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Measuring the impact of community–university research partnerships: a global perspective

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Knowledge, intention, action and impact are intricately linked in a dynamic relationship. Community–university research partnerships are action oriented – exchanging and co-constructing a unique type of knowledge to tackle complex interrelated social, environmental and economic issues. There is evidence that community–university research partnerships serve an important function as they engage in creating greater participation, opportunities, access and impact among those most vulnerable in communities across the world. In these times of global economic uncertainty, families are increasingly challenged by social, environmental and economic realities, such as widening wage disparity, unemployment and poverty. Concurrently, community–university research partners and projects are becoming more vulnerable to shifts in funding affecting the creation of new partnerships, the sustainability of existing partnerships and the structures that support them. Community–university research partners are responding by continuing to work towards social change, exploring creative ways of working together across sectors and borderlines, and developing intentional processes to demonstrate their value and impact in universities, communities and society.

Using the lens of global perspectives, this chapter explores the form, function and impact of community–university research partnerships by examining participatory approaches to research and impacts that serve to foster, facilitate and strengthen the unique relationship and democratic knowledge exchange process between partners, participants and across the sectors they represent. Drawing from examples of hybrid approaches to assessment and evaluation of community–university research partnerships, this chapter argues that measuring impact is informed by partners and participants becoming intentional about the kind of changes, influence and impact they are creating in the partnership, in their local communities and beyond.

Community–university partnership in research: a global scan

One step in beginning to understand the types, roles, interconnectivity and impact of community–university research partnerships is to investigate their form and function in local, regional, national and global contexts. The task of

mapping community–university research partnerships networks and structures began through the work of the Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research (GACER) and continues to be a work in progress (<http://mapping.uvic.ca/GACER>). Names, faces and places represent a growing number of community–university research networks. Now, a new online interactive map widens access and participation as it is accessible and user-friendly for anyone looking for research centres, universities, NGOs, civil society organizations and people engaged in community–university research partnerships. Local, regional, national and international community–university research partnership structures, networked together, offer greater opportunities to draw on global perspectives and act in global arenas.

To date, four broad categories of community–university partnerships in research have been identified (Hall, Tremblay and Downing, 2009), as set out in the following paragraphs.

Type I involves individual faculty engaging in transactional and community-based research partnerships with community created without a systematic institutional support. For example, there are HEIs in which there are no organizational structures such as a centre, office or institute for community-based research or community–university research partnerships to systematically support faculty, community members, groups and organizations in research partnerships. The lack of such a systematic support structure does not preclude the fact that individual faculty and departments engage in research partnerships with communities. These partnerships may be scattered across the institution, and those involved may become isolated in their efforts. In such cases, informal supportive groups may be organized, which can lead to the creation of a formal structure.

Type II describes centres or institutes with particular focuses that support community-based research partnerships with communities of similar interests: for example, Réseau de Recherche Participative en Afrique au Sud du Sahara – African Participatory Research Network (REPAS), based in Senegal; Bolivia Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinarios – Bolivian Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies (CEBEM); Bonn Science Shop in Germany; Centre for Community-Based Research (CCBR) in Canada; and Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), based in Delhi. These are generally independent, non-profit organizations that act upon the power of knowledge, using participatory approaches to mobilize and collaborate with community members, marginalized groups, community organizations, government ministries, social and health services and educational institutions, with the aim of achieving positive social change.

Type III identifies systematic organizational structures functioning in a university whose remit is to engage university and community partners in research for mutual benefit. The following are a few examples among a growing number of systematic organizational structures that operate in HEIs: the Office of Community-Based Research (OCBR) at the University of Victoria, Canada; the Community–University Partnership Programme (CUPP) at the University of Brighton; Science Shop InterMEDIU at the Technical University of Iasi, Romania; and a jointly managed institute hosted by Bukidnon State University with Tanggol Kalikasan, an NGO, in the Philippines.

Type IV involves multiple HEIs and community partnerships engaging in ongoing research and strengthening teaching and research at regional, national or international levels. Examples include: the Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research (GACER); the Living Knowledge Network; the research consortium of the Alliance de recherche universités–communautés en économie sociale/Community–University Research Alliance in Social Economy (ARUC-ÉS); and the Réseau québécois de recherche partenariale en économie sociale – Quebec Network of Research Partnerships in Social Economy (RQRP-ÉS).

An example of research and collaboration in this category is the global participatory research project that contributed to this publication. Funded in Canada by the Social Science and Humanity Research Council (SSHRC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the research project focused on strengthening community–university research partnerships for sustainable development and involves multiple HEIs and community partnerships engaged in research and strengthening teaching and research. Core research partners were all members of GACER; they included the Society for Participatory Research in Asia; the Living Knowledge Network; the Sub-Saharan Africa Participatory Research Network; Community–University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton; University of Victoria; University of Quebec in Montreal; and Carleton University in Ottawa.

Through the global participatory research project, stories have emerged about the collaborative, complementary and challenging nature of partnerships that extend across these four broad categories. Such partnerships are relational in nature, using participatory action research approaches to facilitate and foster the co-construction and co-creation of new knowledge together in order to tackle specific complex and interrelated social, economic and environmental issues. Such collaborations have made a positive impact on the lives and livelihood of people and their environment by drawing on multiple types of knowledge, experiences and expertise across sectors, cultures and regions, while working through the details and overcoming the challenges of initiating and engaging as partners and allies in participatory projects and programmes. It is the work of building a networked knowledge democracy at every level of society and the economy, from the local to the global, to make lives better, protect the earth and foster peace.

Impact of participatory approaches to research

Participatory research approaches such as community-based research value and validate diverse forms of knowledge and wisdom from people, groups and organizations in communities traditionally marginalized in the research process. Therefore, the aim of a community–university research partnership is to create an equitable partnership between those whose knowledge has exerted power in our societies, such as HEIs and policymakers (government), and those whose knowledge and wisdom is powerful but with greater challenges being heard, and so have not been able to engage fully in the process of social change and transformation in their own communities and societies.

São Paulo, Brazil

The Participatory Sustainable Waste Management project provides an understanding of the power, value and impact of using participatory approaches to create sustainable social and economic change ameliorating lives and livelihoods of local and international communities. This project has contributed significantly to informing and expanding theory, creating and reforming inclusive public policies on integrated waste management and promoting environmental sustainability. Emerging from developed and established collaborative research and community relationships, the project focuses on local participatory waste management as an opportunity to improve the social, economic lives of informal recyclers, known in Brazil as *catadores*. The central participants, the recyclers, are a stigmatized, marginalized, exploited, socially and economically excluded people.

The Participatory Sustainable Waste Management, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), is a partnership project between the University of Victoria (Canada) and the University of São Paulo (Brazil) along with the Forum Recicla São Paulo (Brazil), Rede Mulher de Educação (Brazil), a number of recycling cooperatives, NGOs, local governments and the Universitário Fundação Santo André (Brazil).

Participatory and action-oriented methodologies were chosen because of the collaborative, inclusive and equitable methods that could be employed. According to Gutberlet *et al.*

Participatory approaches to development promote social justice and produce empowering outcomes, such as increased community capacities and broader stakeholder participation in decision-making. These approaches provide a platform to reduce and circumvent power relations typical of development research, and provide a voice for marginalised populations by facilitating their involvement in programs. Through this process of power redistribution, opportunities emerge to build participants' capacity to transform their lives. Participatory approaches provide a means to facilitate empowerment and collective action, which can result in significant development outcomes including improved quality of life, the protection of resources, reduced social and economic exclusion, and enhanced equality. (2008, p. 6)

A combination of participatory approaches referred to as *mixed methods* have been used strategically and effectively to combine the strengths of capacity building and knowledge mobilization in this policy-relevant project. Interviews, focus groups, surveys, photovoice, participatory video, community mapping and participatory observation (researchers participate in the work processes of the recyclers) were among the mixed-methods approach used to engage recyclers as co-researchers and participants. Capacity building focused on financial and organizational management, information technology, collective commercialization, microcredit and co-op administration. Collective decision making, sharing and applying participants' knowledge, learning by doing, consistently honest and transparent communication are all cited as contributing factors marking the impact of widely applied results and improvement of recyclers' lives beyond project funding. This project contributed to theorizing the social and solidarity economies in areas of research that remain relatively under-theorized; critical

discourse on collective commercialization and microcredit; the expansion of the body of theory about community-based research and empowerment concepts; and the body of knowledge and practice of sustainable production and consumption. In addition, partners and project participants engaged in policy discussions and supported the participation of recyclers in policy discussion by providing valuable evidence-based research. The Waste Management project demonstrates the realities and possibilities for widening democratic participation and spaces across local, regional and national borders. It has developed into a global reference for knowledge generation and mobilization on inclusive waste management.

The type of knowledge generated, mobilized and co-produced in community-university research partnerships through participatory approaches is unique. The type or mode of knowledge mobilized, constructed and produced by community-university partners and participants is distinctly different from the type of knowledge they produce as separate entities.

Hart, Maddison and Wolff (2007) have classified this distinction by creating a new mode of knowledge, adding to the four existing modes of knowledge already classified by Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Scott *et al.* (2004).

Mode 1 knowledge (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994) is identified as being exclusive to the knowledge generated in universities. It is disciplinary, expert-led, hierarchical, peer-reviewed and offers legitimacy and prestige. Mode 2 knowledge (*ibid.*) 'has not traditionally been valued by academics and by institutions of higher education' (Hart, Maddison and Wolff, 2007, p. 5). It is applied, problem-centred, transdisciplinary, heterogeneous and network-embedded knowledge. Mode 3 knowledge (Scott *et al.*, 2004) is dispositional and transdisciplinary knowledge, having its context in structured university work, specifically at the postgraduate level. Mode 4 knowledge (*ibid.*) has more of a conceptual nature with the purpose of being political and change oriented.

Mode 5 knowledge combines and adds to these four modes in classifying the knowledge created by community-university research partnerships as peer-reviewed, applied, heterogeneous, problem-centred, transdisciplinary, change-oriented and co-produced by the university and community (Hart, Maddison and Wolff, 2007). The classification of community-university research partnership knowledge as a separate mode of knowledge recognizes and validates the unique knowledge created through participatory approaches, which have at their core the exchange and co-production of knowledge with the aim of creating change for the betterment of communities, universities and society as a whole.

Quebec, Canada

Co-constructing knowledge in partnership can take many different forms. In one community-university research partnership – Chantier de l'Économie Sociale Trust (Fiducie du Chantier de l'économie sociale) – academic, professional and practitioner expertise were partnered to create a research locus for research projects or self-directed training opportunities. Throughout the project, research was conducted collaboratively by both researchers and practitioners to mobilize and co-construct knowledge. According to Denis Bussires, author of the case study:

This method, termed the co-construction of knowledge, differs greatly from traditional knowledge transfer methods by supporting the involvement of partners' academic and community settings throughout the research. Ultimately, the research project becomes a common project shared by both the researchers and the practitioners. This method greatly facilitates knowledge mobilization by practitioners because, throughout the process, they can immediately use the results of the research. This research partnership model was employed because it allows for an adequate response to practical problems or questions. It enables research focused on the key issues for the practitioners and allows for the integration of the expertise of both university researchers and practitioners. (Bussires *et al.*, 2008, p. 5)

Practitioners and researchers engaged in a process of knowledge exchange to assess existing knowledge of specific problems and issues. Researchers who found the process challenging and/or who could not align their own research interests with the project either committed to it or quit the project. A strong core of partners with shared interests established a research locus. This research locus is an example of an effective democratic approach to mobilizing, generating and strategizing knowledge from multiple sectors in society towards a goal that is mutually beneficial and for partners. The aim was to develop a new financial tool to fill a gap in financial services, which would then be available to Quebec's social economy enterprises. Through this partnership, a new financing tool was created for supporting community economic development initiatives. The Fiducie du Chantier de l'conomie Sociale Trust created a 'patient' capital loan with zero payments for fifteen years. Other success factors reported by Bussires (see Chapter 23 in this volume) included: research topics were closely linked to questions in the field; supportive leadership by both the university and practitioner coordinators, practitioner members involved in the project were linked to active well-established organizations; researchers listened to practitioners and were able to develop questions and concerns into research projects; conditions for organizations to convert research results into development tools were created. Fiducie holds approximately \$52.8 million in funds, \$10 million of which was generated from provincial and federal government.

A democratic partnership process is related to the successful application of participatory methodologies that positions the voices, experience and expertise of both community and university partners and participants. Through participatory approaches, community–university research partnerships serve to facilitate multiple knowledge types and strategies in the co-construction of a unique type of knowledge useful in many different sectors of society – creating policy changes, improving socio-economic conditions and working towards societal transformation. From social enterprises in So Paulo to Quebec, local impact begins with a participatory approach working from a core principle of local responsibility while engaging, negotiating and advocating across multiple knowledges, sectors and levels of government.

Measuring impact

Questions related to change and impact such as, 'How will we know our work makes a difference?' (Gelmon, 2000), commonly arise in community-university research partnerships. The lens of impact assessment can be applied across all stages of partnership requiring a combination of measurement activities to meet the 'ongoing challenge to find innovative solutions to the complexities of evaluating and demonstrating the impact of this kind of work [community-university research partnerships]' (Hart and Wolff, 2006, p. 196). Partnership stages as identified by Cargo and Mercer (2008) are engagement, formalization, mobilization and maintenance. It is important to stress that, although this may appear to be a linear process, it is not. Partnerships grow and develop at different paces and need time, especially at the engagement, formalization and mobilization stages to develop relations of trust and respect, to determine shared purpose, protocols, agreements and to work through challenges at all stages, such as: communication, time, funding, negotiating power imbalances, cross-cultural and organizational differences, capacity building and the need for reward systems recognizing non-conventional research being conducted by both university and community researchers (Cargo and Mercer, 2008). Of equal importance and relevance in partnership work is the question: 'Who is not being impacted and why not?' Investigating answers to such questions lead to the use and/or modification of existing strategies and tools or to designing and developing new tools.

A working definition of impact assessment that emerged through consultation and case studies is offered by Roche (1999) as: 'the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes – positive or negative, intended or not – in people's lives brought about by a given action or series of actions' (p. 20).

Impact assessment is by no means a new phenomenon; it is often done intuitively in our daily lives. The difference between what we do to assess impact in our daily lives and formal impact assessment is the process of developing a structure, a systematic or complex process, involving indicators, outcomes and timelines, which can be used to map uncharted territory using a pathway of change (Connell and Kubisch, 1998; Hart, Northmore and Gerhardt, 2008; Roche, 1999). Weiss (1995) defines a theory of change as describing how and why an initiative works in the context of theory-guided programme evaluation. Developing a pathway of change is one aspect of applying a theory of change approach that identifies changes (outcomes) planned by a programme, a particular initiative or an intervention. It is important to define the 'level at which change is desired and include stakeholders in the collaboration who are able to effect change at that level' (Todd, Ebata and Hughes, 1998, p. 238). Community-university research partners at the University of Brighton's CUPP apply a theory of change to identify a pathway of change, which includes indicators to measure success leading to particular outcomes (Hart, Northmore and Gerhardt, 2008). There is value in incorporating a theory of change approach to evaluate partnership processes and their impact (Anderson, 2005) because it aids in understanding whether community-university partnerships achieve their desired outcomes, how they achieve

those outcomes and how university participation adds value to the process (Hart, Maddison and Wolff, 2007).

Critical to this discussion is the recognition and understanding that assessing short- and long-term impacts is a complex and multi-tiered challenge, requiring a combination of measurement tools, which must be deconstructed into manageable portions that ultimately converge to construct a web of measurement activities involving university and community researchers and practitioners. Challenges include dealing with indistinct concepts such as outcomes, effects and impact, as they tend to overlap. Many factors contribute to how impact is assessed and whether impact is determined as valuable (good return for investment, contributes to the public good) positive, negative, detrimental or beneficial. The significance of the impact being assessed depends on whose views and voices are represented, who benefits and for what purpose. For example, certain communities' voices, often under-represented, can unintentionally be sidelined while various agendas of other stakeholders are being met. Mapping and revising a pathway of change to reflect meaningful indicators and outcomes for the community, university and their respective stakeholders, while careful use of measurement activities to assess who benefits and where value is being added, can strengthen partnerships working towards change.

In these times of economic restraint and cutbacks at all levels of government, funding agencies and in universities, demonstration of impact, value addition and making measurement statements are becoming increasingly vital to sustaining the work that has already begun through community–university research partnerships and the structures that support and strengthen them in higher education and civil society. Case studies in the global participatory project demonstrate that coordination of qualitative and quantitative measurement activities contributes to greater likelihood of sustainability of these partnerships. The following examples demonstrate that the process of measuring impact is informed by how partners and participants directly and indirectly involved in community–university research partnerships are committed about the kind of changes, influence and impact their partnership creates – locally and beyond.

Demonstrating impact in a community–university research partnership

Communities of Practice (CoP) refer to 'groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise' (Wenger and Snyder, 2000, p. 139). CUPP is the first known structure to modify and apply the 'communities of practice conceptual framework' to community–university research partnerships to improve community, university and practitioners' capacity to: share their expertise, accumulate a body of common knowledge, discuss practices and approaches; and innovate and new knowledge. Bouncing Back is a CUPP partnership project that aims to address the complexities of disadvantaged children and families through resilience therapy (RT). RT 'focuses on "scaffolding" resilience for these children through the imaginative and creative therapeutic work of resilient promoters such as mental health practitioners, social workers, teachers

and parents ... applying RT involves a relentless search for resilient actions that improve the outcomes in situations of high disadvantage' (Hart and Aumann, 2007, p. 171). In the context of the Bouncing Back project, the CoP approach built on 'knowledge exchange and understanding of the research underpinning resilience to continually facilitate refinement of Resilience Therapy in theory and in practice and builds on what is found to be effective' (see the Bouncing Back case study in this volume, Chapter 21). The CoP approach contributed to the effectiveness of this partnership by developing unique perspectives and knowledge in the areas of interest of parents, practitioners and academics, establishing personal relationships, from which the partners derived value.

The REAP matrix was piloted by university and community partners involved in the RT community of practice. REAP is a self-assessment and measurement tool designed to capture *reciprocity* (reciprocal benefit and value for partners), *externalities* (outputs and outcomes), *access* and *partnership* (Pearce, Pearson and Cameron, 2007). For example, to achieve reciprocity, partners describe and then reflect on their respective contributions (input) and the anticipated generated value for partners. In the case of the RT CoP, capturing externalities identified how concrete achievements (outputs) benefit families and/or organizations involved in the project, as well as outcomes that outline the potential and actual achievements and impacts of the CoP for families and organizations in several areas. Designed to be used at the beginning of a project while intentions are being clarified, and at the end of the project, providing a measure of achievement against a baseline, the matrix was designed as a 'cost effective tool for ongoing monitoring and evaluation as well as qualitative measurement which would generate analytical units for understanding the potential contribution of community engagement' (Pearce, Pearson and Cameron, 2009: 35).