

The University and Its Community: The Role of the University in Local and Regional Development (0004)**Short Abstract**

The paper explores the issue of the role the university plays in local and regional development, starting from theoretical premises offered by the work of Kitagawa (2005), Pawlovski (2009), Estkowitz (the triple helix model), the OECD and others and then exploring in depth in a comparative manner four case studies, namely (i) Cornell University, (ii) University of Bristol and South-West Regional Development Agency, (iii) KAIST and (iv) Babeş-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Possible trends for future development as well as lessons to be learnt will be presented as conclusions of this study.

Long(er) Abstract

The role of the university in local and regional development is important from two distinct perspectives, namely on one hand the role the university plays in the social environment it is part of, and on the other hand the university seen as an actor at local and regional level within the broader context of globalization.

From a historical point of view, the first universities that assumed explicitly a connection with their socio-economic environment are the civic universities (established in England in the 19th century); furthermore, the role a university may play at regional level is also often connected with a nation-building role the university is credited with. The university is no longer an isolated ivory tower, where the gown is properly separated from the town, but rather an important factor in the sustainable development of the region it is situated in.

At global level, one can notice new types of relationships between various universities as well (Kitagawa 2005, 2), including strategic alliances between universities at both local and international level.

Duke (2002, 34) argues that an increasing number of universities will become “more local and more global” at the same time. In some cases, setting the objective to become a “regional institution” may be seen as a stigma (Kitagawa 2005, 3), though regional partnerships may also be seen as a means to reach a recognized status at international level, at least in what concerns research activities.

Haleb (2002, 206) argues that a “regiocentric orientation” of the university may not necessarily lead to economic development of the region, especially in the larger context of the global knowledge-based economy.

The regional focus may also influence the specific functions of the university, which underwent a dynamic change during the last decades, influencing, in their turn, the mission of the university.

Burton R Clark’s books on the entrepreneurial university published in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the 1990s opened the door towards looking for diversified funding sources and thus for a more active involvement of universities at local and

regional level (Kitagawa2005, 3 and Pawlowski 2009). According to Pawlowski (2009), the two main factors that characterize the economy of the developing countries (such as those from Central and Eastern Europe) are globalization and the current use of knowledge as vital resources.

Pawlowski suggests the term “fourth generation university” in order to designate a university which is active at local and regional level. The fourth generation university is a more advanced model of the entrepreneurial university, designating a university which tries to change its external environment in order to accelerate its growth, by actively pursuing external initiatives and by cooperating with this changed environment.

One of the functions of such a university is the creation of its own environment, both social and economic. Estkowitz and Leydesdorff (1997) suggest the “triple helix” model, which reunites within the same context of interaction the industry, the government and the universities. Others (Boucher, 2003, Varga, 2000) also look into the manner in which universities impacted their community. Kitagawa’s findings resulting from the analysis of the three levels of interaction in the Triple Helix model support Burton R Clark’s (1998) earlier conclusion according to which the universities that, within their regions, benefit of inter-organizational networks may in their turn influence notably the local and regional development.

There are also a number of indicators to be considered when analyzing this topic, put forward by such organization as OECD or the U Map project.

The four universities considered for the case study ((i) Cornell University, (ii) University of Bristol and South-West Regional Development Agency, (iii) KAIST from Korea and (iv) Babeş-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca, Romania.) come from a variety of backgrounds and were selected starting from the information available on-line and also taking into consideration their geographical distribution as well as local and regional background.

The case study highlights a number of aspects noticed in the universities studied, placing them on a spectrum ranging from highly proactive, engaged in “regional stewardship” to passive, impacting the region as a result of external favourable circumstances. Furthermore, it identifies the particularities of each university’s approach to its interaction at local and regional level with other potential actors and the range of the impact of its actions (some at a noticeable larger and more wide-spread scale than others).

The findings come to confirm that what has been stated by previous documents – such as the Total Development Paradigm (Pfeffer 2007) or the IREG’s Berlin Principles – is already taking place at the level of the universities included in the case study and has the potential to expand to all the actors involved in the higher education systems from Europe and elsewhere.