II.5

ENGAGEMENT BEYOND THE THIRD MISSION: THE EXPERIENCE OF ALBUKHARY INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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THE MALAYSIAN CASE: INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia decided to establish the Division of Industry and Community Liaison at all public universities in the country. This was in addition to the existing Divisions of Academic and International Affairs, and Research and Innovation. Like the other two, the new division is also headed by a deputy vice-chancellor.

This marked the beginning of a new phase for tertiary education in the country, at least at the level of the public sector. Community services that had at one time been introduced as part of the university's mission were now being expounded conceptually into what is known as 'community engagement', of which the industry is a subset. While the traditional missions of any Malaysian university are generally understood to lie within the realm of teaching, research and services, the latter area is being expanded to include full-scale 'collaborative' activities with their own research and teaching dimensions.

In doing this, the 'third (civic) mission' of Malaysian universities is seeking to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with the community and display a stronger commitment to the welfare of the surrounding society. Indeed, several Malaysian universities are located in relatively underserved areas so that they can develop a closer rapport and more meaningful relations with the community at large. This includes creating the relevant industry to serve the needs of the community by using the universities' expertise and facilities. The idea that a university is an ivory tower detached from the everyday needs and life of the surrounding community is now waning following the move taken by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Also waning is the 'tokenism' that was previously related to community activities but was biased only towards benefiting the universities, especially in the areas of research and publication. In the case of teaching, the university assumed a 'university knows best' stance and proceeded to 'teach' the community in a unidirectional way. Similarly, services were being rendered without an in-depth understanding of the corresponding needs of the community. All this was seemingly being done at a superficial level in the pursuit of academic excellence and intellectual 'truth' at the expense of the community. By moving beyond the third mission under the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Division of Industry and Community Liaison, universities are now more conscious of the participatory roles of the various stakeholders in nurturing education in the country's development partners. Partnering, promoting and protecting the public in a more direct way is now increasingly being regarded as the social responsibility of universities – 'university social responsibility'. More so in modern societies where knowledge is seen as key to progress, not just economically, universities are called upon to play this 'new and expanded' role beyond the third mission.

Generally, this role revolves around the major themes of (1) education, (2) economic enhancement, (3) healthcare, (4) environment ethics, and (5) heritage and culture. Where possible, these themes are dealt with in an integrated or transdisciplinary way so that a greater impact or outcome can be realized for all partners. One way to do this is by adopting a sustainable livelihood approach (SLA), as discussed below. The overall aim is to build awareness, partnerships and capacities by directly engaging the community within a systematic and methodic framework. That said, the heart of this mission is the same as for any part of the academy: to discover, develop, disseminate and transfer knowledge for the benefit of society.

THE SLA

Working beyond the third, particularly civic, mission of universities can be realized through the SLA that is currently being adopted by the Albukhary International University (AIU) in Malaysia, especially in

the context of alleviating poverty. The two key components of the SLA are:

- a *framework* that helps in understanding the complexities of poverty;
- a set of *principles* to guide action to address and overcome poverty (International Fund for Agricultural Development, undated).

The SLA seeks to provide a way of thinking about the livelihoods of poor people that will stimulate debate and reflection on the many factors that affect livelihoods, the way they interact and their relative importance within a particular setting. This should help in identifying more effective ways to support livelihoods and reduce poverty.

In addition, the SLA has seven guiding principles that are very much in line with the third mission to engage the community. People, rather than the resources they use or their governments, are the main concern. The guiding principles are therefore as follows:

- *Be people-centred.* The SLA begins by analysing people's livelihoods and how they change over time. The people themselves actively participate throughout the project cycle.
- *Be holistic.* The SLA acknowledges that people adopt many strategies to secure their livelihoods and that many actors are involved, for example the private sector, ministries, community-based organizations and international organizations.
- *Be dynamic.* The SLA seeks to understand the dynamic nature of livelihoods and what influences them.
- *Build on strengths.* The SLA builds on people's perceived strengths and opportunities rather than focusing on their problems and needs. It supports existing livelihood strategies.
- *Promote micro–macro links.* The SLA examines the influence of policies and institutions on livelihood options and highlights the need for policies to be informed by insights from the local level and by the priorities of those who are poor.
- *Encourage broad partnerships.* The SLA counts on broad partnerships drawing on both the public and private sectors.
- *Aim for sustainability.* Sustainability is important if poverty reduction is to be lasting.

The guidelines generally do not prescribe solutions or dictate methods. Instead, they are flexible and adaptable to diverse local conditions, which makes the approach appropriate for projects that go beyond the third dimension.

In the case of AIU, participation in the SLA is compulsory for all students as part of the core curriculum. It is organized into a number of projects, each extending over 10 trimesters (that is, over a three-year period), in which the students work in groups of 10–15 to implement the projects with the community. They are equipped with theoretical as well as practical dimensions so that they can draw on the interplay of the various main factors to effect change in the community. Students are able to identify the constraints and opportunities present in the community, as well as engage and empower the community to arrive at the most desirable 'solutions'.

In one case study, where the community is made up of indigenous Kensiu people, some of the SLA outcomes have been as follows:

- *Entrepreneurial aspects.* Identify skilled handicraft makers from the Kensiu community and streamline production by focusing on specific bamboo products; source the appropriate machines to enhance the production of indigenous handicrafts; connect the community to ready suppliers for the commercialization of the handicrafts.
- *Empowerment aspects.* Plant honey bamboo around the community as the first step in being self-sufficient in the supply of bamboo and in moving towards a 'Bamboo Village'; empower more community members to learn new types of bamboo handicrafts; regarding health, conduct awareness campaigns on the dangers of tobacco, alcohol and glue-sniffing.
- *Sustainability aspects.* Involve the Department of Orang Asli Development and local community leaders; create 'Bamboo Village' eco-tourist projects; set up an awareness programme for better hygiene and sanitary practices; increase access to and awareness of the importance of education – including the compilation of a 'Kensiu dictionary.'
- *Triple Bottom Line.* Planet – the community is now able to live in a more ecologically sustainable environment; People – healthier lifestyles will be adopted and a better quality of life achieved; Prosperity (Profit) – the community will become more entrepreneurial and empowered by learning new skills and getting access to the marketplace for additional income.

The overall reach over a 2-month period has involved about 20 families in the community. This is expected to expand over time as the project develops even further.

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK AND MEASUREMENTS

In order to help implement the SLA in a systematic

and methodical way, AIU is developing a specialized competency framework called the AIU Humaniversity Competency Framework (HCF). This is aimed at developing a set of core competencies that will enable students to better engage with the community in achieving the right outcomes. It is also intended to foster a consistent documentation and reporting format, as well as a reliable monitoring and assessment system. This is an effort to make the third mission more acceptable based on a more defined framework and measurement to support it.

The AIU HCF is designed to ground the university's vision and mission, as well as the core values based on the concept of 'the humaniversity' – which is the AIU tagline. The HCF serves as the foundation for student development efforts underpinned by a comprehensive, well-balanced, structured and standardized approach. It addresses both the academic and the behavioural development components. The latter is assessed separately throughout the students' years at AIU to complement the academic aspect, but it does not supersede it (Figure II.5.1).

As a working definition, the 'competency model' is intended to provide 'a structured guide enabling the identification, evaluation and development of targeted behaviours in individuals'. It encompasses 'a set of observable, measurable and improvable behaviours comprising of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics, including values (KSAV)' (see https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/human-capital-management/reference-materials/#url=Glossary).

The university believes that the competency model, as designed for AIU, can enhance further the third mission based on desired behavioural qualities and values, to take the mission beyond what it is today. The five domains in the AIU HCF are: beingness, togetherness, leadership and management skills, effective communication, and critical thinking. They collectively mirror the set of six core values of AIU that would facilitate their long-term engagement with society and industry. The five domains in the HCF are subdivided into a number of core competencies (Table II.5.1).

For example, under 'beingness' would be included aspects of personal development, emotional intelligence, and perseverance and resilience, whereas 'togetherness' would cover social awareness (local and global), interpersonal skills, teamworking, fair play, valuing diversity, compassion, being recreationally active and sustainability orientation. In all, there are 26 competencies that are further broken down to 'observable' criteria that allow them to be 'measured' on a five-level scale of proficiency (for example, the quality of being competent ranging from very unsatisfactory to outstanding). The purpose of this is to enable monitoring and assessment to be conducted as objectively as possible based on a set of 'scoring guidelines.' This then allows for the necessary 'interventions' to be carried out on a regular basis where indicated.

All these mechanisms are purposefully designed to ascertain not only whether students are well prepared to engage with the community but, equally importantly, can have a sustainable impact on the livelihood of the
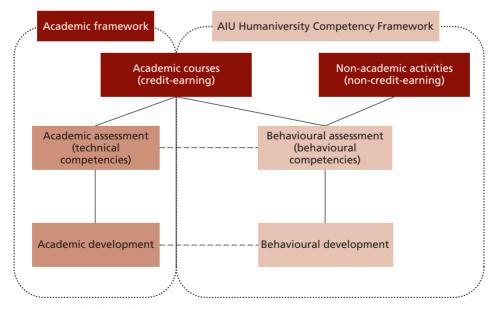

FIGURE II.5.1 **Behavioural competency assessment**
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TABLE II.5.1
The domains and competencies of AIU's HCF

AiU's Humaniversity Competency Framework					
	Domains				
	Beingness	**Togetherness**	**Leadership and management skills**	**Effective communication**	**Critical thinking**
Competencies	Personal development	Social awareness (local & global)	Demonstrating initiative and being proactive	Practical communication	Analytical and reasoning skills
	Perseverance and resilience	Interpersonal skills	Achievement orientation	Presentation skills	Conceptual creativity
	Emotional intelligence	Team working	Decision making	Facilitation skills	Problem solving
		Fair play	Planning and organising	Negotiation skills	Effective questioning
		Valuing diversity	Building effective teams		
		Compassion	Resourcefulness		
		Recreationally active	Time management		
		Sustainability orientation			

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community as a whole. This will be the foundation to go beyond the third mission. In so doing, it will create opportunities for research and innovation, and for various windows for learning and co-creating 'new' knowledge, while (re)discovering the old from within the community. In this respect, the aspect of knowledge diversity – with a special emphasis on local/traditional knowledge – is an important dimension of taking the third mission beyond what it is today.

In October 2012, AIU hosted an international conference on integrating knowledge diversity within the higher education system to understand this dimension further. The conference was organized on the assumption that, just as biodiversity has been the key to sustainability in nature, the diversity of knowledge systems must remain a significant ingredient in the maintenance and survival of our own distinct and unique cultures.

The conference addressed leadership issues and the relationship between modern knowledge systems, as represented by the university, and indigenous, traditional and local knowledge systems that are part and parcel of the survival toolkit transcending the third mission involving communities and cultures the world over. It recognized that higher education today is in the throes of a crisis of multiple dimensions: moral disengagement vis-à-vis the major problems of our age; uselessness of course contents in the face of societies' challenges; increasing student cynicism related to the ideals of a university education; and generalized reluctance to provide public funding. Moreover, the university systems in Asia, Africa and South America are confronting a 'relevance deficit' associated with

the uncritical appropriation of an imported hegemonic 'modern' knowledge system based on a region-specific and culture-bound epistemology (first in Europe and now the USA) with non-transferable cognitive validity.

All these are factors that call for the third mission to be widened as an attempt to reconcile the role of modern-day universities and the community at large. Otherwise, the university, as a system dedicated to knowledge, will be forced to continue with the processes of colonization and homogenization instead of encouraging the resumption of the processes that have been so displaced or halted. Many of these processes have generated violence, corrupting all societies, as all are forced to assume a single universal path to progress. This is the biggest problem. This is where we have to go beyond the third mission as it is understood today.

This provides a singular opportunity to reconsider the sphere of traditional and local knowledges from the world's cultural diversity as a major agenda for knowledge dissemination and generation. This could not only unlock the wisdom of ages from the community in our collective quest for viable solutions to our shared concerns about environmental preservation and sustainable economies, but also, more importantly, lead to an abandonment of the delusionary assumption that there is a single universal path to progress.

During the conference, several speakers highlighted such practical wisdom and science that infused much of what is called traditional technology, including *qanauts* and *khettaras* (the water-harvesting systems of Iran and Morocco, respectively), local pharmaceutical and pharmacological knowledge (in Asia and Africa),

and architectural and home-building techniques as represented by the Malay house in Malaysia.

In furthering the cause of the third mission, some of the proposed affirmation expressed at the conference could be of relevance to carving a new meaning in the forging of closer community–university engagement. This includes:

- the integration of local knowledge as practised by indigenous communities within the framework of academic knowledge taught in modern universities;
- the indigenization of the academic curriculum after having decided that it was no longer relevant to use knowledge created in other social and cultural contexts;
- the participation of university students within communities designated as knowledge sites as an integral complement of their academic work;
- the location of universities that have decided to place themselves within communities and orient their research and teaching programmes in the direction of communities and their needs.

The conference further affirmed that universities are an integral part of society and that it is incumbent upon them to become an effective instrument for achieving sustainable societies beyond the third mission. The latter challenge can only be achieved if universities commit themselves to a thorough reappraisal of the indigenous cultural inheritances of our societies and what they have to offer in terms of sustainable solutions as they engage the community in more equitable and substantial ways.

PREAMBLE TO OUR INTERNAL DIALOGUE

We address here what we consider to be central issues in fulfilling the third mission of universities, by examining prerequisites for developing a strategy and setting it opposite our current practice. This is a perspective that derives from our own special situation but, *mutatis mutandis,* may apply to others in similar situations as well.

We turn first to the identification of our reference community and the engagement processes and objectives. Next, we focus on our external environment, including the reference community, the array of stakeholders with their respective needs and requirements as well as their relative power over higher education institutions (HEIs), the organizational needs of HEIs, including organizational learning, and other matters. Models of organizational management are key to strategic planning and are discussed in the context of conflicting paradigms and trends in practice. The external environment can be seen as the global forces prevalent in our time that have left us with a deep crisis of human values, in a financial abyss with an exacerbation of differences among the haves and the have nots, with a natural environment that is under direct threat and with an uncertain future for all.

We then reflect on the learning issues and approaches, complex precisely because of constraints resulting from our institutional position of limited autonomy in pursuing our vision. If we are to live up to our role as both an international university and one with a strong sense of the space beyond the third mission, we are faced with a Herculean task.

OUR REFERENCE COMMUNITY

An important and specific challenge posed for our university, a truly international one since 80% of our students are not local, lies in defining our reference community. Is it limited to our immediate geographical environs or should it more appropriately refer to our 'catchment area', something that encompasses our students' (and employees') communities? We need even to change the prevalent terminology and not speak of 'foreign' students, as this already casts them outside 'our' community. Addressing the issue of our reference community takes us through expanding circles of engagement:

- the immediate one, our physical neighbourhood, within walking distance, meaningful because it is the space within which our students, and many of our staff, move and relate, frequenting shops, interacting with neighbours and performing their religious worship; it is also the focus of some of our community projects such as tuition for school children, the orphanage adjacent to our campus, support for the disabled, and so forth;
- the city/state where we are located and, *de facto*, the geographically proximal area where crucial projects are running (SLAs and microfinance);
- our host country, Malaysia, where we move and interact in various capacities (administrative, financial, educational and political);
- Southeast Asia/ASEAN, from which we draw large numbers of our students and with which we share much from the environmental, cultural and historical points of view;
- our students' places of origin (50 nations at present and many sub-national regions);
- the global locus of sustainability and action.

Obviously, our approach should be one whereby we start with the inner circle and expand outward as both staff and students develop their requisite abilities. This will also afford us the time and effort needed to plan for our geographically more distant engagement.

Now, if we are to change in substance and not merely in nomenclature, what ideological or organizational changes should we develop and implement? How do we tap into and integrate this tremendous wealth of perspectives, values and cognitive systems into our learning and teaching (and assessing and managing and planning and …)? What is the framework of pedagogic approaches within which we can achieve all this? In carrying on with prevalent imported educational practices while gazing at traditional sources of wisdom, do we risk retaining tools from the 'other' universe, the one we are trying to leave behind, while attempting to fulfil our lofty objectives?

GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

In reflecting upon the transitional university by using our own university as a case study, we are forced to consider the contradictory forces and tendencies, the dialectics of operating a vision within a real world, a world of constraints, external controls and powers, a world where we have to overcome contextual obstacles and where we need to project our vision and persuade decision-makers to adopt it. Our academic autonomy seems at best relative, indeed fragile, and at worst an illusion. Our instructional and other content is subject to strict administrative controls by the relevant ministry within its dominant perceptions of academia. It is also dependent, through our necessary operational finances, on external consent and is subject to continuous negotiation with the offices that control our *waqaf,* the charitable foundation behind our existence. The officers in charge are business people with perceptions and procedures that are not academic.

A vital part of our strategy is the development of the university itself as a learning organization, with learning approaches that encompass not only classroom pedagogy, or learning from practice while in the field, but, significantly, learning by the entire institution across all levels, tasks and functions – action research as well as action teaching and indeed action management. Engaged, indeed, the university must be, and if we are to embrace the community, the university community itself and the immediate stakeholders must be the first circle of engagement. Learning, then, starts 'backstage' in every organizational unit (Eikeland, 2012).

Within this context, what kinds of changes in internal organization can we envisage? Where do we start in identifying what is necessary and the process for attaining it? Universities, AIU included, are organizations, and general organizational management principles and findings ought to be considered in running it. To some of us, a process-relational rather than systems operational approach seems necessary (Watson, 2006).

Now, reflecting on this first circle of achieving empowerment and sustainable environmental and economic practice, where are we? We are still pondering our first steps towards sustainability within the process of also taking our first steps as a university. But these are essential steps to take before we go out to the 'community' lest we be perceived as hypocrites who preach and do not practise.

In their contribution to GUNi 4, Filho and Manolas (2012) surveyed a number of universities and the manner in which they were implementing sustainability programmes internally. Many alternative approaches are given as examples – University of British Columbia, for instance, has a 'Campus Sustainability Office'. So for us too, such options are on the table, but is it all a matter of creating yet another administrative unit or of deeper changes in mentality and 'action management'? How would such an effort be integrated and coordinated with the existing ones?

We are exploring pedagogical approaches and models of internal governance (as, at present, participation in governance on the part of either the students or the staff is mostly lacking), present patterns of decision-making and control, power and how to interface with various stakeholders in decision-making and finances.

ENGAGEMENT

We can now take stock of our trajectory and the distance remaining ahead. We have reached out to the nearby community with solid projects, but these are still *our* projects, conceived and initiated by us. However, we yearn for input, for a joint generation of knowledge, and not merely passive participation. Yes, we serve the community; yes, our students forge their academic and ideological arsenal out there – but is something still missing?

It should be mentioned at this point that another essential element of our institutional identity, and engagement, is student recruitment – one of the most important processes in defining our connection with the 'other' communities. Students' socioeconomic statuses, as well as their academic quality, are the key

selection criteria. Future engagement and employment or placement after graduation are also very important, otherwise we really may 'lose' students to the pull of market opportunities, or worse to unemployment. In any case, students' concern with 'jobs' or gainful employment when they graduate is something we have to support within our engagement strategy.

CURRICULA – 'FIRST MISSION' PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE

As we enter our third year of operation and see cohorts advance from language to foundation courses and the first subjects in a range of areas currently becoming available, matters of pedagogy come to the fore. Are we lugging with us, on our own and our learners' shoulders, vestiges of consumer industry trends in higher education, which many of us had hoped to jettison? How can we graduate students into this empowered space under the constraints of an industrial model of education, of the managerialist corporation where rules for behaviour reflect Taylorian assembly line practices and the knock-on constraints on thinking and relating? Are we trapped, some willingly, in the competing model of higher education that is emerging especially in North America, which is very much subject to the strict requirements of the industry, this in turn dictating the 'profile of the graduate' stripped of humanistic content, and with the power to enforce through reference to the 'job market' and other processes? Is questioning the dominance of this model to be interpreted as engaging in academic arrogance through knowledge? Or do we otherwise run the risk of replacing the tyranny of academic ivory towers with that of the Taylorian factory? Humanism and measurement – a cross-eyed vision?

The driving force for our students to learn, to be and to behave should be a passion for learning, being and doing good, not compulsion brought about by the obsessive measurement of every iota of their behavior, or by fear or even apprehension brought on by punishment. Pedagogy impacts on learners' values and skill sets. Is it, then, reasonable that we are at present being 'trained' how to teach by consultants who know demonstrably little about teaching? Does the much touted competency framework merely produce the illusion that something has been assessed?

Yet, we push forward with our development of approaches enhancing the reflective learning processes. Foundation subjects, ethics, current affairs, fieldwork on SLAs or projects on persons with disabilities have generated lively courses and are certainly preparing the soil for planting the seeds of thinking and feeling about sustainability and our interconnected humanity. Practice-based learning, which is what Eikeland is calling for, is eminently taking place.

LANGUAGES, COMMUNITY LANGUAGES, MEDIA OF INSTRUCTION AND WORKING LANGUAGES

English is presently AIU's 'medium of instruction', but Bahasa Melayu is used in the field through the intermediary of our local students and staff, and we will soon be introducing courses in it. Other languages are *de facto* part of our running projects, the outstanding example being Kensiu, an indigenous '*orang asli*' language. A draft of Kensiu–Malay–English has been compiled, and additional working material will be elaborated to ensure language sustainability as well.

And more languages, world languages as tools and community languages for sustainability, will slowly be added over the next trimesters and will be oriented to community use. There is naturally a certain contradiction in running community programmes with a colonial language as the main medium of programme management and communication, and we have been addressing this issue in our planning; however, we are far from reaching an acceptable solution. The complexity of our situation, as mentioned above, lies in the delimitation of our boundaries, the definition of our community of reference. Herein also lies the great challenge: developing a dedicated programme that will cover a rich array of very different languages from 50 nations and more regions, utilizing our students as primary resources.

FUNDING: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND POWER RELATIONS

As mentioned above, our situation is precisely such that we cannot ignore the decisive powers of both our benefactor foundation or the control mechanisms or the Ministry of Higher Education's Quality Assessment office through the control they exercise over our structure, our content and our pedagogic approaches. Our choices have to be approved and authorized by them. Moreover, our context, the surrounding community, has its own culture, its own practices and its own image of who we are and what we do. Religion forms a very important part of this culture, and it is therefore incumbent on us to negotiate our beliefs and identity. The political landscape and dynamics in Malaysia at

this point are in turmoil with imminent elections, and this too is defining the profile of our engagement.

CONCLUSION

Undertaking a journey beyond the third mission in a new, international university funded by philanthropy is like embarking on an Odyssey. Every day brings uncharted matters, challenging vistas. We have cleared some of the obstacles, we have learned much, yet much, most of it unknown, remains ahead. Part of the excitement! Part of the enchantment!

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