

# Chapter 9

## Universities' Perspectives on Community Engagement

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### 9.1 Introduction

This part seeks to explore a second transformation in the nature of universities, in how the 'idea of a university' has been transformed within a wider epistemic community of universities and scholars beyond particular institutions and activities. This part is rooted in Haas' (1992) idea of epistemic communities in which interacting groups of practitioners in different settings unconsciously coordinate through cultural infrastructure towards common ends. The idea of a university is not something which is fixed, but evolves and is continually defined and redefined by those who have an interest in that definition. In higher education, this typically involves policy-makers, universities, institutions that aspire to university status and scholars of educational philosophy and practice. These definitions are used and influence purposive change and therefore influence the way that the definitions are themselves drawn up.

Within that context, this part is concerned with how the idea of a university has evolved within an epistemic community in response to increasing pressures to engage with society. The focus for this is how the idea of 'community engagement' has been taken up within higher education. This part builds on the intuitive narrative developed within Chap. 1 that explains why community engagement is a subordinate mission for higher education, building on the following stylised facts.

Firstly, universities are societal institutions, and so have a set of duties to their host societies (the social 'compact') in return for their privileges received. Secondly, universities are increasingly important to society in the context of the shift towards a knowledge society. Thirdly, whilst there has been a polarisation towards definitions

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of what kinds of societal benefits universities ought to bring, this has tended towards business engagement, and away from excluded communities. Fourthly, there is a consensus that this position—the subordination of engagement with excluded communities within universities' missions—is rational and reasonable, and therefore should not be challenged intellectually.

This complex set of arguments lies behind Parts III and IV. In terms of understanding why universities do not engage with communities, the focus is on why despite a strong *prima facie* case for fulfilling the societal compact through community engagement, this has not become in reality, and community engagement has become defined as a peripheral mission. Our contention is that this side-lining is an emergent outcome of the fact that universities are rather contradictory kinds of organisations and have always had a degree of freedom in defining their societal benefits.

As pressure on universities has increased in recent years to demonstrate their societal benefits, universities have been forced to prioritise, leaving them very little space to engage with excluded communities beyond very prescribed, limited and ultimately superficial ways. Universities have legitimated and justified these outcomes by mobilising a set of arguments about 'proper' kinds of engagement in the 'idea of a university'. These arguments have achieved a kind of traction and been successful in framing community engagement as a peripheral mission. Yet, they are the result of an emergent process which could have quite easily led in an entirely different direction—Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) (1982) saw community and business engagement as two halves of the same coin.

What this part explores are the debates around the 'idea of a university', its relationship with society in the last three decades and how this reinforced the peripherality of the community-engagement mission. This allows an understanding of the alternatives for community engagement to become a serious university mission. It is important to note that this book, and certainly this chapter, does not take a strongly advocatory position regarding community engagement as something which universities should undertake. Rather we seek to understand the 'social life' of the idea of university engagement which has left university–community engagement in a relatively dependent and subaltern position.

In this part, there are two empirical chapters, each of which seeks to take a number of steps in developing this wider argument. In Chap. 10, Fred Robinson and Ray Hudson provide a practical example of how these connections and debates have played out in practice, in the university of Durham, a world-class research-intensive university located adjacent to one of the poorest and most deprived parts of the United Kingdom, the East Durham coalfield. In Chap. 11, Tim May and Beth Perry explore how community engagement has come to be mobilised within wider political structures, highlighting that the kinds of community engagement which emerge are often denatured and highly nonfunctional and lack the capacity and traction for promoting the development of excluded communities.

To contextualise these empirical chapters, this chapter asks the question of why the idea of a community-engagement mission for universities has proven so complex and contentious. This chapter explores the fundamentally contradictory nature of universities, caught between two quite different philosophies (Allen 1988) and

purposes (Baumunt 1997). Engagement has become trapped at the fringes of these philosophies and purposes, and lacking a strong philosophical underpinning has been pushed to the margins of the institution of 'university'. We focus on four debates around the social compact where these tensions have served to frame 'the idea of engagement' as something peripheral, transient and even undesirable to the institution of university:

1. Between universalist-excellent and particularist-relevant understandings of 'what matters' for knowledge, that is, the knowledge is abstract and theoretically robust as against particular and empirically useful (Allen 1988; Brink 2007).
2. Whether higher education needs to be justified in terms of a set of external societal benefits (extrinsic social value), as against whether higher education has automatic societal value (intrinsic benefits) (Jonathan 1997, Howie 2003).
3. Who are the appropriate beneficiaries for university education, and in particular, why the public sector should support universities, whether that is in terms of individuals or the collective benefits (Penman and Ellis 2003).
4. Whether there are a core of philosophies, missions and activities that all universities share or whether different kinds of institution have very different orientations and missions (Martin 2003).

## 9.2 The Idea of a University and Community Engagement

Before discussing the debates around the role of engagement in the idea of a university, it is necessary to have some precision about what precisely we mean by the 'idea of a university'. When we talk about the 'idea of a university' in this part, we are referring to something that is both concrete and abstract. In the main, these are not exclusively abstract discussions—the epistemic community here is not purely scholarly. Rather, abstractions are being used in the context of particular debates. Definitions of the idea of a university have a Janus-face: On the one hand, they attempt to encapsulate what universities have been, but on the other hand, the point of that definition is to guide a current choice or decision. These debates, as we later argue, have had the effect of conflating those ideas which win particular arguments with statements of what is intrinsically desirable in ideal types of universities. In short, the fact that in practice community engagement has not become important has enabled the mobilisation of ideals of universities in which community engagement is peripheral.

The phrase 'The idea of a university' traces its pedigree back to Newman's (1854) reflections on higher education in Ireland, and there are a multitude of academic articles which evoke or refer to that phrase. We start our discussion from a slightly different point, seeking to understand the role of public engagement in the idea of a university. At its most basic, it is necessary to acknowledge that universities are a societal luxury, and this creates a dependence on society as the source of support for that essentially luxury item. As Shils (1988) observes:

No modern university has ever lived entirely from the sale of its services. Universities have received subsidies from the church, the state, and private philanthropists as individuals and as foundations (p. 210).

Biggar (2010) notes:

Right from their medieval beginnings, [universities] have served private purposes and practical public purposes as well as the sheer *amor scientiae* [‘knowledge for knowledge’s sake’] . . . popes and bishops needed educated pastors and they and kings needed educated administrators and lawyers capable of developing and embedding national systems (p. 77).

Universities have always evolved in response to societal shifts which have changed lead sponsors’ demands for knowledge. To date, there have been three fairly fundamental shifts in western society, each corresponding to an evolution in the idea of a university. Although particular universities and systems evolved differently at different places and times, we characterise three phases of the ‘university’ (Benneworth 2010):

- In the first wave, the university emerged in Europe as the church split from the state, as groups of learned religious scholars were freed from exclusive obligations to spiritual powers and able to educate a mercantile elite vital for emerging city-states (Rüegg 1992; Hyde 1988; Biggar 2010).
- In the second wave, universities evolved from being scholarly communities educating an administrative elite to suppliers of knowledge for the industrial revolution helping to create a technical elite driving national economic progress (McLellan 1988).
- In the third wave, universities became communities supporting educated free thought and emancipating minority groups through access to participation in the structures and activities of democratic society (Shils 1988).

In the last 100 years, there has been what Melody (1997) calls a ‘publicisation’ of universities, with governments investing increasing amounts in supporting university activities. That universities are useful to society is therefore not seriously open to debate—they produce many benefits (cf. UUK 2006). But what is much less clear is the degree to which the production of this public value should feature in the minds of universities’ leaders as central to their institutional *raison d’être*. Certainly, there is a great deal of disagreement over the extent to which universities should define themselves in terms of their public benefits.

The fundamental issue from which this disagreement emerges is a tension between two things which make universities valuable. On the one hand, there are a whole set of direct benefits which universities produce, such as educated graduates, trained administrators, new technologies, support and advice for business and farmers and consultancy/advice services for public and private sectors. On the other hand, what distinguishes universities as knowledge producers is that they are independent or loosely coupled to demands for these benefits giving those benefits an indirectness. This raises the question of how these two elements, the direct public benefits and the wider, indirect public value hang together in an institution.

This is not a simple question to answer, and on-going debate has long attempted to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory tendencies. Smith and Webster’s

(1997) central thesis was that it was this contradictory institutional nature inherent to universities which has led to its success and longevity as an institutional form. Many authors have pointed to the fact that at key points in history, universities have been regarded as being a useful means to an end, and so their lack of immediate utility has been offset by a regard for their longer term benefit. At the same time, universities have succeeded best where they were regarded as directly useful by their host societies (Wittrock 1985). Phillipson (1988) notes that when universities are no longer seen as being useful by their host societies, then they are replaced by other similar but different kinds of organisations such as national academies, learning societies or public research laboratories.

In trying to establish a set of principles for the essence of the institution of university and to infer the appropriate kinds of societal relationships from that idea, the problem recurs that the idea of a university is highly place-dependent, and particular ideal types very clearly reflect the place and time in which those ideas have been advanced (Delanty 2002). This lack of agreement over what constitutes a university is both intellectually unsatisfying and unhelpful in understanding how universities might regard engagement as part of their overall mission. Nevertheless, specific universities have made working with businesses or communities a core part of their mission (Boyer 1990; Kellog 2000; Anderson 2009). Likewise, engagement does fall within a number of commonly occurring 'ideas of universities' where both independent thought and societal relevance are evident.

- The Humboldtian concept of a university as an independent research group was rooted in the needs of the Wilhelminian Prussian state for industrialisation, modernisation and innovation (Flexner 1930; McLellan 1988).
- Newman's (1854) idea of a university as a place of education for students clearly reflected pressures in the United Kingdom and Ireland at that time for the creation of a public service with educated teachers and civil servants (Harvie 1994).
- America's Land Grant Universities were specifically created by American legislators who wanted to stimulate regional development across the American territory and provide knowledge and skills for farmers and entrepreneurs moving to new states (Greenwood 2007; Etzkowitz 2008).
- The democratic mass university of the 1960s was in reality an attempt to defuse student unrest and societal paralysis which manifested itself in demonstrations and occupations of universities and Ministries of Education in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Daalder 1982).

Attempts to precisely define universities' purposes always contain the seeds of their own rejection. The requirement that universities produce and circulate abstract, high-level theoretical knowledge makes it almost impossible to stipulate a practical mission for universities whilst universities' 'luxury' status means that a practical mission is a *sine non qua*. But any practical mission for universities threatens their wider universal mission. By a process of *reductio ab absurdum*, any practical mission can be demonstrated to be incompatible with their needs to retain independence and objectivity.

To take a hypothetical example, one could imagine it relatively uncontroversial to say that the purpose of universities is to provide highly educated graduates for business. One immediately encounters a category problem that there is ambiguity around what it means to provide graduates for business: Does that mean, for example, for businesses that currently exist, or businesses that do not currently exist but are held back from forming by a shortage of skills? If a group of businesses in a failing industrial sector were to come together and argue that universities should create more graduates for their sector to reduce their wage costs, then the overall national benefits of that activity could actually be negative—artificially depressing wage costs, and locking potentially highly skilled graduates out of other sectors. Any acceptable statement around universities' purposes must be so bland as to be meaningless.

### 9.3 Universities and the Societal Compact

The way that this tension has been resolved—or at least finessed—has been through the idea of a 'societal compact' or 'social contract' between universities and their host societies (Barnett 2000, 2003). In this book, we prefer the phrasing 'compact' because it emphasises the implicit and multi-faceted nature of the arrangement, rather than something which can be explicitly stated in a number of clauses (Gibbons 1999). Martin (2003) points to two flavours of the social compact, the Humboldtian and the 'Vanavar Bush' (Bush 1945). Guston and Keniston (1994) highlighted a number of key strands of the social compact, namely:

- *Science as a public good*: Business typically under invests in research therefore investing in universities helps to ensure there is enough useful knowledge.
- *Accountability and autonomy*: In return for the public funding, scientists are open with their research and others can use it as the basis for their own discoveries.
- *Consensus and change*: Investments in science are based on widespread public agreement, and that can periodically be evaluated by participants to see if it still fulfilling its original role.

Nevertheless what is interesting in all these discussions are a number of clear elisions that make the 'social compact' a slippery concept. Clearly, Guston and Keniston's analysis refers to the public compact around science: Whilst universities are part of the science system, they are not its only element. Their notion of consensus and change can be split into two layers, between a short-term political consensus related to a particular government of the day, and a longer term social structure in which the relationships between universities and society are diffused into and absorbed by a range of societal actors such as unions, employers organisations, learned societies, media outlets and governmental structures. This provides no clear analytic basis for different kinds of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to have different missions—the definition refers to the sector as a whole and then assumes common behaviours by universities. These elisions were neatly summed up by Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) (1982):

The problem of democratisation brings up the question of a university's society function in the very broadest sense of the term. It includes not only the development of access to qualifications, but also the production of knowledge and the social significance of that knowledge. It also involves a change in the sharing of responsibility for the development of knowledge and teaching . . . If the university is to be effectively integrated into the community, it must no longer concern only those who attend the university, namely the teachers and the students. It should be possible to pass on one's skills without being a teacher and to receive training without being a student (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) 1982, p. 13).

Our contention here is that social compacts are constructed through ongoing interactions with social partners rather than defined *ex ante* and then implemented mechanically. What Guston and Keniston (1994) point out very clearly is the importance of the process of consensus, negotiation and change between political agents with short-term agendas and the wider societal institutions through which social agency is mediated and hence with longer term horizons (Benneworth 2009).

To return to the place of societal engagement in the university mission, the social compact effectively says that it is important that universities have a societal mission and produce public benefit. The societal compact can be fulfilled when there is a consensus amongst societal stakeholders that what universities do is in some way useful. 'Reading' any particular societal compact is a complex process of understanding the way in which this particular consensus has built up and changed over time. Clearly, different places will have different consensuses at different times, reflecting both the immediate social, political and economic conditions as well as the deeper cultural and social value systems of their national science systems.

So at the same time as debates over whether universities are being useful, there are debates about whether universities should be useful. A central argument in this book is that university engagement with excluded communities is very strongly negatively influenced by the fact that these discussions about ideal type have tended to be framed in ways that have discouraged engagement with the communities in practice. The ambiguities and slipperiness around social compacts have seen universities define their interests in public use and value in ways that have increasingly made meaningful engagement with excluded communities impossible. At the same time there has been a prioritisation of other kinds of more easily fulfilled engagement, notably business engagement and public understanding of science.

In the remainder of this chapter, we look at four domains where there have been debates about whether universities should be useful as against how they can be useful. We consider how these abstract debates have constrained the practical room available for universities to define their purposes. This has had an effect on the extent to which engagement with excluded communities—as part of engagement more generally—can matter to universities (cf. King 1995; May and Perry 2006; Brink 2007). We contend four tensions have all to some degree framed community engagement's suitability as a higher education mission:

- Universities produce knowledge which is useful for societies, but that is a spill-over effect from producing more generally verifiable and abstract knowledge about particular socio-physical phenomena.

- Universities have a set of impacts which contribute to the overall social life of their host society, through cultural production, democratic stimulation and social inclusion, but there can be a tendency to look to the immediate, countable benefits that they bring.
- Universities produce benefits through their host societies in general, but also produce highly localised private benefits for restricted number of students, businesses and other direct service users.
- Universities produce societal benefits, but there are very different kinds of HEIs, with qualitatively and quantitatively different kinds of benefits produced by each.

### ***9.3.1 Universities Between Universal and Particular Knowledge***

The first debate concerns in the relationship between particular-local knowledge and universal-global knowledge for universities. Academics seek to make sense of a highly complex reality by comparing between situations, identifying similarities and differences, underlying processes and independent shaping variables. To build models that explain realities where not all elements are completely understood, science creates theoretical explanations of more general validity: This provides a predictive power which in turn adds to theory's utility.

On one hand, all knowledge production is engaged with reality in some way, with the possible exception of the most theoretical kinds of mathematics (Callon 1999). Indeed, this engagement with reality separates science from other kinds of intellectual but non-scientific endeavour such as spiritualism or casuistry where intellectual frameworks are built that have no necessarily referents to reality. At the same time, places are different, and people are different in those different places, and there are very clearly different styles of science and knowledge production reflecting, for example, very different national cultures (Fischer 2009). Universities cannot produce 'universal knowledge': The knowledge they produce is intimately affected by their wider context.

But at the same time, the scientific process is constructive, building up knowledge that is more generally valid and replicable. Central to this idea of replicability is abstraction which teases out processes which operate across multiple contexts despite influence by contextual variables. Knowledge is useful precisely because studying a small situation and placing it in a broader theoretical context allows researchers to say more about the world, and students to deduce rules to understand and control the world. Theory provides a common edifice and unifying force, allowing researchers with limited and localised studies to contribute to tell more authoritative stories about their world (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Latour 1987).

But this raises the key dilemma of the process by which these 'little' local stories become validated into 'big' global theories. In essence, local knowledge is only scientifically 'valid' if it builds up into a bigger, more generalised, more generalisable and theoretical picture. This means that a key criterion for the validity of academic knowledge is whether it can be put into that wider, more general context.



Of course, that criterion is not a neutral status, rather it is an activity with agency: The scientist puts the knowledge in the global context, validating the local knowledge academically.

This provides a mechanism whereby that problem is situated within a global knowledge base, and is validated as global as suitable for scientific study. This necessarily excludes certain kinds of knowledge from similar academic validation. Our argument here is that the kinds of knowledge which emerge from community engagement suffer from a perception that they are local knowledges not suitable for global validation. Although there are many demonstrations of the ways in which global validation follows from processes of community-situated learning (see e.g. Chaps. 3, 7 and 8) there is a tendency for arguments to create a hierarchy between the two, which is reflected in turn in the subaltern position of community engagement as a university mission.

### 9.3.2 *Universities Between Intrinsic Value and Extrinsic Worth*

A second set of debates concerns the question of whether universities have intrinsic value in their own right, or have to be judged on the more immediate benefits they bring to a society. In that sense, universities are often regarded alongside other less directly identifiably beneficial activities such as culture as something worth investing in (Belfiore and Bennett 2008). This is less a debate around use and more one of the directness of the link between the activities and those benefits. Clearly, investing in the arts or universities does not create 'civilisation', and as Gopal (2010) points out, many tyrants and dictators have studied and patronised the arts. So where might such a direct link lie?

Part of the issue is that there is a tendency to look back to universities in history and idealise their contributions to building democratic societies. In reality, this tendency to tie universities to societal development was not evident until the rise of popular democracy really became a social issue (Delanty 2002). Certainly, universities were long important for producing an educated elite (Harvie 1994), but it was not until the 1960s that universities became important for producing a mass, educated workforce; indeed, some industrial regions were prevented from having a university in the early twentieth century to avoid educating the leaders of future industrial unrest (Hennings and Kunzmann 1993).

In some countries, universities emerged along with emancipation and their intrinsic value was something associated with what Delanty calls the democratic mass university. Even in France, where this happened sooner rather than later, pre-revolutionary higher education consisted of a number of highly functional academies, the *Grandes Écoles*, with liberal education for the (suitably qualified) masses in universities. Given the relatively low numbers in France with a suitable matriculation qualification, this was clearly an elite group—only in 1929 were the numbers of workers' children achieving matriculation requirements statistically measurable (MEN and MESR 2007). Therefore, until the advent of genuinely mass education,

any invocation of an intrinsic democratic value of universities is solely a rhetorical device. At the same time, the expansion necessary to realise universities' democratic roles brought a huge influx of public resources into the system to allow expansion (Melody 1997; Deitrick and Soska 2005).

What is interesting in studying the history of ideas of universities is that the term to describe universities, namely 'ivory towers', has its pedigree in nineteenth century debates concerning useful knowledge. The idea of an ivory tower was never mooted as a positive idea of a university, rather, it was used by those who wished to say what a university should not be. Throughout history, some of the world's best universities (such as MIT, Leuven, Lund and Gottingen) have their origins in attempts made by political leaders to reinvigorate the economy, society and culture of their places in a controllable image. But ideas of the ivory tower are only evoked as a negative vision of universities failing to deliver wider societal benefits.

Nevertheless, this phrase has acquired over time the sense that it was at some point a positive model for universities to aspire to, rather than a rhetorical device in a political debate around public funding and duties for universities. This has served to augment the idea of a prelapsarian university with an idea of detachment from society. But this also has the parallel effect of framing what societal engagement does take place (which has always been important) as a response to small and specific needs rather than fulfilment of a wider set of duties. That retrospective framing is well out of line with the intimate inter-relation between the evolution of the institution of university, and other key structuring societal institutions such as the city (Bender 1988), the corporation (McLellan 1988) and democracy (Delanty 2002).

The effect of this debate on the issue of community engagement by universities has to frame it as something done grudgingly or out of necessity, to be done until a better alternative comes along (Etzkowitz 2002). There is clearly a strong sense in debates around higher education that community engagement is something that is done primarily because it is useful for the institution, but under ideal circumstances it would be abandoned. This imbues the idea of community engagement with a sense of impermanence and has led in many cases to produce a project-led response to it rather than regarding it as something intrinsic to universities' core activities (cf. Chap. 5).

### ***9.3.3 Universities Between Individual and Collective Benefits***

The third set of debates which have influenced ideas of university–community engagement have been debates around whether universities produce public or private benefits. In the historical narrative sketched out in here, until the growth of mass higher education in the 1960s, there was a clear coherence between public and private benefits: Investing in universities produces trained elites who can run the country, as well as intellectuals to provide a counterweight and support to the elite, and this is clearly a public benefit (Bryson 2000). However, that position (Melody 1997;

Deitrick and Soska 2005) came under threat from a declining sense that what is good for a nation's managerial elite is also good for the country as a whole (Leach 2002).

One consequence of the massification of higher education has its individualisation. In what is sometimes referred to the 'cost-sharing' (student fees) debate, it has been argued that higher education brings substantial individual benefits to those in receipt of it. As wage differentials have grown as part of the shift to a post-industrial and flexible society (cf. Reich 1991; Leadbeater 2000), there has been an increasing call for those who benefit individually through higher wages because of publicly-funded higher education to make more of a direct contribution through fees (Lepori et al. 2007). There has been a feedback effect with an increasing framing of the value of universities in terms of these individual benefits, as opposed to the collective benefits that are produced (the Browne Review (2010) in England, being perhaps a highly egregious example of this reframing).

Of course, this is not a ubiquitous trend—in Latin America, there are still many countries and degree courses where compulsory social service is necessary in order to graduate, reflecting a belief that higher education is a collective benefit, but benefiting individuals should also make a social contribution (Aquino Febrillet 2006; Cortez Ruiz 2008). This example clarifies how collective benefits emerge, namely through chains of mutual responsibility within society. Individuals—graduates—receive benefits through higher education, and in return this places duties on them to other—weaker—individuals. Through these chains of mutual responsibility, mediated through overall solidarity, these very individualistic benefits concatenate into particular collective benefits.

There has been of late a clear framing of the purpose of universities which make it seem as if the sole purpose of the university is creating individual benefits (although we would not go so far here as to necessarily tie this into a neo-liberal project refining citizenship in terms of market relationships). The cost-sharing debate collapses the idea of mutual social responsibilities and solidarity into a transaction. At the general level, there has been an erosion of the sense of a university experience as *Bildung* (personal development to create an adult citizen) towards an emphasis on *Ausbildung*, transmitting skills useful for citizens' social and economic roles. What has been lost is the sense of the collective, that in a society in which there are a mix of people from a range of backgrounds, all have a higher standard of living because of this diversity. Conversely, to the cost-sharing argument, the only winners from higher education investments are the graduates able to occupy superior positions in increasingly segmented labour markets.

Leaving aside this unproblematic acceptance of labour market segmentation as an inevitable consequence of late modernism, this raises a number of problems as far as university–community engagement goes. Framing university–community engagement in terms of a discourse of individual benefit reduces those benefits to recruiting individuals from these places and helping them to escape deprived communities. This is quite contrary to the more community-based ideas of university engagement developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where universities provided leadership (educated the leadership) for these communities. These leaders would negotiate hard within political arenas, securing improvement in individuals' conditions, at the same time as a rising level of education benefited these communities.

The current individualistic approach to university engagement can therefore be regarded as encouraging those who can leave a deprived community to do so. At the same time, this undermines any political strength or mobilisation in those communities, further exacerbating these communities' problems of social exclusion. This unquestioned belief of individualisation of benefits has proven extremely potent in framing university–community engagement. This framing allows much less opportunity to articulate the benefits of higher education in terms of mutual obligation and much more pressure to do so in terms of concrete immediate outputs.

### 9.3.4 *Universities Between Ideal Type and Specific Form*

The final set of debates which have framed the idea of university–community engagement are debates around diversity in higher education. In essence, the debate concerns whether engagement could be or should be a central mission only for certain kinds of institution. It can very quickly be established empirically that there are clusters of different kinds of universities with very different profiles, emphasising very different mixes of activity (CHERPA Network 2010). As many universities supposedly engage with communities, it is not hard to envisage that there might be a kind of university for whom community engagement could be a core task.

This can be thought of as a kind of horizontal sectoral differentiation, where institutions which are effectively similar offer different kinds of higher education experience based on students' needs and demands. In principle, universities offer common educational standards to students, guaranteed by national examinations or quality standards, despite differences in the mode of delivery, the curricular content, and practical–theoretical balance. In such a situation, one would expect to find groups of community-facing universities in higher education systems whose own missions reflected higher education policy nationally and local community situations (van Vught 2008). In such circumstances, community engagement could potentially become an important third mission to a particular group of universities.

However, it is important to recognise two additional factors, namely vertical differentiation, and the 'race for reputation' (cf. van Vught 2008), which have profound impacts on the framing of the community engagement mission. Vertical differentiation is a situation where some kinds of university are regarded as being better than others (not that some universities are better than others). Some countries distinguish scientific universities and universities of applied science (e.g. in Germany, the Netherlands and Finland). In France, universities are seen as being a kind of mass and inexpensive education, beneath the *Grandes Écoles*, which are an elite higher education institution, educating 4 % of the students for over 20 % of the total higher education budget. Although the distinction might not be absolute, in each system there is a definite hierarchy of these kinds of institution in terms of the desirability of access, graduate prospects, employment conditions and research intensity.

The other additional factor is that where some kinds of university are regarded as better than others, funding may differentiate to favour the upper tiers. This has

taken different forms—in some systems, only certain types of institution are funded for research (e.g. the Netherlands), whilst the United Kingdom has tried to concentrate research funding, (increasingly explicitly) on a limited circle of institutions. In tandem with the falling unit of resource (funding per student) associated with massification, this has placed great pressure on universities to be associated with the upper tiers of the higher education system.

The issue has been cast into some focus by an increasing emphasis by governments on the idea of world-class universities (Salmi 2009). The popularity of university league tables has encouraged governments to identify their 'best' universities to secure their country a visible place in these international ranking systems (Marginson 2007). Universities are prioritising variables used in compiling particular league tables, such as research income, numbers of students, citation indices and reputational variables (cf. van Vught and Westerheijden 2010).

This means the viability of the idea of community engagement within universities has become dependent on how far that mission is identified as a characteristic of an institution in the upper reaches of vertically differentiated higher education systems. With the advent of transparency tools, part of the prestige of distinction is derived from league tables. It has been almost impossible to include community engagement as a standard variable in ranking and profiling approaches (U-Map 2008). The fact that community engagement is difficult to measure for the purpose of league tables means that it is not necessarily an activity pursued by high-ranking institutions, which in turn creates a vertical differentiation around the idea of engagement. This has become internalised through these policy discussions into an acceptance that it is an irrefutable truth that community engagement is not done by high-quality universities.

## 9.4 Potential University–Community Engagement Profiles?

To provide a sense of how this framing plays out in practice, we return very briefly to our research project "University engagement with excluded communities". More detail on the sample and the kinds of universities involved is provided in Chap. 5. In summary, this was a survey of 33 universities in three UK sub-national territories, the north east, the north west and Scotland. It involved interviews with a sample of actors in each institution (two to four in each university) and explored the breadth of community engagement within their institutions.

The current attitude of universities towards engagement in the sample depended in part on their traditions and history. Most institutions surveyed made at least some reference to their traditions in describing their mission, whether it be to affirm a longstanding commitment to their particular communities or to explain a waxing and waning of engagement over time. We were able to group universities crudely into five categories based on their historical development, the contemporary forms of relationship and engagement with specific communities, and the relative importance of engagement with excluded communities to those institutions given their overarching mission. This data is provided in Table 9.1.

**Table 9.1** The relationship between university type and approach to community engagement in the three UK regions. (Source: Benneworth et al. 2008)

University type	Universities in sample	Primary focus	Role of university-community engagement
Ancient universities	Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, St. Andrews	Building a critical mass of research and developing international excellence profile	Very limited/instrumental
Civic universities	Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Durham, Dundee, Strathclyde	Building research excellence	Establishing legitimacy of local commitment
Technical-vocational universities	Northumbria, Teesside, Sunderland, Manchester Metropolitan, Liverpool John Moores, Central Lancs, Chester, Edge Hill, Bolton, Liverpool Hope, Abertay, Robert Gordon, Glasgow Caledonian, West of Scotland, Napier and Queen Margaret	Recruitment of sufficient students to maintain financial stability	Enrichment of the curriculum related to taught and research degree awarding powers, unique offer for recruitment
Plate-glass universities	Lancaster, Stirling	Development of research profile in distinct niches	Accessing funding streams to support niche development
Rural network universities	University of Cumbria, UHI Millennium Institution	Providing education opportunities in remote rural areas	Activities naturally close to local community, few rivals

### 9.4.1 *Ancient Universities*

In Scotland, the four pre-19th century universities have at times played a central role in the development of the cities in which they are based and are deeply rooted in their local communities albeit often with strong links to local elites rather than disadvantaged communities. Anecdotally, the first ever piece of research on a university's economic impact (cf. Cooke 1970) took place in St. Andrews as the result of a bar room argument between academics as to whether the Royal and Ancient golf-course (the world headquarters of golf) had a greater economic impact on the town than the university (McGregor 2010).

### 9.4.2 *Civic Research Universities*

In the two English regions, there are four universities which have roots in the nineteenth century and emerged from local interests, evolving to become leading research based universities. Three have strong roots with local industry, Manchester, Liverpool

and Newcastle, whilst Durham's link with the church has become less significant over time. All are currently looking to rethink to some degree their role in their region, and strengthen their engagement. In this group we could also include Dundee in Scotland which was established late in the 19th century as a college affiliated to St. Andrews University and like Newcastle with regard to Durham split off from its parent institution in the 1960s. Although Dundee is smaller than the other four universities it has similarities in profile, with a medical school and strengths in biomedicine.

### ***9.4.3 Technical & Vocational Colleges***

The majority of universities in the three regions have origins as technical or vocational institutions of some form which have migrated to university status at some point—an initial round in the 1960s in the form of Salford, Heriot-Watt, and Strathclyde, and later rounds of former polytechnics and HE institutes such as Northumbria, Teesside, Sunderland, Manchester Met, Liverpool John Moores, Central Lancashire, Chester, Edge Hill, Bolton, Liverpool Hope, Abertay, Robert Gordon, Glasgow Caledonian, West of Scotland, Napier and Queen Margaret. Most of these were technical colleges of some kind, but with a few based on other vocational qualifications such as teaching and nursing. The earliest to convert to university status are more research intensive than those that came later but it is useful to group these together in terms of a shared background as locally focused technical institutions.

### ***9.4.4 Democratic Mass Universities***

Only two universities have been established in modern times as greenfield sites: Lancaster and Stirling. Whilst many such new universities of the Robbins period had weak community relations, these two both had quite strong connections from their formation, and indeed, in the case of Lancaster, the county council had been a very strong advocate both in the decision to establish the institution, as well as its subsequent establishment (cf. McClintock 1974).

### ***9.4.5 Networked Rural Universities***

Finally there are two 'universities' with a strong networked rural focus: the new University of Cumbria and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), awarded University status in January 2011. Both of these have emerged as a result of local pressures, bringing together several existing small colleges and institutions to serve a dispersed rural community. As a result of their pre-existing rural situation and linkages, their focus was primarily on working with rural communities and businesses,

as well as public sector organisations in those regions. UHI also acquired an important role in the life of the language of Scots Gaelic, as the only higher education institution undertaking research and offering education in Gaelic.

We do not contend that the table above represents a comprehensive picture of all the potential university engagement missions, or the ways that university–community engagement can dovetail with universities’ overarching institutional imperatives. The CHERPA Network started developing more comprehensive multi-dimensional profiles for universities, as part of a wider project to develop alternative kinds of league tables and ranking methodologies more applicable to European universities (CHERPA Network 2010). Alongside that, in the US, the Carnegie classification provides a means of segmenting universities into different types with different lead missions (cf. Chap. 15, this book). We would expect for each type of institution, there would be different potential for the development of engagement missions. We return to this issue in Part IV, where we consider the evaluation, classification and ranking of universities, and the role of community engagement indicators in that process.

But one note of caution that is raised by the research on profiles and missions is that very similar kinds of universities can have very different approaches to community engagement. In the sample above, some of what we class as technical–vocational universities were very strongly committed to community engagement, others only insofar as it fitted with a model of business outreach and income generation, and yet others were largely uninterested in community engagement, certainly at a strategic level. It is clear that profile does not determine approaches to engagement—there is a strong role to be played both by agency and strategic decision-making, as well as context specificity and the historical evolution of the university. In England, many colleges of higher education built strong community links in the late 1990s and 2000s to mobilise community support for their applications for full university title.

## 9.5 Beyond the Idea of ‘the’ Engagement Mission

It is important not here to default to a fallacious view that ‘institutions’ have singular perspectives on university–community engagement; in Chap. 5, for example, the issue of complexity and diversity within the institution comes to the fore, and it is clear that there was complexity, contradiction and confusion in the designation of the community engagement missions. Universities’ own missions are defined in their attempts to achieve their other missions within wider higher education systems. In systems where there is a confusion at the level of the philosophy of the idea of a university as well as around the practice of community engagement, it is therefore extremely unlikely that coherent engagement missions emerge on an institutional basis.

To illustrate the reality of the confused ‘idea’ of the engaged university, we focus on one region with its own higher education system, namely Scotland, and explore the ways that the community engagement missions were ‘fleshed out’. Although



there were institutional differences, there was a diversity of approach, application and understanding within institutions. Most commonly community engagement was associated with the delivery of vocationally oriented curricula, continuing professional development (CPD), wider lifelong learning programmes and widening access. Alongside more conventional outputs, community engagement also came through 'institutional marketing', 'income generation' and 'campus development'. And whilst practices varied, many institutions had similar rationales. In this section we distinguish between 2 kinds of Scottish university, the old (ancient, civic, Plate Glass) and the new (the remainder), in order to preserve institutional anonymity.

New universities regarded community engagement as a marketing tool to appeal to future students. For some it was 'integral to the brand' (5 universities), with one specifically aiming to 'become the market leader in Scotland for Community Engagement'. For other older and newer universities it was promoted as a means through which institutions could deliver their wider 'civic duty' (3 ancient, 3 new), or contribute to the 'public good' (2 old, 1 new). For the majority of universities community engagement as 'partnership working' was publicised as evidence of institutional commitment to Scotland's economic and social fabric (3 old, 6 new).

A similar range of universities also viewed community engagement as a form of income generation with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) supporting business and cultural engagement projects, as well as widening access programmes. Funding for community engagement partnerships had allowed a number of universities to access additional income streams for the development of mutually beneficial facilities; in the main cultural and sports facilities (1 old, 2 new). Further funding was developed through part-time courses, CPD studies and the more recent 'Beacon for Public Engagement' programmes (1 old, 4 new cf. Sect. 13.6, this book).

For the majority of universities community engagement was closely aligned with 'external consultation', especially at times of campus development. Some universities had initiated stakeholder forums to consult with business, local authorities, public agencies as well as community representatives (1 old, 5 new). These forums had proven beneficial in helping to open-up university–community dialogue, defusing potential opposition to development plans (all six), helping to overcome antagonistic histories (two of the six) or serving to generate wider public support for specific university interests (one). In all six of these cases, universities sought to prove they were a 'good neighbour'.

Given the evident diffusion of the concept and language of community engagement it was not surprising to find its reference in a number of Strategic Plans (2 old, 4 new); often linked to a commitment to the cultural, economic and social well-being of Scotland. Some universities sought to develop separate engagement strategies with varying titles and responsibilities:

- 'Community relations' (old),
- 'Community engagement and volunteering' (new),
- 'Community engagement' (new),
- 'Cultural engagement' (new) or
- 'Stakeholder and community engagement' (new).

For some the focus on engagement had followed appointment of new Principals; some universities deemed it sufficiently important to be tasked to specific Deputy or Vice Principals (two old, five new); although often grouped with other responsibilities such as Culture (old), Research, Training and Community Relations (old) or Student Experience (two new). Likewise application and promotion (both internal and outward-facing) had been tasked to a range of management teams (two old, three new) responsible for such as 'Communications and Marketing' (old), 'Public Relations' (new) or 'Corporate Marketing' (new).

More prevalent than the top-down drive was individual academics' long-standing commitment to community engagement within their research and teaching. Many universities had entire disciplines dedicated to 'community' subjects, particularly health and social care (two old, five new). Likewise a network of relatively independent research centres existed focused on beneficial community application (three old, three new). Individual academic commitment to service learning and applied research pre-dated recent community engagement objective visibility.

Community engagement was common within Scotland's higher education sector, across different types of university. Despite its increased visibility, its understanding, practice, offices and staff were overwhelmingly aligned with service learning, lifelong learning and widening access. Despite its commonness, community engagement remained a confusing concept with interchangeable definitions and the diversity of responses. Community engagement was synonymous with the following:

- 'Business engagement' (1 old, 6 new);
- 'Being a good neighbour' (1 old, 3 new), 'community relations' (1 new);
- 'Corporate social responsibility' (1 new);
- Cultural engagement (3 old, 2 new);
- Volunteering (2 old, 2 new); as well as
- CPD and widening access (4 old, 6 new).

Community engagement was based on existing activities, (CPD, volunteering, widening access) rather than culturally or structurally embedded, activities that were marginal or existed to support 'core university businesses'. Research tended to be project-based and reliant on relentless income generation. 'Communities' were often restrictively defined as professional bodies, the voluntary and community sector and other organised stakeholders (companies, local authorities, the National Health Service, Police). There was little evidence of deliberate strategies to reach to disadvantaged communities and unorganised voices, despite many campuses either residing in or being surrounded by such communities. There was also very little evidence of corporate understanding of community engagement beyond institutional self-interest (income generation, recruitment, research, teaching). Indeed, for many universities community engagement was forced onto the corporate agenda rather an institutionally recognised priority.

## 9.6 The Limits to Contemporary University–Community Engagement

This chapter argues that it is not impossible for a university to adopt a community-engagement mission, nor to put forward an idea of a university in which engagement with excluded communities was a key element of institutional motivation. There are a number of very good examples presented in this book, of universities engaging, sometimes under very difficult circumstances, alongside university systems created to stimulate engagement with excluded communities. Nevertheless, the idea of engagement as a university mission has been framed in a particular way, leaving it channelled, individualised and marginalised as a result of a series of pressures, tendencies and evolutions across the last two decades. At the same time, the pressure on engagement as a mission and ambiguities in its definition lead to many fragmentations of its articulation which further contribute to its marginalisation as well as to its slipperiness and confusion as an appropriate university mission.

This marginalisation means that the idea of an engagement mission cannot be considered independently from these other pressures. This has a number of important consequences for understanding engagement, both theoretically, and as a consequence methodologically, as well as practically and in wider policy terms. From a theoretical perspective, these debates clarify where the idea of an engaged university might be found. An 'engaged university', theoretically speaking, would necessarily go beyond what is already immediately and readily achieved by universities, just as an entrepreneurial university can be regarded not as a university which works with businesses, but which works with businesses even when that is hard to achieve. University engagement would also have a sense of mutual obligation and responsibility between university and those communities, spread across the university and visible in strategic institutional development discussions.

This also has methodological implications for further research into universities and engagement with excluded communities. Claims that particular empirical outcomes demonstrate a new idea of an engaged university must demonstrate that they have progressed beyond this situation of engagement as being individualised, marginalised and channelled. This sets the bar somewhat higher than simply analysing particular engagement activities, but rather in explaining the opportunity costs to the universities of particular engagement activities, the deliberateness of bearing those costs at an institutional level, and also clearly identify the benefits those activities bring to those communities.

The practicalities and policy implications of university engagement are dealt with in Part IV, but it is worth here setting out very briefly what the implications of the limiting framing of university–community engagement for these two areas. Firstly, in practical terms, framing hides the extent to which community engagement cuts against the grain for universities in many kinds of university system. Becoming engaged is not a simple process, because there are so many points in the higher education process that discourage engagement by representing it as a relatively unimportant university activity.

Finally, the policy effects of framing of engagement as marginal, peripheral and individual are clear. Many policy decisions, from research concentration and world-class university policies, through a shift to cost-sharing as a funding mechanism, to increased institutional funding autonomy (increasing institutional sensitivity to external policy stimuli), are reinforcing this situation. Policies seeking to improve universities engagement with excluded communities are therefore faced with the substantial task of changing webs of policies and legislation, but also policy-makers and legislators, which is by no means an easy feat. The consequences of this are explored in more length in Part IV.

In this chapter, we have sought to explore the complexities underlying the idea of community engagement by universities, given that it seems such a common-sense way of universities fulfilling their societal duties. We firstly argued that these societal duties create tensions for universities because they threaten excess social control which undermines their capacity to create their wider benefits. To finesse this situation, the idea of the social compact has been articulated as a means of setting out duties which universities owe to societies. But the emptiness of the concept which makes it such a useful way of defusing tensions around societal pressure on universities mean that it is a concept which requires later filling-up. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this filling up was done through creating the idea of the mass democratic university. The conditions which made this such a fertile and successful institution have recently come under pressure from a range of sources as universities seek to sustain their privileges in increasingly fragmented and contradictory societies.

Contemporary higher education debates have radically circumscribed our ways of thinking about community engagement as a valid mission for universities, increasing its contingency, transience, undesirability and individualisation. Community engagement has become associated as a low-status activity, which has in turn encouraged universities to see it as an optional extra, and not something core to their aims. This chimes with the recurrent message in this book that sometimes the greatest successes with university–community engagement are achieved when universities are able to make community engagement core to their aims and activities, and themselves enact the idea of an engaged university.

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