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What could really excellent civic engagement look like in a Technological University?

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Abstract

The purpose and motivation for civic engagement in an Irish Technological University is clear, as it achieves strategic objectives at a national level for both Higher Education and community sectors. The Technological Universities Act 2018 (<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/3/enacted/en/print>) defines a Technological University (TU) as having a specific focus on community and business engagement, in addition to traditional university functions of teaching, learning, and research. Even the latter were required to be relevant at regional, national, and international levels. We argue that in line with this mission, technological universities should embed deep collaboration with community partners to work towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>). This vision paper considers what excellent civic engagement in a TU could look like, if designed into structures and processes, to progress the SDGs. We draw on relevant research and our experiential knowledge as university and community organisation staff. We focus on four SDGs relevant to both the processes and content of civic engagement: quality education; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; and partnership for the goals. We draw learning from a case study of community engaged research within the curriculum to present a vision for how a TU can embed this work. We also provide recommendations to overcome critical challenges. While Ireland is our focus, our vision has international relevance too.

Keywords: collaboration; transdisciplinarity; community-university partnership; civic engagement; sustainable development goals.

Introduction

This vision paper will consider, from the point of view of staff in TU Dublin and the intellectual disability support services of Saint John of God Community Services, what a Technological University could do to embed excellent civic engagement.

The Carnegie Foundation in the United States defines community (or civic) engagement as “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Brown University (n.d.)). For civic engagement to be excellent, all of the dimensions of this collaboration must be so – it must be mutually beneficial, there must be genuine exchange of knowledge and resources, and there must be authentic partnership and reciprocity. To this definition we would add that civic engagement should work in a structured, systemic, meaningful way towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015). And in line with the Technological Universities Act 2018, excellent civic engagement requires that teaching, learning and research be relevant to communities from a regional to an international level, as well as there being ongoing engagement with communities at a number of levels.

This vision draws on relevant policy literature and research, as well as on the knowledge generated from the collaboration between our two organisations for the past four years¹ on community engaged research and learning within the university curriculum. We draw in particular on one case study, where university students and community organisation participants worked on jointly designed applied research projects together, as part of the TU Dublin students’ modules of study.

¹ While TU Dublin came into existence on January 1, 2019, our collaboration pre-dates this and was originally initiated between St John of God and Dublin Institute of Technology, the latter being one of the three foundation institutions of the TU.

Through these kinds of collaborative projects, a TU can simultaneously fulfil each of the three missions of higher education (research, teaching and engagement) while also actively working towards the SDGs. Curriculum-based community engaged projects are about quality education for university students, quality research outputs for society, and quality engagement between university and community organisation staff and participants.

In this paper we propose a broad vision for embedding and supporting civic engagement in a Technological University. This vision is not a comprehensive vision for all aspects of civic engagement, as this would be beyond the scope of a short paper². We focus here particularly on enhancing the learner experience, on widening participation in higher education, and on collaboration for knowledge co-creation and exchange, as well as on structures and processes to support and embed all of these. These map on to four of the SDGs: quality education; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; and partnerships for the goals. These goals emerged as themes in our analysis of our case study, as well as of the literature, and are key to embedding excellent civic engagement in a TU, from strategic to operational levels. We conclude with key recommendations for TUs.

Key Policy and Strategic Drivers

For both TUs and community organisations in Ireland today, the policy context is particularly supportive of collaboration and engagement. The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DES, 2011) for the first time formally named community engagement as the third mission of Higher Education. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has increased the emphasis on engagement in subsequent System Performance Frameworks, in 2018

² Other aspects of university civic engagement, such as student volunteering, and supporting access entry routes for non-traditional students to undergraduate programmes, are also vital to a TU, but unfortunately are beyond the scope of this paper.

identifying over a dozen metrics on civic engagement on which all HEIs must report (HEA 2018). “Higher education institutions need to become more firmly embedded in the social and economic contexts of the communities they live in and serve. Achieving this will help them become more relevant and responsive, and will also enhance their diversity and distinctiveness as institutions” (HEA 2011, p.78).

The Technological Universities Act (2018) requires Technological Universities to ensure that research, learning and teaching are relevant to communities, as well as promoting access to education by underrepresented groups. In chapter 2 of the legislation, TUs are also required to:

collaborate with business, enterprise, the professions, the community, local interests and related stakeholders in the region in which the campuses of the technological university are located— (i) to promote the involvement of those stakeholders in the design and delivery of programmes of education and training, and (ii) to ensure that, in so far as possible, innovation activity and research undertaken by the technological university reflects the needs of those stakeholders.

For community organisations, the national and international policy context also supports engagement with Higher Education. The Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) and the European Union, for example, each have clear objectives and a vision for more inclusive communities and education (HSE (n.d.); European Commission (n.d.)). The European Pillar of social rights states that “everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning” (European Parliament, Council and Commission 2017, p.11).

Collaboration with universities can support community organisations to achieve goals relating to health and wellbeing, and have environmental, policy, economic and cultural impact (Campus Engage (n.d.)). The similarities in policies on engagement in both sectors, along with the establishment of TUs, provide an exciting opportunity to really embed collaboration through civic engagement.

Urgent societal challenges, as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), are another significant driver affecting both university and community sectors. As mentioned above, we feel that four goals in particular are relevant to, and supported by, civic engagement collaborations: quality engagement³; reduced inequalities⁴, sustainable cities and communities⁵; and partnership for the goals⁶. TU Dublin has already adopted the SDGs as the organising principle for its forthcoming Strategic Plan, and it is likely that other TUs will do the same, given the relevance of the goals to the TU mission of engagement and relevance to society.

Civic engagement can also help to fulfil other strategic imperatives in a TU. Student retention and progression can be a significant challenge. Community engaged learning has been identified by Kuh (2008) as a high-impact activity that can effectively increase student learning, engagement and retention. Student-centred learning is also a dominant discourse in Higher Education, and Hurd's (2008) review of the literature found that curriculum-based

3 'to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to a quality higher education' (<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-4-quality-education.html>)
'Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles [...] global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development' (<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-4-quality-education.html#targets>)

4 'empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status' (<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-10-reduced-inequalities.html#targets>)

5 'creating career and business opportunities [...] and building resilient societies and economies [...] improving urban planning and management in participatory and inclusive ways' (<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-11-sustainable-cities-and-communities.html>)

6 While this goal focuses on developing countries, it is relevant to all countries: 'Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships' (<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-17-partnerships-for-the-goals.html#targets>)

civic engagement could deliver positive changes in the student experience, in staff engagement, and in the university itself.

TUs are also expected to have relevance to, and impact on, their regions (particularly given the history of many candidates for TU status as Regional Technical Colleges). The narrative of 'place' is becoming increasingly central to universities and funders in the UK, along with the concept of the civic university (Unwin, 2019), and is likely to influence the sector in Ireland too. Community engaged research can have positive impacts on community organisations and the experience of their participants, and on society as a result (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker & Donohue, 2003).

Research funding is another key driver, particularly for TUs which may have less of a historical research tradition than traditional universities. Research funders in Europe and Ireland are increasingly emphasising the importance of collaborating with stakeholders to achieve research impact, and civic engagement can support this objective.

There is a clear body of policy and other drivers and evidence to support the 'why' of embedding excellent civic engagement in a TU. The rest of this paper considers the 'how', beginning with a case study.

Case Study

This case study explores recent co-design projects involving TU Dublin students and academic staff with Saint John of God Community Services (SJOG) participants with intellectual disabilities and support staff. TU Dublin⁷ is the first Technological University in Ireland, established in 2019 from a merger of three Institutes of Technology, with around 28,000 students on programmes from apprenticeships to PhDs. SJOG⁸ is a non-profit organization which provides state-funded education, medical and social care services and supports for individuals with an intellectual disability, as well as adult, child and adolescent mental health services in Ireland, to almost 7,000 people. The research goal for the co-design project⁹, which was collaboratively planned over a period of months, was to develop accessible android mobile apps, or “universally designed ICT [Information and Communications Technology] applications for people with intellectual disability” (Bourke, Boland, Mooney, Bourke & Gilligan, 2018, p.1). The experience was both challenging and rewarding for all participants.

⁷ TU Dublin’s foundation organisations each had a strong tradition of engagement with local communities and industry, which was a central part of the proposal to designate them as a TU. For example, within the Access and Civic Engagement Office, in 2008 the Programme for Students Learning with Communities was set up to support collaboratively designed, course-based projects between community organisations, university students and lecturers, for mutual benefit. Since then over 11,000 TU Dublin students have been involved in collaborative curriculum-based projects, supervised by academic staff, with well over 150 community organisations.

⁸ The Vision of SJOG is for "a society inspired by Hospitality, where the potential of each individual is reached". The current SJOG Strategic Plan includes two areas which are particularly pertinent to engagement with Universities: person-centered service development and delivery (services and supports are determined and directed by the individual so that he or she can achieve their potential) and building capacity and relationships (supporting, strengthening and developing the skills, competencies and abilities of individuals, families, communities, and the organization). The TU Dublin SJOG co-design projects fulfil the mission to provide inclusive adult education and lifelong learning, and promote inclusive mainstream learning environments following the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), enhance the abilities of the people SJOG support, and facilitate their independence.

⁹ This project was particularly special in that the collaboration came about through a young self advocate (who receives support from St John of God Community Services) approaching a university lecturer at a Community Hub for Accessible Technology, which she attended with support staff, and asking could they work together, as she wanted to find a way to go to college.

The SJOG participants and support staff came to TU Dublin for a day every week for a full semester. They arrived at 10am for a morning of design thinking workshops, had lunch in the student canteen, and from 1.30-3.30pm they worked with the computing students. In the first year of the project there were 16 SJoG community participants and six staff, but by 2019 there were 26 community participants, 11 staff and three work placement students. TU Dublin student numbers ranged from 18-25 over this period, and three academic staff members supervised the students each year. The co-designers¹⁰ met the students in the computer science labs and worked in small groups, with equal numbers of students and co-designers. The SJOG participants came up with all the concept ideas for apps. During the semester the teams worked together to develop the app concepts and details, each group working on a different concept idea. Over the course of the four years, a small number of project ideas with potential have been worked on in successive years, but most projects are worked on for one semester only. One concept developed, for example, was an app to help participants to manage cash, to avoid the risk of being short-changed when making transactions. At the end of each annual set of projects, all of the final outputs were presented at a gathering of staff and students/participants from both organisations, followed by an awards ceremony where both sets of participants were presented with certificates of participation from TU Dublin.

¹⁰ 'Co-designers' included individuals with intellectual disability and support staff.

My Money App

DUBLIN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY DUBLIN

Saint John of God Community Services clg. Liffey Services

By C.R.E.A.M.

Match notes in your Wallet

Match coins in your Wallet

Your balance Tap Camera at Checkout

Scan the amount owed on the Cash Register

It will tell you what money to give the shop.

It will show you the money you should have left

It will tell you the money you have left

You can track how you spend your money

Watch our video on the Money App here

Figure 1: Money App co-design project output

The relevance of these projects to SJOG and TU Dublin, and to the SDGs, are clearly evident. This was an opportunity for the men and women supported by SJOG to engage in a

meaningful way in college life, accessing quality education, and learning about design thinking. The collaboration also enhanced the quality and diversity of the TU Dublin students' education, helping to develop student graduate attributes and giving them real-world collaborative co-design experience¹¹. The co-designers increased their confidence and transferable social skills, as did the TU Dublin students, thereby supporting the development of sustainable communities where a wide range of people can be actively engaged (and moving from a medical model of support for people with disabilities to a social model). By working on apps to create accessible digital solutions to enable individuals with disabilities, the project was about reducing inequalities.

Finally, TU Dublin and SJOG were engaged in partnership for the SDGs. The co-design project had an innovative and effective collaboration support structure - a cross-partner steering committee which ensured any challenges were thought through collectively. Letters of Comfort working out the project plans and responsibilities were agreed and signed by both organisations. These structures have potential to be scaled up effectively to support embedded TU-wide community engagement, as will be discussed below. After four years of collaboration, there is a strong desire among the project team to continue to develop and grow the work, enhance the engagement, and involve other disciplines and areas within TU Dublin (such as technology transfer units) to bring the app ideas to production and into the hands of eager service users. They are also keen to find a way to formally accredit the learning of the co-designers from SJOG.

The key themes emerging from this case study are sustainable and scalable partnership for knowledge co-creation and exchange, enhancing the learner experience and quality of

¹¹ One student, Modestas, explained why he chose to work on a co-design project: "I was tired of doing little projects that had absolutely nothing to do with the real world, nor do they help anyone" (in St John of God Liffey Services 2016).

education, widening participation in higher education to reduce inequalities - and structures, processes and capacity-building to support and embed all of these. In the sections below we make our recommendations for how to embed these critical aspects of civic engagement in a TU.

SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals

Solving real-world challenges requires multiple disciplines and sectors to collaborate. Historically, societal sectors and governmental departments have at times operated in isolation from each other, each viewing its brief in a narrow focus on one piece of society or a person's life. Education, employment, transport, social welfare, etc. mainly deliver outcomes that appear possible within their own narrow scope. Universities have often worked in the same siloed way. The legislation specifies that TUs can only be created by mergers of Institutes of Technology (IoTs). TUs have scope, as they merge, to re-design structures and processes to embed partnership working, which might be more difficult for long-established universities. The IOTs, from which TUs are emerging, were rooted in practical trades and a focus on service delivery. TUs can find systematic, practical, and meaningful ways to introduce collaboration and engagement into the curriculum and into research to address real-world challenges, with a focus on the SDGs. They can potentially support novel and sometimes unorthodox methods of engagement, as well as finding opportunities to partner with other universities and industry to maximise the mutual benefit and impact of civic engagement – to make it excellent.

The National Strategy for Higher Education is clear about what is required of a HEI to support effective community engagement:

to be internally adaptive in order to be externally responsive [...]: Strong institutional leadership; Change in the culture and internal business processes of institutions; and

Recognition of the importance of engagement activities in resource allocations, in promotion criteria and in the metrics used to assess progress at institutional, regional and national level (HEA, 2011, p.78).

Good governance can create the conditions for deeper, meaningful and consistent civic engagement partnerships, underpinned by key principles including fairness, accountability, responsibility and transparency. Governance is ultimately about the process of decision-making and the implementation of those decisions. A basic community development principle is that those who are affected by decisions should be involved in making those decisions. Community voice needs to be heard, valued, and given weight to redress inequalities between the university and community organizations, and so needs to be built into university structures and decision-making processes. While our vision looks at potential for new structures, as all TUs must involve mergers of institutions there is lots of scope to build community voice into existing structures and processes, and ensure that these support engagement as well as possible.

Establishing a university-wide committee or steering group on civic engagement is an effective strategy to embed civic engagement, scaling up the governance model used in the case study above. Embedding civic engagement has implications across the university at all levels, so membership should include senior leaders as well as other internal and external stakeholders, such as HR and finance, technology transfer and business incubation staff, and community and government representatives, and should be multidisciplinary and diverse. The role of the committee or steering group would be to embed civic engagement and partnership for the goals across all of the TU, particularly into teaching and research (in line with the legislation), identifying the key SDGs and real world challenges to be addressed, and establishing a road map for engagement and progression of partnerships for mutual benefit.

Ideally such a committee would be linked to and report into an overall governance/senior management structure.

Within each structural unit or function, such a committee could be replicated (for example each academic School or College could have a civic engagement committee), all the way down to a committee to manage each significant collaborative project, as in the case study above. A similar trickle-down/bubble-up structure could be adopted for other aspects of community engagement, such as strategic and/or operational plans, written agreements to support collaboration and clarify roles and responsibilities, and key champions. At each level there should be formal linkages and feedback/forward processes to the other levels.










	Governance structure	Strategy/plan/programme	Written agreements	Leader/champion
TU management level	Civic engagement/partnership committee 	Civic engagement strategic/operational plan 	Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with key strategic partners 	Senior leader with civic engagement role 
Unit/function level	Civic engagement/partnership committee 	Civic engagement strategic/operational plan 	Letters of comfort 	Civic Engagement Champion or Lead 
Project level	Project partnership committee 	Project programme	Timeline agreement form; collaborative research agreements	Project champion/lead

Table 1: Trickle-down and bubble-up models for supporting partnership for the goals

Strong leadership is required to foster and encourage buy-in for civic engagement across the university. A senior leader (e.g. Director or Vice President), preferably one with designated responsibility for civic engagement, who would report directly into the senior management team on civic engagement activity and outcomes, is a key recommendation, and is already in place in some Irish universities. All senior leaders could play significant roles in championing

civic engagement and partnerships. A civic engagement ‘champion’ or ‘lead’ within each unit and function could also have a key role in supporting partnership working. Collaborations need to be safeguarded to ensure they are not affected by structural changes in the university or in the community. Sharing responsibility for civic engagement across a range of championing roles and governance committees in a TU can be an excellent way to do this.

For collaborative partnerships, ethics are another key governance consideration. While community organisations may often be smaller than universities, both organisations are responding to regulation and government policy, are likely to be publicly funded, and may have quite rigid processes that need to be challenged or modernised, such as ethical approval processes, which can be slow. For example, looking at the potential to develop and grow the case study projects, under current systems in both organisations ethical approval may not be granted in time for a time-constrained project such as a final year undergraduate thesis. Ethics committees need to balance concerns regarding data, participation, consent, and non-traditional co-design research roles with the urgent need for participatory research to address critical societal challenges. Both in the community and in a TU, ethics boards may need support, resourcing and capacity-building to transition to being more agile and responsive, and to facilitating a more collaborative, emergent model of research to progress the SDGs.

Structures and processes that support partnership working need to be flexible, accessible and responsive, supporting a wide range of both top-down and bottom-up collaborations. While establishing university-wide structures and considering scaling up projects, TUs should not lose sight of the value of smaller projects and collaborations with less well-resourced communities and organisations. Any university or community organisation staff member can begin a working relationship from a chance conversation, as in the case study above. Policies and strategies can empower university staff and students to feel that they can and should

develop external relationships on behalf of the university. Community organisations need to feel welcome to suggest ideas and look for university staff to collaborate with.

A TU can build on its pre-merger cultures of community engagement to ensure that it embeds and grows really excellent partnership work. Civic engagement must be seen to be valued and core to the university mission. TUs can consider the relative prominence and parity of civic engagement with the other pillars of teaching and research, in developing their strategic plans, to work towards equality. Formal recognition of all civic engagement stakeholders (in appropriate awards and fellowship schemes for example), not just community organisation participants, can make visible how a TU values engagement¹². Progression and promotion criteria for staff should include a focus on partnership for the goals. A TU could formally recognise engagement in staff workload models, and in transcript recognition for community engaged learning and research for students, as well as in module credits.

A final note on resourcing partnership work. At the TU level, resources must be committed so that civic engagement can be deepened and sustained, as it requires investment, and targeted and specialist support. Funding can be an even bigger challenge for the community sector. There is no dedicated funding structure for community organisations to facilitate and encourage community engagement particularly with the HEI sector, even though collaborative projects like the case study demonstrate positive impact for both the support staff and service users. SJoG and other partners could use more resources and tools to support engagement and partnerships.

TUs could engage in policy and advocacy work, alongside their community organisation partners, to encourage national and international research and community funders to support

¹² For example in the case study above, formal recognition of the collaboration by the Head of School, through her active involvement in the award ceremony at the end of the project, promoted the engagement from the top down even though the project started from the bottom up.

funding for innovative projects and provide a network of supports for collaboration to build capacity (and in the case study above, to create accessible digital solutions to societal challenges). They could also advocate for funding for the partnership work within community-university collaboration. Most research funding structures fund academic partners to do collaborative research, but few fund community organisation staff for their part in the collaboration, and even fewer fund community organisation participants or undergraduate students to participate in the partnership. A TU can build awareness internally, through its research support staff, of the need to plan, and budget for, collaborative research and dissemination of each project from the start. Funding and commitment to collaboration should extend throughout the lifetime of any collaborative research project, up to and including dissemination. The return for securing funding for all stakeholders involved in partnership work is potentially immense, enhancing the capacity of staff, students and community organisations, impacting on society and the SDGs, and fulfilling the TU mission.

SDG 4: Quality Education

A TU can support several different categories of civic engagement to enhance the quality of education, while also addressing societal challenges and bridging social, economic and digital divides in society. Examples could include co-designing a sustainable programme of volunteering for university students and staff, supporting staff exchange between sectors, developing curriculum-based co-design projects, or co-designing and delivering modules or programmes of study relevant to both community organisation staff and/or participants and university staff and/or students.

One of the major challenges to collaboration between TUs and community organisations is managing expectations on all sides, given the wide range of applied subjects within TUs and the potentially large numbers of students - encouraging all stakeholders to ‘dream big’, but to

plan with reality in mind. Real constraints include available time, lack of budget, and the fact that students are only learning the skills necessary to complete the work, as well as that all participants are on a learning curve in any new project. It is essential to fully resource the time and commitment required to identify the problems and to realistically detail the efforts required to build meaningful solutions together.

Curriculum-based engagement with communities (as well as with industry, although that is outside the scope of this paper) should be fostered and built into as many modules as possible to enhance the student experience. All TU module descriptors could be reviewed for potential to include community engagement projects. Final year students could be encouraged to collaborate with communities for their major project or thesis, where possible alongside postgraduate students, and in an interdisciplinary context. There are good practices in this regard already in TU Dublin¹³ and IoTs, and it is also worth considering successful interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary¹⁴ models elsewhere, including the Engineering Projects in Community Service programme in Purdue University in the US (see Purdue University (n.d.)) and the Academic Consultancy Training module in Wageningen University and Research, the Netherlands (see Wageningen University (n.d.)). An annual review of completed engaged research projects by students could identify the most promising to bring to a university-wide civic engagement committee to explore the potential for development. These kinds of initiatives can enable a TU to build a pipeline of engaged researchers, drawing

¹³ TU Dublin's Access and Civic Engagement Office (previously known as the DIT Community Links Programme) was commended as an example of best practice in community engagement in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (DES, 2011).

¹⁴ Transdisciplinary projects involve university students and/or staff from across academic disciplines working together (as in interdisciplinary projects), as well as working with societal stakeholders and knowledge from outside the university, beyond the boundaries of specific disciplines, to address real-world challenges and problems. For example see Walter, Helgenberger, Wiek, and Scholz (2007).

on existing areas of strength, with the collaborative skills necessary to authentically engage in knowledge exchange to address SDGs.

Research-informed teaching can also be improved when the research is done collaboratively with communities, by ensuring its relevance and effectiveness, and making it more impactful and more accessible. Dedicated networks within a TU could support engaged teaching and research, with membership drawn from within the TU and from its external partners, and could host academic/community networking events to encourage new collaborations.

Collaborative research with communities could be supported by industry sponsors, with bursaries to pay research assistants, researchers from community organisations, and/or TU students to work on these projects. Lecturer-led and student-led projects could together drive collaborative research further towards implementation - TU Berlin's Project Labs, for example, are a good model of student-led research (TU Berlin (n.d.)).

Academic modules and timetables can be rigidly structured, with TU applied disciplines often having higher contact hours than in traditional universities. This can restrict the duration of, and time available for, community engagement projects. To foster inter- and transdisciplinary working, a TU could address timetabling challenges by reserving a half-day on all programmes in every teaching week specifically for interdisciplinary and/or community engaged curriculum-based projects.

The sustainability of collaborative education-focused engagement can be assured by making the activity an intrinsic part of the programme, and ensuring that the module descriptors include and encourage continued engagement. Assessment methods also need to be considered, with continuous assessment of students being a better way than exams to balance the relative importance of process and outcomes in community engaged projects.

One of the key enablers of collaboration is a strong, well-resourced civic engagement staff team. This team or function should operate as a partnership broker, and its staff should have understanding and experience of different sectors, and the challenges and strengths within each. They can provide a range of supports, as per the diagram below.

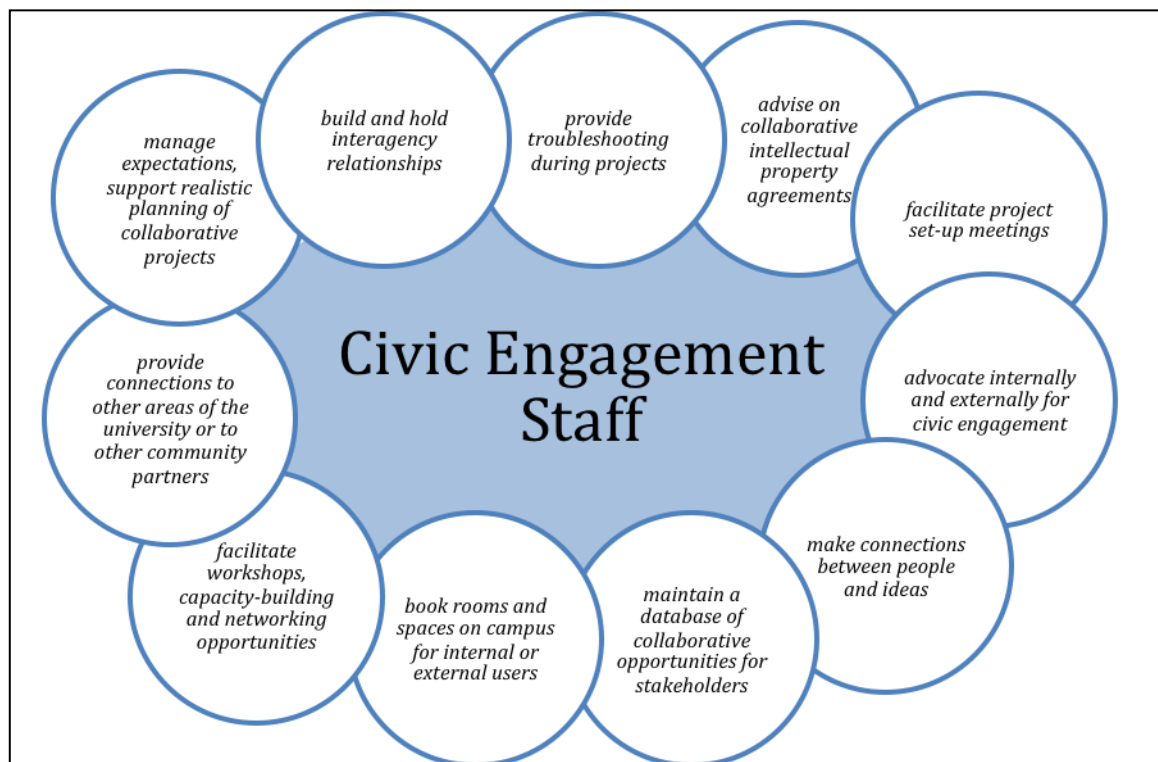


Figure 2: Supports provided by civic engagement staff

At individual project level, the quality of interaction and communication can have a huge impact on the educational experience of all participants. How partnerships are built is the key to successful civic engagement between universities and community partners (Soska & Johnson Butterfield, 2013). Preparation, communication, empathy, respect, vision and realism are all key to successful projects. Training and mentoring for university staff and students, and community organisation staff and participants, can support effective collaboration, focusing on developing communication, interpersonal and teamwork skills. Academic staff may be experts in their disciplines but may need support to develop the skills of engagement needed to empower the voice of community participants or co-designers. To

be really effective, training could be co-designed with community partners¹⁵. A TU could also offer all first year undergraduate students a generic ‘learning to learn and engage’ module, to support quality civic engagement.

In the case study, the willingness of the St John of God participant co-designers to share lived experience, including their vulnerabilities and support needs, and share their ideas for possible solutions to their problems, was a crucial part of the project. To support this trust and sharing, formal or informal exchanges and introductions to the different ‘cultures’ involved in any project are essential from the start (by ‘cultures’ we mean diverse sectors and disciplines, as well as diverse nationalities and ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds). Collaboration means the language must be ‘shared’, and easier for each other, and for others, to understand. Language connects to empathy and understanding. Project time should be allocated to support ‘icebreaker’ sessions and to allow the participants to get to know each other and build relationships. While this could seem from an academic perspective to be a waste of scarce class time on a module, it would increase the empathy and understanding of all stakeholders' roles in the project, and likely deliver better results and quality learning. Ideally a collaborative learning or research process involves a balance of contribution between university staff and students, and community organisation staff and participants.

Finally, environment is an important factor in any collaboration, The logistics of having non-students in a formal learning environment and navigating the setting can pose a problem, potentially preventing the group from feeling welcomed and part of the TU community.

Understanding the needs of all the participants is an important part of collaboration.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), as well as universal design of the physical

¹⁵ For example, staff in St John of God Community Services use simple feedback loops with participants to check their understanding, which academic staff could adapt effectively to use with students. Embedding these kinds of good practices would impact positively on all aspects of the university’s work, including research and teaching as well as civic engagement.

environment, can help address some of these challenges, and should be built into the fabric of each TU.

SDGs 10 and 11: Reducing Inequalities; Sustainable Cities and Communities

As mentioned above, one of the goals of TUs listed in the Act is to widen participation in higher education, and this has clear links to civic engagement:

promote access to the technological university and the education it provides, by economically or socially disadvantaged persons, by persons who have a disability and by persons from sections of society in the region in which the campuses of the technological university are located who are significantly under-represented in its student body (<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/3/enacted/en/print>).

This is clearly a mandate to reduce inequalities, and to make cities and communities more sustainable by empowering individuals within.

In the narrowest sense, ‘widening participation’ can be interpreted as supporting non-traditional students to register on undergraduate programmes. In a broader sense ‘widening participation’ relates to lifelong learning, and to the university’s engagement in a range of ways with a range of people, with an educational focus: “the positive participation of TU Dublin in the social, cultural, economic, and educational lives of members of Widening Participation groups, and their participation in the enrichment of TU Dublin, as students, staff, collaborators, advisors, and graduates” (TU Dublin, 2019, p. 3).

Students with intellectual disabilities often express a desire to go to college. A small number of Irish universities have developed specific programmes of study for people with intellectual disabilities, following the lead of the US¹⁶. There is limited evidence from individuals with an

¹⁶ In the US there are 271 higher education programmes for people with cognitive impairments running in 49 states. There are 19 states receiving funding through Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIDs). There are 95 Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) programmes in 30 states and 19 states have policy or legislation on inclusive higher education, with 28 states having state or regional coordination. (Think College National Coordinating Center, 2019)

intellectual disability of engagement with higher education in Ireland (Corby et al., 2012).

There is little or no integrated educational provision at higher education level for people with intellectual disabilities, so a TU could take a significant leadership role in this area. TU Dublin already has a programme on one campus where people with intellectual disabilities are supported to participate in first year undergraduate modules alongside students of all abilities. There is considerable scope to build on this.

For too long end users of services and products could feel powerless in their ability to articulate, and have an impact on, the real world challenges they experienced. Even where there was engagement with service users in the design process, quite often the solution was already mapped out and the engagement a token gesture in response to a policy directive. In some cases this was understandable, as sector silos and historic institutional legacies could block the capacity and pathway for real end user/civic engagement. However the development of this new type of university, and the increasing urgency of societal challenges and sustainable development goals, now provide an exciting opportunity to change this for the better, widening participation to support end users to advocate for their own abilities and the supports that will enable them. Cities and communities will become more sustainable when more of their inhabitants feel empowered to make a contribution and become independent, active citizens, from community service users to third level students.

To further address inequalities, TU could build on the National Framework of Qualification Learner Competencies (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2003), possibly in collaboration with Education and Training Boards¹⁷ to support and recognise learning for all participants in knowledge-focused collaborations, such as the case study above. While

¹⁷ National education policy does not currently allow universities to accredit below level 6, or undergraduate diploma, on the national framework of qualifications, and there is a policy drive to move higher education access programmes to community or adult education providers rather than universities.

university students submit their project work to the lecturers for feedback, their collaborating community organisation participants could submit documentation of their learning in a parallel track (using appropriately accessible technology such as video blogs) to a lifelong learning centre, demonstrating parity with TU students, and appropriately high expectations of service users. In this way, a TU could support all participants to reach their full potential at the most appropriate level. Formal accreditation for learning could be key to ensuring long-term sustainability for community partners of a wide range of collaborative projects.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt about the positive impact of civic engagement, as it delivers on national policies in both HE and community sectors, as well as institutional and global UN Sustainable Development Goals simultaneously. TUs have a distinctive new remit, and their foundation institutions have histories of regional engagement and applied disciplines which give them unique opportunities to lead in the field of civic engagement. The potential to effectively address real-life challenges, in collaboration with community partners, through cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary projects can be seen in our case study of a co-design project between TU Dublin students and staff, and St John of God Community Services participants and staff. Learning from this case study, combined with four of the most relevant SDGs, gave us a roadmap to demonstrate how a TU can embed really excellent civic engagement, for maximum mutual learning and benefit.

Focusing on partnership for the goals, we argue that a Technological University needs robust governance processes that are clear, collaboratively steered, and focused on mutual benefits. A range of structures, flows and championing roles can enable effective collaborative projects to be initiated, piloted, scaled up, taken to implementation and/or production (if appropriate), and embedded in inter- and trans-disciplinary ways of working. These should

support engagement, capacity building, and visioning. Effective flexible supports for partnership working and collaboration, coordinated by a civic engagement function/team, and championed by a designated senior leadership role, should be well-resourced. A TU should also adopt an advocacy role, challenging inequalities in funding structures, advocating across sectors and funders to grow collaboration and civic engagement at a national and European level, working with community organisations to achieve social change.

Looking to the goal of enhancing quality education, we argue that TUs can draw on their applied learning histories to embed community engagement into the research and teaching processes, maximising the learning for students across professional and technical skills, and supporting and building capacity for staff, students and community partners to do more and better collaborative learning and research. Physical and social environments should create a welcome, safe space where knowledge and experience can be openly shared and built on, based on universal design for learning.

Finally, on the theme of addressing inequalities, and sustainable cities and communities, we argued that well managed civic engagement offers recognition and upskilling opportunities for all participants, supporting lifelong learning and widening participation initiatives and accreditation, and empowering all participants to become active citizens with skills in partnership working.

We hope that our vision, based on our reflection from our experience as practitioners and researchers, can inspire and enable new TUs to develop and grow civic engagement as core to their mission. Learning from a single case study, when reflected on collaboratively, and in context, can point the way to how TUs can embed partnership with communities to make a real difference.

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