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## Orientations to civic engagement: insights into the sustainability of a challenging pedagogy

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Civic engagement in higher education encompasses a diversity of goals, strategies and activities. These include particular approaches to teaching and learning – community-based or service learning – which share an explicit civic focus and combine the features of experiential learning with opportunities for engagement. A range of ‘orientations’ towards civic engagement can be discerned amongst those associated with these initiatives, reflecting different values and priorities. These orientations inform a diversity of academic strategies and practices and have consequences for sustainability. This article draws on findings from a multi-site case study within Irish higher education, and reports how aspects of this nascent but growing phenomenon highlight some of the tensions, paradoxes and sources of ambivalence which are characteristic of contemporary higher education. The findings highlight the challenge of reconciling competing goals and values within higher education for those seeking to infuse the curriculum with a sense of the civic.

**Keywords:** civic engagement; orientations to practice; service learning; community-based learning; academic role

### Introduction

Civic engagement, as espoused in many institutional missions, encompasses a diversity of goals, strategies and activities. The concept of *engagement* is arguably intrinsic to the idea – and the ideal – of higher education (Bjarnason and Coldstream 2003). Increasingly, engagement of a civic nature is posited as a significant aspect of this ideal. The range of competing discourses and imperatives which characterises contemporary higher education, however, poses a challenging context within which to advance the goal of civic engagement. The diversity of conceptions of civic engagement (where it is often conflated with the ‘third stream’) adds to this challenge and reflects its tenuous status and multi-faceted rationale (Gonzalez-Perez, MacLabhrainn, and McIlrath 2007; Slowey 2003; Watson 2003).

Within the broad church of civic engagement activities, particular approaches to teaching and learning have developed which have an explicit civic focus, and combine the principles of experiential learning with the notion of service: e.g. service- or community-based learning (Annette 2005). These strategies also resonate with recent re-conceptualisations of the ‘engaged curriculum’ (Barnett and Coate 2005), and represent potential counter examples to what Cowan (2005) refers to as the ‘atrophy of the affect’ in higher education. There is an expanding corpus of

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literature relating to the principles and practice of service learning with, latterly, some attention to the nature of the relationship with community (Jacoby 2003), and to the process of institutionalisation within higher education (Furco and Miller 2009; Watson 2007). While the inherent tensions posed by a counter-normative pedagogy are recognised (Kezar and Rhoads 2001), less attention has been afforded to the implications for academics in terms of their role and identity, or to the significance of their orientation to civic engagement in this endeavour.

This article explores how the process of embedding such a pedagogy highlights some of the tensions, paradoxes and sources of ambivalence which are characteristic of contemporary higher education. It is concerned with the coexistence of diverse 'orientations' to civic engagement in the context of these curriculum practices, and with the implications thereof. The article draws on just one element of my study of the policy, process and practice of embedding civic engagement within the curriculum within Irish higher education (Boland 2008) – that which focused on the rationale for civic engagement and the question of sustainability. While the findings derive from research undertaken in a particular context, they are of potential relevance to practitioners and policymakers in an international context. The article attempts to address the imbalance within the civic engagement literature, where US scholarly work has dominated to date. The context of Irish higher education, within which the phenomenon of civic engagement must be understood, has arguably more in common with that prevailing in the UK and the rest of Europe, than with that in the US. The research is also timely, given the growing interest in civic engagement as exemplified by the emergence of a number of national and transnational networks such as the Talloires Network (<http://www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork/>), Science Shops (<http://www.scienceshops.org/>), Beacons for Public Engagement (<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>) and Campus Engage (<http://www.campusengage.ie/>). The argument is also informed by my experience as a practitioner of this pedagogy (Boland 2010) and in supporting academics as they design a curriculum for civic engagement.

## Concepts and processes

### *A pedagogy for civic engagement – key features and challenges*

The terms 'community-based learning' and 'service learning' are used variously for a teaching and learning strategy which I have named 'pedagogy for civic engagement' (Boland 2008). The term 'service learning' is favoured in the US, while elsewhere (including in Ireland and the United Kingdom) 'community-based learning' is also commonly used. This teaching and learning strategy is designed to actively engage students in the learning process in a reflective and critical way, through interaction and engagement in the community or civic sphere. It involves active consideration of wider civic/social issues in the specific context of the student's area of academic study. A defining feature is its explicit civic focus, where the design and enactment of the curriculum are underpinned with a rationale which invokes – to varying extents – concepts such as active citizenship, democracy, social justice, community and civic engagement, while simultaneously advancing the goal of enhanced student learning. Reflection is the tool with which students are generally expected to deepen their learning. Community-based/service learning is espoused for its potential to realise academic, civic and personal development goals for students while meeting an identified need of a community/civic partner (Kezar and Rhoads 2001).

‘Service’ to the not-for-profit/voluntary sector is typically presented as the feature which distinguishes it from workplace learning, while the award of academic credit for learning distinguishes it from volunteering. It is notable that, in recent times, this exclusive focus on the community/not-for-profit sector has been contested (Simola 2009).

A key principle of the pedagogy is its focus on real issues which are of relevance to the community, combined with negotiation with a community partner as a valued actor in a learning triad of student, university and community. This learning triad is, in models of best practice, underpinned by the principles of partnership and reciprocity. Establishing and maintaining such relationships, however, proves one of the most demanding and problematic areas, not merely in terms of the time and effort involved, but also when diverse expectations, issues of sustainability and the impact of withdrawal are taken into account. These experiences and tensions are closely connected with competing conceptions of community. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2006), for example, critique the representation of ‘community’ within the service-learning literature in the US, claiming that it perpetuates a construction of higher education as ‘experts’ and communities as ‘beneficiaries of their remedies’. This phenomenon is exemplified in the preponderance of ‘doing for’ – which they characterise as a hierarchical relationship – over ‘doing with’, where service is characterised by mutuality and reciprocity.

It is possible to discern, from the literature, a continuum of approaches to the pedagogy as follows:

- (1) Transactional models which are characterised by an exchange process with the community as recipient of a service, while students gain academic credit for experiential learning, leaving conditions unchanged at best.
- (2) Transformative models (for the student) which lead to deeper understanding and a capacity for empathy or even action on the part of student.
- (3) Transformative models (at community/societal level) which aim to question and change the circumstances, conditions, values or beliefs which are at the root of community/society needs.

The emphasis, in such models, is on public problem solving (Jacoby 2003; Welch 2006). As competing conceptual models proliferate in the scholarly literature, academic practices have attempted to extend civic engagement practice, reflecting the principles of emancipatory education espoused by Habermas and Freire (Avila 2006).

### ***Planning a curriculum for civic engagement***

The construction of curricula as ‘value-neutral’ text is a well-established convention in higher education, consistent with the ideals of a liberal education, based on the principle of universalism. The inherently political nature of the education project, however, is reasserted by Simon (1994). Moreover, the role of values and beliefs in the curriculum process is one of the most neglected aspects of curriculum enquiry. Toohey (1999) attends to the significance of beliefs, values and ideologies in course design, claiming that tacit beliefs about education are not purely an individual matter. They surface in the language used to describe educational goals, and in the choices made about what is to be taught and assessed, and how. Jackson and Shaw (2002) offer their model as an alternative to the classic linear rational model which, they suggest, fails to adequately

reflect the pragmatic, iterative and collegiate approaches of the curriculum design process.

Jackson and Shaw (2002) claim that, in the real world of curriculum making, the primary concern and interest of most academics is the subject content of what they teach within that part of the course for which they are responsible. There is evidence that how academics think about teaching, learning and assessment will affect the strategies they are prepared to use (Prosser et al. 1997; Samuelowicz and Bain 2002). A number of empirical studies have attempted to discern and classify 'orientation' to academic practice (Norton et al. 2005; Samuelowicz and Bain 2002; Wellington and Austin 1996). There is a growing body of research concerned with how differences in orientation and academic practice are associated with particular disciplinary cultures (Becher and Trowler 2001; Oliver and Plewes 2002).

This cumulative literature highlights the potential significance of the values, beliefs and conceptions of academics. Hence, the concept of 'orientation' is of particular relevance when exploring academics' willingness to embed civic values within the curriculum, their approach to doing so and their capacity to sustain this counternormative endeavour. Land (2004, 13) uses the term 'orientation' to denote analytical categories that 'include the attitudes, knowledge, aims and action tendencies of educational developers in relation to the context and challenges of their practice'. He notes that they are neither innate nor fixed. He claims that orientation influences action, and that the strategic conduct of individuals can be characterised by an orientation to their practice. The term 'orientation' has also been used by Wynne (2009) to denote an approach to civic engagement, at a macro institution-wide level, which involves acceptance of an attitude, a way of doing things and a way of operationalising core values as integral to the day-to-day business of the university. She describes such an orientation as an informing purpose of the university.

### **The role of the academic in a pedagogy for civic engagement**

The advent of community-based/service learning initiatives is consistent with evidence offered by Paterson and Bond (2005) that many academics subscribe to a civic role for higher education. Potentially, that claim runs counter to trends such as the retreat from academic citizenship posited by Macfarlane (2005). Community-based learning involves a fundamental shift of focus and power in the teaching/learning relationship and, potentially, in the relationships between the university, its staff and students and community partners (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2006). The challenges of such ventures are appreciable, and raise critical issues of academic role and identity. The role of the academic in this endeavour, however, is rarely explored or problematised. Other than rare insights on personal motivation through autobiographic accounts (Fear et al. 2006), and a limited corpus of empirical research (Hammond 1994; McMillan 2011), this is an under-researched area.

The relative invisibility of the academic in the discourse of service learning may be partly accounted for by the predominant focus on the benefits for learners and, more recently, on the nature of community partnerships. Some recognition of academics' potential involvement in service learning can be discerned within the larger scheme of 'academic citizenship', as mapped by Macfarlane (2007) in his service pyramid. He includes the tradition of integrating service into the curriculum towards the bottom of the pyramid, citing service learning as an example. He reports his respondents' strong sense that service learning work improves the

quality of student learning and that benefits accrue from their own professional perspective:

Although time consuming to establish, such programmes provided a number of gains. The use of applied examples in class, the writing of case studies or the building of relationships leading to research opportunities or scholarly interest were among the benefits derived. (67)

Macfarlane's respondents' apparent failure to connect their involvement in service learning with their *public* service role (which he positions at the top of the pyramid) is relevant and illuminating. In his study of faculty motivation, Hammond (1994) found that a majority get involved for academic rather than for community/civic reasons. Lounsbury and Pollack (2001) and others have noted the need for staff to spend time in and with the community, building relationships that enable their students to have a meaningful learning experience. Academics' conception of civic engagement as a service to students – to facilitate student learning – rather than as 'public' service is relevant for how they conceive of their role, and for their willingness to embed a civic-oriented pedagogy within the curriculum.

Efforts have been made recently to reconfigure the service role, and to explore the nexus between service and other aspects of academic life. Boyer's extended paradigm of scholarly activity is commonly invoked, where he identifies *scholarship of engagement* – the understanding and solving of pressing social, civic and ethical problems – with the other dimensions of scholarship (Boyer 1990, 1996). This paradigm is frequently invoked as a rationale for civic engagement as a form of scholarship connecting the intellectual resources of the institution to public issues, such as community, social, cultural, human and economic development (Holland 2001). Karlsson (2007) critiques conceptions of service which promote a patriarchal 'expert' position for the university, and advocates the creation of new knowledge through 'interactivity' with practitioners in a complementary and mutually enriching manner. These conceptions of scholarship and collaboration resonate strongly with a civically transformative, rather than transactional, model of community-based/service learning.

### Research methodology

The study was designed to address a number of research questions relating to the policy, process and practice of embedding a civic engagement dimension within the higher education curriculum in Ireland. The research questions related to rationale, how a civic engagement dimension was conceived of, interpreted and operationalised within the curriculum, and the factors influencing academics' willingness and capacity to embed the pedagogy, with attention throughout to the significance of context.

The study was conducted using a multi-site case study methodology in the spirit of naturalistic enquiry and within the interpretative paradigm. Four cases of curriculum innovation in four different higher education institutions were studied in depth over a three-year period – each project served as the unit of analysis. The multi-site case study was informed by a number of case study methodologies (Bassegy 1999; Gomm, Hammersley, and Foster 2000; Stake 1995; Yin 2003). Using an approach which combined purposeful sampling and theoretical replication, four projects were selected in four different institutions, which provided a basis for comparison and contrast in terms of potentially relevant features. Factors which featured in the sampling



frame included institution type, level of support for the initiative, nature of the project design, tenure of the relevant academic and the disciplinary context. Projects were drawn from two universities and two institutes of technology; one pre-1900 and one post-1970, in each institution type. They were based within the disciplines of engineering, psychology, art and a multidisciplinary initiative involving communications, cultural studies and education; two projects were relatively low profile and two enjoyed some recognition. Projects were selected to ensure inclusion of academics with a range of levels of seniority; academics being those with responsibility for teaching, research and administration/contribution to wider community. Participants in the study were selected on the basis of their relationship to the community-based/service learning module/project, and named on that basis: i.e. as embedders, co-operating colleagues, facilitators, enablers, link persons and strategists. These titles were assigned as part of the research design process, and in some cases emerged as roles became clear. Roles were generally assumed by individuals voluntarily (e.g. enablers or co-operating colleagues), while some were an integral part of a professional function (e.g. 'facilitators' such as educational developers). The central actor in each case was the embedder. Participants were subsequently categorised for the purpose of data analysis according to these and other attributes, such as their formal position within the institution, gender and prior experience in the broad area of civic engagement. Unstructured interviews and documents served as the main sources of primary data. Forty-one interviews were conducted with thirty-one participants within the institutions, and with four external actors from the national or international policy context.

### *Overview of the projects*

In the *Bystander Project* groups of students of applied psychology gained a critical insight into the nature of altruism by working in a real-world setting with not-for-profit organisations such as those addressing homelessness or suicide. In *Art in the Community* students worked on art-orientated projects in community settings: e.g. women's groups, community centres or prisons. In *Designing Solutions for Community*, engineering students applied their knowledge and skills to designing a tool, device or other outcome that related directly to a real and expressed need in the community, while interacting with people of different backgrounds in a role of service. In *Celebrating Difference* – a cross-disciplinary, community-led initiative – students of communications, education and cultural studies collaborated to produce a range of oral and audio-visual resources aimed at combating racism in the local community. Other than the last case, projects were initiated by the relevant embedder, reflecting the bottom-up approach which prevailed at that nascent stage of community-based/service learning within Irish higher education.

### *Deriving a thematic framework and a typology of orientations*

The process of data analysis, using the facilities and functionality of NVivo7, led to the development of a thematic framework (concepts and categories) focused on three themes: (i) underpinning rationale, (ii) the process of embedding a civic dimension within the curriculum, and (iii) factors influencing academics' willingness and capacity to embed such a dimension. 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. As noted earlier, the concept

of ‘*orientation*’ proved apt as a device when thinking about different kinds of rationale/motivation – one of the key themes within the framework. I derived a typology of ‘orientations’ towards civic engagement, reflecting the respective influence of various sets of conceptions, practices and values. The orientations identified were as follows:

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

Once these conceptual categories were created, it was possible to run further queries to explore the prevalence of these orientations among participants, with reference to the various attributes by which they could be described. For the purpose of analysis, participants were grouped with reference to such attributes as (i) connection to the project, (ii) formal position, (iii) disciplinary background, and (iv) gender. With the caveat that, in the context of a multi-site case study, the number in each category was small, I provide a summary of some key findings.

## **Findings**

### ***Orientations to pedagogy for civic engagement***

The ‘personal’ orientation prevailed in all cases and for most categories of participants. The range of beliefs, values, attitudes and formative experiences which contributed to this orientation was wide and varied. It included prior experience working as a volunteer, beliefs about the value of experiential learning, commitment to the concept of citizenship, concern for widening participation based on personal experience/background, and inability to turn down a challenging opportunity to be innovative. Within the ‘student/learning’ orientation it was possible to identify a number of closely related motivations. These included hopes of promoting deeper student learning, enhancing personal development, realising cross-curricular goals, providing opportunities for vocational preparation, developing transferable skills, giving students insights into prospective career choices, exposing students to life in the ‘real world’, and giving them opportunities to work in unfamiliar contexts characterised by diversity. The expectation of positive benefits for students provided a powerful incentive for academics, and these were often closely linked to the specific discipline. Appreciation of the opportunity to facilitate personal growth recurred throughout and, for some, this represented a pragmatic response to the expressed needs of employers:

And they were saying ‘Great. You’ve really good graduates, they’ve come with first class honours but they can’t talk to us, they’ve no soft skills, we’ve no evidence of what they’ve done outside their 20 hours a week in the library and 20 hours lectures’. (Facilitator)

Within the ‘civic’ orientation it was possible to discern two distinct ways in which it was manifest – local and broad civic. Most commonly, a civic orientation centred on



the local community and issues therein, such as educational disadvantage, homelessness, or racism:

[We're located in] a relatively poor area so there is a sort of back drop of deprived areas. So when these lecturers look out, they think their students should be made more aware of the actual reality of aspects of city life for many of the people who dwell [here].  
(Facilitator)

Concern for local issues and community needs far out-weighed broader, less tangible social/civic concerns of national or global significance, such as citizenship, democracy or equality. 'Community', which features as a dominant concept for those displaying a 'civic' orientation, was commonly constructed as local and as an entity with needs and problems – this phenomenon is evident amongst all categories of participants. A local civic orientation was most evident amongst those affiliated to institutions located in close proximity to areas of disadvantage. With few exceptions, motivation to engage civically was articulated without any reference to the range of theoretical concepts which feature in the literature, or in political discourse regarding civic engagement:

They talk about homelessness, shelters. They talk to me a bit about the little old nun who was nearly 89, and she still runs one of the local food distribution centres. And they felt really guilty, because she's 89, and she is still doing it, 50 on. And some of them who had done it for 10 or 15 years had given up, and they are much younger, so they would talk about 'feeling bad', about 'feeling bad about the nun', but they don't talk yet about civic engagement and social capital. (Facilitator)

Citizenship, democracy and civic society rarely featured in the discourse of those directly concerned with the practice of community-based/service learning, other than of those with a deep personal conviction or for whom it is a central tenet of their discipline, as in the case of one teacher educator:

I've always had a very strong commitment to the concept of citizenship and inclusive citizenship and what that actually means, and the rights and responsibilities that go with it.  
(Embedder)

The role, purpose and interest of higher education was least cited as a source of a rationale. Within this 'higher education' orientation, diverse perspectives can be found, ranging from firm conviction about higher education's civic purpose, to more pragmatic perspectives on how community-based/service learning might help differentiate between institutions in an increasingly competitive market. The role of higher education as a public good featured in the argument advanced by but a few:

Habermas talks about the public good and what it means to be a public institution. A lot of the debate around the modernisation of universities has been an attack on the possibility that ... by being commercially focused a lot of the universities are leaving behind the public reason for existing. And from my perspective ... we're not just here to produce students. We're not just here to help industry. We're here to have a social and economic impact on our greater community. (Strategist)

These sentiments exemplify some of the inherent tensions in the contemporary discourse of higher education. Having a 'commercial' focus is represented as a potential threat undermining the public purpose of higher education – yet institutions are expected to have an economic impact on the greater community. Throughout each of the cases,

there was a sense that involvement in community-based/service learning goes against the grain for academics, that it is counternormative, as suggested by Howard (1998), and that it represents ‘boundary work’ as described by McMillan (2011). When articulating her vision of the university as an agent for social change with other staff, one key actor realises that it is not shared and that ‘I would be perceived as being totally mad and crazy’ (Facilitator). The metaphor of ‘going against the flow’ was echoed in all four sites:

And, you know, it’s a tricky one because I think we know, strategically, where things are going in terms of the broader picture so we are to all intents and purposes going against the flow a lot of the time. We know we’re doing that but you’ve got to keep doing it, I suppose you can’t stop. (Embedder)

### *Multifaceted rationale – diverse orientations, different perspectives*

As Land (2004) notes, orientations are neither innate nor fixed. In the case of orientations to civic engagement, few subscribe to one orientation only. This multifaceted rationale is highlighted in how community-based/service learning was conceived of as a means of fulfilling a number of objectives, thereby reflecting several orientations:

As far as I remember, that’s where that particular project came out of originally, because there was a certain need that [area] had. Our guys were interested from a research point of view and from a teaching point of view, and thought this would be a good idea for the students. So is it citizenship? Yeah, I would say it would be. Now they may say ‘well, we did it because this was a good project from a student point of view’. It’s still citizenship at the end of the day, whether we call it that or not. (Strategist)

Personal convictions were often mediated through a professional role. Academic leaders, for example, held a strong student/learning orientation, but also appreciated the value of community-based/service learning as a means of differentiating the institution and its tradition from competitors. While many orientations could be regarded as complementary, at times a degree of dissonance could be observed. The implications of diverse orientations were most acutely felt where collaborators on the same project held quite different perspectives as to rationale. Within one project, for example, the relative importance of academic benefits to students, and of the civic outcomes for the community, varied significantly between the two key actors. For a link person, contracted to manage the placements:

It’s about giving students an introduction to the collaborative arts process, and about that being a very legitimate work opportunity and professional career path for them when they leave college. So it’s giving them a taste of that, so that they can actually make choices – and giving them some experience about being able to engage with community and all that entails. (Link person)

For this individual, ‘civic engagement’, as such, did not necessarily involve any explicit outcome for the community; that was regarded as a bonus. For the art academic – the embedder – the potential civic outcome was a primary element in her motivation to initiate the project, resulting in tensions and concerns about the imbalance in the benefits for the partners to the process:

And I’ve a feeling it’s the students [that benefit] because they walk away very quickly after six weeks having had this big flashy show, which really hasn’t got a lot to do

with the community that they're in ... and I would hate to think the communities have been used like paint, a medium. (Embedder)

For academics, the personal and student/learning orientations featured equally strongly. Strategists demonstrated the most eclectic orientation, citing a range of factors which contributed to their rationale. They were more likely to perceive the then prevailing political interest in active citizenship (Taskforce on Active Citizenship 2007) as an opportunity to align community-based/service learning with current political rhetoric; that discourse seemed to have little impact on those directly involved as practitioners. A civic orientation (local and broad) featured most prominently in the discourse of facilitators. Academic leaders displayed a strong personal orientation and, not surprisingly, the role, purpose and interests of higher education also featured for them.

The 'student/learning' orientation was strongest amongst engineers, who were more likely to cite the opportunities which the pedagogy offered for practical, applied and experiential learning. Within the discourse of social scientists, on the other hand, it was generally conceived of as a pedagogy which was congruent with their beliefs, and aligned with key concepts associated with their discipline: e.g. diversity, altruism or interculturalism. For those from the humanities, the 'civic' orientation was as significant as the 'personal' orientation. Those from a science or business background – who tended to be in positions of academic leadership – were most likely to make reference to the role, purpose and interests of higher education.

A 'personal' orientation featured equally in the discourse of female and male participants. Men were far more likely to refer to the role, purpose and interests of higher education and to display an eclectic orientation. The actual gender breakdown of participants is of relevance – the majority of those directly connected to the *practice* of community-based/service learning were women, whereas the majority of those in positions of academic leadership, academic management and strategy were men.

### *Conceptions of the academic role, and the place of values*

How people conceived of civic engagement and how they conceived of their role as an academic were inextricably bound. For some, embedding a civic dimension within the curriculum posed little problem, since this practice was congruent with their overall approach to teaching and learning:

I teach accountants, potential accountants, so my whole philosophy with them is that they are members of a society and they have to see themselves as members of that society, and what are they contributing to the society as accountants. (Enabler)

There was, however, some ambivalence regarding the place of values in higher education and the role of academics in this regard. Fears were voiced about the risk of 'imposing one's own views' and about the potential for role conflict:

I see civic responsibility as opening students' eyes ... [but] I suppose I'm always a bit paranoid about not forcing my own left wing views down their throats.... You see when you're a lecturer you're in a position of real power – because I'm the one who marks them. (Enabler)

While 'training good citizens' was regarded as a valid educational goal by some, 'civic education' was eschewed by most academics despite, in some cases, the inherent

contradiction arising from the mandatory nature of the particular module/project. Ambivalence about the place of this pedagogy as part of the academics' role may be accounted for, in part, by the nature of the competing demands on academic staff:

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 you either get out of it or you stay in it.... So how you embed this concept across the curriculum? I don't know because, you know, it does become a human resources issue. Are we supposed to be doing this? This is not in my contract; this is not part of my remit. (Embedder)

Community-based or service learning was regarded by academics as something which, unlike most other responsibilities or expectations associated with their role, they *elect*ed to do. A corollary of the elective nature of this work is that civic engagement is not generally regarded as part of the academic role. The consequences are experienced differentially by participants. One senior academic does not expect to be rewarded for it:

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.... Civic engagement is not part of my job. It will inform my job, it will make me do my job better. I believe for me, I don't think I'm a full person if I'm so job obsessed that I haven't got these other things going on. (Enabler)

The extent to which the civic/service dimension is undervalued and often invisible was widely acknowledged. They (community-based/service learning 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 as well. But I think there needs to be some kind of official recognition. (Embedder)

The diversity of perspectives on the question of recognition and reward for civic engagement activities reflects a recurring paradox in the contemporary context. It is aptly illustrated by one academic's fear that, in the growing managerialist climate, institutional commitment to civic engagement might be viewed with scepticism by the wider academic staff, provoking a degree of resistance, thus undermining its credibility:

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 public relations stunt, or that it's 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)

Regardless of this, however, the extent to which civic/community engagement is regarded as a legitimate and valued part of the academic role was deemed of critical importance to its sustainability.

### ***The impact of orientation on embedders' intentions for the future***

Implementation of community-based/service learning within the curriculum does not necessarily lead to its continuation – the practice is not always sustainable. Between and within the cases, embedders could be differentiated in terms of their intention to continue or not. Future intentions ranged from a commitment to extend the project,

at one end of the continuum, to some reluctance or even a definite decision to discontinue. Continued involvement represented the exercise of choice by individual academics, and resulted from the interplay of a complex range of factors, detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article. They included concerns over time, workload and the absence of recognition, the availability (or lack) of institutional support, the breadth of embedders' academic responsibilities and the level of challenges/problems encountered. Organisational design was significant; projects could be rated in terms of 'complexity' by reference to: (i) the level of internal collaboration amongst academics, and (ii) the level of external collaboration, with community partners.

When these key concerns, circumstances and factors are all taken into account the cumulative effect helps account for the intentions of most, but not all, embedders regarding their future involvement with community-based learning. Generally, academics' willingness to continue a project was inversely related to the complexity of the project; the challenges associated with managing complex projects proved a significant disincentive. The capacity to embed was also compromised where embedders had a wide range of responsibilities for teaching, research and academic leadership. Time and workload were significant disincentives, especially for research-active academics. The frustration of one senior academic reflects the potentially prohibitive effect of these combined pressures when considering the future of a challenging collaborative project:

Well it won't happen [next year]. I won't be involved because I'm finalising the [EU] project and I'm just crazy busy and then I'm taking a year's sabbatical so I won't be involved. And [she] won't be involved, she's far too busy.... I mean, I'm completely burned out, I'm so exhausted and it's not [the community-based/service learning project], it's the [EU] project, it's all sorts of other things. And I'm not the only one. (Embedder)

The impact of academics' 'orientation', however, can be best highlighted by exploring potential explanations for deviant cases – where, given the conditions associated with a project, the outcome is unexpected. Despite valid concerns about time, workload and lack of recognition, one embedder's commitment to extending her project may be accounted for by her strong 'student learning' orientation, which is positively reinforced by her students' experience on the project and a commitment to civic goals:

That was important to me, especially in relation to ... the homework club; they are within the area of —, in a very deprived area. It was very important to me. I also think that staff members and students should be going down working there, because it is in our locality. And its part of our mission statement, that we should be building and enhancing community development. (Embedder)

All three embedders collaborating on an ambitious transdisciplinary project shared a concern about workload and recognition, and bore an extensive range of academic responsibilities. Unwillingness or reluctance to continue, on the part of two members of the team, can be traced to the cumulative effect of these factors. One member of the team, however, represents an interesting and illuminating deviant case. Her willingness, despite the same challenging experience, to 'reignite the team' may be accounted for by a strong 'civic' orientation. Her willingness to commit is further enhanced by the availability of other colleagues willing to continue with the work, within an academic unit where citizenship, diversity and inclusion are core values of the discipline:

There are a lot of people here, I think, to take up the reins . . . particularly in the whole area of citizenship, there would be about four of us who would have a strong commitment to citizenship at different levels. (Embedder)

Finally, the relationship between lack of recognition and the gendered nature of civic engagement practice is worthy of further investigation. In the interest of minimising deductive disclosure, all participants were given a female identity in the presentation of findings. In all categories of participants, other than strategists, the majority were women. Of the six embedders, five were women. There is a relevant and interesting postscript, subsequent to the research study, in one of the case study sites. A review of academic promotional schemes identified an imbalance in the distribution of academic staff across the grades by gender. As part of a strategy to address this it has been recommended that promotional criteria relating to (i) teaching and (ii) contribution to the wider community be better calibrated to measure excellence and to discriminate more between applications. If realised, better ‘calibration’ of criteria could offer embedders better scope for gaining recognition for achievements in this particular arena, especially for civically engaged women.

### Conclusions

Civic engagement in higher education is widely associated with such concepts and ideals as education as a public good, corporate social responsibility and universities as sites for democratic citizenship. These themes, however, did not feature prominently in the discourse of participants in this study. While the rationale offered resonates with a concern for the public realm as represented in the literature, that realm is primarily conceived of as a local one. The idea of ‘community’ featured prominently. Those advocating civic engagement in Ireland were more likely to invoke Edwards’s (2004) conception of civil society as the good society or as associational life, rather than to highlight the role higher education might play as a critical agent within the public sphere.

The rationale for a *pedagogy* for civic engagement is more diverse and individualised, making generalisation problematic. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some salient features. First, while strategists and senior figures were more inclined to advocate civic engagement in universal terms, the motivation of academics engaged in community-based/service learning work was more likely to be particular and personalised. Strategists were more likely to align with the external political environment (e.g. regarding citizenship), whereas academics were more likely to engage in the pedagogy as a way of responding to local community needs, represented to them in the form of requests for students to contribute to projects. The diverse and particularistic nature of academics’ motivations has implications for how any attempt to ‘institutionalise’ such a pedagogy might be approached.

Academics generally possessed a strong sense of why they were engaged in this work and their personal values, beliefs and prior experience featured strongly. The interests of students and enhancement of student learning were the primary motivators, while embedders’ beliefs about education – tacit or explicit – provided an important foundation. In seeking legitimacy for community-based/service learning as a mode of teaching and learning, the strategies used included linking it closely to the academic discipline and highlighting the wider benefits to be gained for students, mirroring some of the conclusions from Hammond’s (1994) study of faculty motivation.



It was possible to distinguish between what motivates academics to take up this innovative pedagogy and the factors which influenced whether they choose to embed it more permanently. The latter decisions represented individualised responses to a range of context-contingent factors. 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. The negative impact of factors was often ameliorated by a strongly held personal conviction regarding the potential for enhancing student learning. For a small minority of participants, the transformative potential of community-based/service learning for students and for local community was an important element. The value of intrinsic rewards for academics – such as personal satisfaction arising from involvement in a creative if challenging, innovative process – was noteworthy.

Findings from this study lend credibility to claims that the nature of the rationale for community-based/service learning has implications for its sustainability within higher education. Proponents of service learning generally highlight the benefits to be gained by constructing it as a pedagogy, claiming that integration within the curriculum can lead to successful incorporation, to proliferation and to legitimacy as an academic practice. A strong disciplinary focus, as adopted in these cases, lends support to Zlotkowski's (1995) assertion that survival is enhanced by strong association with an academic discipline.

One of the salient sources of ambivalence in this study concerned how academics conceived of their role as educators, and the place of norms and values in that context. Ambivalence about the appropriateness of 'civic education' within higher education, and an antipathy to the idea of 'norms and values', coexisted with unease about the questionable values which underpinned some relationships with community, and the values which some students brought to this process. The inherently political nature of the curriculum – asserted by Simon (1994) and others – is at its most obvious in a pedagogy which espouses civic goals. The notion of 'shared norms' continues to prove elusive when practitioners gather to share practice and develop core principles. Civic values centred on the public good do not always coincide with private values, or with the values of the discipline or profession concerned. Academics inculcated in particular professional/disciplinary values, norms and knowledge-making practices are not always equipped to deal with issues which arise in a civic setting or in dialogic, democratic academic practice. Where academics espouse a civic role, the manner in which that might be expressed within the teaching role is often underdeveloped, certainly under-researched and needs to be problematised.

In conclusion, academics' conceptions of the purpose of higher education and of their role in that endeavour are central to their willingness to embed community-based/service learning within the curriculum, and to continue to do so. While longevity is not always required for individual civic engagement projects – as social change can be achieved with focused initiatives of defined duration – sustainability for embedders and others within the academy is an issue. The findings from this study suggest that, as the curriculum encompasses new kinds of engagement and higher education embraces new processes of knowledge creation, we need to revisit our conception of the academic role – a role often conceived of only in terms of certain kinds of teaching, research and service. A re-conceptualisation of the idea of 'academic citizenship' offers a fruitful model within which to reconfigure traditional ideas of 'service', as academics adopt a pedagogy which involves them directly in civic engagement.

The challenge of reconciling diverse orientations to civic engagement in the context of an engaged curriculum reflects many of the tensions and paradoxes which characterise contemporary higher education and its competing discourses.

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