

Community Engagement

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Community Engagement

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Auditing and Evaluating University–Community Engagement: Lessons from a

UK Case

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1. Introduction

Lately, there is a need for community and public engagement into universities' activities, a need for auditing and evaluating this partnership. The development and evaluation of this process is still at the beginning. This essay will present a case of study of the University of Brighton about this new idea of partnership. A review of the literature, an analysis of frameworks, the partnership with community and public engagement, a university public engagement are here presented. The critique of this case study and the lessons learned offer support for activities of universities, the answer to the questions and the tools they might need (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

Society admits that being connected is a sign of being strong (Gilchrist, 2009).

Recently, there was an international interest about the role of universities and colleges in society. This interest is about the partnership between academics and communities. On one side, communities, businesses and individuals can address universities real problems they confront with, on the other side, the student learning environment becomes richer. Globalization has brought many changes in higher education concerning social capital. Universities engage with local communities and the public for different activities. This essay shows some practical ideas about auditing and evaluating this engagement (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

While some people think the community is in decline, some of them think this might have a chance to flourish (Graham, 2006).

2. Auditing and Evaluating University-Community Engagement: Lessons from a UK Case Study (Angie Hart, University of Brighton, a.hart@brighton.ac.uk and Simon Northmore, University of Brighton, S.R.Northmore@brighton.ac.uk)

The first topic, mentioned in introduction is literature review. Literature research has been made from 2000, using words as university, community, public, evaluation, audit, higher education. After a selection has been made, various topics were found universities in economy, case studies of public event, university-community engagement, learning activities, education for public. The first concern was not about evaluation but more about transferability skills to other situations. The development of audit and evaluation tools for university-community engagement are still at the beginning. This subject has been neglected. Many of the important tools, including the one at University of Brighton, were found in grey literature, conferences and audit tools found on the websites. These are related to wiki software. The problems of university-community engagement are lack of concentration on outcome, a lack of tools and benchmarks and random approaches used. The process is more important than the outcome. This led to benchmarks created to help universities to show their contribution to socio-economic and cultural environment. There was no focus on developing tools and there was no great benefit to university or community engagement. Another problem in development was the lack of definition of important concepts. In this partnership, university, community and public, there is a lot of involvement at organizational level, leadership, structures, resources, attitudes, interpersonal. There is no simple answer when talking about audit and evaluation tools of university-community engagement (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

There is a reflective learning and experiential learning (Moon, 2004).

The second topic is about the approaches used in this challenge. Two approaches were identified. From the activities between university and community, there is not certain that there are benefits. The impact on health or economy is even harder to prove. Many organizations have been trying to develop benchmarking tools. These are useful for research and for strategic planning. They provide a basis in this process. In the USA, benchmarking and classification tools have a long history. US approaches are strong on assessments about effectiveness and impact between university and community. The tools for development of this engagement are quite absent in the U.K and beyond (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

The government has been interested in measuring community partnerships. There were established indicators, for example patents, licences, spin off firms which can be evaluated, counted, compared. Another type of measurement task is the difference between qualitative and quantitative indicators. There have been approaches to measure the engagement, such as surveys, project analysis and templates, questionnaires (Inman 2010).

In USA the volunteering has also an old history, in UK the situation presents itself quite healthy (Zimmeck, 2009).

One tool who brought contribution to the engagement, university, community is the University of Bradford's REAP approach, who showed the inputs and the outputs of a self-assessment. The tool of Reap wants to aid people from community to reflect critically, to analyse their activities. Approaches from outside of university are also important. Is important to see if these measures are appropriate, holistic, democratic, trustworthy, if they present any value to the public. The museums, libraries and archives are developing outcome measures and mapping them. Hart and Aumann made a framework to help university and community work better. Dobbs and Moore presented a practice model helping people to be a part of the research. This process gave credibility between all stakeholders (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

At the University of Brighton, the engagement between university and public is advertised and developed by Cupp, the Community University Partnership Programme. It has three purposes: to give access to universities' resources, to increase the benefits between each side, to act against inequalities. The Cupp relates also with voluntary organisations. It has an office, six staff, has the advice of 30 senior members. Cupp is the host of 2 programmes, holds a £550,000 budget per year, has 40 university staff and 60 from the community. Cupp is part of public, open events but also oriented towards business activities (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

The University of Brighton Corporate Plan also includes cultural, social, economic, region and nation, practical, intellectual and ethical issues. The university wants to become an example in economic and social engagement (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

The Cupp programme has been evaluated, projects and activities. The research has been done in different ways, face to face, interviews by the phone, groups, questionnaires. Follow up actions were monitored (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

Several maps on the same topic show the differences in perception of the same subject (Moon, 2006).

The 1 stage of evaluation was about internal processes. An analysis has been taken. Most of the results were positive about the benefits of the projects and Cupp's management. The question was how to involve the community in university's management process (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

Stage 2 evaluated the benefits of the projects. Case studies have been checked, two more exactly, a project to help refugees and asylum seekers into university and the helpdesk. There was evidence that Cupp had been essential to these projects offering a good infrastructure. The key points of this infrastructure university-community were giving a start point, a structure to follow, intellectual capital and finance. They were also some problems, the amount of work, different language, the network between university and community, keeping up with the projects in long term (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

Stage 3 was about the impact. Cupp developed a network between community and university staff, the quality of services, research findings. Because of Cupp, six new modules entered teaching field. Cupp secured grants. After all, Cupp developed community-university partnership. Cupp revealed two approaches to establish an audit tool (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

For a better audit tool, the University of Cambridge approached. Cambridge has collected the data and University of Brighton tried to learn from it. The tools of Cambridge were activities and monetary details. This system was about to be implemented to the University of Brighton. The management undertook this task with the help of others. If this system worked for Cambridge, for Brighton didn't bring any new benchmark even the scope was the same. The activity was measured and not the impact. Besides the audit work, evaluation and impact, a theory of change has been incorporated to measure outcomes at each level (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

At University of Bradford, a system has been developed, REAP. This means reciprocity, externalities, (the economic side), access and partnerships with public good. REAP is practical in community partnerships but also reflects critically and analyses their projects. After this experience, University of Brighton sought about a theory of change in their system. However, REAP has some limitations. It is hard to collect data, some partnerships found that the university-community engagement is hard to be put in practice, the language used by REAP is too academic. The attempts to satisfy the funders and to measure economic impact were difficult (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

At University of Brighton a new Department of Economic and Social Engagement (EASE) brought economic and social partnership together. The key terms are definitions, process, delivery structure, core business, community access communication and evaluation procedures (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

Public engagement is similar with specialists, the public is about individuals or groups with no higher education. By offering higher education to the public, the community will enjoy the benefits. This means that universities are important to society, they can present democratic research. There is a knowledge exchange between university, community, public in a multicultural society. However, everybody has the right to benefit from higher education and

better health. There were found 7 dimensions of public engagement: public access to education (universities), public access to knowledge (research), student engagement (activities), faculty engagement (research), widening participation (equalities and diversity), encouraging economic growth and social involvement (business collaborations), institutional relationship and partnership building (conferences, policies) (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

In today's education, there is quite a standard system. Passing the exams, everything must be by official papers. A lot of crazy tasks, starting with children. Deviation is not encouraged. There is too much information in schools. The teachers want to do their way, the students their way (Epshtein, 2019).

This world is still unequal, greedy. Universities and communities are trying to work with governments, non-profit organizations to help vulnerable people (Fontan, 2017).

3. Conclusion

The case of University of Brighton was a back-and-forth dialogue between practitioners, researchers, community members. In this case some things went good others went wrong. Some things are important to be mentioned. Impact and change are important too, not just activity. Funding sources to support this work is part of the process. The things cannot be perfect. To collect data is essential. To check other universities' models is invaluable. An intangible resource is value in kind. The university and community partnership is possible also through management skill. Transparency is important for efficiency. Primary, the purpose should be clear. A need for benchmarking is obvious. The engagement university-community is quite new topic. REAP was standing out as it has been made an analytical model. The economic, public and cultural capital worth mentioning. The international experience in audit benchmarking and evaluation are more relevant. UK universities would better learn from their experience. This case study was just a starting point and does not want to recommend one tool over others. There is a hope that others will continue this debate and bring value to this practice (Hart and Northmore, 2010).

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