

“Active Regionalism” as a Way to Implement a “Third Mission” of Universities

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Abstract — Although the problem of integration of a higher education institution and its region is not new for Russia, it is relevant to consider the “new regionalization” associated with the increased engagement of universities in the life of their regions. Participation of universities in regional development is connected with the transformation of universities’ mission in the global and Russian practices. The new mission of “serving the community” (“a third mission”) includes innovative regional development, production of human capital and social participation. Universities that revisit and revise their institutional mission and identity as well as develop their “active regionalism” have received a special status of “flagship universities” in the Russian Federation. The program of establishing flagship universities is not only aimed at developing individual universities but also at the evolution of regional systems of higher education and regional development.

Keywords – active regionalism, third mission, regional development, flagship universities, institutional identity

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to secure their place in a modern knowledge-based society, universities throughout the world are carefully revisiting their roles and relationships with stakeholders and communities in the local, regional, national and international contexts [1, 2].

The way a university determines its priorities and interacts with its communities, reflects its evolution. The outcome of the stakeholder engagement process has significant implications for the university’s chances of survival and development. Therefore, a thorough study of such processes, their driving forces and their impact on the internal university’s life appears to be prompt and justified [3].

Changed expectations with regard to universities (economic expectations in terms of the demand for knowledgeable and skilled employees in the modern economy; requirements for relevant research and creation of knowledge that underlie the successful development of these economies [4]; and social expectations) are characterized as “a fundamental change in social contracts between science and higher education institutions, on the one part, and the government, on the other part” [5].

The year 1973 witnessed discussions on changing “the social contract between higher education and society”. In addition to transferring and expanding knowledge, universities at that time were called upon to play an important role in the overall social goal of achieving greater equality of

opportunities, to provide education adapted to a large diversity of individual qualifications, motives, expectations and career aspirations, to facilitate life-long learning, as well as to undertake the function of public service, i.e., to contribute to solving major problems faced by the local community and society as a whole and to directly participate in the process of social change [3].

The list of requirements produced 46 years ago is more relevant than ever in today’s discussions about university missions. Universities are becoming a central element of regional modernization through their integration into the economic and social environment of the regions.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Multiple studies are devoted to modernization of domestic education as well as to regional issues of domestic education development. The relevance of examining the mission of university is induced by reforming the education system as well as by updating its regional specificity.

Investigation into the problems faced by the Russian higher education system on the path of modernization, research of universities’ mission and emergence of the “third mission” are based on the main principles of the systemic approach. Universities are considered to be social institutions in conjunction with economic, political, social and cultural institutional subsystems of the Russian society as concrete historical holism.

The present study attempts to analyze formation of regional identity of universities and specificity of implementing the third mission – regional socio-economic development.

III. UNIVERSITIES, COMMUNITIES AND MISSIONS

Although the problem of integration of a higher education institution and its region is not new for Russia, it is relevant to consider the “new regionalization” associated with the increased engagement of universities in the regions’ lives.

It may seem that interaction with industry and interaction with the community is what every university should be engaged in. Most often, however, universities interact with their traditional stakeholders, such as students, fellow researchers, funders and research sponsors. Russian and foreign scientists highlight the importance of proactive interaction of universities with their regions represented by business, government, and local communities [6].

The strong role of higher education institutions is not only to supply prospective employees to the community, but also to create small innovative enterprises, to prepare entrepreneurial teams, to improve the regions' investment attractiveness, to position themselves as an expert and discussion platform [7], as well as to create regional innovation systems, to generate knowledge in international networks with an access for local agents and to enhance productivity and competitiveness and, ultimately, social welfare [3].

The publication "Public Involvement Mission" identifies four spheres of influence factors and conditions that determine the main implication and manifestation for different regions. Firstly, the institutional sphere, in which respect universities invest in activities, if they can make some profit afterwards. Secondly, the cultural sphere (respect, rejection or expectation of universities' public involvement from the society). Thirdly, the political sphere, in which the existing conditions as well as financial rewards or sanctions can govern universities' public involvement. Finally, the individual sphere (advantages in the labor market and personal development). The range of public involvement varies depending on the level of development, political conditions and cultural diversity in different countries. [8]

Participation of universities in regional development is connected with the transformation of universities' mission in the global and Russian practices [9].

The new mission of "serving the community" ("a third mission") includes regions' innovative development (creation of technological parks and innovative sites), production of human capital (personnel training for innovative economies) and social participation (participation of universities in sorting out social issues).

Important determinants for developing the innovation process are the level of regional economic development, leading industries and regions' educational potential [10].

Creation of the "innovation system" as a necessary condition for implementing a "third mission" encompasses the community of all actors involved in the innovation process. There is a growing regional need for universities to participate in training personnel for the innovation economy - "advanced training of prospective employees for the regional industry, taking into account the transformation of its need for professional personnel (i. e., current changes in the structure of the regional labor market)" and "taking into account the needs of existing enterprises and economic entities that will function on the territory of the region in the future" [10].

When building the system of dynamic interaction "university – region", it is necessary to take into account national and global contexts that have a direct impact on the process of interaction between universities and regions.

Since universities are subjects of the global network of reproduction and use of knowledge, their activities in the reproduction of an "intellectual resource" have a triple-use nature: to pursue international trends and education development standards; to reflect specific features of regional development and local economy needs; and to ensure a

continuous liaison between global processes and regional peculiarities of knowledge application [11].

Formation of regional identity is one of the important factors in developing the university education system. Adopting successful practices of interaction of American and European universities with their respective regions should take into account and preserve indigenous regional specificity.

Pursuit of identity must mean "not equivalence, but rather a complex and flexible model including various subsystems. Any system is more efficient and more susceptible to development if its elements complement each other rather than being denied by submission." [13]

Of particular importance for regional development in the implementation of a "third mission" by universities is fulfillment of the social participation mission.

Social mission, which supplements the first two, learning and research, makes a university as open as possible to participate in solving social problems of the region in which they operate. This includes participation in creating equal access to education (inclusive education "third age" universities), use of university facilities by outsiders in the community (libraries and sports facilities), recognition and transfer of certain values (volunteering, helping elderly people and environmentalist eco-teams) and many other things.

In the broad sense, an underlying idea of a "third mission" is that each of its parts ("missions" in the narrow sense – technology transfer, life-long learning and social participation) cannot be performed without liaising with the other parts. All the missions named must be associated with the basic institutional mission of a university, which transfer knowledge – education as a professional and general cultural training of an individual for him/her to be able to work in a particular social environment (through obtaining knowledge and developing the intellect).

In addition, the institutional mission of universities assumes development of the intellectual personality traits and creative potential to perform professional activities and social adaptation in the society in which knowledge and technology turn into the basis for the economy and social sphere functioning [14].

This social involvement enables implementation of the public servicing mission and overlaps with a variety of motives relevant for society, university, students and the state.

Universities create a trust stock by acting as a competent non-profit partner, which attracts undergraduate applicants. They also use the gained practical experience of social partnership in scientific research and in the learning process. Students, in their turn, have an opportunity to apply academic knowledge and obtain additional qualifications outside the academic institution.

Since the most significant qualities of university graduates are initiative, enterprise, ability to cooperate and ability to make responsible decisions independently while predicting their possible consequences, social activity is a potential of experience enrichment and personality development. Education in universities should not only prepare for future professional

activities, but also for responsible behavior in a free, democratic and social rule-of-law state, in other words, they should bring up civilians.

The state benefits both economically and in terms of strengthening its social stability. Concrete improvements in local living and working conditions, elimination of social injustice, involvement of as many people as possible and, as a result, stabilization of society are the goals to be reached within universities' humanistic social [15]

Universities which revisit and revise their institutional regionalism have received a special status of "flagship universities" in the Russian Federation.

The program of establishing flagship universities, which was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science, is not only aimed at developing individual universities but also at the evolution of regional systems of higher education and regional development.

The majority of such universities have already got involved into the activities specified in the program. Besides, a number of projects and directions have been initiated: technological zones (technoparks), university clinics, children universities, youth technological parks, youth schools, business incubators, etc.

Yet, a number of problems aggravates the implementation of regional projects: economic and demographic challenges of each individual region, shortage of government financing, lack of an established system to support innovative enterprises and insufficient interest of businesses in joint promotion of innovations together with universities.

Domestic and foreign researchers also pinpoint a "low level integration of management teams, a low level of university staff engagement in the implementation of the development programs, an insufficient level of university staff professional development to solve ambitious tasks of the development program, absence or only formal provision of programs of work with personnel reserve and/or scientific-pedagogical staff, constrained experience commercializing the outcomes of research and development (R&D) [16], incompliance of educational curricula and surveys with new requirements, no pay for regional engagement and liaison with the community and absence of entrepreneurial culture [17].

Most significantly, regions often lack the demand for science-intensive products, high technology and innovations implementation, which proves the imperfection or stagnation of the national or regional innovation system.

IV. CONCLUSION

Universities themselves cannot be transformed separately without transforming the regional development pattern, liaising with stakeholders, government and business financial support and, ultimately, without entrepreneurial culture – willingness of the university community, business community and the civil society to comprehend such a way of development.

The purpose of establishing flagship universities is proactive interactions and promotion of "active regionalism".

The key ingredient of successful regional development and innovation activities should be consistently based on mutual interest of all the parties involved in the implementation of innovation activities and social programs. In their turn, universities are to occupy a proactive position and act as initiators of regional development programs. Universities' proactive position provides momentum and improves the regional potential, whilst, on their own, they are unlikely to accomplish the goals they face.

There exists a very simplified approach between the observation that universities, under certain circumstances, are able to work with regions in a mutually beneficial way and the normative statement that universities must contribute into the regional modernization [17].

The industrial policy is to develop the economic activities that would match local peculiarities and have positive feedback for education (increased demand for graduates as well as new technologies and knowledge) [12].

Public involvement mission, representing value-oriented actions, has an impact on social, environmental and economic development of a region. Foreign scientists distinguish between three spheres: civil engagement (voluntary work and social entrepreneurship), involvement of students and staff in social projects in order to improve the learning process and profound identification of target groups that do not possess access to higher education.

University has a meaningful advantage: having a special status in the regional community and being an independent player in the regional public and political field, it is a partner of the regional administration and other civil society participants.

Such a partnership is the only basis for holism, stability and efficiency of civil society. Here, the question arises: how effectively universities are able perform the social function, participating in the solution to social problems at the regional level and interacting with other civil society institutions.

In order to transform the mission of universities, commitment is required to modify the university community proper as well as to involve business and civil society institutions, which are stakeholders (the parties concerned) in reforming the higher education system. However, the key "player" in modernizing the university environment is the state as the subject that projects transformations as well as motivates and financially supports their implementation.

At the same time, as experience of higher education reform in European countries shows, policy guidance by the state should be replaced by expanding universities' autonomy, establishing partnership relations with public (especially local) authorities, engaging businesses in joint activities with universities, expanding universities' ties with civil society institutions and strengthening partnership relations between universities.

Systematic "active regionalism" of major stakeholders engaged in regions' development is a basis for carrying out universities' "third mission", which modernize its institutional identity. At a higher level, "regional involvement" is an external and visible sign of the "third mission" through which the

university can demonstrate its contribution to the creation of civil society.

Government and business interested in creating regional innovation systems should contribute to the financial independence of the regions. Training of prospective personnel at universities for an economy of innovation, carried out in the context of rapid scientific and technological progress, should include new teaching forms and methods, and life-long training, refresher courses being a major part in the system of training.

Distance learning and online technologies (social mission) as well as enlightenment activities should facilitate access to higher education. As a result, training and research should be aimed at solving specific regional problems and promote regional development. At the same time, a university, developing its region, must develop itself, while preserving and strengthening its own institutional identity [18].

This implies that the main institutional mission of university – education through training - should not be “sacrificed” for region-oriented projects that do not contribute to its (university’s) development. Training is built into these projects so that graduates leave the university with a wide range of knowledge, ability to learn and a creative approach to solving non-standard problems.

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