

# The Structure of Universities' Function and Performance, and Their Role in Iran's Sustainable Development

LADAN NASIRI

PhD Student in Sociology of Development  
Social Counselor and Lecturer, Iran

EGHBALEH AZIZ KHANI

Faculty Member  
Islamic Azad University Khalkhal Branch, Iran

## Abstract

*The present research is about studying and analyzing structure, function and performance of universities and their role in the sustainable development of Iran. The main perspective in this article is that despite so much of increase in the quantity of universities and the numbers of students in different areas of study, our universities and higher education centers have been unable to put the society in the path of development. In this article, we have tried to collect data by the use of documentation and fieldwork methods, and techniques of interview and note-taking. Achievements of the study show that universities and higher education centers can be axes of sustainable development; but in Iran, the universities and the higher education centers function weakly and there is no specific attention to research, and the universities and the society are not coordinate with each other. Research is the main foundation of development. Hence, it can be concluded from the findings that there is inconsistency and imbalance between the foundations, elements as well as components of educational system, and, the foundations, elements and components of the social, economic, political and cultural systems. The external factors too, seem to be efficient in this imbalance. The main solution is that until the higher education system is not coordinated with the social system, we will not reach sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** sustainable development, structure of university, function of university, performance of university, social system

## Statement of Problem

Higher education is considered as one of the efficient institutions in the process and procedure of development. This institution takes care of people's education and conducts surveys to teach people social skills. University and its role in the process of economical-social development is one of the most important discussions on development and one of the most controversial subjects that has attracted attention of managers, planners, and thinkers very much. In fact, university and its staff have the responsibility to educate

human forces and create the academic environment, and their performance is the main indicator of production and development. University, as a social organization, plans and carries out programs in order to fulfill the requirements of the society. Generally, one of the important factors in development is the desirable and productive function and performance of universities and their connection to the requirements of the society. In the developed countries, this connection exists, but in the undeveloped countries, university and the society do not move in the same direction for creation of inborn and stable development. In Iran, on the one hand, the university management does not have the full authority and functions of the university are generally educative rather than being various and multiple. The social organizations and institutions do not have connections with each other. Our universities in Iran are separated from the production and service sections. They have solid and inflexible curriculums and instead of paying attention to professional education, they rely on traditional education. There is no demand for training the staff in the job market. On the other hand, our sciences at universities are not applied sciences and planning is not based in organized forms. Our researches in Iran are mostly subject researches instead of cross-subject and ultra-subject ones. Most sensitivity is on internal judgments rather than on external realities (Seifullahi, 2007).

### **Necessity and Importance**

Considering the stated issues and regarding the following elements: the fact that no serious steps have been taken in this direction because university is considered as one of the factors of development and application of advanced technology and the required awareness for planning and solving problems are all duties and functions of universities; and on the other hand, there is a direct relationship between university and development in different aspects i.e. social, economic and political issues of every country so much so that we can say university is the fundamental factor for creation of understanding, knowledge and empowering of the country and is considered as a powerful and to some extent sustainable, considering the fact that development has fundamental bases like machinery, human resources, organization and information whose interrelations lead to development and among these bases, man plays the axial role and application of most modern machinery is not possible without human resources, the fact that sustainable development cannot be achieved without professional teaching and reciprocal relationship between university and the society, and function and performance of university can be influential in sustainable development especially after the Islamic Revolution due to increase of students and universities and quantitative rise of students, it is necessary to deal with these issues to create interrelations between university and the society and create sustainable development which is possibly achievable in this way.

## Objectives

Considering the statement of problem, importance and necessity of the research, the objectives are as follows:

1. Studying and evaluating the structure, function and performances of university
2. Studying and evaluating the social reasons and factors that are influential on structure, function and performance of university and its role in the sustainable development of Iran
3. Presenting functional and applicable solutions for betterment of structure, function and performance of university and its influence on the sustainable development of Iran.

## Theoretical Literature

### Habermas and the Theory of Rationalism in Relative Action

Habermas deals with the role of university and students very well, stating that, university, as an institution, has to bring up the individuals as critics and give them the right to criticize freely and believes that students are not like industrial laborers and have the right to criticize. In addition to teaching and propagating this attitude, the universities should carry out researches and surveys, and also transfer this attitude to channels of industry, armament and social welfare and increase self-awareness of students. In the universities of Iran, except for education, none of these factors are available.

University should give the students the right to choose, should empower them to do research about every subject and participate in the solving of the society problems so that they can, at least, apply their learning for fulfilling the requirements of the society. We hope that as an institution, university can take steps towards sustainable development and can help the society (*The Role of University in Social Development: 2004, 122*)

### James Counter's Theory of Function of University

According to his perspective, the present world relies on three fundamental functions i.e. production of knowledge or research, transference of knowledge or education, and propagation or spread of knowledge or service. Transference of knowledge is considered as one of the three main functions of university. The contemporary industrial and developed world expects that its universities should firstly be the producers of modern knowledge and then transfer the old and new scientific discoveries to the new generations; and secondly, introduce the results of these findings to the society. In Iran, none of these stages have been fulfilled properly and in accordance with the requirements of the society (*The Role of University in Social Development: 2003, 137*).

### The Hierarchical Sibrentik Theory of Parsons

If we are to determine the position of university among the cultural, social, political and economic subsystems, this position should be looked for among the cultural subsystems i.e. the position which supervises and controls other subsystems through a system of values

and norms that produces knowledge and information. Of course, it must be considered that the whole position of cultural subsystem in the general system of actions is not limited to university, but other realms and centers which are idea-makers and culture-makers should be considered as well. But anyhow, the position of university is a cultural position.

### **Richard Smith's Theory of the Concepts of University and the Requirements of the Contemporary Society**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are lots of expectations from universities in all countries. They have to be responsible against a great range of requirements which are sometimes contrary to each other. This is not only based on external requirements, but is based on internal traditions as well.

Firstly, the university is considered as a member of nation-country. Secondly, it fulfills the local, national as well as economic requirements. University has global and international dimensions and has to be accountable about subjects like: justice and sustainable development. Graduates of the university should be citizens of the earth; the higher education system should prepare the society with citizens who have perspectives and commitments. On this basis, the university should not have abstract attitude; and its courses and researches should not have little role and relationship with the related society. In the meantime, university has to be responsive to the global issues (Stilphen 2010, 56).

### **Seifullahi's Attitude and the Performance of the Country's Higher Education**

The country's higher education system, with a long academic background, high statistics of specialized academic studies and number of students in all academic subjects, quantitative development of educational and research institutes, their interest in development, and despite the fundamental attention of the high authorities of the society to education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, has been unable to have a productive and appropriate performance. This doesn't mean that the carried out efforts and struggles in the society are overlooked or they were ineffective, and that achievements of universities as well as governmental and non-governmental educational centers were useless, but the expectations and prospects of people, experts and the social planners from the higher education system are so.

So many years after the Islamic Revolution, the higher education system has to have a fruitful performance in education, research, inborn and technological knowledge, and technology, so that the plans of development are placed along the direction of sustainable development in order to fulfill the educational requirements. Because of the downfall in the quality of educational system, deep shortages in training, refinement of qualifications and manners of students, students' lack of interest, increase of university teachers with degrees lower than PhD, the universities have not had an affective and appropriate performance in achieving the objectives of cultural revolution, people's expectations, and plans for sustainable cultural, social and economic development (Seifullahi, 2007, 27).

## Theoretical Framework

Higher education in Iran, as a social institution and organization with a dissonant structure, function and performance, does not have the ability to respond to the requirements and necessities of the developing society. The structure of the higher education system in the country, during the recent decades, originates from the dissonant and unsustainable economic, social, political and cultural development which is the same in most surrounding countries.

There is no coordination between university and the society. University does not move in line with the requirements of the society, and most of our researches at universities are ostensible and non-applied. They cannot solve the problems of the society.

Our education at universities is narrative because of dissonant and inborn development. Most researches and thesis papers at our universities are carried out carelessly. There is a gap between the universities and the society, especially this gap is more observable in the sense that our graduates in Iran are facing the problems of unemployment, or doing jobs which are never related to the subjects they have studied and to their qualifications. On the other side, at our universities, the students are not taught skills and specializations. Our education is more narrative than applied.

Sustainable development requires universities whose function and performance originate from the needs and elements of the society, whereas in Iran, the society, universities, and the industries are not coordinate with each other.

At our universities, there is no such production of knowledge and information that can fulfill the requirements of the society. We are facing brain drain in the higher levels of education. This phenomenon itself leads to lack of development and it is also because of the lack of balanced and inborn development.

In these conditions, universities in Iran have been unable to have appropriate performances. Neither university trains skills, nor has the job market been identified.

In these conditions, our universities in Iran cannot solve any problems; neither can they help sustainable development. An academic system which itself is ill cannot have any role in development. Universities in Iran cannot play the roles assigned to them and play any role in solving problems of the country (Seifullahi: 2007)

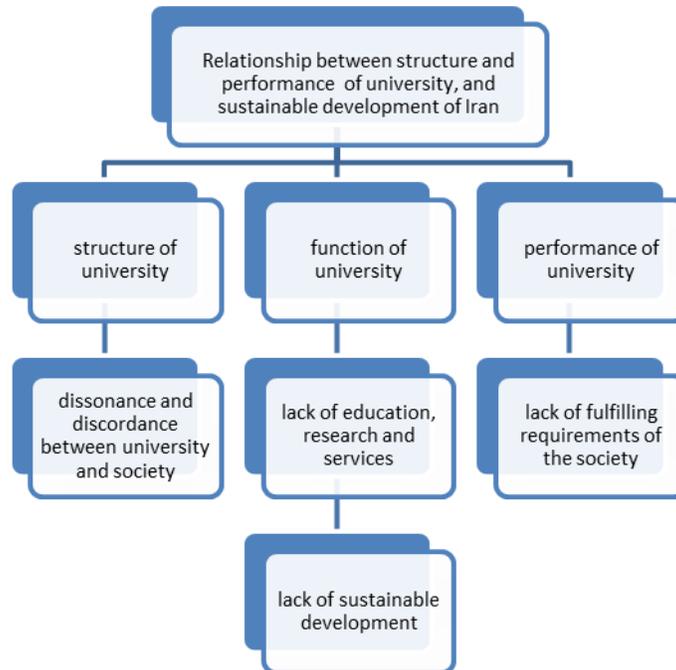
## Research Questions

1. Why cannot university with its current structure have any role in sustainable development of the country?
2. Why cannot university with the current function have any role in sustainable development of the country?
3. Why cannot university with the current performance have any role in sustainable development of the country?
4. Why cannot university, as an educational organization, have any role in sustainable development of the country?

### Variables of Research

Independent variables	Dependent variables
Structure of university	Sustainable development
Function of university	Sustainable development
Performance of university	Sustainable development

### Analytical and Theoretical Pattern



### Research Methodology and the Studied Society

For the subject matter of the research, the two methods of documentation and field work are applied.

In the first method, in order to collect the required materials, the existing sources are applied to evaluate and compile primary research studies, statement of the problem, and theoretical basics and discussions are utilized.

In the second method, by the use of fieldwork, collection of the required data is carried out through observation and interview in order to reply research questions. Regarding the fact that the research subject matter has a qualitative aspect, the studied society is professors, students, researchers and social managers.

### Research Achievements

Research achievements show that the effects of different institutions and organizations have to be defined according to the objectives and have to be coordinated. We can expect that considerable events happen in different subjects in the country. Of course, these events

about development will happen when the structures of university and the society are coordinated with each other. However, we can see some developments in some basic subjects; but in the humanities, because of incoherence with the requirements of the society and its imported nature, these sciences are not based on the structure of our society and have been unsuccessful in the process of development.

Function of university has many contexts. One is about propagation of thoughts, sciences and knowledge, and the other one is about production of the society's required force. We are facing lots of shortages and deficiencies in both contexts because of discordant and non-inborn development. Because of weakness in structure and function of universities, we have not been facing a desirable function at universities. Weak functions of universities include increase of the level of expectations, unemployment of the graduates, imbalance between education and training, etc.

One of the important reasons for this imbalance and lack of development is that Iran, as a system consisted of many discordant political, social, economic, national, cultural and climatic elements, is faced with lots of obstacles. Sustainable development needs foundations which universities in Iran are unable to identify and provide. This development depends on the exchanges between these two groups; if the political elites follow the scientific elites, this is where development is formed. University as an educational organization along with other organizations can be equipped with sustainable development, because sustainable development requires application and employment of education, technology and multilateral participation of people.

### **Findings of Research**

University and society have been unable to adjust themselves with the new conditions, and in Iran, the society is still unable to coordinate itself with the structure of the university; especially the humanities, which is an important column of sustainable development, has been politicized; and also independent research and survey at universities are very rare at universities. In Iran, the universities, independent of society, just act to fulfill the responsibility and finish their educational courses; and, there are no plans coordinated with and supervised by the universities. There is no permission for the students to participate in some subjects of humanities. Lots of the literati have problems with the political system and are not ready to cooperate with the political system. On the one hand, our universities have not properly understood the concept of sustainable development so that we can expect their well-informed participation in this subject. On the other hand, many universities admit students without any attention to the requirements of the society. After paying heavy expenses and getting graduated, the students come to know that the job market of that subject is fully saturated. These reveal the discordance between universities and the society, and the students take no advantage of the knowledge they have learned. According to the stated issues, there is no coordination between the universities and the society in Iran, and sustainable development appears when the social organizations move in coordination with the society and they have interrelations with each other.

About the reasons and forms of universities' role in sustainable development, we have to say that discordance of principles, elements and components of higher education system with the principles, elements and components of economic, social, managerial, cultural, geographical and the public systems on the one side, and also external elements such as colonization, 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalism, cultural invasion and dominance of the western paradigms on the other side, have been influential on the scientific system of Iran. In the social system of Iran, we are facing heterogeneous economic structures like poverty, budget shortage in Ministry of Sciences, dependent economy, and lack of productive economy. In the cultural grounds, we face a heterogeneous culture that includes dominance of task-based, relation-based, and superstitious culture over specialization-based and discipline-based culture, domination of an oral culture and lack of productive thinking. In the field of management, despite having different sources of decision-making, quantitative increase of units, offices and managements, we are faced with the imposition of personal ideas and tastes, illusory requirements, and one-sided management. In the field of population too, we have a heterogeneous structure with a huge flood of *Konkor* participants, different ethnic groups, and young population structure. In the geographical field, we face heterogeneous principles and elements, discordance of the region and its needs with the university. These five elements of economic, cultural, managerial, population and geographical heterogeneity have been influential on the scientific system as well. The scientific system in Iran is facing the problems of degree-based attitude, lack of competence, lack of free space for research, quantity-based attitude, domination of theoretical knowledge, conservativeness, lack of sense of job creation, lack of maintaining behavioral norms in the scientific institutions, lack of axial attitude towards university and science, and the issue of copy right. The reasons for these shortages must be looked for in the discordance between these five elements of geographical, population, economic, cultural and managerial issues. The results rising from these are lack of sustainable and balanced development as well as internal-seeking which we are observing today.

## **Conclusion**

From the achieved findings, we can conclude that there is no coordination between university and society in Iran. Universities with imbalanced and inappropriate structures, do not have good function and performance, and are still unable to identify the requirements of the society, so that they can try to fulfill these requirements and necessities at universities. On the other hand, in our society, the weak and strong points are still unknown for the authorities so that they can help remove them through academic research and studies.

In Iran, still the society and university have not been able to move alongside each other, especially in the fields of humanities, we are still facing problems like unemployment of graduates, lack of their research to solve problems of the society, and mere degree-based attitude. Our universities in Iran are facing problems like imbalance between education and training, high expectations of the graduates, unemployment of the graduates, lack of specialization and brain drain. These are proofs to lack of development and impracticality

of the educational and academic system. Despite the quantitative increase of educated people in every academic field, because of lack of attention to quality of educational system, lack of advanced technology due to lack of specialization at universities, and because research at our universities is ostensible and abstract and has no specific place in solving or identifying problems, and on the other side, planning at universities is not coordinated with the requirements of the society, most subjects are blind imitation of western patterns i.e. they are taught at universities without the society requiring them, these discordances have led to lack of balanced and sustainable development in Iran. Universities have been unable to help increase sustainable development of the country in these fields, and put the country on the path of balanced and coordinated development according to the requirements and components of the society. The reasons of these problems could be found in the lack of insightful participation and powerful management, and in lack of coordination between social system and the higher education system, because development relies on the two wings of insightful participation of people, and powerful and appropriate management, as well as on coordination between social components of the society.

### **Directive and Practical Guidelines of Research**

Without realistic, directive, planned and thoughtful studies and surveys, no new policy, plan and program should be taken in the higher education system of the society.

Structures and functions of universities and higher education centers should be firstly modified for getting fruitful use of scientific insight, and technological as well as applied knowledge; secondly, they should be directed towards fulfilling the true requirements of the society; thirdly, by combining experience and theory, also by gaining the latest scientific and technological achievements, and by fruitful transformation of them to the scientific society, they should lay the grounds for blooming, self-productivity, internal-seeking attitude and scientific dynamism in the higher education system of the country. Fourthly, by the use of fundamental, directive, and practical research and development, the foundations should be laid for scientific, cultural and economic independence. In order to be supplied by the achievements of their own researches, universities and the educational institutes should prioritize research to education, and prepare the basis for coordination between education and research in all levels of higher education. They should direct both of them to educate the society members for construction, triumph, self-confidence and serving the community. The universities and educational institutes should avoid quantitative perspective and development of educational subjects without scientific basis and should not sacrifice quality for quantity. The university management should respect the position of professors and students and work for elevating characteristics of people, providing job security and protecting knowledge and science. It should keep them up and believe in them. The process of planning educational curriculum in the higher education centers, by relying on realities and research data, should move towards self-reliance, self-confidence, productive innovations, productivity and construction, and should try to direct the thinking system towards self-productivity through

internalizing the attitudes; it also has to be immunized against scientific, cultural, political and economic invasions both nationally and internationally.

Also the academic subjects should be designed according to the requirements of the society and the job market, and the mere theoretical education without practical skills has to be avoided so that by observing these cases, maybe we can say that the society with its physical relationship with the university will be put on the track of sustainable development.

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