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Inside View IV.6.1
Research and training beyond the university walls

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Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) is an urban, comprehensive, public French-language university. Since its foundation, UQAM has been engaged in research and training activities with non-profit organizations. An institutional policy on community services was adopted in 1979, which led the way to several approaches indented to support faculty members participating in partnership projects. These institutional approaches are presented here. Community–university engagement (CUE) initiatives are also being developed in other higher education institutions in Quebec; a few examples will be presented here, along with their specific features. Challenges for future development are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Involved since its foundation in 1969 in rethinking engagement and the social responsibility of higher education institutions, UQAM has developed institutional approaches intended to support faculty members implicated in partnership projects with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Designed to facilitate involvement, these approaches aim to recognize engagement as part of the first two missions of universities (research and teaching), which are often perceived as the most important aspects for academics' tenure tracks. These approaches were developed on the premises that such an engagement would contribute to a better knowledge-based society and to improvements in teaching and research functions for the institution. UQAM remains the only higher institution in Quebec offering such institutional support. Other universities in Quebec have developed CUE initiatives, mainly through training programmes (adapted to specific populations or co-op-based) or research projects carried out by institutes, centres or research chairs.

This paper aims to present: (1) UQAM's institutional approaches for facilitating community–university partnerships engaged in co-creating and exchanging knowledge; (2) examples of other CUE initiatives in Quebec; and finally (3) challenges for future development.

UQAM'S INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES

UQAM, an urban, comprehensive, public French-language university, was founded with the mandate of making higher education more accessible and more democratic. Accessibility was defined in a broad sense to encompass sectors of the community not usually served by universities, mainly NGOs, women's groups and unions involved in collective advancement. An institutional policy on community services (see http://www.instances.uqam.ca/ReglementsPolitiquesDocuments/Pages/Politiqueno41.aspx), which promotes the democratization of access for these groups, was adopted in 1979, and concrete approaches were implemented to facilitate and encourage community–university partnerships. This institutional policy was developed based on several founding principles:

- the recognition of NGOs and other groups as full and effective partners of the university in terms of training and research activities;
- a recognition that this strategic partnering, based on intellectual inputs and knowledge-sharing, would enable all the partners to pool their resources to achieve results they could not attain alone;

- a project-by-project approach in which the identification of partners, objectives and methods had to be agreed upon prior to the development of each project;
- the necessity of setting up institutional procedures and criteria to ensure both the social relevancy and the scientific quality of projects;
- the recognition that training as well as research or creative activities carried out with NGOs would be integrated into the regular duties of a faculty member, namely teaching and research, and not relegated solely to a third mission promoting the diffusion of knowledge;
- the importance of knowledge mobilization to achieve engagement and social responsibility at UQAM.

Recognizing and integrating these activities as part of regular task of faculty members was structured as follows.

BOARD OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
The creation of the Board of Community Services (BCS), co-governed by eight in-house and eight NGO representatives, followed shortly after the adoption of UQAM's institutional policy. Its mandate is to provide recommendations on UQAM's institutional priorities on community engagement and to evaluate the different projects that are presented for institutional support (training or research and creative activities).

TRAINING OR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES
Nine hundred hours of training or research activities are made available yearly. Therefore, a faculty member involved with NGOs in providing training or research activities can be exempted from one of their regular teaching assignments (at UQAM, each teaching assignment comprises a total of 45 hours) to participate in such activities. This 'exemption' allows resources to be redirected towards needs expressed by the NGOs. These activities must be recognized and sanctioned by the BCS; evaluation will be based on the scientific and social relevancy of activities.

SEED MONEY ALLOCATED TO RESEARCH AND CREATIVE PROJECTS
Annually, an institutional budget of about $100,000 is allocated to support projects conducted in partnership with NGOs. This money is mainly devoted to supporting students engaged in these projects. Projects must demonstrate their social pertinence as well as their scientific quality. This seed money often provides leverage for more substantial financial support from federal or provincial granting agencies.

COMMUNITY SERVICES UNIT
The operationalization of CUE at UQAM is made possible by the Community Services Unit (CSU; or Service aux Collectivités). Its mandate is to promote and coordinate training and research activities to be carried out by faculty members in collaboration with NGOs, women's group and unions. The role of the coordinator, acting as the intersection between the community and the university, is critical for implementing collaborative, sustainable relationships between the parties. Coordinators provide the main entry point for NGOs in the university, will help with finding faculty members interested in the project and will assist with writing the memorandum of understanding. They will act as conciliators and facilitators throughout the different stages of the co-developed project, helping to define research objectives and methodologies based on a common understanding of the expressed needs, and are actively involved in knowledge mobilization. Coordinators also assure the establishment of a partner's follow-up committee, which meets regularly.

Since its foundation, the CSU has initiated more than a thousand research and training activities. Based on a cross-cultural perspective – scientific and practitioner views – academics, NGOs, trade unions and women's movements have established through these projects a 'knowledge dialogue' based on mutuality. Two fundamental premises have been necessary to achieve this goal:

- trust and mutual respect from both parties;
- a recognition of each party's input into the project.

The CSU was the first structure created in Canada for CUE, years before the current generation of structures. It was the CSU, together with the science shops and participatory research network of the 1970s, that led directly to the creation in 1998 of the Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) funding envelope of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

EXAMPLES OF OTHER CUE INITIATIVES IN QUEBEC
CUE initiatives were developed in past years with support from the CURA programme, private foundations and other provincial funding sources. Engagement can embrace multifaceted strategies and CUE initiatives through training programmes or research projects, mostly carried out by institutes, centres or research chairs. This paper is not intended to present a compendium of such initiatives but will give a broad overview and succinctly present their distinctive features.

Regional universities (see, for example, http://www.uquebec.ca/reseau/ and http://www.usherbrooke.ca/irecus/accueil/) can foster a structuring networking role to support local and regional development. Therefore, regional CUE initiatives are often related to specific economic, social, local and regional needs. Examples from the eastern coastal part of Quebec can be provided by CURA's programme Challenges of Coastal Communities of the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence at a Time of Climate Change, which promotes the co-production of knowledge, skills and methods that will stimulate the emergence of innovative approaches reinforcing communities' capacities to develop strategies to adapt to climate change and to participate in the decision-making process (see http://www.defisdescom munautescotieres.org/definitionaruc/en). A second example from Eastern Quebec can be provided by the work conducted by the Canada Research Chair on Regional and Land Development, which studies the social dynamics and processes surrounding resource and regional development, particularly in outlying and non-metropolitan regions (see http://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/chairholders-titulaires/profile-eng.aspx?profileId=2239).

In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, a northwestern region near several First Nations communities, sustainable forestry is an important local issue. The Canada Research Chair in Aboriginal Forestry (see http://www.chairs-chaires.

gc.ca/chairholders-titulaires/profile-eng. aspx?profileId=2493) was developed to take into consideration the past, present and future in setting up sustainable forestry management strategies that respect the Aboriginal viewpoint and culture. Also in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, an interesting adapted training programme, respectful of Aboriginal perspectives, that is contributing to the improvement of living conditions for Aboriginal people has been developed by the First Peoples' University (see http://www.uqat.ca/en/services/firstpeoples/).

Urban universities also contribute to the development of their surrounding or more remote communities. Embedded in the community-based participatory research paradigm, and promoting the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied for purposes of education and taking action for effective social change, these projects cover topics as diverse as health (http://pram.mcgill.ca/), First Nations issues (http://www.reseaudialog.ca/; http://www.mcgill.ca/cine/) and the social development of communities (http://www4.uqo.ca/crcoc/), among others.

CUE is favoured by training programmes adapted to specific needs or populations, for example: Quebec's First Nations and Inuit Faculties of Medicine (http://old.cssspnql.com/eng/sante/faculte.htm); experiential learning, adult learning and transformational learning (http://chrcs.concordia.ca/about/); community economic development (http://scpa-eapc.concordia.ca/en/graduate-diploma-in-ced/); and diverse co-op programmes (https://oraprdnt.uqtr.uquebec.ca/pls/public/gscw030?owa_no_site=1280; http://www.usherbrooke.ca/ssp/en/).

Other forms of CUE include public conversations in community spaces across Montreal (see http://www.concordia.ca/extended-learning/community-development/univcafe/).

CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

One of the challenges that UQAM and other institutions are facing is to increase the number of faculty members willing to engage their research activities in these non-traditional approaches, and in addition to gain recognition institutionally and among their peers for their work. For example, at UQAM in 2011, 60 out of 1,000 faculty members were involved in 82 projects; the majority of these academics originated from the social sciences and humanities. The number of 60 professors involved is certainly impressive, but there is still room for improvement.

A major stumbling block remains the lack of recognition by the granting agencies of such partnerships, mainly in the natural sciences and engineering, and the evaluation of academia's scientific production based almost solely on mainstream peer-reviewed publications. Only a few programmes from the SSHRC, such as CURA, have encouraged and recognized community–university partnerships and evaluated scientific production in a different way. However, this programme has recently been replaced by others (see http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/umbrella_programs-programme_cadre/connection-connexion-eng.aspx#.

UQAM provides an example of successful CURA alliances in social economy. Research related to social economy that is useful to the community was developed by coordinating networks of researchers and community partners. Sharing knowledge and practices between universities and communities stimulated engagement by bridging spheres of research and action:

over 100 research projects were completed, which led to the publication of research findings and the organization of seminars,

workshops, and conferences. These activities were carried out by more than 160 researchers and partners who are active in the social economy, from universities, research centres, and various collective businesses and non-profit organizations, mostly based in Québec, but also in the rest of Canada and many other countries. (http://www.aruc-es.uqam.ca/Portals/0/docs/Information%20%28english%29.pdf)

Another challenge is related to the complexity of issues brought up by community partners that often require accompanying follow-up measures. An example is provided by the project A Pension Plan Made to Measure, which was set up to remedy the lack of a pension plan for 80,000 employees, mostly women, in Quebec's NGOs and social economy sector. With the support of CSU resources, a pension plan adapted to the community movement's needs and constraints was elaborated; it manages CAD$15 million and has a growing membership of 3,210 employees from 416 different community and women's groups (see www.regimeretraite.ca). Given the complexity of the issue, university resources are still involved in the project to ensure knowledge transfer on a continuous basis to the other pension plan trustees.

The CUE experiences described in this paper were all beneficial for the community partners, the researchers and the institutions themselves. As the enrichment has benefited all three parties, the commitment to pursue collaboration has been rendered easier. However, difficulties related to different organizational cultures – different approaches to learning, action and time, for example – remain. Therefore, academia's engagement and social responsibility must be supported, and a clear institutional commitment must be put forward to ensure the success of these ventures.