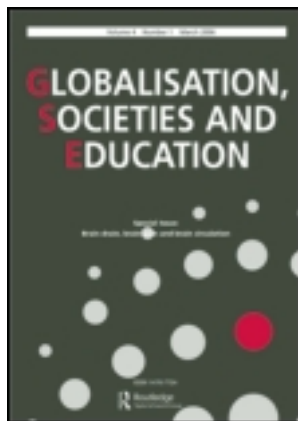


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### Universities, civil society and the global agenda of community-engaged research

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## Universities, civil society and the global agenda of community-engaged research

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This article explores a key point of tension in contemporary discussions of community-university research engagement. Two perspectives are discussed. The first suggests that changes in the nature and structure of research have helped create democratic research spaces and opportunities within the university for communities. In this emerging (global) knowledge democracy movement, community-based researchers are increasingly seeking to connect lessons learned in local settings to the global context. The second perspective situates such developments in the context of the knowledge economy of higher education and suggests that community engagement is also developing in a manner that supports the advance of knowledge capitalism. The decisive tension is that universities around the world are being encouraged by governments to assume greater responsibility for economic development and to translate knowledge into products and services for the market – whilst at the same time being tasked to work with communities in alleviating the social and economic excesses of the market.

**Keywords:** community engagement; civil society; participatory action research; community-based research; knowledge economy

This article addresses the contemporary salience of community-university research engagement in the context of the economic restructuring of higher education and discussions on the social relevance of universities. Although considerable pressure is being exerted on universities around the world to produce tangible evidence demonstrating how they are producing socially responsive research and contributing to local communities, little has been done to situate such transformations as evidence of shifts taking place in the social relations of community-engaged research between the university and civil society in the context of globalisation. Two main perspectives frame the analysis. The first suggests that changes in the nature and structure of research have helped create democratic research spaces and opportunities within the

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university for communities. Indicative of an emergent knowledge democracy movement, the evidence for this is the development of new institutional and organisational structures which have emerged to support the extent and range of participatory and community-based research (CBR) partnerships between universities and communities. The second perspective situates community-engagement more centrally within debates on knowledge capitalism and suggests that it is developing in ways that limit the extent and range of collaboration between communities and universities.

The decisive tension enveloping the discussion is that universities around the world are being encouraged by governments to assume greater responsibility for economic development and to translate knowledge into products and services for the market – whilst at the same time being tasked to work with communities in alleviating the social and economic excesses of the market. Interrogating such tension has become pertinent in an age when universities are being re-structured by neoliberal values and policies and at a time when such transnational actors as the World Bank (2002), the OECD (2004) and UNESCO (2008) have generated a discourse centred on the knowledge economy of higher education (Peters 2007; Robertson 2010; Shore and Taitz 2012). Such developments compel us to interrogate the institutional and organisational contexts in which participatory and community-based methodologies are being positioned within neo-liberal modes of governance.

The paper is organised in four parts. The first part adopts a political economy perspective in situating community-university engagement in the context of the knowledge economy. This part argues that knowledge economy policies have become powerful drivers of change with regard to community-engaged research and knowledge production. Addressing shifts in the conceptualisation of community engagement, the second part addresses how institutional and organisational mechanisms have developed to support community engagement as a scholarly function. Part three addresses how CBR engagement has been conceptualised as a methodological orientation that can play a key role in bridging the divide between university and civil society in the context of globalisation. In particular, I argue that explicating the methodological premises of CBR in traditions of action research (AR) and participatory action research (PAR) is consequential for whether CBR emerges to support a global knowledge democracy movement or the advance of knowledge capitalism. The final section addresses the ‘scaling up’ and democratisation of community-based methodologies as practitioners increasingly seek to connect lessons learned in local settings to the global context. This section explores the tensions inherent to these developments and suggests that the scaling up of community engagement may result in the failure to maintain the *raison d’être* of participatory and community-based research – as a methodological orientation which strives to empower marginalised communities. Illustrative examples from the Canadian

context are used throughout the discussion to exemplify the trends being addressed in the article.

### **Bridging town and gown in the knowledge economy**

A political economy approach – conceived as a broad, multidisciplinary framework that studies the inter-relations of democratic processes and market forces – is a useful point of departure for addressing the changing nature and structure of community-university partnerships. The utility of political economy lies in exploring how global shifts in research and funding policy are having transformative and decisive effects in the university landscape (Rhoads and Torres 2006). In particular, this approach serves to theoretically explicate contemporary modalities of community engagement within the context of the knowledge economy – as it is in this context that CBR has gained traction as a ‘research strategy of choice’ (Roche 2008, 2). Peters (2003) suggests that only those who approach these issues from a political economy perspective come close to questioning the effects of such restructuring of research upon the performance of institutions and individuals. What is required, according to Peters (2003, 155), is a ‘new political economy of knowledge’ – one sensitised to the performance of the knowledge economy in the context of globalisation. With the renewed embrace of the concept of the knowledge economy since the mid-1990s in becoming a national policy template for many Western governments (Peters 2007, 105), the acquiescence to the semantics of the knowledge economy evident in universities around the world necessitates an interrogation of the discursive contexts within which participatory and community-engaged research have become positioned within neo-liberal modes of governance.

Documenting community-university engagement strategies in nine Australian universities, Winter, Wiseman, and Muirhead (2006) suggest that the influence of knowledge economy policies has placed new pressures on universities to demonstrate their social and economic contribution. Highlighting the contemporary importance of the ‘increasing internationalization of higher education and the rhetoric around global knowledge economies’ (2006, 220), they situate such initiatives in a context in which traditional conceptualisations of community have transcended a focus on the local and regional in assuming a global potency. Within this logic, focusing on research that is applicable and utilitarian is one way that universities and academics can ‘maintain their relevance in a knowledge society’ (2006, 217). While this poses significant challenges for reconceptualising the role that universities play in nurturing democratic citizenship, Winter and colleagues suggest that the question of how community engagement ‘fits within the current economic rationalist [neoliberal] policy framework’ needs to be considered (2006, 224).

Commenting on behalf of the US-based Campus Compact, Rooney (2005) suggests that the heightening economic impacts of higher education are ‘natural by-products of the ascendant knowledge economy’. A coalition of

over 1000 college and university presidents dedicated to advancing the cause of community engagement, Campus Compact have explicitly situated their mandate as one of bridging ‘town and gown’ in the knowledge economy. For example, Rooney documents how Harvard, MIT and Brown have produced ‘economic impact’ statements for their respective institutions, and the eight largest universities in the Greater Boston region have published a document entitled ‘Engines of Collective Growth’ which charts their collective impact in this regard.

As universities around the world experience pressure to reconsider their social and economic role in society, and their relation to various community constituencies and stakeholders, discourses of the knowledge economy can be seen to have cut across national, regional and continental boundaries in assuming a global potency (Olssen and Peters 2005; Robertson 2010; Shore and Taitz 2012). As stated by Fasenfest (2010, 483), ‘simply put, universities should be [now] perceived as the engine that will drive the new knowledge-based economy of the present day’. Knowledge economy policies have thus become powerful drivers of change with regard to research and knowledge production in universities. Privileging collaborations with industry and government, they typically orientate universities to a national innovation model and system which positions knowledge as the key factor facilitating economic growth. Terming this the ‘stake-holder society’, Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno (2008, 313) have noted that, ‘the growing chorus of universities as economic engines has elevated the debate beyond rhetoric and into the realm of policy action’. That this is very much part of a global trend is evidenced by the Association of Commonwealth Universities’ (ACU 2001, 1) claim that the world depends increasingly on universities to ‘become engines of development for people, institutions, and democracy in general’. Rather than dismiss the notion of the knowledge economy as a rhetorical construct of the capitalist economy, the very fact that its terminologies have been appropriated in education and research policy discourse at the international level means that it has already become a decisive determinant of institutional change (Peters 2007). In this context, the benefit of engaged research is increasingly cast in terms of its practical utility and policy applicability, wherein the benefits of research collaboration, participation and engagement are tied to research deliverables, outcomes and products.

The expectation that universities be held accountable to social and economic needs in delivering more efficient ‘value for money’ research has been influenced by the ‘new public managerialism [NPM]’ (Robertson 2010, 194). Emphasising cost-cutting measures and institutional accountability by encouraging universities to pursue strategic and external partnership support, NPM has been indicative of a neoliberal shift in social policy that reflects an ideological belief in the virtue and power of the free market. For example, in the Canadian context, Shanahan and Jones (2007) have described

how accountability frameworks, and by extension university conduct and activities, have increasingly become infused with market discourse, principles and mechanisms. To this end, the mandate of the Canadian federal government has been to, ‘turn university research into marketable technologies and increase Canadian global competitiveness in a knowledge-based economy’ (2007, 34).

In effect, I claim that it is important to address how the economic processes influencing the institutional and organisational relationships that frame community-engaged research, as well as the managerial and market-driven practices they give rise to, inevitably impact upon the nature of the research produced. This is similar to a concern raised by Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno in that, ‘an engaged university will be a driver of innovation but it may also be one that fosters the commodification of higher education, placing the private character of higher education above the public good’ (2008, 304–305). Polster (2007, 611) identifies this as a grave threat to the public service mission of the university. As funding has shifted towards more strategic and partnership initiatives, Polster fears that it may become more difficult for researchers to willingly pursue research questions that benefit disadvantaged groups who lack the organisational capacity to meaningfully engage in academic work. In such terms, there is a tension between the democratisation of knowledge production in the university that the institutionalisation of community engagement as a scholarly function promises, and the aligning of this process of knowledge production with market forces and outcomes. It is this tension that establishes the context within which contemporary conceptualisations of community-university engagement must be understood.

### **Community-university research engagement**

Community-university engagement is best conceptualised as encompassing a spectrum of approaches that range from consultation between academic and community partners at the beginning of a research project to modalities of engagement in which both parties are involved in all phases of the process. Such approaches range from attempts to reconceptualise the ‘disengaged’ university as community resource in encouraging the participation of disadvantaged groups, to stressing the responsibility the university has in producing socially relevant and economically beneficial research (Dempsey 2010; Schensul 2010). According to the Carnegie Foundation, ‘Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity’. Such model definitions highlight key dimensions of collaboration, mutuality and exchange that are central to the ‘best practice’ of engaged scholarship between ‘town and gown’. The Carnegie Foundation drew upon Ernest Boyer’s (1996) call for higher education to reaffirm its



historic commitment to what he termed the ‘scholarship of engagement’. Boyer’s call marked a resurgence of interest in engaged scholarship in the USA and Canada. The scholarship of engagement has subsequently emerged to become a much more multifaceted term and has been used to refer to a wide range of initiatives centred on community outreach, public service, civic engagement, community engagement and community-based participatory research (see e.g., Hart, Maddison, and Wolff 2007; Hall and MacPherson 2011). According to Sandmann (2008), the variety of forms that engagement can assume means that attempts to capture what is intended by the scholarship of engagement can become bogged down in ‘definitional anarchy’.

One area in which practices of community engagement have assumed an increasingly global mandate is in regard to post-secondary service-learning initiatives, particularly as evidenced by their growth and institutionalisation over the course of the past 20 years. Sandmann defines the institutionalisation of community-engagement in universities as the development of institutional frameworks that identify and support engagement as a scholarly function (2008, 98). Often utilised as part of a CBR project, service-learning programmes designed to foster awareness of global citizenship are being increasingly conducted through the lens of civil society – that is, by deepening students’ understandings of global issues through lessons learned from local context. What distinguishes ‘service’ from ‘engagement’, however, is that the latter entails more than a one-way transfer of knowledge and expertise from the university to the community (Peacock 2013, 311).

What has clearly intensified in recent years is that contemporary interest in community-engagement is now clearly evident in university administrations (e.g., university mission statements, the creation of vice-presidents for engagement, offices of community outreach and knowledge mobilisation [KMb] units), organisations that represent universities (such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC] and the Association of Commonwealth Universities), national research councils and governments (Lall 2009). In Canada, for example, the AUCC has claimed that ‘the increased expectation to collaborate is changing the landscape of the research community worldwide’ (2008, 54), and the Governor General of Canada recently initiated a national scan of community-university collaborations in order to develop strategies to increase the range, scope and impact of such engagement (One World Inc. 2012). Accordingly, the interest and support for community-based methodologies, now typically mandated to include a KMb component, has become an important and innovative component of the community-university research landscape, to the extent that ‘we now have an emerging space for the systematic sharing of experiences that did not exist in earlier years’ (OCBR 2009, 45). This emerging space is now facilitating collaborations across sectoral, organisational and international boundaries.

*A new mode of knowledge production?*

In *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (1994), Gibbons et al. proposed that the changing landscape of research and knowledge creation, one in which knowledge is co-produced between universities and civil society actors, represented a new mode of knowledge constitution. A key shift has been that knowledge is increasingly being co-designed and co-produced in the context of its application by those integrally connected with its eventual utilisation. According to Gibbons and colleagues, universities have lost their monopoly on the production of knowledge and must necessarily engage with partners and the users of research. In the context of what they term Mode 2 knowledge, research activity in universities has increasingly shifted towards collaborative and participatory research partnerships, from being disciplinary-based to trans-disciplinary in focus, and with a corresponding shift from national to international research networks. Accordingly:

... there is now sufficient evidence to indicate that a new distinct set of cognitive practices is beginning to emerge [...] which, when taken together, have sufficient coherence to suggest the emergence of a new mode of knowledge production indicative of a fundamental reconfiguring of the relationship between post-secondary institutions and civil society. (Peters 2007, 8)

The work of Gibbons et al. has influenced the institutional uptake of community engagement. For example, in a critical discourse analysis of the Australian Alliance of Community-Engaged Universities' (AUCEA 2008) position paper on community engagement, Peacock (2013, 315) notes how the only external text explicitly referred to in the AUCEA document is that of Gibbons et al. In the Canadian context, the Community University Research Alliance (CURA) programme (launched in 1998 until its final cycle in 2011–2012) has been characterised by Chopyak and Levesque (2002) as representing the 'new type of knowledge' indicative of Gibbons et al.'s Mode 2. Created with the explicit goal of helping Canadian communities to cope with the effects of globalisation, the CURA programme was launched in 1998 by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada to support the creation of community-university research collaboration which, through a democratic process of on-going and systematic collaboration and mutual learning, would lead to the sharing of knowledge, resources and expertise between post-secondary institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs). Chopyak and Levesque (2002) were among the first in Canada to position CBR as an important point of organised and participatory coordination between CSOs and the post-secondary sector. By the late 2000s, community-university engagement had become one of the strongest trends cutting across Canadian university campuses in becoming 'a critical strategic choice for public investment' (Hall 2009, 13).



The increasingly globalised recognition of community-engaged research practice is exemplified by the fact that the CURA programme has been held in high regard internationally and has influenced collaborative research practice in the USA and Europe – with the Partnerships of Institutions and Citizens for Research in France being a notable example of an initiative which has sought to replicate the CURA model (Gall, Millot, and Neubauer 2009, 14). According to a report commissioned by the European Research Framework programme, as part of their *Science in Society* activities aimed at promoting the participation of CSOs in research collaborations with post-secondary institutions, ‘... the success of such initiatives as CURAs is an indicator that government support of community-university partnerships and more generally of science and society interactions produces significant social and economic value that is currently left unrealized by traditional research modalities’ (Gall, Millot, and Neubauer 2009).

It is in this context that dialogues on community-university partnerships are experiencing renewed prominence around the world. The focus of the 6th World Conference of Higher Education in 2012, a number of regional and international meetings have addressed the topic in 2013 – most notably the Canadian-led Community-University Expo *Engaging Shared Worlds* in Corner Brook, Newfoundland & Labrador; the 4th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference *Service-Learning as a Bridge from Local to Global: Connected World, Connected Future* hosted by Lingnan University, Hong Kong; the 10th annual Engagement Australia conference *Next Steps: Co-Producing Knowledge for Social Impact*; and the 6th International Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) Barcelona Conference on Higher Education *Let’s Build Transformative Knowledge to Drive Social Change* at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya in Spain.

Schensul conceptualises community-engaged scholarship as ‘third sector science’, the methodological orientation of which is community-based AR. Accordingly, the production of scientific knowledge in a non-traditional manner, and with emphasis upon ‘the role of public and marginalized voices of the north and the south’, is central to a more democratic and CBR process (2010, 314). Typically employing a wide range of action-oriented and participatory research methods, and building upon traditions of constructivist and critical theoretical perspectives, the past 30 years have witnessed the emergence of a vibrant subculture of partnerships between academically trained researchers and communities with the explicit purpose of conducting CBR to address community needs.

### **Community-based research**

CBR is far from a unified approach, but rather encourages the use of a spectrum of research instruments and techniques as opposed to being a specific methodological orientation in itself. As defined by Strand and

colleagues (quoted in OCBR 2009, 11), ‘community-based research is a collaborative enterprise between academic and community members. CBR seeks to democratise knowledge creation by validating multiple sources of knowledge and promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination’. The democratisation of research practice that this implies can be approached in two complementary ways – first, through the strengthening of citizen involvement in all stages of the research process, and second – through democratising research practice by conducting research specifically directed to community needs (Lutz and Neis 2008; Schensul, Berg, and Williamson 2008). An important implication is that knowledge is seen to be inherently democratic due to the fact that knowledge users external to academia (i.e., various community and civil society constituencies) are increasingly becoming more centrally involved in the co-design and co-production of knowledge – thereby making it relevant in the context of its application to those most closely connected to its eventual utilisation.

In light of this, CBR can be classified as both an emerging and emergent practice – as *emerging* in regard to the sheer proliferation of CBR-style approaches to knowledge co-generation which have sought to contest traditional notions of objectivist impartiality and positivistic pretensions to methodological neutrality – and *emergent* in regard to the context-specific and localised constitution of knowledge produced in the collaborative encounter. Before turning to address the ‘scaling up’ and emerging global agenda of CBR, it is important to note how the constituent origins of CBR, in traditions of AR and PAR, were forged in a nascent context of globalisation. Although there is much held in common between these two traditions, there is also sufficient divergence to render their collapse problematic. A key claim I wish to make in the following part of the discussion is that conflating AR with PAR is consequential in light of its increasing appeal to funding organisations and as CBR practitioners seek to apply lessons learned from local settings to the global context. In particular, the distinction is important when questioning the extent to which CBR may emerge in support of the knowledge democracy movement or become complicit in advancing knowledge capitalism.

### ***Action research***

Despite not having a universally agreed-upon definition, most conceptualisations of AR emphasise it to be a community of practice encapsulating elements of research, participation, and action. As defined by Greenwood and Levin (2003, 145), AR is research in which the ‘validity and value of research results are tested through collaborative insider-professional researcher knowledge generation and application processes in projects of social change that aim to increase fairness, wellness, and self-determination’. The approach is credited as originating with the work of experimental psychologist Kurt Lewin and generally attributed to practitioners of clinical research, social psychology

and management/organisational theory (Flicker et al. 2008). A further point of influence for AR has been the tradition of American pragmatism, particularly under the influence of John Dewey who held that professional educators should be directly involved in communities in a problem-solving capacity (Greenwood and Levin 2003, 147). Collaborative action research networks also began to emerge in the 1970s in the Netherlands in the form of the development of structures for linking academic research to the needs of the community (<http://www.livingknowledge.org>).

As its Lewinian origins would seem to suggest, the ideological postulates informing AR have been decidedly influenced by Western, 'cultures of affluent nations with an emphasis on such concepts as efficient and effective task accomplishment, the centrality of individuals, and consensus theories of social change' (Khanlou and Peter 2005, 2335). The participatory dimension typical of AR is thus either client-user or consultant driven, with the action component explicitly conducted in the spirit of a decidedly problem-solving utilitarianism. Much AR is undeniably democratic in intent, particularly in regard to seeking to open a space of collaboration for the 'non-scientific' or non-academic community (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire 2003, 13). The tradition is seen as differing significantly from that of PAR with regard to issues of power and conflict between universities and communities often concealed in the research process (Flicker et al. 2008).

### ***Participatory action research***

In Tanzania, India, Latin America, and elsewhere, a new participatory approach to research – one which recognised the knowledge-creating capacities of community, organisations and social movements – began gaining visibility from the 1970s onwards. Building extensively upon traditions of critical pedagogy, as well as drawing upon aspects of AR, PAR orients towards a socially transformative research practice, a process Paulo Freire (1970) termed *conscientização* (usually translated from Portuguese as 'conscientisation' and meaning critical consciousness). Integral to the Freirian approach is the pedagogical principle of co-inquiry and co-learning wherein community members acquire skills of critical consciousness so as to recognise and assume the roles they may take in effecting community and social change. PAR has traditionally been a 'methodology of the margins' in terms of both its disciplinary currency and predominance in the Global South (Jordan 2003, 186).

Drawing upon the tools of critical theory, feminism, anti-colonial, anti-racist and constructivist paradigms as a strategy by which to critique the epistemological rigidity of more positivist-inclined approaches to teaching and learning, PAR acknowledges the intrinsic value, validity, and veracity of local and indigenous knowledge claims and experience (Khan and Chovancel 2010). As such, the 'reconstruction' of knowledge production gestures

towards the potential to bring about the more equitable governance of research practice between university researchers and community groups, thereby shifting the responsibility for the research process onto those groups directly affected by such issues. As indicated by Jordan (2003, 189), PAR has traditionally been committed to such values as democratic engagement and social justice in combating the excesses of the market.

***CBR: bridging the divide between universities and civil society?***

Both AR-oriented and PAR approaches have achieved much in helping to create a collaborative space of possibility for bridging the divide between academia and society. Both are explicitly normative in tone – variously espousing a variety of underlying beliefs and values in regard to how, for whom, and to what purposes research should be conducted. Furthermore, both traditions operate in sharp relief to more conventional forms of research practice in which decisions regarding project design and implementation are made in advance of the data collection process and without the consultation of those in the community.

However, a critical point of distinction emerges when one considers that AR is generally attributed to the more conservatively inclined Northern tradition of ‘scientific’ practice as opposed to the PAR tradition of pedagogical empowerment practised in the Global South (Khanlou and Peter 2005). As PAR has migrated from its points of origin in the Global South to become a recognisable feature of collaborative research in many European and North American universities, so too has AR moved beyond its traditional context of application in the North and become complicit in a wide range of participatory development initiatives in the Global South. Given the current salience accorded CBR, there remains considerable conceptual confusion which tends to collapse the traditions of both into a unitary approach, often resulting in studies identifying as PAR when in practice they are closer in conceptualisation and operationalisation to the methodological and epistemological principles of AR (see Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire 2003, 12; Jordan 2003, 187; Khanlou and Peter 2005, 2339; Khan and Chovancel 2010). The conflation is significant because the political leanings and democratic intentions of AR differ substantially from those of PAR – particularly in terms of the role of civil society actors in the design of research, the location of power in the research process, the forms of knowledge creation aspired to, and the ultimate goals of the research. Crucially, the pragmatic and policy-orientated impulse typical of AR stands in contrast to the more radical and transformative intentions of PAR – with AR effectively serving to alleviate rather than eradicate the inefficiencies and inequities of the status quo. What this implies is that CBR is being conceptualised in increasingly depoliticised terms as it becomes institutionalised by the academic mainstream. This is

problematic considering that PAR is inherently political in its commitment to social change.

In this context, the power and potential of CBR has not been lost on mainstream funding bodies around the world as they look to add such orientations to their established repertoire of recognised approaches to research on health and community development. In such terms, government departments have sought to advance policy and programme efficiencies through research and policy coordination, government-supported agencies seek to leverage relationships between government and CSOs, civil society agencies and philanthropic foundations engage in the co-creation of knowledge specifically designed for stake-holder use, transnational organisations seek to implement developmental objectives through a range of participatory mechanisms at the local level, and universities seek to enhance the value and relevance of their work in the community through collaborative research practice – increasingly, and preferably, with a transnational applicability (Chopyak and Levesque 2002). In reaching out to civil society groups, however, what has become clear is that contemporary implementations of CBR have begun to transcend their traditional context of implementation as localised community engagement or as modes of action-oriented or participatory research which do not bring into focus wider processes of the economic restructuring. For example, in their study of coastal communities in Canada, Lutz and Neis (2008) stress the importance of increasing the impact of CBR through enhanced knowledge transfer activities between communities, academics, and government for the purposes of influencing government decision-making on economic policy. For their part, Munck, McQuillan, and Ozarowska (2012) stress the importance of situating civic engagement in the context of a critical globalisation perspective. Drawing upon a study of civic engagement in an area of North Dublin in which the ratio of educational access is similar to that of sub-Saharan Africa, they argue that conceptualising engagement within such a framework becomes even more important in an age of austerity and as local processes are increasingly mediated by global forces.

### **The global agenda of community-engaged research**

Hall identifies the renewal of community-university engagement as representing more than an effort to consolidate space in the university for civil society actors. Situating such initiatives in the context of globalisation, Hall (2011) quotes Cristina Escrigas, the Executive Director of the GUNI, in that it is time to ‘review and reconsider the interchange of values between university and society ... we need to rethink the social relevance of universities’. Noting how universities around the world are attempting to increase their social and economic impact, Hall has chronicled the emergence of, ‘new discourses, practices, and structures for knowledge mobilization, engaged scholarship, community-based research, and community-university research

partnerships ...' (2011). Hall offers some perceptive insight into the driving forces behind this knowledge democracy movement, the potential opportunities and dangers, and the possibility of realising a liberatory and transformative research practice in the tradition of Freire (1970). Hall (2009) suggests that using university resources to create 'imaginative partnership structures' has the potential to make a significant impact on communities in addressing a wide range of social issues.

A Canadian-led initiative that is attempting to create a common space between CBR practitioners and community-based organisations in the context of globalisation is the *Global Alliance for Community-Engaged Research* (GACER). Drawing upon the support of universities and CSOs from around the world, the GACER agreement is a statement of principles and aspirations on the part of the major networking organisations in the field of community-engaged scholarship, including the Living Knowledge Network, the Community-Campus Partnership for Health (USA), Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), sub-Saharan Participatory Research Network (Senegal), International Green Mapping Network (USA), and others. Such participating universities, networks, and organisations are now networked globally and coordinating as nodes in a larger international framework of community-engaged scholarship with similar groups of comparable mandate. The GACER initiative is indicative of an explicitly normative attempt to nurture the democratic potential of community-engaged research in a globally networked manner:

In different regions of the world, we are witnessing a strong emergence of diverse programmes that share the purposes of supporting higher education engaging or re-engaging with their communities. Participatory Action Research (PAR) has emerged in recent years as a significant methodology for intervention, development and change within communities and groups. It is now promoted and implemented by many international development agencies and university programs, as well as countless local community organizations around the world. (Forum for a New World Governance 2009)

Such initiatives exemplify a key shift in the conceptualisation of community engagement. One has been a shift in the traditional focus on locality and the regional to include dimensions that are national and international. In such terms, traditional models of community-engaged research are being 'scaled-up' so that lessons learned in local context can be applied in global settings. This shift towards a scaled-up research practice is paralleled by a movement towards transnational and multi-disciplinary research networks with an emphasis on problem-solving, policy-oriented research, in a manner akin to the 'new context of knowledge production' described by Gibbons et al. (1994). The shift towards the 'scaling up' of research collaboration that initiatives such as GACER represent, which tend to be trans-disciplinary and multi-institutional in scope, suggests that participatory, community-based methodologies are in the process of a paradigm shift as they become part



of what Schensul (2010, 312) has characterised as an emergent ‘global knowledge exchange system’. In addition, the growth of larger-scale funding options for research partnerships suggests that, ‘we are at an important juncture for CBR. Having acquired this degree of visibility, the approach is at a new point in its evolution: on the cusp of mainstream acceptance’ (Roche 2008, 7). Although a key impediment that remains to be overcome in universities is the lack of recognition regarding the achievements of community-based scholarship in tenure and promotion processes, it remains to be seen whether the role of community-engaged scholarship will further democratise the production of knowledge between universities and civil society, or become complicit in advancing the entrepreneurial role of universities eager to capitalise upon community resources.

Notwithstanding such challenges, a number of international efforts have developed to nurture this emerging environment of cooperative and collaborative inquiry. Orchestrated by the GUNI in 2010, eight international networks supporting community university engagement gathered to participate in the first Global Dialogue on Enhancing North-South Cooperation in Community-University Engagement. Comprised of the Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinarios, the Commonwealth Universities Extension and Engagement Network, the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research (GACER) initiative, the Living Knowledge Network, the PASCAL International Observatory, PRIA, the Talloires Network, and representing several thousand universities, professional bodies and CSOs, these ‘big-tent’ dialogues provide a space designed to facilitate a global conversation about how knowledge created in universities, communities and civil society can be better coordinated to the mutual advantage of each. Further examples of such coordination include the *Community-Engaged Research: A Step Forward* – as drafted by the Forum for a New World Governance in 2009, the *University Extension and Community Engagement Network* of the ACU, and the launch of the UNESCO Chair in *Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education* in 2012.

In principle, such initiatives recognise that global social, economic, and political dynamics create pressures at the local level – with engaged citizens, communities, and post-secondary institutions seeking to control their impact and outcomes (Schensul 2010). What this implies is that CBR initiatives are being advanced for the ‘common global purpose’ of using knowledge and community-university partnership strategies to achieve ‘democratic social and environmental changes and justice, particularly among the most vulnerable people and places of the world’ (GACER 2009). However, Wallerstein and Duran (2003) question the extent to which the scaling up of community-based and participatory research can be achieved when the success of such initiatives depends on the building of relationships and collaborations over time at the local level. In particular, a major challenge lies in the potential limits of CBR,

‘given the realities of globalization, the imposition of Western cultural and economic hegemony on the rest of the world, and the difficulties for local communities in making meaningful change’ (Wallerstein and Duran 2003, 44). As Singh (2007, 60) further notes, such endeavours may end up shaping the content of engagement in ways that prioritise the agendas of powerful stakeholders whose mandate is one of economic growth and national competitiveness, whilst minimising those situated in the interstices of civil society and whose priorities lie with achieving greater democratic inclusion and the advancement of social justice. In the next section I explore some of the possible implications of the scaling up of community-engaged research in the context of globalisation. Given that the infancy of the initiatives which seek to scale up participatory and CBR practice makes drawing inferences difficult, the discussion is explicatory and interrogative in tone, rather than evaluative or prescriptive.

### ***Knowledge for whom? Knowledge for what?***

Situating their discussion of universities and stakeholder engagement in the context of the knowledge economy of higher education, Bennworth and Jongbloed (2010) suggest that the emphasis on the market benefits of university research is redefining the ‘social contract’ between universities and society. The problem this raises is that universities, ‘become increasingly dependent on market decisions and metric allocations rather than block grants [and they] face an increasingly complicated choice of which stakeholders’ interests to prioritise and how to reconcile contradictory interests’ (2010, 570). Bennworth and Jongbloed suggest that ‘valorization’, which they define as the necessity that ‘the outcomes of [social] scientific knowledge add value beyond the scientific domain’ (2010, 567), is at the centre of debates on the future of academic research. The tension they identify is that, although the valorisation of knowledge is intended to be broader than the commercialisation of knowledge, it nevertheless remains framed by ‘the rise of the hegemonic discourse of academic capitalism ... viewing academics as capitalists in the public sector’ (2010, 568; Shore and Taitz 2012).

The tensions raised by these trends, and the implications for community-engaged research, are twofold. On the one hand, Winter, Wiseman, and Muirhead (2006, 222–223) claim that community engagement ‘may temper neo-liberal policy through citizen engagement’. This is similar to the view expressed by Hall (2009) and Schensul (2010) with regard to the potential of the knowledge democracy movement in nurturing an oppositional space to market-driven imperatives. On the other hand, such engagement is vulnerable to being co-opted by a market-driven and entrepreneurial agenda as the responsibility of the state is increasingly shifted to local and regional communities (Jordan 2003; Peacock 2013). In other words, the penetration of market-driven values and policies into the domain of knowledge production

has amounted to the uncritical embrace of managerial and entrepreneurial practices which coalesce to shape the ‘democratic’ and ‘engaged’ character of collaborative research. In such terms, my intention with the final part of the article is to build upon Holmes and Scoones’s (quoted in Gall, Millot, and Neubauer 2009, 88) contention that while:

... there has been [an] important emphasis on the development of participatory methods in both Northern and Southern settings, there has been less reflection on how these are located within broader policy processes and how those involved in participatory events are linked to wider policy networks and processes of policy change.

Hall is careful to distinguish the idea of the global knowledge movement from that of the knowledge economy. Whereas the knowledge economy connects knowledge production and skills development to capitalist production and the use of digital technologies, the knowledge movement (or knowledge democracy movement) refers to an, ‘action-oriented formation that recognises, gives visibility to and strengthens the knowledge that is created in the context of, as Marx said, people trying to “change the world”’ (2011). That said, Hall remains cognisant of how market forces, operating through the notion of the knowledge economy, threaten to disrupt such movement. Problematically, therefore, and variously described in terms of ‘academic capitalism’ (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Shore and Taitz 2012) or ‘knowledge capitalism’ (Olssen and Peters 2005), shifting regimes of research and knowledge governance have increasingly positioned community-university engagement in symbiotic alignment with economic imperatives. For example, Coleman and Kamboureli (2011, xvi) state that the pressure now placed upon institutions to attract external funds has shifted the focus from a broader academic capitalism to what they call ‘research capitalism’, with such pressures now being felt in areas that do not fit neatly into a ‘discovery-for-application’ research model. Whilst community-university partnerships offer much promise in terms of mitigating the excesses of an explicitly utilitarian and market-driven conceptualisation of research practice, they remain vulnerable to being co-opted by these same conceptualisations.

For example, in their critique of discourses of community engagement in Australian universities, Winter and colleagues (2006) contend that although such engagement demonstrates a commitment to social justice and equity, it has also become an entrepreneurial and effective marketing and branding technique for universities. Also in the Australian context, Peacock (2013) notes how the discursive construction of university-community engagement in the AUCEA position paper is more likely to, ‘resonate with and speak to business and industry interests than non-governmental organisations seeking non-profit or more socially just and democratic outcomes’. As Jordan (2003) has claimed in relation to PAR, CBR initiatives have gradually experienced a

blunting of their critical and transformative potential as they succumb to a process of institutionalisation by mainstream agencies and organisations acting in global concert. The key point here is that CBR practice is increasingly more likely to orient towards the methodological tenets and political effects of AR as opposed to those of PAR. Situating the current salience of community engagement in terms of the knowledge economy of higher education is important as it is this context which threatens to transform the university into a ‘global institution of action-research at the service of global capitalism’ (Santos 2006, 87). To this end, the perceived benefit of such research is increasingly cast in terms of its practical utility – in which the semantics of partnership, participation, and empowerment are incrementally tied to research deliverables, outcomes, products and impact. The general effect of such positioning has been to assimilate and reconstitute participatory methodologies within existing forms of social organisation which conserve rather than contest existent relations of ruling (Jordan 2003).

In practice, this has meant that the growing acceptance of participatory and community-based methodologies at the global level has been accompanied by a dampening of their political intent at the local level. From the World Bank to the IMF to a range of NGOs, ‘participation’ has now become a required and ubiquitous component of programme evaluation, assessment, appraisal, and training (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Khan and Chovancel 2010; Bowd, Özerdem, and Kassa 2010). Indeed, such transnational actors now routinely utilise the semantics of community and participation in their operations – with the World Bank in particular devoting considerable energy to ‘participatory development’ through such initiatives as the Comprehensive Development Framework and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Robertson and Dale 2009). Furthermore, according to Peters, the work of Gibbons and colleagues effectively functions as ‘an implicit neoliberal World Bank policy prescription’ (2007, 9).

As stated by Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire (2003, 24), ‘... while promoting participatory and action-oriented processes in the field, many development agencies remain hierarchical, rigid institutions with little sense of how to operate democratically and inclusively’. In such terms, organisations such as the World Bank and other development agencies are increasingly using the knowledge produced through engagements with civil society for purposes at odds with the original inspiration for such research – that is, to improve global governance in the wake of growing discontent over development and economic policy. It is in such terms that Feagin and Vera (2001, 177) chart the emergence of a new dynamic between North and South in terms of how participatory and sustainable development, human rights, feminist, antiracist and other critical orientations against the status quo ‘have been relentlessly subjected to efforts at co-optation and domestication’. Writing in the context of the UK, Bunyan (2013, 119–120) notes how ‘partnership’ and ‘empowerment’

operate as narratives ‘shaping assumptions about the nature of social change and the respective roles of the state, market and third sector’ and have contributed to the depoliticising of third sector practice.

The danger for CBR in this shifting context lies in the incorporatisation of community-based organisations into structures that redirect their activities towards local service provision and policy recommendations and away from the contestation of economic policy and wider issues of social justice (Bunyan 2013). The result is that their collaborations with universities are being harnessed in service to the economy under conditions of knowledge capitalism. Neis (2010, 248) fears that community-engaged or partnered research has played the role of a ‘Trojan horse’ in academe, serving to alleviate some of the anxiety regarding the shaping of research by market dictates whilst also muting criticism of the incremental corporatisation of the university. In this, community-university research partnerships are positioned as ‘relevant’ to society, and yet are increasingly constrained by the circumscribed economic and political spaces they are being shaped to inhabit. Ostensibly committed to increasing community capacity and advancing the cause of social justice, participatory research partnerships are indicative of the manner in which such concepts as community, participation and engagement are increasingly being operationalised within the ideological parameters of the knowledge economy.

## Conclusion

Central to my discussion has been the acknowledgement that a key augmentation has occurred in the focus of CBR practice from that of capacity-building at the level of local communities to a practice oriented towards research and policy applicability at the transnational and global level. In particular, there is a danger that the ‘scaling-up’ of community-based participatory methodology will result in the failure to maintain its *raison d’être* – as a methodological orientation which strives to empower marginalised communities. This is not to suggest that a wide range of local consciousness-raising initiatives will cease to be conspicuous features of the knowledge landscape. In fact, recent developments suggest that they can be expected to grow in scale and importance in coming years. Rather, my aim has been to highlight that there are serious concerns to be addressed regarding the shift in the role and purpose of community engagement in moving from specialised and marginal discourses of methodological orientation and best practice to mainstream acceptance.

Although there has been enthusiastic talk of an ‘emerging knowledge creation system’ (OCBR 2009, 5) and of a (global) knowledge democracy movement (Vaillancourt 2005; Hall 2009, 2011; Schensul 2010) in some of the recent literature on community-university engagement, my intention has been to support Roche’s (2008, 18) contention that such claims require the creation of a ‘new body of evidence’ by which to critically analyse how the social relations of research practice between universities and communities are

changing. Whilst it is certainly preferable to aim at the institutionalisation of the most conceptually and contextually nuanced versions of engagement, and at weakening its most excessively reductionist forms (Singh 2007, 57), a major challenge for the scaling up of CBR lies in the potential limits of such research practice given the contemporary coalescence of globalisation and the hegemony of Western knowledge economies. There is, therefore, a need to unshackle the notion of the knowledge economy from the monopoly of the market, and for it to be re-constructed so as to include the political, social and ethical considerations that are presently either absent or vaguely gestured to (Sörlin and Vessuri 2007, 24). Such unshackling will depend upon the extent to which practitioners of CBR remain sensitive to the economic and political pressures that shape and limit the democratic potential of the scholarship of engagement.

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