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COMMUNITY, ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING AND THE UNIVERSITY

The title of this paper is "Community, Engagement, Learning and the University" which brings together several related but distinctive concepts and concerns. The idea of community is under severe challenge according to some and when we examine the idea of community we can find ourselves embroiled in questions of identity, nationalism, ethnicity and belonging which go to the very heart of what we think we are and what we would like to become. One such issue is that of how knowledge gained inside and outside the classroom can engage people and communities in new and meaningful ways. This has been called 'real knowledge' and focuses on issues to do with learning and knowledge in workplaces, communities and life experience. It forces us to engage with the 'big issues' – and we signal some of these in this paper.

The 'real' world, out there still consists of millions who are without an adequate income to rear their families, a world without dignity or education, without clean water or adequate food and medicine and whose share of world wealth is actually diminishing. There is also a world out there where climate change and pollution are far from improving and where the threat of human extinction is real. The arguments for devising a new curriculum which addresses these issues seems to be self-evident

The rapid pace of social and economic change, the apparent quickening of mass migration across large parts of the globe, de-industrialisation and the 'hollowing out' of many traditional economies and communities have meant the growth of more challenges to the neoliberal consensus in many societies. For many young people this has meant their future is at risk with youth unemployment and marginalisation the fate of many across the world.

In a society where knowledge has exploded, learning is being transformed by the artefacts and the apps of the information age. Communications can be instantaneous, and reality becomes 'virtual'. Local communities can become marginalised and impoverished by the almost instant switching of production to cheaper locations, perhaps half way across the globe.

The sheer power and availability of computerised automation has now shifted the nature of work and leisure so fundamentally that it faces us with an existential challenge. Modern work, for many, involves a lack of engagement in the task and even leisure and free time may be occupied by 'lazy' and sometimes aimless pursuits.

The task facing universities is of developing knowledge and skills and a curriculum which can cope with the capacities and threats presented by the machines we depend on and which can help us challenge the loss and separation of ourselves from our communities.

This paper seeks to raise these and other major challenges that set the tone and register for higher education's engagement academic enterprise.

INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY.

Universities are always thought of as somehow being learning communities; if not this then what are they? They certainly have to do with learning and knowledge production in its various guises. The relationship a university has to its community or its communities may be, however, much more tenuous. Its community may denote the local neighbourhood or town; the oldest universities had a venerable connection with a locality and some of these places have taken on board the aspects of sacred space. Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Heidelberg, Bologna, Paris, Prague- all are infused with the special meaning of place (see Urry, 2002 and 2005) and could be said to be examples of emotional geographies. A university community may relate strongly to the local or regional town or city and stand for a set of localised identities. Manchester, Liverpool, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Christchurch may all have such a resonance. On the other hand the largest UK university, The Open University, has no specific geographical identity with a place other than the UK as a whole and the world in general, though it too has a headquarters on a campus. It does not aspire to being a physical community but to being a learning community without borders of a conventional kind.

WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY?

Our main purpose is, however, not to explore the university itself as a community. It is rather to look at what makes the idea of community relevant in the 21st century to what universities actually do; what sustains and challenges accepted notions of community and how should a university grasp and respond to this understanding? The idea of community is under severe challenge according to some and when we examine the idea of community we can find ourselves embroiled in questions of identity, nationalism, ethnicity and belonging which go to the very heart of what we think we are and what we would like to become. These are existential questions in a world where migration, globalisation, dispossession, war, terrorism, poverty and extensive cultural and social conflict characterise our way of life. We live in changing and uncertain times which force us to confront such issues if we wish to have universities which help shape our communities as active and engaged partners, because it is ultimately as communities that we face the challenges of change. The ideology of individualism has created and sustained much modern thinking and behaviour, especially in relation to consumer-driven economic development and the cultural industries. However, when faced with what we have said are existential issues, the notion of belonging and community re-asserts itself, sometimes with a vengeance!

What then makes a community? One influential theorist argues that it is a sense of shared understanding which is in effect a reciprocal binding sentiment shared by a certain group of people (Bauman, 2000:10). He writes, "...in a community people remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors". This unity involves a shared understanding which is tacit and taken-for-granted by its very nature. Community attributes, which are the substance of this shared understanding, cannot be random. They involve what he calls "sameness". Once we are no longer the same we are unable to maintain the boundaries of 'community'. This raises the question of whether and how in a globalising world we are all becoming the same? Does the fact that regardless of our national origins or identities, we all consume similar food, clothing, consumer durables, entertainment and technological 'fixes', mean we are all becoming the same ? Or does it mean that as local customs and behaviour become impacted by global changes we lose that local community which was given to us by birth and by having grown up within its boundaries.

What makes a community is obviously more than the place. Community is one of the longings of our century. In spite of all the definitional problems associated with it in relation to education, it retains a powerful charge and seems to offer a framework of meaning for modern life. Those communities which have been left behind by industrialisation and the forces which supposedly were to eliminate scarcity, poverty and ignorance, offer paradoxically an image of continuity and stability. The longing for meaning, for a sense of continuity of past and future has relevance for all of us. This perspective concerns itself with the notions of community and ecology, by which is meant the potential that may exist for integrating learning and community experience. Such experience has geographical, ideological, emotional and political levels; it is never a single reality, but is always imbricated and multi-layered. This paper considers some of the difficulties facing us when we wish to understand and use the notion of community in relation to learning and the university in modern times.

SOME CURRENT AND FUTURE ISSUES: THE COMMUNITY AS A MICROCOSM

One such issue is that of how knowledge gained inside and outside the classroom can engage people and communities in new and meaningful ways. One response to this is the argument that we should seek out experience which yields the knowledge and expertise to understand and transform communities. This has been called 'real knowledge' (Davies et al, 2015). The issue is international and transcultural – we are forced to be part of the global world and are thus interdependent, yet we are losing our sense of belonging to communities which were once local and specific, and were once recognisably 'ours'. This is the conundrum which our learning needs to address in order for real knowledge to be put to the test.

This paper, therefore, aims to explore and understand something of the nature of knowledge that can be gained beyond the classroom or lecture theatre. It looks beyond the boundary and it focuses on issues to do with learning and knowledge in workplaces, communities and life experience.

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The focus is on how learning needs to engage with our lives and identities as individuals who live within communities of interdependence.

Yet we live in a world of neo-liberal thinking where individuals are seen to be acting in their own interests, rightly and without reference to the wider social context. The freedom of one individual is said to be about the right to pursue happiness and make choices without considering the essentially social nature of all human activity (Rustin, 2013). The realities are of course entirely different. Individual freedoms are always controlled by forces and institutions over which no individual has control. The essential interdependence of social life and activity forces everyone into mutual interdependence but this is often unrecognised and refuted by those whose interests lie in stressing the separateness of us all, which leads us to keep returning to the question of what is shaping experience and reality in modern times?

All of this is occurring in a world where communications will continue to be ever more globalised and where cultural and social identities are re-defined and re-made. On the one hand this shared culture makes us all members of much larger communities whilst on the other hand it leads many people to re-assert more local and comprehensible identities in terms of how people feel about their localities, their national and ethnic groups and frequently their faith and religious affiliations. This too creates issues for learning at all levels.

One of the effects of these changes is global pressure to replace systems of national planning and control with devolved and fragmented market-led systems, which allow a more rapid and individualised response to changing needs. These pressures make individuals more vulnerable to change and they challenge traditional notions of authority, accountability and democracy. Giddens (1990) has referred in this context to the ending of traditional sites and sources of authority. We are moving, argued Giddens, into a more fragmented society where the social bonds and shared values and traditions which held us together in the past are breaking apart or dissolving. Beck (1994) has referred to the notion of a risk society within this changing, shifting and uncertain social order.

Perhaps in reaction to this there is also a counter-balancing pressure to assert local identities within nations and regions and within social, ethnic and religious differences. Cultural pluralism which allows the blossoming of many diverse cultural phenomena exists alongside a more fiercely committed orthodoxy where communities feel their identity and/or existence may be at risk.

Economic logic often runs counter to the needs–based logic of human goals (Rustin 2013). The quality of relationships in work and in communal life are often decisive for a positive outcome and there are values located in work, in labour, in community life, in social activity and in reflective self-consciousness which have significance way beyond any profit to be made from them. It is vital that we seek the content of these values so we can organise and educate around them. These themes and issues have led us to identify some six related sets of concerns in an attempt to answer the question of how to get valid knowledge of the issues facing communities as the proper basis for thought and action for change and progress – and as a proper and commensurate objective for universities.

POVERTY IS STILL WITH US – GLOBALLY AND LOCALLY

There is currently in existence an ideology of progress which asserts that new technology can and will bring in a new and better future. This future involves the use and application of computing and digitalisation to transform our working lives. Technological innovation, it is assumed rather than actually proved, will transform our economic and social lives as a vanguard for change. Whilst there is surely truth of a kind in this vision, there is also a wilful wish to ignore the deeper question about the harm and threats our present industrial and social 'progress' is making in its dependency upon this technology. The 'real' world, out there still consists of millions who are without an adequate income to rear their families, a world without dignity or education, without clean water or adequate food and medicine and whose share of world wealth is actually diminishing. There is also a world out there where climate change and pollution are far from improving and where the threat of human extinction is real. The arguments for devising a new curriculum which addresses these issues seems to be self-evident and though this may be the case, it is equally the case that the curriculum and what constitutes valid knowledge in higher education and elsewhere is contested territory. The forms of learning and curricula which predominate in most formal schooling and higher education are not adequate to the tasks they face (Porter, 1999). New and radical forms of 'knowing' which are also rooted in community lives pose difficult questions for conventional educators and universities. Such questions involve not only the problem of delivering institutionally based learning and accreditation to very poor communities who cannot afford to pay for it, but also the thorny issue of whether the knowledge taught is actually 'real' and relevant to the lives and communities who need it (Teare, 2013).

THE MARGINALISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The rapid pace of social and economic change, the apparent quickening of mass migration across large parts of the globe, the de-industrialisation of many traditional manufacturing heartlands and the 'hollowing out' of many traditional economies and communities have meant the growth of more challenges to the neoliberal consensus in many societies. For many young people in particular this has meant the future is severely at risk.

Those young people who are not in education and training or in work with career and training prospects, constitute a persistent and troublesome problem for society which says it believes in offering all young people the chance to fulfil their potential in life. The local economy and neighbourhood characteristics are important in understanding and combating the persistent and multiple disadvantages of certain

communities. Worklessness and lack of access and take up of education and training by young people is a key indicator of such a community, often now referred to as young people at risk (YPAR). Spatial segregation and concentrations of worklessness can be pronounced and show us that economic processes can be profoundly territorial. Spatial development (neighbourhoods) and the 'ecological' cultures they contain are crucial in understanding local concentrations of deprivation. A number of contributors to this issue, notably Bell 2017, stress the importance of neighbourhood and space and perceptions of space and community.

These social processes impact in particular on YPAR and working class people, who often live in economic insecurity and cannot predict the future, and consequently there is a need to define oneself always in the here and now. This enforces a certain type of localism and security around certain primary links such as family and neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods represent specific types of social relations and therefore provide an 'encounter' (not always harmonious) with the 'system' which allocates resources and determines the social practices (ie behaviour) of the inhabitants. YPAR present themselves as a contradiction: they are active agents in a system of social practice and behaviour (they are often unemployed, uneducated, dis-located, 'dangerous' and vulnerable). At the same time they present themselves as themselves but always in relation to something else – as what might be their potential and their position in the wider society and social structure. They may be severely at risk but they are certainly part of our future.

From the perspective of learning providers, including schools, colleges, universities and the myriad of training providers, it can be argued that a new approach is required to meet the challenge of YPAR. This involves, we would argue, a greater degree of understanding of the nature of the actual places where YPAR live and a re-working of the kinds of learning which young people find 'real' and useful. It may lead us to want to re-define our ideas of what useful knowledge and skills are! Our first step could do worse than re-visiting notions of space, neighbourhood and community and identity. The relationships that are experienced in the streets and neighbourhoods of poor and deprived communities are physical and social. They may be dangerous and threatening but may also be close, warm and supportive. Specific social relations with the world of public authority and local government are structured and experienced differently from those who have wealth and economic and social resources. This yields a particular set of attitudes and expectations again whose explanation is social rather than simply educational.

Our starting point in engaging with these issues is a belief that it is possible to break the cycle of deprivation and dependency which underpins the at risk experience in such neighbourhoods. Young people at risk, like all of us, need to have a place in the scheme of things – a sense of being equipped for the present and the future. These are the outputs to be desired. What is needed is that willingness to engage and to learn, a readiness to learn from others and a determination to bring about much needed change through critical and collaborative thinking and action.

THE GROWTH OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

In a society where knowledge has exploded into availability, learning is being transformed by the artefacts and the apps of the so-called information age (see Castells, 1996). Giddens (1990 and 1991) has argued persuasively that the new communication technologies have disrupted the fixed realities of time and space. This impacts on economic and social life in fundamental ways. Distanciation occurs, where individuals can no longer identify with the sources and meanings of the products they acquire. Everything that is consumed is made somewhere else. All communications are instantaneous, no matter where in the world that is. Delivered items arrive the next day; reality becomes something 'virtual'. Local communities can become severely marginalised and impoverished by the almost instant switching of production to cheaper locations, perhaps half way across the globe. The sources of authority can be undermined and fragmentation of value systems and traditions appears to be rampant to those left behind in the global race for economic supremacy. The fixed realities of time and space are increasingly disrupted as the media we use are available 24 hours per day and everyone on the planet is a potential media partner no matter where they live.

What is of huge significance to each and every one of us and to our collective experience, the stuff of our daily lives, is now mediated by the products of the knowledge economy and the communications/entertainment industry. A changing social and economic reality has been accompanied by a rapidly changing knowledge base. It can be argued (Gardner and Davis, 2014) that for some young people the reality of experience and real life has already been replaced by the reality of digital dependency. What Gardner and Davis refer to as the "app generation" may be a metaphor for what young people have come to think of the world as an "ensemble of apps" where everything they do is part of a larger digital system experienced via the screen. The effects of this on the younger generation are as yet unknown. It may be imagined that they are not all entirely healthy as they impact on identity, imagination and intimacy. The question has been put... are young people becoming app dependent, their lives slavishly reliant on software and surealities of the screen as substitute for actually being out there and doing something with other people? Or are they becoming app enabled, with new technology allowing them to express and organise themselves in ways previously unimagined?

Today's young people are internet driven; they download ebooks and articles, skype with their tutors, observe lectures on their ipads at several locations and as students get open coursework on-line from a variety of university and other sources. MIT open coursework has 100 million individual learners and this is increasing by one million a month. The Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL) takes learning to the remotest villages in Papua New Guinea and Africa (Zuber-Skerritt and Teare

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2013). The learning revolution has meant that the mass higher education agenda has penetrated some of the most elitist and prestigious institutions, including the Ivy League in the USA and the Oxbridge axis in the UK.

The explosion of digital technologies has undoubtedly opened up access to learning (Teare et.al, 1998). The virtual classroom has accompanied the virtual university, bringing an explosion of learning resources and open access for learners. However, as well as positive outcomes for many it is also possible to discern some threats to cherished values for those generations who are defined by these dominant technologies. These dangers are part of the mass psychology of contemporary experience.

Gardner and Davis (2014) have argued that a 40-year-old parent may be four generations away from their teenage child, separated by the internet and its applications, smart phones and tablets. Young people today have come to think of the world and themselves as inevitably linked by the internet. The world for young people is an ensemble of apps and they are the app generation. In Gardner and Davis' formulation the metaphor of an ensemble of apps describes life lived as part of a larger digital system, through the screen. This is a world where young people in particular have developed a slavish reliance on their machines and apps. As opposed to the notion that this technology allows people to liberate and express themselves in ways previously unimagined, young people are becoming less capable of developing their identity and imagination. They are becoming app dependent and this is a growing problem which is curbing creativity and creating a conformist generation that is risk averse, shallow and self-regarding.

LOSS OF COMMUNITY – DISPOSSESSION

What then are the dangers and threats to our vision of new learning needed for young people and in higher education presented by the digitalisation of learning and communication? Should we be technophiles or technophobes and do we have an effective choice at all? One of the contexts we would suggest should shape our response might be how such technology does or does not increase our personal autonomy and enhance our freedom to be what we might be. From differing but related perspectives Ivan Illich (1971) and Herbert Marcuse (1964) explored such themes decades ago. Whether we are conscious, creative and active agents in our own world and communities or whether we are passive consumers of things produced for us, elsewhere becomes a vital question? Levitin (2014) and Carr (2015) have shown that extensive use of computer and hand-held screen time encourages consumerism and leads children to value money and branded goods. Furthermore, it induces anxiety, low self-esteem and depression and it harms children's relationships. These arguments purport to show that screens turn children off from accountability and empathy and has proposed that this type of toxic technology does not teach the core curriculum of the human condition such as kindness, generosity, self-control, sensitivity and courage.

There is a loss of 'belonging' and this is frequently experienced as a loss of 'community' and a longing for a sense of continuity of past and future. Community as we have already argued, has geographical, emotional, ideological and identity dimensions. It is a multi-layered and over-lapping idea (see Berger, 1984 and 1985) and can be so over-used that its specific meanings are lost in the generic 'amorphousness' of 'community'. It can be all things to all people. Nevertheless, community represents still the longings of our time and the sense that it can be lost is a powerful driver of emotions and actions.

The new technologies of communication enable and sponsor what are in in effect compromises and distortions of face-to-face reality. The struggle for a viable identity, for example, can be transposed to a virtual place and time; it can be postponed and evaded, for a time. There are people who cannot apparently look up at the sky outside their buildings to see what the weather holds. They unfailingly consult their hand-held device to check whether an umbrella is needed before venturing out. Virtual reality has become more real for some than reality itself. Remote, dislocated and evacuated- the words that are used have lost their meaning - 'friend', 'cloud', 'search' and 'identity' have been drained of life by their web usage; they have somehow been annihilated by their new on-line connotations so they no longer mean what they say.

We are clearly not going to simply lose these means of communication, however, and therefore we need to be able to control them and to conceptually 'master', them in order to be able to benefit rather than suffer from them. This is an agenda for teachers and learners if ever there was one. The problems are compounded by an accelerating set of issues and concerns. The loss of cognitive control and skills already alluded to means that the individual can become an operator of a computerised system rather than an 'activator'. When the computer performs complex activities and intellectual work such as observing, sensing, analysing and judging, and even decision-making, it changes both the nature of work and the worker in unanticipated and disturbing ways.

The contradictory character of modernity is nowhere more clearly shown than in the contrast between the vast expansion of personal means of communication and digital technologies available to all who can afford them and the millions of people simultaneously trapped in economic poverty and backwardness.

Modernity then has brought with it a capacity for dialogue, communication and the attendant benefits of reflexivity and self-awareness and self-development. It has also created unpredictability, uncertainty and exclusion.

All of this illuminates the importance of the learning agenda for an uncertain future, where we shall need 'really useful knowledge' (Johnson, 1988) within the new and emerging 'real' and virtual communities.

THE UNIVERSITY AND LEARNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

The modern university is expected to be many different and contradictory things. It is expected to be an innovator in learning and knowledge; collegial in its dealings with its staff

and its partners yet competitive in an increasingly marketised and monetised world; caring in its concern for people yet entrepreneurial in its business dealings; it is expected to be both a public institution and a private organisation and it is almost always both a local and an internationalised institution. This wide array of university roles and identities does not imply that it is in any sense isolated from its community!

We have already touched on the origins of some types of university. The sense of place of a university of course does not necessarily chime with its origins and from medieval Oxford and Cambridge with their support for poor scholars to the mechanics institutes of Victorian Britain emphasising useful and applied knowledge to the vast array of American colleges and the world impact of modern technological campuses, we can see an amazing diversity in 21st Century provision of university learning. What is perhaps surprising though is the fact that they all seem to be **engaged** with their communities.

How can we categorise this activity? The late Sir David Watson a decade ago suggested that there were essentially two domains of university engagement. The first order of engagement referred to the fact that a university was just there! It existed and it produced graduates who became workers and professionals; these graduates contributed to society as professionally educated and qualified citizens; as such they paid taxes, raised children and played a part in civic society. Universities also did such things as provide museums, libraries and galleries and they allowed challenging ideas to be explored. Watson (2006) also suggests they provided the content for some popular cultural dramas and fictions. In the USA universities are venerated, says Watson, more than they deserve whilst in the UK and Australia they 'stimulate more opprobrium than they deserve'.

First order features might also include the ways in which a university seems to offer the best of our opportunities as a model for aspirations for a better life in all senses. Universities might be the place where the best of ourselves finds an authentic expression and as a model for community itself. On the other hand they may fail to tell the truth about themselves to others and to themselves. As large scale institutions they also have all the pitfalls of 'big businesses' and they can be seen to fail as progressive and democratic institutions. In general the university is expected to behave as a moral force and be better than other large organisations. It is expected to be fair and even generous in its dealings with others.

The second order engagements are focussed on the contractual obligations universities carry out. Graduates and researchers are produced in the relevant and required skill areas; professional updating is pursued; services and consultancy are provided and economic activity is sponsored with spin-off companies. The university is also a consumer of services, an employer of a significant labour force and a developer of its environment and spaces.

In recent times the notion of partnership has impacted on

universities and these may be with commercial concerns where the laws of the market and competition rule, or they may be with local organisations or communities themselves, where different rules are thought by many to apply. Universities, says Watson, are somehow expected to hold the ring. There may be dilemmas here for any university.

Who amongst the partners of a university actually carries the risk; who represents the public interest, especially where financial matters are concerned; and if we have university stakeholders, who are they and how much of the actual risk do they take when it is the people's money at stake?

THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Some of the answers to what are undoubtedly difficult questions lie, according to Watson, in the notion of stewardship- of both the intellectual and moral as well as the concrete assets of the university. Perhaps there are echoes of Cardinal John Henry Newman's 'The Idea of a University' in which ..."poetry , oratory and liturgy can, all have in common the power to stir us into recognition of something that we cannot name... the ideal of the untrammelled quest for understanding..." (Collini, 2012: 60). At the first order of engagement the internal and institutional issues facing the university - about how it governs itself (normally), sets its strategy and admits staff and students-do not necessarily cope with how the university deals with its responsibilities to the wider and deeper public interest. This concerns the idea that learning and education are for the public good; they are for a progressive social purpose

Of course the university is not alone in having such a responsibility. Government itself takes on this mantle; intermediate agencies with funding or quality concerns may also be responsible for right and proper behaviour; and benefactors and sponsors may see themselves as holding responsibilities. At the end of the day, however, universities almost always assert their own sense of autonomy and the value of their own independence as voluntary associations from the state, notwithstanding their financial dependence on public and state authorities.

THE UNIVERSITY AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZEN-MEMBERS?

What then are universities and what are their characteristics that we value? They are voluntary associations and communities and play a significant role in promoting social solidarity and cohesion. They provide key information and analysis for policy making and development and as such are vital to good and democratic government. However, at the heart of the university is the concept of membership, which now of course embraces a wide range of professional and administrative functions, not just the academic ones. Spheres of professional competence now infuse all levels of university learning and activity.

At its heart a university is a community of itself and perhaps for itself, where academic citizenship can be seen to be central to the idea of membership of the community. Students and

staff as citizen-members have a set of responsibilities as well as the rights of consumers. These membership characteristics might just be crucial to the future of universities in the age of modernity and change, as they were perhaps in a very different sense in the past age of elite selection of people destined for higher education. They include recognition of rational and scientific enquiry and procedures as the basis for learning, rather than the handed-down dogmas of orthodox belief. This implies a kind of academic honesty in which all belief systems are open to scrutiny, dialogue, questioning and critical discourse. This is a live issue and is hugely contentious in different parts of the world. Hate speech and the proffering of violence to those with whom we disagree is clearly not acceptable in a university community (or elsewhere for that matter), but that apart it should be possible in a free society, under the law, for one person to express views which are abhorrent to another person without fearing a backlash of hatred, condemnation and proscription. This requires perhaps a special type of academic honesty and it is universities which must help guarantee this freedom by providing open forums for debate of contentious issues and in providing the conditions for study, learning and communication which make discourse possible. Honesty, reciprocity and openness are both the pre-requisites and conditions for the existence of a democratic and progressive community/society. As E. P. Thompson (1963) remarked about the formation of the English working class; they were present at their own birth - and so a militant democratic impulse is needed to ensure the presence and continuity of democracy. Universities can lay claim to the protection of this impulse as one of the key things they do for their communities.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Universities of course are diverse institutions; even within a single nation there are significant differences between types of universities. Nevertheless, we can say most strive towards being 'good' institutions, committed to openness to other's ideas, engaged with respecting the local environment and collectively committed to policies and practices on equalities, grievances and fairness. Hopefully most universities are doing the right thing in respect of their position as a 'public' or citizen's institution. However, in present circumstances universities are forced the world over to maximise their resources and income; they are forced to play a linear game of knowledge transfer from their campuses to the world of industry and commerce. University- business interaction can become the dominating hegemon of academic life; after all money counts. We cannot over-estimate the difficulty of universities implementing learning derived from the real world and real life processes. This situation contains a significant threat to the world of higher education and presents universities with a series of dilemmas. To cope with it universities will have to play a fully developed role in the emerging civil society; a society that on a global scale is faced with a series of problems and issues outlined above.

A first response must be to define and identify an appropriate and justified institutional mission; an arena of autonomy and action in which it is free to be what it declares itself to be. This is not easy when the purse strings are held by government which may have different and competing visions or missions for those it funds. Watson (2006) argues that universities must engage in 'reflective pragmatism', by which he means being serious about who your stake holders really are and responding to your 'true' market. This means we cannot and should not all aspire to be, for example, an institution which replicates all the successes of comparator universities. It means, for example, that 'access' universities can thrive in terms of their values and objectives in the same way that 'research universities 'are encouraged and rewarded for their success in delivering a mission. It means an end to what George Orwell called the graded snobberies of the English where endless league tables purport to show excellence as a disguised form of preferential funding. Such funding often expresses historical inequalities in access to resources and people, and from the start rigs the outcomes of any competition. C. Wright Mills, the great American sociologist noted decades ago, and it remains true today, that for sections of the middle classes, in the 'white collar pyramids' education has 'paid off'; it has been a source of cash and a means of ascent. Here 'knowledge', although not 'power', has been a basis for prestige. It is clear that in the modern era of mass higher education such an approach will simply not do. A university education remains a potential passport to a better life for many people but it is by no means an assured route to the top either for an elite or for the broader masses that it was once. Education does not pay off for everyone and it surely does not pay off in the same way for all social groups (Savage, 2015). In fact universities are still very much in the game of 'sorting them out' that is to say, providing avenues of mobility and achievement for some whilst relegating a majority of graduates to a lower order place in the hierarchy of jobs and careers in a highly stratified and inequitable structure of jobs and social life. Having indicated some of the directions to which we think universities appear to be heading, we can tentatively indicate the key areas where universities must now re-think their positions and act decisively.

WHAT DO ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES DO?

They must of course sort out the money issues and secure their incomes within an envelope which protects the key academic missions and portfolios. After that they must make certain that their boundaries are protected where that is necessary and then, if necessary, join together with those institutions which are compatible in terms of mission and location. Peter Scott (1995) pointed out some time ago that three quarters of British universities have been created since 1945 and that scarcely a single university has not been involved in a merger, amalgamation, status change or radical re-definition of its role at some point in time. Universities could of course view themselves as part of a narrative of communal and socially progressive forces intent on advancing scholarship, learning and opportunity. On the other hand there is plenty of evidence that some of them are defending privilege, social exclusiveness,

snobbery and class distinctions. Some see themselves as driving change whilst some see themselves as defending traditions and values which are universalist and long-standing. Adapting Watson we can list a 10 point agenda for engaged universities now:

- they must devise an attractive and relevant curriculum and learning environment

- they must contribute to research in some way

- the community must be a key focus for engagement

- the university must help its community to define itself and be part of it

- the campus must be a good place to work for students and staff

- the institution must be environmentally and ethically sensitive and responsible

- good staff and students must be recruited and retained

- a mission must be internalised and understood and also the attendant challenges

- a university must play its part in improving the environment, local education and health and community outcomes

- a reputation locally, nationally and internationally must be forged and preserved, and carried forward on behalf of the university by its staff and students.

A CONCLUSION – NOT TO CONCLUDE

This paper has raised questions and concerns on the meanings of community and asked whether the concept is relevant to today's evolving universities and their own concerns with a future role. Some of the global issues surrounding disadvantage, poverty and the marginalisation of young people have been considered because whatever the future holds these young people must be the ones to live it and deal with it. Questions of identity, ethnic and community belonging, nationalism and learning in a world where such matters have impact on our lives have been considered. Universities must be engaged in new and different ways if they are to figure as key elements in the solutions and their critical and defining role, that of promoting and fostering learning, must be re-invented for a new generation.

For this to happen learning must be credible; it must be really useful knowledge for those who are bent on acquiring it. Really useful knowledge may be skills based, it may be qualifications-related and it may be academic but whatever domain it exists in, it must pay off for the learners. In this context we must remember that millions of people across the globe have absolutely no access to university accredited learning and unless their poverty and geographical isolation is s substantially relieved they will remain outside our western system of mass higher education. In the light of such reasoning

surely the time has come to consider the role of universities in a new light and to give our support to those who have demonstrated that alternatives can exist and can succeed , even on the slimmest of budgets (see Teare, 2015). It may be time for universities to take the side of and be in solidarity with collective identities and communities which are in struggle for a fairer society (Crowther, Galloway and Martin, 2005).

The new view of the university in its community will also need to embrace the fact that learning will have to be 'social' that is to say it will be shared and will be for a progressive social purpose. That purpose will be to improve the mass of people's learning and give access to what learning can offer. This agenda, for agenda is what it is, implies that the provision of schooling and universities for elites has a limited future. In a globalised world where mass migration flows are commonplace, it is ever more clear that the old system is broken and cannot serve the needs of the democratic majority. That elite higher education systems have paid off for many cannot be denied, however, the next stage requires not merely a scaling up of existing provision but a wholesale re-thinking of learning for those billions of people who can view the benefits of advanced industrial society (via their hand-held devices and computers) but who cannot achieve it. Stability, let alone morality or prosperity demands that this issue be addressed.

Learning is of course not just a social activity, it is also and co-extensively an intense personal activity. It is about the self and self-awareness and these aspects of life are key to successful learning for change and transformation. Identities are involved and ethnic, religious, cultural and social factors shape our aspirations and outcomes. We do not learn in a vacuum but with intentions and objectives- sometimes even with the intention of surviving and earning a living. Change yourself and you change your situation is no mean epithet, especially when allied to a notion of a community since all individual action needs to find its appropriate object and community, as we have seen, is one of the longings of our century. Achieving a community is a goal striven for by many and is still perhaps one of humanity's most sought after aspirations.

In the developed world, the era when a large majority of citizens had little contact with our universities has passed into history. The emerging, and still largely and spectacularly unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity that characterise our societies, places a challenge of huge significance on our universities. The impoverished and disempowered are one constituency that must be addressed but there are others including that of 'community' itself. It is hoped that this paper has at least raised some serious questions for universities with regard to this most persistent and profound theme of community engagement. No easy answers to questions was presumed and none have been found but in questioning the nature and meaning of community we can begin to bring some critical insights into a contradictory and difficult, yet vital "longing"- that of community and the role of a university within it.

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