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An architecture understood: effective support structures for community–university partnerships

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Introduction

Good architectural design is fundamental to the successful construction, maintenance and liveability of a home. Likewise, the appropriate architecture is necessary in instituting policies and programmes that deepen, broaden, improve and sustain community–university research partnerships. The good news is that much is known about how to design effective support structures to foster and nurture these partnerships.

This chapter reviews ten proven examples of such structures, all drawn from the Global North. These structures operate variously at the macro (national or multinational), meso and micro levels. The chapter also discusses strategies and tools for evaluating partnerships that can be used by support structures. Finally, the chapter addresses the question of how the Global South can institute support structures to promote community–university research partnerships in poor emerging countries, building on the experience of the North.

Macro-level structures

Community–university research alliances in Canada

For more than a decade, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, a federal agency set up by the Liberal government in 1977, operated the Community–University Research Alliance (CURA) programme. Allocating more than \$120 million to this initiative, the council funded national, regional and local partnerships between engaged scholars and reflective practitioners in such fields as Aboriginal languages, social enterprise, food security, and environmental assessment (see Hall, 2009b). CURAs were provided with substantial funds – \$1 million over five years – to coordinate what were often sprawling networks of collaborators, to promote knowledge mobilization and to foster extensive graduate student participation. One disadvantage to community partners was that CURA funds could only be channelled through universities, and then ‘out’ to community groups. However, CURAs did eventually support stipends for practitioners to work on CURAs, recognizing the value of their knowledge and the opportunity of their participation. In 2010, SSHRC intro-

duced new programme architecture that sought to make its support of partnered research even more flexible and responsive (SSHRC, 2010). This new architecture is currently being tested.

Support for higher education's social and economic contribution in England

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), an arm's-length body with its own board, began distributing public funds to universities and colleges in 1992. In 2009–10, for example, the Council received about £8 billion from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and, in turn, distributed these funds to higher education institutions as block grants. Among other areas, HEFCE allocated funds to the theme of 'Enhancing the contribution of higher education to the economy and society'. It was from this programme window that HEFCE supported the South East Coastal Communities Project of the Community University Partnerships Programme (CUPP) at the University of Brighton. Prior to the election of the Conservative government in the United Kingdom, the council was to undergo a review of its effectiveness. In the wake of radical Conservative cuts in 2011 to higher education, the Council's own future is in question.

Lifelong learning in Europe

Operating at the supranational level, the European Commission manages its large-scale Lifelong Learning Programme, whose 2007–13 budget is €7 billion. Encompassing a wide range of educational, vocational-training and e-learning initiatives, the programme aims to enable Europeans at all stages of their lives, in diverse cultures, to pursue stimulating learning opportunities and to enhance their mobility to access employment in the euro region. Grants are awarded on the basis of a call for proposals. The programme frequently funds collaborations between universities and other partners, including both private and non-profit sectors. In the wake of Europe's continuing debt crisis, proposals to renew this programme will face stiff competition and scrutiny as the European Commission deals with cuts to its overall budget.

These three examples of macro-level structures are instructive in many ways: the progressive framing and design of their programmes; their innovative practices of funding grantees, and the ways in which they themselves have been shaped by broader, and continuously evolving, political and economic conditions. It is clear from these cases that establishing such structures is a twofold task: one that is both technocratic and political at the same time.

Meso-level support structures

Community–Campus Partnerships for Health

Community–Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) is a non-profit organization founded in 1996 that aims to promote health through partnerships between communities and higher-education institutions. With a growing membership of more than 1,800 community organizations, universities and colleges, and individuals across the United States and Canada, the organization facilitates networking,

exchange and mutual learning on service learning, community-based participatory research and other partnership strategies. It has also produced a toolkit for faculty members who do partnered scholarship and are seeking tenure or promotion. CCPH organizes an influential annual conference and, through its website and newsletter, provides information on funding and publication opportunities. Governed by a board of directors of community members, faculty and students, CCPH is supported by cash and in-kind contributions from public and private organizations, government agencies, foundations and individuals.

The Living Knowledge Network (science shops)

With its origins in the Netherlands in the 1970s, the concept of science shops has evolved and expanded to many countries. While they take a variety of organizational forms, science shops generally provide independent, participatory research services in response to issues identified by citizens' organizations. Involving both the hard and social sciences, science shops may be based within universities, or they may be stand-alone NGOs operating in the community. For its part, the Living Knowledge Network connects science shops across Europe. The network offers online resources and toolkits relating to science-shop organization and activities and other forms of community–university partnerships. Since 2000, the European Commission has provided financial assistance to science-shop research, networking and conferences, through its 5th, 6th and 7th Framework Programmes of EU-wide research. Science shops receive funding and in-kind support from the universities with which they are affiliated, studentship and research grants, co-funding with partner NGOs, and their own social entrepreneurship.

Community–university partnership in practice

CUPP is a collaborative involving the University of Brighton and communities in and around Brighton. Established in 2003, this partnership has aimed to tackle disadvantage and promote equitable and sustainable development in local communities through research and action. In particular, the CUPP help desk serves as an entry point to the university for local community, voluntary and statutory organizations seeking assistance with research and other tasks. Committed to ongoing learning and improvement, the collaborative built in a phased external evaluation of its work in the period 2004–06, and adjusted its plans and activities in light of the evaluation's findings. CUPP also uses a matrix entitled REAP (Reciprocity, Externalities, Access and Partnership) as a self-assessment tool to capture and measure the inputs, outputs and outcomes for both university and community partners. As noted earlier, CUPP benefited from multi-year financial support from HEFCE.

Le Chantier de l'économie sociale, Quebec

Le Chantier de l'économie sociale is Quebec's umbrella organization for movements and organizations involved in the broad social-economy sector, including day-care centres, housing cooperatives, social enterprises for disadvantaged groups, and

much more. The Chantier has been the prime regional partner for a series of research collaborations with the University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM) on the social economy and social-purpose finance (see Chapter 7 in this volume). These projects were funded by the CURA programme of SSHRC. This research informed the Chantier's proposal to establish a non-profit trust to finance the expansion of the social economy in Quebec. The trust was launched in 2006–07 with support from the governments of Canada and Quebec, further strengthening Chantier's influence and capacity. The organization's regional research collaboration with UQAM continues.

These are four different meso-level structures. The CCPH network is organized along *thematic* lines. In this case, health, broadly defined, is the common focus of a wide variety of partnership programmes, projects, centres and institutes. For its part, the Living Knowledge Network is organized by the type of *partnership mechanism* it supports: the science shop. Members of the networks undertake action research with community partners on a diversity of issues, from water quality to youth unemployment. The third example is that of CUPP, which is a more *localized network* coordinated by one university and serving a group of communities in a common catchment area. The case of the Chantier is different again; it is a *social-movement mechanism* that makes demands on and directs community–university partnerships. In all four cases, however, multi-year funding has been crucial to the effective operation of these structures. Of the four, CCPH and the Chantier appear to have developed the most diversified mix of revenue streams.

Micro-level structures

University of British Columbia Community Learning Initiative

In 2006, the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada launched its Community Learning Initiative (CLI) to promote community service learning and community-based research. Funded by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and the University, the initiative is a broad-based collaboration of faculties, departments and community organizations overseen by three UBC vice-presidents: academic, students and external. CLI offers support to course instructors and facilitates meaningful student engagement through ongoing relationships with community partners. In 2009, Community Service Learning (CSL) projects focused on such areas as sustainability, marginalization, poverty and gender politics. UBC has evaluated the initiative regularly, surveying the perspectives of faculty, student and community organizations. Challenges identified through the evaluation process include the need to develop deeper partnerships in the planning of projects, and establishing the growth of CSL as a strategic priority of the university.

Kids in the Hall Program, Edmonton

The Kids in the Hall Program was a collaboration of the Community–University Partnership unit of the University of Alberta and the Edmonton City Centre Church, in Alberta, Canada. Funded by a grant of about \$250,000 from the

federal government's National Crime Prevention Strategy, the programme sought to address the root causes of crime through counselling in life management, career planning and links to employment opportunities for young people with prior criminal records, substance abuse problems and poverty backgrounds. The University of Alberta team conducted evaluation research from 2003 to 2005 to enable the programme to adjust and improve its delivery approach.

Trent Centre for Community-Based Education

The Trent Centre for Community-Based Education (TCCBE) was set up as a separate non-profit organization to expand and deepen Trent University's engagement with community organizations in Peterborough and Haliburton in southern Ontario, Canada. The founding organizations were the Frost Centre for Canadian Studies at Trent University, the Peterborough Social Planning Council, and the non-profit Community Opportunity and Innovation Network. TCCBE connects students and faculty with local organizations to generate opportunities for community-based research, service learning and other experiential education opportunities. Projects are aimed at enhancing the social, environmental, cultural and economic health of local communities in its programming region. During the period 2004 to 2009, the centre benefited from a grant from the McConnell Foundation of nearly \$1 million to expand its services. Also funded by grants and contacts from the federal and provincial governments, TCCBE is governed by a board of directors of community leaders as well as advisory committees for the City of Peterborough and Haliburton County.

There are hundreds of micro-level structures for community–university partnerships across North America, the United Kingdom and Europe. These three examples present a structure that is inside the university institutional base, one that is both inside and outside (Kids in the Hall), and one that is outside the university (TCCBE). In all cases, once again, the importance of multi-year funding has been key to the success of these structures.

Clearly the optimum scenario is for micro-level structures to flourish in a context in which they are supported by both meso- and macro-level structures. Another lesson from these examples is that ongoing evaluation can be used by structures at all levels to assist in continuously adjusting and improving services. And, behind each of these examples is also the story of an impressive, resilient leader – pragmatic visionaries – who bring these structures to life, and sustain them.

Assessing performance: promising directions

Running alongside the evolving experience of support structures for community–university partnership has been a parallel stream of work on appropriate ways of assessing the performance of local and regional partnerships. In North America, the United Kingdom and Europe, this literature is found in the fields of higher education, educational planning, health services, social work and programme evaluation itself. Discussion of evaluation approaches is particularly evident in the

area of service learning, where various assessment models have been advanced. One, for example, is the 3-I model, which assesses three dimensions of the service-learning partnership under study: the initiator, the initiative and impact (Berry, 2009). In the area of research partnerships, Currie *et al.* (2005) propose a process-oriented evaluation approach that assesses three mid-term impact domains: enhanced knowledge, enhanced research skills and use of information.

Perhaps the most comprehensive assessment framework has been advanced by Holland (2001), a leader in service learning and partnerships more generally for many years. Holland's model for evaluating service learning is based on a goal-variable-indicator-method design, where *goal* refers to 'what do we want to know?', *variable* to 'what will we look for?', *indicator* to 'what will be measured?' and *method* to 'how will it be measured?'. The Holland approach uses a matrix to assign appropriate methods with key variables and their associated indicators. Overall, Holland argues for measuring a few important indicators well, rather than collecting large and time-consuming amounts of data for many indicators.

While her earlier work concentrated mainly on results related to students, Holland later focused on ways of assessing the partnership itself. This framework aims to assess partnership performance on common themes, such as exploration and expansion of separate and common goals and interests; understanding of the capacity, resources and expectations of all partners; evidence of mutual benefit; and shared efforts to sustain the core relationship among the partners (Holland, 2005). More recently, Holland has carried out cross-national analysis of experiences in community-university engagement in Asia, Europe and North America. In this work, she examines three types of engagement processes: routine, strategic and transformative approaches (Holland and Ramaley, 2008). It is understood that universities and communities can, and should, deploy a combination of these approaches in order to address the complex challenges and opportunities they face (Hall, 2009b). And partnerships should be evaluated on this basis, as well.

Furthermore, other scholars have argued that, in order to counter built-in biases, evaluative strategies and tools should be intentionally tilted towards the interests and outcomes that are priorities for community organizations, and away from a focus on the interests and outcomes that are priorities for universities. This is as true for community service learning as it is for community-based research (Stoecker, 2008, 2009, 2010). Indeed, there is a new wave of experimentation which explores, and tests, this perspective on partnership evaluation.

While all of this work on ways of assessing the performance of community-university partnership can be adapted and used by partnership support structures at all levels, this body of analysis and practice could be strengthened by insights and tools from international-development evaluation and in other evaluation subfields. In particular, development evaluation's focus on results-based management, logical frameworks (Rist and Morra Imas, 2009) and theory of change (Rogers, 2008) can enrich partnership evaluation, as can the depth and breadth of its practice in stakeholder participation in the evaluation process (Jackson and Hall, 2005;). In other specialized areas of evaluation, such as social accounting (Mook *et al.*, 2007), there is much to learn and apply, as well.

Support structures which fund regional and local partnerships have a strong interest in performance assessment. Whether they are based in the Global North or Global South, these structures require evaluation methods and tools that are flexible, adaptive and respect local knowledge, promote both learning and accountability at the same time, and usefully inform funding decisions, in real time. The studies cited here show that it is quite possible to design and implement performance assessment systems that meet all of these requirements and more.

The developing country challenge – and opportunity

This volume presents case studies from Latin America and South Asia that demonstrate the effectiveness and ingenuity of community–university research partnerships in developing countries. These cases primarily illustrate micro-level structures that enhance, deepen and sustain such partnerships. But what about macro- and micro-level structures in the developing world? The short answer is that these structures don't exist, at least not in the least-developed countries – yet.

A study of five Ghanaian universities illustrates the nature of the challenges faced by advocates of community–university research partnerships in that country. First, at the most fundamental level, the university sector in Ghana is badly underfunded by its national government. Second, government does not see value in directly including a role for the universities in its development and poverty-reduction strategies, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers aimed at achieving targets towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). 'One needs to answer the question whether this is a reflection of the failure of the institutions themselves to demonstrate their relevance in such cases, or a lack of recognition by the appropriate authorities or a combination of both', observe Manuh *et al.* (2003, p. 32). Third, there has been no systematic mapping of interests and capacities in the university sector with development needs, on the one hand, and partnership opportunities in civil society and the private sector, on the other.

That is not to say that community–university engagement does not take place in Ghana. It certainly does, and often impressively. For example, the University of Development Studies in northern Ghana encourages its students to carry out partnered, action-oriented research in development studies, primary health care and other fields. At the University of Ghana in the south, the Institute of Social Sciences and Economic Research and the Institute of Adult Education have built partnerships with a range of constituencies interested in policy research and training, respectively. There are dozens of other examples.

However, the fact is that these micro-level activities are fragmented and lack support from the meso and macro levels – especially multi-year financial support. And that has meant that community–university engagement remains fragile, transitory, invisible, unscaled and marginal to mainstream development policy. But, this situation can and should be turned around. The most pressing need is to do so in the least developed nations of sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Central America.

The World Bank recognizes that universities can be powerful catalysts of

economic growth. A recent World Bank study examined a range of experiences in North America, Europe, Japan, China, India and Singapore with government policies that encourage university–industry links (UILs) to promote innovation, technology and business growth (Yusuf and Nabeshima, 2007). Both higher education and innovation strategies in these jurisdictions are being used by the state to foster commercialized research, increased registering of patents and the growth of targeted technology clusters in regions. Likewise, universities in these countries are ‘trying harder to commercialize scientific discoveries and connect with the business world’ (*ibid.*, p. 17). There is, therefore, a consensus in both industrialized and industrializing countries that university–industry linkages are important tools of competitiveness in an increasingly globalized world economy.

There is a real opportunity now for a coalition of universities, civil society organizations, donor agencies, foundations and governments in developing countries to build a similar consensus in the sphere of poverty-reduction action. The first step would be to map a theory of change that would make explicit how community–university partnerships would help reduce poverty in poor regions of poor countries, urban and rural alike. The second step would be to embed a significant, visible and accountable role for universities in national poverty-reduction strategies: the international community will need to renew or replace the MDGs in the run-up to their expiry in 2015. The third step would be for certain donor agencies, foundations and NGOs to work with governments and universities to underwrite the costs – for at least a decade – of new meso-level and macro-level structures whose support will deepen, broaden and sustain partnerships aimed at reducing poverty at the local and regional levels.

It is useful to imagine what is possible. Taking elements of the SSHRC–CURA programme from Canada and the Living Knowledge Network in Europe, this coalition could collaboratively design a ten-year programme to fund macro- and meso-level structures that, in turn, would help micro-level partnerships to flourish. It could be delivered on a regional basis in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Central America. Regular external and internal evaluations of the programme should be deployed for learning, accountability and continuous improvement.

Developing-country economies and politics are increasingly influenced by the new economic powers of China, India, Brazil and other emerging nations. The West must, in a very real sense, regroup and reposition itself in this new economic order. Accordingly, the donor agencies, foundations, NGOs and universities of North America, Europe, Japan and Australia could play an important role in funding these new structures. Indeed, this new role could give them renewed influence as poor countries strive to progress. Such renewed influence by the West could help to counter and moderate the authoritarian policies and practices of many of the new powers. This could be a useful asset for developing countries in the years ahead.

Conclusion

The design and construction of support structures for community–university research partnerships is now an architecture well understood. It is the task of advocates for such partnerships in the Global North to create and sustain, inside and outside legislatures, the political constituency that is committed to championing these structures. Of course, this is equally true for engaged scholars and reflective practitioners in the Global South. A robust and ongoing commitment by the state is essential for these structures to achieve optimum scale and longevity and results. Partnership advocates must be creative, resilient and focused in their political efforts to this end.

They also must be of multiple generations. The building of strong, permanent research partnerships between communities and universities – indeed, the larger societal project of building a knowledge democracy – is inherently a long-term task. It requires contributions from the young, the middle aged and the elderly. It requires thoughtful leadership preparation and succession. And it requires careful, continuous sharing of the ‘corporate memory’ of what works and what doesn’t.

There is important work to do in putting in place effective support structures for community–university research partnerships. There is every reason to set about this work immediately, with energy and conviction.