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*"We don't believe you want a genuine partnership": University work with communities*

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## **Abstract**

'Community engagement' has been slow to become a legitimate part of the work of Higher Education Institutions in the UK, and the extent to which different universities subscribe to this agenda is variable. This paper will draw on one part of a large five-University project on 'knowledge transfer' from Universities to the community around urban regeneration. We will describe of the participative processes of developing collaborative projects. Different stakeholder interests, as well as barriers to effective collaboration will be explored and discussed in terms of a model of organisational resource maximisation. The implications for embedding community work into Universities will be examined.

## **Introduction**

University-community engagement is not new. It is an international policy and practice. Service learning and community service are cornerstones of the South African transformation of Higher Education sector (NCHE, 1996); It has been promoted in the USA under the banner of civic responsibility for over 20 years (Ehrich and Hollander, 1999), is reflected in the Science Shop movement (Leydesdorff and Ward, 2005; Fischer, Leydesdorff, and Schophaus, 2004), pre-figured by the Research Exchange developed in Manchester in 1983 (Kagan, 1985). University-community engagement work and is now exhibited in an academic journal in Australasia (*Australasian Journal of University Community Engagement*, which began in 2005), and in Europe (through *Living Knowledge: International Journal of community based research*).

The forms of engagement include service-based learning (SBL), community service (CS) and community based research (CBR) with most attention paid to SBL and CBR (Calleson, Kauper-Brown, and Seifer, 2005; Kelly and Sullivan, 2001). Both of these, learning and research, parts of the core business of Universities, with Community Service more strongly reflecting contributions universities might make, through their students and staff, to communities, beyond their core business.

Recent strategic interest has grown in 'Third Stream' activities (those other than Teaching and Learning and Research. In the UK, these initiatives are variously known as third stream or third leg activity;

outreach, knowledge transfer or knowledge exchange. Public engagement, linked to the opening of new student markets, widening participation in higher education in order to meet Government's high ideals for a 50% participation rate in higher education is a contemporary agenda. It is interesting to note that the boundaries between different third stream activities are blurring. What used to be 'reach-out to business', has now become 'reach-out to business and the community'; what used to be teaching company schemes for knowledge transfer, has now become knowledge transfer partnerships and incorporate public and voluntary sector partnerships; a recent *community engagement in higher education* conference was dominated by discourses about and papers on public appreciation of (hard) science and the use of university museums and galleries by the public.

Within this context, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), underpinned by its most recent strategic plan) has supported, not only university -community partnerships, but also inter-university collaborations. HEFCE (2006) strategic plan states:

We want to focus more on our support for HE to contribute to wider social agendas. This includes its contribution to civic life and developing civilising values; social, community and environmental support and regeneration; cultural, intellectual and moral enrichment; and participation as a nation and as individuals in global development, communication and problem-solving. (p.37).

Further, the plan states:

We will continue to promote and support collaboration – between HEIs, as well as between HE and users and other stakeholders – as an intrinsic feature of third stream activity.(p.39).

Watson (2003:16), the, then Vice Chancellor of Brighton University and a leading exponent of community engagement, suggests that the shifts in policy and practice is a fundamental shift in values and purpose for Universities.

In terms of *community* it presents a challenge to universities to be of and not just in the community; not simply to engage in “knowledge-transfer” but to establish a dialogue across the boundary between the university and its community which is open-ended, fluid and experimental.

He describes both 'inside out' and 'outside in' pressures for change and engagement, the distinction pointing to the possibility that it is not only Universities that are to set the terms of engagement. External demands of the needs of employers and the economy more generally on University activity are well known. Similarly, some of the needs of the public sector, particularly in terms of training the

workforce, are also well known. But in the context of *community* engagement, the very real possibility looms, that the needs of third sector organisations - community and voluntary sector groups - as well as the most vulnerable and marginalised people and their quality of lives, might exert some influence over how such a 'Community of Practice' might be sculptured.

It is in this context that the *Urban Regeneration: Making a Difference* has emerged.

## **Urban Regeneration: Making a Difference**

*Urban Regeneration: Making a Difference* (UR-MAD (sic)) is a project that is Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded, requires collaboration across four universities (MMU, UCLAN, SAL, UNN<sup>1</sup> on projects which address community needs in the areas of Community Cohesion, Crime, Health and Well-being, and Enterprise. Each of these areas is a plank in Government national and regional policy agendas. The business plan for the project (UR-MAD, 2006:1) identified two aims:

1. To address key urban regeneration challenges in the North of England through interdisciplinary collaboration between the partner universities and practitioner organisations, particularly in the public and voluntary sectors, and to enhance their collective impact on society.
2. To build a long term strategic alliance between core university partners while developing a distinctive form of knowledge transfer (KT)), which is both teaching and research-driven, in order to meet the needs of organisations and professionals in business and the community

The plan (UR-MAD, 2006:3) outlined the three-fold need for the project, which was submitted to, and funded by the HEFCE Structural Development Fund to the tune of 3.16 million (SDF)<sup>2</sup>. These were:

1. The need to tackle the real, complex problems facing communities in the Northern region, where social, economic and physical infrastructure issues are closely inter-twined;
2. The need for change in management practices and the culture of academic staff in the universities to develop their engagement with business and the community through cross-institutional and inter-institutional collaboration to enable them to address those problems in society effectively

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<sup>1</sup> Manchester Metropolitan University; University of Central Lancashire; Salford University and University of Northumbria with Bradford University an associate partner)

<sup>2</sup> SDF supports large-scale structural and strategic change in the Higher Education sector that HEIs could not achieve without additional HEFCE funding.

3. A need to provide a demonstrator initiative designed to bring about transformational change by building the evidence base to make the case for a broader involvement by Higher Education (HE) in government agendas relating to the economy and society.

Urban regeneration was the focus of the project as all the universities are from city regions, each facing multiple challenges in economic, social, physical and political factors, and unified by an economic development bringing together the different regional development associations (*Moving Forward: The Northern Way(2005) Business Plan 2005-08 from Northern RDAs*)

The four themes were identified to reflect the strengths of the different partner universities and to map onto major social policies. Each Higher Education Institution (HEI) was to lead on one of the themes, but all were to contribute to all themes. MMU is the lead HEI for Community Cohesion, subdivided into Community Psychology and Wellbeing; Urban Education; and Sport and Physical Activity, again chosen to reflect existing strengths in the university.

## **Community Cohesion**

The rationale for the Community Cohesion theme was given in the delivery plan (UR-MAD, 2006:8)

Progress on increasing life chances for all is a fundamental element of building strong cohesive communities and a dynamic society and economy. Conversely where tensions have developed between different ethnic groups, such as in some Northern towns in the summer of 2001 ...(where significant disturbances took place)... ,deprivation and lack of opportunity have been significant contributory factors. Public services play a vital part in creating opportunities. Collaborative work between HE and civic and community based partners will focus on addressing the cross-government (targets) aimed at reducing race inequality and building community cohesion (Home Office, 2005)  
Partnership working between the HE sector and their public and voluntary sector partners will encourage a sense of identity and belonging through participation in education, work and social activities, and through mutual understanding of cultural difference.

## **Our Roles**

Our roles in this project are to lead and manage the MMU lead theme of Community Cohesion through the plural roles of academic lead and project manager-and- action researcher.

We bring to the project a number of things: a community psychological perspective, underpinned by values of community, stewardship and social justice (Kagan & Burton, 2005); a commitment to working with those most socially marginalised (Burton and Kagan, 2005); experience of working on transformational change in HEIs with relation to Widening Participation (Duggan and Rice, 2005) and interest in exploring progressive organisational change through concepts borrowed both from the environmental movement and soft systems analyses (Kagan, 2007). We both belong to the Research Institute for Health and Social Change (RIHSC) at MMU, and are involved with a programme of work on regeneration and wellbeing (e.g. Choudhury and Kagan, 2005; Kagan et al., 2006; Boyd et al., 2006; Kagan, Castile and Stewart, 2005; Kagan, 2006; Raschini et al., 2006)

Our understanding of Community Cohesion is somewhat broader than that encapsulated in the project delivery plan, as outlined above.

We go along with the definition of a cohesive community as one,

that is in a state of wellbeing, harmony and stability. (IdeA 2006, [www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk](http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk) )

The Local Government Association (LGA, 2004:7) considered, in its guidance to Local Authorities for how to support the development of cohesive communities, the following characteristics of a cohesive community:

A cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities;

and

- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.....

They go on to describe what is involved in creating community cohesion:

Promoting community cohesion involves addressing fractures, removing barriers and encouraging positive interaction

between groups. Community cohesion is closely linked to integration as it aims to build communities where people feel confident that they belong and are comfortable mixing and interacting with others, particularly people from different racial backgrounds or people of a different faith.

Diversity is, then at the heart of community cohesion, and schisms can occur in and between any areas of diversity, fracturing cohesion. The audit commission identified 10 areas of diversity in communities, of relevance to community cohesion. These include:

- ◆ Age equality: older people
- ◆ Age equality: young people
- ◆ Community engagement
- ◆ Customer focus
- ◆ Disability
- ◆ Gender
- ◆ Human rights
- ◆ Race
- ◆ Religion
- ◆ Sexual orientation

## **Project Development within Community Cohesion Theme**

Within the overall UR-MAD project, staff within the universities were invited to bid for funding for projects. These had to be: collaborative across the HEIs; driven by community needs; involve community partners; be interdisciplinary; and address specified and pre-set outputs (as identified in the delivery plan - these were framed in knowledge transfer terms). This was to be an exercise in internal and external partnership development, collaboration and cultural change (within universities and between universities and the community).

At the start, there were no project guidelines available or processes for developing and approving bids. Early on we recognised that, notwithstanding challenges of overall project co-ordination and management (both across and within universities), within community cohesion there were challenges to:

- ◆ identify community partners and viable projects addressing their needs across the three sub-themes;
- ◆ Identify colleagues in partner universities who had complementary expertise to share and combine;
- ◆ Clarify what community cohesion and regeneration might mean to the different partners involved;
- ◆ Work across knowledge transfer managers and academics in the universities;
- ◆ Identify viable projects within the timescale (maximum 18 months)

Pre-empting guidance from across the project, we, in community cohesion, decided to undertake a development process that sought to reflect community psychological values and practices, and be:

- ◆ Led by the interests and needs of community and voluntary sector and public sector groups
- ◆ Open, transparent and inclusive
- ◆ Facilitate 'contact before content' and bring people with different interests together in order to develop ideas.

In some of our previous work we have used the metaphor of the 'ecological edge' to describe the space developed, maintained and worked within for partnerships across organisations (Choudhury and Kagan, 2000; Kagan, 1994; 2006; Burton and Kagan, 2000)

## **Community Cohesion events**

We established a series of Community Cohesion Partnership Events, beginning with a day event involving as many interested academics as possible from the different HEIs coming together *along with community partners*.

This was followed by three half day events building interest and ideas within each sub theme of community psychology and wellbeing; urban education and sport and physical activity. Each of these events included both community partners and academics.

In between each event, notes were written up and circulated widely, along with pen sketches of the interests of relevant staff in the different HEIs.

Each event was organised around participative processes, designed to stimulate discussion and the development of relationships in short periods of time.

### **Findings, Leeds Event**

At the first event, attendees were divided into groups who defined themselves as either members of communities or members of universities and discussed three key areas:

- Challenges of regeneration
- Experiences of working in University-community partnerships
- Mutual benefits of working across sectors

In addition, groups explored the tensions around two key definitions:

- What is Urban Regeneration?
- What is Community Cohesion?

Gleaned from this activity were some salient themes and narratives, particularly from community partners:



### **Economic challenges of regeneration**

- How to work with many communities
- Regenerate communities not areas
- Language-definitions/jargon/HE
  - o *“We don’t believe you want a genuine partnership. With academia, it never feels as if the balance is right because knowledge is power and academics tend to have a kind of knowledge which is conveyed in a language which seems to be more powerful than the language used in communities. Our language is as valuable,... and is the meat of the very work you produce’.*

### **Social challenges of regeneration**

- Community -partnership issues around the genuineness of HE partners (researchers for own benefit) (-)
- Lots of good regeneration links (+) but not joined up and distant (criticism of HEIs)
- Informed feedback leads to better practice (+)

### **Benefits of regeneration**

- Genuinely listened to
- Local practitioners as experts
- Involving local people as researchers-joint Action Research
- Reflection of practitioners on the ground *‘who often operate from the gut’.*

Community Psychology and Wellbeing; Urban Education and Sport and Physical Activity half day events were all held in Manchester two weeks later. These sessions can be best described within the context of ‘speed dating’ with HEI staff and community partners from across the North talking to each other in carousels about potential Urban Regeneration partnership projects that could actively reflect the URMAD Project and business plan as well as the Community Cohesion sub-themes.

The outcomes and outputs assigned to the Community Cohesion theme were then broken down into key headings on flip chart paper mounted on the walls around the room. Attendees at the events, after intense discussion, defined their project ideas, mapped relevant outputs and recorded the names of interested partners who they had been building relationships with around common interests.

Following the half day event on Urban Education, were events which followed the same format around the other two sub-themes, Community Psychology and well-being and Sport and Physical Activity. From this point, those who had cemented such relationships and exchanged contact details were equipped to embark on the writing of a first draft of their collective proposal to draw down resources from the URMAD funding pot.

*'Forced marriages of convenience'* is a term that keeps emerging from reported reflections of HEI staff still involved in the other themes within the overall project, as the funding criteria set out was to work with pre-defined themes/outputs whilst involving staff in partnership from our own/other universities in response to community needs.

However in the Community Cohesion theme, practitioners from the other HEIs, who are still involved, have described these initial events driven by Manchester Metropolitan University as,

*"Beneficial development sessions...none of this, quick, find a partner!"*

*"Where organic relationships began"*

*"At least we had a couple of dates before we got married!"*

## **Communities of Practice**

Etienne Wenger has written many articles on his theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) It is useful in many different contexts as an approach to knowing and learning and has a place in aiding our understanding of the Community Cohesion in the Urban Regeneration: Making A Difference project. He defines it as,

*'Engagement in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour'*

There are three crucial characteristics for a CoP to exist although it must be highlighted that, according to Wenger, not everything called a community is a CoP.

- **Domain**-not merely a network of connections between people: it is *about* something. Identity is defined not by a task but by an area of knowledge that needs to be developed and explored
- **Community**-build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. Members engage in joint activities, discussions that enable them to address problems and share knowledge. *'Not just a Web site or library'*
- **Practice**-body of knowledge, methods, tools, stories and documents shared and developed together. Not a community of interest but an accumulation over time of practical knowledge in their domain, which makes a difference to their ability to act individually and collectively (Wenger, 2004:3).

In terms of partnership development, the notions put forward in Wenger's theory highlight that we have already developed an identity moving through the 'domain' characteristic of a Community of Practice in the context of our project as we all recognise that Urban Regeneration working in partnership with universities and communities in the North of England is an area of knowledge that needs to be developed and explored. It will only be when collaborative projects are being implemented that we can explore further the 'Community' characteristic of a CoP and indeed the development network sessions described, certainly engaged us in joint activities. It is the 'Practice' characteristic of CoP that appears the most attractive characteristic, at this stage in our project development. Could such a theory represent what might be a legacy for change and be considered as a recipe for the success of trans-disciplinary collaboration and a shared vision for HEI-community engagement?

### **Partnership Development and the creation of 'ecological edges'.**

In order to understand this developmental stage in terms of 'edge effects' it is necessary to develop the concept from ecology to organisational transformation.

### **Edge effects: from ecology to organisational transformation**

Ecologists define distinct biological communities, characterised by a set of populations living in a particular area or habitat. Such a community will be organised: it has characteristics in addition to its component individuals and populations, and these elements interact in an organised way, for example through metabolic flows and transformations (e.g. Odum, 1971: 14). Examples of such communities include forests, grasslands, or ponds.

The transition or edge between two or more communities is known as the 'ecotone'. Examples are the transition area between forest and grassland, or the tidal area of a river estuary. The ecotone may have a considerable size, but will not be larger than the adjoining communities. The ecotonal community will contain many of the organisms found in each of the overlapping communities, and in addition may contain organisms that are characteristic of, or even restricted to the ecotone. Often, both the number of species, and the population density of some, are greater than in the 'pure' communities. Furthermore, the junction between communities often acts as a kind of net or sieve for resources such as humus and seeds - they accumulate at the boundary. This enrichment in terms of variety and density at the join between communities is known as the 'edge effect'. The forest edge, or the rocky shore are both examples of ecological edges which are rich in diverse resources. Human settlements and methods of food production, particularly traditional methods, create or increase the extent of edge.

Just as it is possible, through the design of sustainable systems of ecological development, to increase the relative contribution of the 'edge' to each adjoining community, so it is possible to create a larger edge effect in organisational and community development and thereby maximise its benefit to the system as a whole.

We need to be clear that we are using 'edge' here as a metaphor. An edge effect in a natural ecological system is not necessarily the same thing as an edge effect in a human community or organisational system - the mechanisms, the transactions, and the mediations will be different.

Quite often community psychological projects involve working across boundaries and the UR-MAD project involves a number of different boundaries. These include outside-in boundaries - the boundaries of engagement;; and inside -out boundaries - the boundaries of collaboration.

Outside in boundaries include:

- ◆ Boundaries between community group(s) - community, voluntary and public sector groups;
- ◆ Boundaries between citizens and community groups
- ◆ Boundaries between community group(s) and universities
- ◆ Boundaries between different types of activities - services and action of community groups and research, consultancy or teaching in universities

In side out boundaries include:

- ◆ Boundaries between different universities
- ◆ Boundaries between different disciplines
- ◆ Boundaries between academics and knowledge transfer (or development) managers
- ◆ Boundaries between engagement and other academic practices.

At each boundary is the possibility of an 'edge' that maximises resources and enriches ideas and practices. The edge effect is the phenomenon of enrichment through alliances and collaborations. When edge is actually created we notice an increase in energy, excitement and commitment.

What characterises all of these boundary settings (whether edge is significantly created or not) is the problem of spanning social entities with greatly differing modes of operation, power structures, cultures, physical environments, practices, values and ideologies.

We have choices about how best to work at the 'edge, and can identify at three main types of strategies for working across boundaries:

## **Methods of working across boundaries**

### ***Working within boundaries***

Development and change targeted at each community separately. This strategy, in the UR-MAD project would have meant we gather resources within the universities and then explore resources in the community. This is the strategy of 'getting our (university) house in order and being clear what Universities want from the projects and then seeking community partners. It is the universities that define the agenda and terms of engagement, possibly each one separately, inviting others to join later on. Later stages of community cohesion project development may be described in these terms.

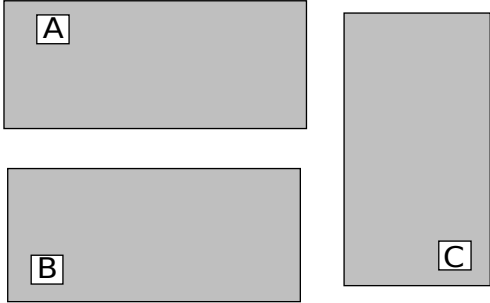
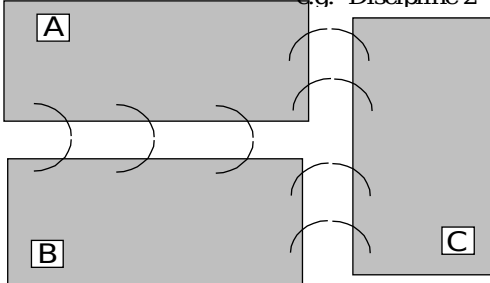
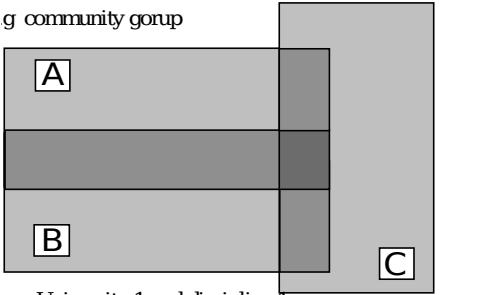
### ***Working at the interface***

Development and change targeted at each partner separately but with early attempt to bridge. So each university develops its own ideas, using the printed material provided about staff interests from the others in order to develop ideas. Community partners may already exist or be sought at any stage. Universities set the terms of engagement and attempts are made to bridge across agencies and groups. Some parts of the community cohesion projects may be described in these terms, especially when other university partners are added at late stages of project development and without discussion.

### ***Maximising the 'edge':***

Using natural resources - getting people from different communities to work together and utilise the expertise of each. Community cohesion theme started off by maximising the edge, through face to face discussions between partner universities and people working in community organisations. The extent to which they continued to work in this way varied, some resorting to interfacing at least across some of the boundaries and others prioritising working within boundaries but with some interfacing elements.

Figure 1: Three strategies for working across community or organisational boundaries.

Strategy	Method	Results	Schematic example
<p><i>Working within boundaries</i></p>	<p><i>Development and change targeted at each community separately.</i></p>	<p><i>Energy inefficient and unlikely to lead to co-ordinated change in the common domain.</i></p>	<p>e.g. community group      e.g. University 2</p>  <p>e.g. University 1</p>
<p><i>Working at the interface</i></p>	<p><i>Attempts to bridge communities. Discipline 1 from one university works separately from discipline 2 from another</i></p>	<p><i>Energy intensive: some likelihood of co-ordinated change, but effort is on the margins of each community area of concern, so sustainability is questionable.</i></p>	<p>e.g. community group      e.g. Discipline 2</p>  <p>e.g. Discipline 1</p>
<p><i>Maximising the 'edge':</i></p>	<p><i>Using natural resources - getting people from different communities to work together and utilise the expertise of each. Face to face collaboration and joint development and implementation of ideas</i></p>	<p><i>Energy efficient and high likelihood of leading to sustainable and co-ordinated change.</i></p>	<p>e.g. University 2 and discipline 2</p>  <p>e.g. University 1 and discipline 1</p>

These are of course 'ideal types': in reality almost any piece of work will involve some elements of each strategy. However, the comparison among these abstracted strategies is illuminative. It suggests that in working to increase the edge and working with the edge, a project will be most likely to maximise the amount and variety of resources available to it. It will also be more likely to preserve the best features of adjoining systems and to enhance the likelihood that developments will be sustainable ones.

We have described some of the ways in which the developmental stage of project development within the community theme can be understood by the creation and maintenance of 'edges'. As the project proceeds, we will be able to see ways in which different projects have maximised, increased or maintained the edges created, or whether the pulls to work within boundaries remain too great.

For the project overall, it will be necessary in the future to identify ways of increasing 'edge' for maximum sustainability, and it is worth considering some of the ways in which this can be done, as it is useful to consider any sustainability strategy from the outset.

## **Strategies for increasing edge**

How might a productive inter-community edge be increased? We suggest the following strategies, which divide into strategies for creating and maximising edge, and strategies for the careful stewardship of the edge. These examples are not linked to university-community engagement, but are offered from other kinds of community psychology projects. They will be useful as a guide to consider the development of the UR-MAD projects.

### ***Creation and maximisation of edge:***

The following strategies have in common the maximisation of points of contact between distinct communities and organisations.

Location and co-location of projects, teams, events (e.g. a research assistant looking at the impact of regeneration on local people's well being is based in the accessible neighbourhood regeneration offices).

Formation of inter-organisations with membership from more than one sector (e.g. an inter-generational initiative has a steering group drawing from education, local government, community, and local business organisations).

Creation of new settings (temporary or long-standing) that bring elements together - (e.g. community festivals that bring diverse sections of a community together - members of the public have fun in each others' company, while those who set up the event learn to work together).

Conduct of activity in other locations, that is in territory associated with another sector (e.g. a health promotion programme operates in a shopping centre rather than from a clinic base).

Creation of multiple points of contact (tessellation) (e.g. a University department sends students to work on a variety of community projects in a particular community, and invites community members to hear students presenting their projects. Meanwhile staff members establish a mentoring programme to strengthen community leadership skills with community activists, and develop joint research projects. Community activists contribute to academic and professional conferences and identify further sites for action research).

### ***Stewardship of the edge***

Whilst the 'edge' is usually enriched by the adjoining communities, with bad stewardship it can become barren and impoverished, supporting little of environmental benefit. Working at the 'edge' therefore has responsibilities to preserve the very best of all adjoining communities and this may present further challenges for a project in the future. The following strategies are possible ways of protecting and supporting the edge community.

Recognise 'edge species' and encourage them. (e.g. a community activist develops skills and credibility in mediating between her ethnic minority community and the police. She is careful to maintain her profile in her base community, continuing to live and socialise there, and she shares her skills with members of what started as her support group).

Encourage fairness in resource exploitation (e.g. a group of mental health service survivors are paid the going rate as consultants to a project on service planning).

Pool resources between sectors (e.g. a local government department provides financial support and office accommodation for a community initiated project on support needs of people with long term conditions).

Respect the uniqueness of each community, or else the edge can become a site of unproductive conflict.

### **Conclusion**

Roderick Floud (2001), president of Universities UK (2001-3) said of university-community engagement:

Universities have been doing these things for many years, but there is now a clear recognition that this work should be explicitly funded and encouraged. And there has been an increasing expectation within the policy community and the general population, that universities should contribute to the regions in which they are based. ....The challenge for universities is to make the current activities and good practices that these funding sources support, permanent and more



central to their mainstream missions. The challenge for government is to clarify how third mission funding will be made permanent, and remove the uncertainties that prevent some universities from making the longer term commitment necessary for these activities to make a substantive difference.

He omitted to outline what the challenges for communities are, but perhaps the UR-MAD project will go some way to convincing them that we are, indeed, genuine in our interest in partnership. Whilst there are some motives of Universities of which we should be justly suspicious, there is a long tradition and commitment from some of us to meaningful engagement and to the permeability of university boundaries with communities. For the first time, we are now pushing at an open door and it is up to us to develop the trust and authentic engagement that will lead to a permanent transformation within universities. We should not forget, though, that just as there are some HE agendas that are favourable, there are others that militate against effective engagement. There will be major challenges ahead to integrate, for example, engaged practice with the Research Assessment Exercise and programme accreditation, a view echoed from the Australian experience of community-HEI engagement (Winter and Wiseman, 2005).

Similarly, Savan (2004: 382/3), talking of the Canadian experience of community based research partnerships, highlights the necessity and challenges of long term collaborative engagement, requiring commitment from both university and community sides ( as opposed to shorter term contractual, project based or consultative engagement).She says:

Both short- and medium-term community-based research projects are enhanced by ongoing university-community partnerships. These long-term collaborations foster the trust and shared values critical to successful work involving partners based in widely differing institutional settings. Partnerships enduring over many a period of many years provide a stable context for both short consultative and medium-term contractual community-based research projects. The long-term collaborative partnerships permit a secure base for the exploration of mutually important and interesting research trails.....but as the longevity, stability and beneficial outcomes of partnerships grow, so too do the institutional supports required to foster them...Generally the longer the project, the more tightly linked the partners and the more involved both (for all) partners are in all stages of the research process.

It is only in this context that communities will start believing us!

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