Launch of *Higher Education and Community-Based Research: Creating a Global Vision*
10am–11.30am, Royal Irish Academy, 19, Dawson Street, Dublin 2.

Community-based research has a long pre-history. Throughout the 18th, 19th, and early-20th centuries, many distinguished scientists and anthropologists were avid collectors of the body parts of indigenous Australians, the remains of hundreds of whom are still held today in museums, medical schools and private collections across the world. In the early 1900s, Dr. William Ramsay Smith, a graduate in medicine from the University of Edinburgh who became state coroner in south Australia, preserved in alcohol and dispatched the soft tissue and bones of up to 600 Aboriginal people to his friend, D. J. Cunningham, Professor of Anatomy at his *alma mater*. In return, Cunningham ensured that Ramsay Smith became a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute and a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. On a tour of New South Wales in the 1830s, the colonial explorer and surveyor, Thomas Mitchell, shot and killed 7 tribesmen on sight and was subsequently knighted as well as having a highway, river and town in Queensland and an area of Canberra named after him. Australian institutions also amassed large collections of human remains: subsequent to the death of the last member of the Ngambri people of the Limestone Plains in a conflict between tribesmen in the mid-19th century, settlers dug up his body and fashioned a sugar bowl from his skull, which remains to this day in a private Canberra collection.[1]

Happily, the community-based research that is celebrated in the book which is being launched today contrasts sharply with these gruesome and flagrantly unethical practices. As Ronaldo Munck observes, 'people in the community, once subject to classification, experimentation, and regulation, are now viewed as owners of skills, knowledge, and expertise that may be useful to researchers and policy-makers'.[2] And, as Vanessa Liston states in the third chapter of the book, 'The Problematic of Participation', community-based research 'is a cooperative enterprise, richly informed by context, experience, and local knowledge in which communities participate at all stages of the research process'.[3] Defined as 'the systemic creation of knowledge that is done with and for the community for the purpose of addressing a community-identified need',[4] community-based research recognises that knowledge-creation is an interactive process in which all citizens have a role to play and which, rather than being confined to the citadel of the university, happens everywhere.

---

[1] See Paul Daley, 'The Bone Collectors: A Brutal Chapter in Australia's Past', *The Guardian*, 14th June 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/14/aboriginal-bones-being-returned-australia.

[2] Ronaldo Munck, 'Community-Based Research: Genealogy and Prospects' in *Higher Education and Community-Based Research: Creating a Global Vision*, Ronaldo Munck, Lorraine McIlrath, Budd Hall, and Rajesh Tandon (eds), (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11–26 (11).

[3] Vanessa Liston, 'The Problematic of Participation: Back to the Future' in *Higher Education and Community-Based Research*, Munck *et al* (eds), 27–38 (27).

[4] K. J. Strand *et al*, *Community-Based Research and Higher Education: Principles and Practices* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2003), 8.

These insights were influentially articulated by Boyer in his seminal 1990 report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, in which he called upon the scholar to ask:

> 'How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems? How can it be helpful to individuals as well as institutions?' And further, 'Can social problems themselves define an agenda for scholarly investigation?'[5]

Arguing that what he termed 'the scholarship of application' should be accorded equal standing to the more traditional 'scholarship of discovery' and 'scholarship of integration', Boyer opined:

> The scholarship of application […] is not a one-way street. Indeed, the term itself may be misleading if it suggests that knowledge is first 'discovered' and then 'applied'. The process we have in mind is far more dynamic. New intellectual understandings can arise out of the very act of application—whether in medical diagnosis, serving clients in psychotherapy, shaping public policy, creating an architectural design, or working with the public schools. In activities such as these, theory and practice vitally interact, and one renews the other.
>
> Such a view of scholarly service—one that both applies and contributes to human knowledge—is particularly needed in a world in which huge, almost intractable problems call for the skills and insights only the academy can provide. As Oscar Handlin observed, our troubled planet 'can no longer afford the luxury of pursuits confined to an ivory tower…[S]cholarship has to prove its worth not on its own terms but by service to the nation and the world'.[6]

Since the publication of Boyer's report a quarter of a century ago, recognition of the centrality of engagement with wider society to the mission of higher education institutions has become a dominant theme of the policy-discourse. Ireland's *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* identifies engagement as 'the third of the three interconnected core roles of higher education', calling on institutions to 'engage with the communities they serve in a more connected manner—identifying community, regional and enterprise needs and proactively responding to them'.[7] Engagement is also central to the 'key system objectives' of the sector set out in the *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014–2016*. Meeting Ireland's human capital needs, promoting access to higher education for disadvantaged groups, promoting excellence in teaching and learning, and maintaining research excellence to achieve societal objectives are all objectives to which engagement with the wider community in the broadest sense contributes.

Crucially, as the book being launched today highlights, engagement is not a discrete function of institutions, but rather is intrinsic to their core teaching and research roles. Boyer's insight that 'knowing and learning are communal acts', and that 'through reading, through classroom discussion, and surely through comments and questions posed by

---

[5] Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (San Francisco: Wiley, 1990), 21.

[6] *Ibid.*, 23.

[7] Department of Education and Skills, *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Dublin: DES, 2011), 74–75.

students, professors themselves will be pushed in creative new directions' resonates strongly in contemporary literature on teaching and learning in higher education.[8] For example, in their *Report to the European Commission on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions* (2013), the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education describes students as 'partners in the co-creation of knowledge'.[9] In practice, this is being realised through the adoption of 'engaged pedagogies', such as peer-assisted learning, technology-enhanced learning, and problem-based learning, as well as through community-based and work-based learning which, as Hollander and her colleagues observe, 'de-centre the instructor, and […] recognise that the authority of knowledge in the classroom is shared among faculty members, students and partners in the community'.[10]

That in the research-domain fostering 'knowledge-exchange' between academics and community-partners has become a core objective for institutions is reflected in the proliferation of technology-transfer offices and business incubation centres on campuses. Since Gibbons and his colleagues coined the phrase 'mode 2 knowledge' in 1994, there have been rising expectations that academics will pursue their research in the '*agora*', as 'the public space in which "science meets the public", and in which the public "speaks back" to science'—'the space, par excellence, for the production of socially robust knowledge'.[11] The extent to which these expectations are being realised is illustrated by the growing international trend towards the 'clustering' of higher education institutions, enterprises and community-partners to facilitate knowledge-exchange, as well as by the proliferation of mechanisms to evaluate institutions' 'engagement' activities. The 'Science with and for Society' strand of the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme for research and innovation aims to foster 'responsible research and innovation' in which societal actors work together with researchers to address societal challenges.[12]

In recent years there have been a wealth of initiatives to support community engagement in higher education around the world, prominent among which are the Talloires Network, Campus Compact in the U.S., the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement in the U.K., and Campus Engage here in Ireland. The launch in June of this year by Campus Engage of the Charter for Civic and Community Engagement, signed by the presidents of higher education institutions across the country and signalling their commitment to the promotion and mainstreaming of civic and community engagement at institutional level, represents an important landmark in the advancement of the engagement mission in Ireland. The book being launched today provides an overview of the breadth of activities that are being pursued in community-based research across the globe—in America, Europe, Australia, Africa and Asia—profiling a range of initiatives including Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research (GACER), the proliferation of

---

[8] *Ibid.*, 24.

[9] High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, *Report to the European Commission on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions* (Luxembourg: European Union, 2013), 15.

[10] Elizabeth Hollander *et al*, 'Indicators of Engagement' in *Learning to Serve: Promoting Civil Society through Service Learning*, M. E. Kenny *et al* (eds), (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2002), 36.

[11] Michael Gibbons, 'Engagement as a Core Value in a Mode 2 Society', paper presented at the CHE–HEQC/JET–CHESP Conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education, Cape Town.

[12] See http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/science-and-society.

science shops across Europe, the U.K.'s 'Beacons for Public Engagement' initiative, and NUI Galway's Engaging People in Communities (EPIC) initiative.[13] The passion and commitment of the contributors to advancing and supporting community-based research is strongly in evidence, and its value across disciplines, but particularly in areas such as health, public policy and education, is clearly demonstrated. (Michael Cuthill suggests that 'there is a need to better understand the scope of scholarship that has moved toward collaborative research approaches, including across the natural and biophysical sciences, and the arts, humanities, and social sciences'.[14]) The manifesto for strengthening the community-based research movement with which the book concludes is a rousing call-to-action to all stakeholders—'in social movements, civil society organisations, and higher education institutions'—to harness knowledge-creation to tackle the greatest global challenges we face.[15]

Nevertheless, for some academics, the rising expectations that higher education will contribute to addressing broader socio-economic challenges imperil institutional autonomy and academic freedom, and risk undermining the true purpose of universities in particular. Back in 1987, Allan Bloom warned that the university 'must be contemptuous of public opinion because it has within it the source of autonomy—the quest for and even discovery of the truth according to nature'.[16] For Bloom the purpose of the university—'to encourage the non-instrumental use of reason for its own sake'—was undermined by 'the democratic concentration on the useful, on the solution of what are believed by the populace at large to be the most pressing problems'.[17] He remarked:

> The for-its-own-sake is alien to the modern democratic spirit, particularly in matters intellectual. Whenever there is a crunch, democratic men devoted to thought have a crisis of conscience, have to find a way to interpret their endeavours by the standard of utility, or otherwise to abandon or deform them.[18]

Similarly, as Ronaldo Munck notes in the second chapter of the book, the distinguished literary theorist, Stanley Fish, author of *Save the World on Your Own Time* (2008), has refuted 'the idea that universities should be in the business of forming character and fashioning citizens', arguing that 'the search for truth is its own value, and fidelity to it mandates the accompanying values of responsibility in pedagogy and scholarship'.[19] Arguing—in an inversion of Marx's famous maxim[20]—that the job of the academy 'is not to change the world, but to interpret it', Fish appealed to academics not to confuse their

---

[13] See http://www.pria.org/, http://www.gacer.org/, http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/work-with-us/completed-projects/beacons, and http://cki.nuigalway.ie/epic/.

[14] Michael Cuthill, 'Community-Based Research in Australian Universities', in *Higher Education and Community-Based Research: Creating a Global Vision*, Munck *et al* (eds), 129.

[15] Budd Hall *et al*, 'Knowledge, Action, and Hope: A Call for Strengthening the Community-Based Research Movement' in *Higher Education and Community-Based Research*, Munck *et al* (eds), 218.

[16] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (1987; repr. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 254.

[17] *Ibid.*, 249–250.

[18] *Ibid.*, 250.

[19] Stanley Fish, 'Why We Built the Ivory Tower', *The New York Times*, 21st May 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/21/opinion/why-we-built-the-ivory-tower.html. See also *Idem, Save the World on Your Own Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[20] In his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) Karl Marx famously remarked, 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it'.

'academic obligations with the obligation to save the world' and not to surrender these obligations 'to the agenda of any non-academic constituency—parents, legislators, trustees or donors'.[21]

I would argue that such concerns are premised on a false dichotomy between academia and wider society, and that they under-estimate the rich potential for the collective advancement of knowledge by higher education institutions in partnership with wider society through the pooling of expertise and experience. The locus of the value of higher education as a public good is in its intersection with society, and it is by focusing on the development of the mission of higher education in this space that, as the book powerfully argues, the commodification of higher education can most effectively be countered. Edited by internationally renowned scholars in the area, including the two Co-Chairs of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility, *Higher Education and Community-Based Research* makes a compelling case for higher education–community engagement as an imperative, outlining its philosophical basis in critical theory, presenting case-studies of community-based research in action, and providing critical analyses of the key concepts within the broader policy-discourse. Highlighting the benefits of community-based research (including the development of human capital and the enrichment of local communities), the book also makes a number of practical recommendations for its implementation and advancement, including the 7 steps identified by Michael Cuthill for the development of community-based research in Australia; Ronald Barnett's 5 'practical principles' for universities' community-engagement; and the 'call to action' with which the book concludes.

Higher Education and Community-Based Research is, therefore, an important book for academics, for institutional managers, and for policy-makers at a time of transformative change for the higher education sector internationally, deconstructing the dichotomies— between the university and society; enterprise engagement and civic engagement; and research and teaching—which all too often inhibit strategic development at both institutional and national levels. Community-based research—or 'community-*sensitive*, community-*transacted*, community-*involved*, community-*engaged*, community-*oriented*, [or] community-*participatory* research' to cite Ronald Barnett's suggested alternative terms[22]—is an area of great potential for all higher education institutions which are strongly rooted in their local communities, as well as for internationally renowned research-led institutions. Its practice promises to support the HEA's high-level objective of creating a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions which will meet the needs of Ireland in the twenty-first century.

In chapter 9, Michael Cuthill describes how, in Australia, 'the lack of clear policy direction as to how […] knowledge exchange collaborations might be recognised, implemented and resourced within higher education institutions has constrained the development of appropriate institutional responses within individual universities'; and how, at institutional level, 'the fragmentation continues in the practice environment, where a lack of project

---

[21] Fish, 'Why We Built the Ivory Tower'. See also *Idem*, 'Aim Low', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 16th May 2003, http://chronicle.com/article/Aim-Low/45210.
[22] Ronald Barnett, 'Community-Based Research: Searching for Its Foundations', in *Higher Education and Community-Based Research*, Munck *et al* (eds), 197.

management and collaboration skills among Australian academics, and limited motivation to engage in collaborative knowledge exchange processes have been identified'.[23] It is imperative that we avoid these pitfalls in Ireland, and the on-going structural reform of the higher education sector, in tandem with the strengthened oversight its strategic development by the HEA, should guard against their occurrence. Building on the strong track-record of inter-institutional collaboration developed over the past 15 years through the HEA's PRTLI and SIF, the development of clusters of institutions and of strategic alliances promises to support a high level of community-engagement across Irish higher education. However a key challenge that we face in the Irish context is to develop effective mechanisms for the evaluation of research quality and impact in a manner that recognises and rewards the rich diversity of research activity and outputs of Irish higher education institutions. Chapter 7 of the book, by Sophie Duncan and Paul Manners, explores the range of mechanisms that are being utilised in the U.K. to support engagement in higher education, including the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which has sharpened the focus of universities on the *impact* of their research. There are lessons that we can usefully learn from the U.K. experience.

I am honoured to have been invited to launch *Higher Education and Community-Based Research* today and congratulate the editors and all of the contributors on their achievement. The book will raise the profile of community-based research internationally, and support the engagement of the higher education community with the key challenges of our times. In chapter 9, Sophie Duncan and Paul Manners argue that 'we need to move from just accepting that engagement is a "good thing" in its own right and seek to open up a richer and more robust dialogue about the purposes, processes and impact of engagement' in order to counter the often robust challenge mounted by its opponents.[24] This book helps realise this goal. As Professor Nicholas Maxwell, Emeritus Reader in Philosophy of Science at University College London, and author of *From Knowledge to Wisdom: A Revolution for Science and the Humanities* (2007), has remarked:

> We need universities to be devoted to helping us to solve our problems of living—above all, our global problems—in more effective, intelligent and humane ways. But universities at present are devoted to the pursuit of 'knowledge' and technological know-how, not to helping humanity learn how to resolve conflicts and problems of living in more co-operatively rational ways. The key crisis of our times is the failure of our universities to help us learn how to make progress towards a better world.[25]

Thank you.

ENDS.

---

[23] Cuthill, 'Community-Based Research in Australian Universities', 120.

[24] Sophie Duncan and Paul Manners, 'Research Engagement in UK: Evolving Policy and Practice', 98.

[25] Nicholas Maxwell, Letter to *The Guardian*, 26th October 2013, 53.