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Editorial: Introducing the IMPACT Journal and its First Issue

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Welcome to this, the first issue of the International Modern Perspectives on Academia and Community Today (IMPACT) Journal. In creating this Journal and producing this first issue we have proven that multidisciplinary working is possible. Moreover, we have shown that as academics, we have the power to challenge the norms and work in innovative ways within the contexts of our institutions. Thinking and working in innovative ways reflects on our practices as we reimagine our work and role in working with the community. Through the creation of a multidisciplinary Journal, we intend to provide a platform that will not only host approaches used in various disciplines but will also act as a merging point by putting forward perspectives from the communities alongside academic work. In doing so, we hope to promote new forms of dialogue, which have the potential to generate new research directions, and help cement the notion that academia and community are intertwined rather than separate entities within the social relations. The purpose of academic practice is to serve the needs of the community as both members of the community and academics who adopt an advocacy standpoint. Therefore, we hope that through the collaborative working practices underpinning this initiative we can achieve our aim to promote community involvement and engagement and meaningful contribution in the short and long term.

As a Journal, we welcome submissions from academia and the community. While as a team, we recognise the need to maintain specific processes and procedures to ensure the integrity of the work we publish (e.g. rigorous peer-review), we are also committed to the urgency that the published work is accessible to all. It is widely known that paywalls have restricted access to knowledge and research outcomes to merely those who can afford them. We understand this condition as a barrier to community engagement, public involvement, and eventually to the very impact of the work produced in academia. Thanks to the generous support offered by Queen's University Belfast, we are in the position to provide a no-fee, open access publication outlet. That is, neither authors nor readers pay any fees to publish or access contributions in this Journal. Together with the procedures we

have in place, we are confident that the IMPACT Journal can help to reverse the stranglehold of conspiracy and political manipulations associated with the rise of 'fake news' and the mistrust of science in the recent years. We hope our collaborations will foster mutual trust and bring value to knowledge produced within local and international contexts. After all, we can only tackle the growing complex societal challenges through working together as global citizens.

Although, 'public engagement' and 'community involvement' have been highlighted as integral to the work of academia, we sense that the existing asymmetrical understandings of 'academia' and 'community' are still being reproduced and maintained in practice. For example, the term 'public engagement' is often used by academics to refer to the dissemination of academic knowledge to a non-expert audience. The flow of knowledge in that case is from 'academia' to the 'public' and consequently, it implicitly denotes that the existing power-relationship described above remains in place. Public engagement also refers to better communication practices and strategies, so that academia, research institutes and other institutions can increase their impact and offer 'better' services, ensuring their 'viability' and 'visibility'. 'Community involvement' usually refers to the need of academia to 'get involved with the community, or that the 'community be more active in involving with the research'. Moreover, the approaches to community engagement and involvement often include an aspect of volunteering initiatives and 'service-learning'. These concepts are often understood from the departing premise that universities as academic institutions promote such initiatives to 'educate' their students and enhance their sense of being 'responsible citizens'. Whilst we do recognise the value and relevance of these aims and practices, as a first step of 'bridging the gap', we do believe that there is much space to develop inclusive practices as we learn together while collaborating with the community. We anticipate that articles submitted to this Journal will start providing such contributions, to move beyond what we think we know and initiate transformation into how these concepts are defined.

It might be easy to point at the gap between academia and community, perhaps due to the distinct asymmetric positions they hold (say by default) in society. Moreover, the word 'academia' allows us to assume it as a solid entity. In fact, there are certain standards that rule disciplines, so that they maintain their place in academia. However, can we say that different academic disciplines have established solid 'relations' with each other, as suggested by their accommodation under the shared roof of 'academia'? Is it true that different academic disciplines may work towards addressing the same problems and tackling the same challenges? Can we positively confirm that each discipline has access to the work produced by other disciplines? While differences in the approaches of distinct academic disciplines could not and should not be underestimated or erased, what would the benefits be if the novel knowledge could be circulated without barriers between different disciplines? How would this benefit the development not only of the academic disciplines as such, but also the development of our understanding of the challenges we face and the possible solutions? These are only some of a long list of questions we would like to see addressed through the contributions of authors from a variety of backgrounds, from within the community and communities around the world and from within academia or other environments which may consider having their work published here.

We are delighted to present this first issue of the IMPACT Journal, which already starts to address some of the questions posed above. This issue comprises three articles, each showcasing an aspect of community engagement across different sectors.

In the first article, Rebekah Corbett reports on her interview conducted with Mr. Brian Gormally, focusing on his experience as Director of the Northern Ireland Committee on the Administration of Justice. More specifically, Mr. Gormally outlines the purpose of the committee, its underlying constitution, their goals and collaborative work approach as well as solutions to challenges they have faced so far. Their course of action is suggested by the will to bring upon positive change in Northern Ireland employing human-rights legislation. This interview provides an illustrious example of effective collaboration between civil society and academics. In turn, it illustrates some of the benefits of collaborative working and provides us with ideas for developing a model of good practice.

In the second article, Innocent Anazia shifts the focus of attention to Nigeria and the critical role that community engagement plays in tackling a major social issue, that of the school attendance gap. Anazia focuses on a neglected aspect of education in Nigeria: the crucial role that community school leaders can have in enhancing the levels of school attendance. The article gives a concise outline of the Nigerian context and the strong socio-economic contrasts between urban and rural educational settings. He argues that rural school leaders have an important role in building communicational bridges

between the educational facilities and local communities and making children's education a matter that engages the whole community.

Finally, Angela Rogan's article proposes an actively engaged academia with the fight against misrepresentation of youth in the media, focusing predominantly on the UK context. More specifically, Rogan provides a discussion on the media's systematic misrepresentation of youth crime in the UK, and negative implications this can have not only to young people, but also the wider society. Rogan argues that academics have the expertise and the means to identify and expose the flaws of such representations and makes suggestions as to how Higher Education can act to eliminate stereotyping and negative representations.

We hope you enjoy reading these contributions as much as we have, and we welcome further high-quality submissions from across all disciplines.

Note on contributions

CK, CMCNB and HN conceived the idea for the Editorial and led the writing of the article. HB and LS supervised writing of the Editorial and reviewed article drafts. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.