

Full Length Research Paper

Rediscovering public engagement in higher education: A bridge between university community and publics

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In recent years, public engagement attention is drawn towards university institutions since the role of universities is projected towards the sharing and spreading of knowledge beyond the traditional academic bounds. Thus, the university is becoming a “partner” that collaborates at the community's growth, and debates with all the stakeholders who might have an interest, either direct or indirect, in the university's activity. However, a systematization of the public engagement in higher institutions is still lacking. The aim of this paper is to advance the study of university public engagement construct through the analysis of research published in the main journals in the ambit of three disciplinary areas: communication, marketing and public management. A systematic literature review was used to select the main articles from these subject areas. Coding a selection of articles from these disciplines it is been possible to deepen the public engagement concept. The results show that public engagement is an umbrella term that covers a range of strategies and activities, which potentially come from different ideological standpoints. Five coherent definitions-in-practice emerged in the literature review: set of activities; process; communication tool; strategy; and approach. Moreover, this research presents some progresses in understanding the variables that intervene in the conceptual and methodological definition of public engagement from an inter-disciplinary perspective and the major benefits of an effective use of public engagement in the higher education management.

Key words: Public engagement, civic engagement, community engagement, systematic literature review, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Public engagement has received much attention in recent years not only from the academic world but also from institutions due to its features, which offer important social and economic benefits. Specifically, university public engagement, that is, “the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public (National Coordinating

Centre for Public Engagement, 2010)”, in recent years, is receiving particular attention. In fact, today universities are recognized as a driving force for economic and social growth and therefore the opening of the university to the territory is a challenge but also an opportunity for a structural change of university organizations in a social and “managerial” perspective (Watermeyer and Lewis,

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2018). Public engagement has many possible uses in the management field and has been investigated as a potential tool for the participation of public. The literature has produced qualitative and quantitative contributions that illustrate experiences of public engagement in a specific context or that have a conceptual nature aimed at retracing the theoretical approaches (Borum Chattoo and Feldman, 2017; Bandelli and Konijn, 2013; Bruning et al., 2006; Curtis, 2014; Domegan, 2008; Hart and Northmore, 2011; Kim, 2007; Watermeyer, 2012, 2016; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018). However, when dealing with this subject it was discovered that its boundaries are badly outlined. The different disciplinary fields uses of the term “engagement” assumes different connotation. The first of which being marketing ambit (in this case, there is consumer engagement; tourism engagement; customer engagement, etc.). Second, politics where the concept of public engagement has been associated to a series of government actions bent on involving citizens more in institutional activities (in this case, there is find citizen engagement). In addition, in a strictly managerial ambit where public engagement is linked to the need for stakeholders who are more involved and more decisive in the activities and choices made by their organizations’ governance (in this case there is have stakeholder engagement). The other studies on engagement sometimes refer to those directly involved in the activities/ services of public utility (institutions/organizations etc.). Davies and Wilkinson (2013a, b) as well as Wilkinson et al. (2011) related it to the concept of “citizenship”, that is, to those practices that lead the citizen to participate in a public decisional process for a common interest; but it also has wider connotations, that is, to interact and share with the members of a community or to be faithful to a group.

In particular, in dealing with the theme of public engagement in universities, there are three main issues: the context within it is dealt that determines its definition; measuring the effectiveness of its activities; finally, the implications that public engagement activities can reserve for those who implement it, but also for those who benefit from it. Although researchers are trying to find a definition for public engagement and to conceptualize its construct (Hart and Northmore, 2011) by applying diversified approaches to its investigation, little attention has been paid to careful analysis of its nature and its determinants and of the context in which it is being investigated (Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018; Davies, 2013a, b; Hart and Northmore, 2011). Moreover, despite the current debate has an intrinsic inter-disciplinary character, little attention has been paid to study of public engagement across different research area. The aim of this paper is to individuate the main definitions of university public engagement through the analysis of research published in the top scientific journals in the ambit of three disciplinary areas: public management, communication and marketing. The present paper explores the university

public engagement analysing the literature found in the top journals of management in order to catch its characteristics, factors and benefits that precede and follow its manifestation. Indeed the systematic literature review will permit to recognize the main contributions of public engagement construct, contextualising the public engagement within literature (Rowley and Slack, 2004).

An integrated vision can help to advance the current research on this topic by highlighting future developments of research and at the same time, it adds its contribution to a multidisciplinary perspective that is so far still lacking. The interdisciplinary point of view that can give an enlarged and complete vision of its subject matter in disciplines that can support public and private management in the specific, communication and marketing. Since public engagement construct implies interest, emotions and interaction between two parties in a bi-directional exchange that generates the co-creation of knowledge (Rowe and Frewer, 2005), the subject area, marketing and communication, can improve knowledge about engagement with the publics in higher education institutions.

The findings of this study provide valuable input to a theme that has not been widely discussed in a multidisciplinary point of view. To fill this gap in current literature, this paper identifies the main contributions on public engagement in the main subject area of management (marketing, communication and public management) by individuating how public engagement is investigated in the literature, the main definitions, the subjects involved, the factors and consequences of the involvement. This research contributes on several aspects. First, it provides a multifaceted perspective of public engagement owing to a multidisciplinary approach. Second, from a managerial standpoint, the clarification of public engagement mechanisms allows for a deeper understanding of the context under which public engagement is effective.

METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review was performed to detect available evidence on public engagement that adopts a rigorous, objective and successive fractions approach (Rowley and Slack, 2004) for detecting the main papers that discuss the topic. A replicable and strict approach was adopted both in the selection of the sample and in the analysis of the data of the research in accordance with the indications given by Davies and Crombie (1998). The course of action included the steps described subsequently and summarized in Table 1.

(i) Keyword Identification: to clarify the use of the term “public engagement” in the management literature, terms used as synonyms in the literature on public engagement were considered (such as “civic engagement, public involvement, etc). In this study, the concept of “public participation” was taken into account that, moreover, has already found its univocal and consolidated definition in the literature: “public participation is the practice of involving members of the public in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations/institutions responsible for

Table 1. The process of analysis.

Step	Phase	Description
1	Keyword Identification	Choose the followings terms: “public involvement”; “public engagement”; “community engagement”; “civic engagement”; “civic involvement”
2	Selection of disciplinary	Research was limited to the subject areas of “Communication”, “Marketing” and “PSM”. Articles published in the scientific journals mentioned by Harzing’s Journal Quality List.
3	Finding Selection Criteria	Search for each keyword in the title or abstraction in the papers of journals ranked as A* (highest quality category) and A (second highest quality category) according to the quality list classification made by the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) (Journal Rankings List 2013)
4	Selection of papers	Only papers that reported the keywords in the abstract and/or in the title of paper
5	Purification dataset	Evaluation of the quality of the studies based on the objectives of the research (purification)
6	Content analysis	Analysis of articles on the base of research criteria

Table 2. Criteria for the paper analysis.

Criteria	Meaning
Level of analysis	Subjects to which public engagement research is intended (citizens, young people, institutions, immigrants, etc.).
Methodological approach	Methodology used: qualitative, quantitative or quali/quantitative approach
Definition	How public engagement is defined
Factors involved	Variables affecting public engagement
Outcomes	How public engagement affects university stakeholders

policy development.” (Rowe and Frewer, 2005: 253). Unlike public participation, public engagement is intended as an underlying mechanism that feeds the different forms of participation of the individuals (Rowe and Frewer, 2005). Public engagement is considered as a multi-faceted construct that implies interaction between two parties in a bi-directional exchange that generates the co-creation of knowledge.

(ii) Selection of disciplinary: to identify a representative sample able to summarize the current developments of the debate on “public engagement” and allow the understanding and replicability of the study, it was decided to refer to the classification of the Harzing Journal Quality List, which reports the international journals based on the main subjects area.

(iii) Finding selection criteria: to narrow the field to our area of investigation, three subject areas were chosen “Marketing, Communication and Public Sector Management”. In addition, to manage the amount of scientific contributions the articles published in the main journals were chosen (for originality, reputation importance and impact factor of the magazine) classified, according to the Australian Business Deans Council, in the categories A and A* as suggested by Webster and Watson (2002). The total of journals that met these criteria were 151 (N=19 in the subject area communication, N=68 in the subject marketing area and N= 64 in the PSM disciplinary area).

(iv) Selection of papers: the collection of the articles involved the works published until 2018. At the end of the selection process, there were 38 active journals with 269 articles of which 71 on the subject area “Communication”, 57 on the subject area “Marketing” and finally 141 on the subject area “PSM”.

(v) Purification dataset: during the research process only those articles in which the object of research was “public engagement” in higher education were selected. So the final sample of articles was 38 of which 22 for “Communication”, 2 for “Marketing” and finally 14 for the subject of “PSM”. A bibliographical list of all publications was developed and a file was created in Excel spreadsheet.

(vi) Content analysis: after having collected all the articles with public engagement as the objective of the study, a contents analysis of each article was proceeded. The coding scheme was constructed based on the paper’s aim established at the beginning of the review (Table 2).

RESULTS

Interest for this topic can be found in all the disciplines with some journals showing more interest than others do: in the ambit of communication, the journal with the largest number of articles is Science Communication (20 papers). For the area of Public Management, Studies of Higher Education has a particularly high number of publications with 6 papers. This attention shown by the different disciplinary areas indicates a certain transverse nature as regards the area of our research. The publication of the articles inherent to our topic varied significantly between subject areas (Figure 1).

Preliminary studies on public engagement were found in the 2004 in the PSM and Communication research

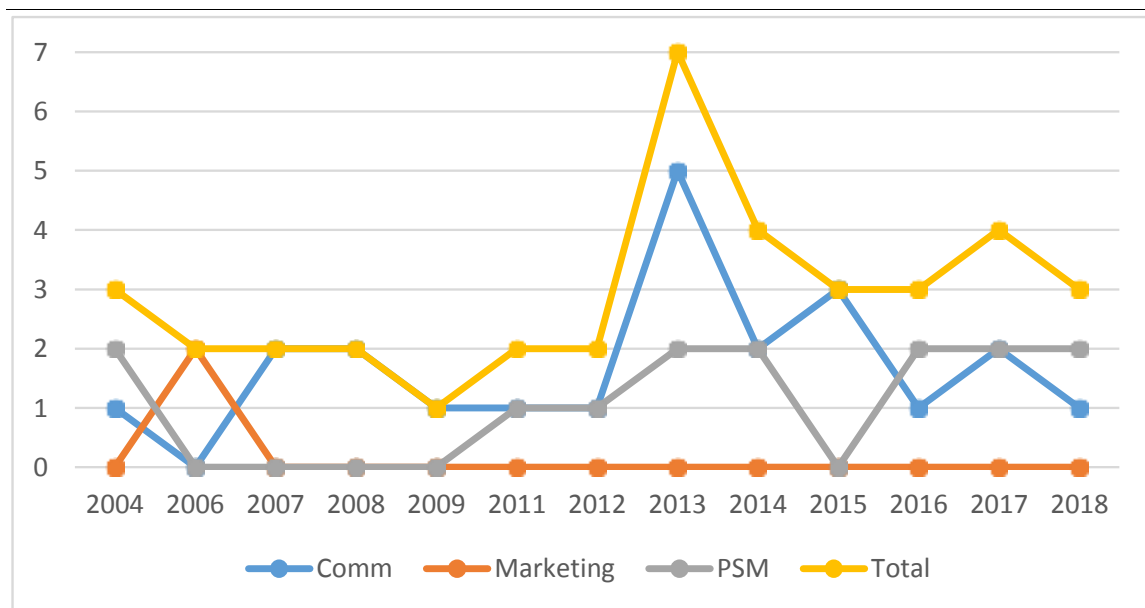


Figure 1. Temporal variation of publication activity for subject area.

Table 3. Public engagement for subject area.

Variable	Public engagement
	N (%)
Subject area	
Communication	22 (58)
Marketing	2 (5.2)
PSM	14(36.8)
Total	38 (100)
Keywords	
Civic engagement	8 (21.05)
Community engagement	4 (10.52)
Public engagement	25 (65.78)
Public involvement	1 (2.63)
Total	38 (100)

areas. In the “Marketing” area, the publication of articles inherent to our topic shows an interest on 2006. The last five years have shown a significant upwards trend for all the disciplinary areas and this reflects a significant increase in interest. The analysis showed that public engagement in the university is mostly dealt with in the “Communication” subject area (N=22 articles out of a total of 38) and only in part by the “PSM” (N=14) and by the “Marketing” subject areas (N=2 out of a total of 38 articles) Table 3 shows the total sample of articles divided for subject area.

Despite these clear-cut separations into groups, it is obvious that an interdisciplinary approach to the interest

in public engagement, even if it deals with only a limited number of contributions, shows the versatility of the subject but also confirms the difficulty of obtaining a unique definition. Moreover, Table 3 shows that the most frequently used word linked to public engagement is just that: “public engagement” (N=25). There are only a few words linked to community and civic engagement or public involvement. The following section presents the main contribution for public engagement in higher education and the main contribution investigated was explained better.

Definition of public engagement in the university context

The research methodology most widely used is the qualitative type (28 articles representing 73.68% of the total for this conceptualization). No particular theoretical approach has been linked to the explanation of public engagement but the studies are based on a research review constructed on the previous contributions.

The construct of public engagement refers to any activity used to connect and share scientific knowledge with a wider public and is not necessarily linked to an academic activity (NCCPE, 2010). This definition is mostly present in the articles even if four of these also refer to “public engagement” as a “strategy” or “method” (Curtis, 2014; Tøsse, 2013; Miller et al., 2009; Fall, 2006). The definition of public engagement considers two fundamental concepts: “connecting” and “sharing”. In fact, unlike “civic engagement” where active citizen participation in the decisional process with on the spot

Table 4. Multiple perspective of public engagement in the university.

Definitions	Meaning	Authors
Activity	Public engagement is a set of activities that aims to bring science closer to the public (children, parents, citizens, etc.) through events and activities that stimulate dialogue and discussion in an informal and fun way (such as open days and science fairs). Among the public engagement activities are those related to the voluntary work of students and professors (e.g. voluntary work outside lesson time, for example in centres for social aid).	Curtis (2014); Tøsse (2013); Miller et al. (2009); Fall (2006); Bruning, et al. (2006); Domegan (2008); Hinchliffe (2014); Tang et al. (2013); Ward et al. (2008)
Process	Public engagement is conceptualized as the process of individual and collective problem solving on aspects related to science. It is a process that involves stakeholders in the decision-making (e.g. through open labs and science live). It provides for collective solutions to the challenges posed by social problems. Public engagement is also considered an integral part of the innovation process of universities. Citizens and institutions engage in dialogue with universities for the realization of technological solutions useful for society.	Kim (2007); Capurro et al. (2015); Bandelli A. and Konijn (2013); Watermeyer R. (2016); Boland (2014); Krabbenborg and Mulder (2015)
Communication tool	Public engagement is defined as any scientific communication that engages an audience outside of academia. It is connected to dialogue with publics and then the relation between public and science.	Poliakoff and Webb (2007); Chilvers (2013)
Construct/ Method	Strategy/ Engagement is a multiple, relational, results-oriented construct. It is a strategy that promotes the understanding of science to a non-academic audience that leads to social change in the direction of a more just and democratic society. It is a method for producing knowledge in a social, economic and cultural perspective that enhances the civic role of the university.	Davies (2013a); Wilkinson et al. (2011); Ostrander (2004); Stephenson (2011)
Approach	Public engagement is seen as the logical basis for participation processes. It is a new approach to tackling social problems. Civic engagement in universities is widely associated with both education and public good and corporate social responsibility concepts. Universities are seen as sites for democratic citizenship and civic engagement is the exercise of this citizenship.	Chilvers (2013); Retzbach and Maier (2015); Kimmel et al. (2012); Persell and Wenglinsky (2004); Denson and Bowman (2013); Boland (2014)

activities is implicit, in “public engagement” the public is involved in activities (such as events, scientific workshops, experiments, etc.). The main purpose of divulging scientific knowledge and information through a mutual and interactive process that must include the commitment of both the organizers (scientists, researchers, university institutions) and the participants (the public, the students, etc.). Table 4 illustrates the main definitions of public engagement recognized by the review of literature. In particular, it is possible to identify 5 macro perspectives attributable to the topic of public engagement. The first perspective defines public engagement as the set of activities organized by the university and research institutes to bring the public closer to scientific knowledge, to stimulate dialogue and reflection, to increase credibility and trust in science (Curtis, 2014; Tøsse, 2013; Miller et al., 2009; Fall, 2006; Bruning et al., 2006; Domegan, 2008; Hinchliffe et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2013; Ward et al., 2008; Winter, 2004;

Davies, 2013a; 2013b). These activities, for example open day, open Lab, science live; scientific research, live demonstrations are aimed at a wide audience of people: local community, parents, schools, businesses, etc. who may have an interest in attending an event organized by the university. The second perspective, on the other hand, defines public engagement as a process. Even in this case, however, it requires a commitment and a predisposition of the university institution to incorporate the benefits of public involvement, but also needs the interest and active participation of the stakeholders to whom the process is addressed. As an innovative process, public engagement is often connected to the concept of Responsible Research Innovation (RRI) (Krabbenborg and Mulder, 2015). The third perspective, on the other hand, defines public engagement as a communication tool that should stimulate dialogue and foster relationships and scientific knowledge beyond the academic walls (Poliakoff and Webb, 2007; Chilvers,

2013). The fourth perspective instead looks at public engagement as a result-oriented construct, strategy or method that triggers participation, social change and relationship (Davies, 2013a, Wilkinson et al., 2011; Ostrander, 2004; Stephenson, 2011). Finally, a corpus of studies sees public engagement in universities as a new approach to the relationship with stakeholders. In this case, the public engagement adopted by the universities facilitates the sense of citizenship, the civic sense and brings the community closer to the university world. It is also associated with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Boland, 2014). This new vision, however, involves a cultural change, new educational models, new skills and a change in the traditional models of organization to dialogue with the plurality of stakeholders (Stephenson, 2011; Chilvers, 2013, Retzbach and Maier, 2015; Kimmel et al., 2012; Persell and Wenglinsky, 2004; Denson and Bowman, 2013) Aranha and Garcia (2014) proposed a Creating Social Value (CSV) as a new model that substitutes the dimension of CSR and serves as an alternative guide to investments in communities.

Level of analysis

The results identify also the subjects that can be involved in the public engagement activities and the main targets to whom these activities are addressed. A first target can be identified in the local community. University can engage the territorial community, thanks the voluntary and recreational activities (for example, science festival or public events). Students, administrative staff and teachers are the main actors involved in these activities. In addition, public institutions and professional world are the others target to which the public engagement activities are oriented. In this case, by means of university research centres, or the departments it is possible to realize activities for sharing the results of the scientific research or the consultancy services. Finally, people are the third target that can have an interest in the university activities (visitors, parents, future students, etc.). University institution is involved directly. Thought spaces welcoming and pleasant, structures accessible and usable and scholarships and prizes to worthy students, university demonstrates its capability to satisfy the needs of this type of public. Scientific centres, new media, new technology, incentives and society orientated university curricula are considered the drivers of public engagement (Tösse, 2013; Retzbach and Maier, 2015; Capurro et al., 2015; Curtis, 2014).

Factors involved on university public engagement

Among the other variables that could influence public engagement by hindering or encouraging these activities there are organizational factors (time and environment

variables) such as lack of time; the time allowed for discussion or environmental factors that construct boundaries around the opportunities participants have to interact. Also institutional barriers, lack of professional development; difficulties in reaching specific publics; fear of public controversy and of institutional change (Davies, 2013b; Wilkinson et al., 2011; Persell and Wenglinsky, 2004; Bandelli and Konijn, 2013). Table 5 describes the factors affecting university public engagement.

Outcomes of university public engagement

Almost all the articles deal with the implications of public engagement both concerning the university Institution and the territory/community. In the first case, the main consequences are accessibility for citizens to scientific knowledge (8 articles), for example, through science events, technology transfer and collaboration with industries and a greater trust in the university Institution with a consequent impact on the reputation and image of the university institution. In the second case “public engagement” reinforces the role of the University inside the territory as a third *propeller* that can contribute to the development of the territory in which it lives and thus works to increase its social leadership to the point of developing a so-called Holding Involvement (3 articles) (Table 6).

In summary, the main papers on the topic define the public engagement as a set of activities that stimulates dialogue and discussion along all of university stakeholders in a process that involves stakeholders in an informal and bi-directional way. Moreover, the results shows that, among factors affecting the effectiveness of public engagement, openness and transparency are the main aspects to which the higher education management should pay attention. Also an application of public engagement into the HE institution supports the sharing of correct scientific information, increases the quality of the student learning and also the satisfaction among all university stakeholders (public, university community, public institutions and firms).

DISCUSSION

Our study contributes to the definition of the university public engagement construct, of growing interest over the last 14 years in the ambits of Communication, Marketing and PSM. In fact, it is evident that public engagement includes concepts such as those of involvement, sharing and participation. Literature on the subject has always shown ambiguity in its definition (Marino and Lo Presti, 2018; 2017; Hart and Northmore, 2011; Rowe and Frewer, 2005; Watermeyer, 2016). Five perspectives emerged from the analysis of the public engagement construct (public engagement as a set of activities, a

Table 5. Factors affecting university public engagement.

Factors	Number of papers	Meaning	Bibliographical list
Commitment and training	3	Long-term commitment, experimentation, and trialling are requested to have the capacity and ability to relate work to different publics	Watermeyer (2012); Watermeyer (2016); Kim (2007)
Motivation and interest	3	Interest of students for community-based/service learning and enhancement of student learning	Boland (2014); Ward et al. (2008); Kim (2007)
Openness and transparency	8	More openness and transparency about scientific results and listening to the real needs and concerns of the public	Tosse (2013); Ward et al. (2008); Kimmel et al. (2012); Ostranger (2004); Stephenson, (2011); Winter (2004); Davies (2013b); Kim (2007)
Cooperation and project types	5	Adoption of a shared immersion model (based on creating a common experience between researchers and publics through joint participation). But cooperative research requires constant attention to transdisciplinary engagement with stakeholders and public constituencies	Tang et al. (2013); Hinchliffe (2014); Ostrander (2004); Glass et al. (2017); Gal-Arieli et al. (2017)
Communication capabilities	4	- How experts interact and talk with publics (accessible language, relaxed style, etc.) - Practical issues such as a lack of preparation, appropriate time, audience expectations, can impact on the intention to offer opportunities for listening and interaction	Ward et al. (2008); Wilkinson et al. (2011); Winter (2004); Reinsborough (2017)
Attitude, beliefs and capacity	6	Attitudes that can limit the public engagement can be: whether participation was regarded as positive, beliefs about whether participation was under their control (perceived behavioral control), past involvement in public engagement, whether scientists believe their colleagues participate (descriptive norms), positive or negative perception of public engagement activities; also interpersonal skills and audience expectations.	Poliakoff and Webb (2007); Kimmel et al. (2012); Wilkinson et al. (2011); Stephenson (2011); Chilvers (2013); Retzbach and Maier (2015)
Organizational factors (time and environment)	4	Organizational factor such as lack of time allowed for discussion with stakeholders and fear of public controversy and of institutional change; environmental factors such as institutional barriers, lack of professional development or difficulties in reaching specific publics can affect public engagement.	Davies (2013b); Wilkinson et al. (2011); Persell and Wenglinsky (2004); Bandelli and Konijn (2013)
Media	5	Mass media and game are engagement tools for sharing research results and scientific projects	Tøsse (2013); Retzbach and Maier (2015); Capurro et al.(2015); Curtis (2014); Borum and Feldman (2017)

process, a communication tool, a strategy and an approach), highlighting the possibility of an integrated study vision on the subject of public engagement in three subject areas: "Communication", Marketing" and "PSM".

In particular, it was found that "PSM" and "Communication" subject areas, investigate the topic

while Marketing presents only two contributes. Moreover, the results presented here have allowed us to clarify public engagement construct and frame the main definitions of this topic. In fact, the definition of public engagement becomes clearly delineated when inserted in the context of reference and its responses at a clear

Table 6. Outcomes of public engagement in the university.

Outcomes	Number of papers	Meaning	Bibliographical list
Inform	8	-Public engagement informs about what university are doing -It counteracts the declining interest of young people in the natural sciences and in engineering, and it raises public awareness of science in general	Davies (2013a); Wilkinson et al.(2011); Winter (2004); Tosse (2013); Curtis (2014); Watermeyer (2016); Winter (2004); Schoerning (2018)
Mutual benefits	4	-Community members attend events that are of interest to them, and the attendees have a more favorable impression of the institution as a result -It helps to build valuable public support for scientific research and academic institutions	Davies (2013a); Bruning et al. (2006); Ward et al. (2008); Schoerning (2018)
Quality	6	-Community-based/service learning improves the quality of student learning and gives a professional perspective to the study -It can support entrepreneurs as they respond to opportunities and challenges identified in the holding environment. -University-community collaboration can be a strategy for institutional and social change leading to a more just society	Boland (2014); Kimmel et al. (2012); Ostranger (2004); Stephenson, (2011); Kimmel et al. (2012); Krabbenborg and Mulder (2015)
Image and Identity	3	-Communities have a more favorable impression of the university institution -It improves the identity and role of university	Bruning et al. (2006); Watermeyer (2016); Ward et al. (2008)
Interaction and cooperation	5	-It helps in building a profitable dialogue that can culminate in an equitable synergy between academic and public communities -The community-university engagement can develop LANs (Learning Action Networks) linking individuals through information and ideas -Through cooperative research, public engagement co-builds and makes the knowledge more acceptable	Watermeyer (2012); Stephenson (2011); Hinchliffe (2014); Kimmel et al. (2012); Dickerson-Lange et al. (2016)
Experience	6	-Public engagement experience is shared and tangible -It increases the degree of personal satisfaction and enjoyment (for engagers) -Science centers and museums (SCMs) perform their role as “facilitators of engagement” between scientists and the public and they are good platforms to bring science to the public	Miller et al. (2009); Wilkinson et al. (2011); Denson and Bowman, (2013); Bandelli and Konijn (2013); Chilvers (2013); Goldner and Golan (2018)
Accessibility	3	-By incorporating online social applications, interaction between scientists and players could be facilitated, thus helping to increase the ‘accessibility’ of science and scientists -It permits the connection with industrial sector	Curtis (2014); Watermeyer (2016); Winter (2004)

managerial goal. The more recent literature is critical about public engagement in higher education. For example, according to Watermeyer and Lewis (2018) “we would caution against an assumption that just because researchers are involved with public groups they are automatically engaged with public groups” (p. 1622). The findings here are an initial step to fill the gap in the extant literature regarding the knowledge of potential differences

in interpretations (and implementations) of the public engagement. Moreover, it responds to the need to determinate the extent of diversity in types of public engagement activity pursued by different universities (Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018).

The analysis also shows the strategic role of public engagement in the university management. The results also show that “public engagement” participation requires

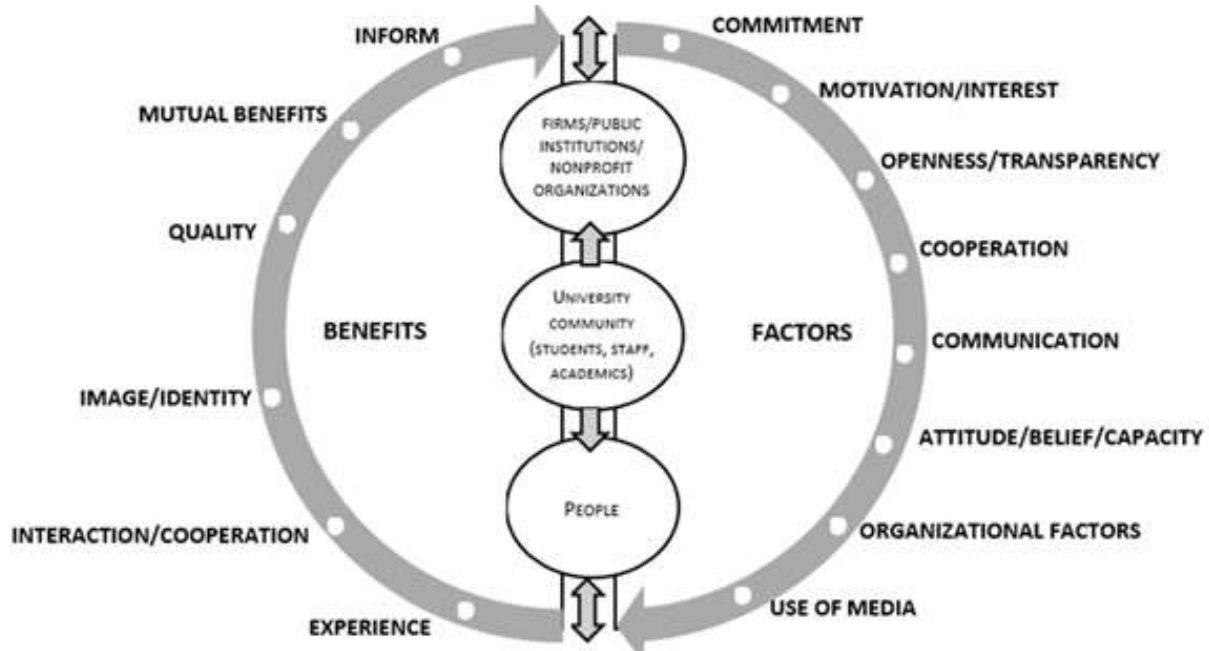


Figure 2. University public engagement circle.
Source: our elaboration.

commitment, time and a strategic plan capable of supporting the new forms of social interaction such as social media and finally dialogue and interest to reinforce the bonds inside the community. Therefore, the systematic analysis of the literature has allowed us to circumscribe the implementation ambits of public engagement by identifying its manifestations, its determining variables and finally the consequences of its on-site application (Figure 2).

The most recent studies on this subject of engagement demonstrate that through the adoption of a new culture that use public engagement as a new approach for tightening bonds with publics, it is possible to build new relationship between Higher Education-Citizens, Higher Education-Businesses and Higher Education-University community. Moreover, in the meaning of “public engagement” as referring to the university context, as yet there is no shared framework capable of illustrating the factors that intervene in the involvement and its consequences, but the contributions on this subject limit themselves to reporting case studies that use qualitative methodologies that only confirm the embryonic state of the research on this subject. A careful examination of the intervening variables and the benefits of public engagement in the university public engagement led us to deduce some new traits.

In particular, in the university public engagement the relational valence is an essential part of the success of public engagement activities. It is also a concept supported by the studies made by Rowe and Frewer (2005) who see public engagement as a mechanism that

initiates participation and identify a two-way communication process as a characteristic of this kind of involvement. Based on the recent studies it is possible to notice that it is in progress a process of istituzionalization of public engagement and there are many initiatives oriented in this direction. Nevertheless, there is a need to evaluate the public engagement and operationalize the construct to permit to be more efficient (Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018). This increasing interest for the public engagement in the university is expression of a reconfiguration of the university: it is not only the place of knowledge bu also a city of citizenship.

The interest for public engagement in the public and private ambits does in fact show the importance of the topic today if the latest trends in the most differing social contexts are also consider, where sharing has become a daily form of interpersonal communication. Public engagement, therefore, becomes an opportunity for sharing with institutions and organizations, which needs to be taken advantage of starting from, of course, its multiple modes of application. The activities used for their implementation also change in function of the perspective from which they are dealt with. To be more specific, the analysis of the literature has helped clarify the concept of “public engagement” by outlining a multi-dimensional construct that takes into account the managerial sphere in which the concept of engagement covers a wider meaning that refers not only to student participation in the university community (usually the student engagement), but also the social relations of higher education institutions with their social stakeholders. While the

research has already moved to investigate the relations that interact between the public engagement activities and the increase in public involvement, in the university ambit however, the subject is still in an embryonic form and the attention of the scientific community is still focalized on understanding what public engagement is and what the potential benefits are for the universities and their users (local communities, students, institutions, businesses, etc.). This last point could be addressed in future research. Moreover, the literature are moving towards a better comprehension of the role of student engagement in the university public engagement activities (such as entrepreneurship education, participation in start ups or in research incubators, etc.) and their impact on social sustainability. Sendawula and Turyakira (2018) identify action regulation factors influencing sustainable entrepreneurship intention among university students (action plans, action knowledge and self-efficacy). For the authors “[the] universities should teach sustainability and entrepreneurship together. This will enhance sustainable entrepreneurship intention among students in the university.” (p. 137). Indeed, universities and teachers should assume more active role in shaping students’ attitudes towards sustainability (Karimi, 2013). For Ebewo et al. (2017) it is necessary to increase positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship for increasing the level of entrepreneurial initiative among students. For this reason, the importance of the learning to sustainable entrepreneurship is another aspect that could be studied and developed in future researches in the ambit of the “encouraging economic regeneration” dimension that is one of the seven dimensions of university public engagement (Hart and Northmore, 2011). From the theoretical point of view, this paper presents the state-of-the-art on the university’s engagement and contributes to advance the research on public engagement construct highlighting the factors and the benefits of an implementation of public engagement in the higher education management strategies. From the managerial point of view, the findings of this paper have implications for Universities and Public Institutions. Individuation and classification of factors affecting the public engagement permit to higher education managers to supervise and manage them in a constructive way. Moreover, the higher education institutions must be sensitive to their stakeholders (community, students, citizens etc.) and to their values and needs. In addition, they must learn how to interact with their stakeholders for facilitating community members’ interactions and strengthening relationships among them. Therefore, higher education should institutionalize public engagement in order to generate mutual benefits, and give greater visibility to its initiatives.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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