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Paper and Poster Proposal

Visualisation of the invisible – A model to describe and measure Applied Research and Third Mission at German UAS

Track 4

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose of this paper: The Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) have been playing an important role in the German higher education system since the 1970s, focussing on an academic education for a labour market outside academia. More recently, UAS are seen as part of the innovation system as well, by doing applied research and development (German Council of Science and Humanities, 2010). Because UAS are more regionally oriented than full Universities, they often pursue these activities in cooperation with local enterprises, institutions and other stakeholders – in short: society. Thus, doing applied research and (research-related) activities in exchange with society has become an important aspect of the portfolio of the German UAS. The latter is often referred to as “Third Mission” (Görason, Maharajh, & Schmoch, 2009; Benneworth & Zomer, 2011).

However, these activities have hardly been included into management tools yet, which makes them to some extent “invisible” for stakeholders like the UAS rectors, the government or the public. Professors pursuing activities like engaging as experts for the local community may have the feeling that their engagement does not count for their institution – because it is not counted. One of the reasons for this is the lack of adequate indicators to measure these activities.

The paper describes the work on and the results of a project called “FIFTH -Facets of and Indicators for Research and Third Mission at UAS”. The aim of the project was to elaborate an analytic description of applied research and research-related Third Mission at German UAS and finally develop indicators and a questionnaire to raise the needed data.

Design/methodology/approach: We developed the descriptive model and measuring tool using a multi-methodological approach: After a comprehensive literature review and a workshop with our advisory board of ten experts, we conducted 49 semi-structured interviews with managers and professors of UAS as well as further national and international experts on UAS and Third Mission. Based on the gathered information we compiled a first catalogue of facets and indicators for applied research and Third Mission. We then had the catalogue assessed by our advisory board (using the Delphi method) as well as by 84 UAS rectors in an online survey. Additional feedback to the model came from a survey among the state ministries of science. Based on the results we made some final adjustments to our model.

Findings: We developed a process-oriented model. The model describes facets of research, Third Mission and of mixtures of both areas, divided into input, output, outcome and impact. The surveyed members of the UAS rectorates as well as our advisory board judged most of the developed facets of the original model as useful for describing applied research and Third Mission at UAS.

Research limitations/implications: The model and the indicators were developed for the German context. However, researchers and practitioners in other countries, which are interested in measuring applied research and/or research-related Third Mission could adopt our model and use it as a basis for measuring the performances of the Higher Education Institutions in these areas.

Practical implications: The developed model will bring applied research and Third Mission into the focus of rectors and ministries. The model also provides a framework for recording and measuring these activities, their prerequisites, activities, outcomes and impact.

Social Implications: The UAS can use the model to explain to the public, which activities are going on at their institutions (besides teaching) and thus enhance the accountability as well as the perceived value of the UAS for society.

What is original/value of paper: There have been other attempts to develop indicators for Third Mission and applied research – none of them focused on the (German) UAS as we have in our project. To our knowledge no other model to describe and measure third mission and applied research as yet taken into account not only the “outcomes” but also the “input”, “output” and “impacts”.

Keywords: Third Mission, applied research, Universities of Applied Science

References

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Biographical Details:

Cort-Denis Hachmeister studied psychology at the University of Bielefeld and has been working for the CHE Centre for Higher Education since 1999. He is currently working on the project FIFTH – Facets of and Indicators for Research and Third Mission at Universities of Applied Science. He also works for the CHE University Ranking, a multidimensional Ranking for German HEI.

Isabel Roessler studied Social Science at the Ruhr-University Bochum and worked there before she started working for the CHE Centre for Higher Education in 2007. She is the leader of the project FIFTH. She is also engaged in other projects on Third Mission and in the international Ranking U-Multirank.

Christina Scholz studied English and literary studies at the University of Bielefeld and has a PhD in literature. She joined the CHE Centre for Higher Education in 2015 and besides FIFTH she also works for the CHE project “Monitor Lehrerbildung” (Monitoring Teacher Education).