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Positioning Civic Engagement on the Higher Education Landscape: Insights from a civically engaged pedagogy

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The significance of competing conceptions of civic engagement is increasingly apparent as efforts are made to respond to the measurement imperative that characterises contemporary higher education. The importance of devising appropriate means of recognising and incentivising civic engagement is asserted in this paper and the potential offered by emerging measurement and mapping methodologies is considered. The empirical basis for the argument derives from a multi-site case study of the process of embedding community-based learning within Irish higher education. Analysis of interview data from four cases, drawn from the university and extra-university sector, yielded, *inter alia*, a typology of orientations to civic engagement. Findings are discussed, including those relating to orientations, ambivalence, scepticism, and legitimisation strategies. The case is made that these themes and the factors which impact on sustainability are mirrored within the wider domain of civic engagement—hence the opportunity to learn from a civically engaged pedagogy.

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Keywords: *civic engagement; community-based learning; third mission; institutional performance measures; higher education policy; Ireland*

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Introduction

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Universities, since their foundation, have been inextricably linked to society and have played a key role within it. In recent times, however, the role higher education institutions (HEIs) play in the civic/social realm, as well as in the economy, has

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come under particular scrutiny. The range of expectations which society has of higher education has expanded and diversified. In this context, the civic mission of higher education has enjoyed renewed attention as universities have sought ways of strengthening and diversifying the ways in which they engage with and serve the needs of society and community. Strategies for doing so include relatively well-established policies, such as widening participation, as well as innovative pedagogies such as community-based learning—a recent initiative in higher education in the European context. In these challenging times the sustainability of innovative practices regarded as outwith the core mission of the university—often understood solely in terms of teaching and research—is of some concern.

The rationale for civic engagement is both multifaceted and complex, reflecting the range of competing imperatives which characterise contemporary higher education. Certain measures—such as teaching and learning strategies with a civic dimension—are often associated with the moral purpose of higher education and with the role of public education in a democracy. The particular need to demonstrate relevance, effectiveness, and value for money has been accentuated lately in light of recent economic events, nationally and globally. The development and use of (key) performance indicators (K/Pis), in response to these pressures, adds further to tensions experienced within academe, as certain kinds of “performance” are privileged over others and those deemed less measurable are overlooked. The measurement of activities associated with civic engagement at institutional level, within academic units or for individual academics, presents particular challenges.

This paper explores the challenge of sustaining innovative policy and practice in the realm of civic engagement and considers the potential impact of the measurement culture in higher education on this domain. One of the characteristics of the debate on the role of universities in society is the range of terms used and the absence of consensus on their meaning. For the purpose of this paper I will explore the relationship between “civic engagement”, “third mission”, and “knowledge transfer” and will elaborate on a particular manifestation of civic engagement: community-based learning. Some of the issues experienced within the burgeoning range of initiatives designed to measure, monitor, and evaluate civic engagement activities will be outlined.

Drawing on findings from a multi-site case study, I explore the significance of underpinning rationale and of institutional recognition for the sustainability of civic engagement initiatives and consider the potential impact of attempts to measure civic engagement on academics’ willingness to contribute as key actors. While the study focused primarily on the policy, process, and practice of embedding a civic engagement dimension within the teaching and learning domain of higher education, many of the findings are relevant to other ways in which universities conceive of and practice civic engagement, such as community-engaged research, community–university partnerships and outreach activities. This paper is also informed by my experience as a practitioner of community-based learning and as project leader for a community-engaged research initiative.¹ Arising from my involvement in the design of a survey of civic engagement in Irish higher education² and in a pan-European



project developing a ranking methodology for third mission activities,³ I have some appreciation of the inherent tensions and challenges associated with these ventures.

The Elusive Concept of Civic Engagement

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“Engagement” has emerged as a guiding principle in the re-examination of the idea—and ideal—of a university which engages actively with both economic and civic society (Bjarnason & Coldstream, 2003; Edgerton, 1994; Harkavy, 2006). Interpretations of “civic engagement” abound because the concept embraces a diversity of goals and activities. Watson (2003, p. 25), for example, suggests that it implies “... strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres”. He identifies these spheres as setting universities’ aims and priorities, relating teaching and learning to the wider world, dialogue between researchers and practitioners and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and as citizens. In contrast, the elaboration of civic engagement offered by Gonzalez-Perez, Mac Labhrainn, and Mc Ilrath (2007) places greater emphasis on a rationale which is closely associated with the norms and values associated with reciprocity, diversity, and social inclusion. This emphasis on norms and values is echoed in the key themes underpinning public engagement as espoused by the Beacons project in the UK, namely “relevance, democratisation, engagement and inclusivity” (Hart, Northmore, & Gerhardt, 2009, p. 12). For the purposes of a recent survey in Ireland, Campus Engage⁴ characterised civic engagement as a mutually beneficial knowledge-based collaboration between the HEI, its staff and students, and the wider community. When elaborating on their institutional conception of the “engaged” university, Bristol University⁵ identifies its priorities as: (1) promoting dialogue between staff/students and the public; (2) playing a leading role in setting the national agenda on public engagement in higher education; (3) responding positively to community needs; (4) playing a positive role in the affairs of the city, region, and nation; (5) nurturing relationships with alumni and other friends of the University; and (6) behaving responsibly as an institution. From within the USA, Holland (2001) offers an all-embracing definition which conceivably spans all the spheres of activity of a university:

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The engaged institution is committed to direct interaction with external constituencies and communities through the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration and application of knowledge, expertise and information. (Holland, 2001, p. 7)

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“Public engagement”, a term that has recently emerged and found favour with HEFCE in the UK, is described as involving specialists in higher education listening to, developing their understanding of, and interacting with non-specialists. The public, states Higher Education Funding Council for England (2007), “includes individuals and groups who do not currently have a formal relationship with the HEI through teaching, research or knowledge transfer”. Such a construction of the public, and of its relationship to the university, is one with which many proponents of civic engagement would take issue.

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5 The inclusion, within civic/public engagement, of activities more commonly associated with third stream or knowledge transfer is not universally agreed. Hart et al. (2009) note that an interesting definitional question is raised by the location of “public engagement” within “third stream” activity. Third stream or third mission has been described as the contribution of universities, directly or indirectly, to decision-making in wider society. “It is therefore concerned with the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments” (Molas-Gallart, Salter, Patel, Scott, & Duran, 2002, p. iv). Knowledge transfer is also commonly conceived of in terms of dissemination of research, development of intellectual property, technology transfer, licensing, campus-based companies, and other initiatives which contribute to the development of a strong and vibrant globally competitive economy. Certain approaches to engaging with the external environment are typified by Clark’s (1998) elaboration of the “entrepreneurial” university and Etzkowitz’s (2008) “triple-helix” model of university–industry–government relationships. The inclusion of such a diverse range of activities, however, within one “stream” of higher education proves problematic.

20 Interpretations of civic engagement and the priority given to the different elements within it reflect the influence of such contextual factors as tradition, location, institutional mission, and public policy priorities. One of the unresolved questions, however, is whether or not civic engagement represents a third stream/mission or whether, in fact, each element of a university’s mission—teaching, research, and service—can be undertaken in a civically engaged way, reflecting the principles, norms and values of reciprocity, partnership, inclusion, and even social justice. Hence, teaching, research, and service all offer “civic engagement” potential, if conducted in, with or in the interest of society and/or community. By adopting this position, universities can choose to make explicit how they regard their core work as civically engaged. Votruba (2005) argues that if a university seeks to increase its public engagement, then all of its functions must be aligned toward that goal—lending further credence to a conception of civic engagement as a way of advancing the goals of higher education rather than as an add-on set of activities. Such a conception of civic engagement—as a way of doing its core business—is entirely consistent with the role and function of public higher education. Inevitably, how civic engagement is conceived of will have significant implications for the design of any methodology or indicators which aim to “measure” it.

35 **Community-Based/Service Learning: A civic engagement strategy in practice**

40 To appreciate the significance of conceptions, this paper will consider what can be learned from those discerned in the context of one particular manifestation of civic engagement. A civic engagement strategy, well-established in the USA for over 30 years, is attracting increasing attention in Europe and elsewhere, as universities seek to diversify the ways in which they link with society, while simultaneously addressing issues of student engagement. Community-based learning (or service learning)⁶



(S/CLB) is essentially a teaching and learning strategy. It is espoused for its potential to realise academic, civic, and personal development goals for students, while meeting an identified community need. The potential outcomes are consistent with one of the central purposes of higher education; the preparation of graduates equipped to contribute positively to the processes of change in society. 5

The pedagogy can be best characterised by its goals and underpinning principles. A “service” is provided to the not-for-profit/voluntary sector that meets a need identified by the community partner; students’ academic learning is strengthened as they apply theoretical concepts to the real world and their commitment to civic participation is advanced (Honnet & Poulson, 1989; Howard, 1993). Academic credit is gained on the basis of demonstrated application of discipline-specific knowledge/skills to practice and for reflection on the experience. Service/community-based learning is often defined in contradistinction to volunteering, with which it is commonly conflated, with the award of academic credit for learning as a defining characteristic. S/CBL can be differentiated from conventional work placements and internships in terms of the emphasis on civic outcomes and the assessment of capacity for reflection as well as the assessment of students’ academic performance. 10 15

A number of conceptual models have been developed to distinguish between different approaches to the practice of S/CBL. “Transactional” models are characterised by an exchange process, with the community conceived of as recipient of a service while students gain academic credit for experiential learning. Such exchanges leave underlying conditions unchanged at best, or even worse in the wake of withdrawal of a needed service to the community. “Transformative” potential may tend towards a focus on student or civic outcomes. Transformative models, for students, aim to lead to greater understanding, appreciation, empathy, and capacity for critique on the part of students. Transformative models which focus civic outcomes seek to question and to change the circumstances, conditions, values or beliefs which are at the root of a community’s or society’s need (Jacoby, 2003; Welch, 2006). Butin (2010) conceptualises how service learning is articulated in the literature and enacted in the field as “technical”, “cultural”, “political”, and “anti-foundational”, capturing diverse ways in which universities engage with community. I suggest that these various typologies are potentially useful when considering all forms of civic engagement, e.g. research, outreach, partnerships, in terms of their rationale, modus operandi, and impact. 20 25 30

Measuring “Performance” and Mapping Higher Education

Performance indicators are statistical indicators intended to offer a consistent measure of how institutions are performing. Part of the rationale for their development and use is that they are claimed to provide reliable information on the nature and performance of the higher education sector. While the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2010) claims that they are not intended to serve as league tables for comparing HEIs against one another, users of these indicators may not necessarily share this view. The outcomes of the process are often used to inform policy 35 40



developments and they are lauded for how they contribute to the public accountability of higher education. Within the UK, for example, performance indicators provide comparative data on the performance of publicly-funded institutions in spheres such as widening participation, student retention, learning, and teaching outcomes, research output and employment of graduates. Within Ireland, a project is under way to establish an agreed common set of key performance indicators to provide university management with comprehensive and integrated information for decision support, strategy development, and external benchmarking (Irish Universities Association, 2007). The state-funded project is explicitly linked to the ongoing process of university reform.

It seems reasonable to anticipate that, however challenging it may be to reach agreement on their purpose and form—especially for such a diverse and dynamic sector—performance indicators are likely to endure as a feature of higher education for the foreseeable future. For those concerned with advancing civic engagement, (K)PIs could be regarded as a serious threat. They could, on the other hand, be regarded as a potential opportunity if they can be extended and adapted to incorporate the diversity of activities, processes, and outcomes that constitute civic engagement. Emerging methodologies offer interesting examples of how diversity in mission could be represented. A recent initiative, supported by the European Commission—U-mapping—aims to develop a multidimensional classification tool which captures and makes transparent the diversity of missions within higher education (van Vught et al., 2010). The methodology is offered as a descriptive and non-hierarchical tool, as an alternative to ranking. It includes a range of indicators across six dimensions: teaching and learning profile, student profile, research involvement, involvement in knowledge exchange, international orientation, and regional development (van Vught, 2010). While the indicators adopted for regional engagement may be relatively narrow, U-mapping offers a potentially interesting model within which a broader range of indicators of civic engagement could be incorporated. The range of organisations currently attempting to develop appropriate benchmarking methodologies and indicators for civic engagement is evidence, perhaps, of the time-honoured strategy—“if you can’t beat them, join them”.

Auditing, Benchmarking, and Evaluating Civic Engagement

One of the main challenges facing any HEI embarking on audit, benchmarking and evaluation of its public engagement activity is to reconcile a diversity of local, national and international interests regarding both the conceptualisation and practice of civic engagement. (Hart et al., 2009, p. 13)

In their review of the literature, Hart et al. (2009) note that the development of effective audit and evaluation tools for university public engagement is at a formative stage in the UK. Elsewhere, in the USA (by Campus Compact) and Australia (by Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance, 2006), the development of national and international benchmarks for engagement activity is arguably at a more advanced stage. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the range of



approaches in use, (refer to Hart et al. (2009) in relation to “public engagement” and Molas-Gallart et al. (2002) for “third stream” activities). An important distinction is made between the purpose and methodology associated with audit, benchmarking, and evaluation. Hart et al. (2009) suggest that a range of possible reasons exist for developing indicators of civic engagement—such as capturing change over time, external verification, or comparing with what others are doing. The particular purpose, they claim, needs to be borne in mind when deciding on an approach. It is notable, indeed surprising, that they neglect to include the aim of incentivising the relevant activities—a function which may, in practice, be of critical importance in ensuring the sustainability of civic engagement.

Many conceptions of civic engagement do not lend themselves easily to translatable objectives or measurable indicators. Garlick and Pryor (2002), for example, identify criteria for an engaged university which include a policy environment that supports engagement and where engagement work is publicised and celebrated. In contrast, many of the criteria associated with third stream activities lend themselves more readily to quantification, e.g. number of patents granted, number of staff employed in start-up companies. Moreover, as highlighted by Watson (2007) internal tensions exist between some civic engagement objectives, especially when it is not clear what priority is afforded to them. In their survey of civic engagement, Campus Engage⁷ seeks qualitative and quantitative data in relation to a diversity of activities—service/ community-based learning; community-engaged research; student volunteering, community/economic regeneration, capacity-building; community–campus partnerships, and access/widening participation—categories which are sometimes interpreted differently by the institutions responding.

There is a real risk, of course, of measurement fatigue. Molas-Gallart et al. (2002) allude to the lack of enthusiasm for measurement activities among UK universities. In light of the limited resources available, they claim that indicators for third stream activities will need to employ a new—and by implication, separate—approach to university indicator collection and management. I make the case that while initial audits may be important in identifying appropriate methodologies and indicators of civic engagement, incorporation into the routine data collection strategies will be central to normalising civic engagement as an integral feature of higher education.

An important distinction between various attempts to measure civic engagement is the extent to which they are incorporated within or regarded as tangential to the key performance indicators which are used to inform policy, including funding decisions. Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (2006), for example, advocates the inclusion of engagement as part of institutional profile assessments by government and as part of the AUQA assessment regime. The REAP approach (Pearce, Pearson, & Cameron, 2007), on the other hand, measures community engagement using a self-assessment tool designed to measure inputs, processes, and outcomes for the university and its community partners. While it is premature to assess the effectiveness of these various ongoing attempts to develop tools to audit, benchmark or evaluate civic engagement, the significance of purpose is incontrovertible.



Insights from a Research Study: Selected findings

At this juncture, I draw on some of the findings from a study of the policy, process, and practice of embedding a civic engagement dimension within the higher education curriculum in Ireland (Boland, 2008). One of the research questions related to the rationale for civic engagement and how it was conceived of by relevant key actors. Other research questions—not of direct relevance to this paper—concerned aspects of the curriculum development process and academic practice.

This multi-site case study was conducted in the spirit of naturalistic enquiry and within the interpretative paradigm. Using an approach which combined purposeful sampling and theoretical replication (Yin, 2003), four cases of community-based learning projects were selected in four different institutions which provided a basis for comparison and contrast in terms of potentially relevant features. These included institution type, nature of the CBL project, level of institutional support, tenure of the key academic, and the disciplinary context. These four cases (two each from the university and extra-university sectors) were studied in depth, over a three-year period, with particular attention to the significance of context—institutional, disciplinary, and national policy (refer to Boland, 2008 for profiles of each case study).

Unstructured interviews and documents served as the main sources of primary data. Participants were selected on the basis of their relationship to the community-based learning project and identified accordingly as “embedders”, “co-operating-colleagues”, “facilitators”, “enablers”, “link persons”, and “strategists”. They were further categorised according to other attributes, such as their gender, discipline, and formal position within the institution (e.g. president/director, academic, educational developer, etc.). Forty-one interviews were conducted with 31 participants within the institutions and with four external actors from the national or international policy context, totalling 46 hours and over 450,000 words.

The data-analysis process drew on techniques of thematic analysis (Ezzy, 2002), grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the comparative method (Ragin, 1987), and cross-site analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using the facilities of a CAQDAS package (NVivo7), the process of data analysis first led to the development of a thematic framework (of concepts and categories) which focused on three themes: (1) rationale or motivation; (2) the process of embedding a civic dimension within the curriculum; and (3) factors influencing academics’ willingness and capacity to adopt and sustain community-based learning. Once the thematic framework was established, the query tools of NVivo7 facilitated the generation of further analytical categories and the testing of a series of emerging propositional statements.

The concept of “orientation” proved apt as a device for considering different rationale/motivations in respect of civic engagement. Land (2000, p. 13) uses the term to denote analytical categories that include “attitudes, knowledge, aims, and action tendencies” which influence the actions and the strategic conduct of individuals. In the course of coding the interview data, four broad “orientations” to civic engagement were discerned, as espoused by participants, as attributed to them by

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others or as inferred from their discourse. A typology of “orientations” to civic engagement was identified as follows:

- *Personal orientation*: a rationale deriving from personal beliefs, values, and experience. 5
- *Student/learning orientation*: a rationale focused on student learning and benefits to students.
- *Civic orientation*: a rationale centred on concern for civic/social issues, which was subsequently sub-divided into Civic (local) and Civic (broad)
- *Higher education orientation*: a rationale focused on the role, purpose, and interests of higher education. 10

Once these conceptual categories were created it was possible, using the functionality of NVivo7 (matrix queries and validation processes), to run further queries to explore the prevalence of these orientations among participant groupings and cases with reference to the various defined attributes. 15

For such a study of policy, process, and practice in respect of a phenomenon at a particular point in time in Ireland, questions inevitably arise regarding representativeness, generalisability, and relevance beyond the scope of these four cases and this particular context. The use of a multi-site strategy enhanced the credibility of the conclusions and the inclusion of rich descriptions of the cases aided the process of naturalistic generalisation. While few in number, the four selected sites provided ample contrast across the two sectors of Irish higher education. Mindful of Stake’s (2005) claims regarding the value of the particular, I offer relevant findings from this study as a contribution to advancing our understanding of the very idea of civic engagement and, for the purpose of this discussion, to the potential impact of attempting to measure it. 20
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The Significance of Orientation and Rationale for Sustainability

For academics with lead responsibility for these initiatives, the interests of students and enhancement of student learning were the primary motivators, while their beliefs about education provided an important foundation. Other actors in the study, such as “strategists”, who generally held senior management positions, were more likely to espouse a civic orientation. Orientation to civic engagement had implications for the sustainability of civic engagement practices. Continued involvement represented the exercise of choice by individual academics and resulted from the interplay of a complex range of factors. These included concerns over time and workload, absence of recognition, level of institutional support, academics’ breadth of responsibilities, the complexity of the project and the level of challenges encountered. The impact of negative factors arising from challenging projects and/or institutional contexts was often ameliorated by a strong conviction regarding the potential for enhanced student learning. The transformative potential of projects for local communities served as an important incentivising factor for those with a strong (local) civic orientation. Where projects 30
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were complex or challenging, sustainability was enhanced when civic values (e.g. diversity, citizenship or social justice) were central to the parent discipline (Boland, 2008, 2010).

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Legitimisation Strategies

In seeking legitimacy for S/CBL as a mode of teaching and learning, strategies used by participants in this study included linking it closely to their academic discipline and highlighting the wider benefits to be gained for students. Within the literature, proponents of service learning highlight the benefits to be gained by constructing it as a pedagogical tool, claiming that integration within the curriculum can lead to successful incorporation and to legitimacy as an academic practice. The strong disciplinary focus adopted in these case studies supports Zlotkowski's (1995) assertion that survival is enhanced by strong association with an academic discipline. The experience of sustainable projects within the study also supports Lounsbury and Pollack's (2001) assertion that re-configuring of S/CBL, with a greater emphasis on the more "measurable" (cognitive) outcomes, has diminished its ability to legitimately pursue the civic outcomes originally associated with the pedagogy. There is evidence in this study, for example, that sustainability was often achieved by marginalising more challenging and counter-normative assessment methodologies, e.g. assessment of reflection. This trend of reorientation toward the measurable mirrors similar trends which have been identified at institutional level within higher education.

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Measuring, Rewarding, and Incentivising Civic Engagement

Some parallels can be found between issues associated with recognition of civically engaged teaching and those pertaining to recognition of civic engagement within higher education, discussed above. The extent to which the civic/service dimension of academic work is undervalued and invisible—"below the radar"—was widely acknowledged and was a source of some frustration. They (CBL projects) are "on the list, but ... they're not on a par with peer reviewed journals or anything like that ... They're very good publicity for the university and there's a cynicism around that which I think is very unfortunate. But I think there needs to be some kind of official recognition" (Embedder).

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Efforts to ensure greater recognition were linked to thorny issues of addressing academic workload:

So the whole idea of academic rewards, academic work loads is a big issue and it should be tackled, but it probably should be tackled on all fronts at once. But as soon as you start saying we should award this more than that, then you get all sorts of problems. (Senior administrator)

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Linking with other core areas of activity was advocated as a means of enhancing the credibility of civic engagement work, by connecting it with research activity or by including it in criteria for promotion. Aligning civic engagement achievements more



closely with other strategic goals of the institution was mooted, for example, but not necessarily on equal terms:

I'm not necessarily saying they should get equal preference, during their review, to whatever they're doing in teaching or any major research that they're doing. But the problem is that at the moment it's looked at but it's not counted, if you know what I mean. So I think the whole recruitment and promotion activities within the university have got to mirror what we're trying to do as an institution. (Strategist)

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Contrasting attitudes to the issue of academic reward confirmed fundamental differences in how S/CBL is conceived of and positioned—as a teaching and learning methodology, as an instrument of an institution's civic engagement strategy or as both. This unresolved positioning contributed to a perception that it was regarded as less than central to the “real business” of the institution. One strategist, with a specific brief to foster civic engagement, states that, in spite of her efforts to do so:

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... for some, I think you don't get them away from the idea that it's not volunteering; the vice president for research would think this is totally minor, nice stuff but not, not the real business. (Strategist)

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It is important to acknowledge that concern for formal recognition and reward was not universally shared:

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I have never been rewarded for any of the things that I have done, that I would regard as civic engagement. I would not wish to be, I think it's completely different to teaching, which is part of my job. Civic engagement is not part of my job. It will inform my job, it will make me do my job better. (Enabler)

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Notwithstanding the variety of perspectives encountered, however, the extent to which civic engagement is regarded as a legitimate and valued part of the academic role was found to be of critical importance to its sustainability. While issues of time and workload represent serious obstacles for academics and while many of the organisational issues prove challenging, the absence of recognition or extrinsic reward is more likely to act as a disincentive in the longer term.

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Ambivalence about the Role of Academics in the Civic Sphere

One of the salient sources of ambivalence in the study concerned how academics conceived of their role as educators and the place of norms and values in that context. It is acknowledged that the very nature of the academic role and the boundaries between different elements of that role have become less certain, especially as the nexus between research and teaching gains greater attention (Jenkins, Breen, & Lindsay, 2003). The findings from this study confirm the phenomenon noted, by Macfarlane (2007), that the service or citizenship role of the academic remains uncertain and less esteemed. Community-based learning was widely regarded by all academics as something which, unlike most other responsibilities or expectations associated with their role, they elected to do:

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The reality, I think, is that a lot of it will be down to individual personalities. It's the people who want to get involved politically or want to get involved societally who will be very keen to do these types of things but there is a real ambivalence to it, absolutely, yes. (Educational developer)

5 This ambivalence about the legitimacy of civic engagement as part of an academic's role is accounted for, in part, by the growing, competing demands on academic staff. Parallels can be found within higher education more generally:

10 Yeah, nobody has time for it, you know, because you've got to get an application in by tomorrow for funding and ... we are embroiled in a particular system and a model at the moment, and you either get out of it or you stay in it ... Are we supposed to be doing this? This is not in my contract; this is not part of my remit. (Embedder)

15 Ambivalence about the appropriateness, within higher education, of what some regarded as a form of "civic education" and an antipathy to the idea of norms and values co-existed with unease about the problematic values which underpinned some relationships with community. The inherently political nature of the curriculum—asserted by Simon (1994)—is at its most obvious in a pedagogy which espouses civic goals. Academics inculcated in certain disciplinary values, norms, and knowledge-making practices, however, were not always equipped to deal with issues which arise in a dialogic academic practice which involves collaboration with community as partners. The diversity of perspectives on the legitimacy of civic engagement within the academic role has significance for the wider debate about its place within higher education. Paradoxically, it was possible to detect evidence of a risk that, in an increasingly managerialist culture, strategic institutional commitment to civic engagement—and attempts to incentivise it—could be viewed with some scepticism by academics, even prompting a degree of resistance:

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30 There's always maybe a genuine critique that this stuff isn't going to have any real impact on the community and there's a critique of the fact that it's just kind of a PR stunt or its part of the strategy document that just makes the university look good. So there's a sense that "well I'm not being told what to do, I was employed to teach the people who come to my class". (Embedder)

Conclusions

35 The map of contemporary higher education is changing and will continue to do so in response to challenging contexts and society's changing needs. There is clearly a desire among universities to find ways to engage meaningfully with community and to be more relevant to society. If we wish to protect and foster a diversity of initiatives which reflect that desire then we need to ensure their inclusion in the methodologies designed to capture the present and map the future of the sector. Factors which contribute to or threaten the sustainability of community-based learning are equally pertinent to civic engagement at institutional and at sectoral level. Parallels can be discerned regarding the significance of rationale or orientation, the need for recognition and reward and the value of alignment with internal and external policy priorities. The orientation of key actors—particularly academic staff—is highly



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Positioning Civic Engagement on the Higher Education Landscape 113

significant. Engagement with community and society continues to involve decisions by individual key actors within the institution—students, academics, researchers, and strategists. Within contemporary academic environments, with competing demands on resources, time, and attention, civic engagement needs to be incentivised if it is to be sustained. Building collaborative partnerships with community, whether in the context of teaching and learning, research, outreach or other public engagement activities, is demanding and challenging. The scope for scepticism within a managerialist culture is such that genuine efforts to recognise civic engagement need to be matched with promotion policies and models of academic workload profiling that recognise and reward efforts and achievements in this domain. For civic engagement to flourish as a sustainable activity, it needs to feature explicitly in a wide range of policies and processes at all levels of the institution and the sector. It needs to be positioned firmly and indelibly on the map.

The emergence of drivers (such as KPIs) and new mapping methodologies which capture diversity of mission (such as U-mapping) represents a potentially positive opportunity, if ways can be found to make visible an institution’s range of civic engagement activities and outcomes. Ongoing attempts to design tools to audit, benchmark, and map civic engagement activity represent a promising step towards identifying appropriate quantitative and qualitative indicators of civic engagement. These could provide the means to recognise, valorise, and promote a civically engaged way of accomplishing the goals of higher education by academics, academic units, institutions, and the sector in general. This desired impact could be realised if key indicators were agreed, endorsed by external stakeholders and—critically—incorporated as an integral part of the process by which the sector is monitored, evaluated, and funded. Such an outcome could help strengthen and assure the future sustainability of missions, policies, and practices which connect university and society.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. See http://www.nuigalway.ie/education/staff/josephine_boland/index.html
2. See <http://www.campusengage.ie>
3. See <http://www.e3mproject.eu>
4. See <http://www.campusengage.ie>
5. See <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/vision/engaged.html>.
6. In Europe, variations on the term “community-based learning” are often used in preference to “Service learning”, which originated in the US.
7. See <http://www.campusengage.ie/site/view/244>. Final Report launched in February 2011.

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