

## **Big Tent Communique VI**

### **Local Identities and Global Citizenship: Challenges for Universities**

#### **BRIEFING**

#### **Big Tent VI – where and why?**

The idea for our Big Tent theme this year<sup>1</sup> arose from thinking about the location in Sicily of the 7-9 October 2015 Pascal Annual Conference, 'on the frontier of fortress Europe'. Its theme is *how cities and their regions are connected to their universities at strategic frontiers*.

*We invite your ideas and contributions: Please share with your networks.*

Could all the networks involved in this work please post the initial information about Big Tent VI in their newsletters etc? We need discussion in our different networks with their different contexts and focuses of interest. Without that the communique will not be as comprehensive and fit for different purpose as it could be. The final text is meant to be the product of a deliberative process; and something that will help us all in separate future action as well as dialogue.

Please do this right away, as I am doing with the Pascal Website - and encourage consideration of it between now and the end of August at the latest. During that time you may wish to share ideas among those involved by writing to all seven members of the drafting committee<sup>2</sup>. That will allow us to sort out any significant differences so that we have a good text for those who are in Catania.

With its commitment to connecting Place, Social Capital and Lifelong Learning through university engagement with the broad policy community, Pascal has as a conference challenge question asking whether education and lifelong learning really are critical catalysts for sustainable regional regeneration. Maybe the broader Big Tent community-university engagement can help answer this.

#### **A Big Tent Challenge Question**

Words, ideas and control mostly flow from North to South. Refugees, like many other migrants, flow the other way. In the fortress North we see such population movements mostly through our own eyes and interests. Let me quote extracts from two recent notes of Big Tent colleagues. *Budd Hall tells us that the recent wave of tragic deaths on the Mediterranean underscores the depth of inequality, which persists, or even increases, in our troubled world. The fact that some of these people have been headed to Catania, where we are meeting means that we must no longer speak of higher education or of universities in technical, managerial or abstracted terms. The starting point for engagement must be a deeper way of listening to the concerns of ordinary citizens, including migrants, unemployed, homeless or otherwise excluded.*

Rajesh Tandon asks: *how can the possibility of global citizenship driven by the youth of today be embraced by communities in a sustainable manner?*

and points out that *nearly half the populations of Asian countries are young people below the age of 25; these billion plus youth have grown in the post Berlin wall era; they have been hearing globalisation since their childhood. They now have access to smart phones and internet which connects them globally with their peers in the cyber world. They now have begun to share global aspirations of One World. For them, movements from villages to small towns to mega cities of their*

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<sup>1</sup> Go to <http://www.unescochair-cbrsr.org> for the text of the five previous global communiques and look under Resources at the Big Tent Documents.

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*own country, and beyond its historical borders, is one seamless aspiration. This generation is beginning to experience global citizenship. yet, the 'host' communities in cities and beyond are resistant to this 'invasion' of youth; they are afraid to change, and they are uncertain about the future that comes in with these waves of youthful migrations.*

Can we 'become bifocal' in preparing Communique VI?

### **A Paradoxical Contradiction**

By chance our theme partly echoes that of the first Big Tent communique in 2010: ***Enhancing North-South Cooperation in Community-University Engagement***. What we see happening politically in southern Europe today, and in other North-South frontier situations globally, is the antithesis of North-South cooperation.

We adopt the theme *Local Identities and Global Citizenship: Challenges for Universities* because of a paradoxical tension and even contradiction. This is between local identity and place-based active citizenship, which we applaud, and the ethnocentric separatism of many of the political and popular responses to South>North migration, both legal and illicit.

The localisation of effective engagement, and of sustainability and many of the other large challenges for humanity, is a commonly accepted good, since it allows for adaptation of general (global) objectives to diverse, often unique, circumstances. Regional development, regeneration and university engagement have long been a policy priority of bodies like the EU and the OECD.

Identification with and pride in civil society participation - in a place, its history, culture and indigenous wisdom - are increasingly revalued. If a dark, inward-focused ethnocentric side of this creates North-South conflict, not cooperation, where do we stand over this and what do universities do?

### **A Big Tent VI Challenge for Universities**

How should universities engage, in these vital and conflictual circumstances?

How are they responding at present in different places:

in Catania and elsewhere in Italy?

in southern and other parts of Europe?

in North America and Australasia?

and between different part of the global South, which is itself greatly differentiated, from very wealthy to very poor? ?

What stops them from doing more and better?

What can be done about it?

### **Regions and Localities – what is 'good' and 'bad' where?**

Why and how do regional identity, pride and development become divisive and ethnocentric inward-looking nationalism at national and sub-national levels? How do we manage this through lifelong learning?

This is a major European challenge, not only a European one. The Northern League in Italy is one manifestation of internal division. Angela Merkel has to manage internal differences, not just between former East and West Germany. Recent Department election results in France were portrayed as a tripartite national politico-geographical division. Spain has long been struggling with separatism that remains critical with Catalonia. The (so-called) United Kingdom is flirting with a choice of seriously deep federalism and the 'loss' of Scotland after 300 years. On the edge of Europe, fear of separatism has barred effective decentralisation in Turkey; anarchic localism has followed political change in Iraq and Libya. Political crises in Thailand threaten not just a rural-metro Red-shirt-Yellow-shirt split but also separatism of the North and the far South. Others can tell their own tales of parochialism and separatism.

### **The Catania Conference challenge question**

Is 'sustainable regional regeneration' just another way of saying 'competitive regions'? If so, does the discourse of mainstream economics dissolve the problem? - surely not. That problem is about the whole spectrum of community and social life and its governance, not just about sustainable economic *growth*. The rhetoric of international agencies and governments has also had us think otherwise. In global educational discourse we trace a modern wider vision back to at least the 1972 UNESCO Faure Report.

In today's world of accelerating, multifaceted and interwoven crisis, to ignore social and quality-of-life dimensions other than the economic is short-term and not sustainable. But if academics and other educationists use the language of lifelong learning and learning cities and hear no clear response #

from outside our own professional communities, how can we connect with the popular mass media and influence the mainstream political processes? Are we able even to use the social media effectively? Do some even prefer not to?

The Sixth Big Tent Communique, to be issued in October 2015, will explore the tension between local identity and global cooperation; and it will seek to chart a pathway towards better engagement through it. To do this means acknowledging the constraints on universities; and being open about their diversity of circumstance, mission and maybe destiny in an increasingly globalised environment and in hugely different local circumstances. World-ranking university 'beauty contests' privilege just a handful of the world's thousands of universities. What does Big Tent VI have to say about and to all of them and their governments?

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