

CONNECTING UNIVERSITIES AND SOCIETIES: TYPES OF ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESS FACTORS

VIEIRA, María-José

FERREIRA, Camino

VIDAL, Javier

Universidad de León

León (Spain)

maria.vieira@unileon.es

Abstract

The concept of Third Mission (3M) is strongly connected with the interaction and mutual contribution between universities and society at large through different actions. These activities could be classified in relation to research (technology transfer and innovation), to teaching (continuing education), as well as university involvement in communities (social engagement). The main focus of this paper is to analyse: (1) the activities developed by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in relation to research (technology transfer and innovation), to teaching (lifelong learning/continuing education), as well as university involvement in social and cultural life (social engagement) and (2) cases of good practices in 3M activities developed by Latin American and European HEIs in order to provide a framework about the main factors for their success. This paper synthesizes, by means of content analysis, a broad range of reports about activities and good practices on 3M in higher education through European projects of which University of León (Spain) has been partner or coordinator: Tempus Programme, 2012-2014: *Developing Third Mission Activities in Albanian Universities*; Alfa Programme, 2012-2014: *Linking Universities with your Environment for Sustainable Social and Economic Development*, LLL Programme 2009-2012: *European Indicators and Ranking Methodology for University Third Mission*, and LLL Programme 2008-2010: *Good Practices in University – Enterprise Partnerships*.

Keywords

Higher education, third mission activities, university extension, Latin America, Europe

INTRODUCTION

The term third mission (3M) is usually defined as a residual and fuzzy concept in contrast to teaching and research, covering all the activities beyond the first two (Vorley & Nelles, 2008; Görason et al., 2009). In this sense, this concept is multifaceted as it incorporates a varied range of activities involving the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments (Tuunainen, 2005).

The main feature of the 3M is the relationship between universities and society at large (non-academic partners). Therefore, the concept is strongly connected with the interaction and mutual contribution between universities and the rest of society, with the perceived need to engage with societal demands and link the university with its socio-economic context and, hence, to contribute to the regional development agendas (Ćulum et al., 2013; García-Peñalvo, 2016; Vilalta, 2013). In this sense, 3M activities arises from the need of HEIs to contribute to society in a meaningful way through knowledge and technology transfer, lifelong learning, entrepreneurship or exchanges of workers with business, amongst other.

Consequently, although there are many forms in which universities interact with society at large, 3M activities are usually classified in relation to research (technology transfer and innovation), to teaching (lifelong learning/continuing education), as well as university involvement in social and cultural life. Additionally, this variety of activities comprises different types of actors, many constituent parts of universities and requires different structures and mechanisms for it to become a reality (Mora et al., 2012).

As a contrast, in Latin American universities is infrequent to use this term of 3M in higher education. Instead, they use the concept of University Extension, and to a lesser extend, Outreach to society or environment. The term of University Extension has a greater connotation to 3M approaches aimed at cultural diffusion and social services for disadvantaged groups. That is, it is understood as working with disadvantaged or less privileged sectors of the population through cultural dissemination and technical assistance (Arocena & Sutz 2005; Vega et al., 2011).

Whatever the used term in different contexts, extension activities, 3M activities, or others, it is widely acknowledge that the importance of these activities in universities has increased as the benefits of close cooperation between them and external stakeholders have been increasingly recognised (Davey et al., 2011). In fact, the concept of 3M itself has been widely reviewed and debated considering even the need of introducing other terms as third stream or fourth mission (Kretz & Sá, 2013). In this paper, we considered extension activities (Latin American context) or 3M activities (European context) as a transversal an essential component of any university's role, whatever it is considered as a mission itself or as integrated in the central missions of universities, that is, teaching and research. From our perspective, universities have the duty of

serving society as a way to paying back its efforts and renew the original contract between universities and their regions.

Considering the needs and mutual benefits of universities cooperating and establishing links with their regions and society at large, the objectives of this paper are:

- To analyse and compare similarities and differences between Latin America and Europe in relation to (1) the political agenda promoting 3M activities at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and (2) the activities developed by HEIs in relation to research (technology transfer and innovation), to teaching (lifelong learning/continuing education), as well as university involvement in social and cultural life (social engagement).
- To analyse cases of good practices in 3M activities developed by Latin American and European HEIs in order to provide a framework about the main factors for their success.

METHOD

This paper draws on reports of 66 universities that have reported on activities and good practices on 3M in higher education through European projects of which University of León (Spain) has been partner or coordinator. In these projects activities and cases of good practices have been analysed by means of qualitative content analysis considering both contextual factors in the country/region and institutional factors that affect the development of 3M activities. These projects are:

1. Tempus Programme, 2012-2014: Developing Third Mission Activities in Albanian Universities, U3M-AL, <http://u3m-al.org>. The U3M-AL project supported the role of Albanian universities in the social and economic growth of the country developing relationships between these institutions and society through the promotion of 3M activities, establishing Regional Development Centres and creating an Albanian network. 7 Albanian universities and 5 European universities from other countries took part in this project.
2. Alfa Programme, 2012-2014: Linking Universities with your Environment for Sustainable Social and Economic Development, VINCULAENTORNO, <http://vinculaentorno.org>. This project was aimed to strengthen relations of Latin American universities with the socioeconomic environment by promoting: the exchange of experiences between Latin American and Europe on the role of 3M activities, the development of specific structures to implement 3M activities at Latin American universities, and the creation of an Latin American network for sharing 3M activities. In this project, 28 Latin American universities reported on 3M activities.
3. Life Long Learning Programme, 2009-2012: European Indicators and Ranking Methodology for University Third Mission, E3M, www.e3mproject.eu. E3M project generated a comprehensive instrument to identify, measure, and compare 3M

activities of HEIs from a wide perspective. This was achieved by creating indicators on 3M activities and by giving a new approach on the concept of ranking methodologies. 8 European universities participated in this project.

4. Life Long Learning Programme, 2008-2010: GOODUEP Good Practices in University – Enterprise Partnerships, www.gooduep.eu. This project supported European universities in the development of effective and efficient University-Enterprise Partnerships governance structures and practices aligned with their particular strategic plans and responsiveness to the knowledge-based economy requirements. 18 European universities participated in this project.

In these European projects institutions from different countries have been involved. From Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru. And from European countries: Albania, Italy, Spain, Finland, Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom, Austria, Ireland, Slovenia and Portugal.

RESULTS

Considering the **political agenda** both in European and Latin American countries to stimulate the development of 3M activities in universities, there are several differences between them. In the European context, the European Commission (EC) has been a crucial actor. In this sense, several documents have been produced by the EC in order to stress the role that universities have to play in order to contribute to the knowledge society and economy in Europe (EC, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011). On the contrary, in the Latin American context the concept of universities cooperating with society, it is embedded within the creation of the Ibero- American Knowledge Space, which stresses the need to carry out actions in two main fields: higher education, and research, development and innovation. In this sense, in the Latin American case, the research agenda in relation to society and the non-public sector is the priority, specially in universities where a significant part of the academic staff have not yet a PhD or where competitive funds for research are very limited at national level.

However, in spite of having different political agendas for the development of 3M activities, both in European and Latin American universities, the **types of third mission activities** that can be found in universities are quite similar, although there are differences in the priorities given by universities. As third mission activities, most activities between universities and society are related to or derived from teaching or research activities. However, in a number of cases, particularly in wide-ranging long-term partnerships, the activities developed integrate teaching and research. The results of these studies show that universities, both in Europe and Latin America, are extremely active in developing third mission activities. The main types of 3M activities that connect universities and external stakeholders are the following considering each of the three dimensions:

1. In relation to research (technology transfer and innovation):

- Creating large-scale long-term projects for strategic joint research developing: science and technology parks, business incubators, large scale research centres, and regional-level R&D infrastructure.
 - Valorising research results in various forms including the creation of spin-off's and licensing protected research results.
 - Developing joint research between enterprises and university researchers.
 - Contracting research.
 - Renting of research equipment and facilities.
 - Funding chair positions supporting both teaching and research activities.
2. In relation to teaching (lifelong learning/continuing education):
- Curricular development and course supply.
 - Further training to enterprises' employees, designed by demand.
 - Organisation of internships for students in enterprises.
 - Graduates' recruitment services, which include facilities for students and enterprises including: electronic portals and fairs for matching enterprises and students, graduates databases and career advice for students.
 - Developing the entrepreneurial culture. Mostly this is aimed at fostering the creation of spin-offs in the short term, but also to promote a cultural change within students to reach more entrepreneurial cultures in the long term.
3. In relation *to social engagement*: Important differences between European and Latin American universities are found in the type of activities developed as social engagement. In the case of Europe, social engagement activities are focused on the provision of student career services, alumni networks and artistic and cultural events, open to society and working together with public institutions. As a contrast, in Latin American, the approach is aimed at cultural diffusion and social services for disadvantaged groups. That is, it is understood as working with disadvantaged or less privileged sectors of the population through cultural dissemination and technical assistance (for example, social service of graduates is mandatory at Mexican universities). The consolidation of these Social Engagement activities has been greater in Latin American than in European universities, but in both cases, there is a common trend that these activities have emerged from institutional or individual initiatives according to the own circumstances and needs of each region.

Finally, considering the **main factors for the success of 3M activities**, results based on the analysis of the cases of good practices presented in the four projects could be extended to a great extent to most 3M activities. There are several favourable factors for developing successful 3M activities:

- The relevance of the contexts, 3M activities need a certain initial basis (financial,

legal and cultural).

- Although the support of a large industrial partner or foundation may be helpful in some cases, especially in the case of technology transfer and innovation activities, 3M activities do not depend on the presence of big business or large multinationals in the region.
- Successful partnerships are always based on the innovative capacity of the institution in some area or field.
- The governance of the institution has an important role in the successful development of 3M activities. A climate of institutional autonomy, flexibility and appropriate management is a necessary condition.
- Initial support from public or private sources.
- Personal incentives to academics involved in the development 3M activities seem to be critical. These incentives are not necessarily economic. Academic work is to a large extent evaluated by traditional criteria of research excellence and productivity. Taking into consideration the academic staff's involvement in 3M activities for their assessment, promotion and academic recognition is a key incentive.
- Mobility, intellectual property regulations and overheads are also aspects that play a role in stimulating or hindering 3M activities related to research.
- At least in the initial stages of successful 3M activities, individual entrepreneurialism and leadership is probably the most important factor.

Consequently, successful 3M activities have to be explained in relation to the context, to national and regional policies, to institutional views on third mission and, in many cases, to individual initiatives by some entrepreneurs at universities that constitute the main explanation of the success in implementing university-society partnerships.

Both in Latin American and in European universities, individual entrepreneurialism is a key factor. There is a common trend that in most cases 3M activities have emerged from individual initiatives -as the ones already developed by the projects in Albanian or Latin American universities- that have flourished in favourable and, generally, in unfavourable contexts and have contributed to a progressive change in reluctant academic cultures about linking universities and society.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The variety of third mission activities is wide and comprises different types of actors, many constituent parts at universities, different structures and mechanisms that make these activities to become a reality. Due to the complex and mixed structure, which normally involve different interests and stakeholders, third mission activities are difficult to identify and to follow at universities. Main reasons for such limitations are based on two complex considerations: the

dependence on contextual factors for the development of 3M activities (national, regional, institutional, disciplinary, and also at individual level), and the nature of data needed to track these activities (regarded in some cases as unquantifiable, informal, and not available in central university units).

Barriers that should be overcome are in line with the key messages promoted by the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: a more favourable vision on third mission activities, adopting adequate governance and funding mechanisms, increasing flexibility and autonomy of universities and promoting an entrepreneurial culture at universities.

In the European context, the political agenda for Third Mission activities in universities has been mainly developed by the European Commission in the context of the role of universities as engines in the knowledge economy. In the Latin American context, the concept of universities cooperating with society is embedded in their role of "extension" to societies.

Latin American universities have included Social Engagement high on their "third-mission" agenda. To be more precise, it can be said the Latin American universities have included social engagement in their university mission, being also an important element of the teaching and research agendas. Hence, social engagement as a means of "university extension" is and has been for many years a priority in universities in the region, something that should be a model for other regions of the world. For successful partnerships between universities and communities, universities must have a clear view of the needs of society in relation to the university capabilities, and be able to select social niches and specific activities to attend to, for their mutual benefit.

REFERENCES

- Arocena, R., & Sutz, J. (2005). Latin American Universities: From an original revolution to an uncertain transition. *Higher Education*, 50, 573–592.
- Ćulum, B., Rončević, N., & Ledić, J. (2013). Facing New Expectations – Integration of Third Mission Activities into the University. In B. Kehm and U. Teichler (Eds.), *The Academic Profession in Europe: New Tasks and New Challenges* (pp. 163-195). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Davey, T., Baaken, T., Galan Muros, V., & Meerman, A. (2011). The State of European University-Business Cooperation Final Report - Study on the cooperation between Higher Education Institutions and public and private organisations in Europe. Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre.
- European Commission (2003). *The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge*. European Commission, COM (2003) 58 final.
- European Commission (2005). Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy. European Commission, COM (2005) 152 final.
- European Commission (2006). Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities:

- education, research and innovation. European Commission, COM (2006) 208 final.
- European Commission (2009). A new partnership for the modernisation of universities: the EU Forum for University Business Dialogue, COM(2009) 158 final.
- European Commission (2011). *Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's Higher Education systems*. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM (2011) 567 final).
- García-Peñalvo, F. (2016). La tercera misión. *Education In The Knowledge Society (EKS)*, 17(1), 7-18. doi:10.14201/eks2016171718.
- Görason, B., Maharajh, R., & Schmoch, U. (2009). New activities of universities in transfer and extension: multiple requirements and manifold solutions. *Science and Public Policy*, 36(2), 157-164.
- Kretz, A., & Sá, C. (2013). Third Stream, Fourth Mission: Perspectives on University Engagement with Economic Relevance. *Higher Education Policy*, 26, 497–506.
- Mora, J.G., Vieira, M. J., & Detmer, A. (2012). Managing university-enterprise partnerships. In P. Temple (Ed.), *Universities in the Knowledge Economy: Higher Education organisation and Global Change* (63 – 81). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Tiana (2009). El espacio Iberoamericano del Conocimiento: retos y propuestas. Organización del Estado Iberoamericano.
- Tuunainen, J. (2005). Hybrid practices? Contributions to the Debate on the Mutation of Science and University. *Higher Education*, 50(2), 275-298.
- Vega, J., Manjarrés, L., Castro, E., & Fernández, I. (2011). Las relaciones Universidad-empresa: tendencias y desafíos en el marco del Espacio Iberoamericano del Conocimiento. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*, 57, 109-124.
- Vilalta, J. M. (2013). La tercera misión universitaria. Innovación y transferencia de conocimientos en las universidades españolas. Madrid: Studia XXI. Fundación Europea Sociedad y Educación.
- Vorley, T., & Nelles, J. (2008). (Re)Conceptualising the Academy: Institutional Development of and beyond the Third Mission. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 20(3), 119-135.