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Title and Abstract

Title 'New dynamics in the interrelations between research and development in Albania: From National Innovation System towards the Triple Helix'

Conceptual Framework: Triple Helix as 'innovation in innovation'

The emergence, development and the rapid proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have significantly transformed almost all dimensions of our contemporary society leading to a conceptualisation of our society as a knowledge-based society. The concept of a knowledge-based society implies that science, technology, innovation and research are the drivers of social, political and economic development. In a knowledge-based society, the production and dissemination of knowledge is not confined to the higher education settings and research institutes, rather science and technology have become part of political discourses and public policy development. This implies for an interrelation between university, government and the business sector as envisaged in the Triple Helix model. The model implies increased cooperation between the spheres of government, business/industry and higher education/research/academia. This has also become a significant dimension of public policy intervention and initiatives in the private sector and civil society settings. The paper concentrates on the following: (i) an elaboration of the role of university in the context of a knowledge-based society by referring to the scholarship as developed by Castells, 2000; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; European Commission, 2011; (ii) a critical investigation of the analytical model of the Triple Helix and its relevance in the context of the Albania higher education system by referring to authors such as Etzkowitz, 2003; 2001; Etzkowitz & Viale; 2010; Etzkowitz & Dzisah, 2008 and the reports of international and national organisations in regards to the Albanian higher education – UNESCO, 2011; USAID, 2011; EC, 2012; (iii) an elaboration of the challenges faced by university in the management of research and links with policy and business sector in the context of the Triple Helix by referring to Beesley, 2003; Etzkowitz & Viale, 2010; Saad & Zawdie, 2008; Yokakul & Zawdie, 2009 Nwagwu, 2008; Datta & Saad, 2008; Kruss, 2008.

Abstract

Research background: Research and Development Landscape in Albania

The Albanian Government is addressing issues related to research, science and innovation at the level of national strategy and policy-making only in recent years, in line with the ambition to join the European Union and be part of the European Research Area. One of the major developments in this regard, has been the adoption of the *National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (NSSTI) 2009-2015* and consequently the establishment of the *Agency for Research, Technology and Innovation (ARTI)* in 2009. Other efforts towards the development of the knowledge-driven society in Albania refer to the adoption of the *Cross-cutting Strategy of Information Society* and the establishment of the *National Agency for Information Society*. What is more, particular attention is paid to innovation in the private sector in order to increase the competitiveness of Albanian companies at the regional and European market and bridge the innovative and technological divide with other countries in South East Europe. In this sense,

the *Business Innovation and Technology Strategy* has been launched in 2010 followed by the Action Plan to implement the *Strategic Programme for Innovation and Technology Development of SMEs for 2011–2016*. This policy framework is supported by agencies such as the Business Relay and Innovation Centre and the Albanian Investment Development Agency. The Albanian government has made efforts to strengthen the development of a knowledge-driven society as envisaged in the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI). In this light, the role of university as centre of education, training, research and knowledge-creation in driving innovation and development processes has been significantly affected by the transformations in the knowledge production system and the new dynamics in the interrelation and communication networks between university, the government and business. This implies that knowledge-production and scientific research are interrelated with social and economic objectives. Despite the significant progress in establishing and sustaining a national system of innovation, which is more and more moving towards the Triple Helix model, Albania faces major challenges in the link between research and development.

Research aim and methodology approach

This research paper aims at investigating the new dynamics in the interrelation between research and development in Albania in lieu of the contemporary transformations underpinning a knowledge-driven society, where research and innovation are crucial dimensions of economic growth and social progress. In order to do so, the paper initially explores the National Innovation System in Albania through a critical analysis of the main strategies, policies, intervention programmes and institutional frameworks regarding these main themes: (i) science, technology and innovation; (ii) higher education and research; (iii) entrepreneurship and business; (iv) information and communication technologies. This is achieved by applying the method of document analysis. This mapping is then complemented with qualitative data from focus groups with relevant stakeholders in the national innovation system regarding the main challenges in the enhancement of the interrelation between research and development in policy-making processes in Albania. Third, the research paper draws conclusions on how to establish successful mechanisms to bridge the gap between research and policy development in Albania. The paper argues that it is necessary to move from a National Innovation System towards the Triple Helix model, where universities drive innovation systems through the interrelation and communication networks with the government and business. The findings of the paper are based on the data gathered through the document analysis and the two focus groups organized with researchers, policy-makers, donors, civil society organisations and stakeholders in the national innovation system in Albania. The focus groups were organised in November – December 2012 in the framework of the project: Policy Dialogue in Albania: Bridging the Gap between Research and Policy Development. The focus groups discussed the dynamics of the national innovation and research system in Albania with the overall purpose to explore the ways in which the partnership between the spheres of government, business and university could be strengthened towards the Triple Helix model.

Findings

This section explores the policy and institutional framework in terms of research, innovation and development in Albania. The National Innovation System in Albania:

a- national strategies

National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2009-2015

National Strategy on Higher Education 2008-2013

Cross-cutting Strategy of Information Society 2007-2013

Business Innovation and Technology Strategy 2010-2015

Strategic Programme for Innovation and Technology Development of SMEs for 2011–2016

b- Institutions

Ministry of Education and Science

Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy

Ministry for Innovation, Information Technology and Communication

Agency for Research, Technology and Innovation

Albanian Investment Development Agency

National Agency for Information Society

Business Relay Innovation Centre of Albania

National Academy of Science

The major constraints in terms of the development of the Triple Helix in Albania are:

in lieu of the post-communist transition and similarly to other emerging democracies in the region, Albanian research sector has had to re-position itself in the context of the development of a robust civil society and re-orientate its role vis a vis the scientific community, the government, the higher education and the private sector as well as reset its priorities;

the research sector suffers from limited public and private funding for policy-oriented research; most of the funding comes from the private sector and the international development aid and research grants;

the Albanian research sector has relatively limited capacities (access to information, research expertise, project cycle management skills, networking skills) to apply for and benefit from the various European research funding schemes such as EU FP7; in this regard Albania has limited participation in FP7 projects;

a considerable portion of the research has been externalised to the international researchers, consultants and experts; this is problematic to some extent as it applies a one-size-fits all approach and takes the accumulated knowledge away from the country rather than developing know-how at the national level;

the research sector in Albania (think tanks, CSOs; university) is donor-dependent and lack sustainability to conduct research projects and initiate programmes that reflect the priorities of the contemporary

society in Albania;

there is relatively limited cooperation between relevant stakeholders in the research sector, i.e. there is need to encourage and strengthen knowledge-sharing, collaboration, peer-reviewing and joint initiatives between think tanks, CSOs, universities, government, private sector and other stakeholders;

the management of research is a very complex matter and full of dilemmas that refer to the governance of the knowledge-production system; self-management of researchers and academics; ethical considerations and balancing research and management; fundraising and participation in policy development.

Concluding remarks: policy suggestions

The research paper draws from the key findings of the focus groups and suggestions the following in regards to policy development in the Triple Helix:

establishment and support a network of researchers who are aware of and committed to the role of the university in the knowledge-driven society;

enhancement of the position/status of research sector in the Albanian public sphere through building capacities of researchers to formulate common research strategy and shared research agenda drawing from a bottom-up approach in setting the research priorities and encouraging their participation in the media and policy process;

building capacities to apply for and benefit from the European research funding and other international research and development grants through the provision of trainings in regards to: research competences; project cycle management; networking skills; information exchange and knowledge-share practices;

alignment of the research agenda with current and emerging policy issues and be able to respond to challenges in the contemporary society;

promotion a culture of knowledge-sharing, peer reviews and cooperation;

new paradigm in the management of research: entrepreneurial approaches;

national, regional and international cooperation linkages.