

Universities and their Communities – Role as Anchor Institutions: European Practices and Policies

Dr John H Smith, Senior Adviser, Former Deputy Secretary-General,
European University Association (EUA), Brussels

Global Forum on Higher Education for Diversity, Social Inclusion and
Community, LUMSA, Rome, 16th June 2017

« The task of universities is to create new knowledge and to educate people to be creative in their personal development, in their economic activity at the workplace and as citizens of a civil society. Innovation is, at its roots, all about people and their ability to reach their full potential in skill development and resourcefulness, and fostering the right conditions to achieve and maintain it »

Smart People for Smart Growth (EUA publication, 2011)

Main characteristics of Europe's universities today – in a complex and demanding environment

1. Adaptability and Flexibility
2. Education and Research benefitting Society
3. No « One-Size-Fit » - Diversity is Strength
4. New Skills for Employment and Personal Development in the Digital Age
5. Building and Strengthening Partnerships
6. Academic Freedom, Autonomy with Accountability to Society
7. International Collaboration and Global Outreach

Challenges & Barriers – Universities working with Regional and Local Partners

Supply side (Reaching-Out)

- In Europe, universities are focused on teaching and research driven by academic output
- Universities operate in national academic systems that are not mainly targeted to respond to regional and local needs

Demand side (Reaching-In)

- Capacity and willingness of external public and private sector actors in the region/locality to seek knowledge and expertise within the university that can contribute to regional socio-economic development
- Leadership initiatives within and across partners – essential to reach mutual understanding of both needs and benefits

Linking European Policy with University Good Practice: Role of Universities in Smart Specialisation Strategies

- EU Structural and Cohesion Funds can be used to support innovative projects in research and training that are conceived by the regional and national authorities in close cooperation with regional actors such as universities and enterprises
- « Smart Specialisation » is a strategic approach to socio-economic development through targeted support of the EU Structural Funds investments to such projects in the EU budgetary period 2014-2020
- In 2014 EUA conducted a study to gain recognition of the role of universities as a key partner in taking forward successful Smart Specialisation Strategies in partnership with other stakeholders in the region

Universities' Potential Contribution to Regional Goals

EUA study demonstrated that EU regional policy debates had a tendency to adopt a conventional approach of viewing the university's role in regional development as focused solely on technology transfer

But Universities can contribute to regional goals in many different ways

- Research and innovation through their project activities
- Creating enterprises and business development
- Human capital development: new skills and curricula development
- Enhancing social equality through regeneration and cultural development

Demonstration by Good Practice - Examples

AUSTRIA – University of Graz

DENMARK – Aarhus University

ESTONIA – University of Tartu

FINLAND – University of East Finland

GERMANY – University of Siegen

IRELAND – National University of Ireland, Maynooth

POLAND – University of Warsaw

PORTUGAL – University of Minho

SLOVAKIA – Technical University of Kosice

SPAIN – University of Cantabria

UNITED KINGDOM – University of Coventry

Success Factors and Obstacles: Dialogue, Trust-Building and Alignment of University and Regional Strategies

Success Factors

Enhanced dialogue and communication between universities and regions is crucial: hence policy initiative of Smart Specialisation Strategies to encourage this dialogue is welcome

Rationalisation of curricula portfolio and research capabilities of universities to match more with regional needs and priorities

New and innovative links between universities and regions: mutual-learning workshops; internships with public and private partners, innovation fairs and open days etc.

Obstacles

Competition or lack of alignment between national and regional political and policy objectives/strategies can make dialogue difficult between universities and regional authorities

University governance structure, autonomy and capabilities: universities need to have freedom to pursue regional goals as well as the necessary financial, managerial and administrative means

Universities need to be, simultaneously, competitive in their teaching and research excellence (as shown for example by emphasis on national and international ranking exercises) and engage in regional socio- economic development – a challenge for academic communities!

Hence, need for recognition and more incentives and merits for academic careers relating to regional priorities

Future Trends

- A recent foresight study « The Knowledge Future: Intelligent Policy Choices for Europe 2050 » envisaged two scenarios – positive and negative – for Europe’s Knowledge System in terms of how they responded to the three major trends of globalisation, demographic change and accelerating technological change
- Let’s choose to look at the positive scenario 2050 scenario – « European Success » !!
- Clusters of well-funded universities are thriving in Europe’s important and growing cities in strong partnership with regional institutions
- Education is « in » - never before have so many wanted so much from teaching: new skills, new jobs, new capacities to cope with rapid change, new perspectives for leading fulfilled lives
- A growing demand for continual education has prompted new efficiencies: course modules shared within university clusters, on-line teaching, and specialisation within universities

Knowledge Future 2050: Greater Investment in « Public Goods » Education and Research is Required

- The private sector can do more but it too depends on « public goods » - an educated population, skilled workforce, breakthrough science
- Universities and higher education institutions will continue to bear the brunt of re-training people to re-enter employment, become self-employed (ever-growing phenomenon), to start a business/service etc
- Greatest challenge remains to prevent unemployment (medium to long term) from leading to discontent and social disintegration – the « trigger » for the negative scenario
- Public funded education including higher education may need to expand massively towards life-long learning for social integration – rather than purely for re-skilling

Summary 1 – Key Messages for Universities

1. University engagement with political and social actors at the regional, national and European levels must be strengthened by the universities themselves and the national and European collective bodies that represent them
2. Universities have not always been effective at promoting what they are already doing in their education and research activities that address real problems at national and regional levels
3. But there are many good practices from across Europe's universities which are leading the way that should be drawn to the attention of policy makers and political leaders
 - Illustrative quote from Professor Chris Brink, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Newcastle UK, which promotes a profile as a « Civic University » - perhaps the European equivalent term to « Anchor Institution »
 - *« A Civic University is one that is able to articulate, clearly and accurately, how it puts academic excellence to work in responding to the needs and demands of society »*

Summary 2 – Key Messages to Policy-Makers

1. At the European policy level the present tendency of « silos » of competition and cohesion policies need to be bridged and become open and transparent to university engagement (Research Framework Programmes, Regional Structural Funds and the new European Strategic Investment Fund)
2. Incentive-providing policies are needed to create new, and to strengthen existing partnerships between universities and other actors (public and private) because they will be instrumental in supporting universities to cope with the fast-paced developments in their regional environments
 - Illustrative quote from Maria da Graca Carvalho (MEP)

« Research and innovation policy and regional policy should be complementary and we should seek to build bridges between the two. Universities and higher education institutions have a central role to play in the process »

Selected References

Smart People for Smart Growth (EUA, 2011)

The Role of Universities in Smart Specialisation Strategies (EUA, 2014)

Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (European Commission, 2012)

The Knowledge Future: Intelligent Policy Choices for Europe 2050 (European Commission, 2015)

«The Civic University. The Policy and Leadership Challenges » John Goddard et al (Elgar publications, 2016)

Thank You for Your Attention!

Feedback to: john.smith@eua.be