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Consortium of Higher
Education Researchers

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Call for proposals

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CHER2020

Engaged Universities: (De)constructing the Theory, Practice
and Culture of Engagement in Higher Education

The 33rd annual CHER
Conference is jointly organised by
the University of Rijeka (Croatia)
and NUI Galway (Ireland), with
their home cities both being
European Capitals of Culture
2020.

SEPTEMBER 2-4, 2020
RIJEKA/OPATIJA
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With an increasing focus on multifaceted missions for higher education institutions (HEIs), there is an international convergence of interest on issues about universities' role in a wider society. University-community partnerships and engagement have therefore

become progressively more prominent in national, regional and international forums of higher education. The objectives of such university/HEIs engagement are both to contribute and to create support from the public by connecting research, teaching and service to help tackle and solve community/societal problems, while contributing to capacity-building, sustainability, economic, environmental, social, civic and cultural development. This is why in particular the theory and practice of university community engagement is as rich and diverse as the historical, political, social, civic and cultural roots that have given rise to regions, nations and continents, and the formation of universities and higher education systems globally.

There is an increasing sense that universities/HEIs should be doing more to engage with various kinds of communities in the course of their activities. One of the challenges universities across the globe face and share is growing public apathy with what is seen to be universities' unresponsiveness to wicked problems. At the root of the criticism is a perception that universities are out of touch and out of date. Another part of the issue is that while society has challenges to cope with, HEIs have "disciplines" and "departments". What these critiques add up to is a perception that, despite the resources and expertise available within higher education, HEIs are not well organised or exist in disciplinary silos to bring them to bear on local/regional/national/societal challenges in a coherent way. Undoubtedly, the engagement mission of higher education has become increasingly important to universities because of a recognition that the massification of higher education in the last two decades has intensified the duties faced by HEIs to actively demonstrate their wider contribution to society beyond the immediate benefits to educated individuals, particularly if they are funded by the public.

Reflecting on those increasing pressure for universities/HEIs to demonstrate how they deliver public benefits, community engagement is emerging as a policy priority in higher education. Indeed, the recent European Commission Communication "A Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education" (2017) identified community engagement for the first time as one of the desirable mechanisms by which European universities should seek to promote their societal purposes.

This renewed emphasis on engagement goes beyond the now widely-accepted need for universities to ensure that they contribute to economic growth. The Commission's Renewed Agenda thus emphasises that higher education "must play its part in facing up to Europe's social and democratic challenges" and "should engage by integrating local, regional and societal issues into curricula, involving the local community in teaching and research projects, providing adult learning and communicating and building links with local communities."

Promoting higher education in an increasingly knowledge-based society as a key factor for cultural, economic and social development, UNESCO positions HEIs as one of the key drivers for the implementation of Agenda 2030, by providing the data and research and analytical knowledge base required for targeted and effective policy-making.

Taking into account these challenges and developments, **this year's CHER conference pursues three specific aims:** First, to critically discuss theories behind the notion of engaged HEIs. Second, to critically discuss methods employed in research and assessment on engaged HEIs. Thirdly, to discuss the relevance of recent theoretical and methodological developments in interdisciplinary context of research on engaged HEIs.

Therefore, **we invite all interested researchers to join us** in discussing and reflecting on how HEIs are coping with the (new) demands placed upon them, and how the various dimensions of change are intertwined, while (de)constructing the theory, practice and culture of engagement in higher education.

Track 1: Theoretical, conceptual, and methodological challenges

The questions arising under this theme are ample and would include: What is an engaged university? How can we deploy theoretical and conceptual tools to advance our thinking and knowledge on this issue and the challenges that come with it? How can we effectively rethink the role, place and nature of governance, policy, and various actors and stakeholders in and around higher education? What kind of challenges do contemporary times pose to the well-established understandings of the historical role(s) of universities and higher education more generally? In what way and to what extent could higher education affect wider social dynamics and address the challenges of the contemporary world? How can disciplinary knowledge be especially of use here? What is the state of research method in contemporary higher education research and how can we improve it to better meet the challenges of studying an engaged university and engagement in academic more generally? Contributions discussing various disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches in constructing and deconstructing the notion of an engaged higher education institution are especially welcome under this theme.

Track 2: Policy and practice-oriented challenges

The discussion under this perspective is open for contributions around specific local/ regional/ national/ global issues and challenges pertaining to the practice of engagement in HE. Empirical studies on how different approaches have been employed and embedded within academic core pillars (teaching and research), as well as those focusing on the role of academics and students are welcomed. Some of the crucial questions in this theme would be: How do higher education systems and HEIs negotiate tensions between excellence and engagement, between rigour and relevance? How is, and whether it is at all, higher education responding to global crises and challenges – refugees, poverty, terrorism, climate change, SDGs, and so forth? Are HEIs actually tackling the more controversial aspects of these challenges or is it staying with the “safer” ones? Is academia critical or critical enough? What theories are readily applicable to investigating the role of higher education in terms of an engagement agenda and practice? How can theory advance an ethos and culture of engagement? What is the state of knowledge on the impact of higher education on society at large and especially with regards to this theme.

Track 3: Culture of engagement in HE and conceptual challenges

The discussion under this perspective is open for more idiosyncratic, cultural and contextual approaches to the engaged university – moving from generic to the diverse. Some of the issues of interest in this theme would be around the historical perspectives on (dis)engagement, as well as around conceptualising both the pathway of institutionalisation and the role university leaders play in shaping and transforming the culture of engagement. How do mission statements, strategic plans, leadership rhetoric, organisational structures, curricula, promotion and tenure practices, hiring guidelines, external communications, capital campaigns, various assessment exercises and rankings ‘communicate’ the culture of engagement? Moving from global to the ‘glocal’ higher education? Contributions discussing organisational culture that can explain why some institutions embrace engagement, why some of them struggle with the change process, and why some deny such shifts in the organisation’s culture are welcomed.

Open Track: Core themes in higher education research

This track is meant to accommodate high-quality contributions pursuing themes of continuing relevance in higher education research that do not have a specific fit within mentioned perspectives and are not explicitly connected to the main theme of the conference. This track is equally important and welcomes papers from a wide range of perspectives in the field of higher education research.

Submitting Proposals

Participants are invited to submit a **paper, panel proposals or posters** of relevance for the conference theme. **Paper presentation** refers to a presentation delivered by one to two authors or collaborators on a particular research topic. **Panel presentation** refers to a series of 3-4 presentations delivered by a group of authors or collaborators on a particular research topic (submitting one joint proposal/abstract). The conference also includes a **poster session** for preliminary studies, works in progress, or early stage research projects. Abstracts for the poster session are also welcome. The abstracts should not exceed 500 words. **Please submit your abstracts by email to proposal@cher2020.eu by 31st March, 2020.** All abstracts will be peer reviewed and applicants will receive a notification of acceptance no later than 15th May, 2020.

Best Doctoral Paper Award 2020

Current PhD students or recently graduated PhDs (within the last two years) are invited to submit papers based on their doctoral work. Among the submitted papers, one will be selected for the Best Doctoral Paper Award and given the monetary award. The deadline for submitting papers for the Best Doctoral Paper Award is 30th June, 2020. To be considered, papers should not be co-authored with a faculty member. Papers should be accompanied by a statement in which the wish to participate in the competition is expressed. The winner[s] will be announced during the conference. Additional academic and social events will be announced on the Conference website.

Important dates for CHER 2020

Abstract Submission: 31st March, 2020

Notification of Acceptance: 15th May, 2020

Early Bird Registration: 14th June, 2020

Best Doctoral Paper Award: 30th June, 2020

Full Papers for Conference: 20th August, 2020

(Note: papers submitted will be given priority considering the publication)

Conference Fees

Category	Early bird registration (May 15 - June 14, 2020)	Regular registration (June 15 - July 20, 2020)
CHER members	225 EUR	300 EUR
Regular participants	300 EUR	375 EUR
Students/PhD Students	150 EUR	225 EUR
Conference Dinner	40 EUR	40 EUR

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The Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes (CMEPIUS)

Contact Information

Conference website: **www.cher2020.eu** (will be launched on Feb 1st)
For any conference related questions please write to Bojana Ćulum Ilić at **bojana@cher2020.eu** and/or Lorraine McIlrath at **lorraine@cher2020.eu**.
If you have any questions related to you travel and/or accommodation, please write to our local organisers at **info@cher2020.eu**

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