

Big Tent Communique VI

Local Identities and Global Citizenship: Challenges for Universities

FIRST DRAFT for development

Five Communiques and now a Sixth - Big Tent VI – where and why?

The idea for the Big Tent theme this year arose from thinking about the location in Sicily of the 7-9 October 2015 Pascal Annual Conference, 'on the frontier of fortress Europe'. Its theme is *how cities and their regions are connected to their universities at strategic frontiers*.

This is the 6th communique since Big Tent was created with a first communique five years ago. The 5th was issued in 2013. The first five show consistent values and purposes. The style and subject focus moved year by year: North-South cooperation; a 2030 Engagement scenario; Sustainability, knowledge and democracy; Grand Challenges and transformation; Inclusive cities. Communiques are rhetorically rich, ambitious, full of hope for change. They speak of problems and processes. They call for action.

The number of adherent Tent networking partners has risen from eight in the first to eighteen in this sixth communique. Does this rising number within the Tent mean more attention and more resulting change? The small hiatus since the 5th communique in November 2013 gives a moment to reflect on our work together. We have rising uncertainty in many arenas of public and community affairs worldwide: environmental sustainability, peace, economic instability, exploding levels of inequality, youth unemployment and lost identity, ageing and now the massive movement of peoples. Different rising crisis levels interact. We talk daily of 'perfect storms'. Governments and inter-government agencies are full of words but seem lost for deep understanding and practical solutions.

The Big Tent network of networks must grow. It must add to persuasive rhetoric the capability and commitment to take the understanding that we share about vital world matters into politics and the market place. We must see and say how problems may be solved by means of knowledge and wisdom, by universities and the many agents of civil society, by living and universalising lifelong learning. We must find and use the words and voices that are heard and create change: mass and social media as well as political, policy and scholarly discourse. If five rich communiques are gathering dust, how to have them heard and acted on.

This 2015 subject and communique have the opportunity to speak sharper and be heard clearer.

2015 - Crisis and panic as the wealthy turn their backs in a wringing and washing of hands

There can be no more fitting time or place than Sicily's Catania in the northern autumn of 2015 to consider colliding interests of North and South (see Communique I). What is happening here and now, and what lies behind the tragedies across Africa, the Middle East, all the global South and so also the global North and the seas between –is an ethical and practical challenge of the highest order. We are nations all afraid. Our governments know not what to do.

How can universities, and the generous ideas of lifelong learning and learning societies first conveyed by those terms four decades ago, help governments to lead well, to think and plan for the sustainable and long term, to identify wise solutions to problems, and to have these adopted and owned by their

peoples? This tough question becomes tougher when passions are heated and clear options seem not to exist. What *is* the solution for ‘the North’ as migrant-refugees rise from thousands to millions? How realistic is even the most intelligent as well as human long-term response: to address and remove the causes of mass migration at source?

The world’s universities, numbering tens of thousands, and their members, numbered in millions, must not turn their backs: they and we belong to both institutions and the world of communities. Universities cannot hide or look away: neither to abstract academicism, nor into technical ‘human resource’ training. This meets just the short-term economic and corporate needs of countries and localities. To survive universities must own and take to the heart of their identity and task the present and future of our inherited local and global world. All share a duty of care for the future of millions of young people who have no employment and maybe, despite the natural joys of youth and energy, no hope or sense of belonging to anything anywhere.

As members of Big Tent we share the belief that universities must engage with the present and future of their communities, local and regional, ethnic and cultural, social and economic, as well as of a global citizenry and destiny. We advocate true partnership where universities with civil society make, own and use knowledge. Such partner participation means sharing power and duties.

People and power – a pesky paradox

We do not share the dominant ideology that favours shrinking the State; but we do recognise that governments should listen more; and devolve and share the process of carrying out policy much more than many do. Regions, cities and towns, local communities and neighbourhoods with local knowledge for different contexts can act more effectively to achieve an agreed direction than any civilised central administration can. In principle, central government resolves, its people (the electorate) strongly agree, and much policy is executed locally because it is ‘culturally’ owned. We know that global solutions must and can only really work locally if they are embedded in communities and their *mores*.

But we must confront a paradox. In democracies ‘ordinary’ people choose governments. Many people are very scared of what the early future holds and are turning in on themselves. Some have become xenophobic: fearful of and hostile to outsiders and ungenerous of the plight of the displaced millions. This strong negative mood in turn makes the governments that set policies and directions play safe, to the point that the post-War ‘European project’, the EU, is threatened by inward centrifugal separatism.

Political parties of ‘the Right’ and ‘Far Right’ supported by mass media have become powerful. The Far Right is even the second most popular party by voting numbers in some countries, and a cancerous presence within EU governance. Allied with wealthy corporate interests they may control policy. Governments confused by multi-dimensional crisis, riven by inward-turning fear and nostalgia at home, yet face critical urgency to act abroad. Living standards and economic security in our own or the next town however matter more to ‘ordinary people’ than the condition of life of foreigners in the global South.

The paradox threatens trust in the wisdom, decency, humanity and communal ethic on which notions of participatory democracy rest. If hearts are closed and vision narrowed and shortened by fear, what does it mean to favour political devolution, and local power-sharing engagement, with such short-sighted self-centred partners?

There are answers, and they are found through abiding optimism by new – maybe transformative? – forms of individual and collective engaged lifelong learning, new pedagogies, and new support, public

and community, for ethic-based learning-for-action. But educators and universities cannot pretend to be apolitical and expect to succeed.

This communique is a call for practical action out from education that means getting our clean hands politically dirty.

Local identity for global citizenship – a message from Catania

Into a morass of short and clouded horizons, financial instability and rival trading interests, security and information management, anti-terrorism and border controls, fear of war etc, comes a new threat.

New peoples invade a Europe where people movements including peaceful and forceful invasions and arrivals are its history. The same is true of the newer ‘Norths’ of Australia and North America. Conversely, emigration northward from the South is a natural sequel to the massive European colonial invasion and conquest of recent modern time – even without the bloody violence engulfing large swathes of the Middle East and Africa..

Disjointing crisis is especially startling in Europe. 2015 moves through fear towards panic. Ever more boat and other displaced people ‘invade’ from the South and East. Elsewhere some South-East Asia nations have hardened their hearts, pushing refugees from Myanmar back out to sea; Australia similarly. ‘Solutions’ range from sinking smugglers’ vessels to refusing landing to rescue vessels to reportedly bribing smugglers to return their human cargoes whence they came.

A different approach – the Big Tent Challenge Question

Words, ideas and control mostly flow North to South. Refugees and other migrants flow the other way. The fortress North sees such population movements through its own eyes and interests. We now look wider.

From Canada in the global North Budd Hall tells us that the recent wave of tragic deaths on the Mediterranean underscores the depth of inequality, which persists, or even increases, in our troubled world.

“The fact that some of these people have been headed to Catania where we are meeting means that we must no longer speak of higher education or of universities in technical, managerial or abstracted terms. The starting point for engagement must be a deeper way of listening to the concerns of ordinary citizens, including migrants, unemployed, homeless or otherwise excluded.”

From India in the global South Rajesh Tandon asks: “*how can the possibility of global citizenship driven by the youth of today be embraced by communities in a sustainable manner?*” He points out that “*nearly half the populations of Asian countries are young people below the age of 25; these billion plus youth have grown up in the post Berlin wall era; they have been hearing globalisation since their childhood. They now have access to smart phones and internet which connects them globally with their peers in the cyber world.*

They now have begun to share global aspirations of One World. For them, movement from villages to small towns to mega cities of their own country, and beyond its historical borders, is one seamless aspiration. This generation is beginning to experience global citizenship. Yet, the ‘host’ communities in cities and beyond are resistant to this ‘invasion’ of youth; they are afraid to change, and they are uncertain about the future that comes in with these waves of youthful migrations.”

Can 'the North' which will numerically dominate Catania Conference participation look from and at both sides? Can we see how all our universities and lifelong learning endeavour can lead towards a shared non-violent future where better life is better shared among all?

By chance our theme partly echoes that of the first Big Tent communique in 2010: ***Enhancing North-South Cooperation in Community-University Engagement***. What we see happening politically in southern Europe today, and in other North-South frontier situations globally, is the antithesis of North-South cooperation.

A new approach for the Sustainable Development era?

What can we in Big Tent do, acknowledging as we must that there will yet be much more fear, more violence, more xenophobia along the way? A sensible time frame is the new UN cycle of Sustainable Development Goals. We already influence UN-type agencies and advocate tirelessly in our different circles for adults' education, and more equal opportunity, and for lifelong learning as a fully adopted policy principle and practice. We may be less firm and clear about global crises and development than we should. And we fall short in making our education and learning policy prescriptions relevant and compelling outside educational circles.

We do not know how to 'solve' the Mediterranean crisis and tragedy of death that paralyses Europe's governments. We do know that real solutions lie in the causes of desperate mass movements. A massive community learning campaign is needed no less challenging than a major national literacy campaigns. This demands political will and courage: leadership of a kind that eludes most Polls-Press-PR driven democracies; explicit principle-based long-sighted policies are needed, not just the semi-covert nudge.

We know too that civil society needs to turn abundantly available badly presented information into knowledge and understanding; and that community dialogue and testing through direct experienced action makes for lasting learning. Without this, referenda are the refuge of spineless leaders and an insult to a neglected electorate starved of engaged learning.

What then is the key to effective engagement and solid patient resolution of the 'perfect storm' of interconnecting issues? Migration is an immediate imperative and a way to enter this maze and find a way through. It could equally be rising gross inequalities, global warming, competition for depleting natural resources, a clutch of employment, health, security, ageing, or other quality of life issues. All require transformational culture change through civil society learning and capacity-building that can inspire governments to hear, fear and at the same time trust people, and tame the acquisitive rapacity of corporate and other interests. Whichever current news-dominating crisis it is, it demands a learning response, huge facilitating educational effort - and deep involvement in politics, local and national.

From universities this communique demands the courage to engage with society and community locally and beyond. It means using understandable language. University and communities must understand and address their needs together, making, sharing and using knowledge, learning *and acting* together.

University governors and managements must courageously resist the seduction of world-class beauty-contest league tables. These, like older beauty contests, are now under sustained intellectual assault. They falsify 'beauty' and divert the other 99.5 per cent, of universities- as do beauty contests of women - from wiser and more useful purpose. They disturb the mission of all to the benefit of a tiny elite.

Rectors, provosts, vice-chancellors and principals with their managements and managers must lead by example in nurturing courage, honesty, public service and humanity. Their role model as leaders of

useful and trustworthy open-system learning organisations is not the proverbially bulldog captain of industry but the nurturing gardener. They must work and sup with politicians and captains of industry without becoming just like them. Each year they should put into the community new cohorts of morally anchored community workers and leaders, in whatever field of expertise and employment. For this they must create and sustain a fitting written and a wider 'hidden' curriculum and a 'student experience' that lifts the eyes above a future income.

University staff, expert in their fields of knowledge or disciplines, and capable administrators of complex knowledge organisations, must make their first duty and top priority doing good for the wider and the local world by the way they make, are part of and use the university. They must value subject loyalty, departmental fragmentation, competition, and rewards of office less. Community service and public engagement in creating public good must be the basis of a deep professional ethic.

Universities forfeit the right to exist if they deny and ignore the political world. Engaging politically is never easy. It can be costly and in some countries is dangerously difficult. Universities together and globally must defend what they stand for and support one another in solidarity for truth and long-term utility. They must **be** an openly committed part of their community and society, even while 'speaking truth to' the power of which they are an inevitably influential part.

Regions and localities must take responsible control of their own destinies through their governance and daily practice. They should contribute robustly to national debate and policy-making, their elected leaders serving as channels of local experience, knowledge and wishes. These should carry out with integrity policies properly deliberated and adopted. They must give priority to real-world needs and help their people – their citizens and communities – to be informed and active makers of their own destiny.

By the way they govern and manage they must be facilitators of applied learning for all, formally and informally. They must closely partner universities, colleges and schools as main knowledge-makers and disseminators – and demand of them their relevant commitment and practical involvement. In terms of refugees and economic migrants they should not just try to be popular and echo immediate perhaps hostile reactions. They should lead and help their communities and citizens to be open to change, generous in the face of others' problems more acute than their own, able to take a long view and weigh short-term disruption with possible wider gain.

Local authority leaders and officers must be moved and driven by the needs of their region and country, not by the ambitions of competing internal departments or self-seeking lobbyists. In relation to the 'immigration crisis' they must be open to all concerns, and firm in enabling practical learning and wise judgement. They should not blame other governments, or the strong opinions of constituents for tough realities.

In the Big Tent and as a periodic Big Tent virtual community of interest and purpose we cannot pretend to know and determine what our governments should do.

But we can say how they should go about learning right and doing right. We for our own part must go beyond undirected rhetoric and not fear dirty hands from political involvement.

We do not have the political answer as to just how to please our own restless ad fearful citizens and reconcile them with the needs and threat of an immediate desperate half million queuing to enter Italy, whose borders to the north are belong closed by EU partners. Behind them we see shadowy millions more, wasting in refugee camps and stirring to move also, or being radicalized in their endless soul-destroying waiting by ISIS-ISIL and others.

But we can see, and teach through our network members, the threat to development aid budgets: from far-right and xenophobic anti-aid parties and from governments turned in on themselves to embrace inequalitarian austerity at any price. We can help civil society to see the connections, join up

the dots, and reach their own long-term sustainable conclusions. Meanwhile we can lobby governments to learn, listen, and lead better.

Dwellers in the Big Tent 2015

TALLOIRES NETWORK

PASCAL INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATORY

LIVING KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

ASSOCIATION OF COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITIES (ACU)

CEBEM – LATIN AMERICA

GACER

PRIA

ASIA ENGAGE

ASIA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NETWORK (APUCEN)

CLAYSS – LATIN AMERICA

COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH CANADA (CBRC)

COMMUNITY CAMPUS PARTNERSHIP FOR HEALTH (USA-Canada)

EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT NETWORK

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES

NATIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION (NCCPE)

SERVICE LEARNING ASIA NETWORK (SLAN)

UNESCO CHAIR FOR COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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