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Putting the horse before the cart: policy research, partnerships and community service

As a result of the way in which community service (CS) partnerships are structured, these partnerships may be dominated by universities, which in some cases become too involved in the operational side of addressing community needs. This article briefly assesses community service learning, action research and CS partnerships. The two research partnerships of the Centre for Development Support are then described and lessons from these case studies are identified. The main lesson is that CS partnerships should be reassessed. It is proposed that a university does not have to be directly involved, as an implementation agency, in order to address the socio-economic realities of our society. The possibility of linking such partnerships with accredited student learning is pointed out, along with the importance of conducting research that is relevant to the socio-economic realities in South Africa, and the fact that CS and the entrepreneurial route are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Om die perde voor die kar in te span: beleidsnavorsing, vennootskappe en samelewingsdiens

Samelewingsdiensvennootskappe tussen gemeenskappe en universiteite kan maklik deur die laasgenoemde gedomineer word sodat universiteite in sommige gevalle te veel aan die operasionele kant van sodanige vennootskappe betrokke is. Om hierdie argument te motiveer, word samelewingsdiensleer, aksienavorsing en vennootskappe kortliks bespreek. Die twee navorsingsvennootskappe van die Sentrum vir Ontwikkelingsteun word dan bespreek en bepaalde lesse word geïdentifiseer. Die belangrikste les is dat samelewingsdiensvennootskappe nie van universiteite blote implementeringsagente van samelewingsdiens hoef te maak nie. Die moontlikheid om die vennootskappe met geakkrediteerde leer van studente te verbind en dat samelewingsleer en 'n meer entrepreneuriese benadering nie noodwendig in konflik hoef te wees nie, word ook bespreek.

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I n his address at the Free State University's (UFS) opening ceremony, the former rector, Prof Stef Coetzee, emphasised that the University should reconsider its approach to research (Coetzee 2002). He further emphasised that research partnerships with the private sector and public service are of the utmost importance. Since the democratic transition in South Africa in the early 1990s, growing emphasis has also been placed on the need for universities to become more relevant to the socio-economic realities of South Africa. In the meantime, the University of the Free State has also developed a Community Service (CS) Policy with Community Service Learning (CSL) and Community Service Research (CSR) as specific sub-sections of CS. In the USA, however, CS has long been associated with teaching (Bringle & Hatcher 2000) and less attention has been paid to research, which has implications for the community, student training and policy. When research was eventually recognised as an important consideration for CSL, it focused mainly on action research, in terms of which universities and communities form partnerships and students are directly introduced to the socio-economic realities of communities.

However, despite these changes in the USA, there is still a need to clarify the precise interrelatedness between CS, CSL and CSR in the South African context. To improve the conceptual clarification of such concepts and in order not to view them as mere synonyms, clear definitions are needed. According to the Chief Directorate: Community Service of the UFS, CS implies "any form of making available the resources and capabilities of the University to the wider public" (UFS 2002) while CSL refers to "applied learning which is directed at specific community needs and is integrated into an academic programme and curriculum" (Joint Education Trust 2000). SL is thus education in which students receive academic credit for performing CS (cf Castle *et al* 2003: 3).

For the purposes of this article CSR implies systematised reflection on and empirical study of the content and outcome of CS. It often reflects on the policy and/or practice of CS or CSL. According to the CS and CSR task team for CSand research at the UFS (2003) there is still only limited understanding of how to operationalise CSR relevant to the socio-economic and environmental situation in South Africa. In fact the second CS Conference itself, held at the UFS in 2003, with the theme:

"The integration of community service and research", evidenced the challenge of coming to grips with CSR.

Against this background we would like to put forward two arguments. First, in our opinion, the nature of CS partnerships could easily lead to an overemphasis on the role of universities.[1] We would like to argue, on the basis of our experience of policy research partnerships as well as a critical assessment of the CS literature, that the implementation partner should be the main implementation agent, and that the role of the university in such a partnership, at an operational level, should be limited. Although this argument is less relevant in cases where a professional service of addressing community needs can be delivered (for example by nursing, medical or law students), it is extremely valid in the context of the humanities and other disciplines where no concrete service addressing immediate needs can be delivered, or where delivering such services would be extremely expensive. However, we are of the opinion that some of our arguments are relevant to all disciplines and faculties. In presenting this argument we shall reflect on our experience at the Centre for Development Support (CDS): developing and managing policy research partnerships, and to a large extent making policy-research partnerships our working philosophy.

The second related argument is that current models of community partnership place too much emphasis on community needs and too readily assume that universities can and should address these needs. Although we do not see our policy research partnership approach as the only or the best way of delivering socio-economically relevant research and services, we are of the opinion that important lessons can be learned from it. Although our approach is open to criticism, we are also of the opinion that it provides a framework for changing the role of universi-

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1   A rapid scan (in July 2004) of the data base on the CS projects of the UFS revealed that almost nine of the 46 reported projects (20%) mainly benefited the learning experience of students. Although one could argue that the majority of the students come from the previously disadvantaged target community, it is still an important finding suggesting the potential risk of university domination in CS projects. In ten projects (22%) the UFS was cited as the sole partner, a typical example of CS occurring outside a partnership framework. Eleven projects (24%) had no reported service sector partner (UFS 2004: 1).

ties, enabling them to assist with key aspects of social change, without actually managing this change. Furthermore, although policy-related research is certain to address aspects such as community views, it is structured within partnerships where government departments or NGOs, and not universities are responsible for addressing these needs. What we are attempting to do here is to comment on current CS practice from a developmental perspective. In our opinion, this perspective is important, since a great deal (although not all) of the recorded research on CS in a higher education context has been conducted by educationists, or from an educationist's perspective ("How does it influence our students' learning?").[2]

In order to substantiate these arguments we shall first provide a broad overview of the importance of CSL in line with the background of the changing higher education environment. This will be followed by a broad assessment of research in CSL, after which the concept of partnerships in CSL will be analysed. In order to explain our theoretical arguments we shall then proceed to describe our research partnerships and identify the lessons that can be learned in this regard.

1.   A brief overview of CSL

The increasing emphasis on CSL in the South African context can be attributed to the changing higher education paradigm and the requirement of the Government that universities should become more responsive to the socio-economic realities of the country (Castle & Osman 2003: 105; Fourie 2003: 32). CSL has not been practised widely, but the interest in CSL is growing (Castle & Osman 2003: 105). Although it is starting to change, CSL research in South Africa has thus far been limited to a few programme evaluations (for example Castle & Osman 2003; Fourie 2003). The Department of Education (1997: 23) requires universities to:

> demonstrate social responsibility and commitment to common good by making their expertise and infrastructure available for community service learning.

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2   Cf Castle & Osman 2003; Fourie 2003; Kraak 2000; Lazarus 2001; Nuttall 2001.

Subotzky (2000: 113) is of the opinion that a fundamental shift is necessary for academics, from seeing the role of the university as that of producing basic knowledge and providing applied knowledge to helping in the resolution of problems, to regarding the university as being jointly responsible for social change, in partnership with relevant bodies within the community. We agree with the argument that universities should become more relevant. However, our critical question in this article relates to what the operational role of universities should be in this regard.

CSL originated in North America, and was used to restructure education on the continent (Castle & Osman 2003: 113). According to Subotzky (2000: 113) it is possible to distinguish between three phases in the development of CSL. The 1970s are commonly associated with outreach programmes by universities. From the 1980s, community priorities were increasingly incorporated into curriculum development — especially in the applied and vocational fields, which could address the community needs through their services. The 1990s saw a period of increased institutionalisation, CSL becoming synonymous with mainstream activities at universities. Subotzky (2000: 113) argues that the idea of service in higher education is not new, but that it is currently receiving more attention as a possible policy option.

Although a precise definition of CSL is not always possible, and although it is not the intention of this article to reconceptualise the term, it seems as if there is some consensus regarding the following aspects. Swick (2001: 261) describes CSL as a pedagogical strategy that combines authentic CS with integrated academic learning, and argues that it "offers students opportunities to gain new skills, apply knowledge in challenging situations and contribute to the life of others in a meaningful way". In the South African context, a recent emphasis has fallen on learning and obtaining credits as well as delivering a service to a community (Furco 1996: 5; Castle & Osmon 2003; Fourie 2003: 32).

Internationally there is a large volume of literature debating the advantages of CSL (cf Kellogg 2002), while literature is also growing in South Africa.[3] It is argued that the advantages of CSL include the following:

3 Cf Castle & Osman 2003; Fourie 2003; Kraak 2000; Lazarus 2001, 2005; Lickindorf 2004; Nuttall 2001; Rosseel 2004.

- In fostering community development and social equity, this model constitutes a complementary alternative to entrepreneurialisation of higher education (Rosseel 2004; Subotzky 2000: 112).

- It integrates and mutually enriches experiential learning, socially relevant research and CS (Subotzky 2000: 112; Lickindorf 2004; Lazarus 2005: 5).

- It improves collaborative forms of decision-making (Subotzky 2000: 112).

- More effective learning takes place (Wade 1997; Subotzky 2000: 112; Swick 2001; Reardon 2003).

- It helps to improve relationship skills, leadership skills and planning abilities (Lazarus 2005: 7).

- It provides opportunities for relevant research, the production and dissemination of knowledge (Elwell 2001; Kowalewski 2004; Lazarus 2005: 7).

- Academic achievement generally improves (Meyer *et al* 2004: 61).

- It has a significant impact on the employment choices and job placements of students after graduation (Warchal & Ruiz 2004).

Despite the putative advantages, criticism against CS and CSL has mounted during the last decade (Stoecker 2002). The following main points of criticism are worth noting:

- In many cases, CS is equated to charity work, reinforcing the perception that poor communities are helpless (Stoecker 2002; Bringle & Hatcher 2003: 7; Lazarus 2005: 7).

- CSL is centred in the university to an excessive degree, rather than in the community; that the processes jointly undertaken with the communities are dominated by the universities; and that it is sometimes doubtful whether communities actually do benefit from these efforts (Stoecker 2002). However, evaluative research and impact studies are useful methodological tools that are currently utilised to search for solutions to this criticism.

- CSL has been associated with the teaching missions of higher education institutions for too long, and that research has not been integrated effectively into the process (Bringle & Hatcher 2000; Stoecker 2002; Stuart & Whitemore 2002: 12).

Against this background, the last part of this section will briefly focus on the CS policy at the UFS (UFS 2002). According to this policy, integrated Community Service Learning and Research programmes imply:

- the joint and mutual acquisition of abilities,
- by all members of the CSpartnership (lecturers and students at the UFS, members of communities and service sectors),
- in teaching, learning and research programmes,
- aimed at a better understanding, handling and resolution of community needs and challenges,
- through available expertise, resources and infrastructure.

The policy identifies two specific CS categories. CS projects and programmes in Category A are integrated into curricula and linked to academic learning programmes, as well as research aimed at CS. The following sub-categories are identified:

- Compulsory practical work and CS;
- Internships and work study programmes;
- Core modules: compulsory practical work that is linked to learning programmes;
- Elective and foundational modules, and
- CSR (problem-solving, developmental and needs-based) aimed at the community.

Category B refers to extra-curricular community involvement, including the following sub-categories:

- CS by lecturers and students on a voluntary basis;
- Consultation services in a community context;
- Workshops and short courses for community members;
- Contractual research on community challenges, and
- The initiation and management of development projects by staff members (UFS 2002).

It is interesting that, at the time when the CS policy of the UFS was developed, policy research linked to learning programmes was not seen as a sub-category under the two main categories. Research was regarded either as community research or as contractual research. We

would like to argue that a combination of these possibilities could be developed. It is also noteworthy that CS, in terms of research, is directly linked to community problem-solving and developmental needs. We will argue in this article that this need not be the case, and that an excessive emphasis on community needs can also be potentially dangerous — especially if the partnership with the service sector is not sufficiently strong to manage these needs.

2. CS and research

Objective 6 of the UFS's Community Service Policy shared the essential dimensions of CS and CSR as it indicates that the UFS strives to:

- Support needs-based CSR, aimed at development and problem-solving;
- Promote interdisciplinary, intersectoral, holistic CSR with partners;
- Promote programme evaluation and impact studies regarding CS initiatives;
- Manage CS-oriented contract research according to an appropriate incentive system, and
- Investigate an appropriate incentive system to promote CSR (UFS 2002).

Although CS has not always been orientated towards research, participatory action research (PAR) has effectively been used in CS, and is closely related to CS. PAR has developed for a number of reasons. The two most prominent reasons are probably the countless "top-down" programmes that have been implemented in many parts of the world (Stuart & Whitemore 2002: 4; Reardon 2003: 59), as well as the world-wide shift in focus, that emphasise those sectors of the communities which have been marginalised. Part of the problem with respect to this shift has been that professional researchers did not have a thorough understanding of the livelihoods of these communities. PAR thus constituted a logical methodology to be used in CS, as it would assist universities to conduct far more relevant community research and ensure relevant participation (Hall 1993: 15; Reardon 2003). Mulroney (2001: 4) states that:

> This approach requires a willingness to begin from local communities, to spend time in and with [the] community, analyzing the community's needs for the present and aspiration for the future.

There is also some evidence that action research and participatory research in particular, have played an important role in assisting communities to address their own problems (Whyte 1991).

CS by means of action research has also been criticised. The following major points of criticism need to be mentioned. In the first place, as is the case with regard to CSL and teaching, the unevenness of partnerships is frequently mentioned in the literature (Stuart & Whitemore 2002: 2; Reardon 2003: 57). To a large extent, these partnerships have enabled universities to access third-stream funds, but have not always contributed to addressing the needs of the relevant communities; especially where the contract research is similar to consultancy work without a skills transfer or partnership component (cf footnote 1). Secondly, in many cases research has been fairly effective in identifying the needs of the community correctly, but it has mostly failed to provide appropriate solutions to these problems (Reardon 2003: 57). The result is that communities tend to be of the opinion that this research may be good for providing students with degrees, but that it is not always helpful in solving their problems. Levesque (2002: 26) recognises that the needs of communities and academics usually differ considerably. In the third place, these partnerships come under pressure because of the impact that some universities have on their partners in terms of labour relations, investment and purchasing policies (Reardon 2003: 58). In the fourth place, as Stuart & Whitemore (2002: 8) point out, university application procedures and the essence of participatory research are sometimes in conflict. For example, according to Stuart & Whitemore (2002: 8), the fundamental assumption in such research is participation, from the development stage to that of approval and implementation. In many cases, however, communities are not involved in the cumbersome university procedures of approval.

3. CS and partnerships

Considering the criticism adjacent to existing partnerships (in terms of CSL, teaching and research), it is worthwhile to reflect in more depth on CS partnerships. Lazarus (2001: 2) also notes that not much has been written on CS partnerships. Fundamentally, the concept refers to the principle that partners should address each other's needs and should form collaborative structures (Stuart & Whitemore 2002: 2). These part-

nerships are also becoming an important requirement for funding. University-community partnerships have become conventional wisdom in order to train students within a relevant context and to contribute to relieving distressed communities (Reardon 2003: 23). Interestingly enough, most research focusing on partnerships (especially by foreign academics) only focuses on the university-community partnerships, and does not always directly refer to the service sector or NGOs (Nuttall 2003: 5). This could perhaps be explained by the fact that these part-nering CBOs are institutionally so strong that they largely fulfil the role of service sector partner. For Bringle & Hatcher (2003: 1), campus-community partnerships are a series of interpersonal relationships be-tween campus administrators, faculty, staff and students, and community leaders, agency personnel and members of communities. Although agency personnel are mentioned, it seems that no specific mention is made of possible service providers in most of the North American li-terature, and that such a service provider is not necessarily seen as a third party to the partnership.

In South Africa, the CS partnership model has only recently been operationalised (Subotzky 2000: 113) and differs somewhat from the model described in the North American literature, as it includes com-munities, service providers (who are prominently included as parties in the partnership) and universities. However, as already noted, partner-ships have been vulnerable to uneven relations, and universities easily dominate these relations. Fourie (2003: 36-7) acknowledges that "there is very little evidence, however, of how effective the partnerships between the university, the community and the service providers are [...]".

The sections above have provided some background on, and pointed out the need for CS, as well as highlighted some of the criticism against CS. However, two more points need to be mentioned. The way in which partnerships for CS have been structured has not always, and in all cases, been appropriate. We agree with Stoecker's (2002) argument that universities often dominate these partnerships. However, the problem that we wish to point out is more related to universities being far too actively involved in the operational side of these partnerships. Comments from young people in the audience during the 2003 CS conference at the UFS confirm this. Some examples of these comments are: "We are still being used to get students to graduate — what are the benefits to

us?" and "When will MUCPP[4] meet our needs? — We are still volunteers without work". Two case studies will be presented in this article indicating that if partnerships were structured differently, with different roles for the university, these partnerships could also have positive SL outcomes. Of late CSL at the UFS has been managed on the basis of thorough involvement of service sector partners and the communities. It is indeed also the vision of the South African-based Community Higher Education Service Partnership Project (CHESP) (CHESP 2004: 1) that the role of the university is to assist service providers, through its student activity or research expertise, to provide a better service to communities. The basic argument mentioned above is further supported by the CS evaluation conducted by Lazarus (2003), who found that in the tri-partnership between the community, university and a public sector department, the two partners who had benefited the most were the two first mentioned. The problem was that many service providers were not involved. It is our opinion that the lack of involvement of service providers as operational structures is one of the main obstacles to the achievement of a more sustainable approach to CS. If service providers were optimally involved, students could still be engaged in action research (as well as other methodologies), and still provide a service, but the service would be provided through the agency of service providers (whose job it is to provide these services). In this case, partnerships should probably no longer be known as university-community partnerships but rather as community-service provider-university partnerships.

In the second place, from the literature it seems that addressing community needs is an essential part of the existing partnerships. However, we have our reservations in this regard. Fourie (2003: 35) argues that in a developing country with huge developmental needs, it makes sense to place particular emphasis on meeting identified community needs as a primary component of CS, and that universities should address community problems. Three critical comments need to be made in

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4   The Mangaung-University of the Free State Community Partnership Programme (MUCPP) is one of the flagship partnership programmes of the UFS. Established in 1991, it strives to form a strong partnership between the community of Mangaung, the UFS, the Provincial Department of Health, the Free State Provincial Government and the local government (MUCPP 2004: 1).

this regard. First, the emphasis on needs assumes that these needs can be addressed; that enough funds are available to address them; and that universities should address these needs. To a large degree, such a needs-driven approach enforces further dependency, as it assumes that someone from outside will address the needs. The assumption that universities can concretely do something to meet these needs is, in our opinion, not a realistic one, where perceived social needs by far exceed the available resources. Universities simply do not have the resources to address the solutions to the identified problems, nor do they have the necessary capabilities. Furthermore, university schedules and programmes are not geared to address these demands. For example, student research results are mostly only available after the student has left the university arena. It should be emphasised that our argument here is not against becoming involved in addressing community needs and working with communities in a responsible manner but rather, that it is aimed at realistically answering the question of how we shall address these needs. In order to address them, extensive staff and operational plans need to be developed, making CS the responsibility of a particular person or party. But, this does not assist in the integration of CS.

Secondly, these underlying assumptions do not consider the development paradigm of the livelihoods approach, where the emphasis is on supporting the assets and strengths of developing communities rather than overemphasising their needs (cf for example Saleebey 1997). The emphasis on indigenous knowledge systems further highlights this paradigm shift from needs to strengths. In CS terms, it is about what lecturers and students could learn from communities. Thirdly, we should be careful to try to relate CS to sustainable development. Fourie (2003) also provides an in-depth discussion of the sustainable development discourse (with which we agree), but does not relate it to the creation of institutions that can promote such development. Partnerships with service providers and communities at the core, and with the universities operating in the background, could assist in building service provider institutions with the ability to deliver. In the following two sections these two main arguments will be motivated by means of a description and assessment of our two research partnerships, while other lessons in this regard will also be mentioned.

4. Research partnerships: the case studies

In this section we would first like to describe the research partnerships that we have created in the last two years. It is not our intention to argue that our partnerships are the only way of dealing with CS partnerships. However, we are of the opinion, given the critical comments we have made with regard to CS partnerships, that some lessons could be communicated on the basis thereof, and that in certain cases the framework could be replicated. The Centre for Development Support (CDS) is an entrepreneurial research unit at the Free State University which generally recovers approximately 70% of its costs. It has three pillars — it manages a multidisciplinary master's degree in development studies; conducts applied development research on a contractual basis; and also provides some short-course training in specific fields (mainly on a client-contract basis). Although it has completed research across a wide range of aspects, four areas of research seem to be prominent — youth research, low-income housing research, local economic development and municipal cost recovery research. In two of these fields, namely low-income housing and youth development, research partnerships have been developed. Each of these will now be discussed in more detail.

The youth commission research partnership was an initiative of the Free State Youth Commission, with the aim of influencing youth development and policy in the Free State. However, the Commission lacked well-researched information and the necessary capacity to conduct this type of research on their own. The Free State Youth Commission then contacted CDS, requesting the latter to assist them in developing a partnership to be funded by the Umsobumvo Youth Fund. In order to do this, a survey of youth activities and youth research in the Free State was carried out. This survey informed a mutually agreed-upon research agenda consisting of six research cluster areas and 17 research topics. The research partnership further necessitates the CDS to build the capacity of the Free State Youth Commission researchers over a period of three years, in order to enable them to operate more independently in the future. This partnership involves academics from the UFS, the Central University of Technology, the former Bloemfontein campus of the Vista University, the HSRC and certain private-sector researchers.

The second partnership, namely the low-income housing research partnership, evolved when the National Department of Housing had

to develop provincial Housing Educators' Forums. Although the CDS played a central role in organising these meetings, one of the ideas that arose from this forum was to develop a housing research agenda for the Free State and Northern Cape provinces (two provinces in which the CDS has been actively involved in providing housing capacity-building programmes). In the meantime, the national Department of Housing has been setting up a housing research unit. However, concurrently there has been a realisation of the fact that housing research in South Africa is dominated by either Gauteng-based case studies or Gauteng researchers, with the result that sometimes no emphasis is placed on the issues in rural provinces (Napier 2004). In order to develop a housing research agenda, the various officials involved in the Housing Educators' Forum were invited to a workshop where research topics were identified and clustered. This agenda forms the basis of all housing research in the two provinces. Unlike the Youth Commission research project, this research agenda is not externally funded. The CDS has committed approximately R20 000, while a R70 000 grant from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences has augmented the partnership. In the meantime, the Free State Department of Local Government and Housing has also committed itself to making a contribution. The CDS will also attempt to access funding from the National Research Foundation, which would further enhance the amount available. These funds will be used exclusively to assist postgraduate students to do relevant housing policy research in the Free State and Northern Cape. From the UFS's side, this partnership involves the collaboration of the Centre for Development Support, as well as the Departments of Town and Regional Planning, Quantity Surveying and Architecture. Other departments can also contribute in this regard, and an open invitation to the Central University of Technology to participate still stands.

5. Lessons from the case studies

5.1 Rethinking partnership structuring

According to Subotzky (2000: 112), "… community service learning — has emerged as an important means by which higher education institutions can directly serve social development". We are of the opinion that the way in which we have structured these two research partnerships

has reduced the role of the university as an implementation agency. In the above discussion it has been indicated that CS partnerships have mostly been dominated by universities. In fact, in our partnerships, the role of the university is reduced to that of supporting the departmental or institutional operational plans, through research in our case; but this could even take place through teaching-based CS. The university can thus not be accused of doing research that benefits university students or institutions at the expense of the community. The responsibility of accessing communities and explaining the relevancy of the research to these communities thus becomes the role of the service provider. Although there are still crucial ethical considerations which researchers should abide by when doing research in communities, it is possible to link the research and government programmes more closely.

5.2 The approach to student credits

An essential aspect which distinguishes CSL from "charity" is that the student outcomes are directly related to credits. The housing research partnership and the funding that has been mobilised for it are directly linked to credits. The CDS provides two routes to obtaining a master's degree. Firstly, through the structured Master's degree in Development Studies (MDS) programme, where the dissertation is worth a total of 72 credits. The other route is through a formal research master's degree, worth a total of 240 credits. Admittedly, the youth research partnership has not yet been integrated with student outcomes at this level, but we are convinced that this could be easily done, and attempts have already been made to get this started. It is important to note that in the proposal that was initially prepared, funds were specifically budgeted for student bursaries. However, these bursaries were never approved, and no reason was provided in this regard. Difficulties with extending the work to students can be related to the funding institution which did not accept the bursary proposal and its budgeting implications. Although research partnerships are closely related to policy issues, there is very little room for service; but it could potentially be incorporated. A possibility in this regard is that our students, instead of doing a research article, could carry out some practical work at an NGO or service provider (for the same number of credits as a research article/written assignment).

5.3 Conducting socially relevant and academic research

As noted in the section on changing higher education, more socio-economically and environmentally relevant research is required. However, ideally, research should also be shared with the broader academic environment. A few members of the CS Task Team on Community Service and Research at the University of the Free State reported that academic journals do not necessarily prefer community-based research (UFS 2003). However, our experience has taught that this type of research is highly sought after when the policy implications of the research can be debated, and when the research takes place aligned with the policy background. In this context, the way in which we have developed research partnerships around policy issues, makes publication much easier in the relevant academic journals; and not many problems are currently being experienced in order to get research published.

5.4 Entrepreneurialism and CSR

Subotzky (2000: 113) argues that CS is a way to counter the so-called entrepreneurialism that has emerged in national and global higher education trends. Although there is potential conflict between these aspects, we would like to argue that our approach in terms of the partnership merges these aspects. The entrepreneurial nature of the CDS makes it easier to provide students with the resources to carry out relevant policy-related socio-economic research.

5.5 Development of research agendas

Another crucial question that has been asked by the CS task team on CSR is how to start these partnerships and how to maintain them (UFS 2003). Our approach has been to wait until we are asked to develop such a partnership. In the case of the Youth Commission research, we acted on a request from the Free State Youth Commission. In the housing research partnership, the opportunity came about through the establishment of the Housing Educators' Forums by the National Department of Housing. In essence, the first step in both of our existing partnerships was willingness, or a request, to develop a research agenda for the specific institution. For the Free State Youth Commission, the process started with a survey of available research on youth development in the Free

State. With the housing research agenda, the acknowledgement that a great deal of housing research is Gauteng-based provided the rationale for research to be conducted in the Free State and Northern Cape. The second step in the development of these partnerships is to develop the research topics. These topics were identified by the various partners, as well as through the background survey. The identified topics were then clustered and prioritised. The next step was to ensure that the managements of the various service providers were comfortable with the research partnership. Other issues that might be relevant include drafting the agenda into a formal research proposal, and beginning to access funding.

5.6 Limited long-term institutional baggage

One of the dilemmas of community-university partnerships is that they usually require extensive institutional arrangements in terms of staff requirements, coupled with the financial implications of such arrangements. In terms of the partnership framework, we are suggesting that limited long-term institutional and financial commitments are needed. For the Youth Commission research, we employed one person for a three-year contractual period, while no person has specifically been appointed for the housing research partnership. All research is outsourced to multi-disciplinary research teams, or becomes part of the dissertations of students who work on a specific research project until it is completed. In effect, the argument is that these research partnerships should not cost extra money to sustain — since they are sustained by means of the research outputs that are delivered.

5.7 Capacity-building lessons

The research partnership with the Free State Youth Commission requires an extensive capacity-building programme conducted in collaboration with their researchers. Indirectly, our service to the Free State Youth Commission, the youth and the community at large, is to prepare two researchers, by means of a "three-year internship", to significantly contribute to their research skills. It should be mentioned that this is probably one of the more difficult aspects of the partnership, and a number of critical questions can be raised in this regard:

- How does one measure capacity-building and research skills? Although we have attempted to put one or two systems into place, there are still a large number of grey areas.

- Some academics who are used to working on an individual basis find it difficult to mentor the researchers from the Free State Youth Commission on an equal basis. It is much easier to mentor students when the power relations are fairly simple. To a large extent, the researchers from the Free State Youth Commission have brought a fairly good understanding of youth development and policy to the table — more so than many academics.

5.8 Accessing resources

Accessing resources is, of course, crucial to the development of such a partnership. However, these partnerships do not necessarily need huge investments. Of our examples, the Free State Youth Commission research partnership is well-funded whereas the housing research partnership is not being funded to any great extent, and it need not be funded extensively to contribute in a positive way. The essence of this second partnership is the idea that university staff should get their students to work on topics identified in the research agenda. The Centre for Development Support has, however, embarked on an attempt to access resources, and has been successful in accessing R70 000 from the Faculty, on condition that six research papers appear in accredited academic journals. A further attempt will be made to access funds from the National Research Foundation for continual policy evaluation in the Free State. Additional attempts to access private-sector funds will also be made. We are of the opinion that the research partnership (and research agenda), coupled with the fact that we have managed to access funds inside the university structure, will make it easier to raise increased public and private-sector funding.

5.9 Multidisciplinary inputs

Kraak (2000) has already mentioned that the new higher education environment requires a larger degree of multidisciplinary thinking and the ability to work in research teams. A general argument is that many social scientists find it difficult to work within this framework. Our experience thus far is that this approach requires a changed way of

thinking; but as our proposal has been based on invitation, we have found that most people who responded were either used to working in a multi-disciplinary environment and as part of a team, or were quite willing to do so. It is alarming — especially considering the fact that the Youth Commission programme is so well funded — that after three invitations to all university staff members, only a small number of them have reacted. Although various explanations can be given for such behaviour, one of the reasons is probably the fact that there is some resistance to working in teams and outside of disciplinary frameworks.

5.10   Contractual issues

In our view partnerships can be highly formalised or fairly loose in structure, and no specific prerequisites should exist in this regard. As an extensive amount of money is applicable in the case of the Youth Commission research partnership, it was necessary that the arrangement should be governed by extensive contractual agreements. This particular partnership also requires monthly and quarterly progress reports. However, in contrast, the housing research partnership is a loose arrangement with the UFS, involving a basic commitment on the part of the latter to get the students to do research on the identified topics in the research agenda. However, an aspect which is probably essential is a broad overall agreement between service providers and higher education institutions in the Free State.

5.11   Some critical questions

Although we have tried to motivate the advantages of the research partnership, it should also be mentioned that such partnerships also have disadvantages and problematic areas which cannot simply be ignored. In the first place, it could be asked whether carrying out research for a service provider, and being dependent on the latter in order to develop the research agenda, necessarily makes provision for the inclusion of the views of poor people. This relates to a fundamental question as to whose research agenda is at stake. Theoretically, it is possible that this service provider could dominate the process of developing a research agenda to such an extent that the research becomes socially irrelevant. Considering non-research-related CS, this might have the implication that pre-determined work-plans could dominate the proceedings, rather than work-

plans developed in a context of community consultation. This aspect is extremely relevant in the Free State, where the NGO environment is virtually undeveloped. A second related aspect concerns the possible impact of critical research which questions service-provider actions and programmes. Of course, any problems in this regard would have the potential to terminate the contract, if the service providers did not have a history of self-reflection.

6. Concluding comments

CS, as it is practised at the UFS, has the potential to transform the UFS into a social implementation institution which requires more and more resources, leaving it open to major criticism, as it is not always possible to address the identified needs. To some degree, the UFS has taken over explicit service provider functions,[5] but since 2005, has striven to include active service sector providers and end-beneficiary communities. Although there may sometimes be good reasons for doing precisely this, we are of the opinion that it is not viable in the long term. The approach of our research partnerships addresses the developmental opportunities and constraints of communities; but the responsibility of implementation lies with the various public institutions. University research expertise is used to address developmental "needs" in conjunction with the implementation timeframes and budgetary provisions of public sector institutions (or alternatively, NGOs or CBOs). This could also be applicable to the teaching and learning component of CS. We have argued that this approach has various advantages, as it allows the university to focus single-mindedly on its core business of teaching and research, but in a way which benefits the community and service-providers, and in itself becomes the third pillar of university core business. We are of the opinion that our framework provides a basic approach for other academic departments to engage in partnerships such as these, without major

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5   Besides the initial funds from the Kellogg Foundation during the establishment years of a service site such as MUCPP, the UFS has contributed more than 90% of the capital and running costs of this CS initiative. The UFS' financial contributions were of such a nature that the people responsible for managing the MUCPP acknowledged the fact that this practice is not viable in the future, irrespective of the fact that the other (community and service sector) partners also contributed substantially to the roll-out of certain CS programmes.

financial resources being required. Although we are fairly critical of interventions in which the university directly plays the major role, we do not contend that there is no place for these interventions. Rather, universities should reconsider their dominant role in this regard. According to Erasmus & Jaftha (2005) the UFS regards collaborative, co-operative partnerships, based on mutual understanding and clear agreements as *sine qua non* for CSL and CSR programmes. CSR should always take a "partnerships or perish" approach as its point of departure.

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