RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Irish Carnegie Community Engagement Classification Pilot: A Critical Analysis on Culture and Context from a Community of Practice Approach

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Abstract

This article provides a reflective critique of the process undertaken to pilot the Carnegie Community Engagement Framework in Ireland between 2015 and 2016. Of particular interest to the authors is the cultural specificity of employing a US-centric self-assessment data capturing tool in a heterogeneous Irish context. Taking the reader through from conception of the idea to its execution and post-pilot reflections, we examine the cultural appropriateness and translatability of the tool to Irish higher education. To frame the discussion of the process, we employ the concept of a community of practice, as defined by Wenger (1998). This was adopted to promote a culture of collaboration in an ever-growing neoliberal system that promotes competition between institutions, rather than facilitating their co-construction of knowledge. In the analysis, we demonstrate how forming this community of practice allowed for a cohesive assessment of the challenges and opportunities that arose through the pilot process. This was particularly important since each participating institution had different motivations for engaging with the pilot.

Reflecting with some distance, we consider the value that comes from operating as a community of practice, as well as some shortcomings that we identified as specific to this pilot.

Keywords

Community of Practice; Challenges; Competition; Collaboration; Neoliberalism; Community Engagement; Cultural Context

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to provide a reflective critical analysis of the process of piloting the Carnegie Community Engagement Framework within the Irish higher education culture and context. The cultural context is key to this discussion, given that the data capturing tool was developed with a US system and audience in mind. Here, we explore how our unique community of practice challenged the processes and conceptions of this US-centred tool in an Irish context. The article is structured around two broad themes. The first explores why a community of practice approach ([Wenger 1998](#)) was central to the Irish pilot, and how this was enacted in terms of the pilot process. It also addresses how a culture of collaboration can be embedded in a neoliberal era of competition and corporatisation within higher education. The second theme assesses the challenges and opportunities encountered during the pilot process, arising from the community of practice, the framework tool and issues of cultural appropriateness and translation.

The Irish pilot project brought together 12 diverse Irish institutions of higher education, each having motivation for participation that both overlapped and diverged, and will be explored later. From the outset of the project, a community of practice approach underpinned and guided the collaborative process, both theoretically and philosophically, so as to share knowledge and expertise, develop a shared vision and document impact, counteract increasing competitiveness in higher education, and understand the limitations and enablers of community engagement in Ireland. Face-to-face national meetings were held to allow for the project leads and participants to discuss processes, data collection, issues related to the framework tool as regards the Irish context, language, and the context of higher education in Ireland. However, while collaboration and partnership were central, more challenging issues related to competition and a growing culture of neoliberalism seeped into the process as discussion of data ownership and future publication opportunities arose.

Below, we analyse how these issues were dealt with during the unfolding process to ensure consistent and ethical collaborative practices. From a community of practice perspective, we also assess the framework tool and challenge conceptions, philosophies and practices that are mainstream in the US but incompatible with Irish understandings, structures and practices. Specific examples explored later in the article include diverse conceptions of community engagement and terminology between Ireland and the US, as well as the culture of philanthropy in the US context that is simply not mainstream in Ireland.

We start by outlining the cultural context and the administrative and institutional practicalities of undertaking this exercise that were specific to the pilot. The notion of a community of practice ([Wenger 1998](#)) is then explored, as this provided the theoretical underpinning for the pilot. In this analysis, we discuss both its value and its shortcomings as a theory when undertaking such a project in the specific cultural context of Irish higher education in which we operated. We raise here issues that arise when operating in an ever-increasing neoliberal system, particularly in a country with a longstanding tradition of committed engagement with the community. Thereafter, language and terminology become the focus as we consider the translatability of such a tool, highlighting divergences between the Irish and US contexts as well as offering some solutions we employed to overcome them within the pilot. Our conclusions, in drawing together the key points raised in the article, provide some 'lessons learned' and highlight the

importance of democratic approaches, reflective practice and cultural specificity when undertaking a multi-institutional, transnational project such as this.

Conceptions and Overview

By way of background, the Carnegie Foundation Elective Community Engagement Classification has existed in different forms in the US since the early 2000s. Higher education institutions there elect to participate and use the Framework developed by the Carnegie Foundation to capture data related to institutionalised community engagement in a process of self-assessment. This is then submitted to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning that offers classification to those that have reached a certain benchmark. There are no hierarchies in the classification; institutions are either awarded or not, based on the quality of the institutional submission. The award of classification can be used for benchmarking, as well as for promotional purposes. Prior to the Irish pilot, the tool had never been formally used outside the US context, hence the importance of this reflective exercise. For more information on this Framework and the critical responses to it, consult McCormick & Zhao (2005), Driscoll (2008) and Saltmarsh & Johnson (2018).

The Irish Carnegie Framework Pilot project was conceived in Boston in early 2014 when Irish and US higher education colleagues engaged in formal and informal conversations on community engagement within higher education in the Irish and US contexts. In 2014, the community engagement director based at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and two US professors based respectively at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and Merrimack College discussed the ongoing challenge of quantitative measurement versus qualitative data and opportunities for institutional self-assessment of community engagement. They also discussed why policy-makers might prefer quantitative metrics, whereas they felt that qualitative understandings provided richer narrative accounts of community engagement and resulted in wider impact. This became a main motivation for exploring how the Carnegie Framework might be tested in a context different from that of the US, and to explore community engagement qualitatively, and thus inform, perhaps, ongoing policy development and measurement within Ireland. The three colleagues scoped out the pilot project during 2014–2015 and became the project leads, having attained funding from the New England Research Centre for Higher Education (NERCHE) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, the Talloires Network based at Tufts University and the Community Knowledge Initiative at NUI Galway. Permission was granted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning to test the tool in Ireland. However, this came without classification opportunities as at the time the Carnegie Foundation was not interested in internationalising the tool.

On reflection, conception of the pilot project bore some community of practice hallmarks (Wenger 1998), particularly regarding the leads' identities. One of the US-based professors was culturally attuned to both US and Irish systems of higher education, having been born in Ireland and spent significant periods of student and professional life in both contexts, and so acted as a type of broker within the pilot. The practice of 'brokering' is essential to communities of practice to allow for 'new connections', 'enable coordination' and 'open new possibilities for learning' (Wenger 1999, p. 109). Some participants within these communities have at times been described as 'boundary spanners' (Hart & Wolff 2007, p. 200), as they facilitate 'different ways of seeing and doing across different domains' (Hart et al. 2013, p. 282). Certainly, at project inception and through the pilot process, this Irish-born, US-based professor demonstrated these brokering characteristics as her knowledge of culture and higher education allowed for the translation of practice, culture and contexts and the brokering of relationships among and between those in Ireland and the US.

In Ireland, the project commenced in September 2015 and formally ended in December 2016. All Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) were invited to participate in the process, and the lead project team was keen to attract five or six higher education institutions, both universities and Institutes of Technology

(IT). At the outset, the Irish higher education institutions were made aware of their commitment to the project in terms of establishing a cross-campus committee to work on completing the framework, gaining commitment from their presidents, designating a campus lead for the project, and committing to participation in the support sessions offered by the project team. The following benefits for the participating Irish higher education institutions were highlighted as:

- utilising the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification Framework to catalogue and document community engagement work;
- receiving detailed external review and feedback from the US Carnegie Community Engagement Classification review team, with a view to developing individual campus strategies to advance community engagement;
- contributing to the potential adaptation of the framework to an Irish context;
- consulting with international experts in the area of community engagement assessment and receiving support for individual campus efforts; and
- participating in potential publication opportunities.

The first introductory workshop was hosted in Dublin in September 2015, in partnership with the Irish national network for civic engagement, namely Campus Engage. The government department with responsibility for funding and policy for higher education, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), was also in attendance and offered their support for the pilot. The workshop, facilitated by the project leads, laid out the project process, developed an understanding of the tool and thematic areas under exploration, the duration of the project and institutional commitment. This was then followed by a letter of invitation to the Presidents of all higher education institutions, with a return date of 30 October 2015, for inclusion in the pilot. The letter of invitation stressed that this pilot represented an opportunity to:

> . . . **find appropriate tools to build an evidence-base of Irish higher education institutions' contributions to civic and community engagement that aligns with the national higher education policy context and Campus Engage priorities (Irish Pilot Project Communication 2015)**

Twelve higher education presidents accepted the offer to become part of the pilot project. This included Athlone IT, University of Limerick, IT Carlow, IT Tralee, Trinity College Dublin, NUI Galway, University College Cork, Galway Mayo Institute of Technology and Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and three institutions affiliated with the TU4 Dublin Alliance. At the time, the TU4 Dublin was an alliance of three higher education institutions, Dublin Institute for Technology, Blanchardstown IT and Tallaght IT, seeking university status. This status was to be granted by the Irish government in 2019 as the Technological University Dublin. Their participation in the project was used as a mechanism to bring the three institutions together and consolidate their work under the community engagement thematic pillar.

The Irish Pilot Process as a Community of Practice

The Irish pilot embedded a community of practice theoretical framework (Wenger 1998) as a means to develop collaborative relationships across the 12 pilot institutions and to possibly enable a democratic approach to the pilot process and outcomes. Communities of practice can create 'connections between people from different organisations, cultures, sectors or localities, brokering and translating varying perspectives, and facilitating the application of ways of seeing and doing across different domains' (Hart et al. 2013, p. 282). Communities of practice have been described as

> . . . **groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 4).**

With these qualities in mind, the Carnegie pilot process brought together diverse institutions from Ireland and the US, which nonetheless shared common concerns. The common concerns, or what we call motivations, shared within the community of practice were multifaceted in nature. Firstly, it was an opportunity for each individual campus to gather data and to develop a consolidated, coherent narrative on the role of the individual institution in the community and society, so that it could tell a larger and more compelling story. Another concern was to counteract the national neoliberal culture of valuing quantitative metrics over qualitative ones. At the time, the Irish government was proposing to fund activities in community engagement and track their impact, as per the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Compact Agreements. These Compacts were asking institutions to compile quantitative data that related to the number of students volunteering, the number of service-learning courses and participating students, and the number of community-engaged research projects. The pilot of the Carnegie Community Engagement Framework allowed for an alternative qualitative approach to be explored with the aim of attaining richer and more narrative-based data. From a national policy perspective, the Irish National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, which was published in 2011, had a new emphasis on engagement as a core pillar for the sector, with higher education embedded as a partner with community organisations and society to encourage social change. The pilot project offered opportunities to ascertain if and how policy was being enacted in practice (Maguire, Ball & Braun 2012).

Other concerns focused on a desire to counteract the polarisation of higher education institutions, particularly along binary divides between the institutes of technology system and the universities. As of 2015, the institutes of technology were no longer part of Campus Engage, and remain so. This independent pilot project represented a means to bring both systems together in a process of learning and sharing on the theme of community engagement. In addition, the three individual institutions making up the TU4 Dublin Alliance saw it as an opportunity to create cohesion and consolidation to prepare for their future designation as a university.

Wenger's community of practice is also a social theory of learning that can be conceptualised as social participation where people come together to actively engage in the 'practices of social communities' and to construct 'identities in relation to these communities' (Wenger 1998, p. 4). The more social aspects of the pilot project were instrumental to the process, in that the pilot institutions during the project lifecycle met for one and two-day meetings in different locations across Ireland, hosted by members of the communities of practice within their higher education institution. The purpose of these meetings was to develop a new identity as a cluster of pilot institutions within Ireland, and to both pioneer and explore the Carnegie Community Engagement Framework. We aimed to do so within a different cultural context to that of the US, to learn and share knowledge and develop and share data gathering methodologies. This also allowed us to link in with the more experienced US-based project leads and develop collegial relationships over meetings, project dinners and lunches. Thus, the Irish pilot developed a uniquely cooperative and collaborative approach, distinct from the way in which the framework is administered within the US. We feel this was a real strength of the pilot in Ireland in terms of social interaction. It could be argued that the US process of application for the classification perhaps isolates rather than facilitates cooperative relationships as there are no formal mechanisms in the US to forge relationships across institutional boundaries. The community of practice approach embedded in Ireland laid a firm foundation in terms of developing a shared vision and new ways of knowing and doing, while pioneering the possibility of internationalising the Carnegie Framework. While this approach within the context of Ireland was very positive, there were some challenging aspects, which will be dealt with later in this article.

Wenger (1998) argues that a strong sense of identity exists among members, which is directly tied to that community, and the practice is developed through engagement with others in it (Wenger 1998). Wenger and Snyder (2000) suggest that a community of practice, as a unit, differs from more formal groups, such as professional work or project team groupings, as these are typically assigned by their superiors. They are

gathered together to perform a task, they work to a deadline with a reporting structure and disband after the task is completed. In the case of the Irish pilot, this strong sense of identity as an informal group has been sustained since 2015. The formal pilot project ended in December 2016, but the participants have retained a connection through their desire to articulate the lessons learned from a number of conference presentations since that time, as well as various written and reflective opportunities.

According to Wenger and Snyder (2000), communities of practice are 'fundamentally informal and self-organizing' and 'they benefit from cultivation' as they 'generate knowledge', and in turn 'they renew themselves' through their engagement with knowledge. There was no roadmap or blueprint for the Irish pilot as it was the first time the framework was nationally and collectively explored within a different cultural context. The group self-organised and decided on the range of meetings to be held and the themes to be explored. Each meeting led to another meeting that the group collectively decided upon in terms of theme, time and location. During these meetings, knowledge was generated on the tool and the process, this knowledge was shared, and fears were dissipated collectively through group reflection and discussion. The meetings also presented the group with an opportunity to use technology to call in and connect with the project leads in the US for their advice and support.

Wenger (1998) states that communities of practice exist to develop a mutual enterprise with a joint mission in order to achieve something on an ongoing basis and are in concert with each other. The joint mission in the case of the Irish pilot was to explore and find new ways in an environment that favoured quantitative metrics to articulate a deeper narrative on community engagement. The framework tool provided a mechanism by which we could be in concert with each other. Five meetings were held across Ireland between September 2015 and December 2016 that brought the institutions together to introduce them to the Ireland pilot and the framework tool, to share knowledge on data collection and methodology, and to close the project with individual institutional and aggregate findings offered by the Expert Review Team. Wenger (1998) also articulates that communities of practice share a repertoire in terms of the work that they engage in, but also share methods, tools and techniques. One major fear, or challenge, was the vast amount of work required within each institution to actually embed the pilot project and gather data for the framework. In essence, through mutual conversation and the cultivation of greater knowledge of the tool, the group was constantly in renewal mode as each developed a deeper repertoire related to the framework, its requirements and how to apply it to each individual institution. Thus, the approach was democratic at all stages, with maximum inclusivity at the core of decisions taken.

The next section engages critically with the challenges facing such a democratic process, and identifies some shortcomings in Wenger's 1998 theory of community of practice.

Community of Practice Challenges and Shortcomings

In our effort to create the type of community of practice, about which many scholars theorise, we identified some shortcomings in their approach, specifically in relation to the possibility of conflict arising within the community due to imbalance of power and the implications that can have on individuals, their higher education institutions and the wider community of practice. We contend that conflict is, or can be, a natural consequence of any relationships, be they familial, friendship, romantic or professional, and if dealt with meaningfully, can allow for more positive experiences and better relationships. Fuller et al. (2005, p. 66) view failing to fully explore the significance of conflict and unequal power existing internally and externally to the community of practice as a shortcoming on Wenger's part. In addition, Easterby-Smith, Snell and Gherardi (1998, p. 265) contend that this theorising of the community of practice does not pay sufficient attention to formal structural power or the significance of the positions of the people participating in it within those structures. In the case of our community of practice, this potential for conflict arose, for instance, from the dual nature of the roles that some participants assumed in the process.

Contradictory and Complementary Roles within a Community of Practice

A key example of such roles is exemplified in the role of the Irish project lead, who was also campus lead for one of the participating higher education institutions. This colleague fulfilled a contradictory and often complementary role in being an internal participant in the community of practice, while also holding an external position, with global perspective of the project, alongside accountability to the funders. In this way the Irish lead acted as a boundary spanner, but this dual role proved complex. While the participating higher education institutions worked closely and in partnership with the Irish lead and colleagues in the US, the reality was that these lead partners needed to have some distance in order to ensure the national pilot was carried out to the standards set out by Carnegie and the various funding bodies. As the person who conceived the idea of piloting the Carnegie tool in the Irish context, this colleague drove the recruitment of higher education institution participants in Ireland. In collaboration with the US-based project leads, this colleague laid the groundwork for the reflective tool to be piloted in as many higher education institutions as possible and facilitated the initial above-mentioned workshop, which led to an expression of interest to participate from the Presidents of the Irish higher education institutions. Given this dual role of project lead and participant, questions arose around data collection and protection, and competition within the sector. It must be noted that this was not a common sentiment across the community of practice, but noted by one institution during the course of a national meeting. With mounting pressure on each higher education institution to compete for and attract funding, some participants sought reassurance that, as a stakeholder in the Irish higher education sector, the Irish lead would not have access to data from other campuses that could potentially provide unfair advantage to her home campus, or for solo publications in the future to further her professional career. While this use of data was never something that this colleague had considered, as a group we sought to address this challenge in a democratic fashion.

Since undertaking the pilot in 2016, we have reflected on the motivation for this discourse. While we do not aim to speak here for all individuals involved in the community of practice, we do recognise general factors that could give rise to the need for clarity around data collection, its use and those who have access to it. The growing pressure faced by colleagues involved in Irish higher education under neoliberal policies fosters competition, distrust and unequal platforms from which to operate. Stephen Ball's (2016) analysis of neoliberal policies in the higher education sector, both in Ireland and the UK, are useful in negotiating and identifying potential challenges faced by communities of practice like the one we sought to forge. Indeed, the neoliberal elements evident in the Irish context are not only relevant to this discussion, but to those who drive the US higher education sector under which the Carnegie classification initially developed. Part of our pilot was to critically engage with the classification tool developed by Carnegie and assess its cultural appropriateness within an Irish context. Coming from an environment where private funding and philanthropic support are commonplace, the tool reflects the requirements of interest groups there. Campuses pay a fee to be assessed when seeking accreditation by Carnegie. The results of the self-reporting process are then used by middle and senior management as proof of community engagement and to lever more money from funders.

Within the Irish context, where higher education is still primarily funded by the state, this seemingly utilitarian or neoliberal attitude to recording community engagement for economic benefit is not at the level it is in the US, but it is becoming increasingly influenced by funding sources and those who contribute to and benefit from these activities on campuses. Corporate lexicon, such as stakeholders, profits, best practice and even referring to students as 'customers', is increasingly accepted within the sector. Holland, Hughes and Leitch (2016, p. 1044) stress that the alignment of education with the economy has been detrimental to education as a social good. This notion of education as a social good is fundamental to community engagement activities on the campuses involved in this pilot. In finding systematic means to record and thus

seek further support for actions that would break down barriers between campuses and the communities they should be serving, the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and resources and a general democratisation of knowledge were some of the driving factors for our higher education institutions participating in this process. Therefore, when the issue of data protection, particularly in relation to the Irish lead's specific situation, threatened to overshadow the joint effort to forge a comprehensive community of practice that demonstrated the significance of this vital facet of Irish higher education, it was a difficult reality to face.

Performativity Pressures

According to Ball (2016, p. 1053), the pressures of performativity within the neoliberal system create competition across the sector. 'Performativity is a technology that relates effort, values, purposes and self-understanding directly to measures and comparisons of output.' Engaging in an exercise that brought these 'measures and comparisons of output' to the fore understandably brought the element of competition to the discussion and could explain in part the queries that arose in relation to the Irish lead's role and whether she would have access to the data from campuses across the country. Within the pilot, none of the campuses were competing, since the option of being awarded the Carnegie classification was not a possibility. Instead, the participating campuses were interacting more widely on other projects. However, they had similar struggles to achieve recognition for the work they were doing and to ensure community engagement was reflected in policies developed for Irish higher education. The growing external factors driven by neoliberal policies also operated against the collective approach of community engagement. Indeed, we could argue that the reluctance on the part of some participants to have campus data shared across the community of practice could simultaneously have been in resistance to neoliberal policies and compliance with them. By refusing to share this data, campuses were not bowing to the neoliberal tendencies to demand transparency in order to classify and rank campuses (and the funding they receive) according to league tables and measurements. On the other hand, by not sharing the campus-specific data, there were certain limitations to the democratisation of knowledge produced in the pilot process. While motivations varied, it was clear to everyone that an appropriate solution to moving forward in a way that participants in the community of practice knew they had certain assurances was vital.

Towards Transformation

Seeking to provide assurances related to the use of data, and in an attempt to diffuse potential conflict, the group agreed to draw up a Terms of Reference document for how they would work as a group, so that the project would be beneficial for all involved. This document, devised by the lead partners, and edited and approved by the whole community of practice, provided specific guidelines that clarified the roles and responsibilities of all participants. Furthermore, it clarified the use and protection of data for the individual campuses and that the data would be seen only by the US project team and assessors, not the Irish lead, and the relevant people on each campus. Data ownership was thus clarified. It was agreed that aggregate data would be shared with all participants in the pilot, as well as relevant national agencies and interested parties. This was also important, since the pilot had been funded by the Talloires Network and endorsed by other groups, which required reports on progress as part of that support. Furthermore, the Terms of Reference (2016) defined the mission, goal and values of the community of practice. The values, in particular, help clarify the discussion here:

> **… this project underpins the concepts of collegiality, knowledge sharing and trust in terms of creating a community of practitioners and practice that is enabling the development of an appropriate tool to capture data related to civic and community engagement in Ireland that is indigenously meaningful.**

In order to ensure this was possible, the data protection agreement explicitly names the Irish lead and home campus at the end of the document, stating that at no point in the process would either have access to data from any other campus, despite this colleague's complex role as participant and lead partner in the national process. This Terms of Reference document served as a guarantee that the intentions of all involved were clear and no information would be misappropriated. Furthermore, for national meetings, the community of practice continued to meet on different campuses and invited external facilitators to chair the meetings, so the element of democracy and reciprocal sharing of practice and knowledge remained the focus of the activities.

While we found a solution that served the purposes of the community of practice at that time through creating the Terms of Reference and ensuring external facilitators of meetings, further research on the nature of negotiating complex roles within a community of practice is needed so that one colleague is not singled out and publicly named in the process, and their motives and professional conduct called into question. We have theorised on the potential rationale behind the misgivings raised in relation to the Irish lead's situation with a view to understanding and providing a means of navigating it, with growing competition in the sector as a result of neoliberal policies being the most likely motive. However, what our solution did not cater for was the impact that this part of the process had on our colleague, as a person, researcher, project lead and campus lead. As the person who conceived the project in the first place, she removed herself and reduced her role in the pilot for the greater good of the community of practice, to ensure no further questions remained regarding her motivations for undertaking it. The community engagement aspect of Irish higher education encompasses a relatively small community. We therefore must recognise that, in national projects like ours, some participants will undoubtedly find themselves in a similar position to this. Thus a process needs to be established that is respectful of such individuals, as well as the community of practice in which they operate.

Contextual and Cultural Nuances

While the above process was demanding, other challenges that directly related to contextual nuances in the Framework tool and its appropriateness within an Irish context emerged. A collective discussion and voice in the community of practice meetings allowed for the Irish pilot institutions to grapple with these issues and to find ways to overcome them collectively. In some instances, this involved a change or an amendment to the actual framework tool; at other times, an exclusion of certain aspects not applicable to Irish higher education; and in other situations, it involved an advisory collective voice in terms of how the tool could be adapted or even improved for an Irish, if not an international, audience. Challenges and nuances related broadly to language, a culture of philanthropy in the US, one to student volunteering in Ireland, and the silence of community voice.

LANGUAGE AND CLARITY

Language and localisation issues were identified as common areas of concern for the members of the community of practice, since the US-centred tool could not reflect the cultural and institutional specificities of those participating. In our face-to-face meetings, we held break-out sessions dedicated to the challenges we had to confront in this area, and common ground for all was the issue of defining community engagement. Community engagement is defined differently in the US and Ireland and needed to be adapted to suit each country and their higher education sector. Indeed, even within the Irish context, the concept of community engagement is nuanced differently depending on the experience and activities of the higher educational institute in question, making streamlining of such a term problematic within the Irish higher education sector. The Carnegie Framework tool we used defined community engagement as:

> Community engagement describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

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

There was little dissent among the community of practice in terms of their alignment with the Carnegie definition of community engagement. Within the context of Ireland, the national network for civic engagement, namely Campus Engage, has a definition that shares many commonalities with that of Carnegie. However, within an Irish context, it is more commonplace for the sector to discuss the civic role of higher education rather than the community role. In Ireland, civic engagement is defined as a:

> mutually beneficial knowledge-based collaboration between the higher education institution, its staff and students, with the wider community, through a range of activities, including: Service Learning / Community Based Learning; Community-Engaged research; Volunteering; Community / Economic regeneration; Capacity-building; Community-campus partnerships; and, Access / Widening Participation (Lyons & McIlrath 2011).

Here we discuss the civic role versus the community role of higher education in Ireland, where civic engagement and civic literacy have been prominent aspects to Irish conceptions of engagement. To further explain this nuance, during the Celtic Tiger years (1994–2007) – a period of rapid economic growth in Ireland resulting from foreign direct investment – there was widespread concern that levels of social capital were declining and materialism and commercialism rising as a result of increased wealth on the island. As a result, Irish conceptions of community engagement sought to redress this imbalance and give students an opportunity to become active and engaged citizens. In addition, a sense of community engagement as social responsibility was common to many approaches across the Irish higher education sector. Likewise, as a group, we agreed that often people are not always aware that their activities could constitute community engagement, and the pilot presented an opportunity to highlight this for our colleagues, depending on the definition chosen. When choosing which aspects of community engagement should be reflected in this process, some institutions wanted the line drawn at work that was carried out as part of staff members' professional roles, not activities completed in their personal time. Others highlighted the necessity to include students' participation in modules or in extra-curricular activities as fundamental when considering community engagement on their campuses. The inclusion of students in our discussions of this definition brought even more complex debates around the tendency to discuss community-based education as synonymous with community-based learning or community engagement for undergraduates, which is not always the case. Likewise, colleagues emphasised the fact that community-based research and community-based learning are inextricably linked, and should be treated as such, with each feeding the development of the other, as with all integration of research, teaching and learning. Related to this discussion of community engagement and the learning environment is 'service learning'. This is an American term that needs to be translated into the specific cultural context of Irish higher education. In Ireland, service learning has been translated and localised and is termed community engaged or community based learning. In addition, the term 'service' has both punitive and religious underpinnings in Ireland and is not appropriate for a higher education context.

COMMUNITY VOICE

Community consultation, cooperation, reciprocity and partnership are core to community engagement internationally. The framework tool respects the individuality of each institution and is comprehensive in documenting all aspects of the engagement cycle, exploring the manner in which institutional infrastructure is designed to facilitate and support community engagement work and to ensure the reciprocity of community partnerships. The process is weighted, however, in favour of the institution, in that input to the framework is not directly invited from the community. There is exploration of the instruments used for systematic assessment of community perceptions. However, the Irish community of practice strongly agreed that the creation of opportunity for the community and, indeed, student voice to be heard in relation to the framework would create a holistic and authentic representation. Another term that ignited discussion within our community of practice was 'collaborative', described as 'working in partnership for the benefit of all'. Further, it was recognised that 'collaboration' should also include the concept of inclusiveness and embrace all people according to their talents, skills and/or abilities. Embodied in this notion of collaboration was the reciprocal nature of community engagement as highlighted in the Carnegie data collection tool. However, Irish pilot participants noted that, despite this reciprocity being highlighted, there was again no space to include the community voice, our democratic partners in engagement, when reflecting on our institutional practices.

VOLUNTEERING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Another challenge that we faced related to capturing the vibrant culture of volunteerism that has long been strong in Ireland, contributing to the cultivation of social capital, and enhancing the social fabric of the local and national communities. This culture is reflected within Irish higher education institutions' and the individual's multifaceted relationship with their respective communities, which has evolved over time. In 2014, all institutions of higher education in Ireland were members of Campus Engage and all the presidents became a signatory to the Campus Engage Charter that commited each institution to enacting and embedding community engagement practice. The Charter includes volunteering as a core practice and places value on staff and student volunteering as an integral component of Irish community engagement. As the Irish pilot project progressed and participants grew increasingly familiar with the tool, dialogue developed, both within the teams formed at pilot institutions and together as a community of practice. These conversations were principally around the challenge of perceived exclusion of staff and student volunteering, and the disparity between the centrality of volunteering in the Irish community engagement landscape and that of the US, as evidenced by the design of the framework.

Commitment to and continued involvement of staff in volunteering was demonstrated in the outcomes of campus-wide surveys of community engagement activity conducted by members of the community of practice during the early stages of the self-assessment process. As a community of practice, much discussion took place, firstly around the array of volunteering activity identified therein that academic, professional service, research and support staff was involved in, both within their institutions and externally, either in a career-related or personal capacity. Ultimately, this conversation evolved into a collective struggle by participants regarding the lack of scope for this work to be fully documented within the framework and concern going forward that this may have a negative impact on the future of the work if considered unworthy. Moreover, in the case of student volunteering, there was overwhelming consensus amongst the community of practice regarding the intrinsic value and positive reciprocal impact of their volunteering and non-credit-bearing community engagement activities in the Irish context. The perception was that this work was almost relegated to the 'outreach and partnership' section of the Framework, in comparison to the detailed analysis allocated to curricular engagement activity, perhaps a legacy of the original designation as subcategories (Pearl 2014).

FINANCE AND PHILANTHROPY

A significant portion of work on the framework tool focused on monetary commitment in terms of the allocation of internal budgets and the sourcing of external funding through philanthropy. As a community of practice, we identified that finance for community engagement within higher education in Ireland is a significant struggle and does not follow the same pattern as that of the US. Also, community engagement within the context of Ireland was mainstreamed during the height of the global recession, and funds for the higher education sector and for new innovations were decimated at that time. The Carnegie classification in relation to the Philanthropy scale did not really resonate with an Irish audience. The scale of donations in the US is considerable owing to university graduates who have become wealthy and formed prestigious alumni groups. In the US, the bonds that are developed between past students and their alma mater run deep. It could be argued that graduates from Irish higher education have the same bond, but have a lot less financial backing or fewer connections. Thus, the Carnegie classification in relation to specifically measuring philanthropy was not always suitable to the Irish situation. In fact, it was a considerable challenge in Ireland. Also, many Irish higher education institutions have strategically avoided embedding a culture of funding in an effort to transcend the traditional charitable conceptions in favour of a model of capacity and relationship building and knowledge exchange. While funding is indisputably necessary, in the Irish context could it be argued that time is often more valuable than money?

Conclusion

By joining the Irish Carnegie Framework Pilot project in 2015–2016, the participating higher education institutions made a commitment to the systematic embedding of community engagement in their institutional practices and consolidation of a national group of pioneers that would drive the shared values promoted through this process. As we have outlined here, the motivations to participate were diverse. The institutions, known today as the Technological University Dublin, united under the community engagement pillar to demonstrate meaningful collaboration prior to their formal amalgamation; other institutions seized the opportunity to take an evidence-based approach to lobbying for better integration of community engagement activities and support systems within their institutions; and collectively, it was envisaged that there would be more meaningful investment and interest in community engagement, as outlined in the Irish National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, as well as a systematic Irish approach to gathering community engagement data.

From the outset, the project leads and all higher education institutions that joined the project were dedicated to a democratic and horizontal organisational structure. To reduce hierarchies and promote this more horizontal perspective, we adopted Wenger's (1998) theory of community of practice. With a common concern and shared passion for highlighting and formally integrating community engagement into our institutional and national frameworks, our community of practice engaged in reflective discussions with a view to deepening our knowledge and understanding of the types of metrics that were suited to capturing community engagement in an Irish context and allowed for a deeper narrative. This was particularly beneficial given the diversity across the Irish higher education sector, with public universities, not-for-profit institutions and institutes of technology all participating and providing heterogeneous perspectives on the practices and challenges of community engagement in Ireland. To understand the complex interplay within and among these institutions, as well as the bodies governing them, from a community engagement perspective, the social aspect of this community of practice was fundamental. Geographically, Ireland is small, so face-to-face meetings, which enhanced this community of practice, were possible, helping us forge lasting relationships founded in sharing knowledge and practice. Where possible, we would highly recommend this approach in other regions and nations. By sharing our challenges and methodologies for data gathering, we built long-lasting collegial relationships that reinforced our community of practice in a

way that, we believe, would not have been possible under the US model, which is driven by neoliberal and performance-based metrics.

Indeed, as we have shown here, the community of practice approach is not without its limitations. Conflict, in its many forms and levels, is a normal result of collaboration and interaction. What is needed, therefore, is recognition of this possibility and development of tools to overcome potential tension. Rather than creating an obstacle for our community of practice, however, it provided an opportunity to test the democratic and reflective approach that had been instilled in the project from its inception. The complex role that the Irish project lead undertook embodied a reality that many colleagues operating within community engagement in Irish higher education institutions could face, given the close-knit nature of and geographical proximity between institutions. This is still a relatively small community of practice and colleagues who hold national, international and institutional roles simultaneously are sometimes faced with the challenge of extricating themselves from one role in favour of another to reduce conflict of interest. This was the situation within our community of practice. While our solution of ensuring an external chair for all future meetings and co-creation of terms of reference by which all members of our community of practice were bound helped, this did not resolve the potential implications for this colleague, from a professional and personal point of view. Further work is needed on this issue, which is undoubtedly experienced in other communities of practice, to find a fair outcome that protects participation and the needs of all in communities of practice, and which does not sacrifice opportunities for the individual in question.

Other challenges that we identified as a community of practice when piloting the tool included deciphering the differences in language and clarity and lack of inclusion of a community voice, which is fundamental to the cycle of engagement, and therefore pivotal in authenticating and completing the framework. Furthermore, the perceived differences in the role of volunteering, social capital within varied community engagement landscapes, and disparity of funding and philanthropy in the Irish context were highlighted in our discussions. Common threads among the challenges were how community engagement is defined and the need to recognise that individual characteristics of community engagement in one country are likely to differ from another, while in the main remaining true to the internationally accepted principles of reciprocity and mutuality.

In keeping with the methodology adopted during the original development of the tool, to respect the diversity of approach of each institution to community engagement (Driscoll 2008), as the tool advances towards an international stage, and data is gathered from participating countries, further consideration and respect needs to be afforded to encompass the multiplicity of engagement approaches of each. In light of our reflections and ongoing interrogation of the literature, we concur with the ideas and recommendations articulated by Watson et al. (2011), Taylor (2014) and McIlrath (2019) that community engagement and its assessment should be viewed through cultural and historical lenses, particularly when we begin to explore the nature of community engagement internationally. Watson et al. (2011) likened the founding charters and missions of universities to DNA, leaving an indelible imprint forever on their evolution and on the expression of community engagement. They argue that culture and history have a huge bearing and influence on the nuanced nature of community engagement at institutional, regional and national levels. Taylor (2014, p. 97), drawing on Vygotskian theory that cultural historical theory has been overlooked and is in effect readily applicable, claims that 'the idea of knowledge as an abstract and autonomous reality detached from issues of real practice, history, and politics is increasingly untenable'. While McIlrath (2019, p. 182) argues in her study of community engagement in Europe that 'diversity exists in all of its guises – from localised terminology, community of practice formation, conceptions of civic engagement, stages of enactment and structural challenges'. On the basis of this argument, a sensitised assessment tool and process should be cognisant of historical and cultural influences as this might provide what Taylor describes as 'new insights' (2014, p. 95). Our advice to a growing critical mass of those looking to assess community engagement is to adopt a democratic community of practice approach, but to be mindful of the

underpinning influence of historical and cultural factors that permeate and nuance the nature of community engagement.

Dedication

This article is dedicated to the life of Caroline Murphy, our esteemed colleague, friend and former President of Carlow Institute of Technology. Caroline was a partner in the Irish Carnegie Pilot Project, but sadly passed away during our work together. She is missed but not forgotten at this time.

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