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Universiti Sains Malaysia and the Engagement with Sustainability and Civil Society within Globalization

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Synopsis

According to some commentators, the dynamics and forces of globalization have led to a radical rethink in respect to the role of the university in contemporary society. This rethink has taken several guises. For some it involves the radical privatization of universities. For others it involves the democratization of universities. Universities exist therefore in a globalized world that is increasingly interconnected and where space and time are increasingly narrowed and accelerated. Within these broad phenomena's neo-liberal globalization entails the increasing need to produce profit and the expansion of the logic of neo-liberal hegemony in education in the guise of reframing education as a service industry. The contradictions that characterize Malaysia's engagement with globalization at a national level manifest in debates over globalization and Higher Education. The most pertinent issue in regards to this relates to the problem of sustainability. In the context of neo-liberal globalization sustainability contradicts the fundamental essence of consumption. The idea of human beings as first and foremost consumers of things is a normative ideal at odds with the concept of a sustainable future. At a very basic philosophical level the concept and normative project of neo-liberal capitalism and globalization is tied to a concept of individual possessiveness and consumption that radically challenges cultures that do not share such possessively individualistic precepts. Marketization in Malaysian universities must be tempered by also connecting universities to civil society in such a way that tempers both extremes of the state and market and allows a more sustainable relationship between the social frameworks within which it operates.

The Context of Globalization

According to some commentators, the dynamics and forces of globalization have led to a radical rethink in respect to the role of the university in contemporary society. This rethink has taken several guises. For some it involves the radical privatization of universities. For others it involves resistance to privatization and a reestablishment of the universities connection to ideas of public service, public good and service. Universities exist therefore in a globalized world that is increasingly interconnected, yet at the same time this interconnection has not dissipated disagreement over the mission and role of universities. Rather globalization has drawn even more attention to the role of the university and the idea of the public good.

Contemporary neo-liberal globalization entails the increasing need to produce profit and the expansion of the logic of neo-liberal hegemony in education in the guise of reframing education as a service industry. Conventional views on modernization and globalization hold that there is a rapid process of convergence toward homogenous organization 'best practice' and 'optimal efficiency' within current globalization (Lazear 1999; Pagano 2007). According to this view those countries and institutions within countries that do not adapt and transform to fit this homogenous world view are doomed to irrelevance and failure. The literature on the problem of convergence in higher education is extensive and the debate with respect to analysing it is also extensive (Marginson 2004; Marginson 2007; Marginson and Wende 2007). The idea of competitive institutional isomorphism on a global scale where convergence on a

single model of higher education is produced through competition is compounded by theories which articulate the mimetic influences of convergence (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; Dolowitz and Marsh 2000).

The argument of those who desire to pursue a homogenous and market driven future for higher education is that neo-liberal convergence is the path to prosperity and efficiency. The gradual erosion of differences between national and regional varieties of capitalism and their respective ideological institutions (such as universities) and the concomitant growing hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism is for neo-liberal advocates a positive aspect of globalization (Levidow 2002). Convergence and homogenization of higher educational organizations and cultures is also seen by some as a net positive and point out the growing external and internal pressures on national capitalism to adapt and adopt neo-liberal norms (Streeck 1996) (Wilks 1996) (Dore 1998). Higher education in Malaysia faces these forces in the forms of isomorphism privatization and globalization (Mei 2002).

These isomorphic pressures are contextualized in higher education within an increasingly instrumental approach to educational outcomes and to social outcomes in general. In other words combined with convergent pressure to conform to corporatized and marketized ideas of what a university should do (within a rapidly accelerating and narrowing concept of time and space and increasing interconnection) is a reduction of complex cultural and social values and practices to objects of instrumental reason. Neo-liberal forms of globalization that privilege individualism and a consumption ethic rearticulate the mission of education to fit the narrow norms and interests of the neo-liberal order. Within such an order, educational reform is characterized by privatization, competition and a spread of business values through education. A corollary of this is an increasing instrumentalization of educational outcomes and objectives. This often expresses it self in a reduction of the aims of education to managerial and performance objectives utterly alien to the deeper ethical and normative issues that for many students and teachers ought to characterize the educational project. Henry Giroux captures the way neo-liberal globalization frames education in the contemporary era:

‘Market forces have altered radically the language we use in both representing and evaluating human behavior and action. One consequence is that civic discourse has given way to the language of commercialism, privatization, and deregulation. In addition, individual and social agency are defined largely through market-driven notions of individualism, competition, and consumption. As such, the individual choices we make as consumers become increasingly difficult to differentiate from the "collective choices we make as citizens."’

Giroux continues:

‘Similarly, as corporate culture extends even deeper into the basic institutions of civil and political society, there is a simultaneous diminishing of non-commodified public spheres-- those institutions engaged in dialogue, education, and learning--that address the relationship of the self to public life, social responsibility to the broader demands of citizenship, and provide a robust vehicle for public participation and democratic citizenship.’ (Giroux 2002)

In such conditions, the role of education as having more import than simply the creation of consumers, and the idea that educational institutions have a social responsibility that is more encompassing than simply serving the market is excluded from vision (Hirschman 1982; Tweedie, Riley et al. 1990; Bridges and McLaughlin 1994; Levin 2001; Stiglitz 2003). Convergence, acceleration of change, consumption orientation and instrumentalism characterize contemporary forms of globalization. Globalization in this neo-liberal framing of the term is deeply infused with the instrumental logic of neo-liberal ideology. The UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge captures the issue squarely:

‘The hegemony of neo-liberal ideology, grounded in the logic of the market, with privatization of the sphere of knowledge production as its advanced expression, has injected a perspective whereby current issues tend to be discussed largely in terms of managerial values and practices. In this setting, issues reduce to the economic aspect alone. They focus on the ‘end application’, on manpower training for employability and on wealth creation, spurred on by criteria of efficiency and by a market-driven rationale. Discussion couched in broader terms of scientific ends and purpose, of long-term development that can be sustained and of society’s broader progress, figures little.’ (UNESCO Forum on Higher Education 2003)

Such radical instrumentalization and privatization of social space and culture radically acts to reduce resistant cultural practices to the margins of the global order. Yet while neoliberal globalization seeks to exercise hegemonic influence at the global level, it is in fact tempered by local resistance and localised forms of rearticulation of globalization (Mittelman 2000). In other words processes of glocalization occur. These processes these practices are critical to grasp if we are to understand globalization not simply as neo-liberal hegemony but also as resistant glocalization. Ritzer for example argues, ‘although all nations are likely to be affected by the spread of capitalism and rationalization, they are likely to integrate both with local realities to produce distinctly glocal phenomena’ (Ritzer 2004; Manicas 2007).

Resistance to neo-liberal globalization can come from nation states that feel threatened or excluded by the processes of globalization. Resistance by advocates of a strong and central state see this as an antidote to the unaccountable power that the market exercises through neo-liberal globalization (Khor 2000). Non-government organizations and the broad associations of civil society are also often seen as resisting neo-liberal globalization (Seligman 1992; Gellner 1994; Hirst 1997; Pye 2001; Saravanamuttu 2001; Weiss 2006). Resistance however is often seen as quixotic or worse irrational. Edward Said captures the issue squarely:

‘The main goal of this dominant discourse is to fashion the merciless logic of corporate profit-making and political power into a normal state of affairs, “that is the way things are,” in the process rendering rational resistance to these notions into something altogether and practically unrealistic, irrational, and utopian.’ (Said 2002)

Neo liberal globalization is therefore ‘implosive rather than expansive: it connects powerful centers to subordinate peripheries, its mode of integration is fragmentary rather than total, it builds commonalities upon asymmetries’ (Coronil 2000). This distinctiveness of contemporary neo-liberal globalization and its millennial certainty and all encompassing nature expressed both as economic dominance but more powerfully as cultural dominance provides the

background for the contemporary problems of Malaysian development and educational growth. Malaysian Higher Education institutions now have to deal with a globalized world in which economies are interrelated, knowledge has become the driver of economic growth, ICT is now a defining form of social interaction, and the interaction between market, civil society the state and education is rapidly transforming.

Constant social change and environmental change is now central to social and national survival and the community's demands upon Higher Education are more articulate informed and engaged (Seddoh 2003). These global forces may provide opportunity for learning and cooperation, if understood and engaged with critically. In other words the processes of globalization and the realization that market rationality untempered by civic restraint and temperance is leading to significant social and cultural tensions and crises is spurring a new way forward for engaging the role of Higher Education.

Globalization and the sustainability of Malaysian Higher Education

The contradictions that characterize Malaysia's engagement with globalization at a national level manifest in debates over globalization and Higher Education. The most pertinent issue in regards to this relates to the problem of sustainability. In the context of neo-liberal globalization sustainability contradicts the fundamental essence of consumption. The idea of human beings as first and foremost consumers of things is a normative ideal at odds with the concept of a sustainable future. At a very basic philosophical level the concept and normative project of neo-liberal capitalism and globalization is tied to a concept of individual possessiveness and consumption that radically challenges cultures that do not share such possessively individualistic precepts.

The concept of sustainability challenges neo-liberal globalization in several critical ways. It challenges the market orientation and neo-liberal reductivism of human capacities and desires to simple economic calculations. It reasserts a common human interest above individual desire and consumption and reminds us of the importance and significance of what we do as harm or benefit to others. One of the most frequently cited definitions of sustainability comes from the United Nations. In its report of the World Commission on Environment and Development it provides a definition of sustainability as, "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"(Development 1987).

The idea that a university should concern it self with sustainability is deemed quaint. How then in such an ideological framework can universities act to sustain national values? How can universities act on their role as servants of the public good? How can universities engage with students and the broader society to educate and instil habits of sustainability, environmental responsibility and social ethics? How can universities engage values for the public good within globalization but in opposition to neo-liberal privatization?

Clearly within the framework of education an uncritical acceptance of the neo-liberal project precludes an engagement with a fuller idea of the educational mission of the university. If the role of a university is conceived of as having an interest in the public good then it follows that a reduction of the role of the university to mere market logic and the embodiment of possessive

individualistic values (Macpherson 1962; Macpherson 1987) is contrary to a university mission so conceived. Following on from this since ecological sustainability, as well as the sustainability of Malaysian culture and values are arguably central to a Malaysian universities mission then the exclusion of these values from Malaysian universities in an attempt to meet the needs of neo-liberal globalization is effectively a negation of the universities basic public role. Sustainability as an ethical project 'derives its normative content in a search for common ground among constituent traditions of civilizations' (Cox 1992). The common ground that animates sustainability as the search for justice and protection of our common heritage can be found among quite diverse civilizations. The desire to forge hope in the world, through temperance of consumerism and respect for diversity as key elements of justice are values, which exist in multiple civilizations. Sustainability in this sense represents an 'overlapping consensus' value system which draws upon a diversity of beliefs (Rawls 1996).

Legitimacy and Capacity

The issue of social exclusion first coined by, René Lenoir (Sen 2000) is a useful concept in explicating the way individuals, communities and entire cultures are either recognised or unrecognised by the explicit cultural assumptions of neo-liberalism. Amartya Sen develops the critique of exclusion to establish a theory of capability deprivation. Sen's insight and philosophical acuity provides a critical referent that connects the role of education to a critique of ideologies of exclusion and deprivation and provides a critical basis for an engagement with the social role education can play in helping sustain and support cultural dignity and individual growth (Sen 2000). Sustainability reminds us of the insight provided by theorists such as Sen in their commitment to capacity building and the way this is articulated within a commitment to the social good (Sen 1999). Sen's arguments mesh well with the desire of Malaysian policy makers to engage with and articulate a sustainable and socially equitable economic and cultural development. The important role that marginalized and excluded peoples and communities can play in reminding global elites of their 'better angels' should not be dismissed.

This project is fundamentally an educational effort and in the context of the contemporary world order, the educational role that peripheral societies, peoples and movements can have on the 'center' is of critical importance. The issue of 'voice' and inclusion is central to ensuring that universities engage with the needs and issues that affect the majority of humanity (such as environmental, social and cultural sustainability). Any inability of the university to perform its function as a provider and engager with the public good, acts to delegitimize the university within society. How then do we maintain the legitimacy and competitiveness and leadership of Malaysian public Higher Educational institutions in an increasingly challenged, globalized and fluid terrain? How do we build capacity and maintain legitimacy? Assailed from without by neo-liberal managerial and isomorphic pressures and from within by state sponsored decisions to open up the educational market place to private competition, state institutions face what Jurgen Habermas refers to as a legitimation crisis (Habermas 1989) (Habermas 1973).

The Need for Reform from Globalization to Civil Society

If marketization in Malaysian universities poses a threat to collective values and the idea of universities serving the public good then how can the overlapping consensual principle of sustainability be articulated in a situation where the legitimacy of public purpose and the institutions identified with it (through their identity with the state) is increasingly problematic?

Connecting to civil society provides one possible answer to this conundrum. Connecting universities to civil society in such a way that tempers both extremes of the state and market and allows a more sustainable relationship between the social frameworks within which universities operate. In other words civil society provides an alternative path to reengage the problem of legitimacy of public institutions in conditions of network society and globalization.

The project of sustainability and education for sustainable development (ESD) in the APEX strategy of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for example, connects down to civil society through USM's commitment to research in the local community. In the Malaysian context, the growing salience of civil society, associations, clubs and social movements is acting as a propellant for democratic reform and social legitimacy (Saravanamuttu 2001; Weiss and Hassan 2002; Weiss and Hassan 2002). In an ideological terrain where both the state and the market are viewed with suspicion by different constituencies, the legitimacy that derives from connectivity to the growing civil society in the Malaysian polity and the way this can reflexively inspire renewed confidence in the moral leadership of Malaysian universities needs theorization(Weiss 2006).

Part of this theorization lies in understanding the important social capital dimension to universities. Universities are places that rely on intricate relationships of social capital. Social capital refers to and describes the ways that people create and inculcate social networks, interactions and social relationships. These social relationships can be for the common good and inclusive of diversity or conversely exclusivist and in opposition to democratic norms and the common good(Norton and Centre for Independent Studies (Australia) 1997; Dekker and Uslaner 2001; Lemmel 2001; Veenstra 2003; Bouma, Soest et al. 2006). The quality of the social capital and relationships between the university and the broader society helps cement the trust and position of a university in the community. Different forms of social capital can be used to hinder and stymie individual development or empower it (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Woolcock 1998; Portes 2000).

The Malaysian example of USM as an educational institution is a salient one since it involves intricate and dynamic associations (forms of social capital) with both the local and global community of which it is a part. Deepening USM's connection and engagement with civil society and connecting USM more intrinsically to the public good (not as state provision and direction nor as market driven individualism) provides both a way to frame autonomy as neither beholden to the state or the market (as currently theorized) and by inference not beholden to those constituencies that are seen to dominate these arenas. USM's civil society engagement is a 'blue ocean' moment, but it is a lot more as well. It rearticulates the moral legitimacy and relevance of USM in the current globalized world.

The aim of USM in engaging civil society and refreshing and renewing the necessary social capital to effectively do this is based upon a clear understanding of the changing role and nature of how universities function in an increasingly globalised and 'mobilized' society. The increasing 'mobility' of society and the declining power of nation states entails a rethink about how universities are legitimized in an environment where 'legitimacy' is being challenged by increasingly mobile identities and movements. Civil society as a mediator between the state

and the market in this sense becomes more critically relevant for universities in their search for social legitimacy and relevance.

Social structures and how universities interact with society influence and reinforce certain types of social interactions and effect how universities are perceived. The values and culture of particular structures/practices trickles down to the practices of participants. Engagement with civil society is needed in the complex mix of state, market and university to provide balance, grounding and legitimacy to the debate over university reform (Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz 2002; Cooper 2006; Kadiman 2006). The engagement of USM in civil society legitimizes it within its own society and forges links globally to broader constituencies. Engagement with civil society (as argued above) also challenges the one sided emphasis on the market found in some recent reform. Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin points out in a critique of the marginalisation of values through marketization that:

‘Consequently in a purely market driven economy, the system of education which emphasizes ethics and values will inadvertently be sidelined and there may be marginalization of the intangibles such as beliefs, spirituality, happiness, tolerance, mutual respect, sharing, caring, loving, *et cetera*. Possible consequences are a lack of social sensitivity and communal engagement, with a lackadaisical attitude to social responsibility and community problems.’

‘This is unfortunate because universities must continue to push the frontiers of understanding by producing knowledge for its enlightenment and empowering effects rather than just for its utilitarian role in the culture of enterprise. Whilst knowledge is an essential defining element of scientific and material progress, it is also critical for the preservation of values such as responsibility, right and wrong, good and evil, traditions, customs and culture which collectively give us our identity or *national self knowledge* (Shahabudin 2007)’.

Civil Society and Network Fluidity

According to Urry, ‘all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an ‘island’ (Sheller and Urry 2006). Urry’s work on ‘mobile’ sociology, ‘paradigm attempts to account for not only the quickening of liquidity within some realms but also the concomitant patterns of concentration that create zones of connectivity, centrality, and empowerment in some cases, and of disconnection, social exclusion, and inaudibility in other cases’ (Sheller and Urry 2006). USM’s strategic shift and engagement with civil society and the overlapping consensual idea of sustainability is in part based upon a recognition of the need to engage how globalization is shifting and challenging our ‘sedentary’ ideas of what an institution does and where it draws its legitimacy while at the same time not falling into the trap of uncritically celebrating certain post-modern idealizations of ‘fluidity’ and ‘liquidity’ which fail to account for asymmetric power inequality.

In this sense the USM strategy with respect to civil society and sustainability is tied to a very real understanding of the shifting nature of ‘liquid modernity’ (Sheller and Urry 2006) while at the same time recognising the continuance of, ‘attachments and reterritorialisations’ (Sheller and Urry 2006) which also characterise our contemporary problematic. The USM engagement with civil society is hence an engagement with reconceptualising universities within

contemporary globalization, as both in need of reengaging issues of legitimacy and place but at the same time recognising the constraints and inequalities that also characterise the higher educational environment. The legitimacy or otherwise of forms of social interaction depends in large measure on the value given differing forms of social practice and the legitimacy accorded to those institutions and associations with which we engage and enact. This issue connects back to the structure and nature of institutional practices within a university and the way universities connect to society and from where they draw their legitimacy.

Trust

One of the critical benefits of developing social capital and engaging with civil society with the aim of advocating sustainability for a university is the generation of trust. What kinds of trust and trust conducive, activities are positive to the public good? Why do people trust or mistrust universities? In this example the bonds of trust between members of the university and between the university and the broader society is of particular importance. What types of social capital generate outcomes that serve the public good? How does a university establish trust between itself and society in a situation of increased mobility and challenges to the normative legitimacy of the state? How does a university avoid being tainted by neo-liberal values that in many people generate cynicism? Interestingly educational literature can provide us with some insight into these issues (Kaur 2001; Mustapha 2001; Neo 2002; Kim 2003; Wong 2003; Yap 2004; Ismail 2005; Yen, Bakar et al. 2005; Brown 2007; Campbell 2007).

While networks and trust generate social solidarity and inclusion and knit communities together, they can also have negative consequences. There is a significant gap in the contemporary literature between sophisticated conceptualizations of social capital and trust and empirical application and understanding of how trust works in associations and how this translates to broader virtues in society (Coleman 1988; Teachman, Paasch et al. 1997; Dekker and Uslaner 2001; Lemmel 2001; Veenstra 2003). Trust is the main constitutive and regulative component of social capital. The habits of trust formed in positive associations, the habits of the heart are central to an effective and vibrant institution. Trust then is the glue that holds society/institutions together. Trust in other words is the key social cement that ensures the non-arrival of the Hobbsian world, nasty brutish and short. The non-existence of trust in other words would lead to an untenable social world and untenable institutions. Adam Seligman's argument regarding trust is salient on this point.

The problem of trust in modern societies becomes more important becomes more rather than less important for stability and progress (Seligman 1992; Seligman 2000). Trust is the 'cement' of community as John Elster argues. The problems of the 'mobile society' do not diminish the need for universities to engage the issue of trust, rather they accentuate it. Thus how a university rearticulates its legitimacy through reconnecting with civil society is a critical component of how it legitimizes itself in current globalization. The extent to which a university (USM) can engender legitimacy and belief for the sincerity of its sustainability approach will rely on the extent of trust it has from the community. In short USM's 'blue ocean' engagement with civil society is as much trust building as capacity building (USM 2008).

Recognition of the way USM repositions itself with regards to creatively reconstituting social capital and civic engagement is of critical import. Irrespective of the theoretical complexity, Kymlicka's observations regarding the importance of trust remain pertinent. Trust along with tolerance and solidarity are the key moral values necessary for a functioning society. As Kymlicka, argues, trust *is a critical component of a functioning democracy* (Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Beiner 1995). For USM trust between staff and students and between the university and the broader society is critical to the success of USM as an educational leadership institution. In this sense the way social capital is developed and the way USM is legitimized within Malaysian society is critical. Hence engaging civil society and articulating sustainability are reflexive moments for a strategy aimed at reestablishing trust and leadership for USM and Malaysian public institutions in general.

Deepening Malaysian universities connection and engagement with civil society and connecting them more intrinsically to the public good (not as state provision and direction nor as market driven individualism) provides a way to frame autonomy (and legitimacy) as neither beholden to the state or the market. Forms of social capital underpin the ability of Malaysian universities to successfully reform pedagogically and structurally and these factors are reflexive to each other. A failure to include civil society in the discussion of university functioning will lead to unintended consequences both in the legitimacy of the university in Malaysian society and in the legitimacy of forms of pedagogy necessary for the knowledge society.

The USM model takes seriously the important role universities play in social development and civic engagement. USM's pursuit of the common good and betterment of Malaysian society is a central plank in its educational approach. This approach is not simply expressed in homilies to improvement. Rather it is the expression of USM's essential philosophy. The clustering of Social Science and Humanities under the rubric 'social transformation' provides us with an insight into the USM approach. The recognition that global problems are interrelated and that change needs to be aimed at changing 'the system of our society' is a clear insight into the fundamentally political and social mission of a university. The recognition that all 'sectors of the society consult and actively participate in decisions relating to sustainable development' and that the USM mission in part is 'extending its reach to the local community' (2008) is a good example of the civic role USM aims to play.

Caught between external (global) and internal (state driven) pressures to corporatize and marketize as well as the shift towards a global network society, where interconnected and interactive and shifting relationships are increasingly challenging statist and static forms of social organization, USM's APEX strategy is an excellent example of trying to regain the momentum and initiative in reinvigorating the idea of a universities moral mission with global responsibility and local engagement. USM's approach to establishing ethical legitimacy and public purpose in the current environment occurs by reflexively modernizing its institutional aims and reasserting its moral vision (USM 2008).

In a sense the role of USM is to rearticulate legitimacy for the Malaysian public sector in conditions where legitimacy can no longer be assumed simply from its location or generation from state ownership and power. Such rearticulation entails a reflexive engagement with

globalization and an engagement with civil society and a renewed commitment to the public good through sustainability. There is global and local support for a more ethically informed and sustainable vision for Malaysian education (overlapping consensus). Developing the forms of social capital (trust and cooperation) and human capital (skills of dialogue and creativity) necessary in complex societies that need both innovation and cooperation is the job of universities (Coleman 1988). Yet the nature of universities and how they represent themselves and engage with the broader social world has an impact on the legitimation of certain values and social practices (Habermas 1989; Somers 1995; Ku 2000; Honig 2002). In short, the way USM interacts with and draws legitimacy from civil society adds to its legitimacy in the eyes of Malaysians and others in significant ways.

Locally support for sustainability as a regulative and constitutive principle of Higher Education has most recently been pronounced in the granting of APEX status to USM. Globally the work that is necessary for Malaysian educational reform meshes with the approaches of the United Nations in establishing and propagating education for all. The preamble of the Dakar declaration, which provides a good segue into the kinds of values that ought to inform education, is a corrective to neo-liberal overemphasis on the market and consumption.

‘Education is a fundamental human right of all people – of value in and of itself, for improving the quality of life, and as an essential part of social and human development. The provision of basic education, whether it be formally or non-formally delivered, is a core responsibility of the state with active and genuine collaboration of parents, communities, and civil society. All people, especially those most disadvantaged and excluded, must be guaranteed access to a basic education of decent quality’ (UNESCO 2000).

The USM Response

USM’s strategic orientation is part of a broader shift. Malaysian political and social change is in many respects finding its deepest expression in civil society and community oriented action (Weiss and Hassan 2002; Weiss and Hassan 2002). USM is also engaging ‘the emergence of a kind of transnational civil society undergirded by nongovernmental organizations’ (Brown, Khagram et al. 2000) as well as broader state based but more autonomous institutions such as universities (Florini 2000). This strategy is part of an effort to make real the promise of localised responsibility. However, its meaning is deeper than that. By linking to local communities and NGO’s USM increases its legitimacy with civil society and makes its research and scholarship relevant to Malaysian society in ways more lived and practically useful. The USM strategy has important implications for pedagogy. The pedagogical approach at USM ties together an engagement with civil society and change and at the same time recognises that educational growth requires direction and moral value. Creativity must be tempered by civic responsibility (Neethling 2002; Peters 2009). Innovation is produced through a commitment to respectful social interaction and the articulation of human values, not despite them. This combination of civic and social responsibility, cultural respect and cognitive growth is the key stone of USM’s educational approach.

Given that USM aims to engage local and global civil society in the project of sustainability what then are some of the critical areas of differentiation that can characterise the USM

approach to globalised competition, and sustainability? USM's approach to sustainability and ensuring competitive advantage lies in its reformulation of the role of a university in civil society as well as recognising USM's important contribution that can be made to diverse public spheres within global modernity. If USM is truly to engage with and develop a competitive higher education strategy for sustainability in keeping with the revised approach to the market outlined in the Blue Ocean strategy (Ismail 2008; Razak 2009) then a part of the realignment relies on redefining where its market lies. In other words opening up new markets for research and learning requires USM to reformulate who their 'customers' are (thus civil society and sustainability are as much market strategies as moral commitments). In other words, while USM's strategy is part moral strategy aimed at engaging the public good it is also market strategy aimed at reworking USM's market direction towards the Blue Ocean of untapped community needs.

The essential strategy is captured by its commitment to 'non-customers'. How do universities such as USM reach out to 'powerful commonalities in what buyers value' and reach the non-customers? (Kim and Mauborgne 2005) The USM strategy is deceptively simple. We must look forward to where the key demands and untapped opportunities lie for universities in the new millennium. One significant market (as opposed to moral or democratic) opening for USM therefore lies in encouraging and expanding its involvement in local and global civil society. Such engagement offers significant research opportunities (Walzer 1995; Pye 2001; Saravanamuttu 2001; Weiss 2006). Grasping the correlation between the moral agenda and how USM is reworking its competitive position is critical to understanding the USM strategy. Engaging with civil society and reworking our understandings of who, a university engages with and how, it does this is central not simply to the ethical program of USM but also to its efforts at reengaging new markets and opportunities.

The engagement with people led, local solutions to global problems and an ethical commitment to ameliorating the disadvantage of the bottom billions involves quintessentially a renewed involvement with civil society. Such involvement and commitment to engaging research in solving real and prescient problems that characterise social and environmental degradation and injustice entails USM engaging with local agendas in the service of addressing global issues. The importance of public awareness and support for sustainability necessitates engaging with and helping to solve the problems that are experienced by the public in a direct and verifiable way.

The USM model takes seriously the important role universities play in social development and civic engagement. This role for USM is expressed in several forms. USM's pursuit of the common good and betterment of Malaysian society is a central plank in its educational approach. This approach is not simply expressed in homilies to improvement. Rather it is the expression of USM's essential philosophy. The clustering of Social Science and Humanities under the rubric 'social transformation' for example, provides us with an insight into the USM approach. The recognition that global problems are interrelated and that change needs to be aimed at changing 'the system of our society' is a clear insight into the fundamentally political and social mission of a university. The recognition that all 'sectors of the society consult and actively participate in decisions relating to sustainable development' and that the USM mission

in part is ‘extending its reach to the local community’(2008) is a good example of the civic role USM aims to play. This role finds solid and deep expression in the RCE program of USM:

‘RCE is a network of existing formal, non-formal and informal education organisations aiming to deliver education for sustainable development (ESD) to a regional/local community. All RCEs have a common framework aspiring to achieve the goals of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014), by translating the global agenda such as the Millennium Development Goals, Climate Change and Education for All into the context of the local/regional/global community in which they operate.’(2008)

The specific engagement of USM with the broader society (civil society) not only links USM with the broader community, the RCE platform links USM to community activists NGO’s and others in a strong bond with broader civil society. This link to NGO’s connects USM through civil society to a broader public sphere that is international and global as well as local. This connection is significant. USM’s efforts in this direction are impressive, and find expression in citizenship projects and environmental projects in the broader Penang community. This strategy should be seen as part of an effort to make real the promise of localised responsibility. However, its meaning is deeper than that. By linking to local communities and NGO’s USM increases its legitimacy with civil society and makes its research and scholarship relevant to Malaysian society in ways more lived and practical than abstract arguments to compete. The following quote captures the essence of the project:

‘in order to navigate USM toward sustainability-led education, the university will adopt a stance that conducts science for humanity which in essence fuses science and technology with the arts and humanity. The focus will now be on research outcomes that will enhance sustainability that includes reducing inequity and increasing availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of our innovations to those who need them most – the people in the bottom billion. In addressing local problems, USM will in essence also provide solutions to global problems.’(2008)

Such a strategy rebuilds USM’s intervention with globalization from the bottom up. In other words rather than accepting the tenets of globalization top down USM’s involvement in local civil society acts as an example of how a global institutions such as a university can still engage contemporary problems as a good local and global citizen. The example of USM in this regard acts to maintain and extend legitimacy of the university in the local context and at the same time provide examples that have relevance globally. In this sense, USM’s engagement with civil society and the public good maintains a proper balance in a world largely dominated by neo liberal discourse. For example, the nurturing of citizen scholars clearly articulates the connection between knowledge, civic duty and the broader aims of the common good. Interestingly the aim to also produce intellectual entrepreneurs(2008) seeks to fuse both the need for competitiveness and innovation as well as civic responsibility and justice.

Conclusion

Neo-liberal globalization constructs our identities as consumers(Gold, Rhodes et al. 2001). A corollary of critically opening up the possibilities of globalization while distancing ourselves from the negative consequences of consumer culture is also a critical issue for universities. The philosophy of sustainability provides us with a critical touchstone in reformulating and engaging with how we can pursue the public good as well as advance national interests within a framework of universal globalization. The opportunities of universities working with civil society and diverse engaged global associations and non-governmental organizations is another opportunity that globalization offers us. Yet again, this opportunity can only be fully developed within a fuller and more sustainable ethical basis than consumption ethics and individualism. This ethical basis can be found in engaging the issue of sustainability.

The disentangling of the possibilities of universities and what they can successfully achieve in the current global world is also dependent upon breaking free from the Washington consensus and the power of the American cultural imaginary over the cultural and intellectual consciousness of student's teachers and administrators. Ultimately, a university engagement with globalization based upon sustainability as its core principle and understanding empowerment of students and the society of which it is a part as derived from a philosophy of inclusion, and capacity building. For both individuals and diverse communities this is the way that a university can globalize on the basis of shared humanity and cultural dignity.

An educational project that engages the capabilities of students, teachers and the community of which it is a part within a framework of sustainability is the path forward to a new ocean of possibility not limited by the narrow promises of consumerism or the shallow goals of pure individualism. A sustainable university is in this sense one that is in keeping with the full development of human freedom tempered by the recognition that true freedom cannot properly exist without social justice environmental protection and mutual respect and recognition(Fraser 1992). Just as Malaysia has forged its own distinct economic response to the problems of globalization, Malaysian educational institutions also need to forge their 'Malaysian' response to global change the problems of education in the new world. Dzulkifli Abdul Razak captures the essence of this aim in the following:

'A university, however, is not an industry as such where students are products and education a commodity to be bought and sold. A university worthy of its name should be engaged in protecting and defending as well as promoting humanity to higher ideals(Razak 2006) .'

Seen from a vantage point of cultural and ethical understanding USM's commitment to sustainability and values of helping each other and not simply advancing personal interests is both a solid reassertion of Malaysian values and also a solid assertion of common values which extend beyond Malaysia. Sustainable education is based on ensuring that the capacities of students and the broader society are reengaged and empowered through connecting education to the needs and aspirations of civil society and moving away from neo-liberal ideas of education as a practice of consumption towards, sustainable values of advancing human dignity.

Current Malaysian higher educational reform is seeking to enable Malaysian higher educational institutions to compete and engage globalization, the knowledge economy and knowledge society in ways that maintain national competitiveness as well as cultural integrity and dignity(2001; ISIS 2002; Hopkins 2005; Malaysia 2006; Bank 2007; Education 2007). Such an approach to higher education articulated by USM in its commitment to a Malaysian and sustainable path is the critical distinction between this ‘Malaysian’ way and the dominant neo-liberal agenda. This approach (as I argue above) finds philosophical support in the arguments of philosophers such as Amartya Sen who recognize the culturally specific way that social goods must be articulated and the centrality of capacity building and recognition as a critical component of development in a sustainable and socially just fashion(Sen 1977; Sen 1999; Sen 2000). The APEX strategy of USM and its commitment to sustainability and engagement with civil society is a working example of this kind of reform.

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