CONCEPTUALISING PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The achievement of human social and economic development has been equated to social innovation. Innovation that focuses on the marginalised communities in South Africa becomes necessary to redress the inequalities created pre-democracy. As social institutions, higher education institutions are well positioned to deal with the challenges of the 21st century, which include poverty, unemployment and inequality, through promoting social innovation. In democratic South Africa the relationship between an institution of higher learning and the community can be viewed as a social innovation. This submission implies that one of the objectives of community engagement as a core function of universities, is to drive the social innovation agenda. The university's contributions to community development can be viewed in terms of its ability to commit to social innovation. It is a better vehicle for understanding and creating social value in all its forms.

Social innovations thrive on collaborative action involving public, private, civic organisations and the community. Community engagement provides an opportunity for higher education to address communities' socio-economic challenges through forming partnerships that are mutually beneficial to all parties involved. Active participation of universities, communities and grassroots organisations ensures that the innovations produce social outcomes that genuinely address the needs of the communities. Higher education institutions can promote the formation of diverse cross sectoral partnerships involving communities and community-based organisations in promoting social innovation, which is a crucial driver for community development. Developing mutual trusting relationships creates a conducive environment to foster social innovations. This conceptual article will discuss how universities can promote the formation of public-private partnerships for social innovation through community engagement. Rhodes university's community engagement division is used as a case study to inform the discussions. The practice of community engagement at Rhodes university community engagement division thrives on the formation of collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university partnerships that promote

socially innovative strategies in addressing community challenges.

Keywords: community engagement, social innovation, higher education institutions**,** Public-Private Partnerships

INTRODUCTION

"Higher education is currently confronted by global forces that necessitate innovative research, innovative pedagogies, and innovative organisational structures" (Tierney and Lanford 2016, 4). It is not surprising that the term innovation has become popular in the higher education arena in South Africa and is mainly linked with the disciplines of science, technology, and business for the knowledge economy. Jakovljevic (2018, 112) acknowledges that innovation encompasses scientific, technological, organisational, financial and commercial activities. Innovation is new ideas that work (Mulgan et al. 2007, 5) and developing individual innovative abilities is imperative in any organisation. There is more to an innovation than an invention. An invention is the discovery of a completely new thing. An innovation can be "the discovery of a completely new thing or a modification of existing inventions and turning them into better products and services" (The Young Foundation 2012, 12). Pol and Ville (2009, 879) argue that innovation has expanded beyond science and technology to incorporate creative ideas that address persistent socio-economic and environmental challenges confronting communities. Blass and Hayward (2014, 4) point to the gap that is created due to a lack of social innovation development in higher education and Jakovljevic (2018, 113) adds that social innovation is a driver of societal well-being and individuals, private and public sectors cooperatively contribute to sustainable societal well-being.

As a concept, social innovation describes novel ideas that fulfil social goals (Mulgan et al. 2007, 8). Achieving human social and economic development is equated to social innovation, specifically in marginalised communities. The goal to meet a social need is achieved through innovative activities and services which are developed and dispersed through organisations with a social purpose (Mulgan et al. 2007, 8). "Social innovation has emerged as an attempt to describe bottom-up approaches where new ideas and techniques grow from humble roots into substantive new social capacities" (Benneworth and Cunha 2015, 511). It is important to note that social innovation does not necessarily need to be distinct per se, but rather it must be new to the community or field of practice (The Young Foundation 2012, 7). In this article, we propose that as a critical form of community engagement in higher education institutions in South Africa, social innovation developed and promoted through public-private partnerships has much more potential to effect the required social change.

This conceptual article explores how universities can engage in meaningful partnerships

with communities and other public and private stakeholders to create social value. Universities have a public mission, which compels them to provide services that benefit society. It is important to note that to perform this public mission, universities need to increase university-community collaborations to influence the public good (Pasque et al. 2005, 5). Community engagement becomes a critical university space to contribute to the social, cultural and technological development challenges that beset communities. Engaging communities in the development processes to address their challenges results in sustainable solutions and mutual ownership of the processes (Littlewood and Holt 2018, 555). Community engagement has the potential to facilitate the birth of social innovations that improve both the economic and social position of communities (Pol and Ville 2009, 879) through public-private partnerships.

This conceptual article will discuss how universities can promote the formation of public-private partnerships for social innovation through community engagement. The case of Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) division will be used to inform the discussions. First, the article will discuss the concepts of social innovation, community engagement and public-private partnerships. Social innovation and community engagement both thrive on collaborative public private partnerships. Community-university partnerships form the bedrock for all community engagement initiatives at RUCE. This is followed by a discussion on the role of higher education in creating partnerships that promote social innovation through community engagement as a core function of higher education. The case of RUCE division will be used to draw practical examples of activities undertaken by the university to support the Makhanda community. In conclusion, the article will briefly discuss the challenges confronting community engagement and the promotion of social innovation in universities.

CONTEXT AND CONCEPTS

On a global level, it is expected that societal contestations around race, ethnicity, gender, diversity, and human rights struggles should be addressed through higher education policies (Maassen and Cloete 2006, 13). As a way of promoting social development, higher education is obligated to find solutions to these social problems. Higher education institutions (HEIs), especially universities, have a crucial role to play in the South African transformation agenda. The transition of South Africa from the apartheid era to democracy requires transformation in all existing practices and institutions, including higher education which is expected to find solutions to these social problems, as it plays a pivotal role in the holistic development of communities. "Universities can be regarded as social institutions well placed to address the societal challenges of the 21st century" (Cunha and Benneworth 2013, 13) through community engagement that promotes public-private partnerships for community development and social

innovation (Pasque et al. 2005).

The policy support for community engagement as an important part of South Africa's higher education process is reflected in the. White Paper 3 on the Transformation of Higher Education (Department of Education, DoE 1997). The White Paper calls on higher education to reconceptualise its relationship with its stakeholders in both the public and the private sphere. Institutions of higher education must be responsive to and engage with their external communities. Community engagement is recognised as one of the core functions of universities, along with teaching and research (DoE 2001). The inclusion of community engagement as a core function of higher education (Nicola 2013) is intended to create an egalitarian and inclusive higher education system that focuses on the public good. The South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF) was conceptualised in 2008 and officially launched in 2009 (Slamat 2013, 153). One of its mandates is to promote community engagement as a vehicle for development and transformation (ibid). Community engagement activities should expand to embed social innovation principles and rethink the relationship between higher education and its community (Hazelkorn 2010, 10).

As highlighted by Jakovljevic (2018, 109), HEIs can promote the formation of diverse partnerships involving community members, community-based organisations, private organisations, government and other public organisations and universities in promoting social innovation, which can contribute to the democratic process and community development in South Africa. The advantage HEIs have is their physical rootedness in communities (Pasque et al. 2005, 7); therefore, engaging with these communities provides an opportunity for higher education to address socio-economic challenges within the communities. Globally universities are being forced to reflect on their role in society and to evaluate the partnerships with their stakeholders and communities (Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno 2008, 303). Jongbloed et al. (2008, 304) further state that "higher education is interacting with an increased number and variety of communities, each of which has its specific demand on the higher education sector". Global partnerships formed through North-South and South-South university partnerships have diversified the types of communities that universities engage with. This has resulted in novel and modified relationships between HEIs and their external communities and stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown HEIs the critical need for novel partnerships and social innovation to address some of the devastation caused by the pandemic.

CONCEPTUALISING SOCIAL INNOVATION

Conceptualising social innovation must start by defining the word innovation, as the word social simply modifies innovation. According to Mulgan et al. (2007, 5) innovation is defined as "new

ideas that work" and social innovation as "new ideas that work in meeting social needs". Literature relating to innovation has focused extensively on technological innovation. This oversight has grossly neglected consideration of societal change (Cunha, Benneworth, and Oliveira 2015, 622). For an innovation to be considered social, "it must improve the economic and social performance of the society under consideration" (Pol and Ville 2009, 879). South Africa's democratic innovation policies and strategies support policy initiatives that produce social outcomes (Hart et al. 2014, 1). However, these policies are promoted on paper but fail at the implementation stage. Hart, Jacobs, and Mangqalaza (2012, 8) are of the view that innovation has become a key driver for achieving human development, in all its forms, in the first two decades of the 21st century. The authors further note that this period will historically be referred to as the innovation decade (Hart et al. 2012, 8). In the South African context, innovation focusing on marginalised communities is necessary to redress the pre-democracy inequalities.

Social innovation has multiple meanings (Haugh, Fergus, and Doherty 2018, 6), which has intensified scholarly discourse on its true meaning (Cunha et al. 2015, 623). Pol and Ville (2009, 875) argue that there is no single accepted definition of social innovation as "the term has developed several overlapping meanings invoking concepts such as institutional change, social purpose and the public good". However, the authors describe innovation as being social if "the applied new idea has the potential to improve either the quality or the quantity of life" (Pol and Ville 2009, 875). Cunha and Benneworth 2013, 14) argue that the definitions of social innovation fall into two distinct categories, those that focus on its contribution towards social justice at a community level and those that focus on its contribution to social value creation and community development. We think this distinction is superficial, and we propose the adoption of an integrated approach, which incorporates the concerns of both groups. We also believe that social innovation is concerned with social justice, social value creation and community development, as these aspects are essential for higher education community engagement.

Conceptually, social innovation has also been used to describe "societal transformation, social entrepreneurship, the development of new products, services and programmes" (Hart et al. 2014, 2) and "a model of governance, empowerment and capacity building" (The Young Foundation 2012, 6). Cunha and Benneworth (2013, 7) describe the forms of social innovation as ideas, pieces of legislation, social movements and interventions. The Young Foundation, a non-profit and non-governmental organisation in the United Kingdom that specialises in social innovation to address structural inequality, further notes that social innovation has come out as a response to complicated and multidimensional societal challenges that are difficult to solve (The Young Foundation 2012, 5). Notwithstanding this view, social innovation practice

promotes human agency (BEPA 2010, 8) which is a vehicle for social change and a fundamental principle of community engagement. Genuine social innovation changes systems by developing sustainable solutions to community challenges that contributes to social value creation for community development (Cunha and Benneworth 2013, 9).

Social innovations also challenge existing social institutions to develop collaborative networks that are local, national and global (Benneworth and Cunha 2015, 509). Caulier-Grice (2012, 21) elaborates on the collaborative nature of social innovations by stating that "social innovations are developed 'with' 'by' users and not delivered 'to' and 'for' them". The 21st century challenges require "designing innovative solutions, mobilising resources and sharing ideas" (Cunha et al. 2015, 617). Westwood (2009, 43) stresses that social innovation provides people a place and a role in economic and social life through addressing their needs that have been overlooked by the market. The ultimate goal for social innovations is to be risk tolerant and identify opportunities that address community challenges in a sustainable way as this also helps to promote social innovation. (Andre and Abreu 2006, 9). The key driver of social innovative activities and services is the motivation to meet a social need. Organisations that develop and diffuse social innovations have a social purpose (Mulgan et al. 2007, 8). Phills, Deiglmeir, and Miller (2008, 43) argue that the value created through a social innovation primarily benefits the society rather than private individuals. Social innovations are meant to contribute to community development. There is need for higher education to collaborate with the community for genuine and sustainable community development.

HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Community engagement "was a relatively unknown concept in the South African higher education until the late 1990s" (Lazarus et al. 2008, 57). Prior to democracy, the major categories of community engagement in South African HEIs were community outreach and extension service programmes (Netshandama and Mahlomaholo 2010, 4). The link between communities and universities was extractive, it lacked reciprocity, community participation and mutual benefit. Service and outreach mainly responded to the immediate needs of communities using the top-bottom approach, with less inclination towards creating mutually beneficial partnerships (Netshandama and Mahlomaholo 2010, 4). The rationale for introducing community engagement as a core function of higher education was for HEIs to contribute to communities' social and economic development and produce socially responsive graduates. However, several universities continue to struggle to fully embed community engagement into the structure of their institutions (Department of Higher Education and Training, DHET 2013, 39). Community engagement is intended to contribute to universities' developmental and

transformative role through its nexus with teaching and research (Jongbloed et al. 2008; Hall 2010; Schuetze 2010; Preece 2016).

In the context of higher education community can refer to the "university's own staff and students, civic organisations, schools, townships and people in general" (Hall 2010, 25). Loosely defined communities are social organisations with shared identities (Israel et al. 2005, 11). The Committee on Institutional Cooperation in the United States of America, as cited in Hall (2010, 23), defines engagement as

> "the partnership of university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity, enhance teaching and learning, prepare educated engaged citizens, strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility address critical societal issues and contribute to the public good".

The concept of engagement centres around the formation of partnerships that are mutually beneficial to all the parties involved. Bender (2008, 87) suggests that the term engagement opens opportunities for meaningful dialogue with communities and also implies that the development of the relationship should involve a shared process where either the university or the community commences the engagement process. Schuetze (2010, 25) argues that "community engagement should be understood as the collaboration between institutions of higher learning and their larger communities (local, regional, national or global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity".

In South Africa, community engagement evolved as a response to the mandate laid out in White Paper 3 on the Transformation of Higher Education, which posited that universities should adopt teaching and learning and research practices that are more socially responsive to broader society and promote co-creation of knowledge with their communities (DoE 1997). The White Paper argued that community service programmes should be mandatory for university students as a way for universities to advance their public good and social responsibility role (DoE 1997). Institutions of higher learning are mandated to demonstrate social responsibility by sharing their knowledge and infrastructure with the communities within their vicinity in support of community programmes. Community engagement should be upgraded far above the current conception of community service, to engagement as advocated in national policies and commissions (Bender 2008, 84). A study conducted by Johnson from 2016 to 2019 on "shifting concepts and meanings of community engagement in higher education", revealed that HEIs were seen as being more powerful than the communities. Due to this power imbalance, universities at times are not welcome in communities as the

communities feel that they are being exploited through research that does not benefit them but the university students and staff (Johnson 2020, 98).

Preece (2016, 208) affirms that there has been a shift in the global ideology of what form of community service is appropriate for universities, from an emphasis on individual philanthropy, to an embedded institutional response to addressing community needs. The shifts in terminology moved from "community service" to "knowledge-based community service" to "community engagement" to "scholarship of engagement" (Preece 2016, 208). This shift is reflected in policy documents on the transformation of higher education, thereby indicating that community engagement has shifted from the unidirectional transfer of university expertise and resources to a collaborative and mutually beneficial sharing of expertise and resources with the external non-university community. Bender highlights these changes when she wrote that community engagement has many names (Bender 2008, 83). According to Preece (2016, 209), policy documents and other institutional strategic plans indicate a shift from the discourse of "service" to "engagement". Bhagwan (2020, 36) noted that scholarly articles on community engagement in the South African higher education system have proliferated. The new norm is that universities should engage with communities in a collaborative effort to achieve mutual gain.

Community engagement should offer equal opportunities for all parties involved in a collaborative activity to share power and resources. This ensures that all parties' values, beliefs and visions will be shared (Kammitha 2017, 39). Through its divergent partnerships with communities, community engagement can develop and encourage learning and innovation so that higher education can be further entrenched within communities and is seen as a partner with concern for sustainable community development (Bhagwan 2017, 171). In all forms of community engagement, the university engages with its internal community and its external non-university communities in different ways and for various purposes (Johnson 2020, 88). Literature on the scholarship of engagement reveals that community engagement, in its multiple forms has become an integral part of the work of universities in South Africa (DHET 2013, 39). Community engagement at HEIs can be strengthened through partnerships that create sustainable social and economic impact on vulnerable communities (Jongbloed et al. 2008, 318). The mandate of SAHECEF is to "advocate, promote, support and monitor community engagement activities at South African higher education institutions" (Bhagwan 2017, 172). Policy and structures have been put in place to support and drive the community engagement agenda in the South African higher education system.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPPS)

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have a significant role in promoting educational transformation that contributes to human wellbeing and the overall development of communities. In PPPs, "the public agency and private entity's assets and skills are shared in serving the public good" (National Council for Public-Private Partnerships (NCPPP) n.d, 1). HEIs, in partnership with industry and civil society, are responsible for providing education that affords individuals social benefits that translate to the overall development of communities. In this way, transformation is viewed as an ongoing process. Xie and Stough (2002, 10) affirm that a PPP can be viewed as

> "a form of cooperation between government and business and knowledge institutions [and civil society] that agree to work together to reach a common goal or carry out a specific task, while jointly assuming the risk and responsibilities and sharing resources and competencies".

From this understanding, it can be discerned that PPPs involve a well-structured project that is co-financed and which shares risks and rewards between the partners. A detailed description of the responsibilities, risks, benefits of both parties, methods of dispute resolution and stakeholder support should the included in the contract of a PPP. This is important as the partnership will affect more people than just the public and the private officials. A well-defined conflict resolution strategy is required as misconceptions about the benefit of the partnership are bound to occur among the stakeholders involved. Open communication with all the stakeholders is, therefore, critical in minimising the potential of resistance to establishing the partnership. The South African National Treasury (2007, 18) affirms that PPPs are "complex contractual and operational arrangements, as they involve several players from different sectors representing various interests". All processes involving a partnership must be formalised and followed systematically in a transparent way.

Pasque et al. (2005, 15) note that partnerships must focus on relationship building instead of concentrating more on the project activity. Relationship building and good communication skills are at the core of a successful partnership. It should be stressed that the key to successful community engagement is relationship building with community partners. However, when it comes to dealing with relationships in cross sectoral partnerships there is no universal formula to address cultural and institutional differences (Xie and Stough 2002, 10). One cannot prescribe how relationships in cross-sectoral partnerships should be maintained as the institutional culture of the partners influences this; institutions have their own culture that shapes how they engage with other institutions and the community. Pasque et al. (2005, 15) note that promoting ongoing knowledge exchange, shared learning and capacity building is the critical objective of partnerships. "A continuous assessment of the partnership relationship is

the seal that builds trust, generates new lines of work and keeps shared goals and expectations visible to all" (Pasque et al. 2005, 16). It is critical to stress that universities and the private sector operate differently. The primary focus of private sector is profit and they are inclined to invest in projects that generate profit. On the other hand, universities are public institutions and are required to contribute to the well-being of their local communities rather than generating profit (Allais et al. 2020, 146). This difference in focus can pose challenges for public-private partnerships. However, it should be noted that the private sector also contributes to the public good through corporate social responsibility.

HEI's should prioritise solving problems within their communities if they contribute to developing knowledge relevant to society and advancing the public good. Partnerships that promote a balance of power and sharing of resources should be encouraged as opposed to outreach programmes that tend to shift power towards the higher education institution. Community-HEI partnerships should promote further innovation by exploiting knowledge capacity and maximising social capital. Genuine democratic partnerships that are sustainable should be embedded into the mission and support structures of both the HEI and the partnering institution (Pasque et al. 2005, 7). For higher education institutions, partnerships should be incorporated into their teaching, research and community obligations. We propose that as a key role of HEIs, it becomes the responsibility of community engagement to develop and promote healthy partnership relationships for social innovation.

SOCIAL INNOVATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In promoting social innovation, HEI's can be viewed as "knowledge-intensive social institutions well placed to address the knowledge-demanding societal challenges of the 21st century" (Cunha et al. 2015, 628). The partnership relationship of a higher education institution with its community can be regarded as a social innovation (Cunha and Benneworth 2013, 7). This submission by Cunha and Benneworth implies that one of the objectives of engaging in mutually beneficial community-university partnerships is to drive the social innovation agenda. The authors further note that the impact of a university's contribution to societal development can be understood in terms of its ability to promote social innovation. Social innovation is a better vehicle for understanding and creating social value in all its forms. Social innovation and community engagement are both participatory in nature. Active participation of communities and grassroots organisations ensures that the innovations produce social outcomes that address the needs of the communities (Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2013; Cunha and Benneworth 2013). The inclusion of community members in various stages of the intervention strategy is critical for the success of the intervention. Caulier-Grice et al. (2012, 2) further note that the

participatory approach enables participants to access resources and to develop socio-political capabilities that empower them to meet needs over the longer term.

Engaging communities in social innovations add social value to communities by promoting social cohesion, inclusivity and community development (Cunha et al. 2015, 622). Community engagement and social innovation create social value. Creating innovative solutions to unmanageable social challenges can promote social innovation and the accumulation of social capital (Leadbeater 1997, 3). Certo and Miller (2008, 268) describe the term social value as "involving the fulfilment of basic and long-standing needs such as providing food, water, shelter, education, medical services to members of society who are in need". The process of creating social value is underpinned by collaborative action among all the stakeholders involved in driving social change. The success of social innovations is facilitated by new forms of action that result from the formation of networks between actors (Benneworth and Cunha 2015, 509. Developing collaborative networks, linking innovators and beneficiaries in mutually beneficial ways promotes the capacity to work as a collective (Caulier-Grice et al. 2012, 3). Collective action and networking are important, and "social networking emerges as a fundamental enabler of new social practices which create social innovations" (Brackertz 2011, 5).

Community engagement can be a sustainable force of innovation (Hazelkorn 2010, 2). It also creates a platform for addressing community needs through initiatives that are innovative (Cunha and Benneworth 2013, 15). Universities have an important role in driving social change through community engagement and social innovation. Benneworth and Cunha (2015, 511) argue that "universities' contribution to societal development can be understood in terms of their capacity to contribute to social innovation". Bawa and Munck (2012, xiv) affirm that societal challenges of the 21st century can be addressed through social institutions, such as universities, which have the potential to promote social innovation. Recognising the neglected and marginalised parts of society (Manyaka 2015, 3) is the social change expected from engaging with communities. A genuine university-community partnership must result in an increase in community capacity development, access to the university and the development of a mutually trusting relationship between the university and its external community. The development of mutual trusting relationships builds a conducive environment to foster social innovations. However, the critical challenge facing universities is to find ways of strategically placing social innovation within their structures (Benneworth and Cunha 2015, 520). Community engagement is the space and has the potential for social innovation through partnerships. Rhodes University, through its community engagement division, has a vision to advance its public good role through the formation of mutually beneficial university-

community partnerships that promote social innovation.

RHODES UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Rhodes University (RU) envisions itself as "an outstanding internationally-respected academic institution which proudly affirms its African identity and is committed to democratic ideals academic freedom, rigorous scholarship, sound moral values and social responsibility" (Rhodes University 2017, 10). The Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) division is one platform from which the university plays its social responsibility role by contributing to the development of communities and instilling civic and social responsibilities in students (Rhodes University 2021, 3). Higher education institutions have a social responsibility role that makes them accountable to fulfilling their civic duties through community engagement. Community engagement is defined in the RUCE policy as "activities conducted by university staff or students with community partners through which knowledge is jointly discovered and in which there is a reciprocal exchange of teaching and learning" (Rhodes University 2021, 3). The ecosystem's theory mainly guides the RUCE programmes. This theory views society as being made up of systems that are interconnected and interdependent (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006, 817). Community development practitioners should acknowledge that human and social needs and challenges cannot be addressed in an isolated and fragmented manner. A holistic approach that considers the influence of the different systems present in the community needs to be adopted in dealing with community challenges.

The mission of the RUCE division is to "actively promote a reciprocal process of knowledge construction and dissemination by promoting knowledge democracy where all who contribute to the making of knowledge are acknowledged" (RUCE Strategic Plan 2020–2025). This mission is aligned with "advancing the public good purpose of higher education", which is one of the four pillars of re-imagining RU as advocated by the Vice Chancellor Dr Mabizela (Rhodes University 2017, 4). RUCE's programmes aim to increase access and broaden participation in higher education, with special focus given to interactions with vulnerable communities in Makhanda. Community engagement provides a key opportunity for universities to address social and economic challenges within their communities (Nicola 2013, 2). The leadership at RU actively support community engagement. In 2015, at his inauguration as the Vice Chancellor of RU, Dr Sizwe Mabizela advocated for the university to become locally responsive to the Makhanda (then Grahamstown) community through his words, "our university is not just in Grahamstown but is also **of** and **for** Grahamstown" (Rhodes University 2021, 4). Senior leadership support for community engagement is critical as (Slamat 2013, 154) points out that "a university stands and falls by university management support".

The goal of RUCE is "to establish and nurture community-university partnerships that contribute to sustainable community development and promote university and student responsibility" (RUCE Strategic Plan 2020–2025). RUCE aims to achieve this goal through its core programmes of engaged research, service learning, volunteerism and critical active citizenry. Johnson (2020, 90) states that "there is no nationally agreed framework to guide the implementation of community engagement"; hence establishing a framework to guide RUCE has been and continues to be a process (Rhodes University 2021, 4).

RUCE programmes and activities are anchored on developing sustainable partnerships with community partners. Building long-standing social relationships is a key driver to community development. For several years RUCE has concentrated on building healthy partnerships with community organisations and members and developing courses and programmes to prepare students to engage with community partners (Rhodes University 2021, 4). Developing partners is time-consuming but critical for creating effective partnerships (Israel et al. 2005). The RUCE division is aware of the need to strengthen the institutionalisation of community engagement in the university's six faculties. The RUCE division offers two accredited short courses in Service Learning and Engaged Research to support academics that wish to implement community engagement. As of 2021, 13 academics have completed the online Service-Learning course, and eight have completed the Engaged Research course (Rhodes University 2021, 14). Support in terms of finding suitable community partners is also available to academics. The RUCE Strategic Plan 2020–2025 indicates that RUCE aims to increase the number of Service-Learning programmes from 20 to 25 courses and to increase the number of academics involved in Service Learning from 22 to 35 (RUCE Strategic Plan 2020–2025).

RUCE advocates for engaged research, as opposed to the traditional way of doing research, which uses the top-bottom approach. Engaged research, in the form of community based participatory research (CBPR), values collaboration and co-creation of knowledge with all participants in the research process. According to Israel et al. (2005, 9) "CBPR is a co-learning process that promotes the reciprocal exchange of skills, knowledge and capacity among all partners involved", it also acknowledges that partners bring different skills, perspectives and expertise, to the research process. Participatory research offers equal opportunities for universities and community members to share power and resources (Kammitha 2017, 39), thereby making it a viable tool for advancing community engagement that culminates in sustainable community development.

Community engagement allows universities and communities to build social networks and connections that encourage people to participate in different social contexts (Kammitha 2017,

36). Community engagement has not received the recognition it deserves in universities (Cunha and Benneworth 2013, 1). The RUCE division is aware of this challenge and is progressing towards embedding community engagement as a strategic university mission. "The false separation that exist among teaching, research and community engagement as the key functions of universities must ultimately change if the academic world is to emerge or re-emerge as a socially relevant institution in broader society" (Bender 2008, 85). The false separation between teaching, research and community engagement has made the infusion of community engagement into higher education an insurmountable task as academics feel it is an addition to their workloads (Johnson 2020, 98). Rhodes University, however, believes in integrating community engagement into teaching and research so that it does not remain isolated from the academic project but enhances it (Rhodes University 2021, 27). Rhodes University appreciates the critical function of community engagement. However, the challenge of a lack of adequate funding hampers the sustainability of community engagement activities. Community engagement is an unfunded national mandate (Rhodes University 2020; Johnson 2020) and if this is not addressed, embedding community engagement into all the university structures will remain a challenge even though it has the potential to contribute to the transformation of higher education (Johnson 2020, 103).

COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

The university can demonstrate its relevance and be held accountable to the society at large through community engagement activities (Jongbloed et al. 2008, 313). The success of community engagement activities and programmes depends on creating mission-focused community-university partnerships (CUPs). Building partnerships is a vehicle to transform universities and position them for the public good. It reconnects the university with its community, allowing for forged authentic, mutually beneficial relationships. RUCE has established 78 partnerships with community organisations in Makhanda (Rhodes University 2017, 26); 54 partnerships are involved in the volunteer programmes, and the rest are in service-learning programmes with the academic departments (Rhodes University 2021, 19). In 2018 RUCE had 533 student volunteers; in 2021, there were 862 volunteers. The increase in student volunteers indicates that the university is progressing in developing socially responsible citizens who contribute to community development through community engagement. All volunteers undergo compulsory training before they are placed in a community site of their choice.

The engaged citizen programme short courses prepare students for volunteering in the different programmes and partnerships in which the RUCE division is involved. RUCE runs five volunteerism programmes, namely: NineTenths (9/10ths) Mentoring Programme; Engaged

Citizen Programme (ECP); Parent Engagement Programme (Vulindlela and lntsomi programmes); Budding Q Literacy Programme and Siyakhana@Makhanda Programme for Residences and Halls. RUCE promotes a co-managed approach to the five volunteer programmes; each community partner appoints a volunteer manager from its staff, who works with the RU Volunteer team leader and Co-ordinator (Rhodes University 2021, 19). The team leader and coordinators submit quarterly reflective reports on the progress of the programmes.

To sustain a partnership, more effort should be placed on building relationships rather than project activity. In June and December each year, RUCE organises a reflection session with community partners to evaluate the programmes, which has helped strengthen the CUP. A continuous assessment of the partnership relationship is the seal that builds trust, generates new work relations and keeps shared goals and expectations visible to all (Pasque et al. 2005, 16). Relationship building and good communication skills are at the core of successful partnerships. Service-learning is a credit-bearing educational experience which allows students to participate and reflect on an organised service activity that addresses a community need and also allows students to develop personal and civic values (Bringle, Hatcher, and McIntosh 2006, 12). This definition of service learning perfectly captures the goal RUCE aims to attain through its service-learning programmes. Service-learning programmes are organised at a faculty level. RUCE division guides academics in identifying a suitable community partner organisation and assisting in building and nurturing these community-university partnerships.

RUCE has established community-university hubs. Three hubs have been set up, namely, the Joza Youth hub, the Assumption Development Centre (ADC) in partnership with the Sisters of Assumption and the RU Social Innovation hub. RUCE refers to these hubs as 3rd spaces (Rhodes University 2021, 20). Bender (2008, 86) points out that aspects of university culture and structure are problematic for community engagement because they tend to isolate the university from the surrounding communities. The perception of universities as ivory towers also contributes to their isolation. The purpose of creating 3rd spaces is to make the university more porous and to establish collective spaces where academics and community partner organisations can collaborate and discuss opportunities for research, service learning and volunteerism partnerships (Rhodes University 2021, 20). The Joza Youth hub is centred on education. The ADC hub has an economic development focus; it has developed mutually beneficial partnerships with the RU Business school, Law school, Psychology department and the Faculty of Commerce. The Social Innovation hub was established to explore social innovation and digital storytelling, address the unequal access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in South Africa, and formulate strategies to bridge the digital divide in the city of Makhanda (Rhodes University 2021, 212).

The Social Innovation hub is located on campus and accessible to community partners. RU has no physical barriers in terms of high walls and remote-controlled gates, making the university accessible to the community. Physical barriers such as concrete walls and remote-controlled gates are exclusionary measures that can deter the university from connecting with the issues and concerns of people in the community (Bender 2008, 86). To bridge the digital divide in the Makhanda community, RUCE, through its social innovation hub, offers a digital literacy course and storytelling course to its staff and community members. To extend services to Makhanda East, RUCE has set up a semi-fixed laboratory in the Joza Youth club where early childhood practitioners and primary school teachers are being helped to acquire digital skills and resources to help them shift to online teaching. Pasque et al. (2005, 7) affirm that higher education institutions impact the communities they are situated in by using their space and resources to benefit the community. Knowledge, resources, and support are the critical university inputs that contribute to the social innovation process (Benneworth and Cunha 2015, 517).

RUCE, through its social innovation hub and the semi-lab at Joza Youth club, is advancing social innovation through knowledge sharing, and providing support to community members through increasing access to infrastructure and assets to drive social innovations. Pol and Ville (2009, 895) argue that social innovation should improve the well-being of its beneficiaries. The social innovation theory is one of the theories that underpin the RUCE programmes. Social innovations facilitate the creation of new social relationships between individuals and groups who were previously separated (Mulgan et al. 2007, 35). Community engagement initiatives should move beyond volunteerism and service learning to embed the principles of social innovation (Hazelkorn 2010, 10). The discussions in this section clearly show that RU is a community-engaged university. The community has benefited from the various education programmes under the Vice Chancellor's Education Initiative as evidenced by an increase in the number of matriculants from the disadvantaged schools that qualify for university entry and the increase in the number of community partners that have access to the use of mobile labs for the benefit of community members. Numerous partnerships have been formed with community organisations to address the needs and challenges facing the Makhanda community. All partnerships are collaborative and provide mutual benefit to all the parties involved. RUCE has extended its activities to benefit communities beyond Makhanda. Academics from other universities in South Africa have completed the service learning short course offered by RU. Community engagement promotes social innovation. The RUCE activities and services outlined in this article are geared towards meeting social needs and creating social value which supports community development.

CONCLUSION

Social innovation empowers community members to take an active part in addressing the challenges in their communities through collaborative action that creates social cohesion and contributes to social and economic growth. Through their third mission, universities have an important role in facilitating healthy partnerships with the community for the public good. The South African higher education policies and legislation, clearly stipulate that universities have to be responsive to community challenges through community engagement. However, there is no national framework to guide the practice of community engagement (Johnson 2020, 90). Each HEI is left to implement community engagement as it sees fit. There is evidence from literature that the culture of universities has created a hierarchical ranking of teaching, research and community engagement as the core functions of universities (Bender 2008, 85). Community engagement is considered at the periphery of the three core functions. Literature related to community engagement in South Africa reflects that there is no conceptual clarity on the practice of community engagement in South Africa (Favish 2010; Bhagwan 2017). This may be a factor challenging its institutionalisation in HEIs (Bhagwan 2020, 38). Jongbloed et al. (2008, 317) affirm that community engagement "is still obstructed by many institutional barriers implying that its acceptance is not a straightforward action". Physical barriers can also disconnect universities from their communities and halt the process of community engagement. Bender (2008, 87) called for an investigation into the extent to which community engagement has been institutionalised across all structures within HEIs.

Universities are still expected to contribute to the improvement of their communities, and this should be reflected by including community engagement in their vision, mission and institutional development plans. The case of RUCE discussed in this article shows clearly that universities have the knowledge, resources and support systems required to drive their third mission. What is required is the acceptance of this third mission and support from the top management and leadership. RUCE has expanded its activities beyond volunteerism and service learning to include social innovation. Community engagement and social innovation are interconnected and cannot be separated from each other, as their ultimate goal is to create social value and change. CUPs as public-private partnerships are imperative for creating efficient and sustainable solutions to community problems. Universities should contribute to solving problems that call for social, economic, technological and cultural innovations in their communities.

Community engagement can empower universities to be locally responsive and drive them to be globally engaged. Successful universities find a way to bridge global and local knowledge

(Cunha et al. 2015, 630). The ability to navigate between the two forms of knowledge is at the heart of community engagement that delivers effective social innovations for societal change. This article calls on HEIs to serve their communities by sharing their knowledge, space and resources through mutually beneficial partnerships with community members and organisations for community development. Slamat (2013, 156) points out that different institutions within higher education system practice and contribute towards community engagement in relation to their contexts, visions and mission.

Jakovljevic (2018, 110) reminds us that sustainable economic growth, which is a driver for community development, in the 21st century has been proliferated through projects and activities that promote social innovation. Social innovation has the capacity to alleviate some of the barriers to sustainable community development caused by persistent social, cultural, and environmental challenges. The nature of these challenges demand innovative approaches and ways of thinking that contribute to the well-being of communities.

The extent to which harmony is nurtured between the public and private sectors has an impact on the success of the innovative activities and the well-being of society. By directing its focus on promoting social innovation through community engagement partnerships (public and private), the university can find innovative ways of sustaining its existence through adding value to society.

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