ITALIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION
Editor-in-Chief: Silvio Scanagatta | ISSN 2035-4983

A Socio-Historical Approach to Community Engagement: Beyond Managerial and Normative Analysis

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Article first published online
December 2024

HOW TO CITE

Flores M. (2024) "A Socio-Historical Approach to Community Engagement: Beyond Managerial and Normative Analysis" Italian Journal of Sociology of Education, 16(3), 1-23.
DOI: 10.14658/PUPJ-IJSE-2024-3-1

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A Socio-Historical Approach to Community Engagement: Beyond Managerial and Normative Analysis

Matias G. Flores

Abstract. In this article, the author offers a theoretical analysis of the social responsibility of higher education, particularly on the Community Engagement (CE) concept, which has gained traction in recent decades as one process through which higher universities interact with external actors, enhancing their societal impact. He argues that the mainstream CE concept reproduces universalistic visions of the university and overlooks the multiple power dynamics of those interactions. The mainstream CE concept is helpful for managerial and administrative goals, for university staff and leaders to delimitate this practice, and to position a normative standard or aim (e.g., public good and social justice). However, it struggles to account for the relationship between CE practices and other processes present in the global higher education system, such as the world class university project and academic capitalism. In this article, the author analyzes the limitations of the mainstream CE notions of community, university, and engagement and synthesize innovative CE studies and relevant antecedents in the fields of political economy and global history of science, sociology of higher education, and network theories, to propose a socio-historical approach to CE. In this socio-historical approach, "community" needs to be understood as a complex group of interests in dispute, embedded in different power dynamics, complicities, and co-dependences with academy, science, and scholars. "University" should be defined as a social institution, an open-ended organization grounded in the conflicts of the "community," a socialization space for students and scholars, and a disputed workplace. Therefore, they are not a priori oriented towards the public good. "Engagement" means emergent and co-constituted networks, whether fragile or consolidated, not reduced to one-way or two-way relations. Later, I apply the socio-historical approach to describe CE in the Chilean higher education system, emphasizing how it allows us to understand the uneven position of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries (i.e., the Global South). Lastly, in the conclusion, I delineate how this approach could be used in future research.

Keywords: community engagement, social responsibility, Latin American universities, sociology of higher education, New Public Management

1. Introduction

> *"Any conceptual analysis of research engagement must engage with its continuously evolving sites of production. Policy processes such as those surrounding Brexit and recent discourses around, for example, 'post-truth politics' will have a significant influence on how the relationship between knowledge and practice is understood and negotiated in the UK context."*
>
> *(Fransman, 2018, p. 209)*

> *"While the changed dynamics of higher education engagement in the Trump era are still unfolding, including a resurgence of student activism and political engagement unrelated to top-down promotion by national-level organizations, Trump's election has created new opportunities for national-scale foundations and associations to draw attention to the value of higher education engagement initiatives in repairing democratic deficits."*
>
> *(Lee, 2020, p. 1584)*

The conversation on the role of universities in society has been gaining strength in the last decades, hand in hand with changes in higher education systems globally. One branch of academic debate, analysis, and policy focuses on the creation of programs connecting scholars and social issues, namely, engaged scholarship, community engagement, public engagement, third mission, and university social responsibility. This branch has emerged as a supplement or response to processes of marketization and commercialization of higher education. In this article, I offer a theoretical analysis of the social responsibility of higher education, focusing on different approaches to understand the practice of Community Engagement (CE), which has been positioned as an umbrella term for the processes through which universities interact with external actors, enhancing their societal impact (Farnell, 2020).

CE is a relatively recent English term that represents an area of work of universities and scholars that is traditionally hard to define. CE's academic work includes an ample range of activities, such as community-based learning, community-based research, citizen science, consultancies, capacity-building, expert contribution, student organizations and activism, the university opening the facilities to the community, and open access (Farnell, 2020). Due to this diverse scenario, CE definitions have been avoided, and the field has been labeled as polysemic or anarchical (multiple interpretations of terms and the abundance of equivalent concepts).

A *mainstream CE concept* has been developed for managerial purposes, which reproduces universalistic visions of the university, making it unable

to account for diverse CE experiences and the multiple power dynamics involved in these interactions between the university and the community. The mainstream CE concept is helpful for managerial and administrative goals, for university staff and leaders to delimitate this practice, and to position a normative standard or aim (e.g., public good and social justice). However, it simplifies and obscures the complexities and contradictions of the interactions and hinders a deeper understanding of the social value of higher education today.

The predominance of managerial and normative approaches generates a paradox in which in a field that deals with the connection between universities and their context, it cannot address the most challenging problems of their communities. For instance, Fransman's and Lee's reflections on the impact on CE of their immediate sociopolitical context (Brexit, post-trust politics, and the Trump era) are rare and uncommon in this academic field.[1] However, Fransman's and Lee's quotes signal a need and a theoretical challenge to create new frameworks that connect the sociopolitical processes with CE. It is an invitation to create new approaches and research that locates those contexts as the starting point, not just on the margins or scenarios where the academic action unfolds.

In this article, I will explore the possibilities of a socio-historical approach to CE. This approach will have two main contributions. On the one hand, it will help to understand the similarities and connections with the trajectories of CE in the Global South. In a field where most of the academic production is in English and referring to Global North experiences, CE in the Global South has been overlooked. The Global South has been developing CE since early stages as part of broader sociopolitical processes. For instance, in Latin America, the debate on the role of universities in society started with the Independence Wars in the XIX Century, when universities were shaped as developmental universities, connected with the mission of building new countries and consolidating new nations (Arocena, Göransson & Sutz, 2018; Gómez de Mantilla & Figueroa Chaves, 2011; McCowan, 2019). These traditions, under the Spanish terms *Extensión Universitaria, Proyección Social, Acción Social,* or *Vinculación* were later reframed in 1918 as part of university reform movements, institutionalized in 1949 as a third mission of universities, and continue to shape a Latin American *ethos* on CE (Cano, 2017; Flores, Colacci & Cano, 2023); Tünnermann Bernheim, 1978).

On the other hand, a new approach will allow the connection of the practice of CE with the academic debate on *academic capitalism* and the *world class university* project, two main global trends and forces shaping higher

[1] In fact, the "significant influence" or the "new opportunities" the contingency creates are not the main topic of their work; these comments appear at the end of their studies or in footnotes.

education. According to the theory of academic capitalism, universities are shifting from a public good oriented regime towards a new "academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime" that forces universities towards market and market-like behaviors (Brunner et al., 2022; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The world class university project appeared alongside the irruption of global rankings of universities in the 2000s. They have consolidated a standardized vision of universities based on the US research model, privileging research and publications over teaching as indicators of a good quality institution, where rankings have become a "governance force" that orients higher education policies and fosters an uneven global competition (Benner, 2020; Rider et al., 2020).

In the next section, I analyze the limitations of the mainstream CE concept, focusing on community, university, and engagement interpretations. Later, I synthesize relevant antecedents in the fields of political economy and global history of science, sociology of higher education, and network theories to create a socio-historical approach to CE. Finally, I apply the socio-historical approach to describe CE in the Chilean higher education system and identify research areas and questions beyond managerial and normative approaches.

2. The mainstream community engagement concept

In short, a mainstream definition of CE could be summarized as: the interactions (two-way relationships, mutually beneficial, or reciprocal) of universities (through diverse academic work of faculty, students, administrators) with the community (non-university actors, organizations, or residents) in response to societal needs (expectation of contribution to public good).[2] The definition is broad enough to include diverse practices and projects and is helpful for assessment purposes. Using this mainstream definition, one can prioritize stakeholders, institutionalize programs, offer training to scholars, assess how bidirectional or reciprocal a program is, or measure the impact on the community and expected replicability. It is useful for administrative goals, for university staff and leaders to delimitate this practice, that they probably want to promote, manage, and evaluate. It also offers a normative analysis, expecting to observe "good" and potentially "accreditable" performances.

Under this broad CE concept, associations are articulated, conferences organized, and studies conducted. Typically, they are all based on sharing "good practices," ranging from scholars that best represent two-way or re-

[2] The definition of the Carnegie Elective Classification may be one example (Carnegie Elective Classifications, s. f.), while Fitzgerald et al. exemplify a mainstream concept with a managerial perspective (Fitzgerald et al., 2012).

ciprocal practices to universities with more comprehensive institutionalization processes. Also typical are the accreditation organisms that asses how well scholars and campuses organize CE. Nevertheless, it oversimplifies the practices and obscures internal contradictions and assumptions.

"Community" usually refers to a variety of actors and interests located outside the university and it is represented as "stakeholders" who have or potentially have an interest or risk in the interaction (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008). They are presented as constituted and distinctive actors participating in an interaction, for instance, in the "triple helix" model, which represents the interactions of "university," "government," and the "industry" (Douglas, 2012). Although it could be presented in more complex versions, such as a "quadruple helix" or "networked governance," the basic idea is that "community" are actors clearly differentiated from university and between them (for instance, public, for-profit and non-for-profit actors, or local, regional, national, and global actors). This perspective offers an image of CE in a vacuum, in which all actors are similar, everywhere and anytime. There is no agency, conflicts, disputes, or culture between actors or within the university. The community is a static and decontextualized place where university actors intervene.

"University," also divided among scholars, students, and administrators, is understood as an actor in a continuous opening to the community, disrupting the "ivory tower" model, where the scholar can teach and do research isolated from the rest of the "community." Two assumptions are problematic with this idea. First, similar to the concept of community, it assumes a homogenous character within faculty, students, and administrators without internal conflicts. Second, it assumes that "university" is a fixated idea where teaching and research are disconnected from the community, without regard for different university formations, missions, and trajectories that might be embedded in the community, such as post-colonial universities in the Global South or historically black colleges and universities in the US.

"Engagement" assumes the pre-existence of these two separate organisms (community and university) that can create "one-way" or "two-way" (mutually beneficial or reciprocal) interactions. Although there is a heated debate about what bidirectionality means, ranging from consultive participation to co-construction of knowledge, there is consensus that engagement is an improvement from old conceptions such as "service," "outreach," or "extension" that -supposedly- are inherently "one-way" (Roper & Hirth, 2005). Based on the oversimplification of community and university, this perspective reduces the multiple dynamics of power relations of actors, assuming that social relations can be unidirectional or bidirectional. In addition, it entails the expectation of contribution to the public good (a two-way relation is normatively and morally better than a one-way relation). It is assumed that

CE was created to contribute to society's well-being or that CE might be the best institutional response to the challenges of the knowledge society and commercialization of higher education.

This mainstream CE concept is not a problem of one author but an issue of the field. It limits what kind of research questions can be asked, the presentation of data, and the uses of those results. The field tends toward an optimistic and, at some point, self-celebratory discourse. And it is understandable. CE, as a practice, is not the university's core function, even if it is part of the institutional missions. Besides, the field also struggles with part of the myths of the university as an apolitical space. This subaltern academic work must continuously validate itself within the institution by showing how it contributes to the institution and society. What are the incentives to show failed programs that reproduced inequalities or created harm in a community? To what extent would someone risk showing internal contradictions or failures if the institution or accreditation agencies expect "excellence"?

3. Drawing from innovative research and other fields of study to create a socio-historical approach

A socio-historical approach to community engagement is not better or worse than managerial or normative approaches. It offers a different angle and entry point, where the complexities and messiness of university and community relations can be the center of the analysis. In this section, I will draw from innovative research perspectives to study CE (cross-country analysis, CE history, political economy) and synthesize key conceptual developments from different fields that directly address knowledge production and universities embedded in social context: field of higher education, history and political economy of science, sociology of higher education, sociology of organizations, and networks.

3.1. A sense of place, time, and politics in CE

Research on community engagement is part of an emergent field (Beaulieu, Breton & Brousselle, 2018; Fransman, 2018; Weingart, Joubert & Connoway, 2021). I identify three perspectives that announce a space for a socio-historical approach: comparative studies, historical research, and political economy.

First, the last version of the cross-country quantitative study *Academic Profession in Knowledge Societies* (APIKS) included, for the first time, a section on *academics' societal engagement* (ASE) (Schneijderberg & Götze, 2021).[3] Their study compares different higher education systems, university

[3] ASE is a broad definition of CE that includes "economic" (such as technology transfer, patents, start-ups, and contracts) and "societal" (such as public lectures and speeches, and

organization types, resources, demographics, and personal characteristics of faculty members. Their work includes a multi-level (macro, meso, and micro) analysis and the need for a thick description (their epistemic cultures and research regimes) of the national science and higher education traditions. For instance, Guzmán et al. compared the number of ASE activities in Chile and Turkey, trying to identify the impact of private or public institutions (Guzmán et al., 2022). Although, in this case, they lacked a broader consideration of the CE Latin American history in their analysis, this comparative effort signals the relevance of place, culture, and higher education systems.

Second, the study of CE's history questions the assumed rupture with the "traditional one-way" past. For instance, empirical studies in the US try to recover democratic engagement traditions in agricultural extension and from early feminist scholars that went beyond "unidirectional" relations (Deegan, 2017; Peters, 2017). These studies reinforce the idea that the former CE practices cannot be reduced to simple one-way relations. Similarly, studies on the Latin American CE history show how universities and CE programs have always been mediated by social movements, political projects, and dialogic and democratic perspectives while in a precarious situation (Cano Menoni, 2019; Flores Gonzalez, 2023; Gómez de Mantilla & Figueroa Chaves, 2011). Following these insights, Tommasino and Cano signal that CE's polysemy results from a counter-hegemonic dispute of the university project (Tommasino & Cano, 2016). Then, these historical research projects show how relations change over time and cannot be reduced to one-way or two-way relations.

Third, some studies debate the relationship between neoliberalism and CE. For example, Philion (2017) argues CE is not a response or necessarily opposes neoliberalism. He claims it could be compatible insofar as neoliberal CE restricts the political and democratic goals of the interactions (Philion, 2017). In a similar line, Thorpe and Gregory analyzed the "close fit" between public engagement in the UK and the Post-Fordist economy and the Third Way political project (Thorpe & Gregory, 2010). They claim participation (the two-way interaction) is immaterial (and unpaid) labor that produces value (science outcomes) and produces publics (disciplining subjectivities, controlling and co-opting) and the emergence of an *engagement community* (professionals and networks of engagement that work as mediators) implies a disregard for social movements or collective action. Brackmann, focusing on the analysis of the US Land-Grant universities' mission, identifies "a fine line between reproducing the logics of competition and individualism and using logics of privatization and quasi-markets to produce public good" (Brackmann, 2015, p. 142). Cano Menoni states that neoliberalism and aca-

voluntary-based work/consultancy) activities (Schneijderberg & Götze, 2021).

demic capitalism have altered and subverted Latin American engagement traditions by introducing new concepts such as "university social responsibility" (Cano Menoni, 2021). He claims this concept is part of a depoliticized neoliberal CE project, questioning the traditional connection with marginalized people and social movements. Lastly, Lee claims neoliberalism, marketization, and financialization of higher education promote a new mission of universities called "democracy transparency," which is more concerned with promoting institutional and professional assessments, audits, benchmarking, and evaluation management than challenging crucial social and political crises (Lee, 2020). She argues that the impacts of combining the mandate of democratic interactions (bidirectionality) and the increasing tendency to assess CE results in an intensification of managerial labor in universities. At the same time, it opens new market niches in which corporations offer their CE data management software. In sum, this line of work contributes to a sense of politics and conflicts where CE cannot be reduced to a normative "public good."

These three lines of recent innovative approaches to studying CE have highlighted some assumptions and contradictions of the mainstream CE concept. In sum, instead of isolated "communities," each place has its own culture, which is crucial for cross-country analysis. Historical research rejects the idea of separating university from community and the idea of a total rupture with the "one-way" model from the past. The political economy perspectives reflect how CE cannot be just framed as a resistance to the commercialization of higher education, a response against neoliberalism, or expecting a contribution to the public good. Still, these are isolated examples. A socio-historical approach to community engagement should build on this trajectory but also dialogue with fields that directly address the connections between university and society.

3.2. History and political economy of knowledge production

From the field of science and technology studies, the global history of science and the political economy of research and innovation allow us to address the assumed disconnection between "community" and "university." Concepts such as *entanglement* and *co-production* are useful to understand that the relationship between universities and society goes beyond a binarism (unidirectionality to bidirectionality) or lineal history toward openness.

The *entanglement* perspective and the empirical research on the history of universities present different ways in which university and community are co-produced. While there is a conceptual debate on how science and capitalism are related to each other (i.e., science as the driver of capitalism and development or, in contrast, capitalism as the driver of science) Rieppel et al. (2018) argue both systems are theoretically *co-produced* or *entangled*

in "complicated circuits, unanticipated trajectories, and feedback loops" (Rieppel et al., 2018, p. 13). For them, the challenge of understanding their relationship is an empirical question without assuming the prevalence of science or capitalism.

Applied to the history of universities, the concept of entanglement helps describe the complexity of the relationship between universities, scholars, and society. When the analysis focuses on the institution in a particular time and space, the interconnections stand out, discarding any a priori definition of the relationship between the university and society. For instance, in the US Cold War military-industrial-academic *complex*, universities created *partnerships* and informal *couplings* of interests (e.g., for scholars, it was a way to fund their research, while for the US government, it was a matter of security and defense of the US imperial interest) (Leslie, 1993). Also in the US, are the *structural complicities*, *dependent relations*, *layered rationalities*, and *interest convergence* between slavery, land dispossession, and US military and imperial goals in the Cold War in the US higher education system (e.g., how the US Land-Grants universities worked as agents of colonialism, occupying indigenous peoples' land until today) (Stein, 2022). In Latin America, the concept of *State-building universities* reflects the role of post-colonial public universities in the last two centuries, *linked* with political, intellectual, and social movements promoting social change, national sovereignty and nationalistic myths and subjectivities (Ordorika Sacristán, 2013).

The political economy of research and innovation also represents a "co-productionist" perspective in which factual knowledge and material economy are "different and analytically distinguishable aspects of one and the same thing, namely, systems of power/knowledge-mediated relations" (Tyfield et al., 2017, p. 4). This perspective helps to frame the relationship between universities and society in the context of the *epistemic project* of neoliberalism, in which the market "knows" best, and the *knowledge economy credo*, in which knowledge is key for economic growth (Tyfield et al., 2017). They also call for an empirical research agenda that avoids generic references to "science" and "economy" and deep dives into analyzing global socio-technical systems, the political and economic aspects of research funding, the relation with regimes of capitalist accumulation, and the cultural and discursive dimensions (Tyfield et al., 2017).

Focusing on the political economy helps them "remap" science by decentering it from the main contributors of change in modernity and showing how academic research is just a part of the whole knowledge production (Edgerton, 2017). For instance, they question the "linear model of innovation" narrative, which assumes more agency on science and academic actors, while knowledge production also happens in other areas of society (Edgerton, 2017). Following this perspective to analyze global interactions

in knowledge production, Delvenne and Kreimer argue that increasing global participation in science does not imply democratization. Some countries participate but in a peripheral or semi-peripheral condition by assuming a second-tier kind of scientific work, reduced to data collection, data processing, and technical work, and unable to influence the global research agenda (Delvenne & Kreimer, 2017). Both examples reflect on topics pertinent to CE today: the assumptions of the centrality of the university (and its one-way or two-way relationships) and implications of global-level CE projects (e.g., engaged global learning, global service learning).

3.3. Sociology of higher education

Traditionally, sociology of higher education research has been concerned with "stakeholders"' influence in universities at least in three different ways: how they cooperated and competed (functionalist approaches), how these groups defended contested interests reproducing inequalities (conflict theory), or how the university governed the different interests (social policy) (Côté & Furlong, 2016; Côté & Pickard, 2022), and on the role of university in the socialization of students (including focus on inequality and access), the university as a workplace, and, in a lesser grade, its role in knowledge production (Gumport, 2007).

For a socio-historical approach to CE, the sociology of higher education is useful to understand how universities are embedded in social relations and the dynamics of the scholars within the institution. Meyer et al., for instance, stress the dependence of higher education on a broader context, claiming that universities have always been a central institution in modernity, reflecting collective and cultural processes while creating webs of relations with authorities and with various roles and activities (Meyer et al., 2007). Peterson (2007) highlights how the US legislation and the state sent signals to universities, which adjusted to the new conditions to compete and secure their existence.

An alternative approach can be drawn from the study of academic professions and careers. These approaches are more sensitive to the lack of legitimacy of specific actors or topics within an institution. Hermanowicks analyzes academic careers, their positions, tenure progression, and regulation by peers, and how scholars manage their motivations, commitments, satisfaction, and productivity (Hermanowicz, 2012). He mentions how the field has developed a line of research on women's participation in the academy, who are treated as "strangers of science," forced to create coping mechanisms or strategies to adapt or overcome institutional barriers (Hermanowicz, 2012). Rhoades focuses on the processes in which academics in the US have become "managed professionals," how universities have increased their nonfaculty "managerial professionals," and how the academic profession's

image has been built on the example of US research universities, which does not apply to most cases in that country (Rhoades, 2007). These reflections are important because CE is usually not institutionalized. Or, even if it is, it functions at the margins of the institutions. It is surviving and not necessarily part of the formal socialization of the academic profession or part world class university project and academic capitalism.

Drawing from neo-institutionalism, *fields* theories, and cultural and political sociology, Eaton and Stevens have developed a definition of universities as organizations that *overlap* and *commingle* among multiple institutional fields (Eaton & Stevens, 2020). For Eaton and Stevens, universities are organizations characterized by: 1) a positional centrality in society, functioning like "hubs" connecting interests or as a "hybrid organization: simultaneously public, private, philanthropic, and familial" (Eaton & Stevens, 2020, p. 4); 2) polysemy, i.e., able to hold contradictory meanings depending on the institutional interstices they are located, being at the same time agents of government, business, gifts, or extended families, and; 3) semi-sovereignty, which refer to the relative autonomy and authority they hold to determine the boundaries of the institutions through mission statements, plans, and protocols for the interaction with other institutions. Based on this revision of organizational approaches, they have proposed to observe university changes over time and context, focusing on state regulations, national historical legacies, and political cultures (Stevens & Shibanova, 2021).

In sum, the sociology of higher education offers important insights to demystify mainstream CE narratives that locate the university as an isolated place or ivory tower. The common challenge is how to describe university's openness. In this sub-discipline, teaching and research are also embedded in society and CE might be understood as one of many interactions between university and society. In addition, the university, as a social institution, reproduces social inequalities and is structured as a workplace.

3.4. Network theories

Network theories are useful to further develop an idea of how these entanglements, overlapping, or embeddedness of university and community emerge and unfold.

In dialogue with neo-institutionalism but drawing significantly from *fields* theory (particularly from Bourdieu), Powell and Oberg understand institutional forms as relational and networks as scaffolds for institutions (Powell & Oberg, 2017). For them, institutions such as universities "reflect long-standing conventions and widely understood sources of power and influence," (Powell & Oberg, 2017, p. 2) representing broader cultural understandings. Networks, instead, "reflect webs of affiliation," which are temporal, last "as long as a relationship endures," and require "much more active

forms of engagement" (Powell & Oberg, 2017, p. 2). Although differentiated, the authors argue there is a "co-constructive relation between networks and institutions" (Powell & Oberg, 2017, p. 3) mediated by the inter-subjective meaning construction of any social relationship. This co-constructed understanding allows them to study the foundation of new organizations in the boundaries of organizational fields (e.g., a new start-up in the intersection between university and market), the creation of new clusters based on the interaction of different types of organizational forms (e.g., hubs of universities and biotechnology industry), and the emergence of new organizational fields (e.g., issue-based collaborations such as "impact" NGO's) (Powell & Oberg, 2017). Methodologically, they use social network analyses, semantic networks, and multi-level networks, which reject flat representations of networks. This perspective allows them to focus on the evolution of networks over time and differentiate types of organizations. They recommend this approach for institutional analysis, particularly for the emergence of "proto-institutionalizations" that may emerge from new types of relations.

A different approach is the actor-network theory, which is a flexible framework to understand social relations emphasizing the co-dependence between actors and networks (Mol, 2010). This perspective focuses on fluid and dynamic assemblages and actors' effects, not pre-assuming motivations. This perspective questions direct causality, preferring coexistence and assemblage, which allows them to be sensitive to the unexpected. For instance, instead of social order, they observe ordering; more than the cooperation of two constituted and separated actors, they see associations, tinkering, or attuning (Mol, 2010). In sum, in this perspective, there is no need to identify closed institutions that interact with each other; their interactions are constitutive of their reality, which simultaneously depends on a diverse participation of actors in different networks and non-human actors. Methodologically, actor-network theory is more qualitative than quantitative. It follows the actor more than constructing models or predictions. Instead of a strict and delimited map, actor-network theory might represent networks as a cloud that is continuously moving, not fixated (Vicsek et al., 2016). Although they might have epistemic and ontological differences with simplistic social network analysis, Vicsek et al. envision possible convergences. (Vicsek et al., 2016).

Both streams of reflection bring to CE the temporality of interactions and the continuous co-constitutions of actors through the network existence. Interactions ("engagement") evolve in non-linear ways through time. They might start as something small, and then circumstances would make them grow stronger or disappear. Both perspectives account for this phenomenon in different ways. The neo-institutional presents this temporality of networks as an empirical question, trying to observe proto-institutionaliza-

tions that might signal the emergence of new organizational fields (Powell & Oberg, 2017). Instead, actor-network theory's epistemology and ontology assume the fragility of relations and would give equal importance to all actors (human and non-human) because there is no *a priori* contribution expected from them. There is no expectation that an institution such as the university might accomplish a particular role. They would focus on the effects of the interactions, to be observed by researchers (Mol, 2010). The co-constitutions of actor-networks or networks-institutions might illuminate the potential of CE practices.

The mainstream CE two-way mandate identifies the impact of the interactions on the university through changes in the curriculums (adapted to better represent societal needs) or research agenda (research priorities aligned with societal needs). However, the network theories show that universities, scholars, and students are risking their own existence and roles, opening chances for new institutions and actors to emerge.[4]

In sum, in a socio-historical approach that draws from innovative CE research and these sub disciplinary fields of study, "community" would to be understood as a complex group of interests in dispute, embedded in different power dynamics, complicities, and co-dependences with academy, science, and scholars. "University" would be defined as a social institution, an open-ended organization grounded in the conflicts of the "community," a socialization space for students and scholars, and a disputed workplace without an *a priori* orientation toward the public good. "Engagement" would mean the emergent and co-constituted networks, whether fragile or consolidated -not reduced to one-way or two-way relations- explaining the existence of institutions and actors.

4. Chilean community engagement under a socio-historical approach

Currently, Chile is experiencing its first national CE reform (Cano Menoni & Flores, 2023; Salazar Alvarado, 2022). By 2025, all higher education institutions will have to be accredited in their CE academic work by the National Accreditation Commission (CNA), which is an autonomous institution responsible for evaluating higher education institutions in various areas of their work, which enables them to access public funding (Ley 20.129 Establece un Sistema Nacional de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior, 2006; Ley 21.091 Sobre Educación Superior, 2018). CNA's definition of CE considers a bidirectional relationship of universities with their

[4] One recent effort to understand CE as networks is Duffy's dissertation, which based on social network analysis, proposes the concept of community-university engagement networks (CUEN) (Duffy, 2022).

significant context, organized by systematic policies and mechanisms and constantly evaluated in its external and internal impacts (CNA - Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, 2022; Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, n. d.). In this context, there has been an increased interest in CE, and a new series of studies on this topic has emerged. These studies range from a managerial and normative approach, which reproduces or critiques CNA's *mainstream CE concept,* to those interested in unveiling the tensions between the Latin American universities' ethos, its CE tradition, and the CNA (Flores, 2024; Muñoz Tobar & Herrera Ojeda, 2022).

From a socio-historical approach, one element would be acknowledging that this CE reform does not occur in a vacuum. Chile is a relevant case of marketization, privatization, commodification, commercialization, and financialization of higher education while promoting entrepreneurial and managerial organizational structures oriented toward academic capitalism, which started during Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990) (Brunner et al., 2020; Labraña & Brunner, 2021). As in other Latin American countries, Chilean universities have been shaped by the world class university project, changing their public-oriented and state-building tradition toward privatization, meritocratic discourse, and futile efforts to "catch up" the status of US research universities, while positioning in the peripheries of the global system of knowledge production (Labraña et al., 2019; Lloyd & Ordorika, 2021; Schulze-Cleven et al., 2017).

In this context, Chilean public universities were defunded, and regulations to create private universities were relaxed, increasing their participation in the system. In this way, Chile experienced a massification of higher education through marketization (Orellana Calderón, 2018). Today, the higher education system includes 56 universities and 1,211,501 students, while there are only 18 public universities where only 17% of the university students enroll (CNE, s.f.). This massification, while opening opportunities to new generations, reproduced segregation insofar as youth from the poorest families studied mostly at non-selective private universities and 2-years-degree institutions (Canales, 2022). Massified universities generate expectations in youth and their families, but also disenchantment and irritation once they recognize segregation and difficulties in finding a job, eventually leading to detachment between individuals and institutions, being a force of democratization and frustration (Araujo, 2019, 2021).

A second element in the socio-historical approach is the need to understand the complexities and conflicts within the community. In the Chilean case, the main recent conflict on higher education could be dated to 2011. That year, university students led a strike and demonstrations demanding to understand education as a social right, not as a market, free tuition, quality, defense of public education, and against for-profit institutions. Although

they mobilized transversal support in Chilean society, the governments did not satisfy their demands (Donoso, 2021; Somma & Donoso, 2021). During the next years, new movements against the privatization of pensions and movements of regionalists, environmentalists, and feminists arose. In October 2019, during Piñera's second term,[5] the increase in the value of subway tickets catalyzed a social uprising that lasted for three months and partially paralyzed the country. Out of this sociopolitical crisis initiated in 2019, Chile has started a process of changing the constitution to try to address the problems identified by the social movements that started in the higher education system (Heiss, 2021). In response to these events, corrections have been made to the extreme privatization. However, they have not solved the main issues, creating hybrid systems that combine market-oriented policies with Compensatory State, Evaluative State, and Provider State policies (Bellei & Munoz, 2023). At the university level, these corrections have not been able to overcome academic capitalism (Brunner et al., 2020).

A third element of the socio-historical approach is to connect this context and the practice of CE. Although CE has been part of this conversation since the students' movement in 2011, institutions are still limited mainly by the CNA's definition (Fleet et al., 2022). Similarly, the academic debate and the empirical research tend to orbit CNA's definition of community engagement, with a large part of the conversation oriented to how an institution could respond to the CNA's accreditation requirements. As part of an emergent critical perspective toward CNA's concept of CE, recent studies contribute toward a socio-historical analysis of Chilean CE. González López et al. (2017), based on an institutional analysis and interviews, identified three models of CE in Chile: conventional instrumental, hybrid reformism, and emergent participatory.[6] In a case study, Dougnac identified that CE in a public university is experienced as "counter-perspective to the dominant neoliberal model" (Dougnac Quintana, 2018, p. 254), and it seems to become a strategy to promote the public good in public universities. According to Salazar Alvarado, who studied the discourse of CE administrators, CE in Chile varies according to the type of institution and ideology, and there is

[5] Piñera's first term was 2010-2014. He became the first right-wing president after Pinochet's dictatorship. His re-election in 2018 was understood as a conservative response to the rising social movements.

[6] The first is a traditional extension, diffusionist, functional/operative, sporadic, and expressed in strategic planning. The second is presented as an academic experience, diffusionist and strategic alliances, facilitator, relations with the community, learning process, and academic practice, and expressed in incubators, strategic planning, and collaborative methodologies. The third is based on critical CE, *buen vivir* (from Quechua *Sumak kawsay* or "good living"), archeological, political, and articulator and transformative perspective, curricularization, university structure, permanent relation with the community, expressed as participatory action research and participation thresholds.

tension between Latin American ethos and the national accreditation system (Salazar Alvarado, 2022).

Still, more empirical research is needed to try to understand the meanings within the networks co-created in the Chilean CE. For instance, how is CE a response from scholars to the social malaise expressed in the detachment between institutions, elites, and citizens? A hypothesis would be that CE might be a response to the distrust between individuals who feel their life depends only on their actions and feel a staggering distance from social institutions. Another element to explore under a socio-historical perspective is the social value of CE when, in Chile, higher education is experienced both as a democratization mechanism and a source of frustration and malaise. As part of the cultural elite (Atria & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021), scholars may be contributing to democratization and, at the same time, the reproduction of technocratic knowledge, increasing the disconnection between politics and society.

In sum, a mainstream CE perspective, managerial and normative, would struggle to highlight these complex entanglements between the recent Chilean context and the CE practice. A sociohistorical perspective, in contrast, can highlight the diversity of projects within the Chilean CE, and its connections to the recent sociopolitical crisis and questioning of the Chilean higher education system.

5. Conclusions

Drawing from different fields and innovative CE research, I delineated the possibilities that a socio-historical approach could offer to the field. This approach could be used as a supplement to the managerial and normative debate, to create new research questions and bring the CE academic debate in connection with broader issues in higher education. A socio-historical approach is a way of putting fields and sub-disciplines into dialogue to foster more research on CE beyond the search for "good practices" or assessments. On the contrary, our lenses should be directed to "bad" practices or so-called failures.

In this socio-historical approach, "community" may be understood as a complex group of interests in dispute. The political economy and the global history of science show how, beyond the assumptions of isolation, universities are embedded in different complicities and co-dependences, decentering academy, science, and scholars. They also offer perspectives to understand the uneven position of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries and the transnational connections and obstructions that limit universities and scientific productions. "University" may be defined as a social institution, an open-ended organization embedded in the conflicts of the "community." It

is a space of socialization for students and scholars and a disputed workplace. Particularly, the sociology of higher education shows us that CE does not play the main role in universities' interactions with society. Instead, it illuminates how CE is still located at the margins of the institutions. Lastly, "engagement" refers to emergent and co-constituted networks, which could be fragile or consolidated or signal the emergence of new organizational fields. Therefore, they are not necessarily one-way or two-way relations or even have a direction at all.

The Chilean case allows us to observe the complexities of the value of the higher education system in the Global South and how social responsibility initiatives, labeled as CE, are entangled in broader sociopolitical processes. This analytical frame would allow us to develop more empirical research that centers context and its politics, such as Fransman's and Lee's comments on the Brexit and the Trump's effect on CE. It also would allow us to analyze how CE is affected by academic capitalism and world class university project and how CE interacts with those processes, changing them and bringing new insights into these critical discourses/policies/theories.

Out of this approach, I identify four lines of research to be developed in future projects. First, the politics of CE: How to understand the political projects in play in CE practices beyond a normative goal of the public good? How do political, social, and environmental crises foster or hinder CE? Why does only radical CE's practices are labeled as "politicized"? How does CE's conservative or far-right politics look like?

Second, CE and New Public Management: What is the social and political implications of CE accreditation systems? What are their institutional impacts, and how do they shape network-building processes? What are the assumptions and neocolonial implications of creating CE global rankings, exporting the US CE Carnegie Classification system to Southern countries (Johnson et al., 2020), and expanding the Land Grant mission to *World Grant* missions (Fitzgerald, Anna & Simon, 2012)?

Third, Comparative and transnational CE: What are the different genealogies of CE in the Global South? What were the main transnational convergences and divergences in the late Nineteenth century and early Twentieth century debate on "university extension"? What was the role of social movements (international workers' movement and international feminist networks) in fostering CE (Flores Gonzalez, 2023)? Why, in the 1990s, was CE rising in the US while Latin American CE was attacked and diminished? What "thick descriptions" (Schneijderberg & Götze, 2021) would be necessary to complement cross-country quantitative analysis?

Lastly, CE and reimagining higher education: What can we learn from CE to reinterpret the modern project of the university? How does CE expand the agency of scholars decolonizing universities (la paperson, 2017)? How

are CE projects connected with broader social reform and social transformation processes?

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