The Global Exchange approach to knowledge-exchange

There is no one model of knowledge exchange. The Global Exchange is experimenting with different approaches to match the needs of academic and non-academic participants - from school students to senior policy makers - who are interested, in their differing capacities, in migration and integration issues. This paper sets out the approach that the Global Exchange is taking, what we mean by knowledge exchange and why we are doing it as well as some challenges that it raises.

There are five underlying principles which guide our contribution:

1. *Knowledge*: We recognise that researchers do not have a monopoly on knowledge, nor do policy makers or practitioners. Rather, we value our differing and complementary contributions to the exchange process and its outcomes.
2. *Exchange*: Knowledge exchange is not a one-way process of dissemination but rather a rich-mix of mutual learning from each other.
3. *Participation*: Knowledge-exchange is most rewarding when the questions addressed are those to which all participants want answers, necessitating their participation at the planning stage; and likewise when they are not an audience but active participants in the knowledge-exchange process.
4. *Reflection:* As brokers of knowledge-exchange, we have to find a path which addresses the questions policy makers and practitioners are facing, while challenging assumptions on which they are based.
5. *Contribution to scholarship*: We are not only interested in 'doing' knowledge-exchange but in contributing to the growing body of scholarship on its theory and practice.

What is knowledge-exchange?

'Knowledge' can embrace an authoritative grasp of facts but also a theoretical and practical understanding gained through experience and education. Socially embedded and shaped by its cultural context, facts do not exist in a vacuum (Strassheim & Kettunen 2014). Never entirely value-neutral, often characterised by uncertainty or open to interpretation, it cannot simply be packaged and transferred but rather drawn together from authoritative sources, discussed and understood.
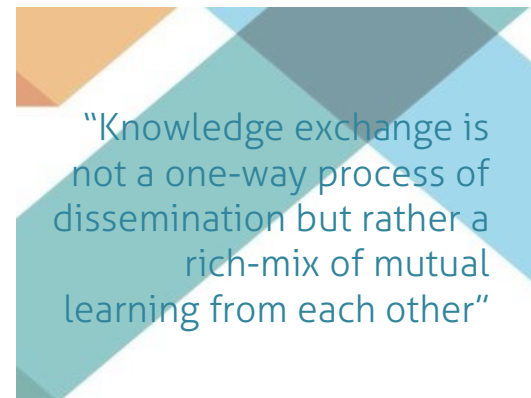
We know that 'knowledge, no matter how rigorously produced, rarely provides unequivocal answers as to what action to take' (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016: 24); and that epistemic uncertainty (where

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even experts do not always agree on 'the facts') can be a problem for potential research users. While knowledge gleaned from research may prove influential in technocratic decisions (as in how many border staff to deploy at the airport on a Sunday evening), it can prove less so in relation to decisions that involve making value judgements (Boswell 2009) (as in whether to give newly arrive refugees or long term local residents priority in relation to scarce social housing). As the Danish Prime Minister was quoted as saying in 2001, 'Experts can be useful in submitting factual knowledge. But when we have to make personal choices we are all experts' (Jørgensen 2011:94).

In contrast to the uni-directional process of dissemination or 'knowledge transfer', knowledge-exchange is 'a dynamic and fluid process which incorporates distinct forms of knowledge from multiple sources' (Ward et al 2012: 297). Most thought was initially given to ways of translating research-based knowledge into policy and practice, in fields such as health care and criminal justice, and remains important to ensure that policy is evidence-based. Now there is greater recognition of the reciprocal value *to* research of practitioner knowledge, and of peer to peer learning among those whose expertise comes not from research but from engagement in policy and its implementation. Nevertheless, there has been greater focus in the literature on understanding the process of translating research into practice – the barriers and enablers in that process – than on understanding the interactive knowledge exchange and problem-solving processes that can in practice take place (Coleman 1991; Ward et al 2012:298).

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Knowledge-exchange can be conceptualised as a long term, iterative, process through multiple interactions over time; as when researchers are embedded in institutions (such as government departments) to facilitate that process or as a single or series of engagements for a more intense process of exchange. In either case researchers may play the role of 'knowledge-brokers': assisting in access to information, facilitating discussion, and building capacity to use and exchange knowledge. Knowledge-exchange is also of course a normal part of working life, complemented by the targeted knowledge-exchange interventions in which we and others are engaged.

Knowledge exchange, so defined, is quite different from less interactive or structured forms of engagement between academics and those outside academia such as attending conferences, giving invited lectures, sitting on advisory boards and participating in networks. They are nevertheless included within broad definitions of knowledge-exchange and overviews of academics' external engagements (Bullock and Hughes 2016).

Why do it?

In recent years there has been a growing expectation, in the UK as elsewhere in Europe, that academic research will have an impact outside of the academy. Considerable debate on the meaning of 'impact' culminated in the UK research councils defining economic and social impacts as:

'The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy. Economic and societal impacts embrace all the extremely diverse ways in which research-related knowledge and skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations by:
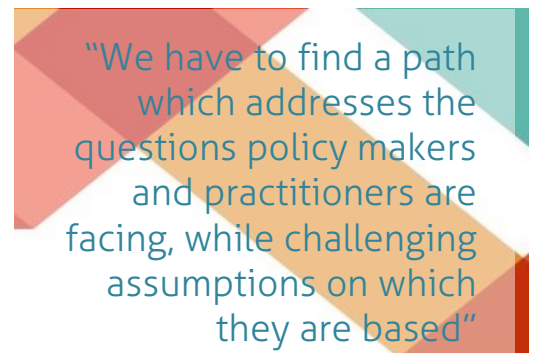
- fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom,

- increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy,

- enhancing quality of life, health and creative output.

(http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/impacts/).

Demonstrating impact is now one of the criteria on which the funding of university departments is based. Knowledge exchange, involving engagement with potential research users rather than mere dissemination, is identified as one of the ways in which that impact can be achieved. Yet there are broader reasons why engaging in such exchanges have long been important to social scientists: as a contribution to strengthening the evidence base of public policy; and a means to learn from those with differing kinds of expertise (Collins 2014). Knowledge exchange has the potential to improve research methods and outcomes, as well as the world in which it is has impact.

Learning from research

The small but growing body of research on the knowledge-exchange process has informed our programme. Crucially, for instance, knowledge-exchange has been found to contribute not only to problem-solving but to a refined understanding or definition of the problem itself (and hence choice of appropriate solutions). This means that an opportunity to revise perceptions of the problem needs to be built into the knowledge-exchange process, not pre-determined at the outset. Research has also shown that knowledge is not only applied instrumentally to change the current or proposed approach. It is also used to endorse or challenge a policy or practice, or to strengthen the authority of the knowledge user (Boswell 2009; Ward et al 2012: 299-302). Neither may have been the intention of the researcher. This has implications for the role of the academic knowledge-broker: what are the outcomes to which the knowledge-exchange process will in practice contribute?

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Contextual factors relating to individuals and their institutions may constrain or enable knowledge-exchange, whether related to motivations or capacity to utilise knowledge, or to the fact that some ideas are more acceptable or politically feasible than others. There are also factors related to the efficacy (or not) of the knowledge-exchange process itself: the accessibility of the material to a non-academic audience, for instance, and its relevance and timeliness for participants' agendas (Coleman 1991; Cherney et al 2015).

Co-production

While knowledge-exchange was a development from the earlier, linear process of knowledge-transfer, 'co-production' is a further development on that trajectory: collaboration between academic researchers and non-academic partners to generate knowledge and deliver change together. The premise is that 'closer and better working between academics and non-academics – the co-production of knowledge – can simultaneously yield greater academic insight and public benefit' (Campbell

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and Vanderhoven 2016: 6). Whereas in earlier models research is seen as separate from and prior to the exchange, here research is seen as part of a broader 'knowledge ecosystem.'

Co-production grew from concern to ensure that those with knowledge of societal problems, and with the capacity to deliver change, are involved in the production of knowledge not only recipients of it. Here there is no hierarchy of knowledge forms; and there is an explicit recognition of 'a normative concern with action' (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016: 12), no presumption of neutrality on the part of the academic partner towards the change sought. Thus the academic is an overt party to the change agenda, not merely a facilitator of it. It is argued that this mode of knowledge-exchange is rich in building mutual understanding of differing contexts for academic, policy and practice agendas and trust between participants; and respect for the expertise of 'lay' community participants. Impact cannot here be seen as the outcome of academic research but of the collaboration: 'Impact is an exchange, not a commodity that is bestowed' (Campbell and Vanderhoven 2016: 36). It nevertheless raises questions about the appropriate role of the academic in the change process and of research methodology where the line between policy *relevant* and policy *driven* is blurred.

How does this inform the work of the Global Exchange?

The Global Exchange programme covers the continuum of knowledge-exchange activity from interactive training (as in our residential course with the ILO for officials in S.E. Asia on labour migration) to co-production in our *Inclusive Cities* [*link*] exchange between UK and US cities, facilitated by a full time project manager. Through our annual photographic competition we encourage photographers and their audience to see migration through (literally) a new light, linking our title theme to what they see on the ground; while at the other end of the interaction scale we engage school students in dramatising dialogues drawn from research interviews [*Exploring Migration*]; and bring policy makers, civil society leaders and international scholars together for four days of evidence based, intense discussion, at a residential symposium [*Autumn Academy*]. Where the sensitivity of an issue or geographical distance present a barrier to knowledge-exchange, we can create a safe space to hold that dialogue, as in Chatham House roundtables [*City Responses to Irregular Migration* and *Migration and Integration Policy Roundtable Meetings*], and in the two-year exchange we have just launched between European cites in eight countries on their responses to irregular (undocumented) migrants [*link to OSF City initiative*]. At the edges of

knowledge-exchange we contribute evidence on the UK to the [European Commission's website on integration](#), engaging with practitioners in drawing evidence on promising practices together; and contribute to developing practical solutions to problems our research has identified, as in our [web-tool for advisors to destitute migrant families](#).

Challenges to address

The limited body of research on the impact of differing approaches to knowledge exchange constrains the extent to which we can draw on external evidence base to inform the design our own interventions. We are contributing to closing that gap in knowledge. We carry out internal evaluation of our knowledge-exchange interventions, but are now moving to more systematic approaches to capturing that learning, as from our recently completed city working groups on homelessness, parental involvement in education and community cohesion: not only capturing learning on the topic but on the model of knowledge-exchange itself [*Lessons Learned Paper*]; that learning in turn informing our current *Inclusive Cities* project. We are now seeking funding to enable us to make a more thorough assessment of our city based knowledge-exchange initiatives and thus contribute to the body of scholarship in this field.

Part of the knowledge-gap is understanding how different 'research users' perceive, receive and use evidence. COMPAS' research relating to civil society organisations has identified context-specific values, staff skills, motivation and timeliness as among the factors those engaged in knowledge-exchange need to take into account (Allen 2016). Recognising the contextual factors which impact on knowledge-exchange should enable us to go beyond a 'how-to' perspective where universal lessons can be applied to more tailored design of interventions to meet he needs of the particular individuals involved.

More challenging still is to identify that 'demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy,' through knowledge exchange. Recognising that impact may be indirect through third parties; that it may go beyond instrumental utilisation of knowledge to less tangible impacts in strengthening the legitimacy of the user or substantiating an argument (Boswell 2009); or, as participants in our city working groups have said, can lead to a paradigm shift in the very way that an issue or approach is perceived (Spencer 2016); we need to devise new criteria for assessing impact and indexes to measure it.

A question that relates to both aims and practicalities is how to reach beyond familiar organisational and individual partners to engage those who have not previously seen the value of giving time to knowledge-exchange, who have views that are challenging to engage, or, at a practical level, are out-with our current networks.

Finally, engagement in knowledge-exchange raises a different kind of question, that of the appropriate role of the academic in the knowledge-exchange process. As social scientists we aspire for our research to be policy *relevant* but not policy driven: that is, where the prism through which the issue is seen and research questions are shaped and constrained by those valued at that moment by policy makers (Castles 2003: 26; Bakewell 2008). We seek evidenced-based policy, not policy-based evidence (Strassheim & Kettunen 2014). This is why we say that, as brokers of a knowledge-exchange process, we have to find a path which

addresses the questions policy makers and practitioners are facing while questioning the assumptions on which they are based.

As we have seen, moreover, knowledge is not value neutral, and the change process to which it contributes may engage conflicting interests, not only differing views on which outcomes would be desirable and which would not. While the scope for differing views is acknowledged in the grey literature on knowledge-exchange and co-production, there remains a sense that 'better outcomes' will emerge from those processes rather than the more challenging reality that a better outcome from one perspective may be a retrograde move from another. This is particularly but not exclusively the case in the contentious field of migration in which we are engaged. Our own role in knowledge-exchange in this field is helping us to reflect on the line between our role in *brokering* and *developing* knowledge-exchange which contributes to social change and the role of other participants in *driving and delivering* that change agenda.

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