HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION

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Sjur Bergan,
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A word from the editors

Sjur Bergan, Tony Gallagher and Ira Harkavy

One of the most important developments in Europe over the past generation is often summarised as "the fall of the (Berlin) Wall", which is shorthand for the fall of communist regimes in central and eastern Europe and a near-universal adherence to democracy. This development is also reflected in other parts of the world. In Latin America, the military dictatorships installed in the 1960s and 1970s largely fell in the course of the 1980s. More recently, democratic aspirations have inspired change in countries like South Africa and Myanmar as well as the Arab Spring (Danahar 2013).

Democracy is indeed increasingly the standard against which societies are measured, regardless of whether they are in Europe, North America or other parts of the world. This is not to say, however, that our societies are perfect democracies. In all countries, there are committed individuals aspiring to make their societies into better democracies. They often do so in the face of developments that challenge democracy.

Most countries have been hard hit by the economic crisis that originated with the sub-prime crisis in the United States. Unemployment has risen and public finances decreased in most European countries. Greece may be the most dramatic example but countries like Iceland and Latvia also went through very severe economic downturns. Economic crises raise important issues of societal priorities that can test the fabric of society as well as its commitment to democracy, human rights and intercultural dialogue.

Migrants fleeing political, economic and societal crises come to Europe across the Mediterranean as well as overland from the east. They come from conflict areas like Syria and Somalia, from countries saddled with repressive regimes that maintain firm internal control and from conditions of economic plight. Migrants come also to the United States both by ship and over land, in large part escaping poverty and violence, including gang warfare, in Central and South America as well as the Caribbean. Regardless of their origin and regardless of whether they arrive in countries that have been relatively accepting or relatively hostile to immigrants, the new migrants are testing how democratic societies view themselves as well as their attitudes towards others.

One group of migrants – Muslims – is particularly exposed, to the point where many seem to forget that some European countries are historically Muslim majority and others have Muslim minorities with a history of generations. This sharpening of attitudes has at least in part been brought about by terrorism claiming to be of Muslim inspiration, perhaps starting with the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States and brought to Europe by attacks in Madrid, London, Brussels, Paris and Copenhagen, the latter as recently as early 2015. In all cases, the perpetrators claimed to act in the name of Islam but their views are far from anything that could be considered mainstream Islam. It should be also kept in mind that other terrorist attacks were not carried out by people claiming to be Muslims, such as the attacks in Oslo and at Utøya in July 2011 and a series of attacks on asylum seekers in Germany.

Nevertheless, these terrorist attacks do raise serious issues. The leaders of the Muslim community, as well as the community in general, need to look at what role they can play in preventing terrorism committed by people whose roots lie in this community, while broader society must resist a double temptation: to believe that terrorism can be met by tougher security measures alone and to develop stereotypes of Muslims.

Terrorism is a serious challenge, and many countries and international organisations – including the Council of Europe – have developed action plans to meet the danger. Significantly, education is an important part of the Action Plan that the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted on 19 May 2015 (Council of Europe 2015). In particular, the plan includes a project to develop and describe competences for democratic culture.

The term "democratic culture", which to our knowledge was first used at the Council of Europe's 2005 Summit of Heads of State and Government (Council of Europe 2005), designates the set of attitudes and behaviour that citizens need to have for democratic institutions and laws to function in practice. This is an important development from older perceptions of democracy, which focus on institutions, laws and procedures. It is a recognition that democracy will not function unless citizens want it to function and unless they believe it will provide them with fair possibilities to influence society and lead their own lives. Elections, city councils, parliaments and due legal procedures are crucial but democracy also requires commitment and participation by citizens, who must be able and willing to see beyond their own personal interest to consider the common good.

Electoral participation generally remains higher in Europe than in the United States but there is incontestably a sense of exasperation with the political alternatives on offer. In Europe, this was particularly evident in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament,[1] which combined a high abstention rate with an unusually high proportion of votes for populist parties. Most of these were votes for right-wing parties but in some countries left-wing populism has also been strengthened. In other words, the European Parliament elections provided the unlikely combination of disengagement and protest.

The hardening of political differences seen in the European Parliament elections is seen also in national politics, and it translates into a diminishing will and ability to

1. www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html, accessed on 12 May 2015.

seek co-operation and compromise across party lines in many countries. In the United States, this is seen in the surge of the Tea Party a few years ago, the related move to the right of the Republican Party and the continuing polarisation of Congress. In Europe, anti-system parties have gained in prominence in many countries, with the United Kingdom and Finland as two examples, whereas in France there is little dialogue and co-operation between the classic left and the classic right. As we write these lines, an armed attack in Kumanovo gives rise to concern that the peaceful co-existence of majority and minority groups, as well as the civic dialogue between political opponents, in the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" could once more be put at risk.

While there are strong reasons for concern at developments in both the United States and Europe, there is also reason for hope. The deep divide between parties in some countries contrasts with coalition governments in other countries; in Germany the current government is even a "grand coalition" of conservatives and social democrats who have traditionally been the main adversaries in German politics. The 2014 referendum on Scottish independence was an example of a highly charged and hotly contested issue that was settled through a campaign that was for the most part orderly and where the referendum result was accepted by all parties even if the vote was relatively close.

Not least, Northern Ireland provides hope. The situation is still tense at times and societal divisions remain, but parties that were in armed conflict for years have demonstrated a remarkable will and ability to find solutions through negotiations and electoral politics. At the same time, local and grassroots initiatives help build bridges between communities and groups.

As the example of Northern Ireland shows, democratic culture must be developed and nurtured. Education plays a key role, and the book you are about to read explores the role of higher education in this respect. As the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, has said on several occasions, our societies seek to address 21st-century issues through 19th-century institutions. The term "democratic innovation" emphasises that we need to explore new ways to develop a commitment to public space and societal engagement among young people and higher education institutions. In the first part of the book, authors from the United States, Europe and South Africa outline some of the challenges we face and also point to opportunities for action. Nancy Cantor and Peter Englot write from the perspective of higher education leaders in a US city marked by social and economic problems. They underline the importance of doing what higher education has not always been good at doing: talking to strangers, "imagining our place as institutional citizens" and building trust within local communities as well as in public authorities. As Cantor and Englot stress, higher education institutions are among those that need to "tend to democracy".

Writing from a European perspective, Snežana Samardžić-Marković, the Council of Europe's Director General for Democracy, emphasises that democratic institutions are insufficiently responsive to the concerns of many voters. At the same time, she states clearly that the task of political leaders is not merely to follow – political leaders should do what their job title implies: they should lead. They need to make

decisions but also to create support for those decisions. They need to contribute to the development of democratic culture, and so does higher education. In this respect, the Anchor Institutions Task Force in the United States should inspire other parts of the world, not least Europe. Democracy requires competences, and the Council of Europe is currently running a project on developing and describing competences for democratic culture.

Ahmed Bawa asks whether it is possible for higher education to put social justice at the centre and explores the South African experience in search of an answer. The commitment to social justice was strong in at least part of the higher education community in the apartheid era but has been challenged since then by the perception that the struggle for democracy has now been won and there is no need for further action. The message has been reinforced by government action, including changes to funding policy. Ahmed Bawa maintains that "South Africa is an excellent example of a society that has an entrenched human rights culture but is far from being a socially just one". A new strategic plan at the Durban University of Technology – the 2-4-6 Plan, which the author analyses – seeks to rise to the challenge of furthering social justice through higher education in post-apartheid South Africa.

The second part of the book – the university and the city – examines the relationship between higher education institutions and their local communities. Tony Gallagher and Jennifer Harrison describe the role of Queen's University Belfast in bridging gaps between the two major communities in a deeply divided society: the Northern Ireland emerging from a generation of civic strife generally referred to as the Troubles. On the basis of their conviction that higher education institutions have a responsibility to engage with grand societal debates and seek to make a positive and progressive civic contribution, the authors show how Queen's has done so in a variety of ways: education, business connections, research engagement, student engagement and political engagement.

Civic engagement by Queen's is also the topic of chapter 5, in which Jackie McDonald, Nikki Johnston and Garnet "Buzz" Busby, with Tony Gallagher, describe the co-operation between the university and the Sandy Row Community Centre. Sandy Row is a working-class Protestant community within walking distance of Queen's, yet Queen's and Sandy Row rarely interacted until recently. Community leaders decided that the high education-dropout rates in the community must be turned around and its young people motivated to aim for higher education, and Queen's has taken up the challenge. The involvement of students from Queen's has been crucial because they provide role models for young people in the community.

In their case study of Widener University and its role in Chester, Pennsylvania, James T. Harris and Marcine Pickron-Davis describe how determined university leadership managed to turn an adversarial relationship with the local community into one of co-operation. Chester is a traditional industrial community which has suffered the full impact of deindustrialisation and its school district ranks among the very lowest in the State of Pennsylvania. The article describes the successful efforts by the current leadership of Widener to develop a role in the community, to the point where the university leadership has been able to play a role in mediating between community actors lacking trust in each other.

Using the criteria for democratic school–community–university partnerships developed by the Council of Europe (Hartley and Huddleston 2010), Claudia Lenz and Iryna Sabor describe a practical case of citizenship education and co-operation between a university and schools in the Russian Federation, on the back of a project run by the European Wergeland Centre. This is an important example because it shows how the relationship between participants from the university and from schools evolved in the course of the exercise. In spite of its focus on democratic participation, the project started out with participants in the traditional roles of the university representatives teaching and participants from schools as fairly passive learners. In the course of the project, however, the university representatives evolved to become facilitators rather than classroom teachers and participants from schools demonstrated greater confidence in the value of their own experience.

In the final chapter in this section, Richard Guarasci and David Maurrasse explore the experience of the Anchor Institutions Task Force in the United States. They define anchor institutions as "enduring organisations that remain in their geographic places and play an integral role in their local communities and economies" and they take their name from the fact that they are anchored in their communities. As Harris and Pickron-Davis describe in their contribution, the mere fact of location alone is not sufficient for higher education institutions to play an "anchor" role. They must co-operate with local stakeholders in a mutually beneficial democratic relationship designed to increase equity and social justice. The article describes the role of the Anchor Institutions Task Force and also provides specific examples of anchor institutions, including Wagner College on Staten Island, New York.

The third section of the book focuses on innovation and inclusion. Mildred García tells the story of how the institution she leads, California State Fullerton, became the leading institution in the United States in terms of enrolment by members of the Latino community. It also has more students from other minority groups than these groups' share of the overall population of California. Many of the students are the first in their family to benefit from higher education, and the article describes outreach measures, such as ensuring information is available in Spanish for the benefit of parents whose command of English is insufficient. The author also points to the importance of legislation and action by public authorities to support the inclusion efforts by institutions.

Viola B. Georgi describes developments and challenges in Germany, where large-scale diversification of the student population is a relatively recent issue, paralleling but also lagging behind the increasing diversity of Germany itself. The author argues that the structure of the German education system, in which students are led into academic and non-academic tracks at a relatively early age, is in itself an obstacle to participation in higher education by students from disadvantaged groups, including groups with no family tradition of higher education, in a country with a lower share of university-level students than most other countries in Europe. Viola Georgi also explores possible measures that institutions can take to increase diversification and takes her own University of Hildesheim as a possible example with its diversity monitoring.

Renée White describes democratic practice in US higher education and emphasises that what she refers to as reframing post-secondary education will require higher

education leaders to reorganise internally, engage with their community and participate in public debates on education. She also underlines the importance of bringing institutional mission statements in line with these requirements. Universities will need to encourage transdisciplinary scholarship and problem-based learning. Renée White responds to the argument that the primary purpose of higher education is preparation for the labour market by emphasising that civic engagement also promotes a competitive and employable workforce.

Charlene Gray provides an overview of how European–North American co-operation on the democratic mission of higher education has developed since the late 1990s through the joint efforts of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy and the Council of Europe. Other institutions and organisations, in particular the European Wergeland Centre, have now joined the co-operation, which has been successful in overcoming differences of traditions and culture as well as of language – even when English is used as the *lingua franca*. Charlene Gray also explores the possible relevance of a collective impact approach to this co-operation.

Paul Manners describes ways in which funders in the United Kingdom have sought to incentivise greater social and public engagement with research. The author examines two parallel policy strands: one seeking to address the cultural factors that inhibit researchers' responsiveness to the wider social and ethical context for their work; the other attempting to enhance the relevance and accountability of the research undertaken in universities. He then focuses on the work of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), which co-ordinates public engagement activity in universities across the UK. The article takes stock of the progress achieved and identifies some of the key challenges that remain.

Drawing on his experience from both South Africa and the United Kingdom, Martin Hall explores innovation in the face of conflict with particular emphasis on the Connected Learning approach, which advocates a world where all learners have access to participatory, interest-driven learning that connects to educational, civic and career opportunities. Universities mostly deal with conflict on their campuses through the principles of academic freedom, responsible free speech and the promotion of reasoned, evidence-informed debate, but there are occasions when a preparedness to listen and consider the opinions of others is absent or the conflicts have become too severe for this to function. Martin Hall explores lessons to be learned from the ways in which institutions have dealt with particularly severe and ingrained conflicts, in particular in Northern Ireland and South Africa.

Aleksa Bjeliš describes another example of universities in situations of strong conflict in his chapter on the role of universities in "demanding times". With a focus on the countries of former Yugoslavia, he describes the role of universities in the face of political conflicts but also the challenges of globalisation and the demand for more immediate "value for money". Economic difficulties and the turn towards a neo-liberal market ideology have brought reduced commitment to public funding and increasing danger of corruption and short-term goals as institutions seek to survive in an environment where academic freedom and institutional autonomy may have increased but where these fundamental values are challenged by economic realities.

In the fourth section, on new technologies, Walid Moussa and Kamal Abouchedid describe the role of new technologies in furthering the democratic winds of change, often referred to as the Arab Spring, and in the development of higher education in the Arab region. On the basis of a study of eight institutions, the authors argue that higher education in the Arab region needs strong faculty and student engagement in research for knowledge production, and therefore content development disseminated through technology suits the needs of the region and meets the democratic aspirations and civic responsibility needs of young people. They also argue that the democratic mission of higher education is subverted by a business culture that is increasingly replacing a concept of citizenship that seeks to prepare students as active citizens equipped with democratic practices, behaviour and actions. They conclude their chapter by offering recommendations aiming to foster civic responsibility and democracy.

The impact of technology on higher education and on its democratic mission is also the topic of Philip G. Rogers' chapter. The classic image of the US campus is being replaced by a blend of face-to-face and online learning. Although higher education is in principle more accessible than ever before through a combination of more institutions, more places of study and more use of new technologies, costs – in particular tuition fees and student debt – combined with cuts in public finance threaten to reduce access for underprivileged groups. Higher education leaders need to consider how they can best respond strategically to the recent developments in digital technologies, their application to the university setting and what that means for the democratic mission of their institutions. Leaders need to find ways to leverage technological advances to integrate civic learning and democratic engagement into the learning process in a planned, expected and meaningful manner.

In the final section of the book, Matthew Hartley's chapter looks at possible ways forward on the basis of the conference held at Queen's University. He emphasises that institutions are best able to realise their democratic purposes through deep, sustained and reciprocal partnerships. We also need to make clear why the democratically engaged university is a better kind of university, which raises the question of how achievements are measured – and what kinds of result are worth measuring. Real democracy is impossible without inclusion, and that has clear implications for access to higher education. No education system can be of high quality unless it offers adequate opportunities for all learners (Council of Europe 2012).

Ligia Deca offers a view of the role of higher education for democratic innovation and citizen engagement in the light of generational differences. The dilemmas and challenges we face may ultimately be the same for all generations, but higher education needs to adapt to the different aspirations and learning patterns of people of different ages and backgrounds – in particular the Millennials, many of whom are now of typical student age or in the early part of their professional careers. Higher education needs to make full use of social media in ways to which Millennials and the "digital natives" (who will soon constitute the main student body) can relate.

Robert Hollister explores opportunities and strategies to advance university civic engagement and democratic innovation, drawing on his experience with the Talloires Network. Higher education needs to underline the importance of democratic values

and skills, and that includes the way learning outcomes are measured and assessed. Hollister underlines, among other factors, the need for institutions to invest in faculty development and the need to integrate civic engagement with teaching and research. He also offers seven opportunities for global action and suggests that the next stage of the global movement can be shaped by the efforts of individual institutions of higher education to expand their civic engagement programmes, but also increasingly by collective action through regional and global networks.

Ira Harkavy provides a historical overview of higher education–community engagement in the United States to help explain the growth of the movement to further the democratic mission of higher education. The author concludes that the crisis of the American city, external pressures and enlightened institutional self-interest significantly account for the increase in university engagement from the end of the Cold War to date. Building on the University of Pennsylvania's work with its local ecological community of West Philadelphia, a largely disadvantaged area of approximately 200 000 people, the author suggests a strategy for further developing mutually beneficial higher education–community partnerships. Specifically, Harkavy identifies working to help solve universal problems that are manifested in a higher education institution's local community (such as poverty, poor schooling and inadequate health care) as an effective approach to contributing to democratic innovation and to the development of fair, decent and just democratic societies.

In concluding the book, Sjur Bergan takes up the challenge raised at the Belfast conference and explores how European higher education institutions could play a role as "anchor institutions". He emphasises that European higher education differs from that in the United States, not least in the role played by public authorities. Bergan describes two dimensions which seem particularly important in this respect: funding arrangements and the role of public authorities at different levels (local, regional, national). Public policies – including funding policies – must take due account of all major purposes of higher education and not focus almost exclusively on preparing for the labour market. The author explores a number of challenges, ranging from employment and qualifications through education for Roma, teacher education and threats of extremism, as well as the situation of Muslim communities, to civic engagement. He concludes by suggesting elements that need to be included in institutional strategies for community engagement.

Higher education for democratic innovation requires democracy in teaching and learning, research and development, theoretical reflection and practical action, community partnerships and international co-operation. We hope that this book will provide insight and ideas that stimulate faculty and students, as well as leaders in communities and at higher education institutions, to reimagine and reinvent the ways higher education and communities can work together to develop and maintain the democratic culture essential for inclusive democratic societies.

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Part I

Challenges and opportunities for action

Chapter 1

Not taking democracy for granted: higher education, inclusion and community trust

Nancy Cantor and Peter Englot

It is useful, as we consider the role of higher education in democratic innovation, to begin with the apparently simple concept that democracy requires deliberate attention and that constructive action must be built on the recognition that innovation, inclusion and social responsibility go hand in hand. As John Dewey observed (1937): 473-474

> we have taken democracy for granted … it has to be enacted anew in every generation, in every year and day, in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions.

Navigating those "living relations of person to person" constitutes some of the toughest work that any of us do, and decades of work in social psychology documents the persistent tendency of all of us to succumb to the diffusion of responsibility (e.g. Darley and Latane 1968), leaving it to someone else to come to the rescue, and the more people there are, the less likely we are to step forth – but stepping forth is what a truly educated person must do, even if no obvious solutions are in sight.

Writer and essayist Wendell Berry (2012) has captured, poetically and poignantly, this active role and responsibility that we all share to use our freedom of inquiry, our creative minds, our education, in the service of an expansive understanding of what is possible in the places we inhabit in our world and in our democracy. He writes:

> I will say, from my own belief and experience, that imagination thrives on contact, on tangible connection. For humans to have a responsible relationship to the world, they must imagine their places in it. To have a place, to live and belong in a place, to live from a place without destroying it, we must imagine it. By imagination we see it illuminated by its own unique character and by our love for it. By imagination we recognize with sympathy the fellow members, human and nonhuman, with whom we share our place. By that local experience we see the need to grant a sort of preemptive sympathy to all the fellow members, the neighbors, with whom we share the world. As imagination enables sympathy, sympathy enables affection. And it is in affection that we find the possibility of a neighborly, kind, and conserving economy.

Of course, the same can be said of higher education institutions; we are what Alice Rivlin and Carol O'Cleireacain (2001) termed "anchor institutions" – place-based organisations that persist in communities over generations, focused on the public good. We are both in and of our communities, serving as social glue, economic engines, sources of imaginative public scholarship, and as cultivators of talent, of engaged citizens and professionals who will enact democracy going forward, day in and day out, as Dewey suggests. There is a role – indeed a profoundly important role – for higher education as what we might think of as an "imaginer of place" or, as the social legal theorist Susan Sturm (2006) would say, as an "institutional citizen" – with the social responsibilities (not just the institutional freedoms) that entails.

IMAGINING OUR PLACE: TALKING TO STRANGERS

There is a very important geography to the deliberate action of imagining our place as institutional citizens – how we belong in our place; what it means to be of the place – and it is defined (by contrast with the ivory tower metaphor) by its outward-looking, publicly engaged thrust. This geography requires a shift of orientation; a decentring away from the institution. It is easier to describe with individuals in mind than with institutions, as a move from independence to inter-dependence, from personal citizenship to community trust, as the distinguished political theorist Danielle Allen (2004) urges in her book *Talking to strangers: anxieties of citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*. Documenting the widely shared narrative of inter-racial, intergroup distrust accumulated in the United States before and since that landmark Supreme Court decision on school desegregation, she reminds us also of the countless daily personal sacrifices that ordinary citizens make to help others.[1] These small, daily actions that she describes as keeping democracy working are so powerful because they fly in the face of that wariness of strangers we teach to generations of children – after all, "don't talk to strangers" has to be one of the most well-worn admonitions. Surely, there is reason to be wary, but there is a power in overcoming it, at least in finding some contexts and some occasions when venturing out makes sense, especially because reaching out tends to bring reciprocation.

Unfortunately, this new outward-reaching, inclusive geography is not easily imagined, at least in the landscape within which higher education operates today in the United States. Instead, it is hard to imagine our place with anything other than a defensive, inward, narrowing posture, in the landscape of wariness, distrust, divisiveness, discord and competition that seems to permeate higher education as it relates to the public, not to mention our daily lives, our social media, our politics and our communities. What we need instead is what the agrarian communities that used to dot our national landscape, replaced now more and more by urban metropolitan

1. In the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the justices unanimously found that educational facilities segregated by race are "inherently unequal". The ruling remains a keystone of American jurisprudence with regard to efforts to assure equality of educational opportunity. A synopsis of the historical context of the case may be found at www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/get-involved/federal-court-activities/brown-board-education-re-enactment/history.aspx, accessed on 15 January 2015.

centres, would call a good old-fashion barn-raising – a commitment to collaboration, a change of mindset that eschews the competitive framing of zero-sum individual rights in favour of the alternative metaphor that "a rising tide lifts all boats" when we build an open, inclusive society.

We are not there or even close to there yet, so we have some hard work to do. In the United States today, 60 years after *Brown v. the Board of Education*, we have increasingly racially, economically and ethnically segregated neighbourhoods and schools, and we still debate fiercely over educational opportunity and the compelling interest of diversity in higher education; 50 years after President Lyndon Johnson declared the War on Poverty, we have staggering and growing inequality; 25 years after the invention of the worldwide web connected the world, we still engage in bitter territorial disputes that divide rather than unite; we now question how inclusive to make citizenship, flying in the face of the centuries during which the United States has welcomed immigrant families, even as we never earnestly took responsibility for what we did to those indigenous first citizens whose lands we pillaged in the course of settling here, nor to those we forcibly brought here as slaves.

In other words, we have a lot of daily sacrifices to embrace if we are going to build a new geography, an embedded and expansive sense of place, and reinforce the network of trust that is the very fabric upon which democracy rests. Yet, each of us can look at our institutions and communities as being on the road to that new social geography that will define the democratic innovations of which higher education can be a vibrant part.

We certainly see this in our institutional home, Rutgers University – Newark, a place where there is no predominant racial or ethnic group among a student body dominated by individuals who are the first generation in their families to enter higher education, a place where a faculty member in the humanities proudly tells us that in his class of 40 students there are 17 different heritage languages spoken, leading his colleagues to suggest that we need an interdisciplinary programme rooted in the intercultural translation of lives as embodied in communicating across languages. This is a place – as the title of one of the signature interdisciplinary centres, The Center for Migration and the Global City, suggests – at the intersection of the newest Americans and the history, resilience, sorrows and spirit of an iconic American city, which Newark, New Jersey, is by having been home for nearly 350 years to waves of different groups reaching for prosperity and to generations struggling for freedom and civil rights. Here we see vividly both the challenges and the possibilities inherent in the dynamics of movement, across geography, culture, disciplines, identities, generations and other familiar boundaries.

Ian Watson (2014), chair of our department of Arts, Culture, and Media – who is working with a wonderful Polish non-governmental organisation, the Borderland Foundation, to create an interdisciplinary exchange framed as The Urban Civic Initiative – reminds us all not to take for granted the civic life of our relentlessly urbanising world, but still to use the power of communication and boundary crossings to spur a new dedication to civility and creativity. He centres, not surprisingly, on the premise that art can generate social change, but we can extrapolate from that focus to consider all of the disciplines and languages and jargons that populate our institutions and that can form the basis for embracing a new, outward-looking geography in higher

education – one that practises building an affectionate community of trust, working with our neighbours as (co-equal) neighbours, not talking to them as strangers.

CONTRASTING GEOGRAPHIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Before we consider that new, progressive geography for higher education, it may be important to take a moment to focus on a snapshot of the sharply divided and divisive landscape in which higher education finds itself, at least in the United States. This is a landscape that increasingly pits the haves and the have nots, as students, as institutions and as communities. Practices and norms of higher education are intensifying these divides. Hyper-selectivity abounds in college admissions, with a focus on narrow input metrics rather than an emphasis on cultivating talent, exacerbating disparities in access.

At the institutional level, we would point, for example, to intense competition for resources and rankings, and the siloed nature of different types of institutions. Consequently, graduation success and pathways to leadership are more and more identified with an ever smaller set of institutions, and the divide between community colleges and four-year institutions is widening just when more seamless pathways need to be built. At the level of communities, our national landscape is riddled with metropolitan centres where economic, social and educational opportunity is elusive at best, as the opportunity index map of the Social Science Research Council shows.[2]

It is precisely in these challenged urban centres where more and more of the fastest growing groups in the US – first generation to college, students of diverse racial and ethnic heritages, low-income students at under-resourced schools – are being left off the map of educational opportunity. Access to higher education is more skewed than ever (Opportunity Index 2014). Income inequality is at an all-time high and trends indicate that this is likely to intensify because the gap between rich and poor in school performance is growing, while social mobility in the United States is near the bottom among nations belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2010) and the present generation is the first in US history to be less well-educated than the preceding one (Carnevale and Strohl 2013). And, conversely, as Sean Reardon (2013) argued powerfully in an opinion piece entitled "No rich child left behind", the wealthy are wasting no time in capitalising on their advantage, pouring resources into preparation for their children that boosts the chances of entering selective institutions. This erosion of social mobility through higher education occurs at precisely the moment when the individual and societal returns in a knowledge economy demand an educated populace and it will incur perilous costs if this diverse talent pool is left behind.

In contrast to this higher education geography – one that might well be described as exclusive and defensive – there is a growing counter-trend among institutions ready

2. The Social Science Research Council has partnered with the group Opportunity Nation to create a multi-dimensional index for mapping opportunity county by county across the United States, accounting for a range of economic, educational and community health indicators. For a complete description and interactive maps of the results of this work, see http://opportunityindex.org, accessed on 15 January 2015.