 20, 43, 44, 65, 66, 69, 76, 91, 117, 118, 124, 145–63, 167–81

poverty, 12, 15, 28–30, 42, 64, 114, 115, 127, 131, 152, 167, 173, 178

power, xii, xiii, 31, 33, 35, 36, 40–4, 55, 58, 60, 61, 65, 68, 69, 76, 79, 82–5, 87–9, 108, 129, 130, 139, 140, 142, 150, 152, 160, 170, 171, 178, 181

public good, xi, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 19, 27, 30, 34, 36, 53, 151, 169, 170, 180

PURE project, 97, 98

R

reciprocity, 54, 56, 79, 80, 83, 100, 126, 133, 135, 171

research

community-based research (CBR), 54, 56, 86, 141, 156, 171

participatory, 54, 81, 86, 91, 112, 167, 168, 171

research methodologies, 86, 156,
167, 168, 171
rural connection, 123, 151–60

S

scholarship of engagement, 53–6, 112,
118, 127, 171, 177
Scotland, 65, 66
SDGs. *See* sustainable development
goals (SDGs)
service learning
civic responsibility, 35, 38, 77–81,
87
community-based, 82
curriculum, 35, 84, 87–90, 134,
138, 160, 172, 178
definition, 78, 80–1
experiential learning, 78, 81, 82,
171
international service learning, 79
pedagogical studies, 84
pedagogy, 77, 78, 81, 82, 84, 87,
90
philanthropical, 87
practice-based studies, 82
progression of ideas, 87–90
radical, 87
research methodologies, 86
social responsibility, 79, 81
SOFAR relationship model, 83
sustainability, 80, 86
transformative, 82, 83, 87, 88,
172
university curriculum, 85, 90, 134,
138
social capital, 41, 43, 100, 108, 111,
117, 118, 133, 135, 139, 141,
173
social justice
cognitive justice, 55, 171
justice, 7, 27–9, 33, 34, 36, 38, 52,
56, 86–91, 111, 169, 172
social network theory, 113

South Africa, xi, xii, 4, 8, 13–19, 35,
50, 53, 56, 65, 76, 80–3, 85, 89,
91, 98, 106, 115–17, 125, 128,
132–41, 145, 151, 169, 173,
175, 179, 180
universities, 2, 5, 16, 34, 75, 77
structural adjustment, 1, 11, 12
Sub Saharan Africa, 4, 12, 41, 114
sustainability, 14, 41, 42, 58, 62, 65,
76, 79, 80, 83, 86, 107, 112,
125, 131, 132, 140, 146, 162,
170, 171, 178
sustainable development goals (SDGs),
13, 14, 52, 99, 100, 140, 146,
150, 156, 162, 171, 174

T

Talloires, xii, 7, 51
Tanzania, 10, 11, 33, 115, 123
Thailand, 110, 111
third mission, xi, 5–7, 53, 54, 147,
167, 168
third sector
NGOs, 81
not-for-profit, 81
Thornville, 157, 158

U

U3A. *See* University of the Third Age
(U3A)
ubuntu, 85, 135, 139, 141, 142, 149,
156, 161, 162, 169, 179, 181
UFS. *See* University of the Free State
(UFS)
Uganda, 10, 53, 63, 131, 142
UNESCO, 9, 10, 13, 51, 52, 100–4,
114, 145, 146, 151, 162, 169,
172
United States (US), 1, 18, 21n2, 39,
50, 62, 65, 77, 78, 82, 118,
150
land grant universities, 6, 51

university

African universities, xi, xiii, 1, 4, 5,
8–10, 14, 21n1, 21n2, 49, 53,
117, 123, 124, 148

British universities, 6

extra mural, 9

land grant universities, 6, 51

marketisation, xi, 2, 7, 19, 162

massification, xii, 2, 52, 147

rural connection, 123, 151–60

South African universities, 2, 5, 16,
34, 75, 77

university education, 2, 5, 9, 15, 35,
84

world rankings, 3

University of KwaZulu-Natal

(UKZN), 5, 64, 67, 116, 159

University of Strathclyde, 65

University of the Free State (UFS)

Edu-village, 14, 135, 136, 142

GULL, 137

Indaba, 142

learning programmes, 142

University of the Third Age (U3A),
106

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee,
62, 171

US. *See* United States (US)

Z

Zimbabwe, xii, 11, 14, 125–33, 169

Mberengwa, 127–32