Civic Engagement in the Neoliberal-Patriarchal University: Lessons from Irish Practitioners Working Within and Against the System

Joanna Ożarowska

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Head of Department: Prof Camilla Fitzsimons
Supervisor: Prof Camilla Fitzsimons

To my parents Halina and Jacek
for the love of learning

and to Paddy
for always reminding me who knocks

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List of Abbreviation

AIT	Athlone Institute of Technology
ALIVE	A Learning Initiative and the Volunteering Experience
ATU	Atlantic Technological University
BRL	Ballymun Regeneration Limited
CARL	Community-Academic Research Links
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CIT	Carlow Institute of Technology
CRALE	Centre for Research in Adult Learning and Education
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DCU	Dublin City University
EHEA	European Higher Education Authority
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IDEA	Irish Development Education Association
IUA	Irish Universities Association
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LIT	Limerick Institute of Technology
MS	Microsoft
MTU	Munster Technological University
MU	Maynooth University
NUI	National University of Ireland
NUIG	National University of Ireland Galway
NWC	National Women's Council (of Ireland)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
TA	Thematic Analysis
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TU	Technological University
TURN	Technological University Research Network
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin
UG	University of Galway
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UL	University of Limerick
US	United States
WGS	Women's and Gender Studies
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology
WW2	World War Two

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Abstract

This study examines civic engagement and highlights the ways community engagement practice can learn from practitioners in Ireland as they navigate present-day university environments. It explores the origins, interpretations, and common operational models of civic engagement, presenting it as a contested field shaped by differing orientations and politics. I delve more deeply into community engagement practices on the continuum from transactional to transformative, making the case for the latter throughout. I also explore how the relevant Irish civic engagement policies are enabling and restricting for practitioners, and how they may contribute to the domestication of community engagement within the neoliberal-patriarchal university.

This research is positioned within the context of the neoliberal-patriarchal framing of the Irish higher education system, and conducted within a critical feminist research paradigm, drawing from the theories of intersectionality, critical feminist pedagogy, as well as my own practice in community engagement. It is a qualitative study that consists of in-depth interviews with seven Irish female civic engagement practitioners.

The findings reveal that the participants' commitments are to a radical and transformative model of civic engagement focused on social justice and equality, and based on the principles of holistic, engaged and nurturing pedagogy. At the same time, this study shows that the practice tends to be more traditional and tempered. This research portrays community engagement as innovative work in a rigid higher education system, and a practice that is liminal and largely invisible and unrecognised. Despite its marginal status, this research also documents the ways in which civic engagement can disturb the dominant discourse of a neoliberal-patriarchal university. The unique contribution of this research lies in its focus on the lived experiences of civic engagement practitioners, offering a new perspective on community engagement through a critical, intersectional feminist lens. It sheds light on the values, practices, and challenges faced by practitioners who work in a university environment that is often counter-normative to their practice and values, expanding our understanding of civic engagement in Ireland.

Meeting the Participants

Ultimately seven women below participated in this study. We encounter them more fully in section 5.3.3.

Name	Introduction	Main Work Area	Teaching University Students	Main Role
Martha	Martha is based in a HEI in the West of Ireland. She has been involved in community-based learning and community-based research in a managerial and leadership capacity. She has also contributed to civic engagement policy development.	community-based learning/ community-based research	no	professional / managerial
Rebecca	Rebecca is a civic engagement consultant and researcher with a particular interest in community-based learning. She has also contributed to civic engagement policy development. Her whole career has been in education.	community-based learning	no	researcher/ consultant
Sara	Sara's main field is student volunteering, and she works in a HEI in the West of Ireland. While her role is in management, she is also involved in university teaching.	student volunteering	yes	professional /managerial
Emma	Emma is an academic in a HEI in the West of Ireland where she has worked for nearly 30 years. She has developed and delivered community-based learning modules in her HEI.	community-based learning	yes	academic

Anna	Based in the South of Ireland, Anna is a civic engagement professional whose main interest is community-based research. She also teaches a post-graduate module concerned with participatory community-engaged research methods.	community-based research	yes	professional
Mary	Mary is an academic in a HEI in the East of Ireland. She has developed and delivered community-based learning modules in her HEI, and worked in industry before joining academia.	community-based learning	yes	academic
Maggie	Maggie is a higher education professional working in civic engagement through student volunteering in a HEI in the West of Ireland. She worked in a private corporate sector before moving into education.	student volunteering	no	professional

Table 1: Meeting the Participants

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the Study

The concept of civic engagement in higher education is nowadays more present in debates surrounding the role and mission of universities - at least compared to when I started working in this field in 2010. There is more recognition these days that higher education institutions have a role to play in responding to pressing social, political and environmental issues in our communities. Indeed, the social purpose of higher education and how civic engagement has been strategised and enacted at universities has been subject to considerable analysis and debate internationally. In Ireland, over the past two decades, there has been increased interest in the practices of higher education civic engagement with a growing body of literature (for examples see McIlrath & MacLabhrainn, 2007; McIlrath, 2009; McIlrath et al, 2012; McIlrath et al, 2014; Wynne & Morris, 2018). Additionally, the government endorsed *Higher Education Authority National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA, 2011) also recognised engagement with the wider society as a key part of the sector's mission, alongside teaching and learning, research and internationalisation.

While it is difficult to fully capture what this 'engagement with the wider society' refers to (see sections 2.3 and 3.3), broadly speaking, university civic engagement activities have included, but are not limited to, community-engaged teaching and learning, community-engaged research, access and widening participation interventions, student volunteering, political engagement, as well as a plethora of campus-community partnerships and projects.

Dottolo & Tillery (2015: 124-125) write that:

> when beginning a project, researchers and practitioners might consider: Why is this a topic in which I am interested? What draws me to this line of inquiry? What is it about this particular question that I want to know? What questions are not being posed? Why? What is lost by not considering these unasked questions? What theoretical perspectives are framing my research questions? Why? What theories

> and approaches am I choosing not to engage? How do my identities and experiences inform what I want to know? What domains of power are implicit and subsumed in these questions and in this topic? Where do I have privilege, advantage, power, and where am I marginalized, oppressed, disadvantaged?

In this chapter, I begin to respond to those questions, and I elaborate on them as the study unfolds.

On commencing the doctoral programme, I had been involved in the field of civic engagement in higher education for eight years. At DCU in the Community, Dublin City University's community outreach unit, I worked on establishing and delivering community-based widening participation interventions, and student volunteering projects in the surrounding communities. Our offices were located off-campus - an embassy of the university in the community of sorts. My work there was local, hands-on, grassroots and done in close partnership and collaboration with civil society organisations. Through my work with Campus Engage Ireland - a national network concerned with promoting, embedding and growing community engagement in higher education - I contributed to promoting student volunteering and community-engaged teaching and learning in the university sector in Ireland. My involvement with the network allowed me to look at civic engagement from a broader perspective and consider some of the wider questions about its place and importance within higher education. It was also through Campus Engage that I met other practitioners of civic engagement - some of whom are participants in this research as summarised in Table 1 - who were genuinely, and somewhat idealistically, committed to fostering community engagement in higher education. In my experience, both at that time and at present, civic engagement work in Ireland tended to be performed in majority by women.

During that time, we discussed our work on the ground, the projects we were involved in, and the resulting small transformations happening for our students and communities. We shared interesting practices, and suggestions for different approaches, and developed collaborative inter-university projects nationwide. I recall that we, civic engagement practitioners, felt we were involved in something innovative, a movement we could shape,

and I often wished the opportunities to engage with communities were available to me when I was a college student - rather than simply sitting in lectures, and passing examinations and assignments. Our work on behalf of Campus Engage was done on a voluntary basis and in addition to our regular day-to-day jobs. This echoes the experiences of many women in higher education who, as some researchers suggest, are more inclined to accept volunteer work (Babcock et al, 2017) and perform work that includes 'service' to communities, students and institutions (Antonio et al, 2000; Guarino & Borden, 2017). Despite that, we felt we were doing important work for our students, communities and universities. We put significant time and effort into building relationships with community partners, as well as our students and university leadership. At that time, I gained a clearer understanding that the knowledge generated by universities is not superior to the expertise coming from communities. The civic engagement practitioners I met through Campus Engage were people who cared about their work, and their students and communities flourishing. The way of learning they promoted was active, engaged, holistic, reflexive and underpinned by the desire to foster an ethos of civic responsibility among students. I did not have a sense that the work was about egos or career advancement - I felt that the practitioners I met, for the most part, believed in the vision of making our world more just and equal through community engagement.

At the same time, I recall our conversations about the growing disconnect between our practice and what the senior university leadership, funders and policy seemed to demand of us. While we, civic engagement practitioners, were involved in the shaping of a part of higher education community engagement policy, and often used policy and university strategies as a rationale for our work and to show the 'strategic fit' of civic engagement, it rarely seemed recognised as that. The joys of our work appeared to be tainted by frustrations of being sidelined, diminished and working on the margins of our universities. While I do not recall the word neoliberalism being used (interpreted here as a set of principles centred around free-market competition that has become a prevailing organisational principle of human activities, be it economic, political, social or interpersonal), we often talked about how priorities were different, that there was no funding, that university leadership and policy makers were only interested in numbers, and

how we had to demonstrate that civic engagement was good value for money for our institutions. At that time, I was unaware of the shifts in the higher education sector caused by the neoliberal project (e.g. Mercille & Murphy, 2017; Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2012; Lynch et al, 2012) - something I delve deeper into in section 1.7.

My research interests stem from these shared experiences and are connected to my commitment to working towards a more socially just world. As this study will demonstrate, the issues signalled above are still of importance to the practitioners I interviewed. I also draw on my professional and personal experiences and listen to the voices of civic engagement practitioners.

To continue, in the first year of the doctoral programme, a session on feminist research was held and it led me to explore in more depth the literature related to feminist ontology and epistemology and to see an overlap in terms of civic engagement and the feminisation of certain aspects of the academy. I found it fascinating to read about how some feminist scholars viewed reality and understood knowledge building. It was compelling to explore the feminist classroom practice, and the intersections of feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogy. I also came to see that civic engagement shared some of the ideals and principles of feminist scholarship (Costa & Leong, 2012a). As a woman who is passionate about gender equality, and who believes that, as one of my lecturers put it, "nothing in society or education is gender-neutral", I began to wonder whether drawing from a gender-based research lens would allow me to pose "unasked questions" (Dottolo & Tillery, 2015: 125) about civic engagement. As this research progressed, I was also encouraged to explore the intersections of patriarchal and neoliberal influences in the higher education system (see section 1.7.2), and to consider how the current neoliberal-patriarchal university environments affect community engagement practice.

1.2 Research Aims and Question

Whether we call it 'engagement', 'civic engagement' or 'community engagement' in higher education, it is a field with a range of discourses, orientations, politics and values

underpinning it. In this research, I use these phrases interchangeably, which is in line with the wide range of terminologies used in the literature on the topic.

The overarching aim of this research is to broaden our knowledge of civic engagement practice, by providing insights into the experiences of female community engagement practitioners in the present-day academy. In order to meet this aim, this study is guided by the following research question:

> *In what ways can civic engagement practice learn from the experiences of purposefully-selected female civic engagement practitioners as they navigate present-day policies and practices of neoliberal-patriarchal university environments?*

I investigate my research question with seven women directly involved in civic engagement work in Ireland. These research conversations explore their understanding of being a civic engagement practitioner. I present insights about their values, practice, the joys and challenges of being a civic engagement practitioner, and the ways they navigate higher education systems and structures that, as we explore, can be counter-normative to their practice, and renders them outsiders, less visible and heard and their work peripheral. While I am wary about calling the participants of this research 'marginalised' as they belong to a privileged group of white, middle-class academics, managers and professionals in a wealthy Western democracy - and therefore a majority in universities - I am interested in discovering how they operate, feel, experience and work in a sector whose culture, I contend, is unfavourable to their practice and gender, and my wish is to lift their "subjugated knowledges" (hooks, 2003: 4).

1.3 Civic Engagement - A Contested Concept

This research charts the various interpretations and models of civic and community engagement in higher education, showing the liminality and spectrum of the practice. In doing so, my research maps a rich tapestry of practice across Ireland and internationally. I explore what the values, orientations and ways of working of civic engagement

practitioners are, and what happens when these come into contact with what I argue is a neoliberal-patriarchal academy.

Community engagement and related practices are not recent phenomena and some researchers argue that the commitment to civic engagement has been present in higher education since the inception of colleges and universities (e.g. Laurison et al, 2006: 17; Hartley, 2011: 27). Additionally, community-engaged teaching, learning and scholarship have been some of the defining features of the academic disciplines of women's and gender studies (Orr, 2011; Costa & Leong, 2012a; 2012b; Iverson & James, 2014; McTighe-Musil, 2010) as well as ethnic studies, education, public health or social work (Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 21) for several decades. However, as will be explored in this study, the extent of embeddedness of civic engagement varies greatly among higher education institutions in Ireland and internationally. There is also an ongoing debate (e.g. Watson et al, 2011; O'Broin, 2010; Bergan & Harkavy, 2018; Bergan et al, 2019; Imman & Schuetze, 2013) on whether civic engagement is an essential activity for higher education institutions or a practice that, while beneficial, is considered supplementary.

Furthermore, and perhaps crucially, community engagement in higher education is a contested realm with a variety of purposes, depending on the perspectives of those who define, shape and practise it, as well as the national and local contexts within which universities operate (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Jacoby et al, 2009: 5-10; Boland, 2011, 2014; Costa & Leong, 2012a: 173; Munck, 2023:42-44). Stemming from this are tensions within the field concerning its orientation and focus, for instance, should we focus on i) *service to* or ii) *transformation of* communities through civic engagement? Can it be both? Moreover, should community engagement have an explicitly social-justice-oriented agenda, or should it stay 'politically neutral'? While these issues will be explored throughout this study, it is worthwhile to signal them here to ground you, the reader, in the debated nature of civic engagement.

Some practitioners believe that universities, with their considerable human, financial and cultural resources, have a responsibility to serve the needs of society, as well as contribute to the development and well-being of communities, especially those they are anchored in.

This service model of civic engagement is “based on a tacit understanding that universities were a public good and had an inescapable and natural social role to play” (Munck et al, 2015: 14). Some scholars, for example Saltmarsh & Hartley (2011: 19), or Westheimer & Kahne (2004b: 243) argue it is a dominant form of community engagement in the education system. This model of civic engagement can certainly assist higher education institutions in meeting their social and public mission objectives, while allowing community partners to benefit from ‘having their needs met’ that otherwise may not be (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011: 19). While it is underpinned by mutuality, as both the higher education stakeholders and the communities receive benefits, this service/charity, model of community engagement is nevertheless argued to be grounded in the “deficit-based understanding of community”, implying superiority of knowledge produced by universities, and politically neutral (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011: 22).

Additionally, the idea of serving the needs of society may mean different things, for instance, where the needs of society are conflated with the needs of industry and the economy or the needs of those in power. This model of civic engagement can perhaps help shape personally responsible or participatory citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, 2004b) - active in their communities, informed about politics and engaged in individual or collective efforts - but not necessarily earnestly challenging the root causes of inequalities and injustices. Additionally, questions remain on whether this civic engagement model can truly affect social change, or if it implies compliance with existing social norms and structures and a lack of challenge to the unjust status quo, and is hence domesticating.

On the other hand, scholars and practitioners working from a social justice and liberatory perspective have insisted that higher education civic engagement involves a contestation not only of unequal social structures but also the systems ruling the academy itself. Proponents of a transformative and critical civic engagement model (e.g. Costa & Leong, 2012a, 2012b; Mitchell & Soria, 2018; Dean et al, 2019; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011) advocate for approaches that challenge the power relations, conditions and values that are the root causes of inequalities, injustices, and community concerns. The principles of such a civic engagement model include, to name a few, reciprocity, an asset-based view of the community, working *with* rather than *for* communities, and collaboration and co-creation

of knowledge for social change (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011: 22). According to Tania Mitchell (2013: 263-264), an American scholar and one of the champions of community engagement as critical pedagogy, critical civic engagement can be transformative for higher education students, communities, as well as universities themselves. Students have an opportunity to gain critical awareness of issues and inequalities in society, as well as develop attitudes, behaviours and skills to tackle them. Communities, in partnership with universities, can evolve and cultivate new approaches to take on their concerns, while higher education institutions can work to transform their teaching and research activities (Mitchell, 2013: 263-264). However, as some scholars notice, this model of community engagement is possibly the least pursued approach in education (Mitchell & Soria, 2018: 3; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a: 242). This may be due to, for instance, curricular constraints, the agendas of those delivering community-engaged programmes, as well as the amount of time available (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b: 246). The critical/transformative model of civic engagement might also not be as widely practised in higher education due to its explicitly political agenda, which some advocates of civic engagement (e.g. Zlotkowski, 1995) consider a hindrance to the wider embeddedness of the movement. In other words, the "troublesome misconception" of "value-laden" civic engagement means that it may not appeal to a wider pool of practitioners, students, and educators (Lopez & Kiesa, 2009: 6). Here, however, Munck (2023: 44) notes that "sometimes the perspectives that claim to be apolitical are in fact conservative approaches committed to the status quo."

Taking the above into consideration, one way to interpret civic engagement is as a continuum from service-oriented to critical/transformative/justice-oriented models, as shown below, where practitioners at times can shift between them, or be positioned somewhere along the continuum.

Figure 1: Community Engagement Model Continuum

It is also useful to think of civic engagement as not necessarily something that is contained with a specific post or unit within the university, but also within individuals in higher education institutions - be they academic, professional support or managerial - who may share a set of values and ethical commitments. According to Dostillo & Perry (2017: 6), for instance, the professional identity of those working in community engagement is often built around "the purpose we serve", fostering stronger civic commitments of our students, colleagues and, more broadly, our institutions. Additionally, the authors note that "fundamental to our commitment to the civic purposes of higher education is a belief that such a purpose is central and critical to a more just world. These commitments are the driving energy behind our work" (*ibid*). Therefore, the body of 'practitioners' of civic engagement may include lecturers and academics whose belief in the social purpose of higher education leads them to reach out and engage with communities and social issues, or to employ elements of community-based learning and research in their work, as well as those holding managerial and professional support roles specifically tasked with promoting and coordinating civic engagement initiatives in their HEIs, and university leaders who foster the culture of engagement with society in the wider sector. As Table 1 demonstrates, the participants of this research represent a variety of these roles.

Whilst there are a variety of approaches to community engagement work and orientation among practitioners, and, indeed, among the seven participants of this research, the model I am drawn to and strive to advocate is social-justice-oriented and involves working for social change, as well as an active contestation of structures maintaining injustices and inequalities. This, I will argue, is a more comprehensive and impactful approach to civic engagement, and I am interested in ways to support practitioners located closer to the service and charity models on the continuum to move along the line towards more transformative models.

1.4 A Note on Research Participants and Research Process

As my study was conducted within a qualitative research paradigm, it was concerned with the depth and richness of the experiences, behaviours, thoughts and perspectives of the participants. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011: 8), "Qualitative researchers stress the

socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry." As a researcher and a practitioner in the field of civic engagement, I had a strong degree of personal investment in the topic - as I felt the potential participants would have. I wanted to encourage a dialogue and sharing of insights and understanding of the practice of civic engagement in higher education between myself and research participants. Establishing and maintaining positive and two-way relationships with the research participants was important for me as a critical feminist researcher. Therefore, I considered that a small group of respondents would be most appropriate for my research. This is supported by Crouch and McKenzie (2006: 483) who state that "a small number of cases (less than 20, say) will facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents, and enhance the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings."

I intended to work with six to ten women who were members of Campus Engage Ireland Steering Committee or Campus Engage Working Groups. These two bodies comprise colleagues from the higher education sector who are involved in civic and community engagement activities - as practitioners, leaders and champions. Throughout the years, the composition of these groups has changed, but generally has included professional services staff specifically tasked with promoting community engagement within their institutions, academic staff who employ community-based teaching, learning and research practices, as well as university management. There are a number of reasons why I chose to work with female practitioners, rather than people of all genders for this research. Firstly, in my experience, those who led civic engagement work in Ireland at the time of the recruitment phase were typically women. Women also comprised more than 70% of the most recently available (June 2021) Campus Engage mailing list, including both Steering Committee and Working Groups members (37 women and 13 men - please see section 5.3.2 for more details on participants' selection). In my involvement in Student Volunteering and, later, Community Engaged Learning Working Groups (2012- 2022), I recall only ever having one or two men attending our meetings. Secondly, I had a particular interest in working with female civic engagement practitioners as in this study I am guided by a critical feminist stance. I articulate this as recognising the relationships between patriarchy and

neoliberalism (expressions that I will unpack in more detail as the study progresses), as well as the intersections of gender, class, race, sexuality and ability, and focussing on issues of power. More crucially, I also situate this research in the context of a neoliberal-patriarchal academy, understood here (and further explored in section 1.7.2) as a space where inequality among genders is exacerbated by neoliberal values and practices (see: Lynch et al, 2012; Leathwood, 2017; Davis, 2017). The 'rules' of a neoliberal-patriarchal academy impact on how civic engagement is enacted and where it is located, as an area that is largely feminised in Ireland, and a practice that has had strong links with feminist scholarship and pedagogy, at least on the transformative end of the continuum (as discussed in section 3.6). Therefore, in this context, I considered that female participants could provide more nuanced insights into the civic engagement practice, as well as the challenges that women working in the academy experience. As a member of Campus Engage, I had a prior relationship with potential study participants.

The research design consisted of introductory information sessions, semi-structured one to one interviews, and a presentation of preliminary findings to participating practitioners. The online information sessions took place between July and September 2020. The in-depth interviews were held between August and October 2020 and were also conducted online. Finally, the online presentation of preliminary findings to individual practitioners took place between August 2022 and June 2024.

1.5 My Journey to This Research

In this section, I present my own trajectory into becoming a civic engagement practitioner, as well as my positionality and journey to this research. In doing so, I am encouraged by Martha, one of the research participants, who told me that on commencing her own doctoral programme she felt compelled to research herself and who she was before researching others. Reflexivity is an important feature of much of feminist research (Etherington, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Letherby, 2003) - where the researcher's positionality and 'bias', formed through their experiences and environments, is explicitly recognised, owned and inhabited. It would be dishonest of me to conduct this research without reflecting on my experiences as a woman and my understanding of feminism.

Similarly, I cannot extricate pursuing practitioner research from my experiences of working in civic engagement, and as an educator. In this section, I therefore reflect on my identities as an educator, civic engagement practitioner, a woman, and a critical feminist, and how my histories shaped my career and personal trajectory.

1.5.1 Early Influences - Joy and Excitement in Education

Since primary school, I have been drawn to educators who in some way 'transgressed' (hooks, 1994). One vivid memory is that of an afterschool project worker, Ms Baster, who would sit us seven-year-olds down on the floor and would tell us the horrifying stories of the Katyń massacre, a mass execution of Polish military leadership by the Soviet Union in 1940. We were encouraged to ask questions about something unexplainable, and we did it as uninhibited children. My two primary-school and secondary-school history teachers encouraged critical thinking, dialogue and exploration; asked us to analyse the causes and effects, the ideas behind behaviours, the impacts of past events on the present - their voice was not the only one in the classroom. Not only did those teachers ignite my love of learning, but they also made me consider a teaching career at a very early age. The recollections of the American educational philosopher bell hooks resonate with me:

> When I think about my life as a student, I can remember vividly the faces, gestures, habits of being of all the individual teachers who nurtured and guided me, who offered me an opportunity to experience joy in learning, who made the classroom a space of critical thinking, who made the exchange of information and ideas a kind of ecstasy. (hooks, 1994: 202)

These were not the only teachers in my life as both of my parents were also teachers and I credit them for becoming a teacher myself. They both went to university, valued education highly, and taught me to treat everyone, regardless of background and creed, with respect. I was fortunate that they had the time and patience to encourage me in learning, and they passed on an attitude of excitement about education to me. Here, I again turn to bell hooks who also pointed out that her early schooling was a space of pleasure, joy and excitement (hooks, 1994: 3). While this changed into disappointment and disillusionment for her in the years that followed, hooks still adhered to that principle, which I also hold strong in my

professional practice: “The first paradigm that shaped my pedagogy was the idea that the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring” (hooks, 1994: 7). I started working when I was in college, teaching English as a second language to children and teenagers, and I knew I found my home in education. At that time, I did not yet understand what critical and feminist pedagogies were, but in my teaching practice I strived for excitement and variety, allowing different voices, as well as holistic learning where both students and myself were whole people.

I emigrated to Ireland in June 2006 - two days after my Master’s viva - and secured a position of a course developer and substitute teacher in a private college of further education. As new immigrants, at that time most Polish people did not seem to have the confidence to apply for jobs like these - most of us felt we could only compete for posts that were below our education and experience level. I was committed to the job, liked it on most days, and in the four years I spent there, I was promoted several times. While I was very grateful for the opportunities, there were things that bothered me. There was a close surveillance of all teaching and administrative activities through CCTV, allowing the management a near panoptical gaze and control. A perceived narrative of ‘lazy and entitled’ teachers that appeared to come from the senior management, as well as labelling teachers who were members of trade unions as troublemakers did not sit well with me. There seemed to be a practice of trying to force out the long-serving teachers. The majority of the students in the college were international students, who appeared to have little choice but to pay huge fees for their education to access part-time employment in Ireland. It seemed like everyone in our college community - students, teachers, administrative staff - were there to make sure the organisation makes as much profit as possible.

1.5.2 Working in Community-University Engagement

These frustrations were influential in my decision to look for work elsewhere. I remember going to a job interview for a post at DCU in the Community, Dublin City University’s community outreach and adult education centre where I subsequently worked for 13 years, in 2010. When I was asked about my values and beliefs about education, and reasons for looking to change jobs, I was frustrated with my inability to articulate these, and just

blurted out “I don’t like the idea of education for sale.” At that time, I did not have the language to express that what bothered me was the shift in thinking on what and who education is for, the disregard for educators, the neglect of employee rights, the passive acceptance of detrimental employment practices, and, most of all, treating education as a means to make a profit while using vulnerable groups who had little choice but pay for this education. I have since come to recognise that what I observed and felt, but could not name at that time, was the growing neoliberalisation of education (for examples see Johnson et al, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2000; Lynch et al, 2012; Lynch, 2017; Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2021; Mercille & Murphy, 2017; O’Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Tett & Hamilton, 2019), where educational institutions act increasingly like corporations, and promote competitive individualism and teaching of skills and competencies to ‘get ahead’ over cooperation, solidarity and care for self, students, colleagues, and the society - something I discuss in detail in section 1.7. At that time, I was quite naive and assumed that public and state-funded education, unlike the private college I worked for, was more immune to neoliberal influences.

Between 2010 and 2023, I worked at DCU in the Community, first as an Access and Support Officer, and later as a manager for the centre. DCU in the Community is located off-campus, in a Dublin neighbourhood of Ballymun - a community that for much of its existence has been linked with social and economic deprivation (Montague, 2021: 23-30). In 1997, a broad physical regeneration (housing, transport and amenities) of the area started, driven by the state-founded Ballymun Regeneration Limited (BRL); however, there was somewhat less focus on social regeneration, and as the only higher education institution in the immediate area, Dublin City University formed a partnership with BRL to support that aspect of local development (Ozarowska, 2019: 32). The goal of DCU in the Community - one of the first initiatives of this kind in Ireland - has been to assist in the social regeneration in the area through, among other things, provision of educational opportunities, facilitating university student volunteering and community-based learning projects, as well as linking researchers with community organisations in the neighbourhood. DCU in the Community has been considered DCU’s flagship civic engagement project and a very real manifestation of the university’s commitment to local

community engagement. Working at DCU in the Community was a time of questioning my beliefs and of shifts and transitions for me; growing up I had a somewhat snobbish and elitist view of the university as the holder of all knowledge and solutions. At DCU in the Community, we always attempted to work in a way that was participatory, inclusive and respectful of the community we have been located in, residents and local services providers who have been working on the ground for decades. The majority of the centre's work has been done in collaboration with local community organisations and service providers - many of whom had to sadly close their doors as a result of austerity measures in the early 2010s. Their input was valued equally to the university's. One of the most exciting civic engagement initiatives I was involved in during my time at DCU in the Community was the development and delivery of an Irish Aid-funded project on building university-community engagement through service learning in Vietnam in 2017-2019 (Phan Nguyen Ai et al, 2023), as well as serving as the General Rapporteur for the Council of Europe forum on social mission of higher education in Strasbourg in 2019.

My work with DCU in the Community led me to get involved with Campus Engage Ireland - the previously mentioned network of practitioners and management from across Irish higher education institutions, currently located at the Irish Universities Association. Campus Engage focuses on fostering and embedding civic and community engagement across the third level education sector in Ireland. It is also a network which the participants of this research are recruited from.

Over the past decade the network has focused on promoting various manifestations of civic engagement, such as community-engaged teaching and learning, community-engaged research, and student volunteering. In the years 2014 to 2017, I served as a Co-Convenor of Campus Engage Volunteering and Student-Led Engagement Working Group, and during that time we developed a national online platform for higher education student volunteers. Additionally, I also represented Dublin City University on the Campus Engage Community Engaged Teaching and Learning Working Group (2018-2022) where I assisted in the development of an online microcredential in community-engaged teaching available through the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. It was a time

of learning for me as well. I came to understand that the way universities at times construct communities can be an exercise in power and privilege, especially if communities are labelled as somewhat lacking (Clark-Taylor, 2017; Dean, 2019: 30-31). I also learnt to more critically examine some civic engagement initiatives, such as, for instance, volunteering overseas, which, according to some scholars (e.g. Tansey & Gallo, 2017: 83-84) can be framed not only as uncritically benevolent and charitable but also salvationist, hence reinforcing the Western-developed-countries and "the exotic other and deficit other" binary (Santoro, 2014: 436). Additionally, other practitioners, including those who participated in this research, taught me to further understand communities as spaces of expertise and as equal partners.

1.5.3 Feminist Critical Pedagogy

As part of my experience as a civic engagement practitioner, I have also remained an adult educator, teaching on college preparation courses for adults returning to education, and in community education settings. It was at DCU in the Community that I started examining the issues of educational disadvantage and its root causes, and I came to recognise the different intersections of disadvantage many of my students experienced. While I was always attracted to teaching practice that was socially-conscious, attuned to issues of power in society, privileging learners' voice and holistic, it has only been in the past decade that I had the language to name it. The educational practice I strive for is underpinned by critical feminist pedagogy (Fitzsimons, 2023). Here, I feel the need to briefly clarify the understanding of feminism I am drawn to. Crucially, I strive to advocate intersectional feminism that emphasises the experiences of those who are marginalised by multiple, overlapping modes of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). My teaching philosophy has been in the past decade largely influenced by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1996), and in particular by bell hooks (1994; 2003), whose theories connect with the civic engagement practice I advocate. My commitments as an educator are around promoting critical thinking, reflection and consciousness; holistic, active and affective learning; as well as the values of inclusivity and equality in the classroom (hooks, 1994; 2003). I came to believe that 'conscientisation', a process Freire describes as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take actions against the oppressive elements

of reality" (Freire, 1996: 17), should be central to pedagogical practice. Critical feminist pedagogy (Fitzsimons, 2023) also emphasises the need for critical reflection, identity formation, action and transformation - both of the self and the forces of oppression surrounding us (hooks, 1994), and the lecture room is seen as a "radical space of possibility in the academy" (*ibid*: 13). Feminist classrooms, that are welcoming to people of all genders, strive to promote independent and critical thinking, creativity, leadership, collaboration, and is where activism in learning is promoted (hooks, 1994, 2003; Shrewsbury, 1987; Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003).

The concept of praxis - something that Fitzsimons (2023: 2) describes as "a cyclical process of reflection and action that is directed at the structures we seek to transform" - is equally a core element of feminist critical pedagogy, as are the ideas of challenging oppressive power dynamics, including the traditional teacher-student hierarchy, engagement, empowerment, collaboration and liberation. My approach to feminist pedagogy is underpinned by hope and love; it is progressive, holistic and engaged, and the wellbeing and self-actualisation of both the learners and teachers are crucial (hooks, 1994; 2003). Feminist education is whole person education, and it promotes the development of a person not only as an intellectual, but also as a member of groups each of us belong to - family, community, society. Such critical education "necessarily embrace(s) experience, confessions and testimony as relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any learning process" (hooks 1994: 89). I recognise that testimonial, experiential and embodied knowledge, both of learners and educators, is valid, and I draw from Donna Haraway (1991: 40) who states that women's and adult education challenge "(...) in concrete, practical ways, the notion of disembodied knowledge, recognising that knowledge is not neutral but always socially situated", which I discuss in section 5.2.

1.5.4 Commitment to Transformative Civic Engagement

There is a congruence, and indeed a significant overlap, between my pedagogical practice and the critical civic engagement orientation I advocate. Transformative community engagement in higher education shares many of the principles and values of feminist critical pedagogy. Critical civic engagement arguably goes beyond simply a

straightforward application of skills and competencies acquired in third-level education to addressing pressing social issues. Rather, it should involve political and social justice education (Freire, 1996; hooks, 1994, 2003), and awareness raising around the root causes of inequalities, injustices, power, and oppression in society and also within the higher education system itself. I argue that civic engagement practice 'done right' does not merely 'expose' students to lives and realities that are different from their own, but creates a critical reflection on their role as a student, a future graduate, and a citizen who will shape society. Therefore, my civic engagement practice strives to encourage higher education actors to perceive community and society as learning resources, sources of knowledge, and partners in the co-production of knowledge. I also argue that civic and community engagement as a pedagogy can challenge the unjust and elitist discourses and practices in our higher education system.

I agree with Leeray Costa and Karen Leong (2012a: 172), two American gender and women's studies scholars, who argue that community engagement must involve a critical analysis of systemic injustices and inequalities, reflexivity, praxis and the focus on the social good. Community-engaged higher education curricula should emphasise the importance of collective action and collaboration and have at their core a commitment to social justice and transformation of societies into more equal and fairer. Additionally, transformative civic engagement should aim to critique and challenge unjust conditions that are the cause of community needs (Boland, 2014: 182). I argue that community engagement practitioners should consider 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1996: 17) and challenging power relations in our society. All these principles are shared with critical feminist pedagogy where they are the core elements of teaching, learning and research (Orr, 2011; Coats & Leong, 2012a, 2012b; Fitzsimons, 2023). Ultimately, I agree with Brid Connolly, who "argue[s] that critical pedagogy is vital in order to have truly emancipatory civic engagement" (Connolly, 2014: 12) and am guided by the view that effective and impactful community engagement should share the commitments and principles of critical pedagogy.

1.5.5 My Understanding of Feminism

I first came across feminist ideas as a teenager through music; there was a strong sense of disobedience, non-conformity, resistance, and social and racial justice in the music I listened to. It appealed to me that calling myself a feminist allowed me to be different, or as Lola Olufemi (2020: 2), a black feminist writer and activist, puts it when describing her own discovery of feminism - "wayward, the wrong kind of woman, deviant." It, however, took me some time to fully develop my understanding of what feminism meant to me. I have gone through a phase of lack of conformity to the essentialist standards of femininity by, for instance, rejecting the idea of motherhood from an early age, refusing to comply with the imposed beauty standards, and involvement with traditionally masculine dominated sports. I have also gone through the stages of pop-girl-power feminism and liberal feminism, and only in the past decade or so, I came to understand that feminism should entail disrupting and transforming multiple unjust structures. These are not only those of sexism and patriarchy, but the interconnected oppressive systems of neoliberalism, racism, classism, heteronormativity, and imperialism, and address them together rather than treating them as separate challenges (Arruzza et al, 2019). In my personal and professional life, I draw from the theory of intersectionality as first articulated by the American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw when discussing the compounding nature of racial and gender oppression. Intersectionality urges us to consider how the multiple sources of oppression, be they race, gender, or other characteristics, converge and impact the experiences of marginalised individuals (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). It recognises that there is no one, single, universal women's experience but rather we exist within interlocking systems of oppression and a 'matrix of domination' (Hill-Collins, 2009) including, among others, gender, class, race, body type, ethnicity, dis/ability, sexual orientation, or age. Feminism, I advocate, is not about achieving "*equal opportunity domination*: one that asks ordinary people, in the name of feminism, to be grateful that it is a woman, not a man, who busts their union, orders a drone to kill their parent, or locks their child in a cage at the border" (Arruzza et al, 2019: 2), but about transforming the multiple existing socially unjust structures.

In relation to university-community engagement, I agree with Costa and Leong (2012a: 176) when they argue that an "intersectional analysis can illuminate the myriad ways that civic engagement and service learning pedagogies may reproduce social inequalities by revealing the privileged standpoints." In other words, applying an intersectional lens can reveal civic engagement in higher education not necessarily as a 'universally good' practice (Mitchell, 2016: 365), but also one that can reproduce oppression. Those involved in community engagement in higher education, be they students, academics, professional staff, or community partners exist at various intersections of privilege and oppression, for instance class, gender, citizenship status, nationality, or level of education, to name but a few, creating a web of often unequal power relations. An intersectional analysis can pose questions on whether civic engagement challenges or maintains the mechanisms of oppression, power and privilege in the neoliberal higher education sector.

1.6 More About the Research Context - Neoliberalism, Patriarchy and Intersecting Systems of Power and Oppression

As I have already signposted, my mapping of the various models of civic engagement and my exploration of its practice is strongly situated in the context of what I argue is a neoliberal-patriarchal higher education system. In this section, I demonstrate how the neoliberal-patriarchal thinking permeates all realms of our lives, including education, where civic engagement practice is located. I agree with Freire (1972: 173-174) that "education cannot be neutral" and that it will "always be in the service either of domestication of men [sic], or their liberation"; therefore, I question whose interests are served in what I argue is a neoliberal-patriarchal academy. I see higher education as a part of "the work of people-making" by "fashioning people with the 'right' attitudes, dispositions and values - abilities, competences, and skills" (Arruzza et al, 2019: 21). This is also why I question what attitudes, values, abilities and skills the neoliberal-patriarchal university promotes, and whether they are values that serve to maintain systems and structures within which education is created and organised (Freire, 1972: 175).

Before I delve deeper into the neoliberal-patriarchal influences and manifestations in the academy, I now offer a brief discussion on these concepts, their impact and their relationship with each other in order to contextualise this research.

1.6.1 How Neoliberalism Became the Prevailing Principle of Economic, Political and Social Organisation

While neoliberalism is a broad concept, carries various meanings, and is not necessary a coherent set of ideas (Connell & Dados, 2014: 118), I align myself with David Harvey's (2005: 2) description of a "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade." The key mechanisms associated with neoliberalism are the reliance on free-market capitalism, the privatisation of services, tax reductions (particularly for higher income earners), and the deregulation of the private sector to allow it to act with no impediments (Harvey, 2005: 23-26; Beckert, 2020: 321). State and government spending is weakened, particularly on public and collective welfare services, and there is less emphasis on organised labour and just labour practices (Harvey, 2005: 23) The foundational values of neoliberalism are self-interest, individualism and competition.

Neoliberalism is wider than simply a set of principles pertaining solely to the realm of economy or private enterprise, as its proponents perceive "free markets as the basis of decision making in every sphere" (Connell & Dados, 2014: 119). To elaborate, the idea of 'free market' can be applied to realms that we traditionally understand as regulated by the state, for instance healthcare, transport, housing, energy, and, as will be discussed shortly, education. The neoliberalisation of public and state services is argued to be often operationalised through new managerialism, or new public management, described as "the application of market economy principles to public services in order to achieve efficiencies and value for money" (Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2021: 55).

The origins of neoliberalism can be traced back to the mid-20th century, and the ideas of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, economists and scholars linked with the Chicago

School of Economics (Harvey, 2005; Connell & Dados, 2014; Monbiot, 2016). It did not, however, take firm hold until late 1970s with Harvey (2005: 1) pointing to several epicentres of it, namely Ronald Reagan's United States, Margaret Thatcher's United Kingdom, the reforms in China aimed to deregulate its economy, and the first attempt at creating a neoliberal state under Augusto Pinochet in Chile. Harvey (2005: 14-16) additionally argues that the perceived threat of socialist ideas spreading across Europe at that time, coupled with the shrinking economies and stagflation, were seen by the elites as a threat to their political and economic status, as well as their potential profits. Furthermore, the earlier Keynesian economic policies of an interventionist state, that were dominant at that time and introduced as a response to the Great Depression and post-WW2, were perceived as stalling growth and failing (Harvey, 2005; Duménil and Lévy, 2011; Beckert, 2020).

The promises of neoliberalism were abundant; however, as Jens Beckert (2020: 321) notices, they were not based on actual results but on "the hopes of future payoffs." Neoliberalisation was thought to bring economic growth, lower inflation rates, and bigger profits for companies and the wealthy; profits that would ultimately 'trickle down' to all strata of society. Neoliberalisation also brought the promises of individual freedom and choice, as well as providing "equal opportunities in the context of meritocracy" (Beckert, 2020: 322).

The near-global spread of neoliberalism followed, and Harvey (2005: 39) attributes this to what he calls "the construction of consent" where neoliberalism has achieved hegemonic status - being widely accepted as the dominant, or even the only possible, economic and political ideology - through a network of powers. These channels of influence have included, among others, political authorities implementing neoliberal policies; neoliberal think-tanks often funded by large corporations; as well as various forms of cultural transmission, such as the media, arts, or, indeed, educational institutions, universities and academic research (Harvey, 2005: 39-63). The "promissory regime of neoliberalism" was so powerful, as Beckert (2020: 321) argues, that it even managed to convince some of the more left/socialist-leaning politicians to adopt it, based on the belief that economic

prosperity would entail equitable redistribution of profits through modernised welfare mechanisms, as well as create equal opportunities for all.

The spread of neoliberalism globally has been uneven, and contributed to the worsening of inequalities between (and within) countries and regions, benefitting some and disadvantaging others (Harvey, 2005: 87-119). It is now well documented that neoliberalism was advantageous to the upper echelons of our societies (e.g. Duménil and Lévy, 2011), caused a favourable environment for large corporations to consolidate and expand their power and profits (Harvey, 2005: 26), as well as contributed to the deepening of class divisions by exacerbating income disparities and the widening of the wealth gap between the rich and the rest of society.

Some researchers note that neoliberalisation has entailed erosion in social justice and social solidarity, intensified unequal access to education and healthcare, worsened the housing crisis, as well as contributed to the current environmental catastrophe (e.g. Beckert, 2020; Harvey, 2005; Duménil and Lévy, 2011; Arruzza et al, 2019). This is well captured by George Monbiot (2016: 4), who states that the neoliberal idea of freedom

> means freedom from the demands of social justice, from environmental constraints, from collective bargaining and from taxation that funds public services. (...) The freedom of the elite from democratic restraints limits other people's freedom from hunger, poverty and brutal conditions of employment. It limits free access to health and education; freedom from industrial injuries; freedom from pollution, addiction, loan sharks and confidence tricksters. Freedom for the financial sector means speculative chaos, economic crisis and bailouts for which the rest of us must pay

Arruzza et al (2019: 16) point to neoliberal capitalism as the "root cause" of "crisis of society", where neoliberal mechanisms and values regulate our underlying social systems and social institutions, and affect our attitudes and perceptions of interpersonal and gender relations, peace and democracy, climate and ecology, labour relations, as well as - as will be discussed shortly - education.

1.6.2 Neoliberalism and Patriarchy

Neoliberalism cannot be disentangled from other modes of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, classism, imperialism and colonialism, as they often work hand in hand to maintain the power status quo and are based on exploitation of certain groups in our societies to the advantage of the most privileged few (Arruzza et al, 2019; Olufemi, 2020). In other words, these "various forms of power cross-cut, cross-fertilize, and amplify one another" (Ortner, 2015: 117), and are in a near "parasitic" relationship with each other (*ibid*: 123).

In my understanding of patriarchy, I draw from bell hooks (2010: 1) who interprets it as "a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance"[1], and who further notes the interlocking of patriarchy with other structures of dominance - imperialism, racism and capitalism. Patriarchy is deeply rooted in our political and economic structures, our culture, workplaces, interpersonal relationships and all other forms of our social lives, and we can find "clear-cut examples of patriarchal structures of power at work within virtually every society in the world today" (Ortner, 2015: 120).

The neoliberal-patriarchal system perpetuates women's oppression by exploiting both their productive and reproductive labour (Aruzza et al, 2019; Federici, 2023). In paid work, women experience barriers to access to employment, occupational segregation, wage discrimination, and more frequent career interruptions (UN, 2023: 18).[2] Lower paid, precarious, 'unskilled' work is also typically overwhelmingly feminised - and racialised (Vergès, 2021; Arruzza et al, 2019; Federici, 2023). It is undervalued, yet essential for "millions of employees and agents of capital, the state, the army, and cultural, artistic and scientific institutions" to function (Vergès, 2021: 1). As is noted by many scholars (e.g. Davis, 1983; hooks, 1984; Hill-Collins, 2009; Arruzza et al, 2019; Vergès, 2021),

[1] Patriarchy is also a system where men dominate each other (Walby, 1989; Ortner, 2015) - for instance due to age, race, class or other perceived inferiority. Patriarchy exploits and affects men as well, for instance through creating a requirement for only one acceptable form of masculinity - predatory, individualistic, emotionally crippled, aggressive, and dominant (hooks, 2010).

[2] According to the most recent United Nations data, only 61.4% of working age women were in employment, compared to just over 90% of working age men. In addition, globally, women earn only 51 cents, for every dollar earned by men (UN, 2023: 18).

neoliberal-patriarchy affects women of colour and working-class women disproportionately, as they experience complex exploitation and marginalisation in both paid and unpaid work due to racism and classism.

The unpaid labour of social reproduction that the neoliberal-patriarchal system benefits from includes, among others, child-bearing, child-rearing, older age and disability care, housework (such as cleaning and cooking), and the emotional labour that these tasks entail (Federici, 2023; Arruzza et al, 2019). These activities are essential in sustaining families, societies and, by extension, economies, yet remain invisible and devalued in economic analysis; however, Oxfam (2020: 6), estimates that it could be worth $10.8 trillion annually. Silvia Federici, an Italian-American scholar, educator and feminist activist, notes that the majority of this work, often emotionally draining, stressful, and energy sapping, is expected of women (Federici, 2023: 7-8), and Oxfam (2020: 14) estimates that more than three-quarters of it is indeed performed by women. The United Nations (UN, 2023: 4) additionally reports that even at the current rate of 'gender equality progress', "the next generation of women will spend on average 2.3 hours per day more on unpaid care and domestic work than men." The labour of social reproduction is physical, intellectual, emotional and psychological (Federici, 2023: 8), and, crucially, can fashion, shape and replenish the workforce to serve neoliberalism (Arruzza et al, 2019).

The above phenomena are perpetuated by the workings of a patriarchal-neoliberal state, with its uneven gender political representation in decision making structures (UN Women, 2023), and legal frameworks such as "restrictions of voting rights, abortion, rights under marriage, and property ownership" that have worked "to ensure women remain 'second-class citizens'" (Olufemi, 2020: 23) and exert control over women's lives. Additionally, the patriarchal-neoliberal state policies of austerity, particularly after the financial crisis of 2007-2009, are also argued by some to be sexist, racist, classist and ableist (Olufemi, 2020: 25-28) aimed at locking "working class, disabled and women of colour out of public life" (*ibid*: 26). This is also relevant to unpaid social reproduction labour, as the neoliberal state's reduction of funding for social and public provisions, as

well as privatisation of those services for the sake of profit making, may force families, and women in particular, to "bear the entire burden of care" (Arruzza et al, 2019: 31).

It can be argued that a few select women - usually white, professional, middle/upper class - have benefited from neoliberalism. However, these women, who often 'lean in' to the existing systems of oppression, often "*lean on* the poorly paid migrant women to whom they subcontract their caregiving and housework" (Arruzza et al, 2019: 11-12). Patriarchal-neoliberalism is a system where some women benefit from exploitation of other women (Federici, 2023: 6). Additionally, the participation of (some) women in the workforce and their financial independence has contributed to the emergence of "marketplace feminism" (Zeisler, 2017: xiii), or "girl boss feminism" (Olufemi, 2020: 3) - a depoliticised, pop, superficial feminism that links emancipation and self-actualisation of women with consumerism. It emphasises individualism rather than collective actions, weakens feminism as a political movement against both patriarchy and neoliberalism (Zeisler, 2017), and "risks becoming a trending hashtag and a vehicle for self-promotion, deployed less to liberate the many than to elevate the few" (Arruzza et al, 2019: 12). This form of feminism - sometimes labelled liberal/white feminism (Zakaria, 2021; Olufemi, 2020; Arruzza et al, 2019; Vergès, 2021; Fraser, 2013) - emphasises the neoliberal notions of personal freedom, autonomy, entrepreneurship and meritocracy over solidarity and collectivism. It is argued that liberal/white feminism has become a "handmaiden of neoliberalism" (Fraser, 2013: np) and its complicity in maintaining other systems of oppression, such as racism and colonialism, is also often noted (Zakaria, 2021; Olufemi, 2020; Arruzza et al, 2019; Vergès, 2021; Fraser, 2013).

1.7 Contextualising Civic Engagement - The Neoliberal-Patriarchal University

To paraphrase Paulo Freire (1972: 175), our education system is both a product of, and a vehicle for compliance with, the dominant forces and structures in the sector. The dominance of the neoliberal-patriarchal rhetoric in the higher education sector cannot be untangled from the wider social, economic, cultural and political environments our higher education institutions operate in. In fact, as I argue throughout this research, our third level system can possibly perpetuate and maintain the unequal and unjust world around us.

Therefore, it is now pertinent to discuss the neoliberal-patriarchal influences in higher education, as it is the context within which civic engagement practice is taking place.

1.7.1 The Neoliberal Reframing of Higher Education

New public management, or new managerialism - described by Lynch (2014) as the governance arm of the neoliberal project that applies market principles to the managing and organisation of public institutions - has played a significant role in refashioning the orientation of third level education (Lynch & Grummell, 2018). It has entered the realm of higher education and firmly taken hold since the 1990s and was accelerated during the time of economic recession of 2008 (Mercille and Murphy, 2017). With it, new public management has brought an increased focus on regulation and control, as well as caused a rise in the rhetoric of performance, efficiency, productivity and transactionality in the academy, and in public service more broadly.

Principally, in higher education, neoliberalism manifests as a decrease in public funding and an increase in commercial and private influences where universities are expected to support private industry and respond to the needs of private enterprise through research, knowledge transfer and a supply of skilled graduates (Mercille & Murphy, 2017). In Ireland, this took place simultaneously with a marked increase in student numbers which "placed universities under pressure to generate income from the selling of patents, the provision of consultancy and the creation of private companies, facilitating the normalisation of neoliberalism" (Hodgkins & Mannix McNamara, 2021: 57). There has also been a privatisation of campus services, including, among others, cleaning, maintenance or catering (Luhmann et al, 2019: 5). The phenomenon of marketisation in the higher education sector is also, and probably most crucially, demonstrated by an increased reframing of education as a service that can be purchased - creating the roles of a student-consumer and an academic-seller where learning is a commodity (Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2021).

Neoliberal and new public management influence has also negatively affected labour practices in third level education (e.g. Jaffe, 2021: 161-181). This is illustrated by the

overall worsening of work conditions coupled with the demands for flexibility, increased performance, the weakening of trade unions, and at the same time the heightened monitoring and control over employees (*ibid*). Additionally, many workers in the higher education sector were forced to accept pay cuts, as well as increased precarity, casualisation of employment, and job insecurity (Mercille & Murphy, 2017; Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2021; O'Keefe and Courtois, 2019) resulting in the rise of "professional proletarians" (Jaffe, 2021: 161) in the academy. The emphasis on performance has furthermore led to the emergence of a "super human academic" (Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2021: 60) - efficient, always available, outputs-oriented and focused on increasing their 'promotability' - as the ideal employee.

These phenomena have also led to a change in university culture, where individualism, competition, academic rat-race, and siloisation is promoted over collegiality, collaboration and solidarity (Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2021). An active encouragement of competition between employees - for instance for grant funding, obtaining patents, and research publications - has been observed; after all, "Competitiveness is the beating heart of neoliberalism" (*ibid*: 58). The culture of competition, and the "obsession with the quantification of outputs at individual and institutional levels" (*ibid*: 60) is also seen at a macro level where individual universities vie for the best possible place in the international higher education rankings that determine what counts as excellent and valuable. Additionally, the increased surveillance of staff performance has also led to the fostering of a culture of distrust among management and workers, as well as among workers themselves (*ibid*).

To summarise, the rise of neoliberal and corporate influences in higher education over the past few decades has caused a shift towards delivering education that prioritises economic purpose, employability of graduates, and 'value for money', where third level students are consumers, and the focus is on topping university rankings, revenue generation, outputs and meeting performance indicators (Lynch et al 2012; Slaughter & Leslie 2001; Mercille & Murphy, 2017; Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2021). This has eroded the public mission of universities with less emphasis placed on educating critically engaged citizens

and promoting the welfare of society. There has been a marked shift in thinking on what public services, including higher education, is for:

> There is a declining use of language that frames public services in terms of citizen's rights, public welfare and solidarity, and a growing emphasis on language that defines the citizen's relationship to the State in terms of market values, be that of customers, service users and competitors. (Lynch, 2017: 159)

1.7.2 Revealing the Neoliberal-Patriarchal Influences in the Academy

The ever-stronger influences of neoliberalism in education are interlinked with the patriarchal power and hierarchies (Grummel et al, 2009; Lynch et al, 2012). The neoliberal-patriarchal bias in the ways universities operate is visible on a number of levels concerning both the culture and mission of universities, and the operations and structures of the academy. While some progress might have been made over the past few decades, it can be stated with a degree of certainty that "the white male remains legitimately in power in HE" (David, 2017: 214) and the "rules of the game remain misogynistic" (David, 2017: 224).

Patriarchal power within the academy can be seen, for instance, in the way knowledge production has been traditionally understood in higher education. Some scholars claim there is an emphasis on academic objectivity, rationality, and impartiality, something that Donna Haraway (1988), one of the most prominent critics of the masculine bias in the pursuit of knowledge, called "a view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Haraway, 1988: 89). This approach to knowledge production renders the scholar neutral; it replaces the 'I' with the seemingly unbiased 'author'. These 'male' epistemologies have been subject to critiques from feminist scholars over the past decades (e.g. Harding, 1995; 2004; Hartstock, 2004; Fricker, 2007). Additionally, despite the rise of the notion of 'expert by experience' in academia, it is still widely accepted that knowledge production rests within the walls of the university, not outside of them. It is the scholars who are considered as knowers, with those outside the academy still widely perceived as passive recipients of this knowledge. These notions of neutrality and superiority of knowledge generated in the academy could be a hindrance to the wider embeddedness of

critical/transformative civic engagement. Practising it would typically entail taking a 'value-laden' and 'biased' stance against inequality and for social justice, and this may be seen as a threat to the traditional institutional 'rules'. Additionally, the asset-based, rather than deficit-based, view of the community that is a feature of critical civic engagement (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011:22), means that the expertise developed in the community is valued equally to the expertise developed within universities, which challenges the authorised knowledge supremacy paradigm.

Furthermore, as a masculinist lens seemingly controls the thinking about the neoliberal global political economy, STEM and business disciplines, traditionally male dominated (European Commission, 2019; UNESCO, 2018; HEA, 2018b), are seen as key drivers of economic progress, while humanities and social sciences, largely feminised (European Commission, 2019; HEA, 2018b), are devalued (Nussbaum, 2010). With the neoliberal emphasis on employability of graduates, and teaching transferable skills, it is typically the STEM disciplines, rather than liberal arts, that can provide our students with an immediately and obviously marketable degree (Luhmann et al, 2019), and knowledge disciplines that that do not have an instantaneous relevance to the market are assigned lower status (Lynch, 2014: 9). This, again, bears relevance for community engagement in higher education. As an area that, I argue, is largely feminised in Ireland (as I note in section 4.4.1), typically originating from humanities and social sciences disciplines (see section 2.1), and, at its transformative/critical end of the spectrum, aims to cultivate socially-conscious and engaged citizens, rather than focussing on development of marketable employability skills, it also may be marginalised in the neoliberal-patriarchal academy.

To continue, within a neoliberal-masculinist interpretation, research activity in academia is typically constructed as "neutral, rational and meritocratic" (Leathwood, 2017: 228). There is a focus on research excellence and global impact, a considerable pressure on academics to produce research that generates revenue - either through grants or knowledge and technology transfer or patents - and a "neoliberal framing of research as innovation" (Leathwood, 2017: 232). 'Research as innovation' is often understood as one and the same

with ‘research in STEM sciences’, and “ontologies and epistemologies dominant in [STEM] disciplines [are] being the taken-for granted norm” (Leathwood, 2017: 232), where the norm means objectivity, neutrality, randomised control trials and quantitative research, with the local, qualitative, subjective research rooted in experience (especially of marginalised groups) is considered as outside this norm. Overall, the qualities that seem to be desired when it comes to research in a neoliberal-patriarchal academy are those of ruthlessness and competition (*ibid*). Within this interpretation of research excellence, community-engaged research (which is typically one of the vehicles for operationalising civic engagement in higher education), underpinned by the ethos of collaboration, mutuality and reciprocity, and aiming to address social issues and needs, rather than the needs of the economy, could be devalued.

Next, women in a neoliberal-patriarchal academy are also largely underrepresented in senior posts, often excluded from decision-making structures, and are paid less than their male counterparts (HEA, 2016; 2018). While in recent years more women have been appointed as Presidents in Irish HEI, it is worthwhile to keep in mind which women are centred when it comes to promoting gender equality in professional spaces (Zakaria, 2021), as women-leaders can also advance unfair work practices, undermine staff and uphold the unjust neoliberal-patriarchal structures.

Furthermore, it is now well documented that the working conditions of men and women in the neoliberal-patriarchal higher education sector differ both in Ireland and internationally, with women continuing to hold the majority of both part-time and temporary/contract positions (European Commission, 2019; HEA, 2018b; HEA, 2022). With the rise of precarious employment, driven by new public management, there are more women than men who have less security when employed as researchers (European Commission, 2019), which effectively renders some women the “working poor” (O’Keefe & Courtois, 2019: 473). Additionally, according to some research there tend to be more male academics engaged on permanent contracts and more female academics on precarious contracts (Leathwood, 2017; O’Keefe and Courtois, 2019). Moreover, the dominant neoliberal demands in third level sector, such as round-the-clock availability, ignoring domestic and

caring responsibilities, gender-neutral professionalism and managerial 'care-lessness' contribute to sustaining the marginalisation of women in the academy (Lynch et al, 2012). It can be argued that "Contemporary academia demands a particular subject: enterprising, highly productive, competitive, always available, and willing to withstand precarity" (The Res-Sisters, 2017: 268).

Finally, the "temporal regimes" of present-day academy are also gendered where child-bearing/rearing, maternity and taking career breaks to care for relatives are considered incompatible with the demands of the neoliberal higher education system (Henkel, 2017). The hours of university operations, teaching workloads, and increasing administrative and procedural burdens largely affect women, who usually perform caring duties (Grummel et al, 2009; Lynch et al, 2012). While some HEIs in Ireland might be introducing actions to promote greater gender equality, not least through the Athena Swan programme, O'Keefe & Courtois (2019) argue that these efforts tend to be mainly focused on senior positions, while ignoring the precariously employed female academics who are rendered 'non-citizens' in academia, and even senior female staff rely on exploitation of 'lower rank' women. It might likely take decades before any significant change is visible, especially when it comes to issues that are not easily addressed by policy or management, but those deeply rooted culturally, and women might continue to be perceived as 'space invaders' and 'interlopers' (Leathwood, 2017).

To sum up, as Grummel et al (2009: 192) note, the ubiquity of neoliberal practices in the academy "allowed old masculinities to remake themselves and maintain hegemonic male advantage." These patriarchal rhetorics and practices are said to often interfere with professional progress of women in academia (Knights & Richards, 2003). It is typically disproportionately women that are negatively affected by the adaptation of free-market principles in the academy. I would argue that the discourses of the neoliberal-patriarchal higher education system, such as competition, dominance, individualism, performance, importance of hierarchy, ruthlessness, and self-sufficiency, may create an environment that is unfavourable to community engagement practice where care, collaboration, collectivity, solidarity, equality, partnership, and community flourishing are emphasised (e.g. Randles

& Quillinan, 2014). Many women directly involved that I interviewed for this research spoke of their love and care for students, their desire for nurturing people and relationships, as well as the importance of collectivism, collaboration and partnership. As such, the dominant rhetoric of the neoliberal-patriarchal academy could potentially prevent civic engagement, especially its critical/transformative iteration, from thriving.

Intersectional feminist analysis demands the critique of the hegemonic unjust and unequal structures of neoliberal-patriarchy - as well as those of whiteness and classism - however, it would be remiss of me not to provide a note of hope and possibility. While the neoliberal project seems to have taken a firm hold on education, it has also been resisted in various educational realms. Tett & Hamilton (2019), for instance, demonstrate that neoliberalism can be resisted, and document how it is indeed challenged across adult and community education, school education, and higher education in various national and transnational contexts. The authors featured in this publication offer accounts of both movements of resistance, and everyday approaches to challenging neoliberalism, such as, for instance, learner-centredness, commitment to holistic learning, or encouraging creativity and collaboration (Tett & Hamilton, 2019). Similarly, Crimmins (2019) documents the ways in which sexism is actively resisted in higher education, and shows that despite the seeming ubiquity of patriarchy, there are many in academia who utilise modes of teaching and scholarship that attempt to undermine it. Both publications provide useful tools and techniques for challenging the unjust dominant rhetoric in higher education, or, in other words, “resources of hope” (Tett & Hamilton, 2019: 4). There is also some evidence from the United Kingdom that implementing the Athena Swan Charter actions has contributed to an extent to addressing gender challenges and promoting incremental cultural change in higher education (Graves et al, 2019). While the current cultural, political and economic higher education environments may remain bleak and hostile, it can be hoped we might be moving in a more positive direction.

1.8 Organisation of Thesis

In this chapter, I presented the research topic, aims and question, as well as the rationale for this study. I signalled the contemporary debates pertaining to the orientations of civic

and community engagement, specifically indicating that transformative and critical civic engagement may have the potential to disrupt unjust and unequal systems dominating our society and education system. I also introduced myself and discussed my ways of being and knowing as an adult educator, civic engagement practitioner and a researcher, and outlined my conceptual and theoretical commitments, focussing in particular on feminist critical pedagogy, intersectional feminism, transformative civic engagement and the critique of the neoliberal-patriarchal influences in education and beyond. I presented my personal and professional experiences as well as bodies of thought that were formative for me and my worldview. This chapter has also positioned the research in the context of a neoliberal-patriarchal academy.

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter Two is concerned with fundamentals of civic engagement - its understandings, key manifestations and activities, as well as its historical origins and evolution. I first trace the emergence and development of civic engagement in higher education - drawing from the experiences of the United States, where much of the literature on the topic originates - and then in Ireland. I also discuss and problematise the various interpretations of civic engagement, as well as consider the concept of an engaged university, and then present the common vehicles through which community engagement is typically operationalised.

In Chapter Three I delve deeper into the contested discourses of engagement and civic engagement at universities. I consider the various conceptions of community and citizenship. I also explore the civic engagement continuum practices from transactional to transformative and pose questions about the former potentially contributing to maintaining the superior status of universities over communities and serving the priorities of a neoliberal academy. In this chapter I also argue for transformative and critical rather than transactional and service civic engagement. I additionally explore the synergies between transformative and critical community engagement and feminist scholarship and pedagogy.

Chapter Four offers a critical review of relevant Irish policies that frame university-community engagement, analysing how policy further situates the Irish civic

engagement within the neoliberal-patriarchal academy. I also outline how policy has enabled and restricted community engagement practitioners in Ireland. I additionally discuss how policy contributed to both the legitimacy and taming of the practice, and whether it served as a vehicle for co-opting community engagement to the dominant neoliberal narratives in higher education. I also outline how Campus Engage Ireland evolved as a network. I finally offer an institutional review of the strategic plans of Irish universities specifically in relation to the place of civic engagement in them.

In Chapter Five I discuss the methodology and methods I utilised. I focus specifically on critical and standpoint feminist research frameworks, discussing their foundational tenets, such as challenging the dominant modes of knowledge building, valuing experiential knowledge, praxis, reflexivity as well as issues of reciprocity, power and hierarchy (Harding, 1995 & 2004; Hartstock 2004; Fricker 2007; Hesse-Biber 2012; Letherby, 2003; Oakley, 1981, 2016). I outline how I draw from these critical feminist inquiry principles in my selected research methods. I follow this by presenting the research design, my approach to participant selection and recruitment, as well as the ethical considerations pertinent to my inquiry and relationship with participants. This chapter additionally offers an account of the data analysis process, focusing specifically on reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). The chapter is infused with my reflections on the research process and myself as a feminist researcher.

Chapter Six forms the first part of research findings, where I specifically focus on the research participants and their ways of becoming and being civic engagement practitioners. I first discuss the participants' ways-in to community engagement, as well as their personal and professional values. I then move to participants' thoughts on transformative civic engagement and active citizenship, as well as their insights into being a female civic engagement professional in the academy. Finally, I focus on the ways the seven women I interviewed do their work, looking specifically at holistic engaged pedagogy, flourishing, connections and relationships, finding community, as well as traversing boundaries. This chapter also shows civic engagement as a workload-heavy, marginalised and largely unrecognised practice.

Chapter Seven then spotlights how the civic engagement practitioners navigate the systems and structures in higher education that can be counter-normative to their values and ways of working. I present the participants' thoughts on the location, liminality and embeddedness of community engagement within the wider university. I focus on the challenges of being a civic engagement practitioner in the present-day university in terms of the clash of values, policy, workloads and recognition. Finally, I also present the ways of working practitioners utilise to further promote community engagement in higher education either through exploiting and leaning into the dominant university discourses or resistance.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis, with a reminder of the research purpose and questions and a final analysis of the findings themes, as well as their implications for civic engagement practice in higher education.

Chapter Two: The Origins, Concepts and Practices of Higher Education Civic Engagement

2.1 Tracing the Origins of Civic Engagement in Higher Education

Engagement and civic engagement are not recent concepts in universities and have a history of development. Some scholars claim that these discourses have been present since the conception of higher education. In the United States, for instance, Laurison et al (2006: 17) note that "As long as there have been colleges and universities in this country, there has been both a commitment at the heart of the curriculum to preparation for what we might call civic engagement, and conflicts around how to square that commitment with the other callings of higher education."

In the US, where literature on the topic is perhaps most prolific, some scholars point to the influence of Benjamin Franklin's philosophical thought on civic engagement development (Harkavy, 2015). John Dewey, an American educationalist and reformist, who outlined how education can serve to shape social and civic consciousness, is also frequently mentioned as one of the forces for spurring the community engagement movement (Benson et al, 2017; Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011; Harkavy, 2015), as are his contemporaries Jane Addams and Dorothy Day - radical women social activists. In Latin America, the rise and development of 'university extension' (initially entailing widening participation but later expanded to mean community outreach more broadly) in the 1920s was also an early manifestation of civic engagement (Munck, 2023: 38-42). Ernest Boyer, a former President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, was another influential figure in reinvigorating higher education community engagement in the United States, arguing that "the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement" (Boyer, 1996: 11). His call for scholarship of engagement is cited as a significant incentive for American practitioners (e.g. Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011; Jacoby et al, 2009; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Hartley, 2009; Harkavy, 2015).

More generally, Paulo Freire (1996) with his articulation of praxis and conscientisation through education, is also often credited as one of the major forces of influence in the origins and development of civic engagement in education (Plaxton-Moore, 2021; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Wingeier-Rayo, 2016). Here, Munck (2023: 41), notes that Freire was Director of Cultural Extension at University of Recife in early 1960s. Civic engagement practitioners are argued to often have a set of shared ontological orientations and ethical values that bring them to the work and enable them to operate (Dostillo & Perry, 2017: 6-7), such as, for instance, a commitment to social, civic and consciousness raising potential of higher education. Dostillo & Perry (2017: 6) note that "fundamental to our [civic engagement professionals] commitment to the civic purposes of higher education is a belief that such a purpose is central and critical to a more just world. These commitments are the driving energy behind our work."

Furthermore, Star Plaxton-Moore - an American civic engagement researcher and champion - states that while the higher education sector's interest in community engagement has increased and decreased over the decades, some colleges have generally retained their commitment to this ethos - namely traditionally Black or faith-based higher education institutions (Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 21-26). The former focused more on transformative civic engagement aimed at disrupting the dominant structures of default whiteness, while the latter generally centred charity and service as community engagement, although it would be unfair to say that they did not have a higher aim of achieving social justice (Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 21-26). Additionally, the author outlines that community and civic engagement have historically had a stronger tradition in academic disciplines that are 'outwardly' focused, for instance education, social work, public health, as well as ethnic and women's and gender studies. The latter two have been promoting the social and political activism inside and outside the classroom as a core, curricular element of teaching, learning and research since its foundation (Orr, 2011; Costa & Leong, 2012a, 2012b; McTighe-Musil, 2010) with a strong focus on transforming society into a more just, and challenging systems of oppression through civic and community engagement (Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 21-26).

While references to the public and social mission of universities might have existed since their formation, higher education institutions had historically been, and to a large extent perhaps still are, spaces for elitism and inequality. As Sara Jaffe (2021: 164) puts it, “Higher education has a long history of a tiered, hierarchical structure; after all, it’s there in the name”, and the purpose “to train the upper castes of society first and foremost." Furthermore, there is a valid reason why the concept of ivory tower, self-absorbed and divorced from the world outside of it, is perhaps most commonly linked with the academy. Additionally, the rise of neoliberal influences in higher education has caused a change in its direction and purpose. These influences “[c]oupled with legacies of settler colonialism, imperialism, exploitative research practices, and epistemicide, [may lead one to argue] that higher education functions more to oppress, extract, marginalize, and co-opt community rather than advance the public good” (Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 7). It is important to keep these points in mind during the discussion on the historical evolution of university civic engagement.

To close this section, I think it is important to acknowledge the rich contributions of women to research on, and practice of, civic and community engagement, and in doing so I take inspiration from Star Plaxton-Moore (2021: 26) who explicitly recognised several “revolutionary mothers” of the practice. Barbara Jacoby, referenced above, has been an active advocate in civic engagement, and in particular service learning, since the 1980s, and has published widely on the topic for the past three decades. Nadinne Cruz is also recognised as one of the pioneers and leaders of practice and has been an outspoken campaigner for critical community engaged scholarship since the 1980s who “has done the courageous and necessary work of inserting incisive and critical questions to interrogate the nature of our community-engaged principles and practices” (Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 26). Caryn McTighe-Musil, an advocate of civic engagement and a champion of women’s and gender studies programmes has advanced the popularisation of civic learning in the higher education sector in the United States. Finally, more recently, Tania Mitchell has been cited as an influential scholar, with her work focusing on critical service learning, the questions of power and oppression in civic engagement curricular activities, and the contribution of ethnic studies in civic learning. In Ireland, the rise of civic engagement in higher education

has been led both through research and practice in majority by women - which is one of the reasons why I chose to interview female practitioners for this research. Community-engagement champions such as Lorraine McIlrath, Lorraine Tansey, Josephine Boland and Ann Lyons, among many others, have worked tirelessly to elevate higher education civic engagement for nearly two decades and inspired me to undertake this research. My attention now turns to tracing the beginnings and evolution of Irish university-community engagement.

2.2 Origins of Civic Engagement in Ireland

2.2.1 Early University-Community Engagement Initiatives in Ireland

The proliferation of research and practice in civic engagement in the United States has contributed to the growing interest in the area in Ireland in the early 2000s, and the National University of Ireland Galway (now University of Galway) was the first non-US university to join the Campus Compact[3] network in 2002, with a view of growing service learning, as Su-Ming Khoo (2006) notices. The author also notes that the rise in the interest in community engagement in that decade could have been influenced by the decline in civic participation among the Irish population, coupled with disquiet about the rise in consumerism (Khoo, 2006).

However, it is worthwhile to note that civic and critical learning, and education fostering active citizenship have had a presence in the Irish third level sector prior to the 2000s. One area where this is visible is in development education. While, similarly to civic engagement, development education is a contested term (Khoo, 2006), it generally employs critical, reflexive and activist approaches to learning and aims at shining a light on inequalities and socio-political issues in today's world. Irish Aid notes that development education "aims to increase public awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent, and unequal world", as well as encourages critical consideration of global justice challenges and emphasises activism in areas such as climate crisis, hunger, human rights and gender equality (Irish Aid, 2021: 45). This demonstrates that critical civic

[3] A network of American colleges and universities committed to the public and social mission of HE

engagement and development education generally share some common values, approaches and goals. Development education initiatives have been present in the Irish third level sector for a number of decades, and a recent report from Irish Development Education Association particularly highlights the long-standing collaboration between Maynooth University and Kimmage Development Studies Centre, the range of under- and postgraduate programmes in this discipline at the University of Galway, as well as smaller initiatives at University College Dublin and Dublin City University (IDEA, 2017).

The strong links between higher education institutions and community development work in Ireland need to be mentioned. Irish HEIs have collaborated with Community Work Ireland, on projects in the areas of research, education and training (including degree programmes in community development), and advocacy. Some recent initiatives include research on Feminist Climate Justice (NWC, 2024) - a collaboration between Community Work Ireland, National Women's Council of Ireland, University College Cork and Maynooth University - as well as a jointly designed certificate programme in Community Work in a Changing Ireland, delivered by Maynooth University.

While typically located outside the formal higher education system, adult and community education also share the commitments of critical civic engagement agenda, inspired by Freirean (1996) ethos of critical consciousness, social transformation, emancipation and actively challenging inequalities and unjust social, economic and political structures. University departments and centres promoting its ideals have been in existence for a number of decades. At University College Cork, the Adult Continuing Education office (opened in 1946) has been delivering programmes on and off campus to adult learners, as well as professional development programmes for community education practitioners. Similarly, Maynooth University's Department of Adult and Community Education (founded in 1972) has been engaging with community learners through accredited and non-accredited courses, as well as other initiatives, such as Communiversity (delivered in participation with local libraries and partnership companies), or the Community Leadership Certificate co-delivered in Ballymun jointly with the Community and Family Training Agency in the 1990s and early 2000s. The School of Social Policy, Social Work

and Social Justice at University College Dublin (UCD) have also engaged in community and adult education with one prominent example including the Diploma in Drug and Alcohol Work co-delivered jointly with Urrús in Ballymun. Some other adult and community education initiatives originating from the higher education sector in Ireland have included UCD Access and Lifelong Learning office (opened in 1989) University of Galway's Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (established in 1993), as well as programmes based in former Institutes of Technology that traditionally have been more responsive to the needs of their local communities. Additionally, Quilty et al (2016) note that a range of community-based higher education initiatives, stemming from the growth in women's community education, contributed to "challenging the spaces of knowledge production within the academy" (Quilty et al, 2016: 38). One can also argue that civic engagement discourses in the Irish higher education sector have been present to an extent in widening access and participation and outreach initiatives (such as Trinity Access Programme established in 1993), as well as in student volunteering.

2.2.2 The Rise of Civic Engagement at Irish Universities

It was not until the 2000s in Ireland, however, that the term 'civic engagement' more firmly entered higher education lingo. That was coupled with an increase in the interest in the theories and practices of higher education civic engagement and accompanied by a growing body of literature by Irish scholars (e.g. McIlrath & MacLabhrainn, 2007; McIlrath, 2009; McIlrath et al, 2012). One of the first formal civic engagement outfits in higher education in Ireland was the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) established at NUI Galway in 2001/2002 with the aim of promoting service learning as a pedagogical approach. Other pioneering initiatives founded in that decade included, to name a few, Students Learning with Communities office at Dublin Institute of Technology (now Technological University of Dublin) which in 2008 took under its wing the HEI's community-based learning and community-based research projects; Community-Academic Research Links (CARL) centre at University College Cork, established in 2006 to promote community engaged research; as well as DCU in the Community - a community outreach office linked with Dublin City University - opened in 2008 (Ozarowska, 2019). It needs to be noted that these initiatives did not seem to be fully integrated with wider university

structures - on one hand perhaps allowing more flexibility in their operations, but on the other hand at the risk of being perceived as auxiliary and non-essential.

Additionally, at that time several Irish HEIs started drafting and adopting explicit institutional civic engagement strategies (e.g. DCU in 2009). These initiatives were led from the ground up by engaged scholars and practitioners, often with little resources. In our research conversation, one participant in this study recalls that "it was very much a grassroots movement" and "a democratic space"; however, she also notes that there was eagerness among practitioners for "some kind of a national network or forum, to elevate and to come together" - in other words, to create a community of practitioners. Here, the words of John Saltmarsh, and American champion of democratic and transformative engagement, resonate with the Irish experience, when he recalls that the Campus Compact network in the United States provided "a kind of a home for early adaptors who were laboring in obscurity at (and often at odds with) their institutions" (Hartley, 2011: 33). The efforts of civic engagement practitioners and researchers resulted in the founding of Campus Engage Ireland in 2007. At that time, the network was led by NUI Galway (NUIG) and Dublin City University (DCU) in partnership with other Irish higher education institutions, and was initially hosted at NUIG. Campus Engage has been funded by the Higher Education Authority with contributions from participating HEIs.

In 2010, Campus Engage (see chapter one) commissioned a *Survey on Civic Engagement Activities in Higher Education in Ireland* which constituted the first attempt to map the range of civic engagement initiatives happening across the sector. The resulting report (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011), authored by Ann Lyons and Lorraine McIlrath - two prominent early female civic engagement champions and practitioners - documented a vibrant area with a spectrum of activities cutting across the practices of community-based/service learning, community-engaged research, volunteering, access and widening participation and other campus-community partnerships happening in universities, institutes of technology, and teacher training colleges. However, the report also portrayed these initiatives as often done in an ad-hoc and informal manner and under the radar by committed academics and practitioners who often pursued civic engagement activities on a

voluntary basis and on top of their regular workload (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011). Additionally, the area in Ireland was shown to be under-resourced both in terms of personnel and funding, and the report highlighted the emergent nature and uneven embeddedness of community engagement across the sector, a variety of understandings of it, and different institutional contexts and infrastructures within which these initiatives were taking place (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011; Lyons, 2012). Overall, though, a "growing appetite and interest in Ireland for civic engagement to be formally adopted and recognised across the HEI sector" was identified (Lyons, 2012: 185). The document made several recommendations for further embedding civic engagement initiatives in Irish HEIs, through, for instance, establishing specific institutional and national infrastructures and systems to enable the development of the area, developing a common definition of civic engagement and a civic engagement manifesto, as well as better measurement of community engagement initiatives.

The intentions were undoubtedly for wider growth and legitimacy of civic and community engagement in academia, as well as a stronger recognition for practitioners and champions performing the often-invisible work. However, given the neoliberal university context within which these calls were made, the appeals for better *management* of the area, establishing *formal structures*, as well as advocating for *measurement* of civic engagement activities (hence being a subject of meeting performance standards and outputs) meant, that the neoliberal thinking was already penetrating the university civic engagement realm with an attempt to co-opt it. Additionally, some of the language used in the report - with a notable example of a wish to deliver community engagement initiatives in a "cost effective manner to ensure maximum benefit" (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011: 41) - suggests that even at these early stages, civic and community engagement champions might have internalised the neoliberal rhetoric to an extent that they were willing to be co-opted by them.

The report also left certain questions unanswered, particularly "with regard to whether civic engagement should be positioned as a third pillar, alongside teaching and research, or whether it should be understood as encompassing all activities of higher education i.e. that civic engagement should be a defining characteristic – "a 'way of doing' higher education"

(Lyons & McIlrath, 2011: 41). Finally, the report seems to be located more on the political neutrality spectrum, with no mention of critical, activist or transformative aspects of civic engagement. Nevertheless, the publication was a significant output as it provided a baseline upon which practitioners and policy makers could work from. Crucially for this research, the Lyons & McIlrath report highlighted several tensions emerging from the landscape of civic engagement practice. Many of these issues and tensions are still acutely experienced by community engagement practitioners in the present, and we explored them with the participants of this study in our research conversations. These issues originating from practice are discussed throughout chapter seven.

2.3 Naming Civic Engagement

With the rise of the interest in community engagement, universities and networks in higher education began naming what civic engagement is, and expanding its interpretations, but it appears that there is no one way to define civic engagement or do civic engagement. As Jacoby et al (2009: 5) put it "there are probably as many definitions of civic engagement as there are scholars and practitioners who are concerned with it." Adler and Goggin's (2005) foundational article on the meaning of the term considers a range of activities that fit under the 'civic engagement' umbrella: from individual volunteering and community service, through collective action focused on community issues, political involvement, participation in public political life, as well as social change (Adler & Goggin, 2005: 238-239).

More specifically, however, what does civic engagement mean in the context of higher education and as understood by those directly involved? In broad terms, it is typically conceived of as cultivating an attitude of civic, social, public or political engagement of students and staff - the university community. However, according to Jacoby et al (2009), there are multiple issues relating to interpreting civic engagement in higher education. First of all, as I touched upon in chapter one, people who practise in the area use a multitude of terms to refer to it, for instance, among others, citizenship education, civic participation, participation in democratic processes, political engagement, community engagement, social responsibility, and public scholarship. Additionally, newer terms have started to appear that refer to roughly the same body of theory and practice. *University social*

responsibility (Coelho & Menezes, 2021; Ali et al, 2021; Larran Jorge & Andrades Pena, 2017; Vasilescu et al, 2010) has, for instance, received more prominence in recent years. Engagement is also sometimes referred to as the *third mission* of universities (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020; Ward & Hazelkorn, 2012), alongside teaching and research, although, as Ward & Hazelkorn (2012: 7) point out, in Europe the term *third mission* is perhaps more focused on engagement with the economy, knowledge transfer and innovation as a form of contributing to the development of societies. The term *public engagement* is also used in literature (e.g. Furco, 2010; Duncan & Matters, 2012); however, the emphasis here seems to be more on science and research communication and the way academics interact with the public. The abundance of terms used in relation to civic engagement is likely reflective of the plethora of activities happening in academia in this area. However, many of these terms carry different assumptions, significance, and politics, which poses a problem when it comes to agreement on central ideas and aims of community engagement (Bringle & Clayton, 2012). This sentiment is echoed by Costa and Leong (2012a) who urge us to be cognisant of "the nuances of each term and the epistemologies that underlie our choice of terms" (Costa & Leong, 2012a: 173). Additionally, Jacoby et al (2009) point to some questions that those involved in civic engagement in academia grapple with when they write, "Others have wondered, is civic engagement a content area, a process for skill development, or a lifestyle? Is it a programme, a pedagogy, or a philosophy? Can it be all of these?" (Jacoby et al, 2009: 6). Over a decade later, there still do not seem to be clear answers to these issues.

To elaborate on the issues raised above, Boland (2011) points to the wider context and environment in which civic engagement takes place that defines the understanding of it, noting that "Interpretations of civic engagement and the priority given to the different elements within it reflect the influence of such contextual factors as tradition, location, institutional mission, and public policy priorities" (Boland, 2011: 104). In a similar vein, Adler & Goggin (2005) argue "how the term is defined depends to a large degree on the perspective and interests of the definer" (Adler & Goggin, 2005: 237). Furthermore, Ronaldo Munck (2022), a sociologist and early champion of the civic engagement movement in Ireland, also discusses the ambiguity of the term:

> The polysemic nature of the term 'engagement' is thus clear: at one and the same time local and global, or business and socially oriented. Like other 'empty signifiers', we might take 'engagement' as a term waiting to be filled by different discursive and political formations. (Munck, 2022: 4)

Munck (2023: 43-44) also points to the risk of adopting one particular national form of community engagement as the norm. He argues that "how we all 'do' civic engagement (...) will depend on the context within which our higher education institutions work" and the way we deliver on the vision of an engaged university "will vary across the countries" (Munck, 2023: 44).

Given the contested nature of the terms, it is unsurprising that a range of different understandings have been adopted by national and international networks tasked with promoting the civic mission of universities. Starting with Ireland, as an active member of Campus Engage, I recall that when the following understanding of civic engagement was being crafted, the network was very much grassroots and led by engaged practitioners and scholars. Our activities and publications were widely consulted with those working 'on the ground', hence, this interpretation is largely Irish practitioner-owned:

> A mutually beneficial knowledge-based collaboration between the higher education institution with the wider community, through community-campus partnerships including the activities of community based learning, community engaged research, volunteering, community/economic regeneration, capacity-building and access/widening participation. (Mahony et al, 2014)

Another interpretation, provided by the US-based Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, is frequently used in the United States. They see community engagement as collaborations between HEIs and communities "for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" with objectives including enhancing curricula, fostering engaged and responsible citizenship and democratic values, and contribution to the public good (Carnegie Foundation n.d.).

The international Talloires Network of Engaged Universities, comprising over 400 member institutions from 84 countries, including Ireland, (Talloires Network n.d.) and the largest network of HEIs focusing on civic engagement and social responsibilities in the higher education sector, state that they "recognise and celebrate the diversity of ethical approaches to university civic engagement" (Talloires Network, n.d). Additionally, Talloires Network declare that the purpose of "collaborating with communities and partners [is] to confront societal challenges such as disease, famine, structural racism, gender oppression, economic inequality, climate change, and political polarization" (*ibid*) and that this can be done through, for example, "community-based research, applied research, service-learning, experiential learning, extension, volunteerism, public service, policymaking, political activism, and social entrepreneurship" (*ibid*).

2.3.1 Problematising Interpretations of Civic Engagement

On the surface these selected interpretations of civic engagement seem neutral and value-free. However, they are not - in fact, they are loaded with assumptions. It is clear that the understandings of civic engagement above emphasise reciprocity, collaboration and partnership between universities and the wider community, whereby higher education and community partners are equals in creating and sharing knowledge for 'mutual benefits'. However, there are challenges relating to the notion of equality in university-community partnerships, and whether this can truly be accomplished. The ideal of reciprocity and mutuality is problematic and difficult to achieve, and it is especially important to consider it in the context of, as Amber Dean, a Canadian cultural studies scholar and a proponent of feminist university-community engagement, notices "the university's long history of exploiting various communities (...) in the interest of controlling the production and reproduction of knowledge for its own benefit" (Dean 2019: 28) and, by extension, to the benefit of oppressive structures.

Furthermore, Iverson and James (2014: 16-18) note that when we speak of higher education students or staff engaging with communities, we usually refer to fostering their civic spirit and participation or educating for citizenship. This means, however, that questions surface around how 'civic' attitudes, skills and competencies are defined and

understood, by whom, and to what purpose (*ibid*). Here, I am reminded that education can serve the "perpetuation of the values of the dominating classes who organize education and determine its aims" (Freire, 1972: 175). Therefore, there is a risk that the formation of 'civic' attitudes, competencies and skills through civic engagement could mean cultivating a form of compliance, loyalty and obedience to social systems and structures that are unjust, unequal and benefit the upper echelons of our society. It is also additionally worth keeping in mind that there is a broad spectrum of 'citizenship' interpretations (e.g. Iverson & James, 2014; Murray, 2013; Powell & Geoghegan, 2004; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, 2004b) as will be discussed in section 3.1.

There is also the question of how 'community' is understood. 'Wider community' can include a broad range of actors, for instance - local, regional and global, public and private sectors, enterprise and industry, third sector, civic society, as well as internal campus communities. This posits questions of who of these stakeholders is the main beneficiary of university-community collaboration? Additionally, civic engagement interpretations often refer to 'the public', 'the public sector' and 'public good' which carries the implication that the community is considered a public sphere, perhaps more "typically associated with governmental, political affairs" (Iverson & James, 2014: 17) - and typically a 'male' realm - rather than 'private' familial or neighbourly networks, traditionally belonging to the female domain; here the gendered public/private dichotomy that feminists critiqued is reinforced (*ibid*). I am also reminded here that universities may often understand external communities they engage with, especially third sector and civic society groups, as underprivileged, lacking and disempowered (Dean, 2019: 30) further complicating the issues of equality and reciprocity in academia-community partnerships.

Furthermore, the interpretations I presented above demonstrate little reference to social justice and transformative orientations even though the Talloires Network explicitly lists the global and societal challenges that university-community partnerships should address. 'Political activism' is mentioned as one of the expressions of community engagement; however, any mention of social justice, transformation or critical engagement is conspicuously absent. It also needs to be noted that not all 'political activism' or 'activism'

is social justice oriented (Luhmann et al, 2019: 10). Finally, it is worth stating that many feminist practitioners and scholars tend to prefer to use terms such as 'praxis', 'activism' 'social justice' or 'experiential learning' in relation to pedagogical practices of civic engagement, in order to emphasise the crucial importance of experience, reflexivity, and critical consideration of issues of inequalities, power and transformation (Costa & Leong, 2012a: 173).

There may be reasons for avoiding politically charged interpretations of community engagement in higher education - 'neutral' language is perhaps easier to swallow, and can appeal to a larger audience, meaning practitioners and scholars representing various disciplines and political spectra can find a space for themselves in the civic engagement movement. However, there is also a risk that using depoliticised and neutral language to encourage more participation may lead to diluting the transformative and critical purpose of civic engagement. It could also be seen as a deliberate attempt to domesticate the existing activism within civic engagement as a part of the neoliberal project.

My meaning of civic engagement is perhaps best encapsulated by two Irish scholars and practitioners, Edel Randles and Bernie Quillinan, who state that:

> Civic Engagement is a process where people join together to conduct public work, it may be for political activism, advocating for social justice, consciousness raising, challenging and changing societal systems. It usually incorporates levels of social connectedness, coherence, shared philosophies, comradeship, social responsibility, compassion, courage and transcendence. (Randles & Quillinan, 2014: 37)

I am drawn to this meaning for several reasons. First of all, the authors emphasise the togetherness, collectivism and connection that, I argue, is crucial to civic engagement, which is never a project to be conducted in isolation. Secondly, I wholeheartedly support the notion of social justice and 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1996: 17) as core elements of community engagement with the purpose of objecting to systemic inequalities and injustices. Finally, I am drawn to the values of compassion and courage that, I argue, are not often present in our higher education system.

One thing seems clear - practitioners, scholars, higher education providers and networks each offer a different understanding of what this field of practice entails, depending on national, institutional and cultural contexts and needs, as well as internal motivations of the definers (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Boland, 2011, Jacoby et al, 2009; Munck, 2022). These differences in definitions, however, can pose some challenges. It is, for instance, noted that the variation in terminology may make interdisciplinary dialogue more difficult, potentially leading to peripheralisation of civic engagement (Orr, 2011; McTighe-Musil, 2010; Costa & Leong, 2012b). Additionally, "without definitional focus and clarity, a movement may end up offending and inspiring no one" (Hartley, 2009: 25). Finally, there is a threat of allowing those who support and maintain the unjust structures in our society and education to name and define what civic engagement should be. This last point is worth keeping in mind as the neoliberal-patriarchal academy can be a cog in a system that helps preserve the unequal status quo.

2.4 What Is an Engaged Institution?

So, what is an engaged, or civically engaged, university in the neoliberal context? David Watson (2007), a British academic and educationalist, notes that a civically engaged university cannot be considered only on the basis of "being there" and educating people to participate in the work, civic and family life (Watson, 2007: 133). Iverson and James (2014: 1) agree, writing that "Just being present is not synonymous with enacting civic responsibility". Watson (2007: 133) also discusses the need for HEIs to contribute to the social and economic development of their region, and their responsibility towards the university's internal community. He offers a summary of what being an 'engaged university' should involve: course portfolio, research, community engagement, a comfortable and enjoyable place of work, ethical and environmental responsibility, reputation, recruitment, reflexivity, professional contributions (Watson, 2007). While the author attempts to capture engagement in its broadest sense, it is worth noting that his emphasis seems to be perhaps of a more neoliberal orientation - this of educating students to participate in the labour market, contributing to regional economic development and engaging with enterprise. It is also arguable whether current neoliberal-patriarchal universities can in fact be 'enjoyable places of work' that truly care about their internal

community of staff, especially given the now well documented and researched prevalence of academic precarity, the culture of overwork and an obsessive preoccupation with performance and outputs (e.g. Jaffe, 2021; Lynch, 2012; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Leathwood, 2017; Ball, 2013).

Furthermore, the Australian sociologist Reawyn Connell describes the good university as "democratic, engaged, truthful, creative and sustainable" (Connell, 2019: 17) and elaborates her understanding of 'engaged' as "being fully present for the society that supports the university" (*ibid*: 172). Munck (2010) also offers a perspective on an engaged university that "is doing far more than just preparing its students for employment: it is seeking to help create fully rounded citizens of their community, even perhaps 'global citizens' as befits the university of the global era" (Munck, 2010: 31-32), and additionally recognises the role engaged universities can play in the enhancement of civil society and sustainable development.

Universities may place more or less emphasis on their civic engagement mission depending on, among other factors, their institutional values and priorities, disciplinary strengths, geographical location, local community needs and challenges, as well as national policy developments (Boland, 2011). However, it is worth keeping in mind here that the co-existing discourses of engagement pose some tensions at institutional level, and lead to questions about which model of engagement universities adopt, or why they choose to commit to civic engagement at all. While generally HEIs have moved away from the 'ivory tower' standard of the past, it is still important to continue to query whether the purpose of university engagement is contributing to the public good, social justice, equitable and just society, and transformation (including not only of communities and individuals, but also the academy itself), or if, as Munck (2022: 3) puts it, "the new 'engaged university' would integrate itself into the market system and serve the needs of business."

Civic engagement can serve the priorities of a neoliberal university - a university that still participates in perpetuating inequalities and injustices (Dean et al, 2019). Some feminist

scholars, for instance, seem apprehensive of institutional civic engagement efforts in fear that when not 'done right' (that is with a critical and transformative purpose) these activities can reinforce the same oppressive structures, ideologies and beliefs that they are trying to challenge (Bocci, 2015; Costa & Leong, 2012a), as well as be used to uphold the power of the academy. To elaborate, at universities that are preoccupied with performativity, higher education rankings, inter-institutional competition, branding, employability of graduates and marketability of skills acquired by students, is civic engagement seen as a tool for social change, or does it in some ways serve the neoliberal university? (Luhmann et al, 2019). Does admirably committing to the goals of community engagement in mission statements - on paper - mean that universities can absolve themselves from a deeper and more meaningful reflection on social inequalities and, importantly, their own role in supporting them? Does branding themselves as 'engaged institutions' allow universities to relinquish their responsibilities to work for social change? Finally, a question remains whether the neoliberal-patriarchal academy could potentially use civic engagement to conceal harmful practices it participates in that exacerbate inequalities and injustices.

2.5 Operationalising Civic Engagement

Despite the lack of definitional clarity of civic engagement discussed above, there is a broad agreement, at least on paper, as to how it is most commonly enacted through curricular and extracurricular activities. Literature from the field of civic engagement practice typically focuses on community-based teaching and learning (or service learning), student and staff volunteering, and community-engaged research and scholarship (e.g. McIrlath et al, 2012; MacLabhrainn & McIlrath, 2007; McIlrath et al, 2014; Soska & Butterfield, 2004; McIrlath et al, 2009; Jacoby et al, 2009). There are also other activities through which civic engagement can be realised, for instance, public engagement and science communications, media engagement, political activism of both staff and students, sustainability engagement, partnering with community organisations on developing curricula, as well as access and widening participation, or equality, diversity and inclusion practices. The work of Campus Engage Ireland, as well as the work of the practitioners and

leaders I interviewed, focuses on volunteering, community-engaged teaching and learning, and community-engaged research; hence, it is these practices that I now briefly outline.

I illustrate this discussion with examples from Irish practice - examples that may be located at various points of the civic engagement model continuum (see Figure 1). Some of these Irish initiatives entail work from a social justice/transformative perspective, while others may emphasise skills and competencies development, fostering participatory citizenship, or service to community. This documents the richness and variety of initiatives and approaches from across a wide range of academic disciplines and institutions in Ireland.

2.5.1 Volunteering

Student and staff volunteering has a long history in higher education internationally (McIlrath & Tansey, 2013: 223) and its full spectrum is extremely broad. For staff it may include mentoring programmes, consultancy, serving on boards of non-profit organisations, committee work, science communications and media engagement. Students commonly volunteer through, among others, university clubs and societies, as class and year representatives, or in their own capacity in the range of community and voluntary organisations locally and internationally. While writing this, I keep in mind that volunteering is not a universally good practice, and that there are critiques of volunteering, including, among others, a 'good intentions', benevolence, and service framing of this activity, the lack of critical engagement of volunteers with socio-political contexts of their activities, as well as their own privilege, and a risk of reproducing inequalities (Tansey & Gallo, 2018: 83-84). I agree that "Student volunteering programmes need to engage with critical dimensions of the work to ensure that students are supported and guided towards social justice and the root causes of inequalities and poverty, rather than propping up a status quo" (Tansey & Gallo, 2018: 77-78).

Some Irish prominent and long-standing examples of formal university volunteering programmes include University of Galway ALIVE certificate and University of Limerick President's Volunteer Awards. In terms of assessment, both programmes incorporate a

compilation of a reflective portfolio for students, discussing their volunteering process, the benefits of student engagement to their own development and to the communities, as well as (in the case of ALIVE certificate) the societal and institutional root causes of problems their volunteering addresses (Tansey & Gallo, 2018: 86). Both programmes offer training for volunteers that involves, among others, ethical volunteering and code of behaviour, intercultural learning, guidelines for international volunteering, practical skills training, and campaign/advocacy training (McIlrath & Tansey, 2013: 228, 232-233). The majority of higher education institutions in Ireland do not necessarily offer formal awards for student volunteering effort, and only a few have a dedicated office or staff members who are tasked with promoting this community engagement activity (e.g. DCU Volunteer, UCD Volunteers Overseas), and others might locate volunteering within their Careers or Student Services units. In 2013/2014 Campus Engage, with participation from nearly all HEIs in Ireland, developed a national student volunteering platform - studentvolunteer.ie - to coordinate and elevate the efforts to encourage this civic engagement activity among students. I was proud to co-lead on this initiative as the Co-Convenor of the Campus Engage Volunteering and Student-Led Engagement Working Group and remember it as a participatory and collaborative project. In 2022/2023, the one-size-fits-all system was deemed unsuitable by a number of formerly participating HEIs and currently only five remain involved. Several HEIs in Ireland formally recognise student volunteering through certificates and awards that may be recorded on their transcripts (e.g. University of Galway ALIVE certificate, University of Limerick President Volunteer Awards, or Trinity College The Dean of Students' Volunteer Awards).

As volunteering is typically an extracurricular activity, it has been difficult to capture and measure the full extent of it; however, Campus Engage attempted to do so, at least regarding student participation, and reported that nearly 19,000 students from 10 HEIs were registered as volunteers in 2021 on the studentvolunteer.ie platform (Campus Engage, 2021). Additionally, a report on the *Impact Assessment of Irish Universities, Delivering for Ireland* (Idecon, 2019) estimated that in the 2017/2018 academic year nearly 18,000 student volunteers generated an economic value of 28.4 million euros through their engagement. Monetising civic and community engagement activities, and volunteering in

particular, can be problematic (Mitchell, 2016: 346-347). The language of 'putting a figure on something' often speaks to university leadership and policy makers, especially in the neoliberal context. Additionally, it can be (and, in my experience of working with Campus Engage, has often been) used to legitimise and elevate civic engagement work by showing 'how much it is worth'. However, we need to be mindful that generating economic value is not the purpose of community engagement. Finally, Mitchell (2016: 346-347) points to the fact that the hourly value attached to volunteering hours is often exaggerated, and monetising our students' work, and not doing the same for the work of our community partners, reinforces the idea of whose work we value more.

Finally, some research suggests that in terms of higher education staff, it is typically women who perform more external/internal engagement work, volunteering and academic 'care-taking' (Guarino & Borden, 2017; Babcock et al, 2017; Pyke, 2011; Neumann & Terosky, 2007; Antonio et al, 2000; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2024) - as will be discussed more fully in section 4.4.1.

2.5.2 Community-Engaged Teaching and Learning

Community-engaged teaching and learning is another common facet of university civic engagement. A variety of terms are used here - service learning, community-based learning, community involvement, or community placements - depending on geographical location and traditions of the higher education systems.[4] In Europe, service learning, community-based learning and community-engaged learning are all used to refer to the same practice where, in broad terms, students receive formal academic credit for the learning they acquire from participating in and, crucially, critically reflecting on, an experience of working with the community and voluntary sector partners (McIlrath & McDonnell, 2014; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). As such, community-engaged learning differs from volunteering, where reflection is not always a requirement. Additionally, when

[4] Service learning is a phrase preferred in the United States, reflecting the culture and ethos of 'service' in North American universities (Perry & Thomson, 2004). Additionally, in the US, civic engagement is often fully conflated with service learning. In countries where the idea of 'service' has a connotation of a master-servant relationship and colonial rule, such as the Republic of South Africa or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, other terms are preferred, such as community engagement or community interaction (Thomson et al, 2010).

volunteering is considered, it is typically the community that is the main beneficiary of university involvement, and if students and staff are recognised for their efforts, it is solely for their engagement in community service/work (Furco, 1996; McIlrath & McDonnell, 2014). On the other hand, in community-engaged learning, it is the learning students derive from taking part in community involvement and, most importantly, the reflection on it that is awarded with academic credit, and the focus is on mutual learning and mutual benefits for both learners and community partners (McIlrath & McDonnell, 2014). Again, I am mindful that the critiques concerning volunteering, as outlined above, are also applicable to community-engaged learning.

While there exist separate community-based/service learning modules, either degree specific or available for students enrolled on any degree, it is often individual lecturers and module coordinators, interested in civic engagement, who redesign their curricula and adapt their assessment methods to include community engagement elements, and map their existing module learning outcomes against civic engagement aims. To clarify with an illustration, a lecturer who delivers a marketing module may decide that their students will work with a community partner to devise an advertising/awareness raising campaign around a social issue jointly identified with the community partner. Such students are then assessed not only on the quality of their marketing work (degree-specific), but also on their level of engagement with the community partner, and, crucially, their reflection on the process. In Ireland, Campus Engage have developed an online course in community-engaged learning (delivered through the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education), available to any academic member of staff interested in redesigning the curricula they teach to include community engagement elements (teaching and assessment methods), or in designing new modules with specific community engagement learning outcomes.[5]

Campus Engage have also collected case studies of community-based learning modules delivered in a range of higher education institutions and across a number of disciplines, for instance, engineering, science, health and wellbeing or education, and it is worthwhile to

[5] See: https://opencourses.ie/opencourse/campus-engage-community-engaged-learning/

mention some examples. Trinity College School of Engineering and University of Galway School of Engineering students engage in accredited service learning projects aimed at designing real-life technology solutions to genuine issues and needs raised by community partners including, among others, non-governmental organisations such as Enable Ireland, Cope Galway, Age Ireland, or National Council for the Blind; statutory bodies like National Disability Authority; as well as local nursing homes or athletic clubs. At Technological University Dublin, students at the School of Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences as a part of their Professional Skills module can choose to work with Core Youth Service, as well as local youth groups and schools on delivering a Junior Scientist badge syllabus with a view to promote interest in studying science at third level among young people and at the same time developing their understanding of the role of scientists in society. University of Limerick Physical Education and Sport Science students/trainee teachers, as a part of their Integrated and Inclusive Physical Education module deliver a semester-long physical activity programme for young people with special needs in collaboration with Down Syndrome Limerick, Mid-West Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association and Enable Ireland. During Dublin City University's Campaigning for Health Equity module, students at the School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health plan, conduct and evaluate health equity campaigns jointly with community partners, such as local primary schools, and mental health and counselling services. The module also encourages students to consider issues of social justice and power in health equity.

2.5.3 Community-Engaged Research

Much of the focus of university civic engagement is on students, and while one of the main goals of civic engagement in higher education might be to educate them to become critically engaged citizens, there is also an emphasis on the ways staff can demonstrate their contribution to the civic mission of HEIs. Here, staff civic engagement can be operationalised through engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1996; Giles, 2016), or community-based/engaged research (McIlrath et al, 2014; O'Mahony et al, 2014; Munck, 2022).

Typically, community-engaged research comprises a wide range of methods and methodologies where the emphasis is on collaboration with community partners with the goal of addressing pressing social issues (McIlrath et al, 2014; Campus Engage, 2022a; 2022b; Munck, 2022). Community partners should be involved at every stage of the research process - from identifying the issues of importance, through problem formulation and deciding on the research methods and methodologies, as well as data analysis (Campus Engage, 2022a; 2022b). At the heart of community-engaged research is the equal co-production and sharing of knowledge between academia and community partners (*ibid*). Scholars engaged in community-based research typically promote an asset-based understanding of community and community partners. It is clear that community-engaged research is not a new concept and has been realised in the higher education sector through a range of participatory research methods. Additionally, the so-called 'Science Shops' - university outfits connecting community organisations with research expertise, originating in the Netherlands - have operated since the 1970s (Living Knowledge, n.d.).

One example of community-engaged research is Boxing Clever, a progressive rehabilitation programme for people experiencing problematic substance use, that has been delivered in Ballymun since 2012 via interagency work including local addiction services (Ballymun Youth Action Project, STAR Project), Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force, Dublin City Council, Health Service Executive, DCU in the Community and Dublin City University, and local boxing coaches. During the programme, participants engage in adult and community education, addiction education, addiction counselling, as well as sports and physical education. In 2015, academics from UCD School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice conducted a research project evaluating the impact of the Boxing Clever programme, jointly with addiction services practitioners involved (Morton et al, 2015). The research was practitioner and participant led. It resulted in the publication of a report (and several other publications co-authored by academics and practitioners) that assisted partners involved in improving the programme and securing further funding for its delivery. It also had a wider impact in terms of considering substance use interventions, which led to replicating the Boxing Clever programme in other areas in Dublin and

nationally. The research has also influenced national policy regarding drug addiction treatment approaches.

Additionally, several higher education institutions in Ireland have elevated community-engaged research activities by founding specific units and centres tasked with its promotion. Some examples include the Community Knowledge Initiative at University of Galway, the Community-Academic Research Links (CARL) at University College Cork, Dublin City University's Centre for Engaged Research, or the delivery of a Master's programme in Community Research at University of Limerick.

2.6 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I first trace the genealogy of community engagement, and I point to the influence of democratic progressive education, development education and adult and community education. I also acknowledge the contribution of disciplines of women's and gender studies, ethnic studies, public health and social work to the development of civic engagement. While my discussion on the history of community engagement in Ireland ends in the early 2010s, it will be continued in chapter four, where I analyse the relevant Irish policies of recent years.

This research supports a critical, feminist and transformative interpretation of civic engagement; however, this chapter documents the various meanings of community engagement. These different understandings of civic engagement are influenced not only by the values and philosophical commitments of practitioners and university leaders, but also the micro and macro contexts in which the work takes place, such as educational policies, or traditions of higher education in various locations. In this chapter, I point to the dangers of civic engagement being an empty signifier as it can be given meaning by those who support the neoliberal structures in which, I argue, our higher education system is located. This carries the risk of community engagement reinforcing the elitist, unjust and unequal discourses of the academy and being co-opted by them, rather than forming a part of educational practice that can challenge them - as this research explores. Given the lack

of definitional consensus, I map the ways through which civic engagement is enacted, showcasing the richness of approaches and initiatives in Ireland.

Chapter Three: Mapping The Contested Field and Discourses of Civic Engagement

3.1 Which Citizenship?

As has been alluded to thus far, civic engagement commonly entails fostering 'active citizenship' among students and staff at third level institutions. However, this concept is nuanced and contested (e.g. Iverson & James, 2014; Murray, 2013; Powell & Geoghegan, 2004; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a, 2004b). There is a wide range of citizenship frameworks - from passive and minimal, through to participatory, to transformative and justice-oriented (Iverson & James, 2014; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a). While it is not the central focus of this research to theorise active citizenship, it is worthwhile to outline some of these debates and state my commitments.

So, what kind of citizenship higher education civic engagement should foster in order to resist and challenge the dominant unjust discourses and structures in higher education and in society? What values, attitudes, competencies and skills are we instilling through community engagement initiatives? And what kind of citizen do we want to promote, knowing that education can be "an instrument to maintain the infrastructure in which it is generated" (Freire, 1972: 175).

Michael Murray (2013) notes the role adult and community education plays in promoting active citizenship but observes that a "particular construction of what it means to be an 'active' or 'responsible' citizen has emerged" (Murray, 2013: 16) that undermines the transformative potential of community learning. He notes that even transformative approaches in education can emphasise political participation within the existing systems rather than challenging them. This view is supported by Westheimer and Kahne (2004a, 2004b) who note that some engaged citizens, rather than contest, often participate within established structures and obey social rules, which in today's world means neoliberal rules. To elaborate, active citizens participate in democracy, act with adherence to the rule of law, as well as demonstrate a level of conformity and obedience in the fight for human rights. In this way a responsible citizen is disallowed to engage in contestation of power asymmetries in our society (Murray, 2013: 17). Additionally, within this understanding of

active citizenship, good citizens do not engage in movements based on civil disobedience that use disruptive methods - such as, for instance, Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, Repeal, or Reclaim the Streets. Additionally, in the context of neoliberalism a good citizen might be encouraged to put their own individual needs and actions first, understand good citizenship as an individual, rather than collective responsibility, and avoid critically examining the oppressive power structures in our societies (Murray, 2013; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b: 243). Within this interpretation, active citizenship does not necessarily mean questioning and challenging the underlying reasons for social problems and does not aim for systemic change to address injustices.

This research is underpinned by a belief that transformative and critical community engagement in higher education aims for a more equal society, thereby shaping citizens that engage in a social critique beyond just what is observed on the surface, that analyse root causes of inequalities, as well as contest and act to change unjust structures; as Westheimer & Kahne (2004a: 240; 2004b: 242) put it - fostering "justice-oriented citizens." This type of citizenship education is political, involving critical challenging of norms, assumptions, power and voice (Butin, 2010) and anti-foundational - one that "fosters a justice-oriented framework (...) that makes possible the questioning and disruption of unexamined and all too often oppressive binaries of how we view the struggle toward equity in education" (Butin 2007: 177). This may at times require a degree of civil disobedience in the name of social justice and human rights, rather than focusing only on participatory citizenship that is exercised within existing laws and structures (Banks, 2017). Mitchell and Soria (2018: 2) note that while we need and should see value in different types of active citizens, higher education civic engagement and citizenship education should ultimately strive for social-justice and transformation oriented practice - one that is perhaps most closely linked with critical and transgressive pedagogies of bell hooks (1994) and Paolo Freire (1996).

3.2 Which Community?

To add to the discussion on the contested nature of terminology, my attention turns to the issue that while 'civic' and 'community' engagement is often used interchangeably in

literature, some scholars, including feminist writers, might prefer the latter term. This is partially since certain groups are denied the very right of 'citizenship' status (Costa & Leong, 2012a). Iverson and James (2014: 16) raise that "a feminist lens demands a more critical read of the word 'community'", and this leads me to consider the 'communities' that our universities engage with.

Fitzsimons (2017: 38-40) notes that 'community' may refer to geographical communities, communities of interest, as well as issue or identity-based communities; echoed by Tovey (2009) who outlines place-based communities and communities of choice, and we can describe communities using terminology from the fields of geography, sociology, political science, economy and more. Overall, the word community generally evokes idealistic connotations of positivity, solidarity, belonging and welfare (Fitzsimons, 2017: 38-39) where the emphasis is on coming together united for a common purpose (Dominelli, 1995; Powell & Geoghegan, 2004: 41-43). However, it is important to note that communities are not always neutral or positive and they can be spaces of segregation and keeping 'the other' out, for instance some class, race or gender-based communities[6]. Additionally, there is also at times an assumption of homogeneity of communities that does not account for intersectional differences (Fitzsimons, 2017: 38-39).

It is important not to forget as well that communities are created not only at a macro level around geographical boundaries, identities or issues, but also at a micro level - such as social and friends groups, families, or informal mutual-help networks - and that forming those micro-communities has often been performed by women (Dominelli, 1995). Building communities and alliances around solidarity, inclusivity and intersectionality and across individual differences and boundaries has been advocated by intersectional feminist writers and activists for decades, for instance by hooks (2000, 2003), Lorde (2019), Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Dabiri (2021), or Aruzza, Bhattacharya and Fraser (2019) - especially as a

[6] There is a recent rise in the right-wing rhetoric in Ireland that has been expressed through the language of 'community'. An example here could be some recently formed anti-immigration groups in Ireland, who invoke the welfare, safety and protection of 'their communities' while often expressing racist views, or some groups invoking the protection and safety of women, while expressing transphobic views.

way of resisting the interlocked oppressive systems of patriarchy, racism and neoliberalism.

In their strategic plans universities in Ireland often allude to engaging with local, regional, global or campus communities. However, it is not always clear who exactly is referred to here. From the university perspective, 'communities' may mean industry, business and private/for-profit sector; state or semi-state entities, such as local and national authorities, policymakers, statutory bodies, or the wider education sector. There is also the civil society and the so called 'third sector', meaning a broad spectrum of non-governmental and not-for-profit associations, for instance community-based or voluntary organisations, human rights groups, local resident associations, charities and cooperatives - and the difficulty to delineate what third sector comprises is noted (Daly, 2008; Powell & Geoghegan, 2004), so there at times might be an overlap of the market, government and non-profit realms. Finally, it is also important to remember that third level institutions also interact with their own internal communities of students and staff.

It is likely that these perspectives have, over the past two or so decades, been influenced by neoliberal thinking, hence engagement with industry and enterprise 'communities' might be prioritised. Additionally, one could argue that market/private sector and state-led entities are located at the higher end of the power and privilege spectrum in terms of significant resources, representation and capacity to assert influence - and therefore may be perceived as more desirable by university leadership to engage with. On the other hand, the third sector, or civil society, 'community' - underfunded, under-resourced, and often struggling to have its voice heard - may not be seen as an attractive engagement partner. When I refer to 'community' or 'civic' engagement in this research, I specifically mean the higher education sector's collaboration with the civic society and the third sector that is distinct from private industry and government/state arenas.

But how is this community perceived and framed from the university perspective? Some would argue that when we speak about communities, we often refer to geographical areas experiencing 'disadvantage', in large part due to bad policy and practice in urban/social

planning as well as systemic neglect (Fitzsimons, 2017: 40-43). Echoing that, it is often the case that within civic engagement discourse universities tend to construct the community "primarily as poor, disenfranchised, marginalised, and too frequently racialised as 'other'" (Dean, 2019: 30). Oftentimes, the communities that universities engage with might be labelled as underprivileged, underserved, somehow lacking and deficient, and requiring their needs to be met. While higher education institutions can and should of course play a role in the work for a more equal and just society they also have to be mindful not to:

> further the structural oppression of communities by situating students and institutions of higher education as a privileged class. Though students through these models interact with the community, they also implicitly learn how to replicate hegemonic, racist, classist, heterosexist, cissexist, and ableist systems. (Clark-Taylor, 2017: 82)

The risk of maintaining and perpetuating the oppressive socio-political structures through university-community efforts could be greater on the charity/service/transactional end of the civic engagement spectrum. Additionally, some civic engagement practitioners, particularly from the field of women's and gender studies, point to the risks of encouraging students to engage in community-based placements to uncritically observe and learn about 'others' from beyond the university walls (Francis, 2019). In such a way, engagement with communities can be "at best an exercise in observing otherness, and at worst a missionary expedition" (Forbes et al, 1999: 162). It should additionally be noted here that the third sector itself is not necessarily universally idealistic and positive and that it also can play a role in perpetuating systemic inequalities, through, for instance, unfair work practices that exploit the emotions and motivations of employees, relying on underpaid or volunteer labour, the precarity of funding, as well as political restrictions in the sector often imposed by the funders (Jaffe, 2021).

Finally, some feminist scholars also challenge the community/university binary; for instance, most authors in Dean et al (2019) publication point to the dichotomy of inside/outside classroom learning as problematic. This binary creates, they argue, a tension between learning with communities (i.e. practice) and university learning (i.e. theory)

where the former is seen as ‘real-life’ and the latter ‘non-real-life’; hence attaching a better/worse value to each. Additionally, in this binary, the university might be seen as a safe and ordered space - “rather than as a site of complex social and power relationships and deeply entrenched inequities, injustices and exclusions” (Luhmann et al, 2019: 18) - while the community might be designated as ‘messy’ and ‘unpredictable’ - hence ‘real-world’. The authors note that what we forget here is that all stakeholders involved, be it teachers, students or community partners, are all located at various intersections of diverse communities that are spaces for both mutual learning and dialogue, and discomfort and imbalance of power (Luhmann et al, 2019).

3.3 Who Are Universities Engaging With?

But who are universities engaging with and to what end? Wynne (2014) notes that both in policy and practice, ‘university engagement’, or ‘university engagement with the wider community’, usually refers to two different but perhaps overlapping areas - engagement with enterprise and industry for innovation, knowledge transfer, and economic growth - hence, by extension, supporting neoliberal policy and practice - and engagement as a service to society. Enterprise and industry engagement is where stakeholders from business and industry are partners in, among others, research, teaching or work placements for students - something that Dean (2019: 32) notes may at times mean provision of free labour and expertise to the for-profit sector; whereas engagement as a service to society emphasises connection with wider society and learning from and with communities (Wynne, 2014). Munck (2022) further points to the higher education sector grappling with these alternative discourses of engagement with industry, and engagement with society. With the rise of the private sector’s influence on teaching and research in third level education over the past few decades (e.g. HEA, 2011) - or, as Jaffe (2021: 172) puts it: “letting ‘the market’ decide what should be taught” - it is perhaps the ‘university of enterprise’ that emerges as an ‘engaged’ university, over an institution that engages with communities for social development, outside of a purely economic relationship (Munck, 2022). Can such ‘engaged’ universities transform societies into more equal ones, or do they support unjust systems?

Higher education policy at European level has also grappled with these discourses of engagement for economic growth and engagement as service to society. *The Bologna Declaration* (EHEA, 1999), for instance, emphasises knowledge as a factor for social and human growth and at the same time enriching European citizenship. *Horizon Europe*, setting out the EU's research and innovation priorities for 2021 - 2027, further centres citizen and stakeholder engagement in research addressing global challenges (European Commission, 2021). It is noted that at the European level there has been some focus on promoting specific social initiatives of higher education, such as community outreach, widening participation, volunteering and community-relevant research, although they often have been ad-hoc in nature, and not well resourced or recognised (Gallagher, 2018: 341). On the other hand, the economic partnerships between the academy and the wider community have tended "to be larger not just in scale, but also in ambition and longevity" (*ibid*).

Of course, these different understandings of 'engagement' can be framed within a wider discussion on the university's struggle of identity in the 21st century (Barnett & Guzman Valenzuela, 2022; Grant, 2021). On one hand, universities, I argue, very much exist in an environment of commodification and consumerisation of higher education, the pressures of new public management and insistence on contribution to knowledge society and economic growth, mainly through the STEM disciplines. On the other hand, with the recent focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the climate crisis, and emerging social justice movements, universities appear also to be forced to rethink how they respond to and engage with the wider world. As Barnett and Guzman Valenzuela (2022) put it:

> Prompted by student movements, feminist scholarship, initiatives such as 'black lives matter', 'Rhodes must fall' (…), a renewed idea of 'the civic university', concerns about past and present elements of colonialism, an awareness of an overly narrow curriculum now seen as an ideology of racism ("why is my curriculum so white"?) or neoliberalism ("why does my economics curriculum include no elements that are critical of dominant economic models"?) and emerging concerns about social and epistemic justice, universities are interrogating their own practices, in admissions, pedagogy, curricula and student assessment. (Barnett & Guzman Valenzuela, 2022: 758)

These ideas chime with the call for a renewal of the social and civic role of European universities in order to better address the pressing political and social challenges of today (Gallagher, 2018).

Munck (2010) discusses how it might be possible to reconcile the economic and citizenship demands placed on 'engagement' noting that:

> the engaged university is both impacted by, and contributes to, a strong economy and a strong, vibrant society. Certainly, both domains pull the university in sometimes conflicting directions. But we can also envisage – and maybe should seek out – the ways in which economic and social factors may act in unison, and even create synergies and a win–win situation. (Munck, 2010: 37)

3.4 The Trouble with Transactional and Service-Oriented Civic Engagement

Some scholars characterise the transactional approach to civic engagement as "instrumental, designed to complete a task with no greater plan or promise" (Enos & Morton, 2003: 24) and involving a straightforward exchange of services. University staff and students perform work (for instance a research piece, a community-based learning or volunteering placement) that the community partners are supposed to benefit from, and in return they gain academic credit, publication record, or another dividend. Activities at the transactional end of the civic engagement spectrum may of course, to some extent, assist universities in meeting its civic and social objectives, as often stipulated in their strategic plans, as well as expand its teaching and research objectives, while allowing the community to benefit from having its needs met that otherwise may not be (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

However, it is important to ask whether transactional civic engagement can resist and challenge the dominant unjust rhetoric and structures in higher education and in society. I recognise several concerns here. First of all, as an Irish civic engagement scholar and champion Josephine Boland (2011: 105) notes: "[transactional] exchanges leave underlying conditions unchanged at best, or even worse in the wake of withdrawal of a needed service to the community." In other words, a transaction takes place from which

both parties expect to gain but perhaps little meaningful transformation occurs in the long-term. Such an approach, while it might on a surface be based on the principles of mutuality and reciprocity, lacks reflection about the nature and purpose of the relationship, and leaves unexamined the fundamental systemic challenges and issues it is supposed to shine a light on and address.

Furthermore, I am reminded about Sarah Jaffe's (2021: 103-109) critique of service/charity activities that often simply address the symptoms of social problems rather than the root causes. While these efforts are usually well-intentioned, they can inadvertently perpetuate systemic inequalities by only addressing what is on the surface. While university efforts to engage with partners outside the university walls, even on the more transactional end of the spectrum, are commendable, they may do little to earnestly challenge underlying existing social and political conditions (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Additionally, if higher education actors perceive their engagement in transactional terms, they might not even be interested in uncovering the structural causes of injustices their community-based projects are supposed to address.

Moreover, students participating in civic engagement activities in a transactional manner may see community engagement as providing 'an edge' to their degree, and a tool to enhance their 'employability', which supports the current neoliberal rhetoric of self-interest (Dean, 2019: 24) - hence contributing to maintaining the attitudes and structures that often are the root cause of inequalities. In my own practice, I remember a student volunteering handbook produced by an Irish HEI that opened with a sentence "In today's competitive labour market, volunteering can give you an extra edge." While likely meant as an encouragement, and speaking a language that would appeal to students, it nevertheless was firmly positioned in the neoliberal discourse of the importance of student employability and skills development over community benefits. To elaborate, on the transactional/service end of civic engagement spectrum, students involved may see their community engagement simply as a way of applying, practising and further developing their disciplinary, or employability, skills and furthering their personal and professional development. I am reminded here of nearly a decade of my work as a mentor for Dublin

City University's Uaneen module that formally recognises and awards academic credit to students for their extra-curricular engagement. Over the years, I have reviewed numerous student essays reflecting on their community involvement - be it in after-school projects, homework clubs, local community sports organisations, free legal advice clinics, homeless services or addiction services, among many others. It was usually very clear how these students applied and honed the skills they acquired during their degree, as well as how their community engagement assisted them in their own personal and professional development. However, what was usually missing was a critical reflection on structural causes of, for instance, poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, or lack of parental involvement in children's education that went beyond simply observing 'the other'. What was also absent were ideas on actions that could be taken to address the root causes of social issues. In other words, while critical thinking and reflexivity were encouraged, they related more to the individual and their personal, academic and professional development and achievements, rather than the society. I do not mean this as a criticism of the module itself; rather, I am using it to illustrate the point that seeing civic engagement in transactional terms may dilute its transformative and critical potential.

Additionally, transactional civic engagement has a stronger service orientation (Iverson & James, 2014; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), and a benevolent and charitable framing (Dean, 2019: 26-27). According to Saltmarsh & Hartley (2011: 22), such engagement may be grounded in the deficit model, and hence situates the university in a privileged position of having the resources and expertise to provide a service to the community, which is seen as lacking and underserved. Sarah Jaffe (2021: 103) additionally notes that "the history of charity [...] is the history of the powerful distracting from their power by 'giving back' to the less fortunate" - in other words, it can be an exercise in power dynamics rather than mutuality and equality, tipping the balance of power in the relationship towards the university. Charity and service can also reproduce inequalities (Jaffe, 2021: 103-104) making university civic engagement an exercise in 'whitewashing' - assisting higher education institutions in presenting as benevolent and charitable 'do-gooders' while at the same time distracting from harmful practices of a neoliberal-patriarchal university, such as, for instance, commodification of education, academic precarity, availability and

hyper-productivity demands, promoting competition over collegiality, or gender imbalance in senior leadership.

Saltmarsh & Hartley (2011: 19) note that charity/service civic engagement locates the university at the centre of solutions to public problems and educates students through service as 'protoexperts' who will be able to perform civic tasks *in* and *on* communities that they work with because they will have the knowledge and credentials to determine what to do to help communities improve. Furthermore, with the university situated as a "privileged class" (Clark-Taylor, 2017: 81), the definitional ideal of equal partnership between community and the academy through civic engagement is put into question. It is also worth keeping in mind here that community partners might require volunteer/service-learning work to make up for the loss of state funding and other resources in a neoliberal state model.

Next, the service/charity orientation to civic engagement can reinforce the 'saviour' phenomenon, where the 'saviour' (i.e. university stakeholders in this case) is always in the privileged position be it due to their race, class, gender, or level of education and expertise. Can civic engagement framed as charity and service truly lead to social or structural change, or does it reinforce the less/more privileged and self/other dichotomies? Here, McTighe-Musil (2011: 24) characterises it as "troubling" and "sometimes disastrous" that some civic engagement programmes involve "students and faculty [being sent] into neighborhoods and partnerships, here or abroad, with profound ignorance of the history, politics, culture, economics, or other factors that explain social inequalities and tensions."

To elaborate with an example, Dean (2019: 25) recalls that many of her students engaging with community groups situate themselves as superior 'experts' and as 'privileged knowers' that "tend to view and often represent [the community] as less fortunate 'others' in dire need of their benevolence, charity, or philanthropy." Closer to home, Lorraine Tansey and Maria Gallo (2018: 83) note that this may lead to the "risk of polarization between them and us." Their analysis of comments from students participating in University of Galway ALIVE programme, volunteering in local homework clubs, revealed

the need to redesign the student reflective portfolio prompts in order to allow deeper and more critical engagement with social problems and systemic changes needed (Tansey & Gallo, 2018: 83-86).

This isn't unique to Ireland, and Dean (2019: 25-26) offers an example of her students wishing to raise awareness of women living in poverty in Canada by displaying female poverty statistics on campus and asking for donations to a women's shelter (hence assuming that a mere exposure to data can cause transformation and that a small funding pot can address structural causes of female poverty). Zakaria (2021) also provides an example of such uncritical and ill informed 'direct action' where a (majority white) women's organisation in the US decided to protest the policy of separating migrant children and parents at the US-Mexico border by getting themselves arrested and then released, ignoring the issues of racial privilege and the possibility of their members of colour being treated differently on and during the arrest.

Furthermore, the 'third mission' of higher education (understood as knowledge, technology and innovation transfer - see section 2.3) is often also located closer to the transactional end of the engagement spectrum, where the university is considered to possess or develop the expertise that can be handed over to benefit the community and society. Civic engagement as 'third mission' thus privileges academic and 'expert' knowledge, de-values or ignores other forms of expertise, and creates a separation between the knowledge producer (university) and knowledge receiver (community). Knowledge and solutions generated by the university are then applied to community problems through a one-way process (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011: 22).

A transactional and service/charity approach to civic engagement, whether done through volunteering, community-based learning/research, or knowledge transfer, thus contributes to reinforcing the status quo of the privileged role of universities and the perceived inferior role of communities, and may work to support, rather than transform, structures that create inequalities. It also might not provide an opportunity for a critical reflection on the historical contexts and causes of societal challenges, and social justice issues. Yet,

Westheimer and Kahne (2004b: 243) note that a “vast majority of school-based service learning and community service programs embrace a vision of citizenship devoid of politics; they often promote service but not democracy." They continue:

> They share an orientation toward volunteerism and charity and away from teaching about social movements, social transformation, and systemic change. These programs privilege individual acts of compassion and kindness over social action and the pursuit of social justice. (...) First, the emphasis placed on individual character and behavior can obscure the need for collective and often public sector initiatives; second, this emphasis can distract attention from analysis of the causes of social problems; and third, volunteerism and kindness are put forward as ways of avoiding politics and policy (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004b: 243)

The above does not mean, however, that university staff and students do not become more critical and involved citizens through participation in transactional or charity/service-based civic engagement activities, and there may be a potential for learning through “unintended consequences and complicity that may result in a profound lesson in how systems of inequality operate and are able to reproduce themselves” (Costa & Leong, 2012a: 175). Having said that, it may be worthwhile to question whether raising awareness of or a mere exposure to/observation of injustices and inequalities can truly lead to a deep structural or social change (Luhmann et al, 2019). Civic engagement actions and projects may naturally lead to the enhancement of civic responsibilities and spirit for higher education stakeholders; however, while laudable, it is not necessarily their ambition to question the issues of inequality and power in society (Verjee, 2010), and additionally, can possibly foster docility and obedience to existing unjust and unequal systems of power. Therefore, civic engagement practitioners from the field of women’s and gender studies strongly advocate working from “social justice frameworks that distinguish engagement from ‘service’ or ‘volunteering’ where too often the issues of power and privilege go unquestioned” (Orr 2011: 10).

3.5 Transformative and Critical Civic Engagement - An Alternative Model

Transformative civic engagement “aims to question and change the circumstances, conditions, values or beliefs which are at the root of community/society needs” (Boland,

2014: 182) and "(...) is based not on transfer of expertise from university to community (technology transfer), but rather on an interactive process in which all partners apply critical thinking skills to complex community problems" (Brown et al, 2006: 10). Transformative and critical civic engagement[7] approaches entail the questioning of power relations, conditions and values that are the cause of those community problems in the first place (Boland, 2011; Boland, 2014; Jacoby et al, 2003; Verjee, 2010). The principles of this model include, to name a few, reciprocity, an asset-based view of community, working *with* rather than *for* communities, and collaboration and co-creation of knowledge for community change (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011: 22). Additionally, Avila (2018) discusses the need for a deep reciprocity in partnership for all stakeholders that should be based on the relationships of mutual nurture and care, developing leadership capacity for civic engagement in higher education and in the community, and a critical reflection on collaborative civic projects' purpose and outcomes, as well as on the power relations between partners and in society.

Critical and transformative civic engagement explores underlying structural sources of oppression, injustices and inequalities in society for students and staff involved and entails action to address them (praxis). However, Westheimer and Kahne (2004b: 246) note that "engaging in critical analysis does not necessarily foster the ability or the commitment to participate"; therefore, practitioners implementing the critical, transformative, and justice-oriented civic engagement should be mindful of not contributing to developing so called 'slacktivists', who put minimum or no effort in supporting causes they pay lip service to. On the other hand, the opposite may also be true - "students can learn to participate without engaging in critical analysis that focuses on macro structural issues, the role of interest groups, power dynamics, and/or social justice" (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004b: 246).

As argued by Mitchell (2016: 365) practising critical and transformative civic engagement should entail ongoing criticism and problematising of our practice, rather than simply

[7] The term 'democratic civic engagement' (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011: 14-26) is also used in literature in the United States, when referring to a similar body of critical practice.

assuming its "universal goodness." It means asking questions about ethical principles of community engagement, and whether our practice does good or harm (Eby, 1998). We should also consider whose needs and voices - community or academia - we are prioritising (Mitchell, 2016; Eby, 1998), how we define and frame the 'needs' of communities we engage with (Mitchell, 2016) and interrogate who is or is not allowed to participate in civic engagement. In addition, as practitioners, we should keep questioning whether university engagement truly benefits, or merely creates further burdens on our (often under-resourced) community non-profit partners (Luhmann et al, 2019).

3.6 Transformative Civic Engagement as a Feminist Practice

Transformative and critical civic and community engagement has been actioned and championed by many practitioners and scholars from the field of women's and gender studies (WGS) since the inception of the discipline. For decades, WGS educators have been designing and delivering civic, community and activist learning opportunities for students where they could engage in praxis - the foundational tenet of the discipline (McTighe-Musil, 2010; Costa & Leong, 2012a; Hale, 2022). WGS has since its beginnings been grounded in social justice orientation, social and political activism, and the employ of emancipatory pedagogies (Hale, 2022). Women's and gender studies discipline has been interwoven with the evolution of the civic engagement philosophy in academia, and community engagement initiatives in WGS have been widespread and well documented (e.g. Balliet & Hefferman, 2000). Many feminist scholars have been calling for critical and transformative community engagement addressing the root causes of inequalities and injustices - rather than transactional one that prioritises the needs of university stakeholders, or reinforces the deficit model of looking at community (e.g. Mitchell, 2016; Orr, 2011; Costa & Leong, 2012a; 2012b; Dean et al, 2019; Hale, 2022; McTighe-Musil, 2010; Verjee, 2010; Clark-Taylor, 2017; Plaxton-Moore, 2021). The disciplines of critical race studies and ethnic studies also share these foundational principles (Costa & Leong, 2012a; Mitchell, 2016), and "incorporating the insights of scholarship from these fields with those of women's and gender studies can only enhance our discussions of critical community engagement and therefore improve our pedagogical approaches" (Costa & Leong, 2012a: 176).

Parallels between the principles of the WGS area and the key tenets of transformative and critical civic engagement can be drawn. There are synergies between intersectional feminist scholarship and critical civic engagement, and community engagement practitioners in other disciplines can learn much from the feminist engaged pedagogy, practice and activism (Costa & Leong, 2012a; Orr, 2011). One example is a shared view of how knowledge is generated, with the community seen not as deficient and in need of receiving knowledge, or simply as a learning resource for students and academics, but as the source of knowledge and expertise (e.g. Costa & Leong, 2012a). Furthermore, in critical civic engagement, the communities are seen as the subjects in and producers of knowledge, and researchers adhere to the values of civic engagement research 'from below'. The view on community-based research is that it is a "messy, socially contextualised, multi-actor science where one cannot easily find a beginning or an end" (Campus Engage, 2017: 16). Engaged research activities employ participatory, emancipatory and collaborative methods and approaches, with researchers carrying out their academic work *with* rather than *for* communities (*ibid*). In critical civic engagement, It is also students who "should be considered as co-creators of knowledge and drivers of social change" rather than being solely "viewed as passive consumers of third level education" (Randles & Quillinan, 2014: 42). These approaches challenge the dominant understanding of the university as the holders and producers of knowledge, whose task is to deposit this knowledge to those within it. In this way, they mirror the tenets of feminist knowledge production (Harding, 1995 & 2004; Hartstock, 2004; Fricker, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Parallels can also be drawn between the principles of feminist pedagogy and critical civic engagement, in particular community-based learning - "feminist pedagogy values share many of the same ideals put forth by scholars of civic engagement, including critical analysis, self-reflexivity, and active participation to accomplish the social good." (Costa & Leong, 2012a: 172). Critical community-based learning classrooms, not unlike feminist classrooms, emphasise collaboration, collectivism and care, rather than individualism and competition. The theme of praxis - reflection on and action to transform structures (Freire,

1996) - is central to both feminist and critical community-engaged pedagogies. Both have an orientation on social justice, transformation of existing power structures and challenging dominant discourses. Community-based learning as a pedagogical approach strives to promote critical thinking, creativity, leadership, and activism in learning. All these are also cornerstones of critical feminist pedagogies (hooks, 1994; 2003; Shrewsbury, 1987; Bryson & Bennet-Anyikwa, 2003). Civically engaged teaching and learning is experiential, and it encourages higher education students:

> to look carefully at (their) experience, to question (their) own assumptions, to place the experience in relation to larger institutional and societal processes and discourses, to hear others' voices, to grapple with the question of why things happen the way they do, to imagine how things might be different, to read (their) experience in terms given by major social theories and to critique those theories from the perspective of (their) experience – to engage, in other words, in serious critical thinking. (Moore, 2013: 201-202, cited in Quillinan, 2017: 1).

Despite the strong tradition of community engagement in the WGS realm, many scholars note that the contribution of this discipline, as well as ethnic and critical race studies, has remained largely unacknowledged, marginalised and overlooked beyond WGS-specific literature and practice (Dean et al, 2019; Costa & Leong, 2012a; 2012b; Orr, 2011). Scholars and educators in these disciplines have always seen critical community engagement as political. As Costa and Leong (2012b: 268) write, "Rather than conform to a pedagogical practice that reproduces status quo power relations, feminist scholars and teachers have preferred a more explicitly political pedagogical approach to civic learning in which advocacy for social change and social justice are integral." Additionally, the above-mentioned disciplines have since their inception also been challenging unjust and oppressive structures within universities themselves - be it patriarchal, racist, classist or neoliberal - and stood against reproducing these systems (Costa & Leong, 2012a; 2012b). In other words, the expertise from those disciplines has been largely overlooked in the debates about civic engagement due to their focus on disrupting the dominant norms and problematising power structures within the academy. Critical community and civic engagement in women's and gender, ethnic, and critical race studies could be perceived as

‘too political’, and therefore not necessarily easy to be universally adopted in mainstream academia.

The critical, political and social-justice-oriented nature of these disciplines has also been perceived by some as a barrier to wider embeddedness and legitimacy of civic engagement. Catherine Orr, American women’s and gender studies scholar, (2011), for instance, points to the fact that community activism is often feared by academics due to potential accusations of bias or political indoctrination and that critical civic engagement can be stifled by the dominant neoliberal-patriarchal discourses in higher education. She also expresses frustrations specifically about “disciplinary hierarchies, specialisation, technocratic expertise, presumptions of neutrality, and fears of bias - in other words, the dominant epistemology of academe - that run counter to goals of higher education’s civic purpose” (Orr, 2011: 20).

The questions asked over a decade ago by Catherine Orr (2011) on how feminist academics can continue to cultivate critical, transformative, activist and social-justice-oriented pedagogical approaches to community engagement in a university that prioritises employability of graduates by providing them with labour market skills and competencies, are still asked in recent literature (Dean et al, 2019). The challenge is, as Costa and Leong (2012a: 173) put it, to decide whether feminist community engagement practice should assimilate to the prevailing university norms or look for an alternative approach. Ultimately, those practising transformative feminist civic engagement “will have to decide to what degree [their] approaches to praxis can co-exist with-or indeed, survive within the market-driven neoliberal university” (Luhmann et al, 2019: 3).

3.7 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I delve deeper into the contested discourses of civic engagement. My overall purpose of compiling this chapter is to present civic engagement not as a “universally good” (Mitchell, 2016: 365) monolith but as a varied and rich movement and a practice with a multitude of voices, as well as values, norms and underpinnings, located on the spectrum between transactional and transformative. I problematise the notion of

active citizenship and argue that in order to transform societies into more equal and just ones, higher education civic engagement should ideally foster active citizenship that is political, anti-foundational and social-justice oriented. I also interrogate the different interpretations of 'communities' that our universities cooperate with, and which community's interests are served through higher education civic engagement. Engagement with some communities, particularly those from the market (industry, enterprise, business) or state (policymakers, authorities) realms may support and maintain the neoliberal rules of the game rather than contest them.

This chapter also discusses the transactional and transformative models of higher education civic engagement as likely much of community-engaged practice is located somewhere along the spectrum of the two. I question whether the transactional model of civic engagement can fully meet a social-justice agenda that it should strive for, or if it implies compliance with existing socio-political norms and structures and reinforces unequal power relations between university and communities. Instead, I argue for the need for a critical, feminist and social justice oriented civic engagement in higher education as holding the potential to have a transformative impact on communities, individuals, as well as the academy itself. Working for social change and challenging systems that uphold injustices and inequalities should, I argue, be at the core of higher education civic engagement. Finally, I also discuss the often-overlooked contribution of the disciplines of women's and gender studies, as well as ethnic and critical race studies, to the development of the civic engagement movement, and document the synergies between critical feminist scholarship and transformative community engagement. I also outline the ways in which critical feminist civic engagement can pose a threat to the prevailing norms in the neoliberal-patriarchal academy, potentially leading to its marginalisation.

Chapter Four: Civic Engagement in Ireland - Policy Landscape, Seeking Legitimacy and Neoliberalisation of Civic Engagement

This chapter examines how policies have both enabled and restricted community engagement practitioners in Ireland. I give particular attention to specific policies the research participants, as well as others working in civic engagement I have known over the years, found strategically significant, professionally validating, as well as elevating, or restricting, the practice, as is further explored in Findings section 7.2.3. I spotlight the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA, 2011) - commonly referred to as the *Hunt Report* - the *Campus Engage Charter for Higher Education Civic and Community Engagement* (Campus Engage, 2014), as well as consider the *Higher Education Authority Performance Compacts* for Irish higher education institutions. Furthermore, I examine the strategic plans of Irish HEIs with regards to civic and community engagement. I discuss how these selected policies influenced the legitimisation and development of civic engagement in higher education in Ireland, as well as the extent to which they influenced the domestication and co-option of community engagement to the dominant neoliberal-patriarchal narratives in the sector. I also continue documenting further development of civic engagement work in Ireland done through Campus Engage, discuss the challenges of the shift in the network from grassroots and practitioner-led to more centrally and top-led, and how these changes potentially contributed to the co-option of community engagement to the prevailing discourses of the higher education sector.

4.1 Civic Engagement - Irish Policy Landscape

While in Ireland civic engagement practices and activities had been taking place on the ground, usually on the margins of Irish higher education institutions and sometimes by specific outfits and centres since mid 2000s (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011), McIlrath (2017: 17) notes that there was a "legal and policy vacuum" at macro/national level in terms of civic engagement in higher education in Ireland, and Wynne (2014: 1477) highlights that this perhaps contributed to "jostling for legitimacy" in the area. Some broad references to the social mission of third level education can be found in policy. *The Universities Act 1997*, for instance, while not explicitly mentioning the term civic engagement, indicates that

higher education aims should be, among others, the promotion of cultural and social life of society, encouraging a capacity for critical thinking in students, assisting the national economic and social development, ensuring provision for adult and continuing education, and promoting gender balance and equality of opportunity among staff and students (McIlrath, 2017: 25) - all of which are some of the defining features of civic engagement.

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA, 2011) - The *Hunt Report* - in the section concerned with the mission of higher education, devotes a whole chapter (albeit somewhat shorter than those concerning teaching and learning, research, and internationalisation) to "engagement with the wider society" (HEA, 2011: 74-79). However, the report refers specifically to *civic* engagement only twice across the document, while the term *engagement* is used significantly more often. The *Hunt Report* also seems to adopt a very broad definition of engagement, which comprises "engagement with business and industry, with the civic life of the community, with public policy and practice, with artistic, cultural and sporting life and with other educational providers in the community and region, and (...) an increasing emphasis on international engagement" (HEA, 2011: 74). Engagement with "business, the wider education system, and the community and voluntary sector" (HEA, 2011: 74) is also spotlighted. It can thus be argued that connectedness with business, industry and international links are given more prominence to relationships with the third sector and local communities - which, as I signalled earlier, is an issue that some European policy in this area grapples with as well.

Nevertheless, the *Hunt Report* explicitly recognised engagement with the wider society, including the community and voluntary sector, as a core part of higher education sector's mission, which, speaking from the perspective of a person working in this area at that time, felt momentous and validating for civic engagement:

> Engagement with the wider community must become more firmly embedded in the mission of higher education institutions. Higher education institutions need to become more firmly embedded in the social and economic contexts of the communities they live in and serve. (HEA, 2011: 77)

The policy document acknowledges the earlier efforts undertaken by higher education actors in the area of engagement, "piecemeal and disparate" (HEA, 2011: 78) as they might have been, but also notes that there is a need for future initiatives to be more coordinated so that engagement is "developed more firmly as a core element of the mission of higher education in Ireland" (HEA, 2011: 74).

The *Hunt Report* calls for stronger relationships between the higher education sector and the communities they work within, as well as ensuring that knowledge and ideas generated in the sector further serve and inform regional and community development (HEA, 2011). Some of the recommendations for actions that HEIs could undertake relate to civic engagement specifically, for instance around formal recognition of student civic engagement through accreditation, involving the wider community in programme design and responsiveness to the learning needs of this wider community (HEA, 2011: 79). Additionally, the *Hunt Report* calls for a recognition of engagement activities in promotional criteria, in funding and human resource allocation, as well as in progress metrics for HEIs (HEA, 2011).

It is evident from the Irish literature on civic engagement that the recommendations of the *Hunt Report* have generally been considered positive and empowering by those championing the practice. Some Irish researchers and practitioners note that it has given the area more prominence (Wynne, 2014), endorsement (McIlrath, 2017) and has created a "particularly opportune moment" (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011: 39) for further development of civic engagement by formally naming it as a core mission for the higher education sector (Bates et al, 2020) and placing it on a par with teaching and learning, research and internationalisation (Munck et al, 2012; Boland, 2012; McIlrath et al, 2014). Overall, champions and leaders in the area, including some of the women I interviewed for this research, welcomed this policy development and saw its stipulations as legitimisation, validation and endorsement for the existing and emerging community engagement initiatives in Irish higher education.

4.2 The *Hunt Report* and Civic Engagement - What Is the Price of Legitimacy?

While the reception of the *Hunt Report* among those working on the ground in civic engagement appeared broadly positive; that its overall focus, position, and values - arguably largely aligned with new public management and managerialism principles - cannot be glossed over. Therefore, its implications, both for the wider higher education sector, and for community engagement, are not unproblematic. While the Strategy Group (chaired by an economist) and the International Panel of Experts tasked with the preparation of the *Hunt Report* included a representation from business, education and state domains, there was not one third sector or community sector stakeholder involved and additionally, only 4 out of 24 members of these two groups were women.

The *Hunt Report* can be examined within what Stephen Ball (2003: 216) calls a reform epidemic in the public and, by extension, education sector, aimed at "aligning public sector organizations with the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector" with an emphasis on the market, managerialism, performativity, commodification and privatisation. No policy is created in a vacuum and considering the document was crafted at a time of a deep economic recession in Ireland, it strongly positions the higher education sector as a vehicle to serve the economy and economic regeneration - third level education is portrayed as a "handmaiden of the market" (Lynch & Grummell, 2018: 9). The *Hunt Report* is a reflection of the wider changes in the Irish higher education sector - changes that aim to make HEIs more accountable, productive, efficient and cost-effective, where rationalisation of institutions is envisaged (Walsh & Loxley, 2015). The critiques go even further with some scholars stating that the *Hunt Report* was one of the key drivers for marketisation, commodification and neoliberalisation of the higher education sector in Ireland (Mercille & Murphy; 2017; Hodgins & Mannix McNamara, 2021).

In this context, engagement with the wider society advocated in the *Hunt Report* seems to have a specific flavour with significantly more prominence given to engagement with business and industry for economic development and innovation. This is visible for instance through the order in which the different types of engagement are discussed, with "engaging with enterprise" (HEA, 2011: 75-76) tackled in the first position and allocated

nearly as much space as both "engagement with communities" and "engagement with other education and training providers" put together (*ibid*: 76-77). These tensions between civic engagement and enterprise engagement have certainly been noticed. Munck et al (2012: 21), for instance, report that the word 'enterprise' is used 40 times in the *Hunt Report* (in fact, it is over 60 times), while the word 'equality' receives only three mentions (and solely in relation to access and widening participation). Similarly, McIlrath (2017: 25) notes that the word 'economy' and 'economic' are referenced significantly more times than the word 'community'. There are no references to social justice, and social needs and economic needs seem conflated.

In the broader Irish context, the tensions between industry/enterprise engagement for economic growth (hence further supporting the neoliberal project) and community engagement for active citizenship and as a service to society are not only evident in the *Hunt Report* but also in several other earlier policy documents. One example is *The University Challenged: A Review of International Trends and Issues with Particular Reference to Ireland* (Skilbeck, 2011) - commonly referred to as the *Skilbeck Report* - where the author advocates that universities build "local and regional partnerships with industry and community" (Skilbeck, 2001: 149). Furthermore, Lyons & McIlrath (2011) note that the *OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland* (2004) also centres strongly on the contribution of higher education to economic growth and, to a smaller extent, on the wider social and cultural aspects of education and its potential for advancement of citizenship and civic society. More recently, *Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education* (2016), popularly known as the *Cassells' Report*, also considers these tensions, but with much more significance attached to engagement with enterprise, and education as a vehicle for economic growth. In addition, the *Action Plan for Education 2016 - 2019* and *2019* also feature "[building] stronger bridges between education and the wider community" (DES, 2016) and "[intensifying] the relationships between education and the wider community, society and the economy" (DES, 2019) as one of the strategic goals. Technological University Research Network (TURN) has also considered the role of the newly established technological universities, and suggests that: "Through the creation of new knowledge in various disciplines, through social, cultural

and civic engagement, and through the generation of a skills pipeline and links to innovation each TU [technological university] will, in turn, help to shape its region" (TURN, 2019: 8). While all these documents attempt to reconcile the discourse of engagement as a service to society, and for active citizenship and community involvement in education with engagement with enterprise, economic stakeholders and international engagement, when one examines the indicators proposed to measure progress it is clear that the emphasis seems to be placed on the latter.

In this context, Boland (2012) notes that the difficulties in negotiating the tensions and contradictions between universities being relevant to the wider society and at the same time being drivers for economic growth have been acutely experienced by academics and practitioners committed to promoting the social and civic mission of higher education. To elaborate, there is a need to demonstrate 'value for money' and effectiveness of civic engagement initiatives within the dominating discourses that favour performance, efficiency and measurability. This leads to civically-engaged academics experiencing their work as "going against the grain" (Boland, 2014: 188). Walsh and Loxley (2015: 1134) go even further by stating that in the *Hunt Report* "Engagement with society is associated unequivocally with economic regeneration" as do Lynch et al (2012: 21) when they state that "throughout the report the development of society is equated with economic development and the latter is focused primarily on science and technology." Here, I agree with Brid Connolly (2014: 11) who writes specifically about community engagement:

> It is not the responsibility of education, either higher or adult education to do the work of the state or the economy. To be trammelled into the role as the nursery slopes for the economic world rather than the well-being of the citizenry and the enhancement of democracy, is to betray its purpose, even when it engages with the corporate world, as well as civil society

Additionally, particularly in relation to community engagement, the *Hunt Report* includes a call for strengthening, extension, and formalisation of activities (HEA, 2011: 76), as well as inclusion of civic engagement in HEIs' strategic missions and plans. While on the surface this might seem positive, it also carries a risk to the grassroots and informal

approach adopted by many early practitioners in Ireland. Formalisation of civic engagement and featuring it explicitly in university strategic plans can of course be enabling and legitimising, but it may also indicate a shift from a practitioner-led bottom-up to a top-down senior management-led approach. Subduing civic and community engagement to such power structure could be seen as a vehicle for taming or tempering the critical and transformative potential of the practice.

Overall, however, the need and urgency for validation, recognition and legitimisation of higher education civic engagement appears to have taken priority among academics and practitioners in the area who seemed willing to pragmatically compromise and participate in the neoliberal, market-focused, economy-driven frame. After all, one may argue that "legitimacy comes at a price" (Hartley, 2009: 24), and questions remain about whether civic engagement practitioners can "establish broad-based legitimacy without accommodating the norms of the academy" (Hartley, 2011: 38).

Nevertheless, as the *Hunt Report* explicitly considered engagement (in its various guises) as the core mission of higher education and advocated for resourcing the area, leaders of the practice involved in Campus Engage were able to leverage the policy against securing more financial resources for the network - both from the government (through the HEA Strategic Innovation Fund), and individual institutions. This, I argue, was a significant achievement at the time of economic recession when the sector was asked to tighten the belt, and allowed Campus Engage to broaden its efforts. Both national funders (e.g. HEA) and individual institutions felt bound by policy to make a financial commitment to advance and formalise higher education civic engagement. With the renewed funding, Campus Engage was relocated from NUI Galway to Irish Universities Association (IUA) in 2012 which, according to McIlrath et al (2014), represented a neutral and strategic location for mainstreaming civic engagement, and a National Coordinator was appointed a year later. While the IUA is not a representative body of the whole higher education sector in Ireland (e.g. Institutes of Technology/Technological Universities), as a consequence of the move to the IUA, the growth of Campus Engage was enabled and the network expanded nationwide, inviting all Irish universities and former Institutes of Technology to join.

4.3 Campus Engage Charter for Higher Education Civic and Community Engagement

Another significant policy development in Ireland came with the launch of the Campus Engage *Charter for Higher Education Civic and Community Engagement* (Campus Engage, 2014 - further referred to as the Charter), signed in 2014 by 20 Presidents of Irish universities and Institutes of Technology, at a high-profile event in Dublin Castle, officiated by the Minister for Education. The Charter, prepared by Campus Engage Steering Committee in collaboration with Irish higher education leadership (McIlrath, 2017: 23), further provided a foundation for developing more concerted efforts to grow civic engagement. While more of a manifesto, the document nevertheless bound HEI presidents to their commitment to civic engagement, at least at a symbolic level.

Closer reading of the Charter reveals that the framing of higher education civic engagement is slightly different in this document to the one promoted by the *Hunt Report*. While the introduction to the document mentions engaging with enterprise, the actual ten principles of the Charter arguably have a stronger focus on civic and community engagement, social inclusion, combating disadvantage, partnership and collaboration, two-way knowledge exchange, sustainability, commitment to diversity, and embedding civic and community activities throughout teaching, learning, research and extra-curriculars. However, the document also expresses a wish to "align [civic engagement activities] with the overall teaching, research and outreach missions of our institutions" (Campus Engage, 2014: 1) - that is, embed civic engagement by matching it to the existing institutional policies and practices, which again raises questions about maintaining rather than transforming the priorities of the sector, and subduing to existing power structures in academia.

4.4 Campus Engage - Furthering and Formalising Civic Engagement through a Network of Practitioners

Around the time the Charter was being prepared, the participation and involvement of nearly all Irish HEIs was secured by Campus Engage and several working groups were established tasked with developing national initiatives and activities in the areas of volunteering and student-led engagement, community-based learning and research, evaluation and metrics and communications. Funding for the working groups' activities was provided by the Higher Education Authority. Each working group was convened by a practitioner - the function was for a specific length of time and would rotate to allow working group members to take more of a leadership role. The activities of the working groups were assisted by Campus Engage National Coordinator and overseen by a Steering Committee, composed of senior management representatives from each HEI. Practitioners were given ownership over creating terms of reference for the working groups, the convenors and the Steering Committee. The working groups adopted a two-pronged approach to promoting and embedding civic and community engagement in the sector - policy and lobbying, as well as resources production and capacity building. Policy and lobbying efforts were centred on influencing some key internal and external stakeholders (HEIs, Irish Research Council, HEA, and IUA among others) via regional meetings, events and networking. There was a focus on lobbying for the development of incentive mechanisms and tools for a formal recognition of those involved in civic and community engagement, including staff performance, promotion and contracts as well as reviews of HEI strategic plans.

At that time, I was involved in the Volunteering and Student-Led Engagement Working Group, first as a member and a DCU representative, and shortly after as a co-convenor of the group. I remember a sense of togetherness, energy, hope and enthusiasm among practitioners involved in designing and implementing civic engagement interventions at that time. Hartley's (2011: 43) experience of 'early-adopter practitioners' coming together in the United States resonates with me here when he says: "Drawing together like-minded individuals (who were often marginalized on their own campuses) helped establish an internal legitimacy among movement members." At that time, I too felt like our efforts

were important and potentially change-making - also for the higher education sector in Ireland - and, more significantly, it felt empowering to work in a collective and participatory manner with others who also held my values. These early experiences of Campus Engage had many of the benefits of a strong and flourishing network, identified by some scholars (Bowl, 2011: 84; Fitzsimons, 2015: 118) as a shared identity, a collective effort, and learning from each other. The latter was especially advantageous; many of us were new to the field and the opportunity to engage with and work alongside more experienced colleagues was invaluable.

Working groups meetings were held in various parts of the country to ensure participation from smaller or more remote HEIs. While activity plans for the working groups were drafted by convenors, they were fully consulted with group members. Here, Hartley (2011) reflects on his experiences of involvement with networks of civic engagement practitioners and professionals that strongly resonate with me - a feeling of coming together to establish the direction of the work and decide how best to advance it and gain momentum.

4.4.1 The Voluntary Nature of Practitioners' Campus Engage Work

There were, of course, challenges as well. There was a significant time and resources burden on the practitioners involved - something that Bowl (2011: 89) also notes when discussing involvement in networks. While Campus Engage working groups were initially provided with a (small) amount of money for activities and projects, the time and work of the convenors and working group members was not compensated. Essentially, the practitioners, in majority women as noted in section 1.4, gave their time and expertise for free and accepted it as a part of the job.

This is in line with numerous studies that indicate that it is women in academia who tend to undertake more engagement, service, volunteering and care-taking activities than men (Guarino & Borden, 2017; Babcock et al, 2017; Pyke, 2011; Neumann & Terosky, 2007; Antonio et al, 2000; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2024). This service involves both the everyday internal 'housework' of academia, as well as external service to "local, state, regional, national and international communities" (Guarino & Borden, 2017: 673). Antonio

et al (2000) state that “higher proportions of women perform service or volunteer work, and women are more likely than men to advise student groups doing service, feature community service in their course work, maintain educational goals focused on service, and favour institutional policies that support community service and involvement” (Antonio et al, 2000: 380).

Babcock et al (2017: 74) note that “relative to men, women are more likely to volunteer, more likely to be asked to volunteer, and more likely to accept direct requests to volunteer” and add that this phenomenon is not necessarily linked to the willingness of men and women to volunteer, but rather the expectation that women will. It is argued that men feel less pressure to refuse service even if it burdens others in their department, while women have a more difficult time declining requests to volunteer knowing that the work will then be passed on to the less senior colleagues in the departments (Guarino & Borden, 2017; Pyke, 2011). Another study (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2024) indicates not only that women indeed perform more internal service work (academic housework) at universities, but also, that men actively and consciously evade it, as they do not perceive it as beneficial to their career. Pyke (2011) also adds that women tend to be socialised to be cooperative; therefore, many feel guilty when having to refuse requests for service, but at the same time feel ‘honoured’ to be asked.

To illustrate the points above, I recall the time when I was asked to take over the role of the Co-Convenor of the Campus Engage Volunteering and Student-Led Engagement Working Group. At that time, I was only two years into my work at DCU in the Community, and, first of all, I did not think I was capable of co-leading the Group, and secondly, I knew that the burden of this additional and voluntary labour that I was supposed to perform alongside my regular workload would be very significant. However, I felt I could not refuse the request from a senior colleague, and did not want to disappoint the fellow practitioner who was leaving that role. Despite reservations, I accepted. While the following years were very pressurised in terms of workload - I often felt stretched to the limits - I must admit that it was one of the most rewarding experiences in my career, as well as an enormous learning opportunity. At the same time, I feel I was also fortunate to have received strong

support from my superiors, as well as to have met and been mentored by one of the most caring and thoughtful female civic engagement champions - a colleague I cherish until today.

Some scholars believe that undertaking civic engagement and other service projects by women might be to their detriment as these initiatives are often labour intensive, leaving less time for research activities, as well as teaching, which tend to carry more significance in terms of promotional criteria, at least for academic staff: "Uncompensated internal service is usually acknowledged and factored into annual performance reviews, but, (...), generally carries less weight than research or teaching, especially in promotion and tenure reviews" (Guarino & Borden, 2017: 73). Pyke (2011) also notes that performing most of the service and 'academic housework' by women often hampers their advancement in their career; however, it is not seen as a systemic fault, rather individual women are blamed for less research output and 'mismanaging' their careers[8]. In general, there is consistent evidence that women accept low promotability tasks more than men, who tend to perform more service only when they see it as career enhancing (Babcock et al, 2017; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2024).

In my research conversations, nearly all women I spoke to pointed to the invisibility and lack of recognition of civic engagement work in academia. Despite serving as representatives of their respective HEIs in Campus Engage, it rarely felt that the practitioners' work was fully acknowledged at institutional and senior level, at least in some HEIs. After all, especially with regards to civic engagement, it may be true that "innovative practices that shift epistemology, reshape the curriculum, alter pedagogy, and redefine scholarship are not being supported through academic norms and institutional reward policies that shape the academic cultures of the academy" (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011: 23). These issues, stemming from our practice, are outlined in section 6.2.5.

[8] It is also noted that not only women, but also faculty of colour and 'lower rank' staff tend to perform more service (Antonio et al, 2000; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019). This may lead to disregard for this work: "As long as most service activities are being practised by marginalised faculty, those activities will remain marginalised in academe" (Antonio et al, 2000: 388).

4.4.2 The Growing Disconnect Between Practitioners and Decision Makers

To return to documenting the further development of the civic engagement movement in Ireland, with time, there was also a shift from Campus Engage being a practitioner-owned and led network to one that was more centrally-led. There seemed to be a stronger accountability for practitioners' (voluntary) work to both senior management in individual HEIs and to the Campus Engage Steering Committee.

There also was perhaps a growing sense of disconnect from the latter. Back in the early/mid 2010s, the practitioners involved in Campus Engage, including myself, knew and engaged with the Steering Committee representatives from our respective HEIs. However, the awareness of who the local HEI representatives were, of how and why they were appointed to the role, or how they could assist practitioners in advancing the civic engagement agenda locally has diminished. Drawing from Fitzsimons' (2015: 118) reflections on networks in community and adult education, leadership of practitioner associations can be a challenge, especially if leaders are self-appointed, outsiders, and disconnected from the 'on the ground' efforts, and their "esteem and credibility with policy makers" does not necessarily translate to "the communities they purport to represent, who might not even be aware of their existence." This sentiment resonates with my experiences of being involved in Campus Engage in the late 2010s. I recall feeling somewhat disempowered by the shift to a more centralised leadership, especially when I was not sure who the decision makers were, and what their background in and commitments to community engagement was. It felt as if the network was no longer practitioner-owned, and the seemingly high turnover of colleagues involved in both the Steering Committee and the Working Groups meant that I no longer sensed the network was cohesive. Nevertheless, I remained involved in Campus Engage, albeit in a much more marginal capacity until 2023.

4.5 Legitimacy or Co-option - Performance and Measurement of Civic Engagement

The realm of civic engagement in Ireland seemed not to be impervious to the neoliberal rhetoric of measurement, rationalisation, productivity, performance and cost-effectiveness.

Some civic engagement practitioners and scholars seem to have pragmatically accepted this prevailing neoliberal narrative as the norm and, rather than challenging the system, they have focussed on carving out spaces for their practice within the existing structures. It also appears that even in the early stages of the movement in Ireland, civic engagement champions and leaders were eager to demonstrate that civic engagement was 'value for money' and 'good for business'. This is visible, for instance, in the *Survey on Civic Engagement Activities in Higher Education in Ireland* (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011) where the authors state that one of the main purposes of that research was to establish a baseline for the development of future tools of auditing and evaluation. Additionally, they note: "Clearly resources are scarce and we are now in a period of reduced funding for higher education" (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011: 41). Even though during the time of economic recession the government spending was indeed more limited, one may wonder about the political motivations for the allocation and distribution of these 'scarce resources'. This point is illustrated by, for instance, the fact that during the time of the economic crisis "corporate and political elites have sought to increase their power and transfer the costs of the crisis onto citizens" (Mercille & Murphy, 2017: 372) with the prime example of Irish bank bailouts and a subsequent introduction of austerity measures[9]. Nevertheless, the authors of the *Survey on Civic Engagement Activities in Higher Education in Ireland* continue: "Consequently, it is both urgent and opportune to engage in a dialogue about how we develop and embed civic engagement in a cost effective manner to ensure maximum benefit" (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011: 41). This sentiment exudes a sense that being subject to performance and impact measurement, evaluation, and auditing, just as teaching and research activities are, is a way to further legitimise and mainstream civic engagement initiatives. Here, Ball's (2003: 216) question on who decides what is valuable, worthy, and satisfactory performance-wise and what indicators are used to assess it, seems pertinent.

[9] In Ireland, the bank bailout was a financial intervention (injecting Irish taxpayer euros into the banks) by the government to rescue the banking sector during the global financial crisis of 2008. Prior to that, Irish banks engaged in excessive lending, especially in the property market. When the cost of the bailout became unsustainable in 2010, the government sought a bailout for itself from the International Monetary Fund and European Union. In return, far-reaching austerity measures, including tax increases, and public spending and social welfare cuts were implemented, disproportionately affecting low-income households and vulnerable groups, and increasing poverty levels. As put by Stephen West (2024: episode 202) in one of his podcasts this was "essentially social welfare for the rich in a system that generally does not believe in social welfare for the poor."

Civic engagement champions and practitioners linked with Campus Engage were keen to take the lead and define what matters and should be measured on their own terms. The result was a report on *Measuring Higher Education Civic and Community Engagement* (Wynne & Morris, 2018). The report suggests a support framework outlining several ways in which civic engagement activities (engaged research, engaged teaching and learning, student volunteering, public engagement and enabling institutional infrastructure) can be measured with a range of both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Civic engagement leaders and practitioners wanted to suggest what can be counted and what can be measured.

These efforts ultimately led to the incorporation of civic engagement activities in *Higher Education Authority Performance Compacts* (further referred to as Performance Compacts) for Irish HEIs. In the most recent 2018-2020 *Higher Education System Performance Framework*, Objective 2 proclaims "Creating rich opportunities for national and international engagement which enhances the learning environment and delivers a strong bridge to enterprise and the wider community" (HEA, 2018a: 1). To measure whether this objective has been achieved, HEIs are asked to report on, among others, the proportion of programmes that provide curricular options for accredited community-engaged learning and research with corresponding number of students and staff involved, as well as the number of students involved in volunteering, and outreach initiatives in primary and secondary schools (HEA, 2018a: 26). However, closer reading reveals that most key performance indicators listed under the 'engagement' objective relate to increasing internationalisation, collaborations with employers, as well as staff and student mobility rather than civic and social goals. Meeting these objectives, as set by the HEA in consultation with HEIs, is linked to funding, which the HEA can reduce if institutional and national performance indicators are not met. In other words, civic engagement work and activities had to be seen to translate into tangible gains for the universities and, to paraphrase Ball (2003: 224) making their contribution to the performativity of the university as a business organisation.

It can also be argued that the Performance Compacts - essentially service level agreements between the HEA (extension of the state) and individual third level colleges - were introduced as a mechanism for ensuring compliance in, and close monitoring of, the higher education sector, and to guarantee the sector is accountable, cost-effective, productive, and demonstrating good business performance. This fits into the narrative of marketisation and neoliberalism advocated by the *Hunt Report* - something that can be seen as "most assertive attempt by the Irish state to re-construct higher education" (Loxley & Walsh, 2015: 1128). Indeed, the key system objectives for the higher education sector, as outlined in the Performance Compacts, seem strongly underpinned by neoliberal thinking. Higher education appears to be framed as a pipeline for skills development and employability; the economic needs and needs of the enterprise and business sector feature strongly; and there is a significant focus on excellence - academic, organisational, and in governance. Additionally, this move to "language of tasks, compliance with [...] goals, quality assurance, and 'efficiency'" (Bowl, 2011: 89-90) is another way in which Campus Engage appears to have shifted to being an agent for ensuring practitioners' conformity to the dominant higher education culture; to paraphrase Bowl (2011: 86) - a community of practice possibly became a network of compliance.

In this context, some questions arise - are we, civic engagement champions and practitioners, and our universities, measuring what really counts? Reporting on the numbers of staff and students involved in volunteering, community-engaged research, teaching and learning can be a useful benchmark. However, we are perhaps not measuring what matters - the personal and collective transformation and change of attitudes, the enhancement of learning and research through community involvement, the benefits of community engagement to staff, students and knowledge generation, or the wider social contribution of the higher education sector. As Hartley (2011: 44-45) puts it:

> The ultimate measure of legitimacy of the civic engagement movement, as in any movement, comes from its ability to inspire people to collectively challenge a problematic status quo. This means more than the advancement of specific pedagogies. It means more than the maintenance or even proliferation of university-community partnerships. It means building strategic initiatives that

> confront injustice and relentlessly seek change through every democratic means possible. It means looking more broadly to work with people who are advancing issues that are of central importance to our democracy— efforts that seek to alleviate the legacies of racism and classism in order to forge a strong, diverse democracy (...)

The introduction of the performance indicators and measurements for civic engagement activities perhaps might contribute to increasing competition among HEIs who, to paraphrase Ball (2003: 225), start asking who does it best, who does more, who does it differently, and whose work counts as 'excellence'. The discourse of competition again feeds into the neoliberal-patriarchal frame.

Moreover, the developments in policy and the following work of Campus Engage has led to establishing specific civic engagement outfits at more HEIs, for instance, UL Engage at University of Limerick (2015), or UCD in the Community at University College Dublin (2017), in order to ensure meeting the HEA targets and to further embed community engagement activities. These units have been tasked with supporting and integrating community-engaged research, community-engaged learning, volunteering and other civic engagement initiatives in their respective HEIs. While committing some financial and human resources to these units was a positive development, I would argue that it perhaps also involved the shift of the overall responsibility for embedding civic engagement within respective HEIs to these centres, or individual champions of civic engagement within institutions. In this way, the powerful institutions deflect their accountability for making structural and cultural changes by making it the responsibility of, sometimes powerless, individuals. Professional support staff and practitioners working with those units might be held accountable for meeting the Performance Compact targets (or blamed for not achieving them) while having limited power and influence over lecturers (to, for instance, adapt their modules to incorporate community-based learning opportunities), researchers (to employ community engaged research methods), or in fact, students (to encourage them to engage in social/community-oriented projects or volunteering). In other words, the establishment of specific civic engagement offices demands the question - is this a way for senior management and university leadership to simply 'tick the KPI box' and absolve

themselves from the responsibility to fully embrace and practise civic engagement across the whole university? According to Sara Ahmed (2007: 593), an intersectional feminist scholar and writer, "if the document becomes the responsibility of an individual within the organization, then that organization can authorise the document (can sign it) and refuse responsibility for the document at the same time." To elaborate, the (perhaps performative) signing of a document or a policy by HEI leadership, for example the Campus Engage *Charter for Higher Education Civic and Community Engagement* mentioned earlier, and then delegating the responsibility for it to individuals or individual offices, allows the institution to take credit for its commitment to being an 'engaged university' while at the same time relinquishing the responsibility for actually implementing structural changes to enable the growth of civic engagement. In this way, the HEI can signal its values to the outside world, while doing little to put those values into practice. Additionally, tasking the specific (often small and under-resourced) units with implementing civic engagement initiatives across their respective HEIs, rather than making efforts to truly infuse all university activities with community engagement spirit, might lead to the perception that civic engagement is something that happens 'out there', on the periphery, by specific practitioners, rather than being central to university's operations.

4.6 Engagement and Civic Engagement in University Strategic Plans in Ireland

Dublin City University (DCU) was arguably the first HEI in Ireland to formulate a specific civic and community engagement policy as a part of its strategic plan in late 2000s (e.g. DCU in 2009). As the *Hunt Report* (HEA, 2011) called for Irish universities to explicitly recognise engagement as a part of their mission, nearly all current strategic plans of Irish HEIs include references and commitments to engagement, or civic engagement. However, as demonstrated in Table 2 below, how universities and colleges interpret, position and action engagement and civic engagement varies considerably.

Higher Education Institution	**Engagement Goals and Actions in Strategic Plans**
Atlantic Technological University (ATU)	● "to [empower] graduates to fully contribute to the social, economic and cultural betterment of society" (ATU, 2019: 4) ● collaboration with government agencies, enterprise and the community ● regional impact, developing community and outreach programmes, strengthening engagement with external partners (industry, agencies, NGOs)
Dublin City University (DCU)	● "to transform lives and societies through education, research, innovation, and engagement" (DCU, 2017: 12) "pursue active engagement with our communities" (DCU, 2017: 50-51). ● "(...) a highly engaged university, the very antithesis of the 'Ivory Tower University.'" (DCU, 2017: 50-51). ● engagement with local, regional and global communities; student and alumni engagement; enterprise engagement (DCU, 2017) ● nurturing "attributes of civic engagement, global citizenship, enterprise, empathy, and leadership" (DCU, 2017: 21)
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	● to "courageously advance the cause of a pluralistic, just and sustainable society" (TCD, 2020:8) ● wider societal impact of research ● students equipped "for lives of active citizenship" ● civically engaged teaching and learning
University of Limerick (UL)	● "global reputation for excellence, creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and engagement" and "creating, harnessing and imparting knowledge for the benefit of our students and the enrichment of our community" (UL, 2019: 19) ● commitment to social good ● being a civic university through engagement with the city and region ● built infrastructure, widening access and participation, collaboration with local and regional agencies and networks, student and staff volunteering.
University of Galway (UG)	● UG "is for the public good" and "our students, our society and our planet" ● students to be "critical thinkers, entrepreneurs, social activists, public servants and innovators of the future" ● university to work "for the benefit of individual, societal and environmental wellbeing" (UG, 2020: 7) ● commitment of universities to sustainable development, societal impact, long tradition of collaboration with regional community groups ● *meitheal* approach - "a shorthand for a spirit of cooperation, empathy and inclusiveness" (UG, 2020: 14) ● strategic goals and actions mapped against UN SDGs
Maynooth University (MU)	● commitment to "[engagement] with the challenges that face modern society", public and civic mission of higher education and contribution to public good ● universities central to "innovation, economic growth, social development and cultural vibrancy, and are essential to a free, open, equal, democratic and sustainable society" (MU, 2018:14). ● equality, diversity, inclusion and interculturalism; widening access and participation ● social justice, human rights and equality underpinning

	● references to community engaged research, public engagement and scholarship ● creating in- and -extracurricular opportunities for students to enhance their engaged citizenship through volunteering and service learning
Munster Technological University (MTU)	● no specific reference to engagement or civic engagement in the vision, mission and values ● strategic themes mention contribution to community, community engagement, regional and global impact through research ● commitment to UN SGDs across its objectives and activities ● commitment to leading regional economic and social development ● community engagement initiatives for students to become active global citizens ● commitment to develop a specific 'community and public engagement strategy' (MTU, 2022)
Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest - Limerick and Athlone Institutes of Technology (LIT and AIT respectively)	● "[becoming] firmly embedded in the civic, social and economic fabric of the communities we serve" (AIT, 2019: 21) featured as one of the five strategic themes ● HEI has a "capacity to enrich civic, social and cultural engagement" (AIT, 2019: 13) and a"critical function in the wider economic, cultural and social and development of the region" (LIT, 2018:2 8) ● commitment to "intensive and impactful engagement with regional business, enterprise and our communities" (AIT, 2019: 14) ● focus on 'engagement as a service to society', engagement with industry and local agencies and networks ● references to volunteerism, community-based learning and research, civic leadership, public engagement, opening the campus to the wider community ● aspiration to formally recognise the civic engagement of staff and students
University College Dublin (UCD)	● engagement with local and global society, societal impact of research ● building mutually beneficial partnerships with industry, public bodies and the community sector ● student and staff volunteering, charity partnerships, service learning and community project work opportunities overarching aim of UCD's centre for civic and community engagement - UCD in the Community explicitly named as an enabler (UCD, 2020)
Technological University of Dublin (TU Dublin)	● three strategic pillars: people, planet and partnership ● driving societal changes, tackling global challenges, developing responsible global citizens and sustainability ● no detailed discussion on how strategic goals will be achieved ● NB: TU Dublin has a long history of leading and shaping national policy and good practice in civic engagement and operates a well-established and embedded Students Learning with Communities programme for community-based service learning and community engaged research.
South East Technological University - Carlow and Waterford Institutes of Technology	● "focus on forming responsible global citizens, creating new knowledge, and actively leading social and economic change" (WIT, 2017: 3) ● "inspiring individuals, transforming society", 'engagement' as one of strategic priorities, objective to "remain grounded in the heart of our community and our regions" (CIT, 2019: 26) ● commitment to "equity of access, transfer and progression opportunities, to lifelong learning, and to making a significant, sustainable and socially

(CIT and WIT respectively)	responsible contribution to our regions, Ireland and the world" (CIT, 2019: 36) ● orientation on engagement with industry and enterprise for knowledge transfer, innovation, generating income and leading economic change in the region (CIT, 2019)
University College Cork (UCC)	● vision and mission of shaping a sustainable and inclusive world, and enabling "transformative research and learning for the enrichment of society and stewardship of our planet" (UCC, 2023: 10) ● engagement with society as the third pillar of operations alongside research and teaching and the 'third mission of universities' ● "at the heart of the future vision and policy direction for higher education in Ireland and Europe. Engaged research and innovation is central to addressing Ireland's social, economic and environmental challenges (...) We promote this mission of collaboration and co-creation with society, embedding a university-wide culture where staff, students and external partners feel valued and supported to deliver engaged research, community-engaged learning and public engagement" (UCC, 2023: 9) ● utilising "civic and community engagement for local and global impact across research, teaching and strategic partnerships, enhancing our reputation internationally as a thought leader" (UCC, 2023: 28) ● commitment to equality, diversity and widening participation ● 'global engagement' - increased internationalisation, and attracting international students, staff and funding

Table 2: Engagement in Strategic Plans of Irish Universities

University strategic plans are formulated in response to a range of internal and external factors, pressures and incentives. The former can include, for instance, what institutions perceive as their organisational values and culture. The latter might comprise international and national policy context, trends in the higher education sector, such as the influence of internationalisation, new public management, and reduced funding, as well as competition and changing student population needs. Strategic planning may also provide HEIs with an opportunity to differentiate themselves from other institutions, and when done right, communicate organisational culture. However, there is also a risk that just like with many institutional policies, we may, borrowing from Sara Ahmed (2007: 590), "end up doing the document rather than doing the doing." While the author discusses equality and diversity policies within institutions specifically in relation to race, parallels could be drawn with 'doing' civic engagement. Strategic plans can be considered aspirational, though not necessarily binding; in other words, they may be seen as superficial or empty rhetoric. However, they may also often provide an enabling framework for certain university

activities and areas of work, and they can signal what universities consider central to their mission.

The review of the Irish HEIs strategic plans in the table above demonstrates that nearly all institutions explicitly recognise that they are a part of the wider society, should contribute to their local, regional and national communities, and be drivers for positive social, economic and cultural change. Compared to previous strategic plans, it seems that engagement features much more prominently nowadays, with many HEIs making strong commitments to their third mission. Most Irish third level institutions appear to embrace engagement as a part of their research, teaching and learning activities to a larger extent, rather than perceiving it only as a separate third pillar. This can give the area an enhanced profile; and, according to Wynne (2014), if (civic) engagement is publicly acknowledged in HEI strategic documents, practitioners and champions in the area can use this for leverage to profile their work.

However, if senior institutional leaders and groups tasked with developing strategic plans perceive (civic) engagement as more central to universities' missions, we have to be mindful that it could run a risk of being tamed, losing its critical and transformative edge and being appropriated by the dominant discourses of higher education and individual institutions. David (2017) discusses this phenomenon with relation to gender equality in universities by asking if we have truly achieved it, or "has the notion of gender equality been captured by the ruling classes or governing elites and been changed to a modest one of access and inclusion, rather than the wider notion of transformation of power relations?" (David, 2017: 210).

Having said that, it is far from clear whether engagement is truly considered an informing and central purpose of university operations and fully embraced by senior leadership, or if it is still somewhat peripheral. This point can be further illustrated by a closer reading of the academic promotion criteria at Irish universities. It reveals that at many HEIs in Ireland, applicants for academic promotions are considered on the basis of their achievements in the areas of research/scholarship, teaching/learning and engagement,

where engagement may be called ‘service’, ‘contribution’ or ‘citizenship’, and can be disciplinary (contribution to the development and promotion of a discipline), internal (service/contribution to the university community), or external (service/contribution to the wider community). Questions remain though whether the ‘engagement’ criteria are considered on par with research/scholarship and teaching/learning, or if they carry less value.

The review of the universities’ strategic plans also reveals that there are various interpretations and guises of engagement and civic engagement in the Irish higher education sector. Engagement comprises promoting active citizenship, societally relevant research, social responsibility, partnerships with the community sector, as well as industry and business, economic, social and cultural change, and international engagement. Many HEIs also include widening access and participation, equality, diversity and inclusion, and environmental sustainability actions under the engagement umbrella. While undoubtedly these activities are laudable and can enhance a university’s standing as a responsible citizen that contributes to a more just society, they might also be an easy way to tick engagement boxes by addressing the symptoms rather than tackling the systemic causes of inequality and injustice. To elaborate, only a handful of HEIs seem to make direct references to their commitment to social justice and equity, social activism, as well as social transformation. Even fewer appear to mention specific enabling vehicles for civic engagement, such as volunteerism, or community engaged teaching, learning and research.

The analysis of the Irish HEIs strategic plans reiterates the point that engagement and civic engagement remain fluid and vague terms, depending on who defines them and to what end (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Jacoby et al, 2009). While there seems to be an almost ubiquitous recognition that engagement and civic engagement are a part of the third level sector mission, according to Boland (2012: 44) “the position of civic engagement conceptually, metaphorically, culturally, physically and organisationally is far from resolved, within higher education as a sector and within individual institutions.” Questions also remain on whether explicitly naming engagement and civic engagement in university strategies indicates a shift from the neoliberal orientation in the higher education sector, or

if it is simply paying lip service to the idea (Munck, 2022). There is also doubt on whether civic engagement is considered central to the mission of the higher education sector, or if it is treated more as a helpful, but auxiliary, offshoot of other university activities rather than its first and foremost concern (Watson, 2011; Munck, 2010). Is civic engagement still treated as a project done on the margins of academia by specific interested academics, faculties or schools? Is the third mission in fact the first and only mission, or informing purpose, of higher education (Wynne, 2014)? According to Lyons and McIlrath (2011: 41):

> There are critical questions to be addressed particularly with regard to whether civic engagement should be positioned as a third pillar, alongside teaching and research, or whether it should be understood as encompassing all activities of higher education i.e. that civic engagement should be a defining characteristic – a 'way of doing' higher education.

Nevertheless, despite the policy and institutional challenges outlined in this chapter, the value of civic engagement practices and projects in Irish HEIs needs to be acknowledged. Community engagement Initiatives such as Community Knowledge Initiative (University of Galway), DCU in the Community and Engaged Research Centre (Dublin City University) or UL Engage (University of Limerick), to name but a few, continue to work at local and national levels and contribute to the welfare of communities they work with. The existing Irish civic engagement initiatives draw attention to the importance of the public and social mission of higher education, and continue to demonstrate that a different university practice and culture is possible.

4.7 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I present how major policy developments have shaped the rise of higher education community engagement in Ireland. I further examine how policy has served as a vehicle for enabling and legitimising the area, but at the same time how it has perhaps led to the co-opting and taming of civic engagement into the dominant higher education rhetoric of performance, accountability, compliance, value for money, and competition.

I also trace the development of Campus Engage network and document the voluntary nature of the practitioners' work for it, as well as how the network shifted from practitioner-led and owned to a more centrally/top-down-led. I discuss how practitioners and champions linked with Campus Engage network perceived policy developments as either beneficial or restricting to their work, and how this network of practitioners itself, consciously or unintentionally, contributed to co-opting the civic engagement movement to the neoliberal-patriarchal higher education system. I consider whether mainstreaming civic engagement entails submission to the dominant narratives of a neoliberal-patriarchal academy. I finally ask if community engagement champions and practitioners internalised the dominant policy discourses and willingly decided to play the neoliberal game in the imperfect system, and if the desire for recognition and legitimacy led to compromising and domestication of the ideals of critical and transformative civic engagement.

Chapter Five: Methodology

In the first year of my doctoral study, I assisted with a conference on the social mission of universities, and I had an opportunity to introduce myself to some of the speakers. One of them, a senior male US academic and a leader in civic engagement, was interested to hear about my study. He was enthusiastic, and even extended an invitation to visit his university as a part of my research. However, when I mentioned that I am exploring civic engagement from a feminist perspective, his interest seemed to turn into slight disappointment. He did not appear to understand why the research could not be about 'just pure civic engagement on its own.' As I felt it was not my place to argue with a respected guest, and not having the language and confidence to do so, I offered an evasive, non-committal response. However, I often wondered afterwards - is the feminist lens considered to be 'polluting' an otherwise 'pure' discipline? Is it seen as contaminating 'objective' science? However, eventually I came to believe that employing this lens can lead to an enhanced, and perhaps more nuanced, understanding of civic and community engagement.

As previously stated, the main aim of this research is to expand our knowledge of civic engagement practice by providing insights into the experiences of female community engagement practitioners in the present-day university. I am therefore guided by the following research question:

> *In what ways can civic engagement practice learn from the experiences of purposefully-selected female civic engagement practitioners as they navigate present-day policies and practices of neoliberal-patriarchal university environments?*

I explore this research question with seven Irish women civic engagement practitioners.

This chapter outlines my approach to research methodology. I clarify the critical feminist methodological frame as it pertains to this inquiry, as well as my values as a critical feminist researcher drawing from theories of intersectionality and critical pedagogy. I also present the research design, research decisions I made, and research methods I employed,

as well as the rationale for selecting those tools. Finally, I also provide an account of the reflexive thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022) I employed when working with data I collected. As the research process was as important to me as the finished research output, this chapter is infused with my reflections on the research process and myself as a researcher.

5.1 Feminism as a Lens - Introduction

While most of my childhood experiences at home were not particularly gendered, gender socialisation in pre-school and then in primary and secondary education was significant, and I certainly felt the expectations of gendered performance or behaviour. I clearly remember some early experiences of sexism. There were two street-harassment episodes, and for the first time, I felt what it meant to inhabit a body that is female. Being passed over for 'the best student' award from my class in favour of a boy, despite my achievements exceeding his, made me feel angry and hurt. My insights were often ignored and trivialised by my peers, making me feel like my knowing was insufficient.

At that time, I did not understand why some men felt entitled to make public comments about my body; why it is me, not them, feeling ashamed; why I should be passed over for an award in favour of a male peer; and why my opinions were often disregarded. I did not have the knowledge to name these experiences. Fricker (2007: 7) articulates this as epistemic injustice; both testimonial (being wronged as the knower) and hermeneutical - not having the tools (such as understanding and language) to describe my experiences of harassment and exclusion. Years later I also started to understand the idea of default maleness and invisibility of women. For decades, some feminist writers, such as De Beauvoir (2010), Saul & Diaz Leon (2018) and Criado Perez (2019), have noted that maleness is considered the norm and the golden standard. Male is all encompassing - after all 'mankind' encompasses all genders, but 'womankind' only one - it is "the world in which *human* is still defined as *man*" (Ahmed, 2017: 15). As Criado Perez (2019: 8) succinctly puts it: "Because men go without saying, it matters when women don't get said at all."

The idea that some voices are privileged, and that people in positions of perceived authority and power are believed more than those on the margins, is not new. Over three decades ago, for instance, Patricia Hill-Collins discussed this in *Black Feminist Thought* (2009), where she specifically focused on the experience of Black women being systematically undervalued as knowers and elaborated on the links between knowledge and power relations. I too have experienced the workings of these hierarchies of knowers when working within the patriarchal and neoliberal academy. As a non-academic member of staff, working in civic engagement (therefore on the margins of the university), a migrant, and a woman, I have often felt that my knowledge and experience is considered lesser. Drawing from Sara Ahmed (2017: 15), I believe that "we enact feminism in how we relate to the academy", and that doing feminist critical research can be a "feminist brick" (*ibid*: 16) in the wall of resistance to the ways knowledge production has been traditionally seen in the academy, and in the wall of support to others researching from this perspective. My research attempts to lift the voices of women civic engagement practitioners within a neoliberal and patriarchal academy, where practitioner knowledge can be often devalued.

The critical feminist methodological frame I adopt, draws from a particular feminist scholarship tradition, and I now discuss some overarching principles of feminist epistemologies and methodologies as they inform my research methods, design and practice.

I align myself with the view that "a feminist perspective not only makes sense of the world which we inhabit (epistemology); it is also a way of being in the world (ontology) and of guiding our research practices (methodology)" (Byrne & Lentin, 2000: 52). Feminist scholarship has challenged our understanding of knowledge production, who knowers can be, what can be known, the ownership of knowledge, and what 'truth' is (Harding, 1995 & 2004; Hartstock 2004; Fricker 2007; Hesse-Biber 2012; Letherby, 2003). Hesse-Biber (2012) states: "Feminist research begins with questioning and critiquing androcentric bias within the disciplines, challenging traditional researchers to include gender as a category of analysis" (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 5). She then continues: "including gender as a category of analysis (...) opens the possibility of asking new questions" (*ibid*: 7). Employing a feminist

lens therefore allows me to interrogate themes that may have not been fully explored in literature in Ireland through capturing the experiences of women civic engagement champions and practitioners and what happens when they meet the neoliberal-patriarchal culture of the present-day academy.

There is no one feminism, and the diversity of feminist thought is reflected in the area of feminist inquiry - there is no universal feminist epistemology and methodology, and no single way to conduct feminist research. Some frameworks for feminist research include, among others, feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, and a range of postmodern and poststructural feminist approaches (Letherby 2003: 41-55). Having said that, several overarching principles guiding critical feminist inquiry are identified in literature (Letherby, 2003; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Lather, 1991), and I present these below outlining ways I draw from them.

5.2 Critical Feminist Methodological Frame

5.2.1 Questioning the Dominant Ways of Knowledge Building

Until only several decades ago the ways of understanding, collecting, building, producing and disseminating academic knowledge have been masculine, male-focused and male-oriented, even if just for a simple fact of who was allowed to pursue those activities in academia and beyond (Letherby, 2003: 20-40). The vast majority of scientific disciplines have been saturated with what Gayle Letherby (2003: 38) terms “DWM” - “dead white males” - meaning that it has only been a particularly privileged category of men, who could participate in knowledge building pursuits and decide what was worthy of researching. For centuries, women, as well as other marginalised groups, have been excluded as knowers and knowledge producers (Letherby, 2003: 20-40; Leathwood, 2017). Consequently, the prevalent epistemologies have focused on the positivist, unbiased and rational pursuit of one objective and universal ‘truth’.

One of the key guiding principles of critical feminist scholarship from its inception has been to disrupt these dominant ways of knowledge building (Leavy & Harris, 2019: 48).

Broadly speaking, critical feminist epistemological tradition is one of the critiques of objectivity, impartiality, universal truths and neutral, value-free research (for foundational texts, see Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1995 & 2004; Hartstock, 2004). I acknowledge that there exists a largely positivist and rationalist paradigm in feminist research, namely feminist empiricism (Letherby 2003: 43-44); however, it is not a paradigm that is drawn upon in my study.

Over the past decades, scholars concerned with feminist theories of knowledge (e.g. Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1995 & 2004; Hartstock, 2004; Fricker, 2007; Letherby, 2003; Hesse-Biber, 2012) have largely objected to the dominant 'male' ways of building knowledge as an exclusionary exercise in power, privileging only certain viewpoints, rendering the voices and experiences of 'others' invisible, and useful only for the dominant, 'superior' groups. In her foundational 1988 essay, Donna Haraway (1988: 583) discusses how "only partial perspective promises objective vision" in science. Importantly for this research, she is:

> arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. (*ibid*: 589)

In other words, objectivity here is partial, located in specific situations, perhaps limited, and yet valid. Situatedness of theories and knowledge is emphasised, there is no one universal truth produced by the rational mind and positivist science. Sandra Harding draws on the idea of benefits of partial knowledge, and discusses "strong objectivity" (Harding, 1995: 331), where the view from marginalised groups assists in building a more objective depiction of the world; where perspectives that may be missed by those who dominate are added, and where a researcher recognises her own location and bias, instead of claiming to be value-neutral.

I do not pretend to be an unbiased truth-teller, and I reject the notion of assumed 'objectivity' in research. I recognise my positionality as a critical feminist and a practitioner-researcher, drawing from theories of intersectionality and critical pedagogy. I do not hide my political and ideological commitments; rather, I explicitly use them as a way of interpreting our being and knowing in the world and embrace their subjectivity. I believe the voices of women civic engagement practitioners are essential if we are to enhance our understanding of the institutions and culture of the academy and of civic and community engagement. What I capture in my research is perhaps a 'partial' and 'biased' view; however, it is not my aim to make universal claims. Instead, I intend to 'shine a light' on the experiences of a group of women who are involved in civic engagement work in academia and to build a partial and local picture of their practice.

5.2.2 Feminist Standpoint and Standpoint Theories

Feminist standpoint theory belongs within the critique of objectivity and universal truths arrived at by positivist means. The theory argues that the social position one occupies affects how we perceive the world, and understand and produce knowledge (Leavy & Harris, 2019: 52-53). Standpoint theory articulates that the unprivileged groups are able to understand their social circumstances with more nuance, and to provide a more nuanced portrayal of and insight into the society, precisely because they are on the outside of the dominant discourse (Letherby, 2003: 44-49). Feminist standpoint also provides a platform and tools for groups other than women that are excluded from dominant discourses to produce knowledge from their location (Hill-Collins, 2009; Kokushkin, 2014; Leavy & Harris, 2019: 52-56). Sandra Harding, for instance, notes that "race, ethnicity-based, anti-imperial and queer social justice movements routinely produce standpoint themes" (Harding, 2004: 3), and the key is to provide marginalised groups with a voice, and recognise them as the subjects in and producers of knowledge.

It has been argued by Hekman (1997), an American feminist political scientist who expressed criticism of feminist standpoint theory, that views from marginalised groups may not necessarily provide unique insights, and a person might not always have a better understanding of the world simply because they belong to a certain marginalised group.

Therefore, it is important to note that having an 'epistemic advantage' is not synonymous with a claim that unprivileged groups are the only, or indeed the best, ones who can understand their experiences. Harding states: "The claim by women that women's lives provide a better starting point for thought about gender system is not the same as the claim that their own lives are the best such starting point" (Harding, 2004: 129). The issue of 'achieving' standpoint through critical analysis of power structures one is located in, is contrasted with simply 'having' a standpoint owing only to occupying a certain location (Hartstock, 2004; Harding, 2004).

Feminist standpoint theory principles allow me to explicitly recognise and use my bias as a researcher. My collaboration with practitioners of community engagement, rather than senior academics, leaders and managers, perceives those working on the ground in civic engagement, who can be sidelined in research, as having an epistemic advantage, and an ability to provide insights that will enhance our understanding of civic engagement and the culture in academy. I argue that together we can "reclaim knowledge based on [our] group's experiences" (Kokushkin, 2014: 11), and reveal realities that are perhaps suppressed (Harding, 1995). Drawing from standpoint theory, allows me to amplify the voices of those working on the margins of universities.

5.2.3 Being an Insider-Researcher

I additionally consider standpoint theory to be well suited to practitioner research and I acknowledge that I am also an insider-researcher as a member of the group and community I am researching, with prior knowledge of the population, cultures, values and issues I am working with (Greene, 2014: 1-3; Chammas, 2020: 537). However, managing the balance between my identity and role as a researcher and as a civic engagement practitioner is one of the challenges for inside-researchers (Greene, 2014: 6-7; Chammas, 2020: 539) - as are, among others, questions of a risk to 'objectivity', 'validity' and 'bias'. These issues are addressed in previous and following sections. While positioning my work as practitioner research that draws from my professional experiences in civic engagement in academia, I feel I need to acknowledge that I left this field in 2023 - it is not only appropriate but also, I would argue, enhancing transparency. There was an array of reasons for resigning from

work, for instance, my personal experiences of mental health difficulties, and my wish to complete this doctoral study, which was nearly impossible to achieve while working full-time. Despite the ongoing, unwavering support of my immediate superiors and the fantastic team I worked with, I did feel professional burn-out. Having left higher education civic engagement, I wondered whether my now "outsider" status still gives me the right and authority to my practitioner-research claim. Sarah Tillery's reflections on being "exiled" as an insider-researcher investigating the representations of fatness after losing weight resonate with me here (Dottolo & Tillery, 2015: 130-132). She considered "that in the eyes of others, [she] had lost the authority to write and research on a topic to which [she] felt intimately connected" (*ibid*: 131-132), and that she had to "acknowledge [her] own transitioning outsider status from the community of people to which [she] had once belonged" (*ibid*: 131). To address these questions, I came to see my dual insider-practitioner and outsider status allowed an opportunity to generate different, perhaps more nuanced, insights on the practice of higher education civic engagement. After I stepped out from practice I could more fully process and unpack my professional experiences. Once 'exiled', I could recognise how I was tired of navigating the complex politics and power relations in the academy - as a woman, a migrant, and a civic engagement practitioner - and trying to carve out a more central place for civic engagement within my institution and the sector. I could acknowledge that for a number of years I spent much time fighting for resources, recognition and acknowledgement from the upper echelons of my institution. However, I could also recognise what brought me joy and helped me revitalise, for instance, performing work that was truly aligned with my personal values and felt meaningful to me, seeing human and community flourishing, and being a part of a supportive practitioner community. The issues above have also surfaced in the research conversations with practitioners and are presented in chapter six and seven.

5.2.4 Lived Experience as a Vantage Point in Research

Another tenet of the feminist epistemology is recognising the lived experience as a vantage point in research (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Byrne & Lentin, 2000; Letherby, 2003) and the knowledge contribution it can generate. Leavy & Harris (2019: 103) share that feminist researchers "always placed the concerns and experiences of girls and women at the center

of research practices." This idea, again, can disrupt dominant ways of understanding what knowledge is. For centuries, 'authorised knowledge' legitimised through the academy has been privileged over experiential knowledge, drawn from everyday experiences (Letherby, 2003: 24-28). To illustrate this phenomenon, Letherby (*ibid*) considers the development of medicine. Women's private and collective experiences of caring for the sick, intuitive understandings of curing practices, learning through informal exchanges with other women, and insights into the healing properties of plants were initially cherished. However, these experiences were thwarted (or even punished as a result of 'witch hunts') during the emergence of modern medicine as a 'science' that should be legitimately pursued by means of reason and objectivity (*ibid*). 'Authorised knowledge' has been considered 'scientific' and providing clarity, while experiential knowledge has been dismissed as subjective and chaotic. Additionally, authorised knowledge can be positioned firmly in the 'masculine' arenas of culture, mind, reason, objectivity and the public sphere; as opposed to 'feminine' experiential knowledge associated with nature, body, emotion, subjectivity and the private sphere (Wajcman, 1991 in Letherby, 2003: 22-23). Critical feminist scholarship has sought to elevate the historically suppressed knowledge derived from everyday experiences. It recognises that women, and other marginalised groups, have suffered 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker, 2007), been wronged as knowers, excluded from mainstream research - their insights and experiences ignored and demeaned. Feminist inquiry listens to the voices of 'others' and recognises their experiences as knowledge. However, it is not about simply bringing in or incorporating women - "Knowledge is achieved not through 'correcting' mainstream research studies by adding women but through paying attention to the specificity and uniqueness of women's lives and experiences" (Hesse-Biber 2012: 9).

I have felt how these hierarchies of knowledge operate within a patriarchal academy. I have experienced this at a number of levels and due to a number of intersecting factors - my gender, age, nationality, the type of work I practise, my less-than-doctoral qualifications. As a member of professional support or administrative staff, I have often felt that my knowledge and experience is considered lesser than the knowledge of academic staff. Oftentimes, academic staff in universities are considered the core and

superior self, while administrative staff are the inferior other, 'the help' - only supporting the real workings of the academy happening elsewhere. I recall a colleague from another institution asking if there was anyone else she could speak to regarding a civic engagement project we had been working on - someone "more embedded", she said. I could not help but feel that what she meant was someone more important in the pecking order of the academy: a lecturer, a course director, a researcher, a Dean perhaps? It may be that she meant someone core, rather than me - working on the margins of the university, in the community, outside of the campus walls. Perhaps her intentions were innocent, but it felt like my experiences and knowledge were insufficient and not important enough.

Having said that, I feel that throughout my time in education, especially higher education, I too have internalised the notion of the superiority of 'authorised knowledge'. While writing this study, I many times removed paragraphs describing my personal and professional experiences, dismissing them as inconsequential rather than valid sources of knowledge. Nevertheless, it is my wish to ground this study in my experiences and those of the research participants as much as it is possible. This research endeavours to highlight the issues concerning civic engagement as they emerge from the landscape of practice by lifting the voices and experiences of Irish civic engagement practitioners, including my own. It explores how female civic engagement professionals in Ireland operate in an academic environment that may at times seem hostile to their beliefs and practice, how they feel, what they experience, what they do and how their stories unfold.

5.2.5 The Importance of Praxis

Equally important in critical feminist methodologies is the emphasis on praxis - the integration of theory into real-world activism - and research orientation on conscientisation, transformation, social justice and social change (hooks, 1984; Lather, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Leavy & Harris, 2019). Patti Lather advocates that feminist researchers should "consciously use our research to help participants understand and change their situation" (Lather, 1991: 57), and Leavy & Harris (2019: 26) add that "Feminism and feminist scholarship, like all social justice projects, are an evolving and infinite commitment, just as working against and into racisms, ageisms, and other

oppressions." This emphasis on reflection and action in order to make a difference is important to me as a researcher. During my conversations with the seven civic engagement practitioners, I encouraged a joint exploration of research issues between myself and the participants, and reflection on our individual and collective practice, as well as the wider higher education sector's culture and climate that, I argue, diminishes civic engagement practitioners in academia. It was reassuring that after the research conversations, some women who participated remarked that they felt encouraged to reflect on their practice to a deeper extent as a result of our engagements.

At the same time, I am cautious of the limitations of my research, and it would be naive to assume that my study could transform what I present as the patriarchal, neoliberal and elitist nature of the academy. After all, many volumes critiquing these hegemonic frameworks in higher education have been written and published, spawning little deeper structural change. Having said that, the change resulting from engaging in praxis in my research does not necessarily have to manifest itself in a deep structural and sectoral change. It might be a transformation at a personal level - encouraging the recognition of, and ways of possible resistance to the status quo; confidence to alter practice; or developing stronger connections and networks among women civic engagement practitioners in academia. Drawing from an example of a study on community education in neoliberal times, such actions can be called "lighting oppositional fires in as many spaces as possible" (Fitzsimons, 2017: 244) and "working in the cracks" where "practitioners should seek out spaces for counter-hegemonic actions and recolonise cracks in neoliberalism to the benefit of a more just and equal society" (*ibid*: 239). These small, personal transformations and acts of resistance may in time reverberate wider.

5.2.6 Reciprocity and Rejection of Researcher-Researched Hierarchy

Minimising the power imbalance between the researcher and research participants is another cornerstone of feminist scholarship (Oakley, 1981 & 2016; Lather, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Leavy & Harris (2019: 105) note that "One way in which feminists account for power in the research process is to create methodologies based on power-sharing with research participants." Scholars working within the feminist

methodology frames favour inclusive, mutual, and participatory approaches in research. Patti Lather (1991: 56-64), for instance, advocates for the need for reciprocity and negotiation between the researcher and research participants in order to make the process more democratic and empowering. In her foundational text, Ann Oakley discusses the rejection of hierarchy specifically in terms of interviewing. She argues against the traditional, 'masculine', approach to interviewing, where it is a one-way process for extracting data from the passive and objectified interviewee with whom the unbiased and value-free interviewer has a non-personal, formal but 'friendly' rapport (Oakley, 1981). Within this interviewing paradigm both the interviewer and interviewee are reduced to mechanical tools whose sole purpose is data generation, and there is no scope for relationships, mutuality and emotions. Instead, Oakley argues that:

> the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her personal identity in the relationship. (Oakley, 1981: 41).

These ideas were formulated over four decades ago and therefore are more foundational, and in her 2016 article Oakley, while re-appraising her previous arguments, also admits that her earlier claims might have been naive and acknowledges their subsequent critiques. These, for instance, include the oversimplification of the interviewee-interviewer power dynamics, the assumption of universal shared female experiences, and an unproblematic expectation of sisterhood and friendship among women (Oakley, 2016: 197-199).

Even when we try to reduce the researcher-researched hierarchy some issues of power remain. Letherby (2003: 77-78) names it as "intellectual privileges" of the researcher, for instance, the ease of access to information, the power to negotiate between ours and research participants' values, beliefs and responses, authority to select or reject data, or control over presenting research discoveries, including a possibility of misrepresentation of the participants' accounts and experiences. The question of power relations between the researcher and the researched and shifting between the researcher-practitioner identities is also one of the challenges of insider-research (Greene, 2014: 3-4). Therefore, it may never

be possible to fully eliminate the researcher-researched relational asymmetry and achieve true equality and reciprocity within any research. However, the following can be helpful in creating non-exploitative relationships with participants: being mindful of the issues of imbalance of power; transparency about positionality, methodology, the research design and process; willingness to invest ourselves; and a commitment to mutuality and sharing during the research process.

When conducting this research, I attempted to minimise the hierarchy and subject-object relationship insofar as it was possible and practicable by using approaches that make the research process iterative and collaborative. I also included the participants at various stages, and through repeated interactions (see: Figure 2: Final Research Design and Table 3: Final Research Design with Rationale in section 5.3.1 for details)

The group information sessions were an opportunity to meet other women involved. More importantly, they allowed the practitioners to learn about the purpose and process of my research, as well as ask questions and voice concerns. The information sessions provided a space for sharing and discussing my research ideas, my positionality, methodology, and proposed ways of researching in an open and transparent manner. I reflect on these initial interactions with the research participants in section 5.3.4. In order to ensure participation, dialogue and reciprocity, during later stages I shared the preliminary findings with research participants providing them with an opportunity to gain an insight into my analysis and interpretation and for having a conversation about those. My wish was to tip the scales of control more towards the participants, but it was also a way to reconnect with each other. I reflect on this stage of the research process in section 5.3.7.

5.2.7 Reflexivity in Practice - Reflexivity in Research

Reflexivity has been an important feature of feminist research methodologies (Etherington, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Berger, 2015; Leavy & Harris, 2019), although, as Letherby (2003: 76) highlights, it is not unique to feminist scholarship alone. As educators we are encouraged to be reflexive practitioners and asked to turn the critical lens onto ourselves, our actions, thoughts, motivations, as well as our stories of becoming. According to Leavy

& Harris (2019: 104) “Being reflexive in our research practice means paying attention to how influences power our attitudes and behaviors, and our own role in shaping the research experience.” This allows us to make sense of who we are, the environment and events that shaped us, and our story and positionality, which all affect our research practice. Kim Etherington (2004: 31-32) notes:

> [Reflexivity is] the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry. If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and write our representations of the work, then perhaps we can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research.

Reflexivity in research is perhaps counter to the traditional ‘view from nowhere’ (Haraway, 1988: 589) in research, and the idea of a distant and detached scientist. Reflexive researchers reject the notion of assumed ‘objectivity’ in inquiry.

Reflexivity in research should be interwoven, visible and felt throughout the research process. In this study, I specifically recognise and own my positionality and bias that has been moulded through my personal, professional and educational experiences as a woman, an educator, and civic engagement practitioner (see section 1.5). My positionality allows me to inhabit a space within the research process rather than being located outside of it. I also make visible the lenses through which I see the world and use as a researcher namely intersectional feminism, critical pedagogy and a critique of neoliberal influences in our personal, social and professional lives. Drawing from Berger (2015) I also acknowledge how my positionality influenced the topic of this inquiry, the selection of participants I collaborate with, and the research and data analysis methods - this is outlined in more detail in sections 5.3 and 5.4. Additionally, I intermittently kept a journal during the research process to record my decisions, actions, emotions and reasons for adopting selected approaches or proceeding in a certain way. This exercise ultimately allowed me to observe and keep-in-check whether my research activities reflected my values. However, I think it is worthwhile to note that, as Dottolo & Tillery (2015: 126) put it, reflexivity is “a

process [that] may seem foreign, complicated, and onerous to those trained in traditional social science disciplines." To echo my comments on the difficulty of unlearning the notion of superiority of authorised over experiential knowledge, I also recognise that my reflexivity skills perhaps need further practice.

Furthermore, I am aware that reflexivity in research is not only about the representation of self, but also of others (Letherby, 2003: 75-79). Here, my decision to interact with the participants several times during the course of my research, and especially to discuss the initial findings from our conversations provided a vehicle to attempt to minimise misrepresentation of others. It furthermore was also an approach that perhaps enabled me and the participants to make deeper sense of our conversations. Here, I draw from Etherington (2004: 29) who notes that:

> When another person mirrors, reflects or paraphrases our words we can notice (sometimes for the first time) what we are really thinking or feeling. When they summarize what we have been telling them we might begin to create links between ideas, stories, experiences, and relationships of which we had been hitherto unaware.

To add to the above, I feel that reflexivity provides me with "a tool of accountability" (Dottolo & Tillery, 2015: 124) in retelling the stories of the women I interviewed during the research process.

5.3 Research Design and Research Process

5.3.1 Evolving Research Design

I spent significant time on developing a research process that would reflect the key principles of critical feminist inquiry I outlined above. Prior to beginning my research, I had planned to hold an online information session with all participants to meet each other, discuss the proposed research aims and procedures and provide an opportunity to ask questions. I then had proposed to conduct semi-structured (Edwards & Holland, 2013) one-to-one and face-to-face interviews with women civic engagement practitioners

identified through purposive/selective sampling. To follow, I had wanted to complete a written reflection based on each of the interviews. Next, I had wished to conduct repeated (one-to-one and face-to-face) interviews with the same participants that were going to be based on my written reflections and reactions to our initial conversations. After completing the data analysis process using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2022) I had planned to facilitate a focus group inviting all women who participated in the interviews. During the focus group, in collaboration with participants, we would collectively reflect on the themes and issues appearing in research findings, as well as explore solutions for arising challenges. At that stage, I would also welcome new insights that emerge as participants engage with each other (Wilkinson, 1998). Throughout the research process, I attempted to be mindful of not making excessive demands (time, workloads, or otherwise) on the participants who consented to collaborating with me.

As I progressed in my inquiry, this initial research design changed, and I found it challenging and frustrating. I discovered that some of the phases I planned simply did not work, feel right, or allow for new discoveries. I kept asking myself whether I definitely needed certain stages, what their purpose was, and whether it could be achieved in a different way. I realised that a degree of compromise and flexibility was required and came to terms with the fact that I had to allow the research process to unfold according to what worked at a particular time, rather than rigidly adhering to rules that no longer fitted the circumstances. I learnt that as researchers we must try to find balance between our ambitions and the practical realities that both we and our participants find ourselves in. The changes I implemented were also in response to pragmatic issues, such as time constraints (for myself and the participants), difficulties in finding time to connect as a group, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/2021. Overall, however, I was mindful not to cause a methodology shift and to keep my inquiry within a feminist research frame I outlined in previous sections. Figure 2 below presents the final research design I implemented, and Table 3 expands on the rationale behind it.

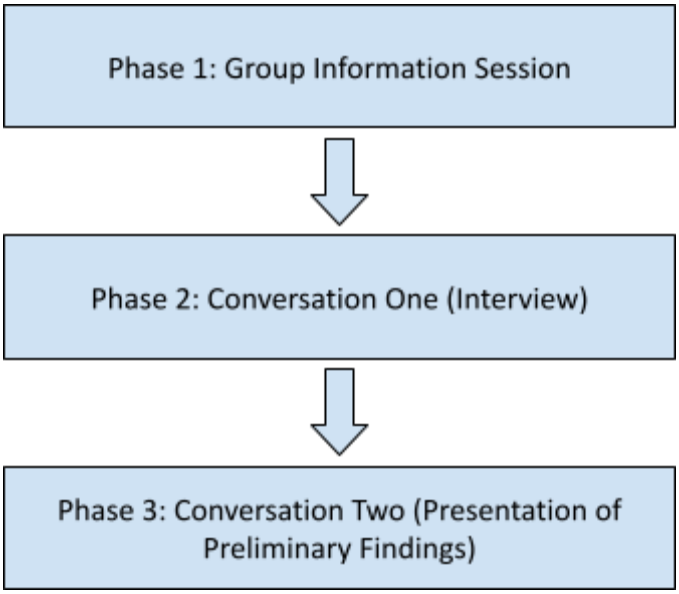

Figure 2: Final Research Design

What?	Who?	Why?
Group Information Session	Whole group	• to inform the participants about the proposed research aims and procedures • to allow participants to meet other women involved • to provide opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns (e.g. research purpose and process, risks and benefits, time commitment, my positionality) • to discuss these in an open and transparent manner
Conversation One (Interview)	Individual (myself + participant)	• semi-structured interviews • to explore participants' experiences as civic engagement champions in academic and as women in academia
Conversation Two (Presentation of Preliminary Findings)	Individual (myself + participant)	• to present preliminary findings • to allow comments from participants • to shift control to participants • to allow participants an insight into my analysis and interpretation • to allow for negotiation of meaning • "submission of a preliminary description of the data to the scrutiny of the researched" (Lather 1991: 53) • to ensure participation, dialogue, engagement and reciprocity • To potentially "[...] add further knowledge and new layers to stories – and create new stories" (Etherington 2004: 79)

Table 3: Final Research Design with Rationale

5.3.2 Selecting Research Participants

The research participants were recruited from the pool of members of Campus Engage Ireland Steering Committee or Campus Engage Working Groups that comprise higher education professional services, managerial, and academic staff. As noted in section 1.4, there were several reasons why I decided to work with women, rather than people of all genders, in this research. As previously stated, in my experience civic engagement in Ireland was a largely feminised area at the time of participant recruitment, with women comprising nearly three quarters of Campus Engage Steering Committee and Working Groups. Additionally, as discussed in section 3.6, there are strong synergies between transformative and critical civic engagement and feminist scholarship. Finally, as this research is guided by a critical feminist stance, and strongly situated in the context of a neoliberal-patriarchal academy, I believe that female participants could provide more nuanced insights both into the practice of community engagement, and the challenges faced by women working in the academy. I used purposive/selective sampling - that qualitative research typically relies on (Harris & Leavy, 2019: 141) - keeping certain concerns in mind. First of all, I looked to reach out to women who I knew would have broad and intimate knowledge of the theory and practice of civic and community engagement. Secondly, I wanted to ensure the diversity of voices and perspectives from each of the various layers of the academy - professional, administrative, academic and managerial. Thirdly, I wished to ensure participant representation from the realms of student/staff volunteering, community-engaged teaching and learning, as well as community-engaged research; hence, covering the main areas of focus for civic and community engagement work conducted within Campus Engage. All participants recruited were Irish and represented five different HEIs - three universities and two technological universities - with one being an independent consultant, previously employed by another Irish university.

Over the summer of 2020, I invited nine women to participate in my research, and while one of them declined, feeling she would not be the right fit, eight of them agreed enthusiastically. Here are some of their responses:

- *"Sounds like a fantastic piece of work. Yes indeed more than happy to contribute in whichever way you decide"*
- *"It would be my pleasure"*
- *"I am delighted to be interviewed Joanna and support you in any way I can"*
- *"Absolutely! Delighted to"*
- *"I'd be happy to hear more details and contribute in whatever way I can"*
- *"This sounds like a very interesting research, well done on pursuing it, I would indeed like to see your research plan, and if I can contribute I will"*
- *"Happy to support this work."*
- *"Your research sounds really interesting and I'd be happy to participate. Thanks for contacting me about it"*

I provided those who agreed to participate with a detailed information sheet (see appendix B) covering the purpose and aim of my study, research activities and commitment involved, reasons for participant selection, data I would collect, as well as information concerning confidentiality, consent and data protection. I asked participants to review the document to make an informed decision on their willingness to engage.

5.3.3 Meeting the Participants

Ultimately seven women participated in my research. While Table 1 (p. v) introduces them briefly, it is here when we encounter them more fully.

Martha

Martha works at a higher education institution in the West of Ireland and has been involved in civic engagement work for nearly two decades. She "was raised in a Catholic all girls primary and secondary school", and she used to volunteer when she was in college. Martha introduced community-based learning in her pedagogical practice early in her academic career, motivated by a strong sense of social justice, and her belief that we should educate students as democratic citizens. She tells me "[she] kind of fell into service learning and [she] was doing this without the understanding that there was a whole body of literature out there." Martha also recalls that before starting in her current post "for a long time, [she] thought [she] was this kind of crazy, young academic in my mid-twenties" and that she would "bring ex-political prisoners in the classroom, and we'd go to various communities

(...) and try to analyse the community's role in the conflict and peace process." In terms of her civic engagement practice, Martha sees herself as “a catalyst in terms of supporting people to move an idea into a project and creating sustainable structures around it” and a person who can discover “points of intersection between the community and the university”. Martha feels our current higher education system is “highly conservative”, which can pose a challenge for the “innovative work” of civic engagement. While she expresses some criticism of the current direction our universities are moving into, she seems pragmatic in her approach to growing the civic engagement movement, choosing her battles wisely, and tends to focus on sectoral and policy opportunities rather than challenges. Martha identifies as a feminist, even though she admits that she is no longer sure what feminism means to her as her understanding of it changed over the years, oscillating between more pronounced and more diluted. She reflects that she was “probably raised to be benevolent and obedient” and says that the past few decades have been about “stripping away all of those benevolent characteristics and trying to be more provocative and more strident as a person” and “stripping away that kind of sense of being a second-class citizen in the world."

Sara

Sara came to work in academia from a non-education background, and says it was a big learning curve to make a transition from a student volunteer to a member of staff at her higher education institution in the West of Ireland - “seeing how higher ed environments worked in terms of research, publications, conferences, trying to create cross campus partnerships and integration of work." In her early university career, she “probably had a bit of imposter syndrome” and experienced precarity, being initially employed on a short-term contract, and then “got another short-term contract, for an academic year which went very well”, and followed “on another series of these short-term contracts” until there were more “opportunities to move (...) to a more permanent situation.” During our conversation I feel a strong sense of energy, positivity, enthusiasm and commitment to civic engagement work from Sara, even though at times she points to her frustrations with the direction the higher education sector has taken. Sara seems quite critical of the

neoliberal rhetoric in the sector that pose challenges to her civic engagement practice, and raises these issues several times in our conversation admitting that it can be “exhausting” to navigate the system and defend “collectiveness and solidarity” in the current higher education environment. Her love for students and commitment to their holistic development comes across strongly in our conversation. Sara tells me that the unit she works at “always had a vision around the civic purpose of the university." She identifies as a feminist which she says is about “equality for all”, “supporting the most marginalised and allowing for (...) the voices of the most marginalised to be heard." Sara has a strong sense of social justice which she says is core to her work in civic engagement.

Mary

Mary grew up as the oldest child in a traditional farming family, where everyone was expected to contribute - “doesn’t matter if you’re male or female, what age you are, (...) we need you to help (...).” On completing her PhD and post-doc, she worked in industry before entering academia, and she has been with a university in the East of Ireland for two decades now. Mary “had always been interested in teaching, maybe not so much the full academic gamut." She first encountered community engaged teaching and learning during a showcase of ‘innovation in teaching’ at her HEI and was initially attracted to its experiential and applied real-world learning potential. She feels community engagement gives students an opportunity to develop their professional skills in their subject area. Mary also notes that through their involvement in civic engagement students can learn how to build collaborative relationships, and value different kinds of knowledge, while she has a chance to get to know them better in an out-of-classroom setting where everyone shares “a little a bit more about [themselves] as well than would happen in a normal environment." She enjoys seeing the difference community-engaged projects make for students and community partners. In her role in her department, Mary is “trying to support and mentor people” and “encouraging other people who are in community engaged learning”. Mary identifies as a feminist, and, with laughter, she shares: “it's just such a loaded word, but I think if you boil it down to the core principles, I'm not sure how any woman couldn't be." The challenges of the neoliberalisation of the higher education sector do not emerge in our

conversation, but Mary recognises that gender equality is an issue in academia, says that "the higher up you go, the less women you see" and offers insights into the differences in the ways of working and approaches between men and women in her workplace.

Anna

Before starting work at her university in the South of Ireland, Anna worked for a government agency and in the private sector, where she had a chance to engage with universities and enjoyed the "matchmaking" and "bringing two entities together" aspect of her work. She always "particularly liked the higher education market" because of the style and pace of work, as well as the fact that "it still had a good cause, and education obviously was at the centre of that." She secured a position in the marketing department at a university but admits that she "wasn't happy at all." Anna "realised that the only way to get a relatively good job within the area of higher education [she] wanted to was to do a PhD", and it was during her doctoral study that she first got involved in community outreach. She has been in her current post for a few years now, after completing a number of short-term projects and contracts. Anna is critical about precarious employment practices in the academy and says it is unfortunate that staff often "don't know from semester to semester whether they'd be working", "are treated unfairly" and spend a lot of time "trying to secure their employment" which creates a system that "leaves little room for the valuable things." I get a strong sense of her commitment to social and environmental justice and equality in our conversation. Anna expresses some criticism of the dominant neoliberal discourses in academia but seems pragmatically accepting of the actions universities have to take to last in an underfunded sector. Anna is a feminist, even though "it's not a word [she is] super comfortable with historically", and admits she finds herself thinking more about feminism since she had her daughter. She believes feminism is "ultimately about equality" as well as "women valuing themselves, valuing what they have to say, valuing their place in society, and not being afraid to invest in that." Even though Anna says that she found herself working in the civic engagement "organically", she also reflects that "it was all very purposeful choices" guided by her principles and values and a

desire to educate students to be responsible, engaged citizens. At the end of our conversation, I am happy to hear that she feels it “pushed” her to reflect on her practice.

Emma

Emma works at a higher education institution in the West of Ireland where she has been for nearly three decades. Her love for learning comes through when she admits she “was a perennial” and reflects: “I didn't want to leave college. I love college, everything about it. And I was out having a great time." Before entering academia, she taught in the further education sector, has always enjoyed teaching, and says she is very much in tune with how to maximise student learning. During our conversation, she often reflects on the values that guide her - human empowerment, collegiality, support, fairness and equity. While initially involved in non-accredited student volunteering, she saw more opportunities in formalising this activity and aligning it with learning outcomes for modules she taught. She gravitated towards community-engaged pedagogies due to their emphasis on experiential learning, as well as their potential to allow student growth and development. She aligns her practice with the principles and theories of positive psychology and human flourishing. Her deep love for and commitment to students comes across strongly and is one of drivers in Emma’s work. She believes that higher education students benefit “from having some level of giving back and civic engagement attached to their holistic educational programmes." Emma feels that “education is not something to be sold” and that universities should respond to societal rather than economic needs, and not prioritise revenue generation. Even though Emma admits that “to be fair, I wouldn't go around saying I'm a feminist” she thinks that “people might describe me as one, because every time there's a potential argument for something in regard to equity, I'm there." To her, feminism is about striving for equity. Emma is passionate about sports and has been an advocate for greater inclusion and equality in sports.

Rebecca

Rebecca admits that she had a “circuitous journey” to a career in education, as she “didn’t plan on working in education at all”, and “really didn't want to teach." She shares: “My own experience of education didn't inspire me to want to be a teacher. And certainly, the kind school that I went to." However, she found it hard to secure a job after graduating, and she started teaching in further education and completed her postgraduate study in education. Rebecca also worked in leadership positions in vocational education and she shares that “it was a fabulous time” and the work she did was “trailblazing” and “exciting." She was later “attracted by the lure of an academic job” and pursued employment opportunities at a university in the West of Ireland, where she remained in various academic and leadership roles before becoming an independent researcher and consultant. Rebecca was involved in co-designing the first community-engaged learning module in her university. She is strategic about embedding and sustaining community engagement in academia and feels it should underpin all university activities. She is passionate about the work, strongly “attracted to the transformative potential” of civic engagement for students, staff and communities, and admits that the civic engagement philosophy resonates with her values as an educator. Rebecca shares that she “always felt that universities also need to have a very close connection with their community" and “should contribute positively to the development of more equal societies”. While she expresses some concerns about the neoliberal influences in the higher education sector, Rebecca seems pragmatic about it and inclined to further civic engagement within the system we have. In our conversation, she appears cautious to discuss the circumstances of women in academia, but although she “wouldn't be a bra burning, poster wielding feminist” she recognises the “journey the women have to make in order to achieve some sense of equal recognition." Rebecca also shares insights into the challenges of feminisation of civic engagement practice in Ireland.

Maggie

Maggie has worked at a HEI in the West of Ireland for her whole career in academia. She was raised in a “staunch Catholic” family and is critical about her early educational

experiences and says: “I just wanted to finish school. I fecking hated it, absolutely. And I just wanted to finish it." Having worked for a large corporation for several years, Maggie discovered that her values and ethos clashed with those of her employer, and she returned to college. She “absolutely loved every minute of it” and tells me how learning not only opened doors for her in terms of career opportunities but also opened up her world. She used to teach on women’s studies modules in both higher and community education, and, with laughter, shares that she was a “raving lunatic feminist for a number of years." Understanding feminism helped her understand how systems of oppression work in terms of hierarchies and power, including those of the academy, which she feels she is very good at navigating. Maggie is quite critical of the neoliberalisation of the higher education sector, and during our conversation, she shares her approaches to subversively using the dominant discourses of the sector to advance civic engagement. However, she also discusses the impossibility of changing systems, and advocates working in niches where she can make the most impact. Maggie held a number of short-term contracts at her HEI before securing a permanent post. Her deep love for students comes across throughout our conversation as well as her commitment to and respect for young people. Her involvement in civic engagement allows Maggie to work with students in a less structured way, as she was never one for strict and stuffy classroom rules. She feels community engagement enables students to explore their interests and understand themselves and their place in the world better. Maggie has a strong faith in young people to become future leaders who are caring, supportive, courageous and thoughtful.

5.3.4 Phase One - Group Information Session

After practitioners agreed to participate, the first obstacle was finding a suitable time for the online Group Information Session. While I wished to meet as a whole group, I had to adapt to participants’ time constraints and decided to hold two Information Sessions, each with four participants. On the day of the first session only one woman attended, and we had an honest conversation about the research. She was curious as to why I decided to do the Group Information Session, calling it “a little unusual." I mentioned that transparency, trust, relationships, and the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns prior to taking part was important to me. Three women participated in the second Group Information

Session and I was asked about my theoretical framework, ways I wanted to interview, the literature I was reading in terms of interviewing, and my methodology. There were questions about identifiability - how the names of institutions would be changed, what would be edited, if they would see transcripts. I conducted individual Information Sessions with the remaining four women. Another issue raised was - "you are giving yourself a massive amount of work and you are collecting a lot of data. How will you make sense of all of this?" That gave me pause and I considered I might have to make changes to my initial research design.

Overall, the Information Sessions served as an important step in building trust and transparency. I spent time considering feedback and questions from the participants. While I was disappointed to not have been able to gather everyone in the same virtual room, I felt we managed to build a common understanding of what this research was and involved. I am glad I was challenged with some questions and concerns from participants as it encouraged me to reflect on my idea of who 'a researcher', or 'an expert' is. It also helped me hone my research question and shape the research design.

5.3.5 Phase Two - Conversation One - Interview

Seven women participated in the first round of conversations. Prior to each interview I obtained signed informed consent forms (see appendix C) from each participant. I decided a semi-structured in-depth qualitative interview framework would be most suitable for my research. Semi-structured interviewing method provides space for participants to share their experiences and insights more freely than a structured interview, while at the same time allowing the researcher to deliberately keep the focus on the research topic - as Galletta (2013: 47) states "The objective [of a semi-structured interview] is to guide a participant in conveying an account of an experience as it relates to the topic of study." An in-depth semi-structured interviewing framework allows "flexibility in how and when the questions are put and how the interviewee can respond" (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 29) - and this flexibility was important to me for several reasons. I wanted to promote a more authentic dialogical exchange that I felt a structured interview would hamper. I believed that a semi-structured interview would allow the participants more opportunity to shape

their own answers and more choice in what they wished to convey; but at the same time I could keep the focus on the research topic, asking each participant similar or even the same questions (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 30). I was interested in the narratives and stories of civic engagement that were participant-led, and a semi-structured in-depth interview framework meant that each conversation took a slightly different direction depending on issues the participants forefronted - and hence allowed me to probe certain aspects of what they shared. Adopting a semi-structured interview method gave me an opportunity to "elicit the interviewee's own story" (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 32), as well as give "voice to women's own accounts of their understandings, experiences and interests" (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 18). Finally, a semi-structured in-depth interview framework based on open questions is well suited to working with smaller size samples and allowed me a chance to elicit lengthy responses and stories (Leavy & Harris, 2019: 138-139). The above links with my epistemological commitments around the importance of lived experience, lifting up the voices of those on the margins, as well as minimising the researcher-researched power imbalance I outlined in previous sections.

The first round of interviews took place in August to October 2020. Due to the Covid-19 public health restrictions, I used a virtual space for our conversations - Microsoft (MS) Teams platform provided by Maynooth University. While I initially worried about whether an online space would be suitable, the video allowed for a good interaction. This experience is echoed by Murray (2022) who, despite concerns about rapport building, the potential (in)ability to read non-verbal clues, technological glitches and distractions, also found the overall experience of online interviews positive. Each interview was approximately 50-70 minutes in duration, and was audio recorded. On completion of each interview, the recording was transferred to a safe, secure and password protected online folder on my Maynooth University OneDrive.

The women I spoke to appeared comfortable and relaxed during the interviews. As most of them were not working in the office at that time, it felt at times as if they invited me into their homes. We took time before I started recording to acknowledge our existing relationship, as well as check in with each other on both personal and professional matters.

I also explained what they could expect from the interaction before starting to record. Our conversations were based around questions concerning participants' experiences as women civic engagement practitioners and interview questions prepared are included in appendix D. These questions served as prompts for further conversation, but I allowed conversations to unfold naturally.

Each interview took a slightly different direction, even though some common threads appeared. Where the conversation took us was largely determined by the response to the first question about each participant's own professional journey where I asked: "Tell me a little bit on how you got where you are now professionally? What has been your professional journey to where you are?." In this opening segment of the interview, I made sure to follow Galletta's (2013: 47-48) guidelines of closely listening to the participants' stories, probing for clarification, taking notes of the aspects of what the participants conveyed that I wanted to return to later in the interview, and considering how what they said linked to the research topic. While I followed the women's lead, in the middle section of our conversations I had an opportunity to ask questions more specifically related to the research aims, which is in line with good practice in semi-structured interviewing (Galletta, 2013: 49-50), and I managed to ask most of the questions I prepared beforehand. We connected and listened to each other and fed off each other's contributions in a space for open sharing and reflection. After I stopped recording, I asked each woman how she felt, and what she thought of how the conversation went and invited them to suggest questions for inclusion in the following interviews with others. I was also open to comments on the interview process and myself as the interviewee, and finally, I asked the participants to select their own pseudonyms.

The interviews were transcribed. As I have a visual/read-write rather than aural preference when it comes to processing information, I was able to immerse myself better in words on paper rather than sounds. Additionally, the process of repeated listening to and transcribing of the conversations allowed me to become more deeply involved in what my interlocutors were saying. Finally, completing the transcripts allowed me to familiarise myself with participant stories hence enabling me to start the process of data analysis. While I

attempted to transcribe the conversations exactly as they were on audio, I decided to remove some filler words and repetitions. The interview transcripts were saved in a safe, secure and password protected online folder on my Maynooth University OneDrive. The transcript of our conversations was made available to those who participated in them and I welcomed any amendments, additions or deletions from the interlocutors.

5.3.6 Research Design Pivot - Written Reflection on Interviews

As previously mentioned, I had initially planned to provide the participants with a written reflection reacting to our conversation, before conducting a repeated interview. To me, this "submission of a preliminary description of the data to the scrutiny of the researched" (Lather, 1991: 53) was to embody participatory, dialogical, engaged, and reciprocal research. Additionally, I felt that the use of written reflections on initial interviews, and subsequent repeated interviews could "frequently add further knowledge and new layers to stories – and even new stories" (Etherington, 2004: 79).

Following the seven interviews, I read and re-read the transcripts, making notes on the margins, highlighting insights. But I struggled with the written reflections. My supervisor encouraged me to consider what the purpose of these reflections was, how it would feel for participants to read them, especially the parts where I disagree with them, and if that layer was truly needed. Did the women need to know my thinking through our conversations? Was it not excessive? Would this research suffer if I skipped that step, arranged for a second conversation, and simply provided a summary reflection on the day? Could I infuse my reflections in my analysis of findings instead?

Having considered the questions, I decided to forgo that stage, and initiate a second conversation instead, where I used a summary of the written reflections as the starting point. However, the concern about departure from the original plan lingered, and I worried about the arbitrariness of my decision, the participants' perception of me as a researcher and a colleague, as well as not honouring my commitments to reciprocal meaning making. It is, however, noted in literature that changing the original research design in response to participants' or research needs can be good practice. CohenMiller et al (2020) for instance,

discuss how essential flexibility in social science research is, and how they reframed their research design 'failure' as an opportunity, which ultimately helped them to address their participants' needs and employ more innovative interviewing methods. Walters (2020) reflects on how relinquishing her research roles as an 'expert' and 'questioner', and losing control of the focus groups she held led to richer and more interesting exchanges among the research participants.

Taking the above into consideration, I decided to accept the messiness and complexity of an evolving research design; however, I wanted to reconnect with the women I spoke to before Christmas 2020. I sent them each an email, attaching a transcript of our conversation, where I tried to indicate some generative themes from our first conversations, and I provide a sample below (Figure 3). I received five immediate responses, and the participants were happy to hear from me and keen to reconnect. One took the time to make a few corrections and suggestions for coding in the transcript of our conversation.

Dear X,

I hope you are well and wrapping up for the year, which has been very challenging for all of us. I just wanted to check in with you before the end of the year.

First of all, apologies for very slow communications on my part - managing work, the doctorate and unexpected care responsibilities has not been easy to say the least! This resulted in delays with my research. I was truly hoping to conduct a second interview with you by the end of 2020, but it now looks like it will be early in the new year.

I wanted to say that I feel privileged to have been able to listen to your story and insights on civic engagement. I was particularly interested in your comments on the competing discourses of higher education and civic engagement in terms of knowledge creation, collaboration & partnership, competition and going "against the grain".

I look forward to connecting with you in the new year, but in the meantime, please find attached the transcript from our conversation. While I took out some "fillers" and repetitions, you will see that the transcript is quite "rough and ready". I also want to assure you that while there are still identifiable markers in this transcript (e.g. names of institutions), they will of course be all removed in the quotes I will be using in my thesis.

I would also like to wish you a very Happy Christmas, and plenty of rest, self-care, and opportunities to recharge.

Figure 3: Sample Letter to Participants

5.3.7 Phase Three - Conversation Two - Presentation of Preliminary Findings to Participants

Having completed an initial reflexive thematic analysis process (which I outline in section 5.4), I had a much stronger understanding of the data I collected, as well as more clarity on the direction this research was headed. However, I struggled with questions about the purpose of those repeated interactions. Was I looking to collect new data or uncover more nuance? What if new data interfered with the now refined and named themes? Would I be forced to go back to the drawing board? Forgoing the repeated interaction step completely did not feel right to me. I wished for the women I interviewed to gain an insight into my analysis and interpretation of our conversations, and to ensure a continuous engagement with them.

Eventually, I proceeded with the second conversation where we discussed the preliminary findings allowing me to reconnect with the participants and involve them at that phase of my inquiry. I also wanted to make the participants feel respected and valued. Additionally, sharing research findings with participants (or a 'member check') can strengthen their credibility, as the participants have an opportunity to confirm (or deny) that the findings represent their views and beliefs (Goldblatt et al, 2011). Furthermore, I felt that 'member-check' could enhance the dialogical and reciprocal nature of my study. I was conscious that at the data analysis phase "the researcher has ultimate control over the material and authoritative resources" (Letherby, 2003: 117), and that our repeated interaction could somewhat balance the issue of control over findings. Having said that, I recognised that our second engagement was not without its risks. I acknowledge, for instance, that such 'member-check' could never fully eliminate the issue of power. I was also aware that there was a possibility that the participants might not feel represented by my preliminary findings well, or at all. Overall, however, the benefits outweighed the risks.

Five people[10] participated in the repeated conversations that took place between August 2022 and June 2024, online, using MS Teams software. Again, I made sure to check-in with the women first and outline the agenda and purpose of our repeated interaction before

[10] There was no response from one participant, and one was on maternity leave

proceeding. I decided not to audio/video record those engagements, and instead took notes with comments the participants made. All five felt the preliminary findings represented their beliefs and views well and resonated with their experiences. While no comments from those repeated conversations are included in this thesis, I found that stage beneficial for keeping the participants informed about this research, as well as validating the findings.

5.4 Data Analysis Process

I considered various methods for working with qualitative datasets including open coding, thematic analysis or narrative analysis. Eventually, I decided to utilise the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and more specifically reflexive thematic analysis (reflexive TA) process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The key assumptions of a reflexive thematic analysis were well suited to work within a critical feminist methodology research framework I drew from. This method of data analysis perceives researcher 'bias' as a strength and a resource, rather than an issue that needs to be eliminated (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and hence links with the notion of owning and inhabiting one's own positionality that is key to critical feminist scholarship. Additionally, this type of thematic analysis emphasises researcher reflexivity - another foundational assumption of critical feminist methodologies, be it personal (values and beliefs), functional (in terms of how methods and tools chosen shape the research process) or disciplinary (linked with how my academic discipline - education - influences knowledge production) (Braun & Clarke, 2022: 13). Furthermore, reflexive TA is a flexible and creative method of data analysis, while retaining rigour (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This flexibility allowed me to be open to grasp a variety of meanings without committing upfront to a certain type of coding (semantic/latent). It also gave me an opportunity to adopt a data-driven/inductive approach, but at the same time retain the choice of looking at data through the theoretical lenses of intersectional feminism and critical pedagogy and situate my analysis within the context of patriarchal and neoliberal academia. Finally, I found the guidelines to the reflexive TA phases of data analysis clear to follow.

Analytical work on data I collected happened at every stage of this process. In line with my theoretical and methodological lenses, I was drawn to the idea of 'telling a story' rather

than ‘revealing the truth’ (Braun & Clarke, 2022) when working with the qualitative data I collected. My theoretical and methodological commitments, as well as my experiences of work in civic engagement in higher education, provided the context, foundation and positionality for meaning-making. In this way it was subjective and partial. However, I was also aware that my interpretation of the qualitative data I gathered has to be “defensible” and that I should not “force the data into the story you want to tell” (Braun & Clarke, 2022: 202). In my interpretative work, I attempted to make meaning of our research conversations but without meandering too much beyond what my research participants expressed.

Returning to reflexive TA process, Braun & Clarke (2022) outline the analytical phases involved as dataset familiarisation; coding; generating initial themes; developing and reviewing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; and writing up; however, the authors also emphasise that it is not a linear but rather an iterative process. Below I outline how I broadly followed the phases of reflexive TA in this doctoral study.

5.4.1 Data Familiarisation

Before beginning my analytical work, I considered that “having a clear but still broad research question is beneficial for keeping the scope of your TA open in the early phases” (Braun & Clarke, 2022: 42). The broad question I adopted at that phase was in line with my overarching research question: In what ways can civic engagement practice learn from the experiences of purposefully-selected female civic engagement practitioners as they navigate present-day policies and practices of neoliberal-patriarchal university environments? Gaining intimate and deep familiarity with qualitative data is crucial in TA and involves both dataset immersion and critical engagement with it (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2022). My initial immersion in the data involved transcribing and repeatedly listening to the interviews. I then further delved into the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. At that stage, I also started to critically engage with the data by underlining parts I found interesting or relevant, and making notes on the margins. These notes included my reactions to what the participants said, brief paragraph summaries, ideas and questions that occurred to me while reading and re-reading, as well

as potential areas to explore further during repeated interviews. After I felt I gained deep familiarisation with the data I collected, I proceeded to generate initial codes.

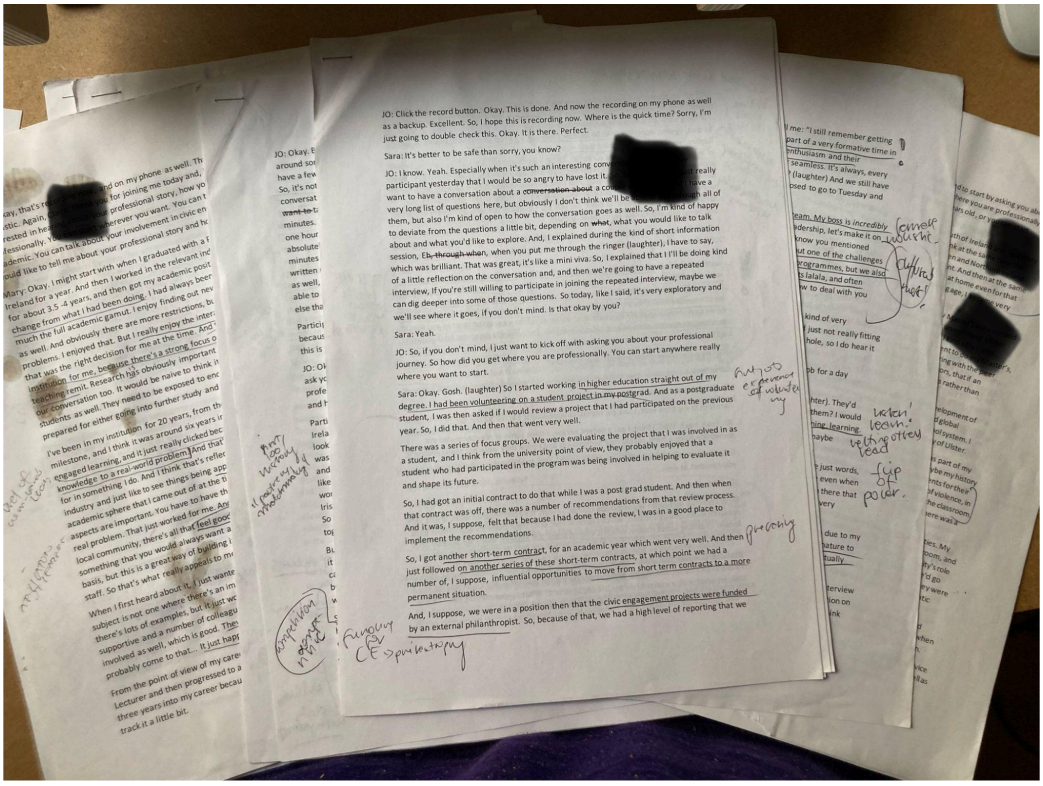

Figure 4: Data Familiarisation

5.4.2 Coding

This phase of reflexive TA is both critically engaged and systematic, and "the coding process involves reading each data item closely and tagging all segments of the text where you notice any meaning that is potentially relevant to your research question with an appropriate code label" (Braun & Clarke, 2022: 53). While I considered using software such as NVivo or MaxQDA for this phase, I eventually decided against it as it felt quite mechanical and somewhat lacking in hands-on creativity. I instead worked on MS Word documents, examining them line by line and paragraph by paragraph, and using the comment tool to generate code labels. I additionally used various highlight colours to mark parts of the text that the code labels referred to.

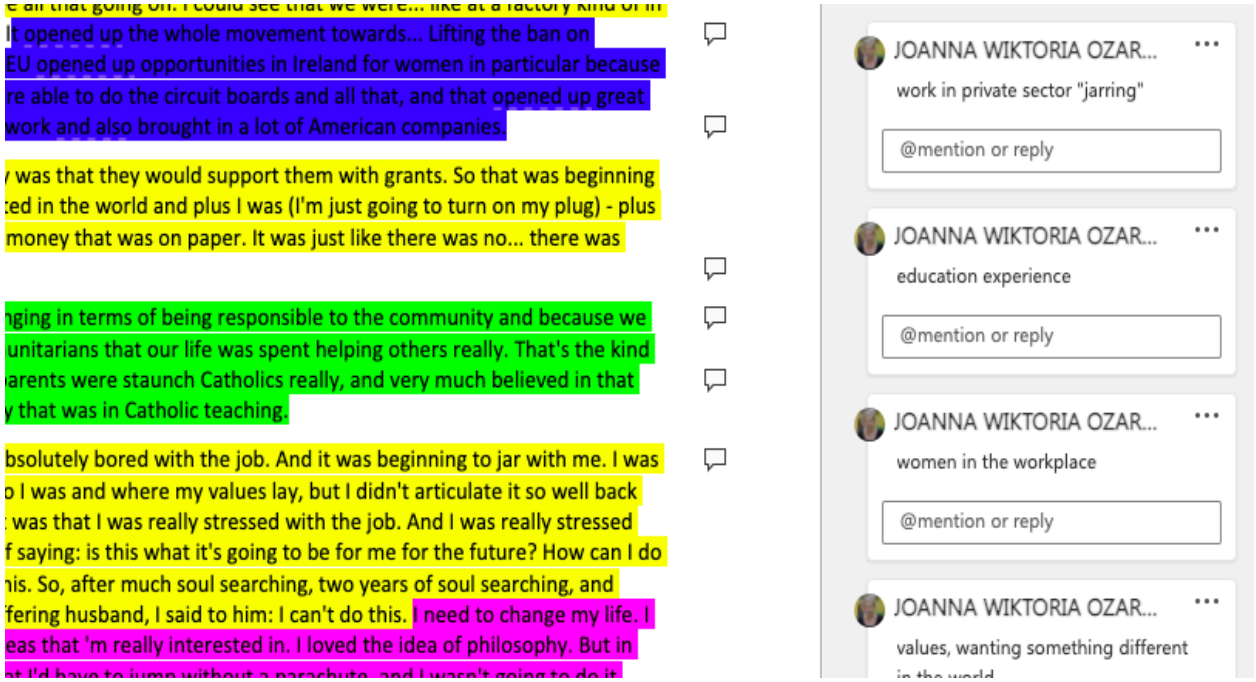

Figure 5: Coding Example 1

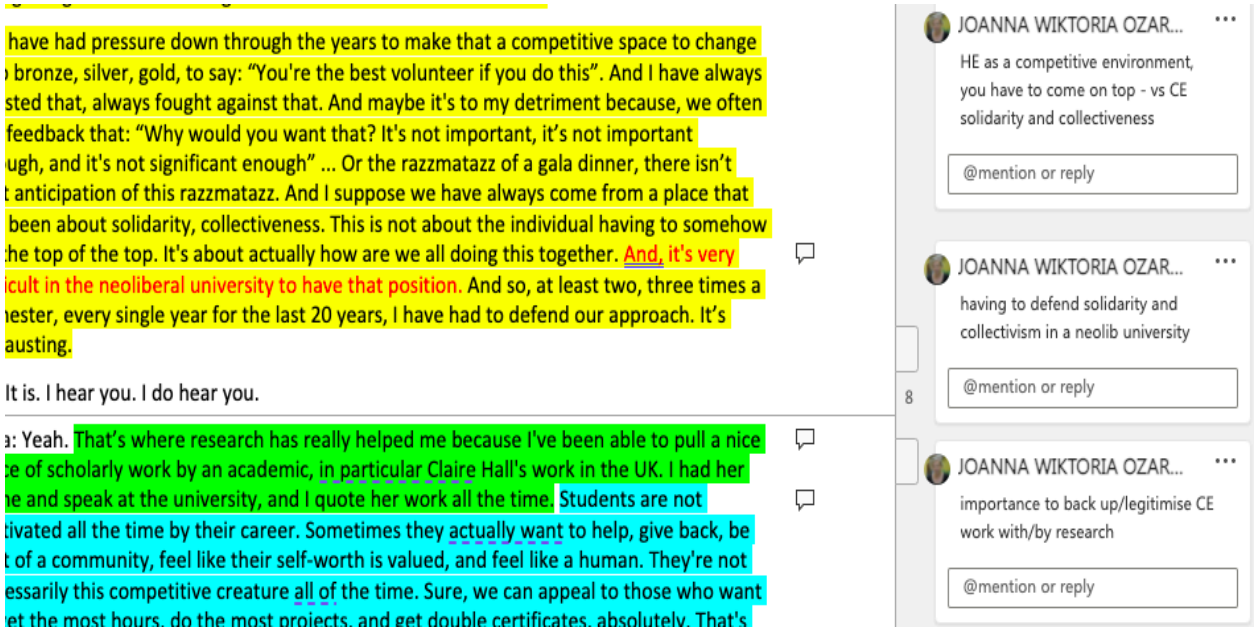

Figure 6: Coding Example 2

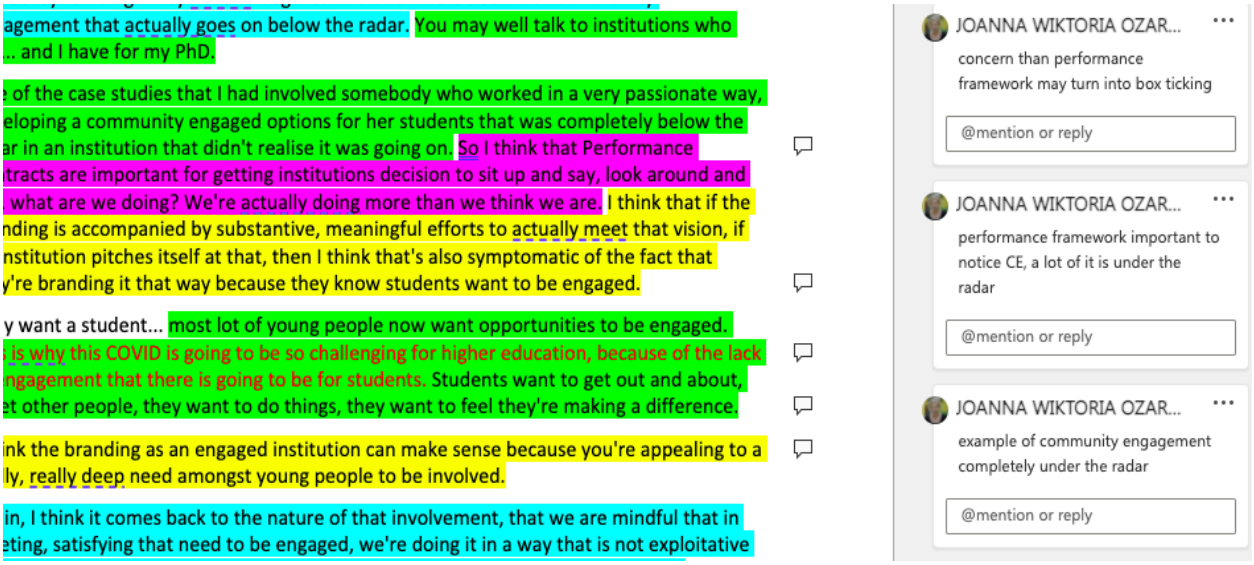

Figure 7: Coding Example 3

I drew from aspects of grounded research (Chun Tie et al, 2019) when coding (open-coding) as it best suited my research purpose, and, initially unknowingly to me, I generated codes that were both inductive and deductive, as well as both latent and semantic (Braun & Clarke, 2022). While I allowed the data to 'speak for itself' (inductive coding), I was also conscious that my positionality, theories and experiences I draw from (e.g. intersectional feminism, critical pedagogy, neoliberal-patriarchal academy context, my own practice in civic engagement) provided me with lenses to make meaning of the data (deductive coding). Similarly, some of the generated codes reflected the explicit meaning expressed by the participants (semantic coding), while others captured deeper and more implicit meanings (latent coding). While this initially worried me as inconsistent, Braun & Clarke (2022) state that these are not dichotomies, and 'either-or' approaches, but rather continuums, and can be utilised at the same time. To follow, I exported the code labels into an Excel spreadsheet for more clarity, and to review them. I noticed that my code labels became more succinct and specific with each subsequent interview I coded. Nevertheless, I generated several hundred codes, which I then further refined.

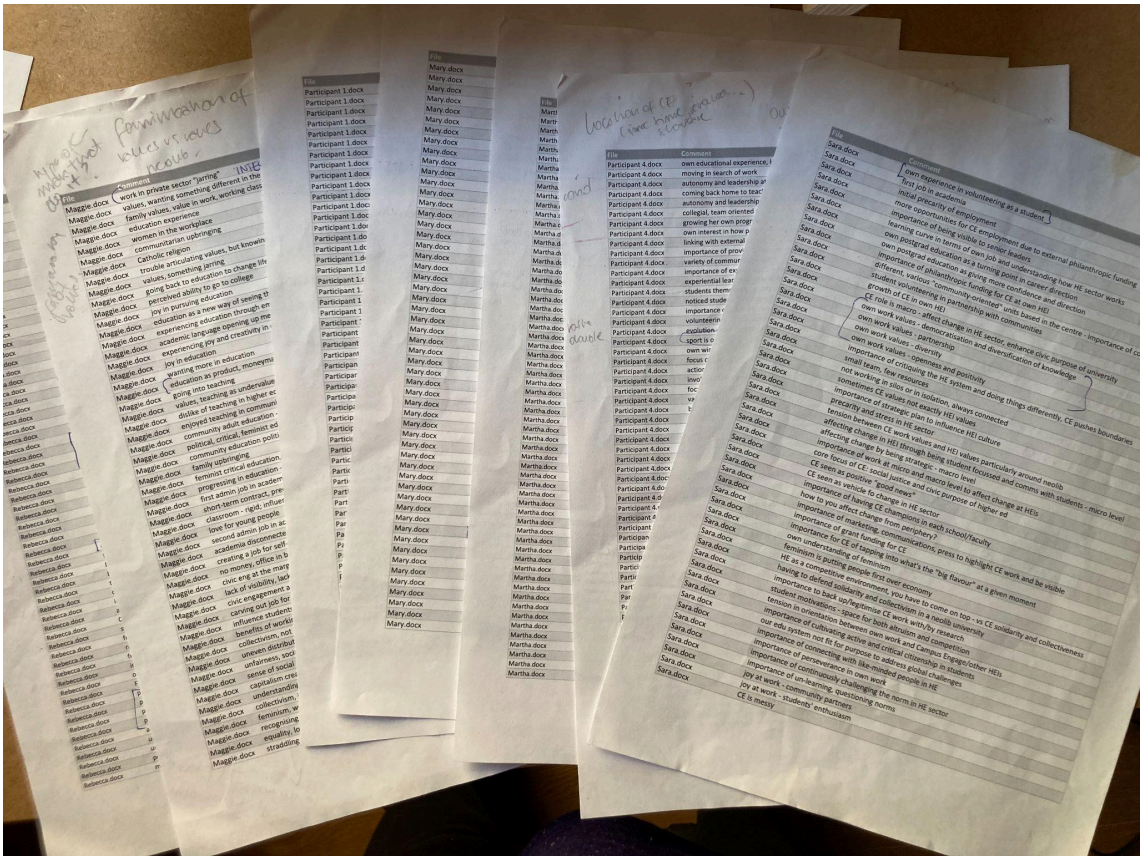

Figure 8: Generated Codes

5.4.3 Generating Initial Themes

In reflexive TA, a theme captures "a shared meaning organised around a central concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2022: 77); and is not simply a summary of what research participants say about a certain topic. While developing themes, it is crucial to search for meanings and concepts that are shared and are patterns across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2013). The authors also state that the themes do not simply passively emerge from the data but are actively generated and developed by the researcher. I struggled in my search for broader patterns among the hundreds of codes I produced. I explored these codes to search for clusters of shared meaning - again, working 'on paper' with a highlighter to mark the codes that could potentially form a theme, and making notes on possible theme names. I was conscious to avoid thinking about responses to specific interview questions as potential themes, and I kept in mind the tips provided by Braun and Clarke (2022) for this phase of reflexive TA. These included recognising that not every

code has to be captured, searching for central concepts, accepting the tentative nature of initial themes, and developing a bigger number of themes for potential inclusion. While at that stage, I was conscious of my interpretations of what the participants conveyed to me and representing their voices appropriately. I initially generated ten possible themes and labelled them with tentative names.

5.4.4 Developing, Reviewing, Refining, Defining and Naming Themes

While I recognise that the heading above combines two different phases of reflexive TA, I moved back and forth a number of times between them for several months; hence, I decided to group them in this section - the boundaries between them were blurred to me. After generating the initial themes, I created bullet point 'abstracts' of each theme, that served as theme definitions - "the central organising concept or key take-away point of the theme, as well as the particular manifestations (...) of the theme, and any subthemes" (Braun & Clarke, 2022: 108). This helped me gain a greater clarity around the potential themes, as well as allowed me to notice an overlap between some of them, which led to narrowing down the number of themes. I presented these themes and their summaries during a group supervision discussion, and sought feedback on their clarity, breadth, and their boundaries and overlap. Presenting these 'initial findings' gave me a sense of accomplishment, but also led me to consider the viability of several themes, the potential of collapsing some of them, and the possibility of removing certain themes altogether.

I also considered how I would present the themes in a more finessed way in the Findings chapter, and I decided to report one theme through a formal write-up, including data extracts from participant interviews. I presented this work at CRALE Research Day at Maynooth University Adult and Community Education Department and sought feedback on several questions:

- Is there enough evidence in data to support this theme?
- Do the data extracts selected represent the theme well?
- How best to select and edit data supporting the themes?

Preparing the presentation and practising naming and defining the theme, as well as selecting and editing data extracts to support it, was beneficial and helped me clarify my

thinking further. By the time this thesis was finalised, I went through the process of reviewing, refining, defining and naming the themes a number of times.

5.5. Ethical Considerations

I found the process of applying for and obtaining ethical approval to pursue this research both arduous and vigorous. My ethical approval application went through several iterations, and I had to carefully consider my methodological frame and research design, the welfare of participants, power relations present, as well as conduct a risk/benefit analysis. With each version of the application I was encouraged by my supervisor to think through my reasons for pursuing this research and research objectives, my positionality and what the theories I draw from mean to me, the research stages and procedures, and to ensure that all these are consistent with my ontological viewpoints. The process of crafting the application took nearly two months, and ultimately I found it very useful when writing the methodology chapter. The ethics application was submitted via the university's Research Information System. Approval was granted by the MU Social Research Ethics Subcommittee in May 2020 (see appendix A) after amendment regarding the provision for conducting interviews online due to Covid-19 public health regulations.

Several ethical considerations were identified through the process of obtaining ethical approval prior to pursuing this research, with the key ones relating to issues of power, relationships, ownership of data collected and its representation, confidentiality and anonymity.

While reducing the power imbalance between the researcher and research participants is at the heart of feminist scholarship (Oakley, 1981; 2016; Lather, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2012); I recognised that some power aspects will always be present. Etherington (2007) notes:

> Power issues permeate every aspect of research relationships: from considerations of who owns the data and outcomes of the research; how we interpret and represent others; if and how we make transparent the decision-making processes between researcher and participant; and the potential fluidity of power between the parties involved (Etherington, 2007: 614)

It was important for me to ensure ongoing consent throughout. Rather than obtaining a signature on the consent form only once at the beginning of the process, I made sure that the participants were happy to proceed at every stage - either in writing or verbally (see consent form in appendix C).

In terms of further ethical considerations, I examined my working relationships with research participants, as well as among participants themselves. Some participants were practitioners who I worked with on civic engagement projects through the Campus Engage network at the time of conducting this research or hoped to collaborate with in the future. Therefore, I considered that an element of coercion or obligation to participate might have been present. This was addressed by ensuring that potential participants understood that taking part in my study or exiting the research at any stage and with no explanation, was completely voluntary and would not impact on the on-going or future joint projects. The consent forms also included a clause addressing this issue.

It was difficult to estimate the exact number of women involved in civic engagement work in higher education in Ireland; however, the relatively small number in the sampling frame (those involved in Campus Engage Steering Committee and Working Groups) might have carried the risk of identification. I took all practical measures to ensure confidentiality of participants to the greatest possible extent. I ensured that all identifiable markers (e.g. names, institutions, locations etc.) were removed from the published research and names of participants were changed to pseudonyms. From the group information session onwards, my proposed research was designed in such a way that those who agreed to participate would have the knowledge of the identities and involvement of others.

While above I highlight the ethical issues for consideration, and discuss the possible ways of alleviating them, I am aware that we can never ensure that all ethical issues disappear. Etherington (2007) suggests that maintaining awareness of all these issues is crucial for ethical reflexive research, as is transparency in navigating and negotiating research decisions with participants, informing them of decisions taken and seeking their consent,

as well as recording our research dilemmas, whether they are resolved or not. In summary, while it is not possible to resolve all ethical issues fully and completely, it is important to maintain awareness of them and mitigate them as far as it is practicable and possible.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this research lie in the qualitative and small-scale nature of my inquiry, as well as the purposive sampling technique. Therefore, I cannot claim that this study represents the experiences of all those working in higher education civic and community engagement in Ireland. The research focuses on portraying a partial, narrow and local picture of community engagement practice, as done by women, and therefore does not provide any basis for generalisation, nor does it attempt to, in line with my methodological commitments. Having said that, small-scale in-depth qualitative research can contribute to a deeper examination of participants' experiences, feelings and perceptions, and generate new understandings of the researched phenomena (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The qualitative nature of this study can provide us with a richer understanding of the civic engagement practice and truly illuminate it.

Chapter Six: Findings on Becoming, Being and Doing

In the first iteration of this thesis, the findings were presented in a single chapter; however, I later decided to divide them into two sections. During the process of refining the themes (as outlined in section 5.4.4), and as encouraged by my supervisor, I started to notice that some themes related more to the practitioners themselves and the nature of their work, while others more closely concerned the participants' interactions with their institutions and the wider higher education system. This seemed like an appropriate distinction to divide the findings; hence, the former are presented in chapter six and the latter in chapter seven.

Overall, the findings of this research are divided across six broad themes. They are:

- ways in and becoming a civic engagement practitioner
- ways of working and the nature of civic engagement work
- women in academia and women in civic engagement

presented in chapter six, and

- location/liminality of civic engagement within university architecture
- civic engagement in the neoliberal academy
- negotiating and navigating higher education systems

presented in chapter seven.

Some themes include sub-themes for clarity of presentation and to more accurately capture participants' responses. While I paraphrase much of what the participants told me during our conversations, I also include longer quotes to elevate the practitioners' voices.

This chapter first discusses the findings related to the ways of becoming and being civic engagement practitioners. I then move to outlining the ways of working in civic engagement, including the research participants' values and orientations towards community engagement, their commitments to transformative civic engagement and holistic engaged pedagogy, the boundary spanning nature of the work, building relationships with communities, as well as their workloads, and lack of visibility for their work. I then present findings related to working as a woman in civic engagement and in

academia, and finally spotlight the ways in which research participants find support and community.

6.1 Ways In - Becoming a Civic Engagement Practitioner

To start my interviews, I asked each person about their trajectories to civic and community engagement. While my query was about their professional life, many of the women spoke about their private experiences, personal growth, family life, and identity-formative years alongside their work practice. Their personal and professional stories of becoming civic and community engagement practitioners are a part of their strive for integrity and aligning their work with their values. As has been identified in some studies (for example Dostillo & Perry, 2017: 6; Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 31-32), many of the civic engagement practitioners I spoke to had some shared values and motivations, as well as an outlook on their professional identities.

One person speaks directly about her biography, in particular an early experience of loss and conflict, affecting her professional choices. She shares:

> I think at the same time the Northern Ireland conflict was ongoing. And I couldn't understand how men in Northern Ireland were killing each other deliberately when I knew the pain of losing a parent. And then at the same time there was no discussion of the Northern Ireland conflict in school or, at home even for that matter. And there was a sense of embarrassment. I think from a very young age, I became very motivated by what was happening in terms of conflicts on my island.

She adds that while her history is personal to her, and not reflective of experiences of other civic engagement practitioners, it has “totally informed [her] career path."

Maggie also outlines how she brought her upbringing, religion and family experiences to her career, particularly around service to others, and love and respect for people. She recalls:

> We were kind of raised as communitarians in that our life was spent helping others really. That's the kind of lifestyle we just had. My parents were staunch Catholics

> really, and very much believed in that whole concept of subsidiarity that was in Catholic teaching.

Maggie continues: “Cause the one thing I do love is absolutely young people. I adore young people and that comes from my childhood, from my father, from just the way we were brought up, and the way he absolutely respected young people. So that brought me then to [name of HEI]." Maggie’s experience is not isolated, but rather echoed by Rebecca when she discusses how her school experiences initially discouraged her from entering a career in education, for fear of reproducing a model of education that did not parallel her beliefs. Rebecca tells me: “I went to a girls’ private secondary school, convent school, which was so far removed, which is why I didn't want to be in education when I left school, because I always associated it with a very particular model of education that did not resonate with my values."

This need for resonance of professional and personal values, to be whole, and a desire to align one's own beliefs with professional practice is also illustrated by Anna’s story. Anna, who describes herself as “very social justice kind of feminist minded” speaks of her discomfort caused by the disconnect between her personal values and what she used to do at work.

> I was teaching marketing, and it just killed me that I was essentially a cog in the wheel for churning out people who would be peddling more stuff to more people, stuff that they don't need. And that it was kind of eating me up on the social justice side. So I found myself bringing in like... We might be doing a case study on Penney’s and I'd be like: Did you know that in Bangladesh, they were the primary clothing manufacturer of this factory that, you know, fell down and blah, blah, blah. And then I'm like: This isn't on the curriculum. Could I get in trouble for teaching this? How do I integrate this into a marketing module?

Anna then made a purposeful career change towards the civic engagement area and speaks specifically about helping students develop critical consciousness as being one of the motivators for her. She mentions that the values of reciprocity and equity in her work practice resonated with her most. She recalls:

> And so I suppose when the role came up in that outreach type role, it kind of fulfilled a tiny bit of the working with others outside the university, and trying to get students have a bit more, have a sense of the real world, an overused phrase, but you know what I mean?

Anna admits that at first, she did not fully grasp the mutuality and equality aspect of working with community organisations and civic society, but that it "struck a chord" with her due to its potential to provide students with their critical "citizenship moment." She continues, saying that she understood that:

> This is the juncture and the opportunity where we can give students that exposure to their democratic literacy, I suppose, and their citizenship, to wave their citizenship flag, I suppose. So (...) it was really that that attracted me (...) So that graduates aren't going out, going "money, money, money, money", stepping over homeless people on their way to a Black Lives Matter protest and stuff, and that they really grasped the structural elements, the cause and effect, and (...) most importantly, that they understand their role in that. So again, that (...) is the fire within me to do this work.

Maggie also describes the experience of the disconnect between personal and professional values as "jarring" when she says:

> I worked for American companies for 20, 25 years, for multinationals. I worked in finance and I worked my way up to finance and I did some exams in finance. I ended up being a Financial Controller of a $20 million company, American company. And in my thirties, something jarred with me about the American setup in Ireland, about transferring all the profits to America. I could see all that going on. I could see that we were... like at a factory kind of in North Korea or somewhere.

Similarly to Anna, Maggie goes on to express the desire to integrate the mind and soul with every-day work activities, the impossibility of her former work practice not reflecting her as a person - a desire to be whole. She admits that she could not articulate it well at that time, but had a feeling of being bored and stressed with her job, and was asking herself - "is this what it's going to be for me for the future? How can I do this? I can't continue to do

this.” After “two years of soul-searching, and discussions with [her] ever suffering husband”, Maggie said: “I can't do this. I need to change my life. I need to educate myself in areas that I'm really interested in.”

Emma articulates a similar sentiment, where her involvement with community-based learning was spurred by her dislike of the creeping individualism, competition and inequality in the area of sport and physical health. She reflects:

> We [the department] always had this ethos of providing sport, physical activity, health promotion opportunities across the spectrum to everybody, giving everyone equal access to something. And creeping in was this attitude that: ‘I'm better’. I'm unsure how to describe it, but it is the ego versus the mass (...) I thought I'd come in a little bit. And I thought now maybe students need to look a bit more in terms of they're all within society and see themselves in society and how they belong, what they can give back. That really pushed the whole idea of two community-engaged learning modules come together so then that started, I suppose.

Emma’s wish was to return to the values of community, equality and belonging in her sport and education practice. Her comments also captured her desire to, through her civic engagement work, inspire young people to act as active and full members of our society, “that they are not passive in their existence and society they live in, and that they have opportunities and ways in which they can impact things." To add, Emma further speaks about her commitments to inclusion, fairness and equity - and her wish to embody these values in her work.

Rebecca too tells me about the need for resonance between her values and beliefs and her work practice, particularly around social justice and civic consciousness and responsibilities. She has “always felt that universities also need to have a very close connection with their community” and she does not believe “in this elitist ivory tower conception of higher education that is removed from the society it’s supposed to serve.” Rebecca shares:

> I do believe that universities and what they do should contribute positively to the development of more equal societies, of graduates who are committed to doing that. It's like you learn to teach education for social justice. It would resonate with others, my former colleagues in [city name] who would talk about civically conscious engineers who have to think about the community, think about the environment, think about the social impact of the work that they do. I think that's really important and I think it's something in the way I've always taught.

Rebecca also adds that while she worked in teacher education many of her students "created [transition year] modules that were socially conscious, that reflected a social conscience, and I would have always encouraged that."

Sara speaks about her postgraduate education as a turning point in her career, and how it allowed her to deepen her understanding of the higher education system and helped her to find the language and start articulating her own positioning in it:

> So, I took a career break for a year, went to [country name], and in that time I was able to maybe articulate and strengthen my understanding of where I was coming from, my position, my understanding of higher ed as a field and of itself, having not come from that original background. And so, I probably had a bit of imposter syndrome up until then, and then it kind of felt a bit better [laughter], so I came back then, I suppose, very confident in the direction we wanted to go in and seeing maybe opportunities that were available.

Maggie, who did not like her primary and secondary schooling, also speaks of educational experiences being a turning point for her. She is exuberant and full of passion for learning when she describes "the joy, the absolute joy" of driving to college, and says: "I don't think I ever missed a day of college. I *absolutely loved* every minute of it. I loved the learning." Maggie speaks of how higher education helped her overcome depression as "the world opened up to [her] in a way that couldn't before." It was not just the learning itself - what Maggie says was important was the ability to see the world in a different way, and the confidence and emancipation that came with education:

> I had found a way of putting the world into context. (...) And also that I could participate confidently in conversations around the world that I lived in. And I

> think that was the greatest joy for me of education, just knowing I wasn't closed off in my brain, but my emotions were attached to something that was very real as well.

Maggie continued on to complete her Master's degree: "It's like you're on a journey, and you know you can't get off, you just know that you're not going to stop the journey" - and was offered work as a lecturer on a Women's Studies course. Even though she says she did not like teaching big classes, she enjoyed working with women in the community setting. Here, she speaks of the transformative and critical power of education, drawing from Freirean (1996) ethos of conscientisation, social transformation, and emancipation in women's community education:

> I just *absolutely loved* the light bulb moments in the classroom. And I *loved* the feedback I got from women. Because, of course, I was political in my thinking, because I'm a feminist, and I didn't hide that at all. But actually the response I got from women recognising their experiences and go: Oh my God, I hadn't noticed that there was a structure around me that didn't allow me to move on; Oh my God, I see things in a very different context.

Maggie discusses finding a way to integrate her strong political and social beliefs into her work, and 'be herself' in her practice, rather than compartmentalising and leaving herself outside her career. She reflects that she found herself at home working in adult education with women. She continues by saying that she also discovered a love for administration and working outside the structure and rules of the classroom to influence students: "But I could actually impart my knowledge. And that was very important for me. I think I always had a problem with authority. So in this way, I could kind of manoeuvre the rules and regulations and be myself in my dealing with students."

6.2 The Nature of Civic Engagement Work and Ways of Working

6.2.1 Transformative Civic Engagement - More Than Just Skills

When speaking of the orientations of civic engagement, all but one participant advocate transformative and critical civic engagement that strives to shine a light on power relations

in society, and the underlying structural causes of inequalities and injustices, as discussed in section 3.5. The transformative purpose of civic engagement - for participating students,[11] communities, and the academy itself - was frequently mentioned. Additionally, the participants also raised issues of fostering active citizenship through civic engagement, understood mainly as participatory, political and justice-oriented as described by researchers such as Butin (2010), Westheimer & Kahne (2004a, 2004b) and Banks (2017) and detailed in this thesis in section 3.1.

To start, Rebecca speaks about the necessity for critical, rather than service-oriented, community engagement, and says she encourages "people to think about ways in which they can tweak what they're doing to have a more transformative purpose", explaining that this is not simply about higher education students "providing the service, doing a project, and getting credit for it, and moving on." Rebecca continues:

> it really should be something that stops them in their tracks a bit and has a longer-term impact for students and for the community partner that they're working with. I have this vision of this slide I use in any presentation, much of what I do, which is to talk about the transformative potential that community engagement can have.

Rebecca speaks about the first community-based learning and volunteering project she was involved in as a practitioner - where the university student-teachers worked with a local Traveller movement - and the mutuality, reciprocity and transformation for both students and communities that underpinned it. She shares that "as an approach to education it would have resonated with [her] values." Rebecca feels some community benefits deriving from the project were around empowering parents to provide their children with encouragement and support in their education, as well as giving the children who participated "some

[11] When research participants speak about their students, they mean third level/university students who are involved in either volunteering in the community (either on a purely extra-curricular basis, or as a part of a university volunteering programme/award) , or pursuing community-based learning/research modules, where as a part of their module assessment they complete a project/placement with a community partner (typically non-governmental and not-for-profit associations, e.g. community-based or voluntary organisations, human rights groups, local resident associations, charities and cooperatives). As indicated in Table 1, some participants are involved in coordinating volunteering programmes and awards, and some are lecturers who deliver community-based learning/research modules.

positive role models, people - their own peers - not that much older than them who would work alongside them."

Rebecca also discusses the transformative potential of civic engagement for third level students, where through their volunteering and community-based learning placements, she felt they might be better equipped to challenge and counter racism in their future classrooms. She shares:

> And for student teachers it was a real opportunity to experience, and see it first-hand, the life Travellers were having in school, and in particular the prejudice they were undoubtedly experiencing in school and why. And to get them to understand why the Traveller kids eschewed school, why the school was sometimes so negative. They had a good cause to be negative.

Rebecca "was very much attracted to the fact that there was a transformative intention to this module" and felt that "it was really to enable us to empower student teachers to be forces within a staff room, whereby they would, with first-hand experience, counteract some racist comments they'd routinely hear in staff rooms about Traveller kids, and who are being dismissed by other teachers." She stresses the need for transformative, rather than transactional civic engagement a number of times in our conversation and describes her focus as promoting consciousness raising. However, Rebecca also points to the challenge of explaining transformative civic engagement, rather than civic engagement focussed on skills development, to colleagues in the past, especially in the field of medicine, where her colleagues "couldn't see the difference between a community engaged learning module and some of what they do because those students are learning in the community all the time." Rebecca continues:

> But yet we did have special study methods, special study courses, that were much more explicitly transformative in their purpose in terms of community engagement. They weren't about developing their clinical skills primarily, they were about getting them to appreciate the life of children who are diabetic, for instance, or fishermen in the West of Ireland, or being able to teach.

Rebecca stresses the importance of cultivating active and critical citizenship among students, rather than just equipping them with skills for their future professions. This sentiment is shared by Sara, who reflects on a clash of priorities and perspectives on civic engagement between her and some others working in academia. Like Rebecca, she feels that community engagement work is about more than students (in Sara's case, university student volunteers) simply developing skills and competencies for the future. Sara feels some of her "colleagues in other universities might not be coming from the social justice lens" but "coming from the students' need to get ahead", to "get a job" and "be the best graduate ever so that they can give us money when they graduate [laughter]." She continues:

> Whereas I would be like: Let's see if they all will go and work in the voluntary sector, wouldn't it be lovely! And be caring humans, have empathy, and that's the graduate we want, that... who doesn't rip down the bridge, but actually thinks what community will be affected by that bridge.

Sara adds that "unlearning your own positioning" and "unlearning your own privilege" should be a part of civic education, and shares that "you're trying to get your students to unlearn stuff, and then they're melting down because it's very tough to unlearn [for instance] patriarchy."

Martha also feels that involvement in civic and community learning in third level should focus on creating change through active citizenship. She reflects:

> I guess maybe my history is tainted with the events of social justice and this belief that we need to educate students for their role as democratic citizens, and not as people who would take to the streets in terms of violence, in terms of creating change. I believe that learning should be inside as well as outside of the classroom.

To continue, another participant, Maggie, does not shy away from describing her early teaching practice in women's community education as political and consciousness raising and says:

> And while I was conscious of the kind of understanding of the world I was imparting, at the same time I could back it up with the research, so I didn't question whether I was influencing in a particular way. I actually *wanted* to influence in a particular way, because I believed in the concept of feminism, and I understood it. It made my life. I understood my life more because I understood feminism.

Maggie carried with her the idea of transforming individuals and societies through education in her future professional work with higher education students engaging in volunteering. She also speaks about how participating in civic engagement projects in college can influence the next generation of leaders to make informed changes in the society and the world around them. She shares that her vision is for the student volunteers she works with to "bring some insight with them around people that they're going to be dealing with in the future", "support the communities where they live" and "understand it more."

Anna, who delivers a community-engaged research module for postgraduate students, also comments on the role that higher education and civic engagement activities have in instilling critical citizenship values in students. She speaks to the political perspective on community-engaged learning that provides students with "that exposure to their democratic literacy (...) and their citizenship", and, importantly for critical community engagement, an opportunity to grasp the structural causes of social inequality. She wants her students to grasp "the structural elements, the cause and effect" of inequalities and injustices and to understand that they have a role in contesting their root causes.

Anna also offers an example of how participating in the community-engaged research module she teaches has influenced one of her student's perceptions of research and knowledge in academia and whose needs are served by it. She recalls that "it was the first time she [the student] opened her eyes or was illuminated towards the inequity of the publication world" where "potentially the people who need her research results wouldn't be able to access them unless they're willing to get their credit card out." She remembers the student asking why "we continue to buy into this system (...) where we kill ourselves to publish for free, and then the journals make money on it, and the universities pay for these

subscriptions.” Anna feels that “those types of breakthrough moments” should encourage students “to push the boundaries and always challenge how they can manage that flow of information."

Similarly, Emma, who teaches on an undergraduate community-based learning module, also points to the fact that her work has a purpose of encouraging students and graduates to be courageous and active citizens, “to feel that they can contribute, and they're not passive in their existence and society they live in, and that they have opportunities and ways in which they can impact things, not to be afraid to impact things." She continues:

> I'm very much tuned into that idea of students often feeling they can't make a difference, and the ‘power of one’ type of thing is important as well. And to let people feel: yes, I am significant, what I know is important in society, and I can make a difference. That underpins a lot of what I'm trying to achieve.

To continue, Emma finds community-based learning “very rewarding” for her as an educator due to the transformative benefits for her students in terms of personal development, critical consciousness, and the way they connect with society. Emma sees that her students “are engaging with external entities, they're making contacts, they're making friends, they're getting a chance to see that their knowledge and expertise matters, they can make a difference” and that is “hugely transformative in a way for them.” She finds it rewarding when she sees “the evidence of them developing as people, and flourishing, and seeing how they connect with society” as well as understanding the communities they live in better. Emma feels that “youngsters can live in their own bubble, their own world, and they don't notice what's going on” and that participating in community-based learning can cause them “to step outside and to take note of things” which can be a “very significant learning episode." However, Emma points out that the higher education system does not fully encourage students to connect with the wider community or provide opportunities for learning outside university walls.

Like Emma, Maggie, who works with student volunteers, is also critical of the rigidity of university learning where there is a dearth of opportunities for reflection on students’ role

and place in the wider society. She suggests how engagement in extracurricular activities outside university walls is a challenge to the norm in the academy by stating that “that in itself is a threat to the notion of a structured environment where you do your learning. You come into the university, you sit in the classroom, and you’re duly learning there” and you are “channelled and funnelled in the education system." Maggie speaks of how volunteering in the community can change students’ understanding of their identity and their place in society and that “it gives an opportunity to explore ideas they might have, or areas that they’re not studying but they might have an interest in.” She feels higher education should not be about “just getting the coursework in" and that volunteering influences students to understand their abilities better and improve the ways they engage with others in society. Maggie continues:

> Just to give opportunities and for them to embrace the opportunities and understand them. Just another little piece in their lives that will help them move forward, or maybe help them to understand themselves a bit more, and the world they live in. That's my greatest joy. That's what drives me. That's what drives me, nothing else. And I know that the communities benefit as well, and they get to do more services.

Unlike other participants, Mary approaches civic engagement and civic education from a different angle and shares that her team “were coming from the professional skills development perspective." Mary shares:

> Through the community-based learning and other activities, again, as I said, my focus would be on developing students, key professional skills embedded within their subject area. Again, having worked outside a university, there's just an awareness of the broader skill set and not teaching it in a bolt-on way, but embedding it so that students can see it's directly linked to their profession.

Mary reflects that taking the professional skills approach was “a framework to hang things on”, and this way of developing community-based learning in her department “was just an easier sell to [her] line manager at that stage.” However, she also feels it is important that her students reflect on the issues of class, educational disadvantage and access to education from their engagement in a community-based learning module where they teach science in

local schools. She shares that while her (often middle-class) students initially can be apprehensive of working with school children in DEIS schools (schools in areas that experience educational disadvantage) ultimately they find the experience rewarding and meaningful and can articulate their own privilege. While these initial students' reflections must delve deeper into issues of class, access to education and othering to make a transformative learning moment, Mary points out that even this basic consideration of these structures is quite unusual for life sciences students, saying that "Science is very: you go in, you do your lab, you write up your report."

6.2.2 Holistic Engaged Pedagogy

When discussing their practice,[12] most participants spoke of cultivating reciprocal, equal relationships and critical dialogue between the educators and the learners. They also emphasised student centredness, acknowledging the presence of all actors involved, as well as the wholeness of mind, emotions and soul in learning - resonating with bell hooks' thoughts on engaged pedagogy (1994: 13-22). "That's what you want in your teaching and learning", says Emma, who coordinates and teaches on a community-based learning module that involves lectures and tutorials, as well as a placement in a community setting, allowing students to consider their role in communities, social issues and active citizenship. She continues, speaking about the students who participate in the module:

> You're working with youngsters and they're developing in front of you, and they're getting confident and they're people and not a number. So much about education is huge lecture theatres. We don't have that. We know the students, their name, and we're in an environment a bit like "Cheers", (...) the programme, where everybody knows your name. And I like that. I like that feeling... That's the way places should operate in, and I feel energised from the work.

It is clear to me that Emma advocates against alienation and separation in higher education and chooses to get to know her students intimately to create a sense of belonging to a learning community (hooks 1994, 2003) - more so than it is the norm in universities.

[12] As civic engagement practitioners, involved either in delivering community-based learning/research modules, coordinating and managing student volunteering programmes and awards, or coordinating larger university-community projects and partnerships

Mary also speaks about developing closer connections with her learners participating in community-based learning placements on a module she developed, and “find[ing] out things about your students through that process.” She continues, sharing that “It's also just the chatting, it's a more informal environment, so you get to hear a bit more about them, you share a little bit more about you as well than would happen in a normal environment." Mary also feels community-based learning gives third level students “a chance to shine” and that her visits to the schools her students work with always brought her joy. She shares: “When I used to get to go to visit them, really just seeing the people who work with them, your faith in human nature is just reinforced. Because those people just really believe in those kids and really know what they’re doing." Emma and Mary also discuss that learning in a ‘normal environment’ in higher education, often with big lecture halls and overworked teachers, is perhaps less conducive to nurturing relationships with students than learning outside of university walls.

Mary additionally expresses her emphasis on students’ wellbeing and providing a space where concerns and issues are discussed and where students' emotions are acknowledged. She shares that: “(...) I think you have to go in there being very, very positive, but also acknowledging and giving people space to be able to say ‘I’m a bit nervous about this’ and recognising this is something different." Mary knows some of her students would be “delighted” to get involved in community-based learning placements but there are many who might be apprehensive. Her approach is to anticipate her students’ questions and concerns and “reassure them that it’s normal to feel concerned initially, and that they’ll be outside their comfort zone”. However, she emphasises that there is support for students involved in civic engagement activities and encourages them to “come and talk to me if you have concerns [because] not everybody's going to be comfortable here.”

Similarly, Emma describes how she worked with a group of students who resisted participating in her community-based learning module in their final year, fearing the time commitment and its impact on their degree: “They saw it as a lot of work. There was

resistance (...) they just didn't want this subject to be located at this time." Emma speaks about how she attempted to build a rapport with the students and reflects:

> I went into this group going: Okay, now. I have to be so nicer than nicer and softly softly to the group, because I know they're antagonistic already. So I went in and worked completely with them. Generally speaking the students who were vocal about being against doing it turned out to be the best at it (…) and did very well, selected the projects they wanted to get involved with well, which helped them in their career. (...) So they worked very well.

However, Emma also recognises students are "only going to learn by mistakes" and that she does not only "want to hear about 'Oh it all went well'. We want to hear about the dip. The devil is in the detail in terms of how you felt, what you did."

Mary and Emma also speak about the time, workload and commitment required of students involved in community-based learning projects, while Maggie points to an additional voluntary commitment. They all acknowledge that there may be feelings of anxiety, resistance and uncertainty for students when participating in civic engagement activities that are not standard, and that are largely self-led. Therefore, it is important to recognise, acknowledge and celebrate students' contribution and achievement. Maggie, who developed a university-wide student volunteering programme in her HEI, involving an annual award ceremony, tells me that this is the reason why she "set up the ceremony, the award system, getting all the Deans to congratulate them, getting the President" - she wants her students to "know that this is important". She feels it is crucial that student volunteers are recognised and acknowledged by "the people that they look up to in their education system."

Emma tells me more about acknowledging students' presence, emotions and contribution, and nurturing positive relationships with them through dialogue, and how this leads to students flourishing:

> Because I would align a lot of the modules with the whole Martin Seligman's positive psychology and with the flourishing. (...) So now we're applying it to them

> engaging with their civic society organisations and how it works for them. They'd have a greater understanding of that. Because over the last seven, eight years, I've seen evidence of human flourishing, most definitely, really rewarding experiences, I decided to capture it.

Sara speaks about being present for the formative years of the students she works with as a "gift." She appreciates when her former students send her messages telling her how well the volunteering programme she runs worked for them. Additionally, she is "really appreciative of their enthusiasm and their willingness to roll with it." Sara also feels it is important to recognise that growth and self-actualisation is not about competition and career for young people, but about feeling whole, and having opportunities to develop and flourish as humans. She believes that her civic engagement unit, which coordinates university-wide student volunteering programme, as well as assists lecturers in developing community-based learning/research opportunities for university students, is the sole entity on her university campus that provides students with the space and opportunities to flourish, contribute and self-actualise. Sara reflects:

> Sometimes they [students] actually want to help, give back, be part of a community, feel like their self-worth is valued, and feel like a human. They're not necessarily this competitive creature all of the time. Sure, we can appeal to those who want to get the most hours, do the most projects, and get double certificates, absolutely. That's all there for you. Knock yourself out. But also we need to provide that other avenue. And we're the only place on campus that is doing that.

Maggie adds that she feels sometimes students are surprised how they grew and developed through participating in volunteering. She shares:

> And that's another thing I hear at the ceremony when it's over. Students go: "Jesus I can't believe that, God, I can't believe that people think this is great." [laughter] Cause they're so nonplussed about what they did, but then they realise, actually, this is something good. And I *love* that.

To continue, Emma tells me about what brings her joy in her work - seeing her students engaged in a passionate discussion, speaking openly, and taking initiative in their own

learning, which, again, reminds me of hooks' (1994, 2003) call for creating spaces for dialogue and discussion on difficult topics:

> I like the interactive side of it. I like students feeling they can talk about things openly. And I like seeing students being more involved in their own learning. I like to see that. I like when I go into a group and there's an animated discussion, there's a fervour and passions about things, there's people who are not afraid to talk about things that are wrong, or need to change, or things they're doing. I get a buzz and get an energy from that. The student-centredness of the work as well, and that the students are individual people.

6.2.3 Community Relationships and Connections

Nurturing positive partnerships with communities, as well as the challenges of creating the 'ideal' mutual and equal relationships with community partners, is something that was frequently raised by the participants. The community partners that research participants work with include a range of non-governmental and not-for-profit associations, such as community-based or voluntary organisations, human rights groups, local resident associations, charities and cooperatives. Research participants engage with these community partners through student volunteering or community-engaged learning programmes, as well as engaged research. Anna, for instance, talks to me about the perception of 'ivory tower' that her community partners might hold about universities, as well as mistrust they might feel. She shares:

> And equally in the community, when you're working with a particular group. And there's a lot of hostility sometimes. And just by [the] very nature of [it], they expect the ivory tower. They've had negative interactions and there's this hostile: "I'm not trusting you." And when that wall is broken and when your efforts at building trust [work], that can be really rewarding too.

All practitioners shared how they worked to build trust and nurture relationships with community partners outside university. Martha, for example, speaks about the importance of listening: "But I think also what we've done is, we've maybe listened to the community, and try to understand what they wanted from the university." Speaking of community partnerships, Martha adds: "I think none of this work can happen without good

relationships with people, so I think trust is fundamental, and a culture of openness, and kindness, and giving away your work." To add, Anna, who as you might remember coordinates a community-engaged research module, also emphasises that she wants the process and output of student-researchers' work be truly beneficial for community partners, and not just "a document on the shelf". Anna emphasises responsiveness to community partners' needs and pursuing civic engagement projects that are useful to the partners, and applicable to what they require.

To continue, Sara also stresses the partnership aspect of building relationships with communities, both internal and external to the university:

> We also value partnership. It's a huge value for us. Every single project we've ever done has always been in partnership with either students (...) or community, we've never really, I mean... Maybe it's been because we're a small unit, we have to do things in partnership, but it also just makes perfect sense. So that's a really important value for us.

Sara follows this by providing an example of building partnerships through listening and being responsive to the needs of community partners, as well as negotiating and co-creating learning experiences. A day before our conversation she received a list of potential community projects that were not necessarily a fit for the volunteering initiative she coordinates. Sara did not dismiss the projects because "those are our community partners to the university (...) it's so valuable that we nurture those." She contacted the community partner to "meet with [them] and just learn more and figure out if there's something else we can connect on." Sara feels that it is important to "understand what's coming from the community sector and what they need of higher ed" and expresses that she values "the vital resource that is the community non-profit sector" and adds that her civic engagement unit promotes connectedness over isolation.

To continue, Mary speaks about the need for dialogue, open communication, respect, honesty and transparency when building trust and nurturing relationships with community partners. She feels that "it's that thing that you would do in any partnership really where

you want to make sure people are going in with their eyes open and you haven't over promised anything, that it's clear to them, that (...) you've managed expectations." Furthermore, Maggie also tells me about how essential she feels the community partners are in creating holistic and engaged learning experiences saying that she could see that students "would benefit hugely from working with communities and understanding communities."

Finally, when those lasting, respectful and mutual relationships and partnerships work, they bring joy to participants:

> Anna: And I think we've created lasting partnerships, however tenuous some of the links might be, and a lasting kind of a (...) favourable view of each other. And so, it's moments like those [that give me joy].
>
> Emma: And I love to hear from the organisations that they're delighted. A lot of the time they're actually quite delighted with what the students are doing.
>
> Sara: Yeah, I think the community partners are great. They're so communicative of their appreciation and the impact.
>
> Maggie: And I think there'd be a lot of love in the world if we understood that everybody has a contribution. Even the people that I absolutely don't agree with their values, there's still a contribution to make.

6.2.4 Spanning Boundaries and Stradling Divides

Thus far, I have shared findings on the participants' work with the wider student population - either through curricular community-engaged learning/research, or through volunteering - as well as the labour involved in building relationships with community partners. What also emerged from research conversations is a hybridised and "boundary spanning" (Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 73) way of working in civic engagement. The hybrid and multifaceted roles of community engagement practitioners were also named as misunderstood and not fitting in the historical division between academic and non-academic work in higher education. This phenomenon resonates in Sara's words

whose “hat involves also not just being part of that local piece around degree programmes and volunteering programmes, but also at a national level developing student volunteering”, as well as doing “a little bit of teaching as well." Sara continues:

> (...) one of the challenges I've had has been, we occupy this space where we run student [volunteering] programmes, but we also do a bit of teaching, we do lots of research, we have European grants la la la, and often within academia you're either admin or lecturer. They don't know how to deal with you other than that. And that's a huge challenge.

Similarly, Anna also describes her varied practice that does not necessarily fit neatly within neither administrative, academic, technical and managerial areas. She shares that at the moment she is curating content for a community engagement toolkit webpage, coordinates and teaches on a community-based participatory research module, which she also has to do “marketing” and “admin side” of. Additionally, developing community trust and partnerships is also a part of her role. Anna feels that “it’s quite a nebulous role” as well as “an undetermined or new enough area” that is “still very much finding its feet.”

While some practitioners point to challenges posed by their hybridised roles, Maggie believes there are advantages of being in-between, “straddling divides”, and of multifaceted civic engagement roles. In her opinion, this liminality provides civic engagement practitioners with a stronger understanding of all university activities and operations, rather than knowing only your own disciplinary corner, and the ability to serve as a connector between different entities and groups both on and off campus. She feels that often the different groups exist in their silos rather than connect and communicate. Maggie reflects that when describing her role, she “always talked about straddling divides, because there is a divide”, for instance between university and non-university students, academic and professional staff, students and lecturers. She feels that when you’re in between “you get to actually know each of the areas.” Maggie continues:

> I see myself as a kind of knowledge transfer. I can bring information from the university to the community. I can bring information from the community to the university. I can bring information from the university to the student. I can bring

> information from the student back to the university. I can bring information from the administration to academic, and I can bring academic to administrative. I think it's hugely important to have that very helicopter view of the world.

Several practitioners I spoke to point to the emergent, versatile and unorderly nature of civic engagement as contributing to its lack of 'fit' or fixed location for it in existing HEI structures - something that is perhaps best encapsulated by Martha, who shares:

> It's a bit like that book, I don't know if you have it, *We Make the Road by Walking*. It's by Myles Horton and Paulo Freire. I'd like to think in the [name of unit] that we've made the road by walking and that we haven't followed a kind of a university blueprint in terms of our work and doing things for a kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy in the university.

6.2.5 Workloads, Recognition and Invisibility of Civic Engagement Practice

What also emerged from the interviews is the labour, time, intensity and workload of civic engagement practice - something that most participants shared. Maggie, for instance, speaks about the commitment required in order to support her students: "I do whatever that takes and that takes a commitment. It takes an absolute commitment."

Emma articulates how demanding the community engagement work is, not only for university staff but community partners as well. She tells me that she knows her community-engaged learning module is "going to take too much time compared to my other subjects." Emma continues:

> That takes time. The class time is there. And the assessment, we invite the host organisations (...) to see the presentations and that involves time and linking with them, if there's any issues. It does take time. I would have maybe 15 or 16 students. And outside of the core time with them, I would get an admin time of, we'd say, one hour per eight students, generally.

Emma notes that the intensity of civic engagement work is also felt by students. She recalls how "there was resistance" to community-engaged projects among some of her students

who “saw it as a lot of work” and wondered “how am I going to have time to do this... Because there is a commitment of time outside of the lectures and processing, and a lot more.”

Mary also discusses how laborious community engagement work can be, perhaps specifically for academics who include community-engaged teaching, learning and research elements in their curricula. She reflects on the advice she gave to a colleague who was taking over her community-engaged module, in order to “make sure she knew what she was getting herself into.” She told her that “there is extra work involved here” and “there’s no denying there’s more involved than your day-to-day teaching.” At the same time, she assured her new colleague of her support and noted that being involved in community-engaged teaching and learning is an opportunity to get involved in something new and outside the box, despite the workload it entails.

In our conversation, Rebecca gives me an example of a colleague “who worked in a very passionate way, developing community-engaged options for her students that was completely below the radar in an institution that didn't realise it was going on.” This, according to Rebecca, is problematic and can be exploitative. She shares that as civic engagement practitioners we must be mindful that the way we work is not only “not exploitative of communities and partners, and that we’re doing it in a way that has a long-term sustainability” but also:

> that isn't solely dependent upon individuals who do it at a personal cost to themselves, academics who do it at personal cost to themselves, because they're not going to get rewarded for it, and because if they're not getting the research out in high impact factor journals, that they're not at the races. It needs to be accompanied by really meaningful efforts to make sure that that engagement is potentially transformative, if you're sustainable, and it is recognised and rewarded for those who actually get involved.

Rebecca observes that civic engagement is not recognised as valuable in academia to the same extent that publishing in high impact publications, and that the lack of recognition for

and visibility of civic engagement work means that those involved may be left behind in a competitive university environment.

Civic engagement practitioners are at times expected to not only perform their work without recognition, but also without funding. Maggie, for instance, recalls an experience she had to move her office:

> (...) and then I had to go out with my begging bowl, you know what it's like in universities - spaces are at a premium. So then I'd be on my knees begging. And I hadn't made any inroads as such. Nobody knew what I was doing, you know what I mean? I had no one. There was no champion, really, for what I was doing, because... I think the director liked the idea of it, but liked the idea of it without funding, that I'd be working away in that kind of way.

Maggie's work was not only invisible, and not championed by others in her university, but she was also expected to perform it without resources. Mary, similarly, mentions that her institution is generally supportive of academics involved in civic engagement work; however, "maybe not in terms of time, money or recognition from a career perspective [laughter]." On the other hand, Emma shares that in her department, there is perhaps more recognition of the time required for community and civic involvement; however, this is due to inviting senior staff from her department to see the results of her students' community placement work and recognise its value. Emma says that: "there is more awareness happening around just in terms of the work. But that's happening because I would involve my Head of Department all the time and for him to see, sit in, and mark the presentation, for him to see the value of what's happening."

Here, it also is worthwhile to mention that four out of the seven women I spoke to - Sara, Anna, Maggie and Martha - experienced precarity of employment at the beginning of their career in civic engagement in higher education - being on short-term contracts, moving around offices and departments, or dependent on grants and philanthropic funding to cover their posts. On this, Martha tells me:

> I was brought in in 2004 and I was on a three-year contract and I thought: okay, this is going to be the sexy thing for three years and then they'll get rid of us because that's the way higher education works. Civic engagement for a number of years, then it's digital learning, or internationalisation, there's always some kind of a sexy thing.

And yet, despite the general lack of recognition, the invisibility and the labour and time intensity of the civic and community engagement work, some practitioners I spoke with expressed their wish to do more in this space. Anna, for instance, says this about community partnerships:

> But I still feel that there are too few and far between, they're not enough. And I'm itching to do more and itching to achieve more, and sometimes the pace and the ability to do it and to be allowed to do... allowed is the wrong word... but, pace. It's the pace that sometimes frustrates me.

6.2.6 Finding Community and Team Support

Overall, most (not all) participants expressed a sense of fatigue and weariness of doing work that often seems counternormative in the higher education sector - work that often remains on the margins, not visible, and not recognised. Sara mentions that it is crucial "just to keep ourselves revitalised along the way." This reminds me of what bell hooks wrote about healing in her 2009 book *All About Love*: "Healing is an act of communion. Most of us find that space of healing communion with like-minded souls" (hooks, 2009: 215). In our conversations, Sara, Rebecca, Emma and Mary discuss that seeking support from others who share their values and understand their work - in other words, finding community, or forming care collectives, to revitalise - is important.

Sara, for instance, shares that she feels supported by her team and managers, and she says:

> I think also I'm very grateful for the staff that I work with in the team. My boss is *incredibly* supportive. She's just a mega star in terms of trust, leadership, let's make it on with it, there's no micromanaging. So that's really good.

When speaking about being a woman in academia Rebecca tells me that she "would recognise the need to, and value the support of other women" in university. She says that she has often deliberately "chosen to collaborate closely with women, and have enjoyed support of women, especially in higher education at difficult times when women can sometimes get a hard time." Mary also speaks of support in her institution as helpful in her work and mentions that "my colleagues were supportive and a number of colleagues in my school and my discipline area are now involved as well, which is good. They all happen to be women [laughter], (...) It just happens to be that way at the moment." She was also willing to give the support back when handing over work on a community-based learning to another colleague by telling her - "And I'll do everything I can to, to give you the support you need, and you can always come and ask me anything." Emma mentions her desire to instil the idea of support and community among her students when she tells me that she encourages "this idea of supporting each other, to embed that in there, it's not competition, it's collegiality." And finally, Sara shares:

> what I've found helpful is finding people on campus who think the way I think and being in groups that think that way. So, I'm on the university sustainability group. I would have colleagues in the School of Sociology and in natural sciences who are planet first, people first, human rights. I just hang out with those people [laughter] because otherwise... otherwise you crack up.

6.3 Women in Academia, Women in Civic Engagement - A Feminised Realm

During the interviews, and in line with the research question outlined, I also raised questions about the participants' understanding of feminism, and their thoughts on being women in the academy and women in civic engagement. I asked these questions specifically in five interviews, it emerged organically in one, and did not appear in one. Nearly all participants raised issues related to being a female in a neoliberal-patriarchal higher education system (as detailed in section 1.7) even though only a few used this word specifically. Some observations focussed on the challenges women working in universities may face. Rebecca, for instance, shares:

> We work in very patriarchal institutions, where most of the decision making and the power lies in the hands of men. (...) I would certainly accept and recognise (*pause)* the particular... the particular (*pause*) journey the women have to make in order to... achieve some sense of equal recognition. And I think that's particularly the case in higher education. I know there's lots of other industries and businesses where it's the case, but I think in higher education, and in Irish universities in particular, it's very much the case.

In our interview, Mary comments on the lack of representation of women in the upper echelons of higher education sharing that even though her department "would have about 50:50 ratio for staff as well, and would have in the past" the "usual thing [is], the higher up you go, the less women you see." She was appointed as the first female Assistant Head of School in her discipline and there is "a pretty good mix at most levels, but not higher up, but then it probably is changing." Mary also points to the gendered temporal regimes (Henkel, 2017) particular to her discipline that may prevent women from progressing. Mary reflects that even though it is more feasible for women to do so now, in her area there has been a requirement to have "worked in industry as well, having done a lot of postdocs" and that "if you have to go off and travel and postdoc for ten years, you know yourself, it's just, it's tough." She also adds that in her disciplinary area "there might be some qualities that are considered to be feminine in a very traditional way that apply less in a science environment. I don't know. I think people just have a very particular approach to doing things as a scientist." Finally, she describes an experience of being "the only woman in the room":

> I did have an experience early on in my new promotion when I was chairing an exam board for [a School] and I was actually the only woman in the room [laughter] and I find it... it was a room of twenty people and there are some female staff in that School. They just didn't happen to be involved in the programmes that were being examined. The externs and everybody else in the room were male. And you get those moments from time to time, where you just get brought back to: Okay. This is a bit much. It was a bit... it was fine, but I did feel a bit odd [laughter] because there were so many there.

Additionally, the issue of women performing service in academia has also surfaced in my conversation about civic engagement with Mary who told me (with caveats about her fear

of generalising) that she feels men “tend to be more focused on what I will get out of this, and they will say no to things” and mainly perform tasks for which they know they will be recognised. Mary senses that men seem to be “much better at compartamentalising” and the “bits and pieces that need to be done are essential” tend to be done by women because they understand that absence of this work may have “consequences for maybe a student personally, for our School, or institution”, while men tend to assume that “other people will pick up the pieces." These issues, among others, were detailed in section 4.4.1.

During our conversation, Emma comments on the changes she feels are needed, and speaks against leaning-in to a discriminatory system:

> What do women have to do to progress there? I'm more into transforming the environment into one that is more conducive towards women to belong in naturally, not to become like men to get the positions. And often you can see that being the case. And that's to the demise of the educational environment. We need to bring and highlight what women possess for them not to be copying the male hierarchy there already, because that's not working, the way I see it. It's not working the way it should be.

Specifically commenting on civic engagement being a female-dominated area, Rebecca reflects:

> I mean, I think as you say, there are a number of striking examples of men who are engaged in community engaged learning, but they are a minority. If I was to think of all the people that I know who are involved, the vast majority are women. And that's problematic in a way because it creates a kind of a gendered role for that engagement piece within higher education. And that's not good, I think.

She then adds that if we saw more equality in terms of gender distribution among activists, champions and practitioners, it would raise “the apparent status, and credibility, and the currency” of civic engagement practice.

Additionally, Martha tells me about the selflessness of her colleagues working in civic engagement. She sees this as problematic, even though she feels it indeed might be the way herself and colleagues operate, and reflects:

> Cause I think myself and my team, we're not selfish enough. We're all the time giving. I mean, you just have to look at [name of colleague], she's giving, giving, giving all of the time. I think maybe somebody like that who would be a little bit more selfish and allow us to project our stuff might be good for actually. Does that make sense, or sounds mad?

Despite seeing selflessness as dubious, Martha feels that the work her and her team are doing should not be claimed by one person or unit but shared - a sentiment that is rare in the hyper-competitive, individualistic and siloed environment of the higher education system. She shares:

> I don't think you can set something up, and then own it by yourself. It's about setting something up and giving it away, and allowing it to be owned by everybody. And I think that can be difficult for people. And while I'm ambitious about my work, I'm not necessarily ambitious about myself.

6.4 Summary of Chapter

This chapter examined the participants' insights under the headings of becoming a civic engagement practitioner, ways of working and the nature of community engagement work, women in academia and women in civic engagement and finding community and team support. It uncovered some significant similarities in terms of participants' trajectories into higher education civic engagement. Firstly, all women I spoke to expressed a desire for congruence between their values, political beliefs, commitments to a more equal and just world, and their practice, which in some cases stemmed from their childhood or education experiences. Secondly, there is an agreement among all but one participant on the model of civic engagement they attempt to practise. Most women I spoke to see community engagement as a vehicle for raising consciousness, promoting active citizenship and understanding of structural causes of injustices and inequalities (as I discussed in section 3.5), rather than a tool for disciplinary skills development. Additionally, all participants

seem to express their commitment to helping students develop skills and behaviours that are not simply *marketable* but that will help them challenge inequalities and *make a difference*. Another similarity that this chapter uncovers concerns the participants' ways of working. It is clear that the women I spoke to work from the perspective of holistic engaged pedagogy that emphasises nurturing, flourishing, mutuality, dialogue and respect. It also seems that participants do not adopt the deficit-based understanding of community, but rather value community partners and demonstrate a commitment to building trust and reciprocal relationships with them. Several practitioners spoke about the hybridised and unorderly nature of civic engagement roles that do not necessarily fit the existing university structures and hierarchies. There was broad consensus on both the workload and commitment required to practise civic engagement, as well as the invisibility and lack of recognition for it across the wider university. The issues of working as a woman in academia and feminisation of civic engagement work were also discussed, as was the importance of finding communities of like-minded individuals.

Chapter Seven: Findings on Structures, Systems and Navigating Them

Thus far I have presented the findings related to the participants' ways into civic engagement, their values and orientations, as well as the nature of the work they do. In this chapter, I outline what happens when those ways of working and values come into contact with the wider university, and I consider the broader environments in which civic engagement takes place. The findings are grouped under the three broad themes of engagement with the wider university, including a discussion on the location/liminality of civic engagement within university structures, and suggestions for further embeddedness of the practice; community engagement in a neoliberal academy; and navigating and negotiating higher education systems. These themes are further divided into sub-themes for clarity. Again, much of what the participants told me is paraphrased as appropriate, but longer quotations are included as well to spotlight the practitioners' voices.

7.1 Engagement with the Wider University

7.1.1 Location/Liminality within University Architecture

During the course of our conversations, the practitioners often spoke of the location of civic engagement activities within our higher education system - is it central or peripheral? The women I interviewed considered the 'location' of civic engagement in several ways: physical spaces (buildings) and the location of community engagement offices and units within/outside university structures, its placement in university ethos, mission and strategy, the positioning of civic engagement activities within degree programmes, as well as the different disciplines and faculties, or the position of civic engagement within the research-teaching-engagement hierarchy. The location of community engagement practice within the wider university is challenging not least due to 'straddling divides' I discussed in section 6.2.3 - between the university and community, fitting in/standing outside existing HEI structures, crossing over academic, administrative, professional and pastoral practice, between 'third mission' and 'the only mission' of higher education, being embedded or standalone.

To begin this section, here is Maggie's story:

> I think at one stage my office was in a boiler room, where they've just taken out the boiler. And it was right behind the canteen in the university. No one knew there was an office there, basically. You just pass it out, you wouldn't know. And you'd be boiling during the day, cause the boiler was up there.

Maggie's description resonated with my experience when I recall my own office in the DCU in the Community building, located off the main Dublin City University (DCU) campus, in the heart of the North Dublin neighbourhood of Ballymun. While we were a mere 15-minute walk apart, the two locations - university and its local neighbourhood - seemed miles apart in terms of their demographic composition, class, culture, economy and social architecture. We served as the 'embassy' for the university in the local community and were well visible and embedded into the local education and training provision network. However, our peripheral location outside university walls seemed to result in the lack of awareness of our work among my DCU colleagues, who at times expressed surprise that we still operated.

While relegated to the 'boiler room' Maggie had to carve out a physical space for her office; however, with little financial support. She shares:

> So I put a proposal together to the university to say: look, there should be [an office] where people in the community have one door to knock on and they say, come in here. (...) So, I put a proposal together and they were happy to go ahead, happy to say: yeah you can work on that with no money and no nothing, and we'll find you an office.

In our conversation, Sara discusses how locating all externally and community-engaged initiatives (for instance "child and family research unit, disability, family research, autistic research, gerontology centre, and then our centre for civic engagement") in one building on her university campus contributed to creating networks and connections. Despite being clustered with a range of other initiatives that perhaps do not neatly fit the existing

university structure, I get a sense of building a 'home' for community engagement from Sara:

> And we kind of fit together because we're looking at, I suppose, the life cycle and how meaningful engagement of people, I suppose to support their trajectory in their success in community and in life. But there's been nice connections. So, from our centre, we have a lot of degree programmes (...), and we would do a lot of volunteer projects with local schools, Foroige, youth work, and all of these different youth focused charities that we would have had long partnerships with. Now that we have this [name of large research centre], we are now getting to enhance those community partnerships in new ways within the degree programs and the research.

Sara feels that co-location with other externally oriented university initiatives means "being a part of a wider agenda, if you like, around the impact of education and its purpose." However, could this mean that external community outreach is something that happens alongside and separate, rather than within, universities? Is civic engagement still relegated to 'the boiler room', in other words - peripheral within the system?

Moving away from physical locations, Rebecca offers some comments on the location of civic engagement in what universities do:

> The way I explain it is that I think that the university has three pillars: teaching and learning, research, and engagement. And that community engagement is a way of doing all three of them. So, I don't see community engagement as a third pillar. I see community engagement as a way of doing teaching and learning. It's a way of doing research, it's a particular way of doing the engagement, which is a transformative rather than transactional way of being an engaged institution. I think it's something that you have to infuse in the way we do all of our business, rather than it being a third pillar out there.

While the idea of infusing all university activities with civic and community engagement would seem ideal in terms of its recognition, visibility, and embeddedness Rebecca also points to a "problematic and challenging" aspect of it, namely, recognition of that work, and she is "conflicted about that." She feels that if community engagement is seen as "a

way of doing each of the three other parts of our role", it might "get lost then when it comes to recognition and acknowledgement" and disappear.

Martha speaks about the location of civic engagement within the teaching, research, internationalisation and engagement hierarchies of the university, pointing out that community engagement might not be located at the top of these hierarchies. She also tells me about the variety and unevenness of structures supporting civic engagement in the academy, as well as the lack of visibility and recognition for this work. Martha feels that in countries with longer traditions of community engagement, for instance the United States, there are "professional career trajectories related to this work", dedicated civic engagement departments, and senior university positions with responsibility for engaged scholarship, which elevates this area. Martha notes that it is not the case in Ireland and perhaps "Campus Engage could be doing more to articulate the serious nature of this work." She adds:

> Maybe it's about timing here. There's a lot of personnel now in existence but the higher echelons of the institutions haven't elevated the portfolios to be on par with research and internationalisation, and first year experiences, and centres for teaching and learning. Maybe it's only a matter of time I don't know. We're nearly 20 years into this work. But I don't know when it'll happen. I'll be retired anyway [laughter].

Martha also highlights the lack of apparent alignment for community engagement professionals with official university staff grades, which poses challenges in terms of career development for practitioners. She mentions that "20 years ago our positions didn't exist, and now they do", but "we're all on the same grades that we were in 2004." It is an issue for her as a manager as she sees her colleagues - "high performers and ambitious about their work" - who are not being promoted and properly acknowledged. She continues:

> And if they are promoted, they'd be promoted to other parts of the university, so they're going to leave behind community engagement. The same is true of me. I think in 20 years' time, this won't be the case, but again, I think we've made the

> road by walking. We've made these rules by walking. And then professionally we can suffer the consequences because we're stuck in these grades forever.

In other words, the commitments to social and civic purpose of higher education might feature in HEIs' missions on paper (as discussed in section 4.6), but there may be a lack of actions to recognise and reward this work.

The liminality and lack of defined location for civic engagement practice within the wider university led some of the practitioners to carve out spaces and locations for their work. According to Mary, for instance, growing civic engagement activities often came with no additional resources or time allocation, required moulding a niche for one's own practice, and proving that civic engagement can work. She recalls that while in her School[13] she had "a reasonably supportive management" and would not be prohibited from developing community engagement initiatives, "you don't necessarily get the time and money [laughter] to do what you want, but nobody would stop you." Mary feels it is "not realistic" to receive additional funding for new civic engagement programmes; however, she says that "Sometimes you have to go out and do something, prove it can be done, and then the time and money will start to follow."

7.1.2 Thoughts on Embedding Civic Engagement in the Wider University

Research participants also discussed the integration of civic engagement within existing university structures for greater embeddedness of the practice. The development of civic engagement in Ireland has not only been about shaping a space for oneself and the realm of community-university engagement, but also about either creating enabling structures, or 'hanging' civic engagement on existing structures, as described by the practitioners I spoke to. In our conversations Martha, Mary, Anna and Sara all discuss the importance of creating sustainable structures for civic engagement, which often means utilising the existing university architecture to embed and make civic and community engagement work more prominent. Just a decade ago the civic engagement activities in Irish higher education

[13] School is understood here as an organisational unit within a university, offering courses in related disciplines e.g. School of Mathematical Sciences. The language here is not uniform and HEIs in Ireland use varied terminologies here, e.g. Schools, Colleges, Faculties, Departments to refer to larger and smaller organisational units.

sector were described as “piecemeal and disparate” (HEA, 2011: 78), ad-hoc, informal and under the radar (Lyons & McIlrath, 2011); hence, the sustainability and better embeddedness of the movement have been of significance for leaders and practitioners in the area. Martha, for instance, compares these efforts to embed civic engagement on her campus to growing tentacles across the institution. She shares:

> I guess I'm very much into developing sustainable structures. I think one-off things are all very willing, good, but if you want to make change you have to create sustainability. That's kind of a key priority of mine. And creating change within the institution whereby we have civic engagement representatives now in each of the four [schools], one of them has been elevated to Vice Dean for Civic Engagement. Those people have mattered as well because they’ve become champions. So, it's more than just me, it's like tentacles moving into the institution. And I guess once you've set up structures like that, it's very difficult to take them away.

Echoing Martha’s comments, Sara also speaks of having civic engagement representatives and champions across the different faculties “was helpful because that meant you were on the [school] agenda for every session, so that was helpful."

Martha continues on the topic of building sustainable structures for civic engagement within the university, saying that she “get[s] a buzz when good things happen and they’re sustained.” She feels a lot of effort can be spent on creating one-off civic engagement initiatives that dissipate if they are not maintained. Martha likes to “see good things happen that are sustainable”, and names several projects in her HEI, including “forty service learning modules” and a volunteering programme, and concludes: “Nobody can take these things away because there’s things around them to scaffold them.”

The importance of sustainability and making oneself indispensable is also raised by Anna who reflects on her leadership on some of the first civic engagement initiatives at her university “to get us more integrated and more top of the mind and so on with individuals." She recalls that through co-developing “a module in community-based participatory research, which became kind of a permanent feature in [the university] calendar” and her

work with Campus Engage, she became “too involved to let go, I suppose, and I made myself useful, we’ll say."

Mary also discusses attaching civic engagement activities, specifically community-based learning, to existing university programmes. She describes in detail how she managed to introduce accredited community-engaged learning activities into a module by mapping its learning outcomes against community involvement. Mary shares that she feels some of her colleagues consider civic and community engagement as something that “you would always want and like to do in your spare time on a volunteering basis”, but she advocates “building it into your core activity”, teaching, learning or research, as a way to further embed it. Mary notices that her module learning outcomes were “a framework to hang things on” and she encourages others to:

> just find what you're already doing that could easily... that's already within your curriculum. It might started out being a case study of a problem that the students work through. (...) You've got the basis there to do it, and then look at making it more substantial and embedding it more.

However, Mary also points to the fact that certain disciplines might be a better ‘fit’ for integration of civic engagement activities into core curricula, and this sentiment is shared by Emma who reflects:

> Unless, fair enough, if somebody is coming through an education background, they may be more inclined towards this experiential learning, but if they're coming from a mainstream science, engineering, business background, they may not get this as readily, as easily. Cause their whole focus is directed differently, to look at society in a different way.

Rebecca also sees more opportunities for embedding civic engagement if it is fully integrated across university activities, when she shares:

> I actually prefer the idea of it being named as a community engaged way of doing my teaching, a community engaged way of doing my research and the community engaged way of this external relationship that we have with our region and with

> society in general. That offers more opportunity for it to be further and deeper embedded in the actual core of the university, rather than it being the third pillar to me.

Rebecca feels that over the past decades, civic engagement has perhaps become more embedded and there is more understanding of civic engagement as a discipline nowadays. She feels that "you can cite lots of examples of where universities are reaching out, they're breaking down the walls, they're trying to be much more part of the community." Rebecca believes that things have changed since she started working at her HEI and adds that at that time "there was no naming of community engagement as a part of the agenda." Finally, Rebecca reflects:

> But I think as I said, my first point was that I think that you don't have to work quite as hard at explaining it to people now, because it is more in the parlance of talking about higher education, of what it's about. That this community engagement strand to their work is more accepted as part of what they should and are doing.

7.2 Civic Engagement in the Neoliberal Academy

7.2.1 Innovative Work in a Conservative System

In our research conversation Martha emphasises a mismatch between community engagement and higher education philosophy and structures, and points to the disruptive nature of the civic engagement work:

> Like sometimes I think I might be a slight thorn in the side of the university because I'm creating provocative entities that aren't necessarily the mainstream. But I think that's the very purpose of the work that we do. It's to provoke the university, and to do things differently. (...) I think the work that we do is highly innovative in a highly conservative higher education system, not just in Ireland but elsewhere.

Sara agrees, saying that in her civic engagement unit they "constantly, I suppose, are critiquing and asking to be doing things in different ways and pushing the boundaries a little bit there, I think." She notes that it requires determination, perseverance and grit to challenge systemic obstacles when working in civic engagement. Sara understands that her work challenges the traditional ways universities operate but feels it is important to

“un-normalise the normal enough and just start to chip away at that” in order to “prevail in the end”. Echoing Sara’s comments, Martha also stresses the importance of perseverance by saying: "And I'm a very determined individual and I probably don’t take no for an answer."

The disruptive and innovative nature of civic engagement work may result in a lack of understanding of practitioners' work, especially in the context of neoliberal university leadership and culture. While civic and community engagement features in university strategic plans, Emma reflects that she “over the last while felt that [she is] just completely misunderstood at a higher level.” She shares:

> The people who are in charge in institutes at the moment are not coming from an education background, which is disappointing. There are accountants there. Interestingly enough, a lot of them are engineers. So I struggled a little bit with that to a degree. And often I said, okay, go back into your own little world and plod away and all.

Maggie comments on the rigid and conservative institutional culture in higher education and the challenges of implementing cultural change. She feels that for the higher education sector “what becomes more important is *protecting* the organisation” and that “the institution becomes more important than the value." Maggie thinks that our higher education system lacks self-reflection and is not transparent, open to critique or change. She is doubtful about disrupting the well-established system - “the kind of system we’ve got and we’re part of an international culture of that.” Again, while on paper higher education institutions commit to the social and civic mission of higher education, Maggie feels that:

> (...) it would take you... take a good bit of leadership to disrupt that [established] model because there's a lot of people making a lot of money off that system. So, anything like that is going to take a lot of lobbying, a lot of hard work for a university culture internationally to change. It's not going to change overnight.

Maggie does not think universities are necessarily opposed to changing their culture, but perhaps people in charge do not "get that opportunity to critique it and go: hold on a minute, what am I doing here?"

To add, Sara feels our education system is not fit for purpose to address global challenges, and points to the need to redesign it, and there is a sense of urgency for changing the purpose of our education system when she shares:

> So, we know that our current educational trajectory has arrived at a place where the planet is not sustainable, human life is not sustainable. So that's a fundamental flaw in our educational trajectory. So, if we don't start to unpick that and completely redesign it…

In her reflections, Rebecca understands that critical civic engagement initiatives can be risky, different and pushing boundaries, and recognises that the higher education system is perhaps not built for taking risks. She feels that creativity and flexibility are needed to overcome some procedural and systemic challenges for further embeddedness of civic engagement. Rebecca believes that as higher education sector staff "we are capable of doing amazing things":

> We're actually doing more than we think we are. (...) And most people who are in academic jobs, they're creative people. They're able to adapt, they should be. And I think it is a matter of trying to do things differently. We work in institutions where sometimes that's made difficult for us by the bureaucracy, by the process, by how long it takes to change a course, and things like that.

At the same time, she says that "there are things that we can do in how we do things that are different" and that "there's still creative ways that we can work outside of the box within the bones of the bureaucratic processes that are there." Rebecca understands that academic staff have a commitment to "the bureaucratic ends of the machine of higher education" but feels there is scope for creativity and flexibility in how they respond to it.

7.2.2 Dominant Discourses of the University - Clash of Priorities and Values

Overall, the participants share a similar view on the dominant nature, values and orientations of the current higher education system. Additionally, what surfaced in the interviews was a belief that the priorities of the present-day university are not always congruent with the imperatives of civic engagement practice. Our conversations revealed a critique of phenomena neoliberal in nature and present in our higher education sector (previously detailed in section 1.7) with the participants reflecting on competition, bureaucracy, profit-making and economic orientation of our universities, as well as a lack of self-reflection and rigidness in the system.

To start with, Maggie, who manages a volunteering programme and award at her HEI, reflects on the demands of hyper-productivity and competition in the present-day university, and she likens her experience of working in higher education to her previous employment in the private sector. Maggie shares:

> And Joanna, I found this particularly over the last number of years (...) I affirmed the same kind of oppression that I found in the private sector in the organisations I worked with. I found that same kind of not being able to get my breath almost, because I see that the higher education institutions are equally non-open to being critical of themselves. And I see it more and more. It's become *so competitive*. It's how many you can stuff into the classroom. It's how many international students you can bring because of the money that they're bringing, when they come here.

Maggie also expresses her frustration with the shift of higher education to prioritising economic purposes rather than providing opportunities for dialogue and mutual learning. She notes that "it's not about how we actually bring all the students together to learn from each other, from the different cultures. (...) Why doesn't it do what it says on the tin instead of being competitive?"

Anna echoes Maggie's comments on the need for productivity and performance demands of the neoliberal university and compares it to being "on a hamster wheel" and in "disciplinary silos." She names these phenomena as some of the possible reasons why it can be a struggle for educators to introduce community-engaged learning/research

elements into the modules they teach. While it is possible to implement community-engaged learning in any curricula (see section 2.5.2 for explanation) Anna feels that academics have to stick to their module descriptors without considering "what are the crazy issues that we're facing in life?" and how to "integrate those with my teaching, and (...) actually merge them with the curriculum." She feels that the time and performance pressures on lecturers can prevent them from integrating civic and community engagement elements into their teaching and research. As we know from section 6.2.5, civic and community engagement is time and labour intensive and, especially for academic staff members, involves not only regular teaching and assessment but also finding and building relationships with community partners, liaising with community partners, managing students on community-based placements, redesigning learning outcomes and assessment. This can be especially difficult in a university culture and environment where workloads are already heavy, and expectations of productivity are high.

Anna also comments on the pressures on universities to generate revenue, in the context of reduced state funding, and an urgent need for investment into the higher education sector in Ireland (HEA, 2017). She feels that it leads to changes in what universities prioritise. Anna notes that higher education institutions are "largely run as businesses", "ultimately (...) operate in an economic market" and that "they're reliant on the state for funding and they are reliant on international student numbers (...) and to top up that funding [in] that really underfunded sector. And so there's only so much that can be prioritised." This may mean that, despite strategic commitments of HEIs, the civic and social mission of higher education is pushed aside, as it rarely brings any tangible, financial benefits to the university (in contrast to, for instance, internationalisation, or research and innovation).

Emma echoes Anna's comments and points to the economy and funding orientation of our higher education system, which she feels is not the purpose education should serve and says: "I think the way education has gone at the moment and the way it is evolving is really all about the economics." Similarly to other practitioners I spoke to, Emma is also frustrated with this shift, calling it "really disappointing" and admitting that she "[finds herself] struggling with that ethos and attitude." She also comments on the

commodification of education and framing students as consumers, which to her mind is a departure from what the higher education purpose should be. She reflects:

> Universities and higher education institutes were designed to be there to respond to questions coming from society, not from the economy, and not to make money or to further businesses. Money is important, obviously it is, but it seems to be something that has taken over the operations. We seem to be in a market economy in terms of education. Education isn't something to be sold. It's something to be facilitated.

Similarly, Rebecca speaks about the priorities of higher education vis a vis those of civic engagement. Asked whether she thinks universities are committed to the transformative experience of their students and forming civically conscious graduates, she responds: "I think they like to think that they are, and I think they try." Rebecca feels that "you have some very strong pockets of individuals and elements that speak to that mission", that "it varies from institution to institution", and she warns against generalising. She elaborates on the economic priorities and focus of the higher education sector by sharing:

> But fundamentally, I think there's a lot of other imperatives that probably take priority over this [civic engagement]. (...) I think especially at the moment, for instance, I think that some of the concerns universities have about funding, about finance, about international students, around the viability of them in terms of core funding and so on, when push comes to shove, I think that they are major concerns. (...)

Rebecca does not think that HEIs are not committed to fostering civic engagement; however, she admits that the higher education sector's "primary concerns are probably far removed from being a positive force in the community."

Taking into consideration the participants' thoughts on the dominant rhetoric in higher education, our research conversations also reveal the tensions that civic engagement practitioners experience when doing, according to Martha, "innovative work in a highly conservative system" whose values and priorities might be different to their own (Distillo

& Perry, 2017: 12). When asked if she thought her personal and professional values are shared by her institution Sara laughs and admits: “Okay. That’s a hard one." She continues:

> I mean, you would like to think that we are the institution, so we represent the institution, but unfortunately, sometimes the institution is represented by maybe senior leaders or whatever news frenzy is happening at the time. So, it can be quite challenging to navigate that. (...) So, I think that we are the institution, but we are at the same time... because we are the institution, we can be open to critique and improvement. Because sometimes we have seen those values, and sometimes we really haven't seen those values at all. And it's hard to know if it's maybe individual or structures around decision making at senior levels that means that we haven't seen those values represented at times.

Echoing Sara’s comments above, Anna tells me that she does not necessarily think that the values of her institution are opposed to her own. She admits however that she “would argue the vast majority [of HEI values and priorities] aren't necessarily aligned with the things that I would be most passionate about, but I would most definitely say in the same token that they're not opposed to them."

On the question of own values and those of her institution, Martha shares: “I can have my own values, but they may not necessarily be shared by the institution.” She is hopeful, however, that despite challenges, the institutional culture might shift with compassionate and kind leadership. She continues:

> We do have a very amazing President now. (...) He's developed a values-led strategic plan, and openness is one particular value of his, and he talks about a culture of kindness all the time. So at least we have discourse around that now, but I think he inherited an institution that had a lot of flaws, particularly around the promotion of women, and women not being recognised. He's had a hell of a job to create a culture shift. And the word kindness was never mentioned in [our HEI] before [the date of the new President’s appointment]. It's been a huge overhaul if you like, in terms of discourse and language that's been used. I think that the institution is becoming more kind.

However, Martha also thinks that “maybe that culture of kindness should exist also in institutions in terms of minding people and promoting people who exist in these [civic engagement] roles.” This leads to a question: if universities are truly supportive of civic engagement - why did four out of the seven participants experience precarity of employment at the beginning of their career in community engagement?

Mary, on the other hand, speaks of an institutional ethos supportive of civic engagement, however, she also points out the lack of recognition and resources for the work. She shares:

> I think as well our institution just tends to... there is a good ethos, and lots of other institutions would have that ethos as well, but there tends to be, as I said, maybe not in terms of time, money or recognition from a career perspective [laughter], but that there would in general be a positive response.

Again, this poses questions about university ethos that may be supportive of community engagement work vis a vis the lack of actions that tangibly assist further embedding of it, the lack of funding, and the lack of recognition for civic engagement work and practitioners. In other words, is the support on paper and in spirit just an exercise of whitewashing for a neoliberal academy, as signalled in section 3.4?

7.2.3 Thoughts on Civic Engagement Policy

National policy around civic and community engagement, that I presented in chapter four, featured in the research conversations with several practitioners. Overall, there seemed to be a broad consensus that formulating policy was enabling and legitimising for the movement. Commenting on the Campus Engage *Charter for Higher Education Civic and Community Engagement* (Campus Engage, 2014), Anna tells me about her university feeling bound to fulfilling the stipulations of the document: “We are a signatory of the Charter and we would see that we've responsibility to fulfil what we said we'd do and to be a player, if that's the right word." Mary, similarly, found the signing of the Charter as “very significant”, and adds: “I think Campus Engage have done a lot on it from a national perspective, just to bring civic and community engagement more centre-stage and get more recognition on that.” To add, Rebecca also noted that the Hunt Report (HEA, 2011), the Charter,

> and all of those initiatives in the past five, ten years, have prompted universities to take community engagement and their civic role more seriously, and anything that can incentivise them to do so they will respond to. And I'm not being cynical by saying that. That's not the case.

Martha also sees policy developments as enabling, although as she points out several times during our conversation, policy has been playing catch-up with practice on the ground. She notes that civic engagement practice "supersedes policy" and "is far more sophisticated than the policy." While recognising the work of Campus Engage in the area of policy, she also reflects that "Campus Engage in policy no longer matches my work and [her unit]. We have other activities that aren't part of policy, like the University of Sanctuary initiative, which is very much part of [her unit] but isn't in the discourse of Campus Engage for a national policy."

Martha continues by saying that even though her work predated the publication of the *Hunt Report*, civic engagement practitioners "have a policy mandate now since 2011" and "certainly that policy makes things far more easier." Martha continues by saying that even a mention of community engagement in national policy "is just a good thing." However, she also admits that she "would hate to see Carnegie[14] turn into some kind of a neoliberal instrument that's internationalised as well". Overall, she feels that "we have to be pragmatic about policy", despite some reservations, and she shares:

> The fact that it's there is a good thing. Maybe some people might be critical of it, that it's a little bit new neoliberal in terms of how it's described or presented, but that's okay. We can be critical, but from my perspective, I'm just thrilled that it's there and it gives me another mandate to do my business within the institution.

Additionally, a similar pragmatic attitude to 2018-2020 *Higher Education Authority Performance Compacts* for Irish higher education institutions was present in our

[14] In 2005, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching developed a classification framework for higher education civic and community engagement which Jacoby et al (2009: v) describe as a "coming of age". Martha has worked to adapt this framework for Ireland.

conversations. Rebecca, Emma and Martha admitted that while the measurements and indicators of civic engagement in Irish higher education are by no means perfect, they are nevertheless needed to demonstrate the value of civic engagement work to policymakers and senior sectoral leadership. Rebecca speaks of the engagement indicators in the Performance Compacts by noting that she thinks ”it's valuable that it's there. It means that institutions have to pay attention to it. They have to begin to audit what they're doing. They have to begin to find out. There's so much community engagement that actually goes on below the radar.” She feels that “Performance Compacts are important for getting the institution's decision to sit up and say, look around and say, what are we doing? We're actually doing more than we think we are.” However, Rebecca does express a worry that the transformative and critical elements of civic engagement might be lost among the quantitative indicators, and reflects:

> I would have a concern that some of the ways in which those performance indicators are structured, that it could potentially become a tick boxing exercise as opposed to something that looks very meaningfully at how transformative and how intentional our engagement is.

Emma also feels that once the breadth of civic engagement activities is highlighted through indicators, the practitioners should focus on incorporating the qualitative stories of transformation through our practice into performance reports. She recognises that the indicators for the capturing and measurement of community engagement might be imperfect but admits that they are a step in the right direction for more recognition for the area, and a way to capture the attention of policy and decision makers. She feels once these initial measurements and performance indicators are captured, then our efforts can shift to telling fuller civic engagement stories to show the true impact of our practice. Emma shares:

> I'm reminded of that quotation of the fattened pig and all that, that you have to convince somebody that it’s fat. You need the measurements, the outcome measurements for them to know what's what. And we are being directed that way ordinarily. I think it’s a stepping stone. I think it has to be there to get attention to the whole area, to the value. And then you come in underway. Once you have their attention, then you highlight the other things, the actual quality of what's happening there as well. I just think it's playing the same game to get noticed, and it may be

> just necessary at this point. But anyone who's involved, we'll say that we have to look at the positive, descriptive elements in the qualitative data in support of this. And I think that'll come. But it's just harder to combine it, and in Ireland in particular, and it's the same all over, that data needs to constantly be developed and highlighted.

Finally, Martha shares her thoughts and echoes similar sentiments, noting that even though civic engagement practitioners "fought hard to have qualitative and quantitative metrics under student volunteering, engaged research and engaged teaching", ultimately HEA were solely interested in the latter and so "we're kind of backed into a corner because this is what policymakers need at performance level." In her words, it is "quick data that they can look at and draw some comparisons or a decision to award funding." However, Martha also expresses a wish that in the future there should be "other tools available to the sector to allow us to both quantitatively and, maybe more importantly, qualitatively report on what we're doing." Finally, she reflects:

> Every kind of measurement too has limitations and problems, as well as opportunities. Nothing is perfect is what I'm saying. But I might like to see from a performance impact situation in Ireland that yes the government are doing their own tiny bit, but then us as institutions have a suite of other tools that we can choose from at various stages to track the nuanced nature of this work at an institution level.

7.3 Negotiating and Navigating the Higher Education Systems

The various ways of negotiating and navigating institutional demands while ensuring the civic and social purpose of community engagement work featured in my conversations with the practitioners. Several women spoke about developing an understanding of what matters and how the power flows in the higher education system as crucial to operating within/against it. In Maggie's words: "You need to understand the hierarchy and I am *very good* at that. You need to understand the hierarchy in order to manage." Her way of work combines subservience and subversivism. Maggie continues:

> It's actually that you need to *understand* the hierarchy of any institution or any organisation in order to operate effectively with the values that you have, but also

> enough to disturb that kind of thinking. And be subservient to that, but then almost subversively work in the way you want to work.

Maggie compares this to her work in the private sector where she learnt how to "please the Yanks", but at the same time act to support her organisation locally. She feels that "if you *understand* (...) how the world operates, (...) you can work successfully within it (...) but you actually do it subversively?" The sub-themes below demonstrate that the practitioners I spoke to share a good awareness of how their institutions work, what they are preoccupied with, and what their priorities are, and explore the ways they exploit, lean into, or resist the dominant rhetoric of their universities in order to, as Maggie puts it, "get some of what you want done"

7.3.1 Exploiting University Performativity

Nearly all practitioners discussed the need to widely publicise their work as a way of utilising the system to advance community and civic engagement. Mary recalls that it was a "showcase of teaching and learning" at her HEI where she first encountered community-based learning and followed up with one of the colleagues who presented at it with a view to implement community-engaged pedagogy in her modules. She also remembers that "within a year of that (...) there was a network starting to build in our institution." However, I question whether showcasing and publicising existing civic engagement initiatives by universities is done in order to encourage more staff to include elements of community-based learning/research in their educational practice, and to encourage more students to participate in community placements or volunteering, or whether it is done to project an image of a 'good' and 'socially engaged' university.

It seems to me that many of the participants were aware that universities want to project a certain image to the outside world and found ways to exploit this. Rebecca, for instance, discusses how to forefront civic engagement work utilising the power and influence of public relations in the higher education sector. She feels that HEIs can use branding as an engaged institution to their advantage - and this could be leveraged by community engagement practitioners. Rebecca thinks that "the branding as an engaged institution can make sense because you're appealing to a really, really deep need amongst young people to

be involved." She elaborates on how marketing themselves as engaged institutions can be useful to HEIs in terms of attracting students, but she strongly notes that it does need to be "accompanied by substantive, meaningful efforts to actually meet that [civic engagement] vision." Rebecca reflects:

> if an institution pitches itself at that, then I think that's also symptomatic of the fact that they're branding it that way because they know students want to be engaged. (...) Most young people now want opportunities to be engaged. (...) Students want to get out and about, meet other people, they want to do things, they want to feel they're making a difference.

Sara also points to recognising where the power lies within the system and ways to exploit it to her benefit. She feels that "university marketing teams tend to be actually the most powerful." She notes that university public relations offices have the power of communicating what is important in the organisation, and to the outside world, as their messaging is "a reflection of the institution." Sara feels it was "another route in" to influence and convince others across her HEI that civic engagement is valuable as a part of institutional culture. She recalls:

> And so we from a very early on stage did extensive work there around interviewing every single academic, getting newspaper articles in local papers, photos of students with student projects, just ad nauseam [laughter] being: Here's a press release, here's a press release, here's a press release until it was like: Okay. They could really get to know us! [laughter] And now they don't think of doing anything without ever popping us a line first (...) So, we kind of became, I guess, a staple, through the marketing and press office.

However, Sara does also point out that influencing through marketing and communications may have unfavourable consequences by saying that: "One of our greatest concerns is that we would be utilised as the good news all the time to maybe potentially cover underlying issues." She is wary of a university that can use civic engagement as a "source of good news and positive things" while at the same time supporting a system where "staff are undermined with short term contracts [and] no one is really being celebrated or respected there" - in other words, again, to whitewash the harmful practices within the academy. Sara

concludes: “So, we are both part of the problem and part of the solution [laughter], to push for change, to push for... against the neoliberalism of higher ed, essentially.”

Martha expresses a similar sentiment. She does recognise that she can influence the thinking about civic engagement work positively through utilising the importance of internal/external communications and public relations within the university. However, when our conversation turns to the higher education sector’s civic response to the 2020-2022 Covid-19 pandemic, she shares: “I don't want this to turn into another PR exercise for universities to make themselves look good. I'm optimistic, but I'm cynical as well.” Martha proceeds, touching upon the competitive nature of the higher education sector:

> And that we're not projecting [this] ‘aren’t we amazing’ type discourse in a very neoliberal type of way. Oh yes, we're very civic orientated but this civic orientation is very neoliberal in a way, because it's about us having another competitive edge against our peer institutions. So, as long as it is a genuine attempt.

Martha further provides an example of when she appreciated the lack of performative press and communications. She outlines her HEI’s actions for students living in Direct Provision centres[15] during the Covid-19 pandemic, which included providing those learners with free student accommodation and a weekly stipend. She feels her university “could have used that in a way to make themselves sound amazing” but did not. Martha is unsure if this was a conscious approach aimed at protecting vulnerable students, or whether it was simply an omission: “And I don't know why that didn't happen (...) Whether it was a deliberate decision not to project that as a response, or whether the press office just didn't pick up on it... But I appreciate the silence around that. They are our most vulnerable students.”

Emma also discusses the importance of publicising her work to further the civic engagement agenda; however, rather than an institution-wide perspective, she speaks of a more local aspect of communications, and she focuses on her immediate sphere of influence: “But that's [community-based learning] happening because I would involve my

[15] Centres that provide accommodation and catering for people seeking asylum in Ireland

Head of Department all the time and for him to see, sit in, and mark the presentation, for him to see the value of what's happening." She continues, highlighting the importance of communication in bringing others on board and creating broader support across her Department:

> (...) Previous to the current Heads of Department, we had a female Head of Department who I felt got it more and she was on board more with it. (...) She [was] nature, nurture, caring. I think she got it and understood it at the start. Then I had my new Head of Department, and I had to make sure he got it and understood it, he had to be involved. (...) I had to make sure our Head of Department knew everything that was happening in the space. Equally with the [name of initiative], which is growing and growing and the other things are coming out of that, I have to communicate things more than I would normally do. I'm not shouting in public but I really do have to communicate it in a manner that lights the fire and get some tune-in to it.

7.3.2 Leaning into the Dominant Discourses or Resistance?

Many women I spoke to pointed to the dominant economic priorities of the higher education sector, as discussed earlier in section 7.2.2. Here, Sara and Martha discuss using the importance and power of attracting funding in the sector to their advantage, to further the civic engagement agenda and efforts, leaning into the prevailing financial rhetoric. Sara offers an example of "one of the science outreach programs on campus [that] received an absolutely ginormous grant funding, research grant, to continue their outreach programme." She reflects:

> And they had a lot of attention and power from that press release. And the university was like, suddenly, like science outreach became the big flavour. And we were like: Yeah, we've been talking about public engagement for a long time. So I think it's just that we've maybe been able to tap into those various avenues that... things like the research grant, it's so powerful, the media is so powerful that... These different channels.

Martha echoes the sentiment by stating: "And we've been successful as well in terms of bringing in different funding over the years from the Higher Education Authority, to the European Union, to philanthropic funding. And of course, money always matters as well."

Martha recognises the importance of the bigger forces of "policy, funding, and structures" as well as "providing positive case studies of the work that we're doing" in order to influence change. However, she also notes that it is crucial to inspire others to follow you at a micro-level through personality and attitude:

> I think also we've maybe, or I've maybe, killed people with kindness as well. I think there's a bit of that personality piece as well. (...) [You need] maybe a personality trait where you're kind to people and you're creating change not through any argumentative position, but more of a 'this would be a good thing for the university' type attitude.

Sara also feels her office can "affect change" by "everyday micro interactions, how we treat people" but she also taps into the power of university boards and committees where she can include and influence university leadership. She says that her unit also used "those bigger strategic moves around forming the big committees with the big positions or roles or offices across the campus to push those [civic engagement] agendas." She feels her office is often seen as "maybe this vehicle for change" but crucially adds that "At the very core is social justice, it's' the focus, and the civic purpose of higher ed."

Maggie discusses how she at first used to actively oppose the unjust and unequal structures in the higher education sector, rather than leaning into them, by saying: "Our natural ability is to fight or flight. So, my thing was I never flighted, I always fought it." However, she also describes resigning herself to the fact that active resistance was ineffective and:

> that actually no matter how much shouting I did, and no matter how many doors [I kicked], and no matter how abusive I was, that's not going to change the system. And that's where the frustration was, that I knew I couldn't change the system, but I thought I could just by shouting and roaring at it.

There is a feeling of frustration and exhaustion when Maggie speaks of her fighting the university system, and it ultimately led her to adopt a more pragmatic approach to "work out a little niche for myself and then influence where I can along the world." In her words, the realisation that "the system is so embedded, and the structures are strong (...) built up

for years and years" and that she alone could not change it "de-stressed [her] life completely" and allowed her to "be in control of the way [she manages] herself." Again, Maggie is aware of how universities operate and what matters to them, so she believes that she:

> (...) found a much more manageable sort of way of doing it, and more subversively, because actually that's how institutions operate. They're subversive in the way they operate. Once you get to know that you can also act that way but get what you want. Well, get some of what you want done. What you can do is operate within the ethical values that you hold, and within the belief system that you hold, you can make a place for yourself within it. Does that make sense?

Maggie offers an example of her (subversive) leaning into, and pandering to, the dominant ethos of competition in the academy, and using it to advance and grow a student volunteer programme. She shares how she approaches the Deans at her HEI and presents them with the number of students from their Faculty that participated in the volunteer award programme she manages, and how their Faculty compares to others. Appealing to the competitive side of the Faculties, she managed to ensure that they started to encourage more of their students to take part in the volunteering programme - simply for the ability of having the 'bragging rights' over other Departments. Maggie shares: "Not that any of the Deans ever came back to me to know what the feck was the [name of award]! But I exploited it for what I needed to exploit it for – that was in order to get some kind of support for the development of the programme."

While Maggie decides to strategically lean into and deploy the dominant rhetoric of the sector to grow her community engagement work, Sara, on the other hand, offers a perspective of resistance to the system. She speaks of refusing to conform:

> (...) we would have our Careers Centre and their focus would be very much on individuals striving, achieving, enhancing their positions, and it would be about CV enhancement, and interview enhancement, and really it's a competitive environment. (...) They run a student award and we also run a student award, which is about recognising their volunteering and their collaborative contribution. We have had pressure down through the years to make that a competitive space to

> change it to bronze, silver, gold, to say: 'You're the best volunteer if you do this'. And I have always resisted that, always fought against that

Sara recognises that perhaps she is seen to fight for something that is not that significant, or even perhaps damaging to her: "And maybe it's to my detriment because we often get feedback that: Why would you want that? It's not important, it's not important enough, and it's not significant enough." Sara also speaks about the difficulty of defending the values of her unit in a neoliberal university:

> And I suppose we have always come from a place that has been about solidarity, collectiveness. This is not about the individual having to somehow be the top of the top. It's about actually how we are all doing this together. And it's very difficult in the neoliberal university to have that position. And so, at least two, three times a semester, every single year for the last 20 years, I have had to defend our approach. It's exhausting.

7.4 Summary of Chapter

This chapter spotlighted the participants' experiences related to navigating, as civic engagement practitioners, the wider structures and systems within higher education that are not necessarily conducive to community engagement work. Participants spoke about the location (physical and philosophical) of civic engagement and the liminal nature of their work. There was some difference in opinion on whether community engagement should underpin all university operations or exist as a stand-alone strand of higher education, despite seemingly being less valued than teaching, research and internationalisation, and an apparent lack of fit with university systems and culture. Participants also expressed varied views on embedding civic engagement; however, the majority emphasised the need for creating sustainable structures, and alignment of community engagement with established higher education frameworks.

Additionally, all participants pointed to the apparent mismatch between the present-day culture of neoliberal academia and the ethos of (especially transformative and innovative) civic engagement. There was broad agreement that there are bureaucratic and systemic obstacles to fostering community engagement in higher education. Furthermore, all

participants shared a similar perception of the dominant discourses of universities, with many pointing to their neoliberal nature and naming phenomena such as, among others, revenue generation and economic priorities, conservatism, competition, and performance and productivity demands. These discourses were identified by the majority of participants as counter-normative to the ethos of their practice. In terms of civic engagement policy, a broad agreement among participants was expressed in terms of perceiving it as enabling, and there was a general attitude of pragmatism towards policy.

Finally, I presented the various approaches the practitioners I spoke to adopt to navigate and negotiate the (sometimes hostile) structures of the higher education sector in order to promote community engagement within it. Here, participants discussed the ways in which they often exploit the institutional preoccupation with performativity and projecting a public image of a 'good' university and utilising university communications, marketing and public relations activities to advance their work. Nevertheless, some concerns about universities potentially concealing their harmful practices and culture by presenting themselves as 'engaged' in public were also mentioned. Additionally, the women I spoke to discussed how they lean into, albeit at times subversively, the dominant neoliberal rhetoric of the higher education system to further promote community engagement; however, an approach of resistance to these discourses was also mentioned.

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The previous two chapters presented the research findings. I explored the experiences of participants in terms of becoming and being civic engagement practitioners, their professional identities, and their ways of working. I also captured their thoughts on the present-day academy and its main discourses, and the ways in which they engage with the wider university and the policy on civic engagement. I presented the ways in which civic engagement practitioners operate within higher education structures that they themselves identify as at times unfavourable to their work. In this chapter, I synthesise all of these aspects and analyse these findings and discuss their implications. Through my theoretical lenses, I also consider how these research findings fit with what we already know about civic engagement practice from the literature I selected and reviewed, and how they reflect the issues emerging from it.

8.1 Reminder of the Research Aim and Research Question

When I started this study I set out to broaden our knowledge of civic engagement practice, and to provide a snapshot of the experiences of female community engagement practitioners in the present-day academy. In order to meet this aim, this study was guided by the following research question:

> *In what ways can civic engagement practice learn from the experiences of purposefully-selected female civic engagement practitioners as they navigate present-day policies and practices of neoliberal-patriarchal university environments?*

My research is strongly positioned in the context of what I argue is a neoliberal-patriarchal academy, with a society shaped by intersecting modes of power and oppression - something that I have examined throughout this study and analysed in detail in sections 1.6 and 1.7. In seeking to address the research question above I have explored, through selected literature, the contemporary debates and tensions within civic engagement that emerge from the landscape of practice. I have discussed the various interpretations and orientations of civic engagement and presented community engagement practice as

happening on the continuum from transactional/service-oriented (and therefore domesticating), to transformative/social-justice oriented (and therefore liberatory). I have also argued that critical and transformative civic engagement shares many principles of feminist scholarship, and that the practice itself, at least in Ireland, is heavily feminised. The study has found that how the models of community engagement translate into practice in higher education depends on a range of macro-factors, including national and institutional contexts, traditions and policies, as well as micro-factors, such as ethical and moral commitments of individual scholars and practitioners. The review of relevant literature has also shown that there are various actors that our universities engage with from the private, public, and civic realms. Drawing both from my professional experience of working in the field of civic engagement and from literature, I presented the various ways of operationalising community engagement, and traced the evolution of the movement in Ireland. The latter in particular is illustrated with examples and recollections from my time working with Campus Engage Ireland. The review of selected Irish policies showed that policy can serve as an enabling and empowering mechanism for civic engagement practitioners, but at the same time a way to subdue and co-opt the practice to the 'neoliberal ways of being'. In similar vein, this study has demonstrated that while the broader legitimacy and embeddedness of community engagement practice within the higher education sector can ensure its greater impact, it also carries the risk of not only being appropriated by a neoliberal-patriarchal academy, but also of maintaining and perpetuating the oppressive socio-political structures our universities participate in. Throughout this research I have also shown that the rules of the neoliberal-patriarchal academy can often be counter-normative to transformative community engagement, leading to its marginalisation.

8.2 Contribution of This Study

This research contributes to the growing body of literature about civic engagement in higher education in Ireland. It expands our understanding of the community engagement practice, as experienced by those working on the ground.

Much of literature about the area, especially generated in Ireland, focusses on the models, management, and leadership in civic engagement, as well as relevant policy. Additionally, publications presenting case studies and various national and international perspectives also exist. However, much less was known about civic engagement practitioners in Ireland, how they think, what they feel and how they work.

The originality of this research thus lies first of all in its focus on civic engagement practitioners, issues emerging from their practice, and their experiences. Their voices might not always be heard in the higher education system, and this study aims to elevate them. Secondly, this research offers a new way of looking at civic engagement practice through a critical feminist lens, by strongly contextualising it within the neoliberal and patriarchal higher education system and by placing it on the continuum from service/charity-oriented to transformative and liberatory.

By portraying the experiences of civic engagement practitioners and locating them within the context of a patriarchal-neoliberal academia, this study expands our knowledge about community engagement practice in Ireland. As a former university civic engagement professional, my hope is that this research will support those working on the ground in higher education community engagement and that the voices and experiences of the participants of this study will resonate with their peers, as well as their advocates and champions.

8.3 On the Civic Engagement Continuum - Discussion on Findings

8.3.1 What We Do Is Who We Are

The first lesson we learn from community engagement practitioners concerns their shared perspectives on the world, and commonalities of their experiences. Research participants talked about their journeys into civic engagement, as well as their motivations for doing the work. I was struck by how profoundly the women's professional choices and ways of becoming and being have been influenced, shaped and informed by their personal experiences and values. This notion is broadly reflected in the existing literature. Star

Plaxton-Moore (2021: 32), for instance, notes that the work of community engagement professionals "is infused with the theories and experiences acquired through our formal educational and professional trajectories and informal epistemological traditions." This certainly was expressed by the practitioners (in section 6.1), as they spoke of their family upbringing, their own educational experiences that were often transformative, as well as their experiences of incongruity when working in careers and areas that did not resonate with their values. Their wish for alignment of their own values, and the values represented in their professional practice also emerged. The participants expressed a desire to be whole and to integrate their mind and soul with their work activities. To borrow from Mena & Vaccaro (2014: 61), this research demonstrates that community and civic engagement is not only what the research participants do, but also who they are as people.

To continue, I therefore ask: who are the practitioners I spoke to as people; what do they believe in; and what have we learnt about their motivations? As noted in section 1.2, Dostillo & Perry (2017: 6-7), discuss that civic engagement practitioners often have a set of shared orientations and ethical values that bring them to the work and enable them to operate. This aligns with my own research findings as reflected in my conversations with the participants. Their journeys to civic and community engagement shine a light on the motivations and values of the practitioners in the area, and there is a sense of a shared set of ethical and moral commitments, choices and beliefs among my interlocutors. This study evidences that the main motivators experienced by the participants are social justice, collectivism, solidarity, care, critical consciousness, belonging, equality, fairness, and the empowerment of young people they work with.

What this research also documents is that the participants primarily believe in the social, civic and consciousness raising potential that our higher education system can achieve through community engagement. This study evidences a strong sense of purpose to further the civic commitments of higher education that ignite the women to do their work in academia. This shared commitment to education as a vehicle for social justice chimes with Plaxton-Moore (2021: 31), who also writes that in her professional experience, civic

engagement practitioners have a strong desire for their work to be impactful and meaningful - something that is also confirmed by this research findings.

But what is the relationship between these commitments and university policies and practices? What happens when they come into contact with the way the neoliberal-patriarchal academy operates? And what are the implications and learnings for civic engagement practice? It is certainly uplifting and hopeful to see the ethical stance of community engagement practitioners. However, I am reminded about Sarah Jaffe's (2021) examination of work 'not loving you back' and her words of caution for those who hold strong and highly principled beliefs about the purpose of their work. Jaffe writes that people who work in non-profit, cause-based, value-based or care realms (as, I argued, civic engagement often is) are frequently expected to be propelled by their passion and beliefs rather than recognition (monetary or otherwise), and to labour "purely out of selfless (...) love" (2021: 219). This research documents that those working in community engagement indeed do so from an ethically principled position based on their strong belief in the social and civic purpose of higher education. Therefore, Jaffe's comments are particularly important in the context of the invisibility and marginalisation of (largely feminised) civic engagement practice, as well as the lack of funding and recognition for community engagement work within individual institutions and the wider higher education sector identified by research participants. Can the practitioners' beliefs and values sustain them in such an environment?

Secondly, regarding the neoliberal-patriarchal nature of the present-day higher education sector (see section 1.7), it is worth interrogating how the values that the community engagement professionals hold can fare in an academy where individualism, siloisation, competition, elitism, privilege, carelessness, selfishness, and a deliberate breaking down of connections prevail. We now know that there are challenges to the social and civic purpose of higher education enduring alongside the economic and revenue-generation priorities in our universities. What is also crucial for civic engagement practice is to ensure that the practitioners' work based on the values of social-justice, solidarity, togetherness, belonging and equality does not serve as a potential smoke-screen for unjust practices at universities,

or is not used by the neoliberal-patriarchal academy as a facade hiding the lack of changes to put the social and civic purpose at the heart of the institution. Throughout this research I have emphasised that civic engagement work requires significant effort, perseverance, labour (often invisible), and a capacity for going unrecognised, while the structures of the present-day academy are strong. This research evidences some concern about civic engagement practitioners' beliefs thriving within the neoliberal-patriarchal environment of the present-day higher education. However, it also brings hope that the ethical ideals expressed by those working on the ground can indeed survive within the university. This can be seen through the creative ways the participants use to find cracks in the dominant structures and discourses of the present-day university, and how they revitalise by building alliances and connections with their peers and those who can elevate their voices and champion their practice.

8.3.2 Commitments to Transformative Civic Engagement and Active Citizenship

A second lesson we learn from the community engagement practitioners concerns their commitments to the transformative potential and purpose of the practice. The notion of transformation through and in education featured throughout the research conversations with the practitioners. We spoke of our own transformative educational experiences, the transformation for students participating in civic engagement activities, and the potential of community engagement to transform society and the higher education system itself.

Throughout this study, and in chapter three in particular, I discussed the different models and orientations of civic engagement in higher education, looking at the spectrum of transactional and charity/service (e.g. Enos & Morton, 2003: 24-25; Boland, 2011) to transformative (e.g. Boland, 2014; Jacoby et al, 2003; Verjee, 2010). I argued that transformative civic engagement is what practitioners should strive to move towards; however, it is often difficult to achieve, due to, among many other factors, academic bureaucracy, the lack of time and resources, and the perception of critical civic engagement as too political and a threat to power structures both in the academy and wider society. While the practitioners I spoke to represent a range of views on orientations to civic engagement in higher education, this research shows that these are, at least in theory,

generally situated within the transformative and critical paradigm, rather than merely promoting the transactional or service-oriented interactions. This research makes clear that there is a desire to keep transformation at the core of civic engagement practice.

Similarly, the participants display a range of views on how community engagement can foster student civic learning but again the majority of them articulate that the focus of their community engagement efforts tends to be more on fostering critical active citizenship, despite the fact that, according to some scholars (e.g. Mitchell & Soria, 2018: 3; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004a: 242), it is an approach that is perhaps the least enacted in education. This research demonstrates that the practitioners wish to enable their students to become active members of society, who are attuned to the needs of their communities and engaged in individual or collective efforts to address those needs. This study also reveals that most participants earnestly want their students to develop a more critical consciousness that could lead to the challenging of the accepted societal and political norms and assumptions, and to pay close attention to power relations in societies and the structural causes of inequalities. This could be linked with the fact that most, if not all, practitioners I interviewed identify that social justice and equality are the ideals they value highly.

Overall, this research documents that the practitioners believe in the potential of civic engagement to transform individuals, institutions and societies. This aligns with the literature on civic engagement emerging from the field of Women's and Gender Studies. Mitchell (2013: 263-264), for instance, emphasises that civic engagement can be a vehicle for developing critical consciousness around pressing societal inequalities and injustices, learning the ways of addressing them, empowering communities to devise ways of tackling their own concerns, and promoting transformation of higher education teaching, learning and research approaches. To the last point, this research also argues that learning with and in communities can be a challenge to the existing academic perceptions of knowledge and knowers. As I have shown throughout this study, transformative civic engagement practice values the knowledge, expertise and experiences coming from the community, and considers them equal to knowledge produced by academic 'experts'. Additionally, critical

transformative engagement practice is based on an asset-based rather than deficit-based view of the community. This can pose a challenge to the notion of supremacy of authorised knowledge, which I earlier named as traditionally patriarchal and masculine.

Again, I ask what happens when those commitments to a more radical model of civic engagement encounter neoliberal and patriarchal university policies and practices? As noted before, the critical and transformational community engagement, where the orientation is on social justice, activism, challenging unequal social structures, dialogue and reflection, and where students actively engage in praxis can be seen as threatening to power structures in the academy (and society) and hence might be difficult to embed more widely, and risky to practice. Additionally, as expressed in literature and as this research further demonstrates, such work is labour-intensive, time consuming, and often counter-normative to the traditional academic practices.

This study shows that the above challenges may lead those working in community engagement to adopt a more tempered and pragmatic approach to their practice; in other words, to move towards the middle of the civic engagement continuum. This could entail, for instance, community engagement professionals turning their attention to fostering less 'anti-foundational' good active citizenship traits among students, such as honesty, civility, kindness, respect for others, commitment to one's community, responsibility, or willingness to contribute time, skills and resources to alleviate social ills. This, however, will not necessarily be sufficient to effectively challenge the root causes of social inequalities and injustices. Additionally, adopting practices located more to the middle of the civic engagement spectrum may entail simply 'providing opportunities' for out-of-classroom learning in communities, and exposure to issues related to inequality and injustice. Here, there is a threat that just exposing students to communities that our universities frequently position as 'disadvantaged others' (Dean, 2019: 25), and a focus on university-community interaction that is unexamined and uninterrogated may, according to some scholars, reinforce the power and privilege of higher education (Clark-Taylor, 2017).

Finally, questions remain on whether the more transactional and service/charity focussed civic engagement model can truly affect social change, or if it implies compliance with and obedience to the existing unequal social norms and structures and a lack of challenge to the unjust status quo. Taking the above into consideration, there is scope to examine the ways in which community engagement professionals, given their commitments to critical and liberatory practice, can be supported to move towards the transformational end of its spectrum - for instance by university leadership, policy, or networks such as Campus Engage.

8.3.3 Holistic and Engaged Learning as a Disruption of Academic Norms

This research also highlights the centrality of holistic and engaged learning in civic engagement practice, and the practitioners' commitment to community and student flourishing. A deep love and care for students, for communities, for learning and for the wellbeing of our society permeate much of what the practitioners told me. This research demonstrates that all these seem to be positioned firmly at the core of civic engagement work as identified by those working on the ground. What emerges from our conversations is the idea that civic engagement in higher education could potentially serve as a vehicle for creating, or carving out spaces where everyone - lecturers, coordinators, students and community partners - are valued, nurtured, cared for/about, are an equal part of the learning and growing process, and where all actors involved have an opportunity to flourish.

Comments from participants on their pedagogical perspectives remind me strongly of how bell hooks (1994; 2003) advocates for teaching and learning in higher education. The practitioners discussed the importance of student centeredness, acknowledging the presence of all actors involved, recognising teachers, students and community partners as whole humans, and in this way nurturing their emotional and holistic growth. It was clear that they wish to bring this wholeness to the classroom with them. These women emphasise the importance of minding the wellbeing of everyone involved in the teaching and learning process and the need for cultivating reciprocal, equal relationships and honest critical dialogue between educators, learners, as well as community partners. Furthermore,

insights from several participants also chime with bell hooks' (1994, 2003) thoughts on the emotional dimensions of learning, and the need for educators to provide spaces for students where they can express their feelings, engage in difficult conversations and negotiate their own learning.

But how do these commitments to holistic and engaged learning and human flourishing interact with the present-day neoliberal-patriarchal university policies and practices? The pedagogical principles of caring, engaged and holistic learning are perhaps not too common in the current frequently careless, hectic and performance-focussed neoliberal-patriarchal academy, where, according to hooks (1984: 7) lecture rooms have become places of alienation. As Edel Randles and Bernie Quillinan (2014: 38) - two Irish civic engagement champions - put it, in our higher education system "What we often forget in necessary conversations about outcomes, retention, and graduation is that learning can fulfil us - providing a sense of purpose, connecting us with others, and helping us gain perspective." This certainly chimes with my own research findings. Additionally, according to bell hooks (2003: 91) educators who care usually find themselves at odds with their institutions, where education often serves to reinforce the prevalent culture, which I name as neoliberal and patriarchal - and this research also demonstrates that the nature of civic engagement work is often counter-normative to the present-day university rhetoric. Traits such as care, nurture, empathy, communality, relationality or compassion - identified in this research as important to civic engagement practice - are not innately gendered. However, they often are attributed to women. Given that community engagement practice in Ireland is heavily feminised, there is a risk of reinforcing the idea that caring and nurturing is fundamentally women's work, and therefore in a subordinate position in a patriarchal academy. Additionally, care, nurture and commitments to flourishing are often stereotypically seen as private and familial, and hence having no place or value in public realms, such as the higher education system. Taking all this into consideration, this study is important in our interrogation of whether the caring and nurturing (and therefore 'feminine' and 'female') nature of civic engagement work contributes to the marginalisation and devaluing of the practice in a patriarchal university.

However, even from its marginal position, the caring and nurturing ways the civic engagement practitioners work with students, staff and community partners can perhaps disturb the current higher education culture. Through working from the perspective of holistic and engaged pedagogy, civic engagement practitioners can show that a different way of teaching, learning and research in the academy is possible, even if it is potentially disruptive to the accepted norms of higher education. Civic engagement spaces can be where there is excitement about learning - perhaps excitement that can be "viewed as potentially disruptive" in academia (hooks, 1984: 7).

At the same time, however, this research shows that working from the perspective of a holistic and engaged pedagogy takes time and commitment on the part of all actors - practitioners, educators, students and community partners. Drawing from my own experience at DCU in the Community, and the experiences of the participants, nurturing relationships, building connections and providing spaces for growth and self-actualisation for all involved is challenging work in a hectic and workload-heavy third level education environment. Creating a transformative learning community where everyone benefits and flourishes can be time-consuming and, potentially, emotionally draining.

8.3.4 The Trouble with Liminality of Civic Engagement

Another lesson from this research concerns the problematic nature of the liminality of community engagement work. This often leads to the practice being misunderstood. Indeed, while compiling this study, I often found myself clarifying what exactly university civic engagement entailed, how it was operationalised, who the students and community partners the research participants worked with were, where they were located, and how their work was different from, for instance, access and widening participation. All these seemed self-explanatory to me as a person who worked in civic engagement for over a decade; however, I realised they may not be clear for other people.

This study documents the challenges of location of community engagement within the wider university as they emerge from the conversations with research participants. Here, Star Plaxton-Moore (2021: 29-31) paints a landscape of civic engagement affiliations in

the US that is not unlike the Irish one. In both countries, physical infrastructure for community engagement activities varies in different HEIs, and they can often be offered through a dispersed networks of, among others, individual activist scholars, individual departments and schools with a stronger community engagement ethos, chaplaincy representatives, or student clubs and societies. While DCU has a dedicated off-campus centre (DCU in the Community), most civic engagement outfits and offices in Ireland are located on campuses, for instance UL Engage or UCD in the Community, and additionally some might be integrated within other structures, such as access and widening participation (as is the case at TU Dublin), careers or student support services, student affairs, support and development units, or equality, diversity and inclusion outfits.

Based on the research conversations I was prompted to reflect on how DCU in the Community's location outside of the university walls affected the perception of our work both in the community and in our institution. While our location was a strong indication to the local community that the university is reaching out, I often felt that by not being located on the main campus, we might have missed some opportunities for networking, making connections with other university staff, visibility and perhaps better embeddedness. I would argue that it perhaps also reinforced the idea that civic engagement is something that happens 'out there', in that one building, office or centre, rather than across the university.

The affiliations and reporting structures for civic engagement offices and units are as varied as the work that they perform, which can include serving

> multiple constituencies, including students, faculty, and community partners by providing educational and professional development programming, establishing and stewarding relationships, and creating and implementing policies and procedures (Plaxton-Moore, 2021: 31)

The diversity of the civic and community engagement infrastructures in Irish HEIs are reflective of the multifaceted and hybrid roles of practitioners in this area, as also identified by the research participants. What the findings reveal is that civic engagement practitioners

seem to occupy the in-between spaces - something Dostilio & Perry (2017) name as the hybridised nature of community engagement roles crossing over the administrative, leadership, advocacy, pastoral, research and scholarship, teaching and student support realms. The participants of this research often pointed to the challenges of these nebulous roles and identified them as being misunderstood, and not fitting in in the rigid hierarchies and divisions in the higher education sector. This is significant as neoliberalism and patriarchy that permeate our universities, like any systems of oppression, are based on hierarchies and divisions, and anything disturbing these can be seen as a potential threat.

However, on a more positive note, in terms of implications for practice, I agree with Dottolo & Tillery (2015: 133) that being able to draw from and synthesise these various perspectives is an opportunity to be a stronger problem-solver, communicator and connector. As I demonstrated in section 1.7, siloisation is one of the features of a neoliberal academy, and hence, I would argue that creating synergies and collaborations, as well as drawing from experiences from different parts of the academy can go counter to the prevalent academic norm. This chimes with the findings of Plaxton-Moore (2021: 33), who writes that civic engagement practitioners are "connecting campus with community in intentional and mutually beneficial ways, working across disciplinary silos to create cohesive institutional outreach, and weaving together multiple stakeholders into transformative relationships."

Given the liminality of the civic engagement realm, and a doubt expressed by some Irish scholars (e.g. Boland, 2012; Munck, 2010; Wynne, 2014) about whether the position of community engagement within academia is resolved, this research documents the insights the practitioners offer into the possible approaches to more firmly embedding it in the higher education system. Some practitioners note that rather than community engagement being a separate third pillar or mission, it would be ideal for it to be seen as underpinning all university activities. This, I argue, would probably be quite difficult to achieve, given what emerged as a peripheral, marginal and devalued nature of civic engagement, and as it would require a significant institutional cultural shift. However, several research

participants articulated the possible ways of making community engagement a more definite part of the core mission of Irish higher education institutions.

One such idea was to create a network of champions for civic engagement in each school, faculty or unit, perhaps focussing on supporters from the upper echelons of our universities, such as Deans. Some participants expressed that this would ensure the inclusion of community engagement on school/faculty agendas, making it more visible and sustainable. This idea, something that Martha referred to as "growing tentacles", is also reflected in literature where, for instance, Avila (2012: 42-43) discusses how crucial faculty connectors and supporters have been in her institution for, first of all, championing civic engagement as a rigorous and legitimate pedagogical practice, and second of all, ensuring the continuation of community engagement work in the times of changing leadership or reorganisation of university architecture. Additionally, several practitioners advocated weaving community engagement activities into existing university programmes and curricula. To paraphrase Mary's words - academics could look into what they are already teaching or researching and treat it as the basis for introducing elements of civic engagement. This research also shows that having civic engagement activities included in the promotion criteria for higher education staff could make it more prominent and sustainable. Again, however, caution is needed with building community engagement into existing higher education frameworks, as this may inadvertently lead to its co-option to the dominant priorities of a neoliberal-patriarchal university that transformative civic engagement should be challenging (Dean et al, 2019; Costa & Leone, 2012a; Bocci, 2015).

8.3.5 The Wider Analysis of Higher Education Sector Culture, Practices and Policies

What this research also evidences is that the civic engagement practitioners hold similar views when it comes to the wider analysis of universities and their culture. The voices of those working on the ground reveal that there is a broad recognition of the prevalence of neoliberal and patriarchal rhetoric in our higher education system. The dominant higher education discourses expressed by the participants comprise, among others, competition, bureaucracy, rigidness, hyper-productivity, individualism, and time pressure. Most participants also note the current focus on revenue generation, profit-making and the

market-orientation of the third level education sector. While some practitioners feel that universities attempt to be committed to their social and civic mission, ultimately the economic priorities rank higher. What emerges from our conversations is a picture of a wider university sector as conservative and risk averse. Additionally, some practitioners perceive the current prevalent institutional culture at universities as too challenging to disrupt. Here, however, some hope can taken from Barnett and Guzman Valenzuela's (2022: 758) observation that in the recent context of emerging human rights and social and climate justice movements (corresponding with what transformative civic engagement efforts can address) universities may be "interrogating their own practices, in admissions, pedagogy, curricula and student assessment."

This research also demonstrates that there is a broad acknowledgement of the difficulties that women experience in the academy. For instance, the participants raised the lack of senior female leadership, and the avoidance of service and other low promotability tasks by men. The feminisation of civic engagement could be problematic in that culture. To the last point, this research shows that civic engagement can be seen to bear the mark of social reproduction work. As I noted in section 8.3.3, care, nurture and a commitment to flourishing (often associated with reproductive labour) are substantive in community engagement practice. In addition, similarly to the labour of social reproduction, feminised civic engagement work is also often invisible, devalued and unrecognised, as emerges from interviews with participants, and illustrated by universities placing less value on civic and community engagement in promotional criteria for university staff (see sections 4.4.1 and 4.6). Yet, as research participants note, it is work that carries a significant emotional burden. Civic engagement can be seen as a part of, borrowing from Arruzza et al (2019: 21), the "people-making" work of education focussed on shaping attitudes, behaviours, and skills. Given the profit-making orientation of the neoliberal university, this research is important in examining whether the feminised community engagement work of "people-making" is considered inferior to revenue generation priorities of the higher education system.

To this point, another lesson for civic engagement practice is to interrogate what kind of university graduate we wish to "make"? This study is important in our interrogation of how we can ensure that graduates are not only student-consumers, or student-workers equipped with professional skills and marketable degrees (and hence replenishing the neoliberal workforce), but also citizens and activists attuned to the issues of inequality and injustice. As I argue throughout the study, civic engagement practitioners should be mindful not to reproduce the existing unequal and unjust social order, but work to transform it through critical civic engagement.

This research brings to light the difficulties in making civic and community engagement flourish in a risk-averse, conservative, neoliberal-patriarchal environment. It evidences that most practitioners experience tensions and dissonance between their own values, beliefs and purpose of work, and those of their institutions. This issue is also articulated in some literature, where Dostilio & Perry (2017: 12-13), for instance, state that civic engagement professionals "may face unsettling dissonance when our commitment to certain communities and ways of being in the world runs counter to the foci and norms of higher education." This research also reveals a sense of frustration among some practitioners about how the dominant cultural values of the higher education system run counter to what they feel third level education purpose should be. An implication of doing civic and community engagement work in an environment that seems not conducive to it could be an increased sense of disempowerment, fatigue and isolation among practitioners, which can further lead to hamper their efforts.

Additionally, in Chapter Four I outlined that while both Campus Engage, and the *Hunt Report* (HEA, 2011) called for more recognition and centrality for civic engagement, not much progress seems to have been made in over a decade. This research further documents the concerns that while universities may, publicly and internally, pledge support to civic engagement policy, it may not entail much tangible action, especially in terms of promoting and rewarding community engagement work or changing the dominant higher education culture. A worry was also expressed by practitioners that if civic engagement activities are recognised and publicised, it can be simply done to performatively project an image of a 'good' university, without much action and effort to change its culture. In other

words, this research demonstrates that in terms of policy, universities may still, to borrow from Sara Ahmed again (2007: 590), do the document, rather than do the doing.

While some scepticism about the neoliberal nature of national and institutional civic engagement policies was expressed by the research participants; overall this research shows that they nevertheless appear welcoming of policy. There was a broad consensus among the practitioners that policy developments can be a step in the right direction. Policy is generally seen by the participants as enabling and legitimising - providing practitioners with a high-level mandate for continuing their work. It is also perceived as generally binding universities to their social and civic mission commitments; however, we now know that this commitment can only be at a symbolic and performative level.

Additionally, this research shows that there are some concerns that the quality of civic engagement work could be somewhat lost among the quantitative performance indicators developed for the area in Ireland. It is clear that some research participants are eager to tell the stories of transformations - of students, communities, themselves and their institutions, and see the qualitative element of capturing community engagement efforts as important. This research further shows that while policy can be beneficial, we also need to be mindful of its double-edged sword nature, where policy can serve as a neoliberal tool for monitoring performance, accountability, compliance, 'value for money', and for promoting competition for resources in civic engagement.

8.3.6 Disrupting the Academy or Being Exhausted by It?

Another lesson we learn from the experiences of civic engagement practitioners is that they view civic engagement practice as innovative, different and provocative but sometimes misunderstood or resisted in a conservative third level education system, despite it being enshrined in policy. This research also documents creativity, flexibility and inventiveness as some of the characteristics of community engagement work.

What happens when those innovative and creative ways of working come into contact with higher education policies and practices? This study shows that community engagement

practitioners can disturb the existing university norms and, borrowing from Martha, continue to provoke the university to think differently. This finding chimes with Catherine Orr's (2011: 20) observation that community engagement in higher education can sometimes disrupt the dominant epistemological discourses in the academy. At the same time however, this research documents concerns whether a practice that is marginalised and largely invisible can cause major shifts in university culture, and at what cost to the practitioners themselves. Many participants of this study point to procedural and systemic challenges of further embedding civic engagement in the higher education system, as well as the lack of support and recognition. This finding aligns with what Saltmarsh & Hartley (2011: 23) note, namely that creative actions that change and reframe educational and scholarship practices may not be supported or rewarded within the culture of the academy.

Additionally, in the context of the neoliberal-patriarchal university, we now know how labour intensive the civic and community engagement work is - as the participants expressed throughout our conversations. This resonates with findings by Guarino & Borden (2017: 673) that the role involves internal and external service. The former includes, among others, administrative, human resources, supervision, marketing, or programme development duties. The latter comprises activities related to off-campus work with various communities and carries a significant load. The civic engagement practitioners strive to create connected learning communities allowing all participants - students, external partners, and educators - to flourish, and where each party's contribution and experience is acknowledged in the process. At the same time, the research shows that the contribution and experience of civic and community engagement practitioners themselves often goes unacknowledged and unrecognised in the academy. Here, to paraphrase Antonio et al (2000: 388), 'service' activities, both internal and external, can remain marginalised in the academe, because they are usually done by marginalised faculty, for example women, or people of colour. Heavy workloads did not stop people articulating not only the love and joy they felt for their work, but also the intensity of their labour and the time commitment required that, unfortunately, was not always visible. Here, I am again reminded about Sarah Jaffe's "labor-of-love ethic, where we're expected to

enjoy work for its own sake" (2021: 16) and that "too much love will cost you" (ibid: 73), which could be words of caution to civic engagement practitioners.

8.3.7 Surviving the System: Exploiting Performativity, Leaning into Dominant Discourses and Resistance

This research confirms that much civic engagement practice in Ireland is underpinned by strong ethical commitments to social justice, equality, holistic engaged learning, connectedness, transformation and relationship building. It documents the challenges of the liminality and boundary spanning nature of community engagement, which may lead to its marginalisation and invisibility. Additionally, this study shows how the prevailing rhetoric in the current higher education sector may often run counter to civic engagement discourses. But what does the research reveal about the ways the practitioners operate and advance their efforts and agendas in this higher education environment which may seem hostile and have differing purposes and priorities? While the participants' commitments are to a more radical and transformational model of civic engagement, this research shows that their practice on the ground is more tempered, pragmatic and moderate.

What we now know is that the participants have a strong recognition and awareness of what matters in the higher education sector. They understand the hierarchies and power flows in the system, and in many cases identified these structures as problematic or unjust. A lesson we learn here from the experiences of the participants, and their relationship with university policies and practices, is that leaning into, or exploiting, the existing features, characteristics and discourses of the higher education institutions can be used as a way to advance civic engagement work. Some participants, for instance, identify that branding, marketing and public image matters to their institutions. They recognise that some HEIs may wish to project an image of an 'engaged' university to the outside world, and that it can sometimes be done in a performative way. Therefore, a response from some participants is to exploit institutional performativity by utilising public relations and communications channels to make community engagement work more visible. Other participants note that the discourse of competition - inter- or intra-institutional - features heavily in the neoliberal-patriarchal higher education sector, and they suggest working in

ways that exploit this rhetoric to their advantage. Another way in which civic engagement practitioners work to incrementally place civic engagement more firmly on the institutional agenda is through trying to attract funding and grants, again, exploiting the dominant financial and revenue-generation discourse of a neoliberal university.

Overall, this research reveals an attitude of pragmatism rather than idealism among the research participants. On the one hand, they are highly principled and committed to their guiding ideals of social justice, equality, solidarity and transformation, and experience discomfort stemming from the clash of their values with those prevailing in the higher education sector. On the other hand, however, most practitioners have resigned themselves to accept that the dominant cultural influences in the academy are perhaps too prominent to fully shift. Hence, they adopt an approach of what Dostilio & Perry (2017: 13-14) call "tempered radicals" who may often find themselves either on the periphery of their organisation, or within institutions whose values conflict with their own. Tempered radicals actively challenge structures they perceive as unjust; however, they tend to do this in a moderate and incremental way, focussing their efforts on the realms they can actually influence and building support to create wider cultural change (*ibid*: 13). Rather than challenging the whole system, tempered radicals focus on finding cracks in it and trying to influence where and who they can. This research shows that you can work within the system, but exploit its strengths and weaknesses to your advantage to make incremental changes. This entails being both compliant and subversive. Again, this research is important in our interrogation of whether such ways of working within the system, even if practitioners exploit it to their advantage, simply support and maintain the power structures in the sector that go against their values. This study also encourages us to examine what leaning into the dominant discourses in the academy means to the need for integrity as expressed by the research participants, and whether this integrity is compromised.

While, as this research shows, many civic engagement practitioners focus on working within the structures, the ways in which they revitalise by finding community is perhaps a small act of resistance against the system. Fostering collegiality, love, joy, care, and support - for oneself, students, communities, and colleagues - is a way of protesting the

system. After all, to paraphrase Audrey Lorde (in Sara Ahmed, 2017: 239) - care can be an act of warfare. It also needs to be noted that an ability to simply exist in a system that is often hostile to your values, ideals, principles and ways of working, that delegates you to a peripheral position and subordinates your work, can be an act of resilience and resistance. This aligns with Sara Ahmed's (2017: 239) words that "survival is a radical action" and "to survive in a system is to survive the system." This research reveals that the pragmatic, incremental and somewhat tamed ways in which the practitioners navigate the higher education system is a way to survive. The way the participants manoeuvre through the sector entails carving out spaces where they can work towards change but at the same time feel safe. The themes of persistence, perseverance, resilience, inventiveness, creativity and adaptability in civic engagement also emerge strongly throughout this study - and this can be seen as the practitioners' "refusal to not matter" (Ahmed, 2017: 240). Finally, having hope that change might come is another feeling running through the research conversations, which can in itself be resistance.

8.4 Concluding Remarks - Circling Back to the Research Question

This study was grounded in the research question concerning the ways civic engagement practice can learn from the experiences of purposefully-selected female civic engagement practitioners as they navigate present-day policies and practices of neoliberal-patriarchal university environments. This research mapped the different orientations of community engagement, placing them on a spectrum from transformational/critical to transactional/service/charity, and argued for the former. This study explored what the values and ways of working of civic engagement practitioners are, and what happens when they encounter the policies and practices of what this research shows to be a neoliberal-patriarchal academy. This research also documents the decisions practitioners make on approaches to ensure community engagement practice can exist and survive within the present-day higher education system. As this research focuses on the experiences of purposefully-selected female civic engagement practitioners, further research into the area could have a broader focus.

This research evidences a broad support for a more radical, liberatory and transformative model of civic engagement. This is demonstrated, firstly, by the way the practitioners spoke about their values and ethical commitments, such as, among others, social-justice and equality, human flourishing, a belief in the social and civic purpose of higher education, as well as the potential of community engagement for consciousness raising. Secondly, it is visible in the way the practitioners do their work, which centres around holistic engaged pedagogy, and an emphasis on care, nurture, collectiveness, connectedness and relationship building. As I argue throughout this study, and in section 3.6 in particular, the principles of the critical and transformative model of civic engagement that research participants express commitments to share many similarities with feminist and Women's and Gender Studies scholarship. These disciplines, from their inception, have focussed on praxis, social justice and challenging power structures in society and in the academy. The transformative and feminist civic engagement, coupled with its boundary spanning nature, can therefore be seen as a threat to the existing higher education norms, divisions and hierarchies, and hence sidelined.

Despite the practitioners' commitments to a radical and liberatory community engagement model, this research evidences that at the same time much of civic engagement practice on the ground tends to be more traditional and pragmatic. This can be seen, for instance, in the wider acceptance and welcoming of national and institutional civic engagement policy, which, as I noted in chapter four, and as the participants themselves recognise, can serve as a tool to co-opt transformative and critical civic engagement into the dominant rhetoric of the academy. The tempered practice is also demonstrated in the way the participants work towards incremental changes in their institutions and the wider higher education sector within its structures, and often through strategically exploiting and leaning into its dominant discourses. In this way, this research interrogates whether working *within* the system can be a way of gradually working *against* it, or whether leaning-into the system entails perpetuating it. This study documents that the radical commitments of the community engagement practitioners appear to be tempered by their recognition that the current culture of the higher education system, often clashing with the culture of community engagement they advocate, is too strong to shift, especially from a peripheral

and marginalised position. The tensions and frustrations stemming from the incongruence of the practitioners' values with the prevailing discourses in the present-day university are documented in this research. This study shows that working in civic engagement entails being at times exhausted and disempowered by the system. To further embed community engagement practice, practitioners may at times be compliant with the system that frustrates them. This leaning into, or exploiting the existing university discourses may entail a risk of taming and co-option of civic engagement practice, hence contributing to maintaining systemic inequalities. Therefore, this research is important for potential future examination of how best to support practitioners located more on the tempered and transactional end of the civic engagement continuum to move towards a more transformational practice.

This research also reveals that to be a community engagement practitioner is to ground your practice in the principles and ethics of equality, solidarity, collaboration, and social justice, and to strive for integrity and transformation. What is important for the research participants is to create conditions for flourishing for students and the community and to underpin their practice with care and nurture. This study shows that these traits - for instance, nurture, care, connectedness and relationality - while not in themselves gendered, can often be assigned to the 'female' realm, labelled as 'women's work' and therefore subordinated to the dominant priorities of a neoliberal-patriarchal academy. This is an important lesson for the largely feminised area of civic engagement. This research also offers words of caution for the value-based practice, namely that passion for and commitment to transformative civic engagement work may not be enough to sustain it without proper recognition, resourcing and visibility.

Furthermore, this research also demonstrates that civic engagement practice can be a "thorn in the side" of universities and provoke the academy to interrogate its operations and values and to act differently, with a social and civic mission more firmly at the core. In Sara's words, community engagement practice can help in "un-normalising the normal." Employing holistic engaged pedagogy principles in teaching, learning, research, and engagement, as advocated by the participants, can disrupt the rhetoric of carelessness,

alienation and disinterest that seems to permeate the neoliberal-patriarchal academy. Through cultivating and nourishing relationships with those inside and outside the university, civic engagement practice can disturb the discourses of heartlessness, individualism, and siloisation. This research reveals that the modelling and encouraging of transformative civic engagement, can not only promote positive change among students, staff and society, but can potentially disrupt academic norms. Finally, despite the challenges of holding your values and position in a patriarchal-neoliberal academy that may be at odds with your morals and practice, it is possible to do so and, as shown by this research, the practitioners can find creative ways to do so. This simple act of surviving in an environment that marginalises and devalues your work is in itself an act of resistance.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval

Message

Subject:
Ethics Approval

Message:

Dear JOANNA WIKTORIA OZAROWSKA,

Your Ethics Review has been now been approved:

- Ethics Review ID: 2406869
- PI: Joanna Wiktoria Ozarowska
- Title: Universities that Care? Civic Engagement in Higher Education in Ireland through the Gender Lens (draft title)

Please login to RIS in order to view the application and review it.

Send At:
29/05/2020 11:39:22 AM

Appendix B: Information Sheet

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of the study

My name is Joanna Ozarowska, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University.

As part of the requirements for the Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education, I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr Camilla Fitzsimons.

The study proposes an exploration of the practice of civic engagement in higher education. It intends to document the experiences of women who are involved in civic engagement work in academia, as well as to build a picture of their practice.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve interviews and a focus group with six to ten women who are involved in civic engagement work in higher education in Ireland.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in the following:

- a group information session (face-to-face or virtual) with all other participants of the study, where all participants will have an opportunity to ask questions about the research purpose and process, the risks and benefits, or the workload and time commitment.
- a face-to-face (or online) interview, lasting up to 1 hour: The interview will be based around two questions concerning your experience as a woman in academia and as a civic engagement champion in academia.
- a repeated face-to-face (or online) interview, lasting up to 1 hour, which will be based on my written reflective account of our first conversation. This written reflective account will be sent to you in advance should you wish to read it ahead of the repeated interview
- a focus group (lasting 2-3 hours) with all participants where we will collectively reflect on the themes and issues that emerge from our research findings, as well as explore solutions for arising challenges.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part?

As you are an active member of Campus Engage Ireland network, with extensive experience in civic engagement work in academia, I believe your insights and expertise will assist me in gathering rich stories of civic engagement practice in third level education in Ireland. I am also especially interested in hearing stories from women civic engagement leaders. I believe that our dialogue and engaging with each other, as well as all research participants, will provide us all with a space for reflection on the environment we work in, our guiding principles and influences, as well as the challenges we face in our civic engagement practice.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up to the time of the submission of the doctoral thesis.

A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with the Campus Engage Ireland network, colleagues involved in the network, or myself. Your decision is completely voluntary and will not impact on any on-going or future joint projects we might collaborate on professionally.

What information will be collected?

- Initial face- to-face (or online) interview:
  - Qualitative data will be collected, audio-recorded, and possibly transcribed.
  - I will ask for your permission to record the interview and take notes.
  - The interview will be based around two questions concerning your experience as a woman in academia and as a civic engagement champion in academia.
  - Information collected will be anonymised, and I will ask you to select your own pseudonym.
  - The audio recording (or transcript, if transcription is used) of the conversation will be made available to you and I will welcome amendments, additions or deletions
  - I will also ask you for comments on the interview process and myself as the interviewer.

- Repeated face-to-face (or online) interview:
  - Qualitative data will be collected, audio-recorded, and possibly transcribed.
  - I will ask for your permission to record the interview and take notes.
  - The repeated interview will be based on my written reflective account of our first conversation. This written reflective account will be sent to you in advance should you wish to read it ahead of the repeated interview
  - Information collected will be anonymised, under the pseudonym you selected.
  - The audio recording (or transcript, if transcription is used) of the conversation will be made available to you and I will welcome amendments, additions or deletions

- I will also ask you for comments on the interview process and myself as the interviewer.

- Focus group:
  - Qualitative data will be collected.
  - The focus group might be audio recorded or captured through note taking, and artefacts produced during the focus group (e.g. flip chart notes, artistic outputs, action plans or other) might be photographed and used in the final thesis.
  - I will ask your permission to record data through recording, note-taking or photographing the artefacts.
  - If any passages or extracts from one-to-one interviews are used during the focus group, I will ensure that no utterances can be attributed to you specifically, unless you choose to disclose it yourself.
  - Please note that if Covid-19 restrictions on physical distancing and travel are still in place at the time of conducting this research, the focus group might be held in an online environment.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. If any passages or extracts from one-to-one interviews are used during the focus group, I will ensure that no utterances can be attributed to you specifically, unless you choose to disclose it yourself.

Hard copy Information Sheets/Consent Forms and data collected will be held securely in locked cabinets, locked rooms or rooms with limited access on MU campus. Electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by Joanna Ozarowska and Dr Camilla Fitzsimons.

If online/virtual space is utilised for research interactions, only the Maynooth University recommended software (Microsoft Teams) will be used.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

What will happen to the information which you give?

All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by the researcher (Joanna Ozarowska). Manual data will be

shredded confidentially and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by the researcher (Joanna Ozarowska) in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a doctoral thesis. It may also be presented at national and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part, however, if you have any concerns you would like to discuss, you can contact me.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of each interview and the focus group, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. You may contact my supervisor, Dr Camilla Fitzsimons, camilla.fitzsimons@mu.ie, if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Joanna Ozarowska, joanna.ozarowska.2019@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

I……..……. agree to participate in Joanna Ozarowska's research study titled *Universities that Care? Civic Engagement in Higher Education in Ireland through the Gender Lens*

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.
I am participating voluntarily.
I give permission for my interview with Joanna Ozarowska to be audio-recorded.
I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.
I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to the time of the submission of the doctoral thesis.
It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.
I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet.
I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below: **[Select/tick as appropriate]**

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview
I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview
I agree for my data to be used for further research projects
I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects
I agree for my data, once anonymised, to be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive

Signed…….....….....

Date…….....

Participant Name in block capitals ……...

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed…….....…….

Date…….....…….

Researcher Name in block capitals …….....……...

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for PI

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Introduction

1. Thank you for the consent form - any questions?
2. Recording - audio only, Quicktime and phone, upload on OneDrive & anonymised with your selected pseudonym, transcript can be sent
3. Today I just want to have a conversation around some themes that I hope to explore together, and I will be very much led by you. I hope the conversation will last for 45-60 minutes, and I will keep track of time.
4. We will have some time to reflect on this conversation and dig deeper during the second interview.

Your Story

1. Tell me a little bit on how you got where you are now professionally? What has been your professional journey to where you are?

Your Values

1. Tell me a little bit about your current role in civic engagement.
2. Why did you decide to practise in the area of civic engagement?
3. What are some values that guide you in your work?
4. How do these values fit into what your HEI is about?
5. What makes you happy about your work?
6. Any particular achievements, something that you are proud of?

Role of Universities

1. How do you see the role of universities in society?
2. What in your opinion universities are about? What is valued or not valued in present day university?
3. In your own experience - do you think civic engagement is truly the core/third mission of the university? Core or peripheral?

Challenges

1. What challenges have you experienced in your practice? Think of a time you were stuck. How did you overcome this?
2. What is the most time/labour consuming activity that you do in your daily practice?

Involvement with Campus Engage

1. Why did you get involved in Campus Engage? (additional work at national level, rather than just institution)

Being a Woman in Academia

1. What are some challenges for women in academia?
2. Has gender affected your career or career choices?
3. In your opinion and experience - are there more men or women doing civic engagement work? Why?

Supports

1. What are some institutional supports you received? Formal/non-formal? What supportive networks do you use? What have been some enablers in your work?
2. Where do you see yourself next in your career?

Me as an Interviewer

1. Is there anything else that you would like to add? Is there anything else I should be asking?
2. What was this interview like for you?