Popular Science Abstract

In today's world, universities are increasingly expected to contribute to society beyond their traditional roles of teaching and research. This additional responsibility, known as the Third Mission (TM), encompasses various activities, including commercialization and knowledge transfer. However, a key aspect of TM, knowledge valorization—which emphasizes the broader social impact of research—remains underexplored. This project aims to address this gap by investigating how universities perceive, implement, and measure knowledge valorization, and by examining the roles of different stakeholders in this process such as universities (research units creating knowledge), industry (businesses and corporations implementing new knowledge and innovations, creating products, services, and jobs), government (authorities on different levels who are policymakers), civil society (innovation users, non-governmental organizations, associations, citizens, workers, different social groups and institutions), and the environment. The last element, the environment, is not an actor itself but provides the context for creating and developing ecologically sensitive knowledge. All these elements form a quintuple helix. The main goal of this project is to develop a model that supports universities in successfully implementing their TM activities, tailored to their level of knowledge valorization maturity.

The importance of this project lies in its pioneering focus on the social impact of TM activities and the creation of tools to measure this impact. Understanding and measuring knowledge valorization is still a novel field, particularly in light of the European Union's emphasis on the social value of research. Therefore, the basis for knowledge valorization is formed by EU documents, according to which it is the process of creating social and economic value from knowledge by linking different areas and sectors and transforming data, know-how, and research results into sustainable products, services, solutions, and knowledge-based policies that benefit society. By contributing to theories of knowledge transfer, stakeholder theory, and collaboration theory, this project seeks to provide comprehensive model and best practices for universities. Additionally, it aims to develop methodological tools for assessing the social impact and maturity of knowledge valorization efforts.

The research plan involves several steps: in-depth literature review, selecting appropriate research methods, techniques and tools, collecting and analyzing data, and creating the TM model. Specific objectives include identifying the content of TM activities, recognizing the roles of various participants of the knowledge valorization process, assessing awareness of social impact, understanding needs and expectations, and evaluating key factors influencing knowledge commercialization and valorization. Preliminary research at prestigious universities has shown a growing awareness of the importance of integrating economic and social value in their activities. To achieve these objectives, the project will employ a mix of research methods, including document analysis, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Document analysis will help categorize universities based on their TM activities. Interviews with university authorities, knowledge transfer units, and policymakers will provide insights into stakeholders' roles. Focus groups with NGOs, associations, citizens, and workers will explore societal needs and expectations. Surveys will gather data on motivations, roles, needs, expectations, and constraints from researchers and businesses. The research team comprises four investigators with expertise in university research activities, knowledge transfer, and collaboration with stakeholders.

Overall, this project aims to deepen the understanding of universities' Third Mission by focusing on knowledge valorization. By developing a TM model and tools to assess knowledge valorization, the project seeks to support universities in maximizing their social and economic impact. The findings will offer valuable insights and best practices, contributing to both theoretical and practical knowledge in this emerging field. Moreover, the research results and proposed model will help universities assess and enhance their contributions to society. This will lead to stronger university-community relationships, informed policymaking, and sustainable innovation. Additionally, it will promote environmental awareness and enhance the educational and professional development of students and researchers. Ultimately, the project will contribute to global best practices in knowledge valorization, increasing public trust in science and academia.