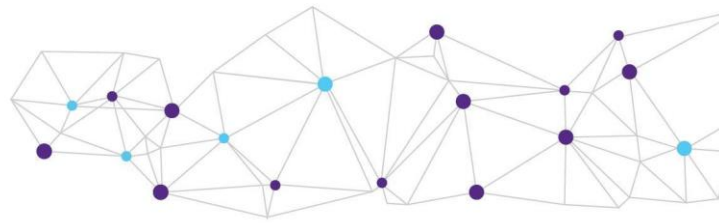


# Policy recommendations for the enhancement of community engagement in higher education:

national and system-level policy recommendations for Catalonia

**Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP)**

**ACUP** ASSOCIACIÓ CATALANA  
D'UNIVERSITATS PÚBLIQUES



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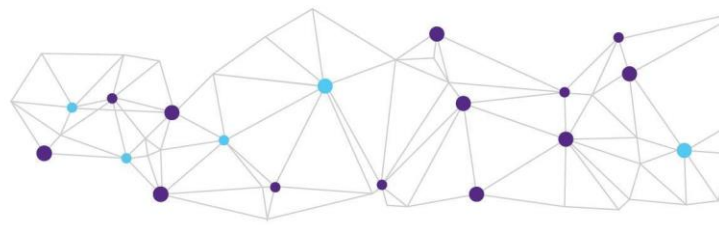
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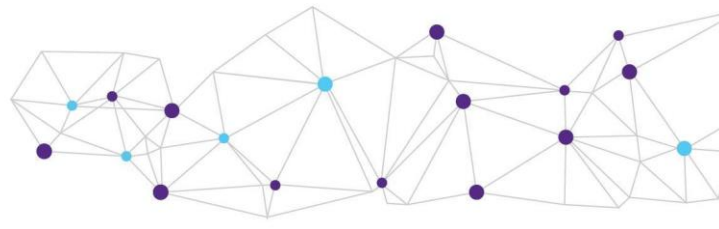
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# Policy recommendations for the enhancement of community engagement in higher education: national and system-level policy recommendations for Catalonia

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## Summary

There are increasing demands for universities to open up to society and demonstrate their societal impact. Community engagement is a key precondition for societal impact and refers to partnerships between universities and their external communities, encompassing the public, business and civil sectors, to address societal needs.

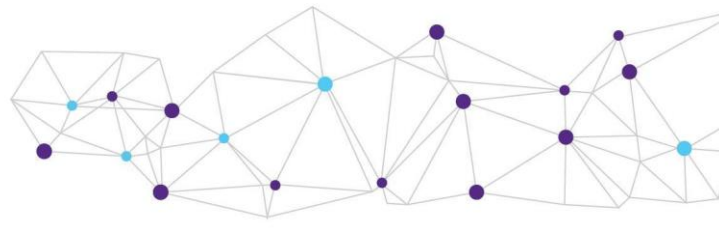
Thus, following on from the previous project titled TEFCE (Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in higher education), SHEFCE aims to help increase the community engagement of European universities by developing their capacities, and also those of policymakers and stakeholders, in order to mainstream community engagement in higher education.

The SHEFCE project methodology involves parallel actions on a local, national and European level. Four intellectual outputs are established: at the local level, processes have been implemented to develop quality action plans to improve community engagement at universities; at the national and system level, political recommendations have been drawn up to boost evidence-based community engagement addressed at those responsible for university policy; and at the European level, the project has produced an online platform as a valuable source of information and has piloted an innovative methodology and tools to measure community engagement.

The political recommendations have been drafted by the five countries and regions represented by the project partners: Austria, Flanders, Croatia, Ireland and Catalonia. The published reports are the result of in-depth reviews of the obstacles to community engagement in the higher education and research systems of each country or region, the draft of initial evidence-based recommendations and the enrichment of these through national consultations with ministries, university representatives and social agents.

The overview of community engagement policies in the Catalan higher education system suggests an ambivalent scenario. On the one hand, there have been identified a significant number of initiatives and programs deployed by the universities themselves. These may be highly specific and rather scattered, but do demonstrate a general concern and initial steps already taken. On the other hand, it is noticeable the lack of a policy for the system as a whole, meaning that the existing initiatives are not structured as part of a shared framework. Therefore, the diagnosis shows a bottom-up approach where further endeavour is required at the system-level to transfer the given importance to the Third Mission and community engagement into effective public policies that support it.

Thus, the policy recommendations here presented address this identified need by taking into account the challenges and opportunities of the specific context of the Catalan university system. Policy recommendations for Catalonia were conducted by the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), coordinated by Marina Sampayo Cortés (project officer at ACUP) and with the collaboration of Joaquim Brugué-Torruella (full professor of Political Science and Administration at the University of Girona).



## 1. Introduction: an approach to community engagement from the context of the Catalan higher education system

### The Higher Education context in Catalonia

Catalonia is a region with its own culture and language. The Catalan education system has shared competences with Spain in terms of education policy, which are linked to the regulation of and compliance with the right to an education.

Catalonia also has very rich pedagogical experience that places the education system at the cutting-edge of innovation, integration, inclusion and multiculturalism within the national education system.

Catalonia has an autonomous government within Spain and has authority over policies on universities, among other areas. Another fundamental element of the Catalan culture and identity is its language. Catalan is the country's official language, alongside Spanish, and it is the language of preference in the education system.

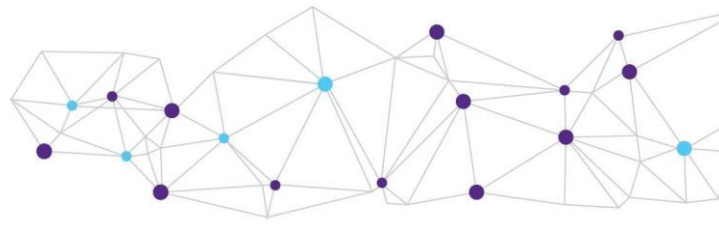
Catalonia offers university students a prestigious, quality higher education system, with over seven centuries of history and tradition. The system comprises twelve universities –seven public universities, one distance-learning university and four private universities— that serve almost 265,000 students and offer over 500 degree programs.

The current structure of university degree courses involves three cycles leading to the issue of official university bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees, as framed by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

In this context, the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (MECES by its initials in Spanish), designed to ensure the classification, comparability and transparency of qualifications, establishes different qualification levels depending on the certificate awarded at the end: bachelor's degree – level 2; university master's degree – level 3; and doctorate – level 4.

### The Catalan Association of Public Universities

The Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP) was created in 2002 at the initiative of the following universities: Universitat de Barcelona (UB), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), Universitat de Girona (UdG), Universitat de Lleida (UdL), Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV) and Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC). Its main objective is to be the essential voice of Catalan public universities and to combine efforts to promote initiatives, programmes and joint ventures to improve the university system and to make it a driving force for social, cultural and economic development. The association is a network of innovative universities that boost each other's synergies and work together in training, research and knowledge transfer. These eight public universities cover the entire Catalan territory.



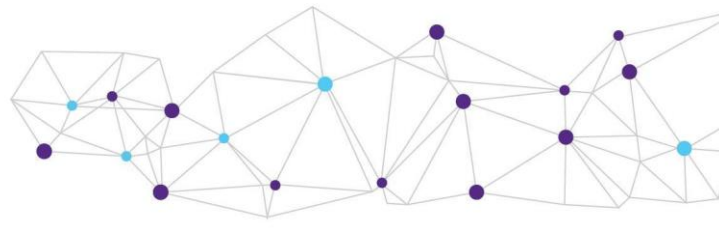
The ACUP works on numerous programmes and projects in five main policy areas.

- **Strategy and Institutional Relations**  
Analysis and design of policies for the Catalan public university system in collaboration with other institutions and organizations. The ACUP maintains institutional relations with university and research policy stakeholders in Catalonia and throughout Spain.
- **International Relations**  
Promotion of international relations with countries, regions, university systems and similar organizations around the world as well as fostering the international visibility of Catalan public universities. Another of the key strategies of ACUP's International Relations Plan is to strengthen its members' international presence in forums, fairs, international organizations and supranational institutions to promote new alliances and the Catalan public university system as a whole.
- **University Management**  
Spearheading initiatives and projects for the improvement and innovation of university management, both in the Catalan public university system as a whole and within each of the member universities.
- **Society-University Relations**  
Promotion of holistic programmes and projects to bring universities and society closer together in the interest of social, cultural, economic and technological progress.
- **Monitoring and Studies**  
Preparation and coordination of studies, reports and statistics on university matters in the main areas of activity of the member universities (training, research, knowledge transfer and university management), also in collaboration with other organizations and countries.

### **Position statement:**

The policy recommendations focus on a regional perspective with the aim of extending the scope of implementation to the national level in the future. The reasons to adopt a framework centred on the regions of Catalonia are the following:

1. Limitation of the desk research to a region where ACUP has the expertise and capacity for more in-depth analysis within the higher education ecosystem of Catalonia.
2. There is no national regulation on Community Engagement, so by focusing on Catalonia as a region we could eventually expand to the national level.
3. ACUP represents all of the Catalan public universities. It makes sense to narrow the impact of the recommendations to the region where these universities are located.
4. Since one of the SHEFCE partners is the Universitat de Girona (UdG), which contributes to the project on the Intellectual Output 1 (O1), it is arguable that all the desk research and policy recommendations concentrate on the regions of Catalonia, keeping with the rationale of the partner's contributions to Intellectual Output 1 (IO1) and Intellectual Output 2 (IO2).



5. Policy recommendations for Catalonia, which could be implemented by its universities, might generate greater impact than national level recommendations for Spain, given the plurality of the country with its 17 different autonomous communities.

We should note the difficulty that the translation and use of the concept of "community engagement" entails in our context. The European Union, through the Farnell report (2020), describes the concept as the need for universities to respond to the demands and needs of their contexts:

*"This report argues that universities play a crucial role in responding to **societal needs**, and can further enhance their societal impact at local, national and International levels through **community engagement**."*

And it defines the concept with the following terms:

*"**Engagement** refers to the range of ways in which university staff, students and management interact with external communities in mutually beneficial ways, either as part of teaching and research or as part of other projects and joint initiatives;*

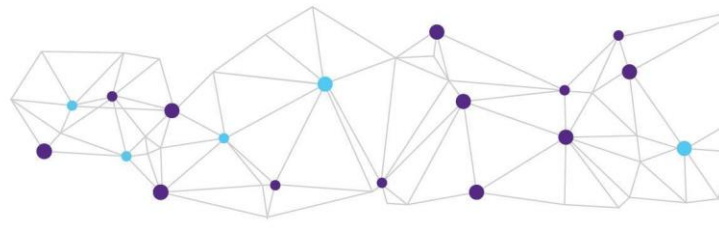
***Community** is defined as 'communities of place, identity or interest', and thus includes among others, public authorities, businesses, schools, civil society and citizens;*

***Societal needs** addressed through community engagement refer to all political, economic, cultural, social, technological and environmental factors that influence the quality of life within society."*

However, the translation and use of the concept of "community engagement" presents difficulties in the Catalan context due to the lack of a direct equivalent. Beyond these definitions, in terms of the university debate in Catalonia, we would have to refer both to the participation of Catalan society in the definition of university policy and the relationship between the university and its immediate territorial environment. In the former case we would refer to "community engagement" as *social participation*, while in the latter we would use expressions such as *social transfer*:

- When we speak of **social participation** in the Catalan university system and institutions we mean the public debate about what the objectives are and, therefore, also the activities that our public university would have to carry out. That is to say, public debate about aspects such as the type of training and research that we want to promote, the labour conditions of teaching staff, the fees that students have to pay, or the type of relationship that universities should establish with the social and economic agents of their immediate environment.

However, this debate has very rarely been addressed in Catalonia. And when it has -an example might be the Catalan Agreement on the Knowledge Society (Government of Catalonia, 2020)-, this has been restricted to the sphere of the academic community itself, with a heavy focus on economic development, and without any reference to the concept of community engagement.



Still from the perspective of social participation, the concept of "civic engagement" has been used to refer to a type of engagement characterised by a willingness to support the community; prioritising collective work over personal demands or opinions.

- Meanwhile, when we use the expression **social transfer**<sup>1</sup> we mainly mean knowledge transfer to the society around us, but also how this same environment helps us to define and deploy training activity and the research agenda. Hence, it is a bidirectional relationship between the university and its local setting that, beyond the general debate on the *why* and *how* of the university, focuses on the *what*. So, *what* we teach and *what* we research needs to be coherent and interrelated with the needs, concerns and expectations of the surrounding territories and communities.

This second aspect is currently the subject of considerable debate, as the dominant university model has tended to disregard the *social transfer of proximity* and to value *international academic input*. Without questioning the importance of academic contributions, the challenge of fostering and valuing knowledge transfer in the community - community engagement - has yet to be addressed. Indeed, participants in the national consultations described the unidirectional relationship between universities and their social environments in terms of the ivory tower model, scientific in the production of knowledge and transfer-oriented in teaching.

Finally, in the Catalan university debate, the use of other related concepts, such as **social responsibility**, **social engagement** and **social value**, should be highlighted. A recent publication on the social value of Catalan public universities stated that:

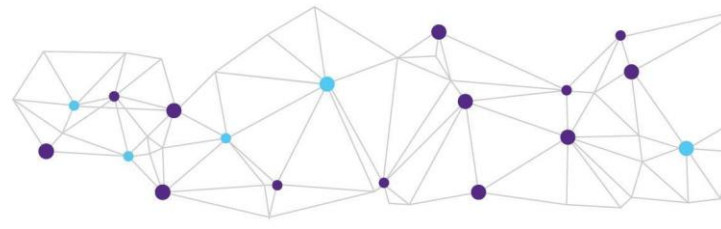
*"The ultimate purpose of the university is social progress. Its activities and infrastructures have a direct impact on the environment, both socially, economically and environmentally, while the environment also transforms it. (...) In this sense, Catalan public universities perceive the commitment to society and the environment as a value, a part of their DNA and a strong point that must be enhanced and made visible." (ACUP, 2020: 141)*

Catalan universities, therefore, recognize both the moment of major transformation that we are experiencing and the importance of getting involved and even playing a coordinating and leading role in this transition process. They are doing so by adopting the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda as a frame of reference. They are also joining university alliances on an international scale, participating in different working groups and commissions and, in short, adopting the community engagement approach in order to intensify collaboration and networking with their local environment.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "social transfer" is chosen as it is the most widely used. However, the suggestion is that this transfer is unidirectional, which does indeed still tend to be the case. Other terms such as "co-creation" or "social contract" express the willingness to work towards bidirectionality, a shared understanding and purpose that shapes the present and the future.





## 2. Overview of developments in Catalan higher education policies relevant to community engagement

As clearly identified in the European Union report (Farnell, 2020), community engagement (CE) is an imperative need of the new millennium. This need is related to the growing complexity and uncertainty that characterizes the social, economic, technological, political and environmental context in which universities operate. As a consequence, the community engagement debate has been placed on the agenda, often invoking the "third mission of higher education".

The pressing nature of the issue, however, has not always been transferred into specific public policies. As a result, at least in the case of Catalonia, there is a significant gap between rhetorical discourse and effective practice at the system level. In system level discourse, rhetorical commitment to CE is demonstrated by the frequent mention of the concept and perspective of the Third Mission and praise for the openness and commitment of Catalan universities to the territory and the community. However, the lack of effective practices at the system level is made evident by the non-existent references to community engagement in governmental guidance documents, such as the recently approved Catalan Agreement on the Knowledge Society (2020). Nor do we find any mention of community engagement in the reports of the Inter-University Council of Catalonia (2016-2020).

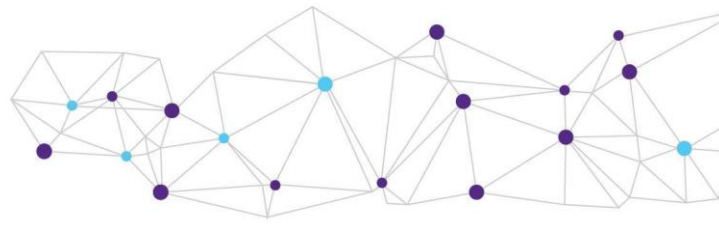
Diagnosis at the university level reveals a different scenario, and a greater abundance of effective practice. Catalan public universities have produced a rich set of initiatives, as well as governance models that take CE into account. However, challenges have been detected, such as the need for greater identification of initiatives as community engagement practices, greater dissemination of these and realisation of the potential of existing governance structures and models to endow each university's actions in this area with direction, unity and coherence.

The following points further develop this diagnosis at the system and university level. We have identified certain aspects that illustrate the progressive introduction of community engagement to our higher education model:

- In relation to the **university system as a whole**, the Catalan model is homologous with globally dominant trends. This means that in recent decades, competitiveness and measured university productivity have been prioritized according to the metrics of indexed journals, marginalizing knowledge transfer and community relations.

Even so, this very year of 2022 brought the creation, within the framework of the Inter-University Council of Catalonia (CIC), the Commission for Social and Community Commitment (REU/1259/2022). The purpose of this commission is to equip the Catalan university system with a specific organizational structure to address the challenges of community engagement. To quote the decree that created this commission, it aims to achieve *"a stable space for coordinating and fostering the social commitment of the universities, through all actions that strengthen engagement and relationships with the people, territory and society."*

We should note, however, that this objective is diluted into a long list of functions with no clear resources or operations. The decree that created the Commission contains references to



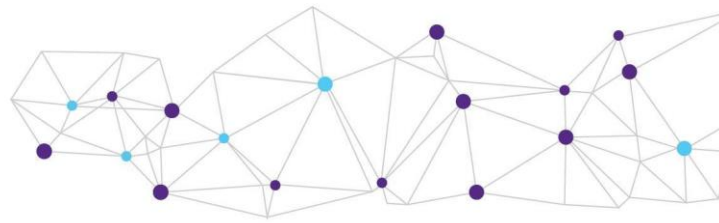
reinforcement of the concept of social commitment throughout the university system, to fostering projects that link university and the community, to the promotion of programs to encourage volunteering, to the promotion of non-formal lifelong learning, to proposals aimed at the inclusion of vulnerable people and groups, to the deployment of measures to guarantee the free expression of gender at universities, to recommendations to improve health and sustainability in university communities, to the promotion of the 2030 agenda, and to the study of proposals to develop social impact indicators in the field of research and universities. But this wide range of functions is formulated more as a declaration of intent than as a plan of action. We will need to give the commission time and observe how it evolves, although for the time being, the expectations are moderate.

- In relation to the **initiatives and activities developed by the universities themselves**, the panorama is richer. In fact, Catalan public universities have been incorporating the logic of community engagement into (1) their governance models, (2) their teaching and (3) their research activities, and also (4) specific actions in relation to their local communities. We describe them here in brief, although more information is available in the aforementioned ACUP document (2020), where specific cases of all Catalan public universities are listed.

- (1) **Governance models.** The concern for social impact and community engagement has been incorporated into governance structures; for example, through vice-rectorships dedicated to this area, the mention of community engagement or social responsibility in strategic and master plans, and programs aimed at coordinating the social responsibility of the institution or social councils that act precisely as a nexus for relationships with the territorial context and the community.

In relation to this issue, during the national consultations, specific mention was made of social councils and programme contracts. Social councils would be excellent platforms to coordinate and foster community engagement, but the participants in the debate considered that this potential has so far been little explored. On the other hand, programme contracts are a tool that could be used to reorient current incentive systems, a topic that arises prominently in the recommendations section. In any case, the experience accumulated so far did not seem to be moving in this direction either.

- (2) **Teaching activity.** Actions aimed at transforming teaching to respond to the needs of the community. At Catalan universities, there are different examples of cross-cutting subjects in the field of social commitment and responsibility, recognition of credits for carrying out activities of a social and charitable nature, and also the launch of new degrees that address the challenges of sustainable development.
- (3) **Research and knowledge transfer.** Specific research projects incorporating the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) approach are becoming more and more frequent. This approach is frequent in European projects, but is also increasingly present in agreements aimed at producing applied research. It should be noted, for example, that the Strategic Plan for Social Services approved in 2021 establishes research as one of the pillars for the construction of a cohesive community.



Catalan universities have also designed and implemented their own research policies aimed at intensifying their relationship with and impact on their communities of reference. We cannot go into detail here, but could highlight the CORE<sup>2</sup> (Community of Strategic Research) and CAMPUS<sup>3</sup> programs of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and the University of Girona (UdG), respectively.

- (4) **Actions related to the environment.** In this last section we can include the growing activity of Catalan universities in relation to such diverse aspects as social volunteering, mentoring, consultancy or advisory support, participation in different organizational structures of the institutions and/or communities of reference, presence in the media, vocational training, etc.

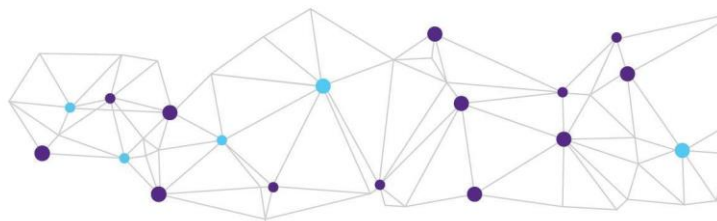
In short, this overview of community engagement policies at Catalan universities suggests an ambivalent scenario. On the one hand, we have identified a significant number of initiatives and programs deployed by the universities themselves. These may be highly specific and rather scattered, but do demonstrate that there is concern and that the first steps have been taken in this direction. On the other hand, we also note the lack of a policy for the system as a whole, meaning that the existing initiatives are not structured as part of a shared framework. The work has been initiated from a bottom-up approach, while top-down commitment and direction for the Catalan university system as a whole is still lacking.

Be that as it may, and despite all the work that remains to be done, the ultimate message is optimistic. As remarked in the national consultations, Catalan universities have accumulated experience and already have a significant number of staff engaged in the drive towards community engagement. We will need to improve the coverage, coordinate initiatives and scale up experiences, but the foundations are in place and we can at least say that we are on the right track.

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<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.uab.cat/web/research/itineraries/innovation-and-knowledge-transfer/cores-uab-1345841945987.html>

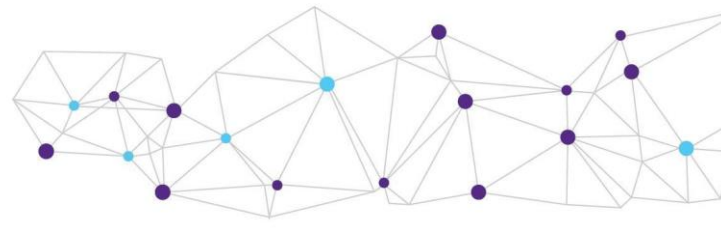
<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.udg.edu/es/campuscohesio/campus/que-es-un-campus-sectorial->



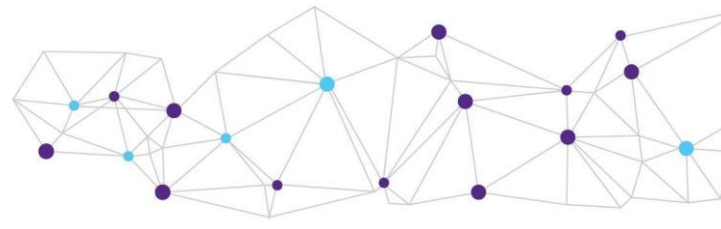
### 3. Assessment of the main challenges and opportunities for community engagement improvements in Catalonia

#### Challenges

<p><b>Depart from the dominant global competitive model of higher education</b></p>	<p>This competitive model encourages universities to prioritize activities that maximize their academic performance, measured in terms of resources achieved and the number of publications in indexed journals. In fact, Catalan universities have improved greatly in this type of performance and have demonstrated their ability to climb positions in international university rankings. Even so, this competitive capacity, which permeates the academic community, inhibits both transversal relations and relations with the context. The logic of community engagement, therefore, is perceived as an interesting endeavour, but one that weakens the ability to compete.</p> <p>Reversing this perception is one of the main challenges ahead. First, it should be borne in mind that the primacy of the more productivist and competitive model is being questioned at the international level, throughout the EU for example, and aspects such as CE are likely to be increasingly valued and appreciated on a global level. Second, competitiveness and community engagement do not have to be mutually exclusive. It is quite possible to foster CE and transfer the effort into valued, competitive results on an international level. Therefore, competitiveness and CE can be made compatible as long as quality is prioritized over quantity.</p>
<p><b>Overcome the difficulties of involving different academic and social agents in shared projects</b></p>	<p>Beyond the rhetoric regarding the importance of the relationship between universities and the various socioeconomic actors in their surrounding communities, the truth is that this relationship is fragile and costly. Each actor recognizes the need for the relationship, but encounters many difficulties in making it effective. The reasons are diverse, but we could highlight organizational inertia and the lack of a culture of collaboration. The challenge, in short, is to find ways to make it easier for academic and social agents to become more open to each other than they typically have been.</p> <p>In the case of Catalan universities, ACUP has promoted different meeting points between the academic world and the society around it. However, these are still not fluid enough and, as the Farnell (2020) report explains, relations have been biased towards the actors in the economic world. It is noted that universities do have collaborative relationships with their most immediate social and economic environments, but a more defined structure is required.</p>
<p><b>Overcome bureaucracy burdens and fragmentation within the university</b></p>	<p>Catalan universities are highly complex, bureaucratized and segmented organizations. It is difficult to view the university as a whole, since its parts have a great deal of autonomy and also very different organizational cultures and references. A university is like an archipelago of isolated, disconnected spaces, making it arduous to address joint challenges such as community engagement.</p>

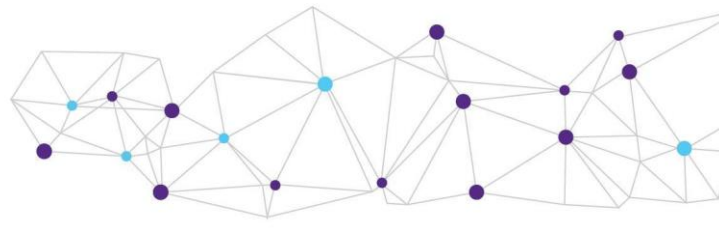


	<p>Moreover, work on and promotion of community engagement initiatives is very difficult in an environment where administrative procedures become real burdens, especially when trying to deal with certain operational routines. Bureaucracy is implicit in all public activity, at the university and governmental level, from access to funding to bridging departmentalized structures. It therefore hinders interdisciplinarity and reduces the availability of time, two essential elements for CE. To foster cross-sectorial projects, it is crucial to facilitate procedures and bureaucratic requirements.</p>
<p><b>Overcome difficulties -in terms of lack of resources and time- to work in partnership</b></p>	<p>Working as a network requires commitment and trust between different organizations (also between different parts of the same organization). This does not happen spontaneously, but requires time and resources. The community engagement approach therefore calls for dedication that goes beyond the day-to-day running of the different organizations. The challenge is to achieve this dedication which, today, is not part of the obligations of the different organizations.</p> <p>In the case of Catalan universities, there is a long history of such shortcomings, and they have been accentuated since the crisis of 2007-2008, which led to a very significant cut in the resources allocated to universities. After 15 years, this situation has still not been reversed, meaning that Catalan universities are suffering from an acute shortage of resources.</p>
<p><b>Overcome the limitations of a model where only what is quantitatively measurable counts</b></p>	<p>The community engagement approach clashes with both the difficulty of measuring its actions and performance and with a context where it would seem that only that which can be measured is valued. That is to say, there will be a need to address the challenge of knowing how to showcase the benefits of community engagement by methods other than classic quantitative indicators.</p> <p>Catalan universities are assessed by the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU by its initials in Catalan), which is doing important work to evaluate and accredit both the academics themselves and the different degrees offered. Even so, the AQU uses the aforesaid indicators that have been dominant in the model of global competitiveness, and has been finding it difficult to introduce indicators that can appraise aspects such as community management.</p>
<p><b>Depart from traditional models of teaching and research</b></p>	<p>Promotion and consolidation of the community engagement approach implies changing the way things are done in the two core areas of the academic world: teaching and research.</p> <p>From the teaching point of view, new relationships with students must be fostered, favouring not only inclusiveness but also learning based on experiences, values and challenges (service-learning, known as ApS in Catalonia). In terms of research, we must also change the way things are done, shifting from a highly academic tradition towards a firm commitment to open science and citizen science.</p>

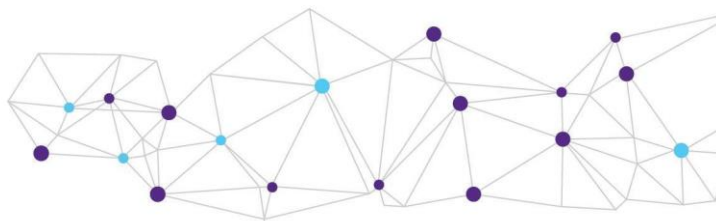


## Opportunities

<p><b>The pressure of reality</b></p>	<p>The first opportunity is found in the community itself, an environment where the different agents are overwhelmed by a reality that exceeds their capacities and knowledge, and which is pushing them to look to the university as an institution that might help them to find the answers. In short, it is reality itself that is urging us to make the community management approach effective.</p> <p>But the socio-economic scenario around Catalan universities might be particularly significant. Without going into too much detail, several studies have demonstrated the difficulties of translating the Catalan economic model into welfare for the community as a whole. More than 20% of the people in Catalonia are at risk of poverty, inequality has grown and there are serious problems with educational segregation, poverty in the workplace, and so on. The region is also especially sensitive to the effects of climate change and faces major challenges in terms of mobility and energy infrastructures, etc. All this leads to uncertainty about the best ways to address these collective challenges and hence a growing interest in the answers that universities might be able to provide. The evidence-based application of knowledge and research to social demands and policymaking will become essential for societal recovery.</p> <p>Finally, we must not forget that universities are also affected by these collective challenges. They are already in a tight financial situation and there is further complexity on the way due to the current economic situation. However, even in times of difficulty, universities have a proven capacity to respond. It should also be noted that Catalonia has a dense social fabric with the capacity not only to question universities, but also to work together with them.</p>
<p><b>The predisposition of the academic world</b></p>	<p>On the other hand, the academic community is receptive to the pressures of the circumstances described in the previous point. Despite the difficulties involved in departing from the dynamics and incentives that have shaped the model of global competitiveness in higher education, the vast majority of the human resources of Catalan universities are sensitive to the challenges around them and are willing to get more involved in resolving them. Self-criticism of the current model is frequent and it is in these attitudes that opportunities can be found to make advances towards the community engagement approach.</p>
<p><b>First steps already taken</b></p>	<p>Finally, it must be recognized that the first steps have been taken and there are already examples of community engagement at Catalan universities. These examples probably do not yet represent a shift in the entire Catalan university system, but they do present an opportunity to move in that direction. We mentioned these aspects in the previous point and full information can be found in the ACUP report (2020) on the social value of Catalan public universities.</p>



	<p>At the same time, we can also draw from SHEFCE's and TEFCE's experiences, generation of knowledge and guidelines. Both projects have initiated a process of evaluating existing CE efforts, increasing their visibility and fostering policies for their consolidation. As for Catalonia, the University of Girona (UdG), as a partner of both TEFCE and SHEFCE, has the experience of implementing the TEFCE Toolbox and creating an action plan, which must be underpinned as a key asset and opportunity. This valuable expertise should be shared through ACUP with other public universities, so that they can replicate it.</p>
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## 4. Policy recommendations for the enhancement of community engagement in the Catalan higher education system

In this section, there are presented the policy recommendations coming from the diagnosis, challenges and opportunities identified, to enhance community engagement in the Catalan higher education system. Moving from the promotion of specific actions by universities, these recommendations focus instead on proposals that affect the entire Catalan university system (system-level). They are differentiated according to the timeframe for implementation. Both conditions are difficult to achieve, but interesting to address:

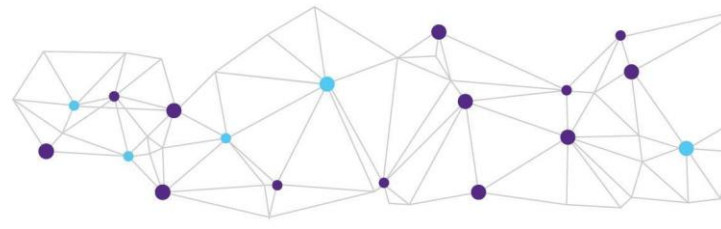
- On the one hand, at least at Catalan universities, community engagement experiences have mostly followed a bottom-up logic, where specific university initiatives have been the protagonists. Change in terms of the university system as a whole is very much a top-down process, but one for which we have few precedents.
- On the other hand, in system logic it is difficult to think of initiatives that are not long term, so some effort will be required when reflecting on actions that could also be deployed in the short term.

In order to incorporate this system logic, we will also need to think about the type of leadership required to guide Catalan universities towards the reinforcement of community engagement.

### a. Long - term (8 -10 years)

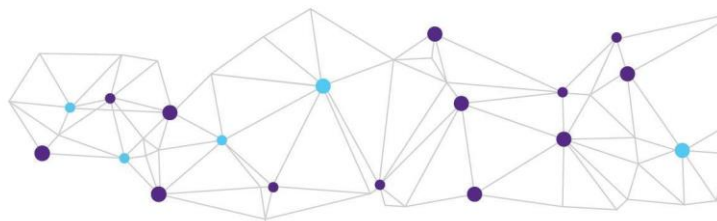
<b>Title a.1.</b>	<b>The social role at the centre of the university mission</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Depart from the model of global competitiveness.  Make the leap forward that will allow us to move from specific actions and projects to a coordinated, well-resourced public policy.
<b>Approach</b>	Leadership from the government with the involvement of universities. The objective is to get the issue on the public agenda (agenda setting).  Achieving this means taking into account the regulatory framework (Catalan science law) and the main institutional actors (regional ministry, AQU, ANECA, etc.).
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explicit positioning of the Catalan government on the university model.</li> <li>- Positioning of the Catalan public universities through the ACUP.</li> <li>- Action plan with concrete proposals to generate a shift towards a community engaged university system.</li> </ul>





<b>Risks management</b>	<p>The risk is that these are only declarations of intent that are not put into practice. It is necessary, therefore, to put the emphasis on the plan of action and not only on making declarations.</p> <p>In this first step, the capacity and commitment of leadership across the university system as a whole is critical.</p>
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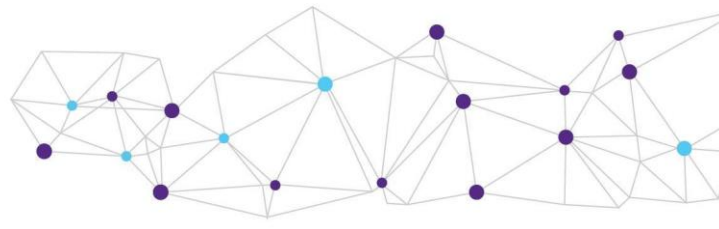
<b>Title a.2.</b>	<b>Strategic agreements with community engagement as a core priority</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Overcoming resistance when establishing relationships and working collaboratively with the actors in the local environment.
<b>Approach</b>	<p>University leadership, establishing relationships with all social, economic and institutional actors in the local area.</p> <p>Aim to build and consolidate a highly diverse network of actors.</p> <p>As underlined in the national consultations, a two-way perspective is essential in the relationship with external actors: it is not just about talking outside the university, but also about listening to the outside. To get out of the ivory tower and establish symmetrical relations with the wide range of local actors.</p>
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revise and update the Catalan Agreement on the Knowledge Society, clearly adding the community engagement approach.</li> <li>- Draft a communication plan aimed at building a shared approach and language among the various academic, social, economic and institutional actors.</li> <li>- Encourage the opening -there are already some precedents- of councils and/or university areas in Catalan municipalities. Also, intermediate level institutions such as county councils (<i>consells comarcals</i>) and regional councils (<i>diputacions</i>).</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	<p>The risk comes above all from the need for very strong, distributive leadership that goes beyond common understanding and guidelines to reach concreteness. That is, a leadership that has to enforce relationships that do not occur naturally but that, at the same time, has to let them work without imposing its hierarchy. A balance that is not always easy to achieve.</p> <p>As in the previous point, the capacity and commitment of the leadership of the university system as a whole is a fundamental aspect.</p>



<b>Title a.3.</b>	<b>Transform the organization and foster a culture of collaboration</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	<p>Overcome the fragmentation and isolation that hinder collaborative relationships within the university itself.</p> <p>In this regard, it is essential to create a regulatory "facilitating umbrella", the necessary administrative adjustments to streamline and facilitate the actions required for community engagement.</p>
<b>Approach</b>	<p>University leadership, now making a priority of the different departments, faculties and other units.</p> <p>Aim to transform the university institution's ways of working, favouring transversality and networking.</p> <p>Reduction of bureaucracy and streamlining of procedures.</p>
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote organizational transformations that favour the emergence of meeting spaces</li> <li>- Promoting projects -both in teaching and research- that involve several departments or research groups at the university. Also inter-university projects.</li> <li>- Regulatory changes leading to a reduction in administrative burdens.</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	<p>The risk lies in the resistance of an academic culture impregnated with individualism and competitiveness, especially in the field of research, as well as very rigid and bureaucratized structures. A dangerous combination.</p> <p>It will be necessary, therefore, to look for incentives and very actively promote the construction of a new culture of collaboration.</p>

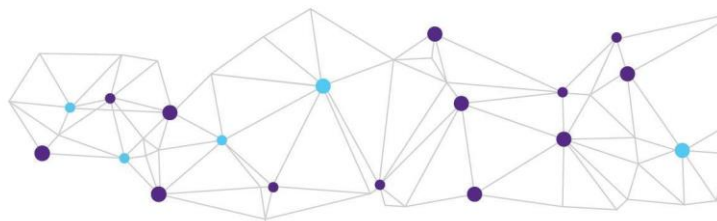
### b. Medium - term (4 -7 years)

<b>Title b.1.</b>	<b>Training and selection of academic profiles oriented towards community engagement</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Depart from the dominant global competitive model of higher education and traditional models of teaching and research.
<b>Approach</b>	<p>Leadership has to be shared between the government and the universities themselves, but it will be necessary to count explicitly on the academic community as a whole as well as other related organizations.</p> <p>Aim to promote new profiles and new behaviours among the human resources of universities.</p>



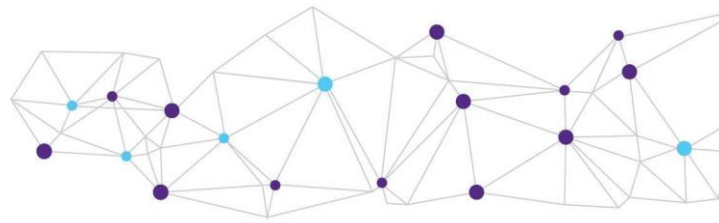
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plan to disseminate the community engagement approach among the academic community</li> <li>- Encourage exchange between university organizations and those in the society around them, facilitating the inputs and outputs that are so complicated today.</li> <li>- Facilitate access to the university for people without an orthodox academic background but with personal and professional experiences that can be very enriching (gateways between the university and its local environment)</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	<p>The main risk lies in organizational inertia and regulatory constraints. These can become insurmountable barriers when it comes to modifying the forms of access and the profiles of human resources.</p> <p>As was pointed out during the national consultations, one of the risks is the creation of two types of academics: first class and second class academics. This danger will have to be countered with policies on equal recognition and incentives.</p>

<b>Title b.2.</b>	<b>Evaluation system to enhance the value of community engagement</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Overcome the limitations and constraints of a university model that only values the achievement of quantitative indicators of academic productivity.
<b>Approach</b>	<p>Leadership of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU). It must incorporate the perspective of other agents, both inside and outside the university.</p> <p>It is also necessary to involve the student body and to ensure that university evaluation incorporates teaching, a crucial -and often not very explicit- aspect of community engagement.</p>
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discuss, design and implement a new model for evaluating both the activity of academic staff and of the university as a whole -both in terms of teaching and research-</li> <li>- Once again make the student body and university community the main receivers of university activity and, therefore, the people with regard to which its actions and results are evaluated.</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	The risk lies in the practical and methodological difficulties of moving from a simple, quantitative evaluation system to a more complex one that combines quantitative and qualitative assessments.



<b>Title b.3.</b>	<b>Working based on projects and with shared agendas</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Overcome the difficulties of involving different academic and social agents in shared projects, working together and, therefore, join forces and perspectives that should lead to community engagement.
<b>Approach</b>	On the one hand, it is a matter of building a shared, strategic agenda based on dialogue with all actors. And, on the other hand, to replace sectoral perspectives with thematic (issue oriented) approaches that turn social challenges into common ground.
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Calls for research projects oriented towards strategic challenges (shared agenda) and with the requirement that the proposals be made jointly by different areas of the university and by social, economic or institutional actors outside of academia.</li> <li>- Calls for research and training promoted by the territory itself (city councils, regional councils, etc.) that are aimed at the co-production of knowledge from local territories, towns, cities and neighbourhoods.</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	The risk is that these calls for proposals will not be attractive enough for actors both inside and outside the university. To overcome this risk, incentives are needed, in economic (calls with resources) academic (projection and recognition of results) and social terms (relevance and applicability).

<b>Title b.4.</b>	<b>Focus teaching on creating citizens and not just professionals</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Transform teaching activity to incorporate the perspective of community engagement.
<b>Approach</b>	This work must favour teaching based on both values and experiences, and inclusive access to ensure that the university is a place where the full diversity and complexity of our society is reflected.
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporate cross-cutting subjects that respond to the principles of community engagement.</li> <li>- Encourage internships and volunteering that facilitate the integration of students in their socio-economic environment.</li> <li>- Scholarship policies aimed at guaranteeing a diverse and inclusive university.</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	The main risk lies in the current model's lack of recognition of teaching, which could dilute actions that, in fact, would need strong support from the university governors.

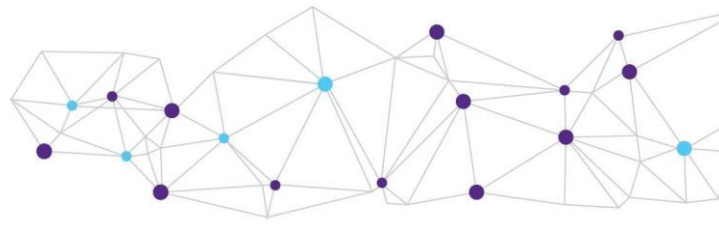


### c. Short - term (1 - 3 years)

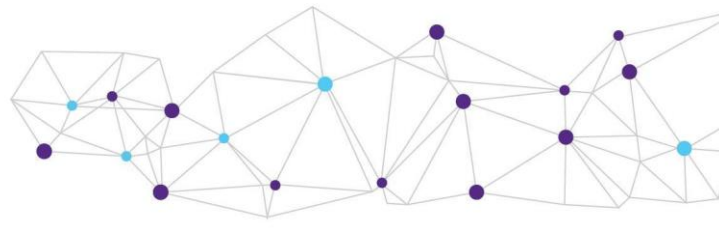
<b>Title c.1.</b>	<b>Allocate resources to promote community engagement</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Find solutions for the situation of budget cuts that have characterized the Catalan university system since the 2008 crisis.
<b>Approach</b>	Responsibility of the government, but it is also necessary to raise awareness among Catalan society about the importance of university. The community engagement approach can be an important reason.
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase the budgetary allocation for universities.</li> <li>- Get the different departments of the Catalan government to allocate resources to projects that are developed in collaboration with the university.</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	The obvious risk lies in the difficulty of obtaining more resources in a context like the current one, where challenges and needs are piling up in many areas.

<b>Title c.2.</b>	<b>Raise awareness of the actions that have already been carried out.</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Difficulty of moving from theory to practice, from discourse to concrete practices.
<b>Approach</b>	<p>Highlight the value of the work done, to present possibilities for action and, in short, to show the way forwards toward community engagement.</p> <p>Moreover, by showcasing real cases, a scaling effect can be achieved; that is to say, what for the moment are one-off actions can be generalized.</p>
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular workshops and seminars to disseminate initiatives and exchange ideas.</li> <li>- Reward best practices linked to community engagement.</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	The risk, in this case, would be the trivialisation of community engagement, making it more about isolated actions to foster a positive image than a real transformation strategy.

<b>Title c.3.</b>	<b>Modify the incentive system in academic careers.</b>
<b>Challenge</b>	Seek alternative incentive systems to the current one, which rewards the global competitiveness model and undervalues activities related to community engagement, among others.



<b>Approach</b>	Governmental leadership (system-level) with the participation of universities and academic community as a whole, especially the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU by its initials in Catalan).
<b>Proposed actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incentive system that contemplates social transfer actions.</li> <li>- Introduce qualitative aspects to a quantitative system: the AQU needs to work in this direction.</li> <li>- Promote collaborative research programs with agents outside the university.</li> <li>- Get teaching to be appreciated, especially when it is related in an active and committed way with its local environment.</li> </ul>
<b>Risks management</b>	The risk lies in the practical and methodological difficulties of creating this new incentive system. Also, and very importantly, the resistance of those actors who are comfortable with and benefit from the current model.



## 5. Policy alignment and implications for community engagement

Developing policy recommendations for the enhancement of CE in higher education implies aligning with the strategies of many other organizations, institutions and policies. This approach cannot be adopted alone, and instead requires support and complicity that will only work if there are shared objectives and common ways of working. The EU itself expresses this in the following words:

“A coherent policy approach will need to create synergies with other policy areas and existing programmes” (Farnell, 2020)

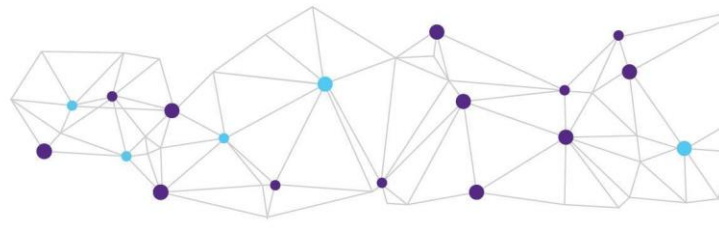
Moreover, these synergies need to be generated not only with other public policy areas but with institutions external to the government itself:

- Indeed, primarily, community engagement cannot be the project of a single department but should instead involve the whole Government of Catalonia. It will obviously be necessary to share both the generic guidelines and concrete projects with the departments dedicated to economic promotion and social welfare, but there is also a basic need to forge links with others that are dedicated to the environment and climate change, health, education, culture, energy and agriculture. Without these synergies, the department responsible for universities will not have enough resources to promote community engagement.
- Secondly, community engagement also has to involve other administrations in the Catalan territory, such as municipalities, county councils and provincial councils. The very notion of community engagement supposes interaction with the territory and, therefore, it will be essential to count on the support of institutions that represent it. Hence the need to emphasize certain precedents, such as, for example, Barcelona City Council’s commitment to science, and the existence of university councillors’ offices in certain Catalan municipalities (Manresa, Mataró, Sabadell, Igualada).

Still at this institutional level, the importance of relations with all Spanish and European bodies must also be emphasized. The higher education system is not shaped at the Catalan level but is strongly conditioned by and interrelated with the international model. Hence it will be essential to establish alliances and work together with the university system at the EU and international level:

“Joint action is required from the European Commission, EU Member States, International stakeholders and universities” (Farnell, 2020)

- Thirdly, and finally, it will also be necessary to work on synergies and joint approaches with the various social, economic and environmental actors existing in the territory. As mentioned in the previous section, the agreement strategy and the capacity to generate meeting points with a wide diversity of actors will be very important. ACUP has experience in this type of initiative and could therefore be a key factor when working in this direction.



## 6. National consultations on the policy recommendations with stakeholders

The national consultations on the policy recommendations were held on the 27th of October, 2022, and the panel was composed by regional and local authorities (the officer of the Social and Community Engagement Commission of the Catalan Interuniversity Council and the Head of the Science and Universities Department of Barcelona City Council), representatives of selected universities (vice-rectorates, cooperation and development centres, heads of departments of innovation and community, etc.), members of the student council of Catalonia (CEUCAT), experts on the social value of universities and service learning and NGOs focused on voluntary activities involving students.

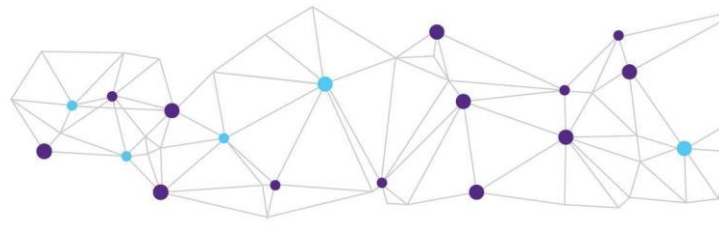
The policy recommendations document was shared with the participants a week before the consultations, together with an information sheet about the SHEFCE project, and it was presented during the session along with the framework of the project and SHEFCE's understanding and definition of Community Engagement. ACUP's SHEFCE team presented its diagnosis of community engagement in Catalonia together with the challenges and opportunities identified. This was followed by an open debate during which participants were free to express their views on the adequacy of the diagnosis, ways to deal with challenges and opportunities, and their proposals for amendments, additions or underscoring.

The participants were generally satisfied with the approach taken and celebrated SHEFCE's initiative and the work promoted in Catalonia by ACUP. Community engagement, in its various terms, is viewed as a transversal element that should be present in all areas and university professionals. The attendees added to the diagnoses the idea of being in the "pilot phase" of community engagement in Catalonia. They acknowledged the absence of a solid background and emphasised the need to share practices, knowledge and work sessions during this phase in order to scale experimentation to obtain conclusions and coordinate future paths.

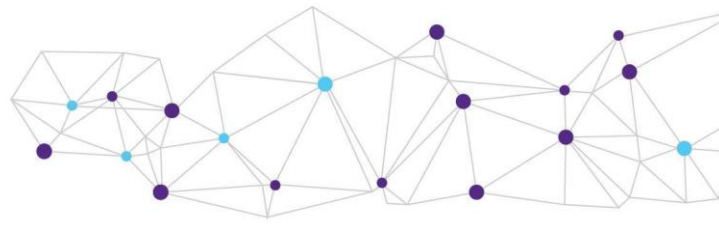
The second part of the session concerned the specific recommendations presented in the document, namely regarding the viability of the actions, the identifications of actors, resources, difficulties and risks, and proposals for mitigation. The participants mentioned the need for a bureaucratic umbrella to unify and simplify the paperwork, the idea of fostering collaboration by observing the criteria of funding calls, the urgent need to change metrics, incentive models and the recognition of different types of faculty, the need for capacity building and mechanisms for collaborative work among researchers, university personnel and social agents, and the need to disseminate community engagement and its activities at the core of universities and externally among civil society. These proposals, and many more, have since been studied and included in the present document.

In short, ACUP's SHEFCE team can report that the consultation session was a success both in terms of the project and the enrichment of the document, as well as the interest shown by the participants. The general feeling is one of high expectations and a willingness to continue contributing to and participating in the project, and to know about its results. We are convinced





that the engagement that has been generated will be a useful asset for disseminating and strengthening the recommendations and the implementation of the proposed actions.



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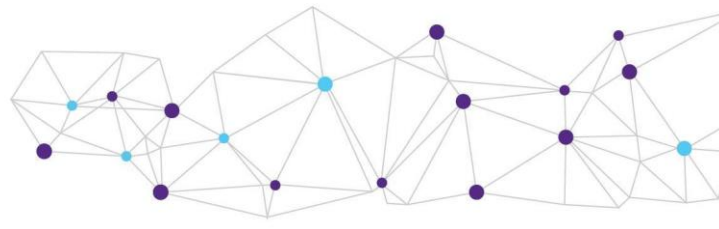
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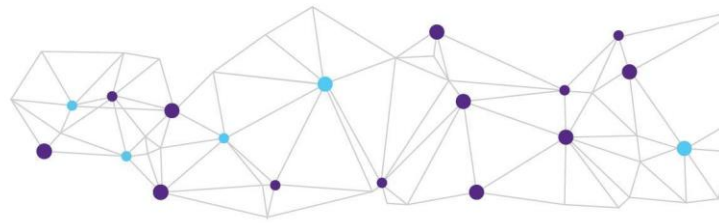
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## Appendix

### Acknowledgments

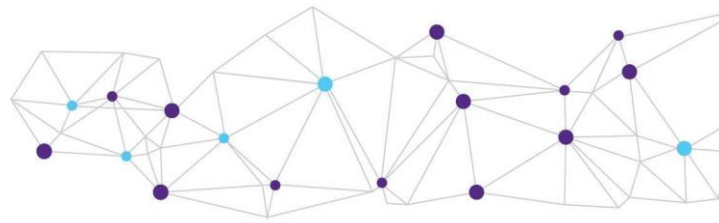
The content of this document and the policy recommendations have been enhanced by the discussions and cooperative work of all project partners of the SHEFCE project. Special acknowledgement must be made to the collaboration of SHEFCE’s critical partner, Karel Verbrugge, project coordinator of the Science and Outreach Office at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, who carried out an in-depth revision and provided written comments for improvement. The final version of this policy recommendations was created by January 31, 2023.

### Key information on the project SHEFCE

Project Title	Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement
Project Acronym	SHEFCE
Project Start Date	1.9.2020.
Project Total Duration	36 months
Project End Date	31.8.2023.
National Agency of the Applicant Organisation	HR01 Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, Croatia
Project Web Sites	<a href="https://community-engagement.eu/">https://community-engagement.eu/</a> ; <a href="https://www.shefce.eu/">https://www.shefce.eu/</a> ; <a href="https://en.iro.hr/2022/05/12/steering-higher-education-for-community-engagement/">https://en.iro.hr/2022/05/12/steering-higher-education-for-community-engagement/</a>

### Project partners

	Organisation	Abbrev.	Country
1	Institute for the Development of Education – <b>project coordinator</b>	IDE	HR
2	University for Continuing Education Krems	UCEK	AT
3	University of Rijeka	UNIRI	HR
4	Ghent University	UG	BE
5	Technological University Dublin	TUD	IE
6	University of Girona	UDG	ES
7	Free University of Brussels	VUB	BE
8	Association of Catalan Public Universities	ACUP	ES
9	Mary Immaculate College	MIC	IE



10	Brodoto	BDT	HR
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## Associate partners

### Advisory team

1	European University Association	EUA
2	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education	EURASHE
3	European Students' Union	ESU
4	Council of Europe	CoE
5	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD

### Dissemination partners

1	Campus Engage	CE
2	European Higher Education Society	EAIR
3	Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research	MESR

### Local partners

1	CitySpark	CS
2	Dublin City Council	DCC
3	Girona City Council	GCC
4	Rijeka City Council	RCC