

Big Tent Communique VI

Local Identities and Global Citizenship: Challenges for Universities

SECOND DRAFT *for further development in August 2015*

Preamble: The Sixth *Big Tent Communique* – where and why?

This Big Tent Communique arose from thinking about the location in Sicily of the Pascal Annual Conference on 7-9 October in Catania 'on the frontier of fortress Europe'. Its theme is *how cities and their regions are connected to their universities at strategic frontiers*.

The first Big Tent communique, on North-South cooperation, was issued in 2010. All show consistent values and purposes. Communiques are rhetorically rich, ambitious, full of hope for change. They speak of problems and processes. They call for action.

The number of Big Tent networking partners has risen from eight to eighteen. The rising number may mean more attention and more resulting change. The pause since the 5th communique in November 2013 has given time to reflect. This network of networks must grow in capability and commitment to take the understanding that we share about vital world matters into politics and the market place. We must see and say how problems may be solved with knowledge, wisdom and courage, by universities and civil society, in living and universalising lifelong learning. We must find and use simple words and voices for complex problems: words that are heard and that create change using mass and social media as well as political, policy and scholarly discourse. The time and subject of the 6th communique in 2015 are an opportunity to speak sharper and be heard clearer.

The 2015 Context - a World in Disorder

Our theme partly echoes that of the first Big Tent communique in 2010: ***Enhancing North-South Cooperation in Community-University Engagement***. What is happening in Europe today and in other North-South frontier situations globally is the antithesis of North-South cooperation.

There is rising uncertainty in many arenas of public and community affairs world-wide: environmental sustainability, peace, economic instability, exploding inequality, youth unemployment and lost identity, ageing and the massive movement of peoples. Different rising crisis levels interact. We talk of 'perfect storms'. Governments and inter-government agencies have many words but seem lost for deep understanding and for applying practical solutions.

What is happening here and now, and what lies behind tragedies across Africa, the Middle East, the global South and now the global North and the seas between, adds up to a massive ethical and practical challenge. Our nations are fearful, our governments uncertain what to do.

A paradox

We must confront a paradox. In democracies 'ordinary' people choose governments. We believe in active participatory citizenship, trusting traditional values and local wisdom. Today many people are scared by the early future and turn in on themselves. Some become xenophobic: hostile to outsiders, short-sighted, ungenerous of the plight of displaced millions. A strong negative mood drives

governments to short-term play-safe policies and directions. The post-War 'European project' is threatened by divisive centrifugal separatism.

Political parties of the Right supported by mass media have become powerful. The Far Right is popular, strong in voting numbers in some countries, undermining EU governance from within. It allies with corporate interests that may determine policy, causing massively rising inequality. Governments are confused by multi-dimensional crisis and nostalgia at home, when it is urgent to act wisely and long-term abroad. In such times the living standards and economic security of self and neighbours weigh heavier with many people than the condition of life of foreigners in the global South, and so with their own long-term future.

This paradox threatens trust in the wisdom, decency, humanity and communal ethic on which participatory democracy rest. If hearts are closed, and vision is narrowed and shortened by fear, what does this mean for political devolution and local power-sharing engagement?

Local identity for global citizenship – a message from Catania

New peoples are joining a Europe whose history is one of invasions and new arrivals. They are most feared by those most shielded from newcomers. The same is true of the newer 'Norths' of Australia and North America. Emigration northward from the South is a natural sequel to massive European colonial invasion and conquest, even without bloody violence engulfing swathes of the Middle East and Africa.

Disjuncting crisis is especially startling as Europe in 2015 moves through fear towards panic and ever more displaced people approach from South and East. Some South-East Asia nations, like Australia, have also hardened their hearts, pushing refugees from Myanmar and elsewhere back out to sea. Proposed 'solutions' range from sinking smugglers' vessels to refusing landing to rescue vessels to reportedly bribing smugglers to take their human cargoes back.

The Big Tent Challenge approach

Words, ideas and control mostly flow North to South, refugees and other migrants the other way. Fortress North sees population movements through its own eyes and interests. We look wider.

From global North Canada Budd Hall sees the recent wave of tragic deaths on the Mediterranean underscoring the depth of inequality that persists and increases in our troubled world.

"The fact that some of these people have been headed to Catania where we are meeting means that we must no longer speak of higher education or of universities in technical, managerial or abstracted terms. The starting point for engagement must be a deeper way of listening to the concerns of ordinary citizens, including migrants, unemployed, homeless or otherwise excluded."

From the global South India's Rajesh Tandon asks: *"how can the possibility of global citizenship driven by the youth of today be embraced by communities in a sustainable manner?"* He points out that *"nearly half the populations of Asian countries are young people below the age of 25; these billion plus youth have grown up in the post Berlin wall era; they have been hearing globalisation since their childhood. They now have access to smart phones and internet which connects them globally with their peers in the cyber world."*

They now have begun to share global aspirations of One World. For them, movement from villages to small towns to mega cities of their own country, and beyond its historical borders, is one seamless aspiration. This generation is beginning to experience global citizenship. Yet, the 'host' communities in cities and beyond are resistant to this 'invasion' of youth; they are afraid to change, and they are uncertain about the future that comes in with these waves of youthful migrations."

What Can Be Done?

How can universities, local communities and people North and South in 2015 together make things better?

Universities with generous earlier ideas of lifelong learning and learning societies can help: leading by teaching well to think long term, to identify wise solutions to problems and have them adopted and owned by everyone. What is the solution for 'the North' as economic migrant and refugee numbers soar? *Can we better focus our research and engagement efforts to see and make the most intelligent and human long-term response by naming and removing the causes of mass migration at source?*

One implication as seen by a Big Tent blogger is "(1) for high income country universities to provide a big picture to rich country audiences, to feed in to pressure for systemic reforms and necessary cooperation; and (2) cooperating to support low income country universities and social movements, perhaps university-to-university partnerships embedded in city-to-city / region-to-region partnerships, thus giving the university-to-university linkages both more robustness and more richness, intellectual as well as other".

The world has many thousands of universities. They and their millions of staff and students must not turn their backs: all belong to institutions and a world of communities. Universities must not look away: to abstract academicism, or to technical 'human resource' training that meets just short-term economic and corporate needs. Universities must take to heart as their primary task, the present and future of our inherited local and global world. All share a duty of care for the future of the young with no employment; and maybe, despite the natural joys of youth and energy, no sense of belonging to anything anywhere.

Regions, cities, towns, local communities and neighbourhoods with local knowledge of contexts can act more effectively than can any civilised central administration. In principle, central government resolves, its people (the electorate) agree, and much policy is 'culturally' owned and executed locally. Global solutions only really work locally when embedded in communities and their *mores*.

Answers can be found through abiding optimism and new, maybe transformative, forms of individual and collective engaged lifelong learning; new pedagogies; and public and community support for ethically-based learning-for-action. Educators and universities cannot be apolitical and expect to succeed.

A new approach for the Sustainable Development era

What can we in Big Tent do? There will be more fear, violence, and xenophobia along the way. The new UN cycle of Sustainable Development Goals provides a sensible time frame. We influence UN-type agencies and advocate tirelessly in our different circles for adults' education, more equal opportunity, and for lifelong learning as a fully adopted policy principle and practice. We may be less firm and clear about global crises and development than we should. And we fall short in making education and learning policies compelling outside educational circles.

We do not know how to 'solve' the Mediterranean crisis and tragedy of death that paralyses Europe's governments; we do know that real solutions lie in removing the causes of mass movements of despair. A massive community learning campaign is needed, no less challenging than mass national literacy campaigns. This demands political will and courage: leadership of a kind that eludes most Western democracies; and explicit principle-based long-sighted policies.

Civil society needs to turn freely available information into knowledge and understanding; community dialogue and testing through directly experienced action make for lasting learning.

What key to effective action might unlock the 'perfect storm' of interconnecting issues? Migration, an immediate imperative, is a way to enter and find a way through this maze. Like all the other big quality of life issues, this requires *transformational culture change throughout civil society*; learning and capacity-building that can inspire governments to hear and trust people, and to resist selfish sectional interests. Whatever the current news-dominating crisis is, it demands a learning response, huge facilitating educational effort, and deep involvement in politics, local and national.

From universities this communicate demands courage to engage society and community locally and beyond. It means using understandable language. University and communities must understand and address their needs together; make, share and use knowledge; learn *and act* together.

University governors and managements must resist seduction by world-class league tables. These, are now under sustained intellectual assault. They divert 95 per cent of institutions from wiser and more useful purpose. They distort the mission of all to benefit a tiny elite.

University governors and managers should lead by example, nurturing courage, honesty, public service and humanity. Their role model as leaders of good, trustworthy open-system learning organisations is the nurturing gardener. They must work with the powerful without becoming just like them. Each year they should give the community new cohorts of morally anchored community workers and leaders, whatever the field of expertise and employment. For this they need a fitting curriculum, both written and 'hidden', offering a 'student experience' that lifts eyes above a future income.

For university staff, expert in their fields of knowledge and disciplines, capable administrators of complex knowledge organisations, their first duty is to do good for the wide and the local world by the way they lead and use the university. Subject loyalty, departmental ambition, competition, and the rewards of office must matter less. Community service and public engagement in creating public good must be the basis of a deep professional ethic.

Universities that deny and ignore the political world forfeit the right to exist. Engaging politically is never easy. It can be costly and even dangerous. Universities must together and globally defend what they stand for, supporting one another in solidarity for truth and long-term utility. They must be an openly committed part of their community and society, 'speaking truth to' the power of which they are an inevitably influential part.

Regions and localities must take responsible control of their own destinies through their governance and daily practice. They should contribute robustly to national debate and policy-making, serving as channels of local experience, knowledge and wishes to carry out with integrity properly deliberated and adopted policies. They must prioritise real-world needs, helping citizens and communities to be informed and actively make their own destiny.

By the way they govern and manage they must help applied learning for all, formally and informally. They must partner universities, colleges and schools as main knowledge-makers and disseminators; and request their relevant commitment and practical involvement. In terms of refugees and economic migrants they should not echo immediate hostile reactions, but lead and help communities and citizens to be open to change, generous in the face of others' distress, able to take a long view and weigh short-term disruption with possible wider gain.

Local authority leaders and officers should be driven by the needs of their region and country, not the ambitions of competing departments or lobbyists. In relation to the 'immigration crisis' they must be open to all concerns, and firm in enabling practical learning and wise judgement. They should not blame other governments, or the strong opinions of constituents, for tough realities.

Undertakings by Big Tent Partners

Participants from 'The North' outnumbered other Catania Conference participants but were determined to look from and at both sides. They saw how all our universities and lifelong learning endeavours can lead towards a shared non-violent future where better life is better shared among all.

We will work individually, institutionally and collectively to secure this understanding.

As members of Big Tent we believe that universities must engage with the present and future of their communities, local and regional, ethnic and cultural, social and economic, as well as of a global citizenry and destiny. We advocate true partnership, where universities with civil society make, own and use knowledge, sharing power and duties to do so.

We will work individually, institutionally and collectively to ensure that this happens.

We reject the dominant ideology that favours shrinking the State. We recognise that governments should listen more; and devolve and share the process of carrying out policy much more than many do.

We will work individually, institutionally and collectively to change the narrative, and to reinstate more sustainable, people-centred development shared globally and acted out locally.

We realise that no university can be an island unto itself. Making change happen means getting politically committed and involved.

This communique is a call for practical action from educators with their communities, to risk deeper engagement and make a better and safer world for all.

As a periodic Big Tent virtual community of interest and purpose we cannot pretend to know and determine exactly what our governments should do. But we can say how they should go about learning right and doing right.

We pledge to go beyond undirected rhetoric, and not hide from political involvement.

We do not know just how Europe can reconcile fearful citizens to the desperate dispossessed trying to traverse closing borders. Behind them millions more, waste, stir, and are radicalized by merciless circumstances partly of our making.

We pledge to argue publicly for, and ourselves to apply, principles of good governance based on ecologically and socially sustainability, equal concern, and opportunity for all.

We see threat to development aid budgets: societies and governments turned in on themselves and embracing anti-egalitarian austerity at any price.

We commit to teach through our network members for an engagement and community education with civil society that makes connections and reaches conclusions in the long-term interest of all. We will lobby governments to learn, listen, and lead better.

Big Tent

The Big Tent Global Communiques on Higher Education are an initiative of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education in partnership with the following. These statements are owned by all who find them useful in advancing their work. Partners in this 2015 Big Tent initiative are:

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