

**Kövér, A., & Franger, G. (Eds.) (2019).  
*University and society: Interdependencies and exchange.*  
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Using case studies from several countries, this edited collection examines the experiences of elite and non-elite institutions regarding the relationships between universities and society. This work is intended for administrators, instructors, researchers, and students interested in the planning and deployment of community engagement initiatives. The purpose of the book is to “explore multifarious relations, connections, and mutual influences and exchanges between university and society from different perspectives, giving different understandings to the role of universities, and the variety of approaches undertaken with its support” (p. 1). The diversity of contexts, and the multiple disciplines and methodologies covered in the chapters, help this work to reach a broader audience.

Another vital strength of the book is its critical approach, which illuminates not only the successes but also the challenges and difficulties faced by these institutions when working with the community and other relevant stakeholders. While the book includes a variety of cases, providing rich and detailed information about diverse national and institutional contexts, each case focuses on different topics, which may pose a difficulty when it comes to making comparisons between jurisdictions. It could be argued that presenting the cases through a more homogeneous structure could facilitate the identification of patterns in the development of successful community initiatives, allowing a better comparison between practices. The counterargument is that considering the diversity of the contexts covered by the book, using a template could obscure contextual or unique aspects of the initiatives examined in each chapter.

The book has four parts: 1) Challenging academia, 2) The university as an agent of dialogue, 3) Service learning and service provision, and 4) Working within and for the community. Part one is divided into two very relevant thematic lines: The first thematic line includes a significant conceptual and philosophical discussion that can be found in the first two chapters. Some of the topics discussed here include the changing role of universities during history, accountability, government agendas, autonomy, and sustainability. Chapters 3 (Georgeou & Haas) and 4 (Franger), warn about the risk of universities not recognizing the contribution of communities when entering in relationships, a situation that may exacerbate power differentials and may produce struggle instead of collaboration. The conceptual discussion on the first two chapters urges higher education institutions to not focus just on their two traditional missions: namely, the mere generation and accumulation of knowledge and the simple diffusion of knowledge via

academic instruction (Jaeger & Kopper, 2014). Instead, universities are called to fulfill their mission of impacting regional development. The last two chapters of part one, analyze in more detail some of the consequences of the university- community development efforts in their particular contexts.

Several cross-cutting themes can be found in different sections of the book. The first cross-cutting theme is the university-society relationship. This relationship is the primary motivation of the book and is explained in the introduction by Ágnes Kövér and Gaby Franger. The interaction between university and society can take many forms and paths, for instance, a university can represent an economic and cultural impulse for the locality, but at the same time, it can generate resentment and conflict due to noise, increased traffic, and the presence of newcomers within the local population (Murray, Chapter 11). Blanco et al. (Chapter 14) partially differ with this assertion, arguing that the relative self-sufficiency of universities can cause them to isolate themselves from communities, prioritizing connections with industry and institutions with a more global character.

If universities want to be able to perform productive work with other stakeholders in society, they require a set of values. Trust is one of the essential values to guide both the process and the outcomes of these engagements (Lohman, Chapter 5; Csepeli, Chapter 6, and Rawsthorne & de Pree, Chapter 8). Other essential values identified in the book are consistency (Csepeli, Chapter 6), respect, freedom (Winkle & Perry, Chapter 13), and social justice (Háberman, Chapter 16). Regarding the latter, several of the initiatives reviewed in the book emphasize the relevance of guiding community engagement programs according to the actual needs of the community, paying careful attention to address the inequalities already existing at the local level.

Georgeou and Haas (Chapter 3) detail how inequalities can distort the experience of volunteering, generating a perception that the university's relationship with society is unidirectional (see also Campbell & Pendleton, Chapter 15), that is, when the university develops these initiatives in a paternalistic fashion. Franger (Chapter 14) agrees, stating that activities such as volunteering in communities can bridge the gap between "we" (university) and "they" (community). Some of the recommendations to deal with these disadvantages are: avoiding the arrogant imposition of knowledge (Franger, Chapter 4), strengthening commitment and social action (Blanco López et al., Chapter 14) and generating a genuine rapprochement between the different social groups (Buber et al., Chapter 10). Winkle and Perry (Chapter 13) identify several levels of interaction, noting that it is convenient to migrate from a vision of the community as a university laboratory, where the benefit is exclusively for the university, towards models of community problem solving and empowerment, where the benefit is mutual.

According to Murray (Chapter 11), the universities' primary functions are the dissemination and generation of knowledge. Scientific production is considered a visible outcome of the knowledge generation process, but it is not possible to define the value of this outcome without some controversy. Háberman (Chapter 16) believes that researchers take advantage of publications in books, articles, and conferences to draw attention to social problems, such as housing, education, and employment. This view is consistent with Casa-Nova's (Chapter 1), which suggests that universities gain power and prestige through the production of "powerful knowledge (p. 25)". Further, Campbell and Pendleton (Chapter 15) strongly question the use of indicators, such as impact factors, to quantify research results, because, for them, performance measuring practices deny some of the overlooked benefits of community-based research. Instead, they propose the acknowledgment of working with the community, even in cases when the results obtained differ from those expected. Still, these initiatives generate new relationships and opportunities that are equally valuable (see Rawsthorne & de Pree, Chapter 8, and Campbell & Pendleton, Chapter 15). In this regard, Casa-Nova and Blanco et al. (Chapters 1 and 14 respectively) agree that the goal of the community engagement initiatives is not only the contribution to scientific knowledge but also the transformation of the social reality of communities, building scenarios that promote social justice.

The book exemplifies several methodologies for carrying out community interventions to connect the university with its local context. Instead of focusing on the abstract conceptualization of the methodologies, the authors focus on their application. These illustrations can be highly valuable for the reader, who is planning to use a given methodology in a concrete context. Methodologies such as community interventions, community-based research, experiential learning, participatory action research, and interactive socio-dramatic sessions emerge as models for the co-production of knowledge with local communities. Several of the authors propose some key strategies to consider in the development of research

initiatives, such as: avoiding the establishment of hierarchical power relations in research (Rawsthorne & de Pree, Chapter 8), allowing participants to share their experiences, and recognizing the participants' capacity to influence decision-making. For example, by involving community members in the identification of research questions, design methodologies, and interpretation of the findings.

Additionally, the book provides a comprehensive description of the different roles of the university, its professors, and the students, in relation to community engagement. In the case of the university, the existence of a permanent struggle for power and prestige is recognized (Franger, Chapter 4). Universities are part of communities; they share related challenges, which in turn forces higher education institutions to become active participants in the search for solutions to these problems (Bibu & Lisetchi, Chapter 7). Professors/researchers are identified as fundamental actors in the translation of research into knowledge for students and communities at large (Casa-Nova, Chapter 1). However, the demands towards the professoriate are continually increasing. Several of the chapters compile some of the challenges that professors/researchers face. Casa-Nova (Chapter 1) explains that excessive teaching loads have the potential to limit scientific autonomy, forcing faculty members to become mere transmitters of knowledge. In Chapter 5 (Lohman), the reader can find a very detailed description of the typical activities of university professors and how their workload is distributed in diverse contexts. In this chapter, Lohman explains that at West Virginia University, a tenured faculty dedicates 40 percent of their time to teaching, 40 percent to research, and only 20 percent to service. Rawsthorne and de Pree (Chapter 8) complement this analysis, noting that while peer-reviewed publications usually receive recognition, working with the community is not seen in the same way, and in some cases, it is excluded from the university performance metrics.

Students are involved with the local context at different stages, notably, through volunteer activities, where they provide leadership, supporting other students, and the community (Buber et al., Chapter 10). Murray (Chapter 11) recognizes the importance of including students in project planning, considering that one of the objectives of the universities must be student learning and empowerment. Through community projects, students gain a better understanding of complex social problems and assume their social responsibility, a crucial aspect of professional development (Buber et al., Chapter 10). Understandably, not all possible topics related to the university-society relationship can be covered in a single publication. However, the diversity of contexts and the wealth of details in the description of each case, make this work a useful reference for current and future community engagement practices. This book is worth a read for administrators, instructors, and researchers interested in identifying potential stakeholders and all those concerned with planning community engagement initiatives.

## References

- Jaeger, A., & Kopper, J. (2014). Third mission potential in higher education: Measuring the regional focus of different types of HEIs. *Review of Regional Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10037-014-0091-3>