

The dynamics of research changing role in Albania in its way to knowledge-based economy

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Abstract:

Being part of a dynamic global society, which is actually developing quite rapidly towards a knowledge-based society, it has certainly brought out the prioritization of the research and innovation quality. The quality of human knowledge is crucial for the successful steps towards social and political development. Albania is actually going through one of its most ambitious paths, the EU integration.

European Union in itself is a union based on knowledge economy and as such it is implementing a stimulating strategy named "Europe 2020", which put a lot of attention on the education and research to promote "a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth".

Therefore, Albania as a country that considers its future at the EU has to shift and adapt to the new role of the university from the traditional one based in teaching and research to an entrepreneurial one. Such a new role is characterized by the set-up of the knowledge transfer centers, where the research, project management or enterprising/innovative activities are considered as a core activity.

In this context, the reality in Albania is quite different. The role of the university is in a transition period and with a great need to be transformed and re-dimensioned. Hence, it is crucial that, especially in the research domain, universities need substantial support from public policies. Such support aims to change it to a main generator of the country's social and economic development.

This paper endeavors to further contribute to the enrichment of the country respective literature and furthermore debate on the dynamic role of the university in the context of its trifold role: i) as a provider of the highest level of education, ii) provider of the advanced

research and iii) provider of the innovative initiatives. These three dimensions are the components of “knowledge triangle”, and main features of the Europe’s ambition to be the world’s leading knowledge based economy and society.

Furthermore, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for analyzing variation in the roles performed by universities in the development of own research capacities. This framework is based on the triple helix model of university, industry, government relations and the literature on university engagement, more generally.

Key words: knowledge economy, triple helix model, entrepreneurial university.

INTRODUCTION

The actual dynamic society is quickly developing towards the “knowledge-based society”. Education is the most influential force for alleviating poverty, improving health and livelihoods, increasing prosperity and shaping more inclusive, sustainable and peaceful societies. Therefore, it is in everyone's interest to ensure that it is at the center of the post-2015 development agenda. The quality of human capital is crucial for a successful social and political development. European Union has prepared and is actually implementing the stimulating strategy “Europe 2020”, which is focused on education and research to promote “a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”.

Albania is a country that considers its future in European Union. Since the core policies of this union are based in knowledge economy, the debate on the new role of the university in Albania is quite vivid. And this role should be changed from a traditional teaching institution to academic center, where research, projects management and entrepreneurship as an innovative activity take place. In this context, the current university system has an inevitable need to be transformed and re-dimensioned. Several respective

researches consider crucial the support of university system from public policies, which aim to promote it towards the main generator of social and economic development of the country.

In this perspective, this study aims to contribute to the debate on the dynamic role of the university considering its traditional role as not the sole one. Instead, having a university which offers a triple function: offer a high level education, offer advanced research opportunities and foster pioneer and innovation initiatives. These three dimensions build up the knowledge triangle and are the main incentives of the EU ambition to be the leading knowledge-based economy and society.

Critical analysis on the main grounds

Since the industrial revolutions it was clear that the development of a country is closely related to “scientific knowledge” more than just natural resources. The synthesis of this experience through centuries is the indispensable role education and research in promotion of social and economic development of the countries that could create a proper correlation between these two elements (Beesley, 2003)

Literature and many examples of different countries, mainly in Southeast Europe prove that although these countries have invested in their educational system, they still lack a significant progress. (Bryde, Leighton, 2009). Studies highlight the fact that “just an enlargement and support of high education system does not automatically lead to social and economic development. (Yokakul, Zawde, 2009). If there is no symbiosis of qualified academic staff with infrastructure, systems, institutions, legal framework and other incentives on research and development, then the needed synergy and proper environment to boost these academic potentials is missing.

In policy-making and academic settings it is constantly discussed on the possibility to further grow a contemporary knowledge-based society. (Castells, 2001). On the other side,

the role of the university and research actually in Albania is quite modest as far as the influence and support to public, social and economic policies. The university is actually not playing a substantial role in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of different research projects.

On the other side, Albania is facing all the obligations that that derive from the EU integration process. From the study of the respective strategic documents of European Commission, as the new strategy of “Europe 2020”, some of the declarations of Council of Europe with regard to partnership to universities, government and businesses, it results that the future requires that universities should play a leading role in knowledge exchange and implementation of research and innovation projects. This agenda exposes Albanian universities to challenges and competitiveness.

Albania, in the framework of connecting higher education with development, growing role of European Research Area (ERA) and the integration process, has undertaken a number of initiatives. (UNESCO, 2011).

Although there are some government institutional efforts and a few initiatives in the private sector of academia to encourage the development of the knowledge society through the research and innovation (Nazarani, 2011), Albania is still confronting substantial challenges in this respect.

The studies (USAID, 2011; UNESCO 2011, Nazarani, 2011) show that despite the abovementioned initiatives, it exists considerable restrictions to connect education, innovation and social-economic development in the framework of knowledge-based society. These restrictions are closely related with (non-) interaction of three spheres: government, university and business. Thus, university is going through a re-orientation ongoing process from a university serving to the totalitarian system towards a democratized one. Therefore, it is the repositioning route in relation to government, business, civil society and citizens is needed. Furthermore, the legal

framework and the financing schemes determine the ways of cooperation between these spheres.

In this context, the proactive role of the university in international funds absorption is crucial to support research centers and respective projects in favor of social and economic development, as well as the enhancement of their human and institutional capacities. The literature suggests that application of a model that inter-relates the communication of each of such spheres, where each of them takes the role of the other, is indeed indispensable. As such, the university changes its identity to an enterprising structure becoming a center of innovation and economic and social development in the triple spiral of interrelation between the university, business and government.

Multidimensional transformations of contemporary society generate debates on the role of the university or academic sphere in the knowledge transfer, research and applied science and the relations to other spheres and government and/or business and industry (Kirkland, 2008).

In this reality, this study intends to address these main research questions: apart for the first dimension of lecturing, can the academic sphere also enhance a second dimension: research and innovation and include the third dimension: social-economic development and entrepreneurship? How are these transformations of the university main role integrated to its mission in the contemporary society?

This study aims to contribute to this existing vacuum, focusing, in particular, on the development of a model, where the role of the university is converging to capacity enhancement on research projects management, consequently in an institution with the adequate potential and importance in regional development, as one of the main priorities of European Union.

Methodology of the study

Aiming to tackle the research questions according to the adequate importance, the strategy of the study will be a combination of the theoretical analysis and empirical study carried on according to study models.

The focus of the study will be the universities and related institutions in the analytical critical perspective. They will be analysed based on the model Triple Helix (Figure 1). In difference to conventional paradigms, which consider the government or business in a leading role of innovation and the development of university mainly in the terms of knowledge transfer, Triple Helix model highlights the empowered role of the university in innovation and development in a knowledge-based society. (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000)

Triple Helix serves as an analytical model to designate and explore the dynamics and variety of policies and relation models between the government, university and business. The metaphor used 'Triple Helix' implies dynamics that are in constant change in a transition process that does not end. (Saad & Zawdie, 2008).

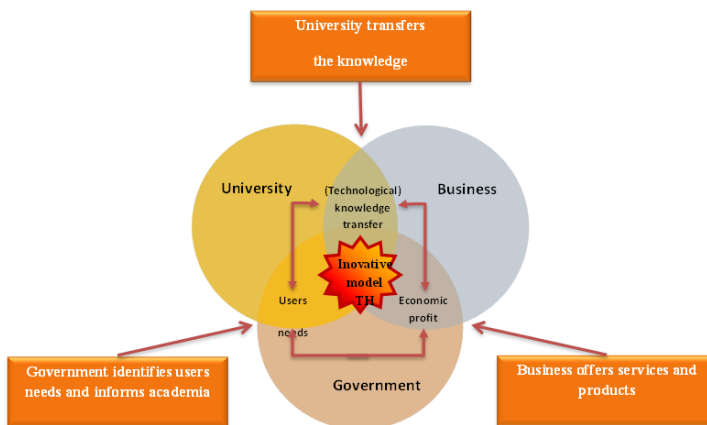


Figure 1. Triple Helix model

Triple Helix model implies that the interior energy generated from the inter-relation between the three spheres of government, university and business encourages innovation and development contributing to a knowledge-based society. (Metcalf, 2010). The evaluation of the dynamism generated in concrete terms, is a considerable challenge in this intensive study. Therefore, a detailed scientific project is ongoing. It is based on sound conceptual and methodological grounds contextualized to analyze the challenges of Triple Helix model and the possibilities to apply such model in countries, such as Albania.

CONCLUSIONS

The global society is quickly moving towards a knowledge-based one, where universities are more and more changing their profile to entrepreneur structures. There is an obvious need for Albanian university system to re-think its role.

Triple Helix is model that promotes capacities to cope with the dynamic changes in countries such as Albania in its road to EU integration. Three main actors of such process: university, business and government can not operate on their own if they want to achieve success. Partnership is a must in order to progress towards an innovative society based on hybridization of knowledge.

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