

Chapter 7

An Analysis of University Governance Dimensions in Academic Research and S3 Innovation Performance

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ABSTRACT

The chapter examines the multi-dimensional university governance topic, looking into five governance dimensions of universities and the differences across EU member states. It analyzes how the differences in university governance dimensions influence in their role in their regional research and innovation systems, and specifically in the smart specialization strategies (S3) implementation. The S3 is a new policy that has introduced novelties in regional development policy, requiring the mobilization of quadruple helix actors in setting the regional priorities for innovative potential. The involvement of universities in the formulation of these strategies is of high importance; however, it poses a number of challenges, particularly in regions with incipient regional innovation systems with low institutional capacity and leadership to coordinate the different actors' capacities. The chapter sheds light for policymakers and university managers on the most relevant university governance dimensions that can influence on how they engage with their regional research and innovation system.

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INTRODUCTION

Smart Specialisation and the Involvement of Quadruple Helix Actors

The national and regional strategies for Smart Specialisation (S3) have been promoted by the European Commission for the period 2014-2020 for a more targeted regional policy and use of Structural Funds. This new policy framework is based on activating a comprehensive collaborative leadership process among local innovation stakeholders, to identify potential areas of competitive advantage of the region, and better exploit their economic and innovation potential, rooted in more targeted investment and policy-making in those areas of strength. The notion of specialization to address knowledge-based strengths is an important conceptual step forward in European regional policy, which entails considerable changes in the governance of the R&I policy with an active role taken by all quadruple helix actors. The activation of stakeholders has evolved towards a better integration of the innovation users, moving from triple helix management model towards the participation of the quadruple helix stakeholders (Arnkil et al., 2010), representing academia, business, public administrations and civil society.

Therefore the way in which institutional governance is arranged, particularly of key R&I players such as universities, is of utmost importance to engage in R&I processes and in S3, being both closely interrelated. The complexity of the S3 process mostly lies in the need to generate a consensus governance space (Ranga and Etzkowitz, 2013) that brings together multiple stakeholders for the cross-fertilisation of differing perspectives of stakeholders to discuss innovative ideas that bring forward the knowledge-based economy. Nevertheless, for some countries and regions this constitutes a completely new approach that requires specific skills on co-creation dynamics as well as a change of mind-set by stakeholders that sometimes are not used to interact in such collaborative environments and do need to overcome existing rivalries and lack of strategic vision.

The Performance of Locally Embedded Actors

The matter of reaching the full potential for a region cannot ignore the performance of locally embedded actors. Achieving excellence, as a terminology, is one that have been, to a certain extent, over-used and, concurrently misunderstood. The mixed reactions to such terms reflect both varying degrees of knowledge and/or exposure to “excellent” or “smart” settings, as well as their interpretation within the context

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