

Call for Proposal: EAIR

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Title

The interrelation of Third Mission and research partnerships in reference to German Universities of Applied Sciences

Abstract

The higher education system in Germany is changing. Especially the Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) are determined to develop new profiles. One key-word in this context is Third Mission. Third Mission encompasses activities of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) besides teaching and research, like technology transfer, life-long-learning or science communication. Within Third Mission, HEI are cooperating with a broad range of private, public and third sector partners. Thereby HEI are getting in touch with society and its needs: cooperative projects and other types of interaction support an exchange of (currently) relevant information between HEI and society. In the best case, cooperation projects and partnerships emerge out of these contacts. Yet it is not clear, if existing cooperation projects and partnerships do influence Third Mission activities at HEI, or if Third Mission activities do have an impact on partnerships and types of cooperation. This paper illustrates and analyses the interrelation of Third Mission and different types of cooperation with different stakeholders: How is the activity-level in Third Mission-areas linked to cooperation with partners from academia, economy and society? The findings presented in the paper are based on a quantitative survey among rectors of German Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). The results show, that there are correlations between the activity level in Third Mission and the different types of cooperation.

Outline

In Germany, with its more than 400 Higher Education Institutions, the competition for external research funds, partners and cooperation projects increases. Only 30.5 % of the 423 German HEI are full-universities. 50.1 % are Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and about 20 % are specialised institutions like Universities of Arts (Federal Statistical Office, 2014). Due to their enormous number, UAS need to develop individual profiles in order to become visible for partners outside academia. One possible method for profiling is provided by Third Mission and its activities for and with society, e.g. cooperation with public and private partners (Roessler, Duong, & Hachmeister, 2015).

Concerning their (applied) research, UAS have to cooperate with partners of the private, public and third sector. An annual overview about the sources of research revenues, published by the German Federal Statistical Office, shows that the private sector is the second highest source of revenues for the Universities of Applied Sciences. In 2013, 22.8 % of the external research funds came from trade and industry. Full-universities obtained only 19.0 % of their research revenues from the private sector (Federal Statistical Office, 2015b).

The statistics also indicate, that UAS relate to broader sources for external research funds than full-universities. Besides, UAS seem to receive money from more different stakeholders than full-universities.

Unfortunately, statistics on research revenues do not show, whether fundings for research were given for contract research, or if the HEI and the financier were working together in a partnership. Therefore, it has to be analysed, what kinds of research partnerships HEI are forming (Roessler, 2016).

Contacts between the HEI and external partners are not only realised by research. In addition, Third Mission activities help to get in touch with society, because the HEI and external partners interact in the different areas of Third Mission.

Thus, the questions arises if and how Third Mission is interrelated with cooperation of the HEI with external partners and which areas of Third Mission are interlinked with which kind of cooperation.

The following hypotheses might give an example of how Third Mission and types of potential cooperation could be interrelated:

1. Universities of Applied Research, which are very active in technology transfer, could also cooperate easily with their business partners in research activities.
2. Universities of Applied Sciences, which are engaged in life-long learning, could have contacts with stakeholders from outside academia. Future cooperation projects and collaboration in research activities and even for partnerships could be prepared in this way.

The paper is based on a PhD thesis that will be completed by mid- 2016. The findings are based on a quantitative online-survey among rectors of Universities of Applied Sciences. Replies were received from 84 out of 198 rectors of UAS. One aim of the survey was to get a comprehensive insight into the current situation of cooperation between UAS and external partners from different sectors. In the paper the following information will be given:

1. Overview about research-cooperation which are realised by UAS in general:
 - a. onetime cooperation,
 - b. strategical partnerships,
 - c. collaborative operated institutes/laboratories,
 - d. science-to-business centre.
2. Overview about partners with which the UAS are cooperating in research:
 - a. with other HEI in Germany and abroad,
 - b. with enterprises in Germany and abroad,
 - c. with partners from society in Germany and abroad,
 - d. with politics/governance.
3. Overview which Third Mission-areas are interrelated with research cooperation:
For example
 - a. technology transfer,
 - b. science communication,
 - c. life-long-learning,
 - d. regional engagement,
 - e. etc.

The responses of the rectors showed different kinds of cooperation: 92.6 % of the UAS cooperate with partners from outside academia in form of onetime cooperation. 51.9 % are involved in strategic partnerships. 34.6 % operate institutes/laboratories in collaboration with external partners and 9.9 % are running science-to-business centres (Roessler, 2016).

The analysis shows that there are cooperation with all four stakeholder-groups listed above, although not every UAS cooperates with each stakeholder group. Only 62 out of 84 of the respondents answered that their UAS would cooperate with partners from economy, society, academia and government in equal measure (Roessler, 2016).

The results of the study show impressively, that the activity-level on several aspects of Third Mission is interrelated to different kinds of cooperation: The more active UAS are in Third Mission-areas, the more likely cooperation are. Most important for research cooperation is the activity-level of the UAS in the Third Mission-area "regional engagement".

Yet it remains unclear, if a higher activity level in Third Mission-areas makes UAS cooperate with external partners, or if cooperation encourages UAS to become active in Third Mission-areas (Roessler, 2016). Both directions might be possible.

The findings give an overview about the kinds of cooperation that are existing at German UAS. Cooperation with various stakeholders are analysed in detail. For the first time, the activity-level in Third Mission-areas are analysed as factors with a possible impact on research partnerships with stakeholders from academia, economy, civil society or government.

Literaturverzeichnis

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