



Gateways: Expanding knowledge through broader participation

PHIL NYDEN, PAUL ASHTON, JULIE DAVIS, MARILYN KROGH, REUBEN MILLER,
PAULINE O'LOUGHLIN AND DAVID VAN ZYTVELD

This new journal, *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, responds to a growing global movement of university-collaborative research initiatives. It also strives to fill a gap created by the sparse number of journals which publish outcomes of community-engaged research and work concerning community engagement. We seek articles based on research that is the result of actively engaged research-practitioner collaborative projects, has the potential for informing community-based activities or develops understanding of community engagement. Combining different knowledge bases that have traditionally been separated into academic and non-academic worlds can dramatically increase information flowing to scholars, community leaders and activists seeking to improve the quality of life in local communities around the world. We also wish to encourage work that contributes to the scholarship of engagement.

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Gateways is the product of a series of discussions among faculty, staff, students and community partners involved in university-community collaborative research at the Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University Chicago (CURL)¹ and the Shopfront² at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). CURL and Shopfront represent a new generation of university-based research centers focusing on breaking down barriers between university and community in both the shaping and completion of research. These two centers work collaboratively with a broad range of community partners in developing and completing research projects. Partners have included informal neighborhood groups, community organizations, citywide advocacy coalitions, local government, regional policy making bodies and national coalitions. Over the past ten years, in the course of a variety of visits to each other's center, as well as participation in a number of seminars and discussions, we recognized the need to create this new international journal that highlights community-engaged work throughout the world.

It may seem counterintuitive that two research centers anchored in studying local issues with local community groups would think that there is a need for an *international* journal on community research and engagement. However, just as our centers have been challenging the notion that the only rigorous research is research completed inside universities and defined solely by disciplinary-determined priorities, we have also challenged the notion that community-based research is parochial. Community-based research can be a basic building block of regional, national and international research. Rejecting the view that international policy institutes are the only networks capable of framing and completing comparative international research, we strongly recognize that grassroots-anchored research can provide valuable ground work that produce additional democratic forms of global knowledge shaped by researchers and community members alike.

In past decades, the expenses of funding and coordinating international research favored large government and foundation-supported institutional research operations such as the World Bank, the World Health Organization or the Council on Foreign Relations.

¹ Center for Urban Research and Learning at www.luc.edu/curl

² UTS Shopfront at www.shopfront.uts.edu.au

While these organizations have certainly contributed to our understanding of some global issues, they have sometimes left out local voices or have not always been sensitive to emerging issues in local communities. However, the new and much more accessible modes of communication that we now have available – from the internet and e-mail to faxes and international phone access – have extraordinary promise to democratize the research process and pull together more local voices (Nyden et al. 1997).

At the same time, there has been a flood of new grassroots social change and policy organizations worldwide. In *Blessed unrest* environmentalist Paul Hawken points to a massive growth in grassroots organizations around the world that are having an impact on local practices and increasingly influencing global policy (Hawken 2007). A similar expansion in grassroots organizations can be seen in other advocacy areas. As a free e-journal available to everyone, *Gateways* will take advantage of increased access to communication in sharing research results and in stimulating interaction among community-based researchers and community partners worldwide. We are fortunate to have the generous support of the UTSePress, based at the University of Technology, Sydney's Library which uses the Open Journal System (OJS). OJS is a free journal management and publishing system, developed by the Public Knowledge Project, which seeks to improve and expand access to research.

The term 'research' is used here more broadly than in most academic journals (see for example Williamson & DeSouza 2007). It can be research based on questions generated within an academic discipline or it can be a research based on a collaboration among academic researchers, community leaders, policy makers or other local activists. It can be original research or it can be 'translational' research. Although original research has long been favored in academic journals, a research-outcomes communication crisis has emerged in many of our countries. Much of the knowledge produced in the academic world does not find its way out of specialized journals and into the hands of local communities or community-serving organizations. For example, in the case of basic biological research in the USA, it can take more than fifteen years for results of 'bench research' to get into the hands of health practitioners. This disconnect dramatically slows down our ability to improve the quality of lives of millions of people worldwide every year. In the

USA, the National Institutes of Health has actually created new 'translational research' units and initiatives to address this problem (Zerhouni 2005). The continuing effects of economic rationalism, through governmental exercises such as the Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) and the British Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), have also made pressing the need to provide refereed outlets for community-based research and work on community engagement.

By providing a publication outlet for engaged research outcomes, *Gateways* also hopes to encourage more collaborative research-practitioner/activist research activities as well. We seek articles based on cooperative research approaches in conceptualizing, designing, completing and communicating research. Universities and university-based researchers sometimes behave as if they have the corner on the knowledge market. Local communities and residents are mere respondents in these research endeavors. However, this approach to research has the potential to produce less rigorous research with only a partial view of the social, political and cultural world around us. Without including the knowledge and perspectives of people engaged on a day-to-day basis in local communities, local workplaces and locally-anchored organizations, we can blind ourselves to emerging critical issues. More importantly, we can overlook the kernels of solutions that are already in place in local communities that successfully address problems facing communities, regions or nations. With more systematic research, such emerging solutions can be better understood and potentially grown to a larger scale of impact.

In essence *Gateways* seeks to add chairs at a global research table. For years academics very successfully have used a model of informal discussions around the 'research table' to develop, guide and disseminate research results with colleagues in their respective fields. In a typical academic department, lunchtime conversations about the best methodology to use for a given project or an informal afternoon seminar where a research idea is floated with colleagues are used to strengthen the quality of research and draw on the knowledge of others in the department. Discipline-based scholarly meetings do the same thing on a national scale. We would like this journal to be a vehicle for expanding that research table to include experienced community voices. This can only strengthen the quality of research since it taps into knowledge and experience often not easily accessed by academic-based researchers.

The expanded research table is also an effort to democratize knowledge production. As information is more and more the major currency in shaping policy in local as well as international forums, strengthening a grassroots voice can challenge knowledge inequalities in our societies. That, in turn, can challenge basic inequalities in the quality of life we see in all of our nations. Beginning in the 1970s, the science shop movement in Europe has effectively worked to do just this. For over three decades, university and non-university science shops have worked with community members in defining pressing research needs and completing solutions-oriented research. Research reports have addressed matters ranging from the measurement of the impact of industrial farm insecticides on local communities to the evaluation of new approaches to reduce domestic violence (European Commission 2003). This work is described in more detail elsewhere in this issue.

In keeping with our perspective in democratizing knowledge production, we are using a broadened definition for 'peer' in our peer-reviewed section of the journal. Non-governmental organization leaders, community activists, regional policy organization staff often have the credentials and/or experience to review research articles. Whether holding a PhD or having decades of experience, such non-academic peers may be as qualified or more qualified to judge the quality of articles submitted to this journal as are university-based researchers. Consequently, in addition to using academics, we will go outside the university walls to find qualified reviewers of *Gateways* articles. Recognizing that community activists, social service providers and policy makers among other non-academics do not necessarily see peer-reviewed articles as the only source of information, we also are including a non-peer-reviewed section to publish reports and comments of value to the broader engaged research community.

An added benefit of focusing on community-based research is that it tends to be interdisciplinary because issues important to those outside of academia do not necessary neatly fall into disciplinary silos. Thus, we expect *Gateways* articles not only to transcend university-community, researcher-practitioner and scholar-activist boundaries, but also to bridge disciplinary boundaries. Much of the creativity in research and in policy innovation takes place at the *boundaries* in our society. Such work pushes us outside familiar

worlds and forces us to take into consideration different perspectives, different sets of knowledge, and different experiences. We expect the quality of *Gateways* articles to be enhanced by this combination of different knowledge bases and tensions among different participants in the research enterprise.

There are a number of national and international networks that promote engaged research. The European-based LivingKnowledge network is such an example.³ Growing out of over thirty years of science shop experience and capitalizing on recent support from the European Union, this network has supported bi-annual international conferences of scholars and activists and has created mentoring networks to develop new science shops in other European countries and cities. The Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC)⁴ program of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development functioned to facilitate growth in university-community partnerships for a number of years. Although COPC has not been funded in recent years, there are other efforts in the US to bring together university-community research centers and informal groups of researchers and community partners.⁴ Within the public health field, the Community Campus Partnership for Health (CCPH)⁵ has been among the most effective networks in the USA. The Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA)⁶ has worked to promote coordinated research projects in that country (Temple, Story & Delaforce 2005). In Canada the biannual Community-University Exposition has served to bring together community-based researchers and community activists to share information and forge new connections (Clover & McGregor 2008). Participatory action research networks in Latin America have regularly held conferences and seminars to maintain links among community-based projects in multiple countries.

Gateways holds the promise of being a valuable tool in promoting and reporting on grassroots research initiatives, community-university engagements and the scholarship of engagement.

³ The Living Knowledge Network at www.scienceshops.org

⁴ Community Outreach Partnerships Centers Program at www.hud.gov/progdesc/copc.cfm

⁵ Community-Campus Partnerships for Health at www.depts.washington.edu/ccph/

⁶ Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance at www.aucea.net.au

Ultimately it will be the authors and readers of *Gateways* who will bring this promise to life.

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