Agenda for the future

Budd L. Hall, Edward T. Jackson, Rajesh Tandon, Jean-Marc Fontan,
Nirmala Lall

As partners in the study that led to the creation of this book, we are encouraged by what we see as increased visibility for a *knowledge democracy* movement. In this volume, we have documented the emergence of new practices and new theory that highlight the relationship of knowledge and its construction to issues of local and global social justice. Community–university research partnerships can be critically important locations of transformative energy in the larger effort to understand and use knowledge and its construction and co-construction in ways that are authentically linked to the struggles of everyday people for a better world.

The global neo-liberal economic agenda that has produced a kind of market utopia has been supported by a canon of western, largely male, elite knowledge systems and practices. As the failure of the global market to close the gaps between the rich and poor or provide a platform for more democratic citizen engagement becomes clearer every day, we are thinking of ways to *decolonize knowledge*, to rupture and allow new light into the liberal knowledge canon and to give visibility and respect to the knowledge of those historically excluded. We recognize that, as knowledge is of critical importance to the continuation of dominant relations of power, challenging our understandings of the role of knowledge and its uses will be an arena of contestation. We are ready. Indeed, we are already deeply engaged in that contest. And we know that hundreds of thousands of people in literally every community of the globe have, as African-American civil rights leaders once said, their *eyes on the prize*. The prize, of course, is a more just, sustainable, joyful and loving world. Based what we have learned from our work together in this project, we offer our thoughts on an agenda for the future.

Emergence of a new architecture of knowledge: beyond experiments and pilot projects

Our study provides evidence that, at a global level, we are moving from the tradition of engaged scholarship based largely on the work of a number of committed individual scholars and their personal connections to community to a new, institutional approach. This new phase is characterized by the creation of many centres, some wholly located in communities themselves, and new structures to enable the generation, facilitation and sustainability of community university research

partnerships. And from a theoretical perspective, we see evidence of a growing critical sophistication of research methods as co-construction of knowledge has taken its place in the panoply of academic work. Continuing to give visibility to and build this new architecture of knowledge is critically important. The several case studies in our book coming out of the PRIA work in India show a degree of sophistication both in practice and in theory of how a civil society-based research and capacity-building organization has moved not only into the realm of the academic but beyond. The new architecture of knowledge that we speak of is here.

In the present formulation, institutions of higher education are expected to serve three missions: teaching, research and service. The mission of 'service' is seen independent of teaching (or education) and research (or knowledge). In operational terms, primacy is attached to teaching and research functions of HEIs; 'service' is undertaken afterwards. Many connotations of 'service' tend to assume that knowledge and expertise available to HEIs will be transferred to communities and thus help them to address their problems. No assumption is made that community engagement may, sometimes, actually contribute to improvements in HEIs, especially to their teaching and research functions. In the emerging new architecture of knowledge, we approach engagement in ways that accept the multiple sites and epistemologies of knowledge, as well as the reciprocity and mutuality in learning and education through engagement. In this sense, this book calls upon policymakers and leaders of HEIs around the world to *rethink* social responsibilities of higher education in being a part of the societal exploration for moving towards a more just, equitable and sustainable planet over the next decades.

The power of social media is only beginning to be understood

Most contemporary social movements employ social media extensively to organize their members and advocate the change they want to realize. This is true locally, and it is true globally. The powerful combination of smart phones and laptops with Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter and other local social media powered the organizing on the streets of the Arab Spring and Occupy movement in 2011. At the same time, though, opponents of democracy and the public interest have also learned to deploy social media in order to retain power and justify their actions. As one journalist has remarked, 'Every dictator needs their own Facebook page'. So, the situation is now more complicated, but it is real and these tools are even more important to the struggle for knowledge democracy. Community-university research partnerships can experiment with new ways of using social media for the greater good, while countering the forces of violence and oppression. This will not be easy, but it is necessary.

A new appreciation of place

The University of Victoria, where one of the editors is based, uses the following phrase in the context of engaged scholarship: 'Locally relevant and internationally

significant'. Our study demonstrates the benefits of HEIs' listening to those who have been excluded from the naming of the world in the very places where we are all located. The case study from the Philippines in our collection shows us how to do this work. To those leaders in higher education who are drawn to the idea of international comparisons, we say that excellence at a world level also comes from making a difference in the lives of those living in our communities. In fact, we would go further and say that failure to make a difference in the lives of those persons in the regions and communities of our HEIs constitutes dramatically negative performance, no matter how high up in the global league tables our universities might be placed. Our study shows that whether dealing with issues of climate adaptation, supporting community business, creating more affordable housing and local jobs, or ensuring better-quality local food, research partnerships between communities and the HEIs are working. Through collaborative research practices, universities are becoming ever more active partners with local governments, non-profits, businesses and service providers – all enabling significantly stronger regional development. A focus on place, therefore, provides us with a critically important lens for both analysis and action.

Creating a more dynamic and relevant and curriculum in higher education

Felix Bevins's work in this book documents how the establishment of social justice research partnerships at universities in the United States and Canada has had a positive impact on the curriculum within these institutions. In India, the social work schools have turned to an NGO to provide access for their students to grass-roots co-creation of knowledge experiences. Clearly, a knowledge democracy movement must have at its heart two groups of persons: community activists and leaders (including those from the social movements), and students. Students in the universities that we have studied have been eager to make a difference in the world. In an environment filled with too much disappointment and fear, students, like all of us, are attracted to hope. The examples from the science shops in Europe, of students working on community environmental projects, and the work with older persons in Brighton, England, illustrate the benefits on making community-based research projects part of students' normal academic life. What is more, each of us with a teaching position in a university holds the power to create these kinds of decolonizing and engaged learning conditions within our courses. Indeed, in terms of changing the curriculum, we have much more power than we sometimes realize.

Increased recognition of regional, sectoral and national research alliances and networks

Our study and its rich variety of case studies provide compelling evidence of the critical value of the many new kinds of local, regional, national and global networks that are emerging. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada created a funding programme in 1999 – the Community University

Research Alliance – which funded activists and scholars to work together on the co-creation of knowledge. The idea of research partnerships between civil society organizations can be seen in almost all of our studies. For example, the Living Knowledge Network in Europe has catalyzed effective policy influence at both local and European levels. NGO environmental networks in the Philippines demonstrate their impact, as well. And the various continental and international networks that have emerged such as the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research, the Global University Network for Innovation, the Talloires Network, PASCAL International Observatory and more all have shown how broader and thicker linkages can accelerate the pace of change that we are seeking. Local social movements, government, community environmental, social, cultural and economic interests co-constructing knowledge, ensemble can produce tangible and important results when the common goal is making a difference in the lives of people where they live and work.

Partnerships are for ever!

The evidence which our study demonstrates is that the benefits to community, to theory, to student experiences and both local and global impact accrue in direct proportion to the quality, longevity and trust developed between academic and community partners. We are not looking in the future simply for more partnership projects; instead, we are looking for a whole new architecture of knowledge – a knowledge democracy movement that recognizes new ecologies of knowledge. The sites of effort may include the Canadian social economy sector, indigenous higher education institutions, cooperatives in Bolivia, NGOs in Senegal or networks of informal sector recyclers in Brazil and Canada. What is needed for the future is a multiplicity of ongoing partnerships and alliances that the community can count on for years – in fact, for decades. In turn, such long-term collaborations offer the greatest power to transform our institutions of higher education.

Knowledge cultures are different in communities and the academy

Our study and its cases also serve to underscore what may be obvious, but bears re-stating. The ‘knowledge cultures’ in community settings, community agencies, local governments and so forth are different. We need to learn from each other. Community partners need to know that university partners have a duty to share our work in the world of peer-reviewed spaces as well as with them. As academics, we need to know that the real needs of people struggling in our communities are urgent and that solution-oriented knowledge is the gold standard for community impact. Both scholars and community leaders have to learn, in an emerging world of knowledge democracy and co-creation, that excellence can be increasingly understood within the context of mutual respect.

Increasing recognition of partnership research as a measure of academic excellence

For the pioneers who have been engaged from the university side for many years in participatory and community-based research, we have done this work because we feel that it can make a difference in our communities and the world. We have chosen to work in this way and in many cases have chosen the university as a base for such work. Some of us have had recognition from our universities for this work. Many of us have not. In fact, for many of us who are more senior scholars at this stage of our careers, it is only very recently that any positive attention at all has come to this kind of work. But in the interest of building a knowledge democracy movement, it is worthwhile challenging our various institutions to begin recognizing excellence in engaged scholarship as much as in other ways of doing scholarly work. Increasing efforts are under way within individual academic departments around the world, within faculties and, in some cases, across full university systems to broaden concepts of excellence in academic scholarly performance for the purposes of obtaining tenure and promotion and in the interest of annual merit reviews. While still uneven and with substantial variability among disciplines, professional schools, faculties and universities, partnership research has served to stimulate a broader conception of excellence in scholarship that shows every sign of becoming a global trend.

The policy change process will be long and must be deep and permanent

Instituting pro-community policies across the entire system of a single university is a long process that must be deep and permanent. This will require focus, policy models and tools, and leadership. In fact, it will take multigenerational leadership. Moreover, the external resources and incentive structures must be changed, as well. Political parties and policymakers must be persuaded to tie public funding of universities to strong performance through research and teaching of meaningful value to the communities in which those institutions are based. Governing boards must see that it is in their interest to recruit and support chief executives of universities who are committed to ensuring and improving such performance. In short, what is required is a thoroughgoing process of policy change inside and outside individual universities and across entire national or sub-national higher education sectors. Clearly, the coalition that will drive and achieve this ambitious agenda must be creative, resilient and comprise diverse stakeholders. Planning and building such coalitions cannot start too soon.

A coming together of the streams of knowledge democracy

The field of community–university research and engagement partnerships represents just one of the elements in an emerging knowledge democracy movement. A fully-fledged agenda for the future must be built at the local, national, continental and global levels in order to achieve the radical transformative potential that is

needed. This will mean that voices from the open access knowledge movement will need to be present. It will mean that those like as Boaventura de Sousa Santos and colleagues from Brazil working on the ideas of a 'University of Social Movements' should be present. So too should networks from such diverse fields as Green Map International, which links activist community mappers around the world working for radically new relations with the earth, as should the DESIS (Design for Social Innovation towards Sustainability) network which is based in design schools and universities. It means forging links with networks of indigenous village-based HEIs, like the Mpambo Afrikan Multiversity or the shack-dwellers of South Africa's University of Abahlali base Mjondolo, and many others working towards an *epistemology of the South*. It means understanding and building links with the knowledge creation and learning potential of the Arab Spring and its antecedents, and the Occupy movement in the North.

Will the coming multipolar world thwart or promote knowledge partnerships?

The longer-term prospects of the world economy pose their own set of challenges to civil society and to knowledge partnerships. As the new economic powers of China, India, Brazil and other nations continue their ascendance, and as the West struggles to regain its economic equilibrium, universities and communities across the world will face new threats and new opportunities in their work together. As the world's new economic superpower, will China move globally to recolonize knowledge within its ancient, hierarchical and Confucian traditions, or will it allow or even enable countries and local cultures in its sphere of influence to produce, and sustain, their own knowledges? To what extent will the vibrant civil society sectors in India and Brazil be able to sustain and even expand political freedoms not only in their home countries but in other nations, as well? How will North America and Europe cope with austerity and high unemployment, especially among young people, as these regions seek to reinvent their economic foundations? Clearly, community–university research partnerships can play an important role in generating on-the-ground analysis of and solutions for these new conditions. However, they may also face new obstacles and complexities and will need to stay together and pool their resources even more effectively as they navigate forward.

Not all knowledge is power, but in *knowledge democracy* lies hope

We recognize that not all knowledge is power. The wicked and the greedy of the world are well educated and know how to use technical and strategic knowledge to monitor the aspirations of the majority of people in their communities and in the world. But we also know that we are living in a restless, impatient, changing and an exciting time. We know that hope for new transformative energies in our world originate in many places. We celebrate the possibilities. But we also believe that we can build another world by working together as community activists and

AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

workers, as social movement supporters, as local government people who believe in better service to our people, as small and medium business owners and workers who value community service, and as scholars, researchers, staff, students and teachers in HEIs. Effective knowledge partnerships build better communities. A strong knowledge democracy movement can build a better world.