CHAPTER

Strategic Alliances between Universities and their Communities

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations are changed and shaped by the alliances that they make. This paper examines the potential impact on universities of their community alliances. This article draws on the experiences of two universities, in different settings, and their alliances with communities — alliances which fundamentally changed many important aspects of how those universities conducted their core functions. Alliances are particularly important in situations where community "development" is needed to help create a climate in which conventional business can thrive. They are often funded by the business community — sometimes under the banner of "corporate responsibility". The experiences of these two universities are set within a wider consideration of universities' roles in social transformation and of the nature of their relationships to their host and other societies.

The two universities are those where one author served as Vice-Chancellor and Principal; each university unique in its way, operating in different parts of the world: one, the University of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal), situated on the east coast of South Africa — a traditional, residential university, multi-campus, offering a full range of disciplines, with 30,000 students — a university that survived and thrived through historic times in the struggle for freedom — and did so largely because it engaged so thoroughly with its communities. It was, by necessity, required to reconceptualize its role in the new South Africa and earn its credibility in a very diverse and newly democratised society.

Indeed that process continues; transformation is hardly an event, much more a process.

The second university is The Open University in the United Kingdom — one of the great inventions of the 20th century, one specifically designed to reach communities and people who had not had the opportunities made possible by higher education. It is a university conceived as one where there are no entry qualifications, only tough exit standards — a university that also had to earn its credibility; a university which is essentially "distance" in concept, yet one that offers a great deal of local student support; a university which has grasped the opportunities offered by the wonders of technology and whose reach is now global in nature; a university which has a very large, "networked", virtual community of over 200,000 students. It is also, of course, a university which offers a model for reaching the many millions of people who need higher education in this knowledge society of ours and for whom society would never be able to afford provision using the conventional model.

WHO DEFINES 'COMMUNITIES'?

Universities operate in a variety of settings, and cater for a variety of students. Some cater mostly for a local higher education need; others draw students from all over their country and even the world. Some are located in societies which are very multicultural in nature, others in societies which are culturally rather homogeneous. All are experiencing the forces of globalization, while at the same time recognizing the various identities (culture, ethnicity, religion and more) that people bring with them to higher education. Technology and the possibilities of the "network society" introduce different issues and possibilities. Thus, issues of where boundaries are drawn, which identities are recognized and catered for, which cultures dominate, are all delicate and contested. Under such circumstances, "engaging with the community" is a very complicated exercise.

It was Manuel Castells who introduced the concept of a network society (Castells, 2000) and, indeed, in a university such as The Open University, community has many of the attributes of such a society. Certainly "community" has come to mean more than one thing. We all know that it is now common for people to live in areas remote from their work, to be very mobile and to have allegiances in many areas. Indeed the knowledge society is fostering increasing numbers of "stateless" individuals who migrate to follow work or interest without regard for boundaries. Yet we also know that the majority of the peoples of the world are not that mobile or sophisticated and do look to their geographically local university for their higher education. Not only that, but we know that the forces of globalization are themselves feeding a need that people have for identity — usually expressed in

terms of culture, ethnicity, religion or whatever. As our societies become more complex, people have multiple identities: occupations, disciplines, football teams and more. Thomas Friedman expressed this very well in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (Friedman, 2000). In a "knowledge" network society, the nature of the university experience and what localness means, what "community" or "the public" mean, which particular identities are recognized and catered for, where boundaries are drawn, all these are particularly important to debates about curricula, research and the very purposes of universities.

It is instructive to bear in mind that it is not only universities that grapple with these terms and try to act on their interpretations. Anyone who works in the public-policy arena has similar issues. In a recent published lecture, Janet Newman, a professor of public policy, talks about how difficult it is "to speak about a public domain, and to think about how we should act in it; indeed the language of public domain, public sphere, public realm, public sector, all imply a rather spatial metaphor that fails to capture the mobile, elusive and problematic character of publicness." (Newman, 2005, p. 2) She gives examples of "how the boundary between public and private is culturally contested, but also raises issues about who can speak about — and for — particular publics; who has a public voice and whose voices are silenced" (p. 4).

This is entirely non-trivial in an increasingly multicultural society. As large universities (like the University of KwaZulu-Natal) sought to engage with "the community", it became increasingly clear that some voices were louder than others, some easier to access than others and some accorded more importance than others. Some were indeed silenced completely. Cultural boundaries between men and women in a large number of societies in this world are one easy example of this. Universities in societies where social transformation is taking place are often symbols of the old order, not the new — and this, too, further complicates the issue of university-community engagement.

At the University of KwaZulu-Natal, initially existing in the "old" South Africa where boundaries were drawn by an illegitimate government, engagement with community was exceptionally difficult. Demands and expectations of an expanded view of "community" could not be met within conventional funding models so different sources of funding also had to be found. Necessity, courage and imagination all played a role. For example, during the repressive years leading up to 1994 the university gave refuge to a whole range of NGOs that had their headquarters on one or other of our campuses. They represented "community" in these unusual circumstances and played a vital role in the formulation of the agenda on campus just by virtue of their presence. They also vastly improved the quality of the strategic conversations in the university. Their perspectives were different and they pointed the university to new areas of curriculum and research.

In the "new" South Africa, it was only by being visible in the community, accessible to students from all walks of life, and delivering some tangible improvement to daily circumstances that the university could be credible and secure, let alone deliver on its mission. The university made every effort to incorporate the views of trade unions, local councils, employer organizations, leaders of non-government and community-based organisations, development agencies and funders, women's organizations, and youth organizations, as well as community leaders. Some were approached in consultative forums; others were co-opted onto governing structures. The university — really to survive — had to be open to its communities in ways that many traditional universities have not. Mission was one thing; government policy was another. The latter emphasized "reconstruction and development" as well as "equity" — and the university's demonstrable engagement with community was tangible evidence of delivering on government policy.

If engagement is difficult in a geographically located university, then how much more difficult (and important) is it for a university such as The Open University? It operates across many, many national boundaries and its presence is more real in cyberspace than it is in physical presence on the ground. E-learning and the possibilities it presents make more and more universities part of this reality.

As we all become more aware of the importance of higher education in uplifting the peoples of the world, as we more and more seek social justice across our global society, so it becomes clear that it will not be possible to build enough physical facilities of conventional universities equal to this task. The model of open and distance learning will be far more able to cope with the reality of large numbers than traditional models of higher education — however much we may wish otherwise. It does however challenge our concept of "community" — and brings us much closer to Manuel Castells' "network society" (Castells, 2000). The Open University grapples with this reality. In contrast to universities where most of the students are very young, it has a student body of 200,000 which ranges in age from very young to very old, from employed to unemployed, from public sector to private sector; across 100 different countries, although 80% are British. In many important ways this huge body of students represents "community" in a way that few would contest. The university's very mission is about finding people who have not had the benefits of education in the conventional forums and who need second and third chances. Reaching these kinds of people remains its special challenge. Having reached them, they provide us with important footholds into their particular communities. The ubiquity of the Internet also gives us marvelous opportunities to broaden this engagement — although the challenge of the "digital divide" remains.

The Open University in a sense "constructs" community for three main (and strategic) purposes: first, to reach students across a range of networks

(learning networks, health authorities, trade unions, refugee organizations), workplaces (employers and employer groups, as well as professional accrediting agencies), institutions (prisons, other providers) and other social communities; secondly, to deliver, contextualize (and sometimes create) curricula in different regional and national settings (with public and private-sector higher education providers with whom we have formal partnerships to deliver curricula); and, thirdly, to improve the information and strategic conversation and debate in the university (where we appoint representatives of important parts of these communities to our governing structures, as well as inviting them into consultative bodies). The university also actively engages with its virtual community is a variety of ways. This community logs over 250,000 transactions a day between its members. These transactions might be formal, mediated seminars or conversations; they might be students' support-group interactions or chat-room activity, or clubs' and societies' business. They might be providing evaluative feedback or even market research on planned activity. They also constitute an active research community doing distributive research in very new ways. One example of this is the operation of a climate-research activity where the capacity of over 100,000 computers around the world is harnessed to record and analyse climate change across the world. The possibilities are limited only by our imaginations.

If it is a complex matter to define "community" for the purposes of this paper, how much more so for universities expecting to engage with communities that are geographically spread and which may well be in conflict or tension with each other. The desirability of community engagement should not disguise the difficulties of achieving it.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES THAT CHANGE ASPECTS OF CORE BUSINESS

The idea of a "strategic alliance" indicates a rather strong form of collaboration or partnership, something that one would expect to see formalized and enshrined in the mission and strategic plans of the alliance "members". Before we move to pondering the implementation of university mission, it is important to understand that not all individual members of a university community would accept the imperative of engagement with community. Those of us who do would see it as so important that it might well be the saving grace of a traditional university model otherwise terminally doomed. The nature of our networked society suggests that the university as we know it, in particular the university that integrates teaching and research under one (physical) roof, might well be at an end. Certainly management guru Peter Drucker thinks it is (Drucker, 2002). Change is on the agenda (whether we like it or not) and the introduction of engagement as a purposeful strategy is a necessary response

to a complex and globalized world where we must aspire to being both local and global citizens, and prepare our students to be both local and global citizens as well. In this globalized, networked society, communities have vastly differing perspectives on the priorities of the real world and these perspectives need to be part of the living and dynamic university of today if a continued relevance to this real world is to be maintained. Certainly the record in this respect is mixed (see Brennan *et al* [2004], discussed briefly below). The point does, however, need to be made that no university can be so dominated by "community" concerns — from whatever source — that it loses its international and global role (Singh, 2003, p. 288). Community engagement is not a replacement for a critical and independent stance by the university, but an essential part of it.

The Association of Commonwealth Universities consultative document, "Engagement as a Core Value for Universities" (2001), also made the point that "21st century academic life is no longer pursued in seclusion (if it ever was) but must rather champion reason and imagination in engagement with the wider society and its concerns". (p. i). It goes on to assert that "engagement implies strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres: setting universities' aims, purposes and priorities; relating teaching and learning to the wider world; and back-and-forth dialogue between researchers and practitioners; and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and citizens." (p. i). These broad categories will be used in this paper for the sake of example. It is interesting to ponder the passing of a time where democratically elected governments represented "society and its concerns". It is clearly the varying extent of universities' autonomy and the growing complexity of society that make the national policy process no longer a sufficient basis for social and community engagement by the university.

The four aspects of university endeavour (identified by the ACU study, 2001) that can be influenced and even profoundly changed by our alliances outside the campus "walls" are taken in turn:

Setting universities' aims, purposes and priorities

The alliances described in this paper are "strategic alliances" and no alliance is likely to be "strategic" unless it is serving the university mission — either at a generalized level or a more specific one. In this context the UNESCO Declaration on Higher Education (1998) is useful. It states that higher education is "for citizenship and active participation in society, with a worldwide vision, for endogenous capacity-building, for the consolidation of human rights, sustainable development, democracy and peace, in a context of justice." (p. 21) While other statements (e.g. World Bank, 2002), and in particular those of national governments, have tended to place most emphasis on the economic

case for higher education, what virtually all statements of this sort share is a highlighting of higher education's role in social change and transformation. In the developing world at least, this is a relatively recent emphasis.

The fact is that as higher education consumes a larger and larger proportion of national budgets, the debate about how this cost should be funded (and by what mix of beneficiaries) becomes more intense. The very idea of a remote group of people, teaching in a disinterested sort of way — and, perhaps more importantly, researching in a disinterested sort of way — seems less and less feasible. Yet "disinterestedness" lies at the very heart of why academic freedom is seen to be a significant matter, at the very heart of what universities can and have contributed, while not being even part of the public discourse. We are quite understandably more and more in societies where accountability is demanded, yet we are also more and more in a world where it seems that everything is determined by the marketplace, and almost everything is for sale. It is not always possible to serve these basically opposing forces. "Disinterestedness" may be the only distinctive feature left of what many of us regard as "universities".

Derek Bok, former President of Harvard University, has written about these concerns being linked to "a broader disquiet over the encroachments of the marketplace on the work of hospitals, cultural institutions and other areas of society that have traditionally been thought to serve other values. Almost everyone concedes that competitive markets are effective in mobilizing the energies of participants to satisfy common desires. And yet the apprehensions remain. However hard it is to explain these fears, they persist as a mute reminder that something of irreplaceable value may get lost in the relentless growth of commercialization." (Bok, 2003, p. 17).

And we do know that by no stretch of the imagination can the "market" substitute for "community" or "society" at large. We know also, as Ron Barnett has so powerfully written in his excellent book, *Beyond all Reason* (2003): "The university remains an extraordinary institution. (But) a higher education system that educates upwards of 40% of the population cannot be what it was when it educated, say, less than 15%. It can be much more. Its scale, its reach into society, the intermingling of its knowledges with those of the wider world and the wider forms of human being that it promotes are already enabling it to be much more. But it can be even more still." (p. 173).

In society as we know it today, it is clear that no university can separate itself (nor should it) from the larger problems of the world, much less its immediate community setting. The University of KwaZulu-Natal, after extensive consultation and debate with a huge range of different representatives of community made a very deliberate commitment in its mission: to not only commit to the conventional assertions about teaching, research and community outreach but to make specific commitment to "development". This may be unsurprising for a university located in sub-Saharan Africa — but is signif-

icant nevertheless and a radical departure from the past — and focused the mind of those developing strategy to deliver on this mission. It had major implications for all three legs of university activity: teaching, research and community development. Interestingly, it made our endeavours even more important to local business than it was before.

The Open University also broke from the past in a radical kind of way, a way that served the cause of social justice and set in motion a whole new method of delivering higher education. Given that its reach is global (and its government funding local), this mission is one which needs careful management — as well as several international partners (both in educational, business and donor community) — and an imaginative harnessing of technology. Its mode of delivery makes it possible for students who are geographically or financially constrained to obtain a British degree without having to leave their home country.

One of The Open University's major legacies lies in self-replication: in consultation with partners in other countries (some private sector), it extends its mission by assisting other organizations to set up open universities and, over time, to become independent. While this is an admirable extension of its mission, it may well not sit easily with those who espouse "the market" as the solution to higher education demand.

The conclusion must be that "mission" is not something to be taken for granted as it was in a bygone era of privilege and elitism — but rather something which may well need to be negotiated in the context of the social needs of the time. The social needs of our time, in turn, may extend well beyond our immediate physical boundaries as we all come to realize that we are part of a global society. At the same time, however, we need to understand, as we embark upon more and more engagement, that we are walking a tightrope where the balancing of disinterestedness, responsiveness and market forces may well overwhelm our best intentions.

In conclusion, let us be in no doubt that bringing outsiders' views into the sometimes secluded world of the university can have a profound change on the university. So, indeed it should, otherwise what would be the point? And let us also be in no doubt about its being difficult. With a range of world views being brought to bear on mission and strategic priorities, there will be disagreement. But, it is argued, it is precisely in the resolution of such disagreement that the university demonstrates its relevance to our modern, complex society.

Curricula changed by engagement and alliances

Not all cases of societal engagement require the creation of formal alliances and the following examples cover a spectrum of types of engagement that profoundly changed the university.

Five examples are cited of curricula transformed by development concerns at the University of KwaZulu-Natal:

- An architectural department surrounded by inadequate housing trained its students for many years for a first-world environment before recognizing the need to address the imperatives of alternative and low-cost housing, as well as built environment support in its curriculum. As a result the students and staff found themselves in great demand internationally because the problems of urbanization they were addressing are indeed global problems.
- An agricultural faculty that concerned itself exclusively with large-scale commercial farming turned its attention to the problems of small-scale and subsistence farming, and established a Farmers' Support Group to assist local farmers.
- A realization that a great many jobs are generated in the small business and voluntary sectors led to the tailoring of appropriate degree programmes.
- Service learning (or reflective community work) was added to the curriculum. This enabled students to become acquainted with development issues at first hand and also to obtain an insight into what they could do to improve matters.
- Development Studies as an area of teaching and research was strengthened and, indeed, in the course of time the Faculty of Social Sciences changed its name to the Faculty of Community and Development Disciplines — a strong signal to community and potential students alike.

At The Open University similar examples can be cited of where alliances have helped influence curricula:

- With so many students in employment, the university developed work-based learning (with unions, health trusts, business and other partners) and is finding new ways of recognizing and crediting learning done in the workplace. For example, there are programmes to turn nurse aides into fully qualified nurses and teaching assistants into fully qualified teachers.
- There are programmes where students acquire professional qualifications with alliance organizations such as Microsoft and Cisco at the same time as they earn their university qualifications.
- An alliance with the College of Law whereby the college supplies legal curricula in accordance with professional requirements and the university uses its experience and infrastructure to support the students in the shape and delivery of those curricula.

- Gradually, alliances with international partners enable their curriculum innovations to be absorbed into the curricula available to Open University students everywhere.

Alliances that impacted on the research agenda

What about research initiatives that flow from community alliances or need alliances to be successful? In a society defined as a knowledge society, as the ACU document (2001) makes so abundantly clear, "increasingly, academics will accept that they share their territory with other knowledge professionals. The search for formal understanding itself, long central to the academic life, is moving rapidly beyond the borders of disciplines and their locations inside universities. Knowledge is being keenly pursued in the context of its application and in a dialogue of practice with theory through a network of policy-advisors, companies, consultants, think tanks and brokers, as well as academics and indeed the wider society." (p. iii) Michael Gibbons (1994) has described what he calls "mode 2 knowledge production" where alliances between researchers are formed around particular problems or applications which, once solved, dissolve.

At one level, it is true to say that academics have always pursued research alliances (often at an individual level) and hardly need encouragement to do so. It is, however, important to look at the current climate and recognize three factors which might well not work in favour of academics pursuing community engagement and development in the research endeavour. The first has to do with the commercialization of research, whereby researchers are more often engaging in research which funders (business, government and other agencies outside the university) are prepared to pay for, rather than research that is important to society. It is regrettable that some of the most pressing of society's problems are not on the research agenda of universities. The second factor has to do with "disinterested" research (an issue referred to above). Disinterested research is increasingly difficult to fund and we live in a university world where the number and size of grants are seen as one of the main criteria of success. Yet "disinterestedness" lies at the heart of what universities can contribute, and have contributed over the years, and has led to some of the more spectacular breakthroughs in human knowledge. Some kind of balance needs to be maintained on the university research agenda to ensure that cognizance is taken of community needs without sacrificing essential independence and disinterestedness. The third factor has to do with interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity. Any focus on community problems and, indeed, many of the big problems of the world today rapidly makes clear that people working from the perspective and knowledge of one discipline will not reach

solutions. The problems of the real world are seldom so kind as to divide themselves into disciplines. Most community development issues require a multidisciplinary approach.

Let us give some examples of where the preoccupation of the community and imperative of "development" in the mission of the university did and does drive the research agenda. The University of KwaZulu-Natal, for example, is located in a region of massive disparities, terrible sickness, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, inadequate schooling and violence.

One excellent example of putting development at the heart of the university endeavour at Natal was the number of research projects devoted to one dimension or another of the HIV/Aids pandemic (a pandemic at whose epicentre the university found itself located). Over 150 research projects necessitated the setting up of a Networking Centre to coordinate the projects and disseminate information. Formal community agreements and partnership were essential to success, and since all the necessary expertise did not reside in one university, alliances with other universities inside and outside South Africa were formed and partnerships entered into with major funders from various parts of the world.

The university also had large projects in violence prevention, illiteracy, teacher education, low-cost housing and subsistence agriculture — to name but some. All of these projects were carried out in large and quite formal community alliances. Community issues often require what has come to be called "action research", and it is clear that large projects of this sort require particular skills in their management and implementation. The point, of course, is that community problems informed the research agenda of the university and shaped the policies that went with the funds available.

The Open University also has excellent examples of "community" impacting on research: its very mission defines an important part of its research agenda — and that is the use of technology, to reach and serve people who would not otherwise be able to access higher education and give them the best learning environments possible. The establishment of an Institute of Educational Technology and the Knowledge Media Institute as two large bodies of people focusing on these issues is evidence of this. This has extended into "ambient technology" and this too must become an important part of the knowledge base if the O.U. is to continue to be at the forefront of "distance" learning. There is also ongoing research on technology for various types of disability and it is no accident that The Open University has over 10,000 disabled students. The researchers in the university also use the possibilities presented by such a large virtual community and engage members of that community in research projects such as the climate-change model described above.

It may not be entirely fair to assert that many of societies' most seemingly intractable problems are not presently occupying high priority status on the

research agenda of universities and yet it must be clear that better research should inform public policy debates at local, municipal, national and even international level. Often it is politics rather than hard evidence that dictate one course of action over another. Universities that give their academics the freedom and encouragement to make public the issues and make public the intellectual debate that should inform the politicians play a valuable role — if they care sufficiently and take their role of intellectual leadership seriously. But if we find ourselves concerned only with that research which attracts the largest grants, selling our intellectual skills to the highest bidder, then increasingly it will mean abrogating our responsibilities to the communities which sustain us, abrogating the most basic human responsibility — that of making the world a better place for all its citizens.

Responsibilities as neighbours and citizens

It is interesting to realize that it is during hard times that universities really demonstrate their core values because it is during hard times that society needs a place where some semblance of free speech and academic freedom prevails and the real issues of the day can be freely and robustly debated. In such circumstances, universities are faced with engagement with an existing social order while at the same time sowing the seeds for its transformation or transition into something else. And following regime change, there are major challenges for universities in both changing themselves and in contributing — both constructively and critically — to the wider changes around them. There are many places in the world which have experienced or are still experiencing transformative change in their immediate societies, change with which universities have, perforce, to contend. It is interesting to consider the contribution of universities to such change.

To do this, the findings of a large international research study led jointly by The Open University and the Association of Commonwealth Universities are drawn upon. The study was entitled "The Role of Universities in the Transformation of Societies" (Brennan *et al*, 2004), and it focused on roles played by universities in contexts of radical political and economic transformations in their host societies. The project sought to examine the extent to which universities generated, contributed to or inhibited change in such contexts. In choosing which 15 countries to study (Central and Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and Latin America) there was an assumption that by focusing on places where there was a lot of change going on, the part played by universities might be more visible.

Three roles for the university were highlighted:

An *economic* role: Overall, the project's case studies did not suggest that universities were not playing an economic role, rather that the role was not

necessarily a matter of major debate, and that it was not considered to be "transformative". And while economic transformations were clearly taking place in a majority of the countries considered by the project, what was much less clear was the extent to which these were "knowledge-driven" developments and whether universities were playing a significant part in them. The report suggests a number of possible reasons for this relatively downplayed economic role. One was that many countries did not possess adequate steering mechanisms to change curriculum and pedagogy in directions required by economic and employment considerations. A second reason was that funding formulae for higher education in terms of staff numbers and other relatively fixed costs meant there was little pressure on institutions to take account of market responsiveness or other demand-side pressures. A third reason was an absence of staff to teach new subjects. One consequence of all this was the emergence of quite large private sectors of higher education to fill the economic gap created by the lack of responsiveness from the state institutions.

A *political* role: As far as a political role in social transformation was concerned, the project found the notion of "protected space" to be useful and near universal. In it, universities could provide at least some of their members with "islands of autonomy" from existing regimes and political cultures. On some of these islands, the seeds of future political opposition could grow but there were probably as many examples in the case studies where the islands had either provided succour to previous regimes or showed general indifference to local conditions. The islands, while isolated at home, were often connected to the rest of the world through cooperation programmes and research networks.

An interesting comparative study by Chowdhury (2004) of universities in India, Bangladesh, Poland and Slovenia described the role of universities in socialising "elites in waiting" and the creation of the human resources needed after regime changes, even though the changes themselves owed little or nothing to higher education.

The Transformation report (Brennan *et al*, 2004) concludes that universities are as much concerned with reproducing the old and protecting existing interests as they are about fermenting and supporting political transformation. Both processes can be found, sometimes even side by side in the same institution. One question the project sought to explore was whether the universities' political role was largely dependent or autonomous. It concludes: "On balance, we take the view that universities are used by different internal and external groups to attempt to achieve their various political ends. These reflect the particular group's strategic position in their society rather than an institutional strategy." (Brennan *et al*, 2004, p. 35)

Social and *cultural* aspects: The social and cultural aspects of the university's role in social transformation were also mixed and complex and as much con-

cerned with social reproduction as they were with social transformation. South Africa provided the strongest example of concern with social-equity issues and the case study report recorded some impressive achievements as well as policy initiatives (Reddy, 2004). In Central and Eastern Europe, social-equity issues appeared to be lower on the agenda with universities possibly playing a less important part than they had under the old regimes. Culturally, universities had in some places provided a kind of repository for national sentiments that could come out of "storage" when time and circumstances permitted. But there could also be tensions between the "international" and "national" elements of the cultural role.

The project also looked at the *ways in which universities had themselves been transformed by external societal changes* and distinguished between:

- changes in curriculum, quality and standards;
- diversification;
- changes in access policies, student profiles and experiences; and
- academic responses to change.

Once again, a mixed picture emerged. There were pressures to change in all four areas, but responsiveness varied considerably. In Central and Eastern Europe in particular, emphasis on newly recovered "autonomy" tended to work against responsiveness and institutional change in the state sectors of higher education. One might also note that the responsiveness of many individual academics entailed escape by emigration rather than change and adaptation at home. In some cases, the project noted a tension between the demands of responsiveness to changing local contexts and the demands of increasing internationalization. A concern for legitimacy among new institutions could lead to a referencing against international standards through accreditation arrangements with foreign universities. National governments were generally introducing national, quality-assurance arrangements, again largely for purposes of legitimacy. The effects of these regulatory processes, however justified, tended to be to standardize provision and reduce the possibilities of responsiveness to more local needs and circumstances.

Conclusion: The Transformations project concluded that higher education's contribution to social change and development in societies undergoing radical transformations had been both modest and mixed. Schematically, from this project it seems possible to identify five models of higher education's engagement with their communities, whether local, regional, national or global. These are:

- "innovation" — universities providing new knowledge and people with new skills leading to transformation of enterprises and civil society;

- "maintenance" — universities reproducing the professionals needed by existing organizations and codifying the cultural knowledge to maintain identity and loyalty to existing structures and social hierarchies;
- "critique" — universities providing "protected space" for the thinking of the unthinkable and the possibility of challenge to existing structures and social practices;
- "shelter" — universities providing the conditions for their members that would allow an absence of social engagement, an isolation and protection from external change and development;
- "escape" — universities providing a route out of the host societies, especially for the young.

In fact, all five models can suggest "impact", whether positive or negative. And the Transformations project provided examples of all five models, often in combination even in the same university or even department. The project also demonstrated that universities generally have not been seen as the obvious sites of transformation nor have they seen themselves as such sites. However, it must also be acknowledged that, even if not crucial as originators of social transformation, universities may nevertheless be part of a vital set of mechanisms — developing human capital, supporting new institutions of civil society — that are essential to the success of the transformation process, even if that process is largely driven by other social forces.

There is, however, a further way in which universities could conceive of themselves as forces for social change and agents of global citizenship — and that is in their support of their fellow universities elsewhere in the world. In this way, engagement and impact are not within the host society of the university, but quite possibly with societies on the other side of the world. One can cite several examples:

- There are many universities that have link programmes with universities in other countries, and staff undertake teaching duties as well as make it possible for staff in either university to spend time in the partner institution. This is helpful to new curricula initiatives as well as to research programmes, including those involving community development. There are several initiatives at the moment (for example) where staff in "top" universities donate their time to teach in disciplines where local expertise is insufficient to the need. These are however usually individual rather than strategic, institutional arrangements.
- Of the many ways in which universities can (and should) fulfil their citizenship role, the Open Source and Content movements represent a particular challenge and opportunity. If universities are to be serving

the long-term benefits of society, if scholarship and knowledge are to be shared for the benefit of all, then it is difficult to argue against the placing of our material on the Web. This has been done by some universities — most notably M.I.T. — but what M.I.T. is sharing is its lecture notes, not material that is likely to endanger its business model. For The Open University to share its carefully constructed, student-centred material could well threaten its business model — and yet what an amazing difference it could make to colleagues in those parts of the world where libraries are poor and books hard to come by. The Open Content movement may well have other fundamental consequences. Quality assurance would assume a whole new meaning if it opened individual university offerings to comparison with the best of what is available on the Web. It might also change the economics of higher education. What is the point of individual academics in each institution endlessly reinventing undergraduate courses when excellent material is available on the Web?

- In a similar vein, one could cite the call being made by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Association of African Universities and the Higher Education South Africa Association to the world's universities to help revitalize the universities of Africa. One hopes that their call will be heard and their needs may well overlap with the possibilities of the Open Content movement.

ALLIANCES BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES

There is a lot of higher education about. In consequence, and linked to the general "rightward shift" in political economy in recent years, competition is an increasingly important feature of the contexts in which most universities operate. Even in this environment, collaboration is often a sensible "business" proposition. It is interesting to reflect on alliances that our two exemplar universities have forged.

Post-apartheid consortium

In KwaZulu-Natal, the five universities and polytechs in the region were driven to form a consortium by the recognition of three main issues:

- Recognition that apartheid had produced strange arrangements and the new South Africa had to find a way of moving beyond the "geopolitical imagination of its apartheid planners" (to use a phrase coined by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal);
- In a financially constrained system, recognition that (a) students were bearing more costs than necessary (for example, by paying application

fees to all institutions in the hope of being selected by one); and (b) institutions were bearing more costs (for example, by each processing all these applications — as an obvious example); and

- The hope that a federal system (of some sort) could provide some mobility for our students and some benefits for the institutions.

The consortium was a success only in a very limited way. In a system which was hopelessly unequal, it was naïve to imagine that students (and their parents) and employers were not adequately informed as to the academic ranking of the participating institutions — or indeed that the unhappy history didn't bring with it baggage in the nature of trust relationships, to name but one aspect. The mix of student bodies, unions (and each participant had separate unions), senates, unequal competencies and capacities in administration and management, and leadership (with differing commitments to the consortium [and varying loyalties within their institutions]) — was altogether too complex a mix to go beyond the most obvious cost-saving measures. The issues were not helped by the administrative incapacity of the central body. Eventual government legislation enforced formal mergers — and the jury is still out as to whether these could be called successful. It would take a long time to even agree on the criteria for success — and those institutions with the most to gain would have different criteria to those with the most to lose. By the criteria of the business world, where mergers are common, universities are difficult and unusual bodies. Their governance structures are such that many people in the organization are in a position to block or jeopardize the implementation without sanction — and the managers manage more by influence than by exertion of authority in the formal sense. This is not a sensible cocktail — nor has it proved to be so.

O.U. alliances

The Open University is also a university with several "academic" alliances. Since its model of learning requires local support to its students wherever they are, it provides such support to international students (of which it has about 40,000) through local partners. These partnerships can be divided into four main sorts:

- Those enabling public-sector and even private-sector bodies to establish their own open universities and negotiate over time to achieve independence from the facilitating partner (O.U.), as well as title in their own countries. Examples of this sort are the Arab Open University which used O.U. material (suitably amended and contextualized) to start up. The partnership included training of staff and even use of systems — and ensured that a large number of students could be

enrolled in a relatively short period. The institution started in 1999 and already has about 30,000 students — a large number of them women. Another example is the Singapore Institute of Management and similar arrangements were in place. It has established its reputation, weaned itself off O.U. material, been granted university title in its home country and will soon be independent. The O.U. also offers a Masters in Distance Education to assist staff acquire the knowledge of a specialist type of education.

- Those which are essentially business/private sector bodies in a foreign country where there is a market for business/management type courses, where the fees are relatively high (but still much lower than they would be if enrolled in another U.K. institution) — and, of course, "open" in the sense of entry qualifications.
- Those where the local partner is simply delivering tutorial support to students working to an O.U. curriculum. This may be a long-term arrangement or a short-term arrangement. In Ethiopia, the Civil Service College (in partnership with the O.U. and financed by the World Bank) offered the M.B.A. to a limited number of senior politicians (including the Prime Minister) and civil servants.
- Those which are essentially contractual arrangements to deliver a particular outcome. This would cover consultancies, often in the specificities of distance learning.

These have been successful partnerships and it is instructive to consider why. Opinions will differ on this, but the strongest possibility is that both types of partnership accept the "senior" status of the O.U. As the O.U. becomes more venturesome and seeks alliances with partners who see themselves as equal and even superior partners, the question of partnership becomes more difficult — and even impossible. Faculty are seldom inclined to accept others' considerations about curricula; national quality assurance mechanisms seem to baulk at even the idea that some countries might have an acceptable way of ensuring quality different to our own; and the pound is so strong that only relatively affluent partners can make the economics work. However as the O.U. becomes more conscious that it cannot deliver curriculum to a global audience from a mono-cultural base, it seeks opportunities for curriculum partnerships, perhaps with "virtual" staff members, albeit part-time, living in places outside Britain.

A regional alliance

Another example of a large and more complex alliance of institutions is the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance involving five universities, 19 other tertiary education providers and seven existing social, economic or educa-

tional agencies or networks. Created only a year ago, the principal initial aim of this alliance was the widening of participation in higher education in a region marked by very sharp differences in economic prosperity and prospects between areas. The alliance was created precisely because of the very large volume of current educational provision. The complexities of choice facing individuals wanting access to higher education were considerable. And the challenge of inducing sufficient numbers of additional people to want access, in order that deeply rooted patterns of social inequality in the region could be overcome, could not be addressed adequately or cost-effectively by individual institutions working separately. Thus, the creation of the alliance.

What will be interesting about the Manchester alliance is the extent to which the initial impetus to cooperation — widening participation — will broaden to encompass a fuller range of community-linked functions. Already, considerable emphasis is being given to local and regional economic needs, along with concerns about social inclusion and cohesion. (Some of the northern parts of the sub-region witnessed race riots not so long ago.) The key here to making cooperation between institutions override competitive instincts is the commitment to extending higher education: in this way, competition for existing students becomes replaced by collaboration to increase student numbers overall. Ideally, all partners can be "winners"!

New technology and new ways to learn

The Open University and the University of Manchester are in discussion about an alliance that will pool the benefits of e-learning without both partners incurring the considerable costs and ongoing research that is essential to delivering education using the latest technology. As educators come to realize that the new technology introduces entirely different ways of student learning, they will also come to realize that the costs of delivering the best learning experiences are very high. Institutions have not been very forthcoming in sharing their knowledge in the teaching and learning domain so far. Faculty members are also unwilling to spend the time away from their disciplines necessary to become (and stay) educational technology specialists. Maybe, now with the costs so substantial, the climate for alliances of this sort will improve. It remains to be seen

Milton Keynes alliance

An unusual alliance has been growing in the Milton Keynes district where there is an under-representation of the population in higher education. The alliance is dubbed "Universities of Milton Keynes" and represents an attempt at a new form of educational provision whereby all the universities in the area (four, including The Open University) and the local college combine to make

their particular educational offerings available to students and, in an alliance with the City of Milton Keynes, run a central facility where students can have access to some central facilities and campus life. It is an unusual response to under-provision and recognition that it is no longer feasible to build more and more physical facilities.

Conclusion

The need seems to be for cooperation in doing new things. The question is whether this can be achieved while competing over the "old things" at the same time? One of the questions to be asked must concern the extent to which regulatory frameworks — whether national or international — support or hinder co-operation. It is difficult to encourage "market" forces while at the same time expecting cooperation.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Permeable structures

It should not require extraordinary circumstances or incentives to get universities to engage with their communities. It is good practice to make our governing structures as permeable as possible; to pay careful attention to diversity so that other world views may be heard (which calls to mind Peter Senge's "learning organization" [Senge, 1990]); in short, to ensure our debates about important issues are as informed as possible. It should not be imagined that all views can be accommodated. Some can — and some cannot. The process, however, is vital — and provides a good example of democracy at work.

Finding resources

It is not the leadership and administrations alone that can make such engagement real for the universities' core functions. It is mostly in the faculty that tangible expression will be given to whatever alliances the institution will make. Faculty will not be instructed to engage and the nature of their engagement will not be controlled from above. They will engage if they are genuinely interested and it is in their interests to engage. It is up to university leaders to ensure promotion criteria support strategic alliances; it is up to leaders to find resources to support alliances (including, importantly, research projects) and resources may well be found from business interests, even if such resources are drawn from "corporate responsibility" funds; and, crucially, it is up to leaders to find and support good faculty leadership that understand and pursue institutional goals as well as faculty goals.

Sustaining partnerships

The capacity to sustain partnerships and alliances may well be the distinguishing feature of universities that will thrive in this new world of "engagement". This is not as easy as one would imagine. The locus of decisions about partnerships, curricula, financing and other matters that impact on any one partnership are often in several different parts of the university — and sophisticated structures have to be found to bring them all into line with strategic intent.

Engaging with society

It is important that individual academics publicly engage with different parts of society. The university, as an institution, will always find it very difficult to engage with the many and complex parts of modern society. But its individual academics can be in many forums and part of many different "communities", and it is there that the "voice" of the university can be heard and the role of the public intellectual understood. Without that kind of engagement, the institution, however assiduous its leaders, cannot be truly seen to be in the community. It means that academics must move out of their "tribes and territories" (to quote Tony Becher [1989]) and take the university into the community — and bring the community into the university. The worth of this kind of engagement must be formally recognized by the institution as a whole.

Blurred boundaries

Boundaries are becoming blurred and include the spatial (where learning takes place), time (when learning takes place), knowledge (where it is produced), environments (local, national, global), control (learners, providers, funders), and roles (teacher, learner, assessor, enabler, manager). And to these boundaries must be added the boundaries of our universities themselves. Fewer of our students will attend a single institution. Many will expect increasing recognition to be given for learning that has been accomplished elsewhere, including — but not exclusively — in the workplace. Alliances facilitate these arrangements.

Multiple identities

Identities will become increasingly multiple and will change throughout the life course. Some identities will be easier to integrate than others. Identities will be parallel (student, worker, parent) rather than sequential, and some identities will be increasingly contested (entailing both mobility and mobility blockages) and insecure ("Do I really belong here?" — "Am I good enough?"). Academic identities will not be immune from these changes.

Social responsibilities

More and more (and especially after the spate of scandals in recent years) business is being pressured to demonstrate its commitment to its social responsibilities. Working together with universities in communities (especially communities where development is clearly needed) is a mutually satisfactory way in which to make a tangible difference.

Openness

Taken together, these trends will require a much greater "openness" from our institutions of higher education, including an openness to change themselves into quite different kinds of institutions, institutions which are able to be more collaborative in nature, more diverse in composition, more responsive to addressing the major issues of our time. We must surely share the vision that derives from the idea that the world will be better off, at best healed, by educational intervention that is conducted in alliances that, quite literally, share our common wealth. The task is worthwhile and possible if it can overcome the acquisitiveness that characterizes so many of the initiatives that currently ride the spirit of globalization.

A new collegiality

We noted earlier that "alliances" sit at the stronger and more formalised end of a spectrum of forms of collaboration and partnership between universities and the increasingly wide varieties of communities with which they must engage. But relationships of this sort should not blind us to the importance of other — and in some senses weaker — forms of collaboration, both for institutions, for groups within them and for individual academics. In some ways, these direct us back to older ideas of collegiality, but also to a new collegiality that extends beyond the boundaries of academe to embrace wider communities — locally, nationally and internationally. Though weaker in form, such relationships may nonetheless have considerable impacts. But whether one uses "alliance" or some other word, whether one talks about institutions or individuals, the message is the same one — working together, we can achieve so much more.

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