

ISSUES OF A UNIVERSITY ADVISORY SYSTEM FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Background. The main thesis of this paper assumes that advisory services provided by universities may be the basis for regional and local development. Therefore, presenting those issues, the objectives of a university advisory system for regional and local development should be defined. They include: preparing development strategies, supporting changes, adapting to existing operating conditions, developing and creating entrepreneurship, preparing to use assistance funds, etc., thereby influencing the preparation of enterprises, public and social organisations to carry out these tasks.

Research aims. An attempt to define the essence, scope, and types of university advisory services and activities related to their provision to regions, while also determining the conditions of their delivery.

Methodology. This study relies on the relevant literature, selected documents on the European Union and Polish development programmes and the author's own reflections. The foundation for drawing it up were data processing methods, i.e. analysis and synthesis, and logical inference methods, in particular induction.

Key findings. The performed analysis indicates that universities can and should be involved in advisory services as part of their activities. A university advisory system should be built on the cooperation with other actors, cooperation under concluded agreements, but also for the preparation and implementation of regional development strategies.

Keywords: university, region, development, strategy, scientific research, types of advisory services.

INTRODUCTION

The elementary functions of an academy/university include educational and research activities. Discussions highlight that it is important to change the nature of university operations towards entrepreneurial

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involvement in practical activities. In this case, commercialisation of research findings and cooperation with economic operators is stressed. University advisory services, which form part of practical activities, are less frequently mentioned, especially as regards public advisory services for the area (region, province, county, etc.) where the university operates. Meanwhile, they may be a significant element of its operations and integration with the region, as reflected in the fundamental thesis and the aim of this study.

The main thesis of this paper assumes that advisory services rendered by universities may be the basis for regional and local development. The aim of this study is to attempt to define the essence, scope, and types of university advisory services and the activities related to their provision to regions, while also determining the conditions of their delivery. Conventionally, advice is provided to the region and actors therein, yet in practice, advisory services may be delivered more widely (supra-regionally), but also more narrowly (locally). All this depends on the size of a university, the scale of its impact, the nature of cooperation with non-academic actors, its business policy, etc. Although the most common area of university activities is a region, in Poland, it may be a province or group of provinces, but these considerations can also apply to the whole country, a macro-region, and a particular area (e.g. Warsaw, county or group of municipalities).

The contents of this study, resulting from the specified thesis and aim, cover the following aspects: the essence and types of advisory services, an entrepreneurial university and its advisory approaches, university advice on the preparation and implementation of regional development strategies, and university advice on project development. This paper relies on the relevant literature, documents on the European Union and Polish development programmes, discussions on this topic, and the author's own reflections. The methods employed included primarily data processing methods, i.e. analysis and synthesis, and the logical inference methods, in particular induction.

THE ESSENCE AND TYPES OF ADVISORY SERVICES

Advice is an educational service involving a transfer of expertise along with the ability to use it in practice, ranging from devising an idea of

a specific action through strategic solutions to the daily operational implementation thereof. An advisory system is designed to (Wiatrak, 2011a, p. 56):

- support beneficiaries in assessing the existing situation and assist in drawing conclusions for further actions;
- assist in solving existing problems and making decisions when possessed knowledge does not allow for a clear and entirely informed decision on adaptive, developmental, or new actions;
- support beneficiaries in implementing certain undertakings, projects, investment programmes, including the introduction of various innovations;
- prepare beneficiaries to take effective actions based on a prepared strategy and operational plans, collect and analyse information about the conditions for their organisation's operations, etc.

Advisory services thus comprise different areas of activity of people and organisations, changing the current way of conducting activities and disseminating their new quality. Depending on the assumed criteria and areas of activity, various types of advisory services may be distinguished. Taking into account the different types of economic and social activities, we can identify industrial, construction, agricultural, environmental advisory services, etc. On the other hand, depending on the subject of advice, investment, tax, HR advisory services, etc., can be recognised. From the point of view of actors that render such services and their ownership and legal structure, the following types may be distinguished:

- **Public advice** provided by special institutions established for this purpose by public organisations, i.e. administrative and local government authorities, or private and social organisations under public-private or public-social partnerships. The scope of support for the population and economic and social actors depends on the socio-economic and environmental policies of a particular country or region. In the European Union, it covers, among other: environmental protection and climate change, management in agriculture, achieving equal development opportunities for areas, entrepreneurial activity development, innovation dissemination, etc. (Europe, 2020, pp. 5–6).
- **Social advice** provided to their members, a particular social group or the society by social organisations such as associations, federations, foundations, etc. to achieve their statutory goals

(e.g. the Tygiel Doliny Bugu Association bringing together 24 municipalities of the Mazovia and Podlaskie provinces).

- **Private advice** provided by private organisations as part of their primary or ancillary activities in accordance with their established business objectives.

The scope of advisory services offered by individual actors may be the same, but generally possible access to particular types of advice varies (e.g. access for a specific profession, free of charge, at a partial or full price, etc.). The advisory assistance, regardless of the entities providing it, aims at resolving the existing socio-economic problems, improving knowledge and innovation level in the society, including workers and entrepreneurs, enabling them to adapt to the changing labour market and development processes and to the achievement of socio-economic and environmental policy goals.

Analysing the types of advice, the manner in which it is provided should be taken into account, and depending on that manner, the following advisory services may be distinguished (Chrościcki, 1997, p. 110 *et seq.*):

- **Task-related advice** that answers the questions asked and responds to reported problems, which includes collecting information and knowledge, developing action programmes based on them, and assisting with their implementation;
- **Process-related advice** that teaches beneficiaries to solve problems independently, collaborate, make decisions about changes and improvement of their organisation, etc.

Depending on the manner of advice provision, demand exists for different kinds of advisers of whom a variety of organisational behaviours and activities are expected. From the point of view of this criterion, at least 4 types of advisers may be identified (cf. Schein, 1969; Chrościcki, 1997, pp. 6–8):

- **reviewer** who assesses proposed organisational solutions, indicating their correctness or defects;
- **seller** (trader) who receives problems to be solved and designs solutions thereto, selling his or her own ideas and research results or those of the organisation he or she works for. In this case, expert knowledge and research work outcomes are sold;
- **doctor** who collects information, diagnoses problems of a given organisation and prepares solutions thereto (i.e. “recovery” of the organisation);

- **initiator and facilitator** who, together with the beneficiary (beneficiaries), participates in collecting information, diagnosing, and defining ways to solve existing problems, but also takes part in the implementation of solutions, indicating the causes of the existing situation and of the changes being introduced and related opportunities and threats, teaching the beneficiary (beneficiaries) to understand the changes and make decisions about their direction and scope. In the case of such advice, the adviser acts as a facilitator who prepares beneficiaries to solve problems independently, simultaneously assessing their choice (Wiatrak, 2011b, p. 50).

Advisory services are provided by different types of advisers depending on the scope of their work and tasks and activities undertaken. As regards task-related advice, advisers generally work as reviewers, sellers, and doctors, whereas in the case of process-related advice, they act as initiators and facilitators. In Poland, task-related advisory services prevail, usually replacing educational activities and disseminating new solutions, promoting the introduction of innovation, the use of certain assistance programmes, etc. Such advice is needed and brings results, yet is not a fully creative factor encouraging stakeholder involvement in the change process. That role is played by process-related advice, which should also form the basis for solving social and public problems.

ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY AND DIRECTIONS OF ITS ADVISORY ACTIVITY

The traditional university model involves providing higher education and carrying out scientific research that supports the education process. Today, it is stressed that this is not sufficient since the university must be closer to practice, cooperating with the economy and public and social organisations. This is reflected by the Triple Helix Model, which takes into account three sectors: science, business, and administration that are complementary through networking of organisations having different experiences and expectations, but striving for a new quality through collaboration and innovation (cf. Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000, p. 109 *et seq.*; Jasiński, 2006, pp. 29–33). In this model, a significant role is played by mutual cooperation and interaction among the various sectors, including through the creation of new network structures to

solve existing and developmental problems. In consequence, this brings the university operation and organisation closer to an entrepreneurial university which is expected to have a broad impact, encompassing two dimensions (Matusiak, 2010, p. 180):

- 1) Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of innovation processes in the economy through cooperation and combining activities of individual participants (including entrepreneurs), favouring better use of owned resources, reduction of time elapsing from an idea to market deployment, creation of an innovative environment, etc.
- 2) Improving the image and competitive position of the university by expanding its educational offer to include courses preparing for the practical use of knowledge and the ability to adapt to changing conditions, etc., while opening up a new career path for researchers and increasing revenues through commercialisation of research outputs and research and advisory services.

An entrepreneurial university may comprise all types of advice provided to public, social and private actors and the society depending on their concept of operations and concluded agreements. Given the nature of the university work aimed at the society and the fact that universities (especially in Poland) are financed with public funds, I specifically note the possibility of their involvement in rendering public advisory services. The basis of public advice and advisory work is always formed by the policy implemented by a country or its region or a specific group of countries. Today, in the European Union, "Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth," the EU's long-term development strategy for 2010–2020, is the foundation for such activities. The strategy sets the following priority areas (*Europe...*, 2010, pp. 5–6):

- 1) **smart growth:** developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- 2) **sustainable growth:** including environmental protection, promoting green growth through innovation, mitigating and adapting to climate change;
- 3) **inclusive growth:** supporting employment and retraining of employees and preserving social structures that will ensure economic, social, and territorial cohesion.

For the implementation of the priority areas, 5 objectives, 10 integrated guidelines, and 7 flagship initiatives are foreseen, aimed at, among other (*Europe...*, 2010, pp. 5–22):

- improving the conditions for scientific and research activities, along with optimising support for research, development, and innovation,
- strengthening the knowledge triangle and unleashing the potential of the digital economy,
- working towards new skills and jobs, thereby developing a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs, and promoting lifelong learning,
- improving the quality and performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary or equivalent education,
- improving resource efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions,
- improving the business and consumer environment and modernising the industrial base in order to ensure the full functioning of the internal market,
- reducing poverty in order to lift people out of poverty and social exclusion and promoting actions in this respect.

Universities can and should be involved in the attainment of the set priorities and objectives, working out solutions to individual issues and providing advisory services for their implementation. The fact that the Triple Helix Model includes (national, regional, and local) administration authorities promotes their relations with universities and the economy and the orientation of their actions in line with adopted strategies. In order for this to happen, the model of the university functioning and assessment needs to change, namely to incorporate links with practice, i.e. evaluation of employees' work for the economy and society, including the implementation of (national, regional, and local) development strategies, in the assessment of the university and its staff. Universities may participate in implementing strategies at all levels (macro, mezzo, and micro). This activity should be targeted particularly at local and regional strategies since the university is located in a particular place and should engage not only in their implementation, but also preparation as part of strengthening its image. This is because it is in the university's interest to be present in the area of its activities and exert influence through its students and graduates but also through working with residents of that area.

Summarising, universities' activity for the benefit of the environment where they operate and their involvement in implementing development strategies point to the need to develop the following orientations of their communication and advisory work, together with the transfer of knowledge:

- 1) advice on the preparation and implementation of development strategies for a particular area (province, county, municipality, local action groups, etc.);
- 2) advice on the development of specific projects and the conditions for their conduct (especially technological, economic, organisational, and environmental projects).

UNIVERSITY ADVICE ON THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

As already mentioned, universities exist in a particular environment; therefore, striving to ensure their good image, they should engage in the process of drawing up and implementing regional development strategies. The participation of universities in such activities may vary depending on their activity but also on the commitment and involvement of other stakeholders, their qualifications and willingness to cooperate. University staff may prepare the whole regional development strategy, but may also review its successive versions or participate in its implementation. Given its research potential and its employees' qualifications and competences, the university should participate fully, if possible, both in the preparation and implementation of the strategy. It can simultaneously provide advisory services and devise and implement the strategy.

The advice may cover all stages of strategy preparation, successively (Wiatrak, 2011b, p. 25 *et seq.*):

- the strategy essence, objectives, and types;
- elements of the strategy and procedures and methods for its preparation;
- information collection for the strategy preparation, and description and analysis of this information;
- diagnosis of the current state, with formulating objectives, orientations and tasks to be accomplished under the proposed strategy;

- determination of implementation costs of individual tasks and sources of financing;
- establishment of a timetable and tools for the strategy implementation;
- the strategy implementation monitoring, assessment and evaluation;
- promotion of the region and its strategy.

By informing about the range of advisory activities and services, universities make the society and particular stakeholder groups in the region aware of the need to design a strategy and engage in its implementation, simultaneously disseminating knowledge about this. The links between the university and other stakeholders in the provision of advisory services vary depending on regional conditions (e.g. current knowledge and experience in this respect, participation of stakeholders in strategy preparation and implementation, etc.), but they may be reduced to three models (cf. Kania, 2007, pp. 55–60):

- 1) **knowledge transfer model** involving dissemination of knowledge about the region and the strategy and its use in strategic planning and restructuring of regional development;
- 2) **social interaction model** where not only knowledge about the region's strategy is transferred, but also opinions are collected from those interested in these issues, concerning their needs and directions of actions to be covered by the strategy. Gathering such information usually leads to modifying the future advisory service;
- 3) **problem solving model** where people interested in the team work technique are taught to jointly identify and solve the region's development problems.

The presented models of university advisory activities may include different groups of advisers: experts and facilitators. The former are involved in knowledge dissemination, as in the transfer and social interaction models, whereas the latter provide assistance to interested stakeholders in the region, which encompasses consolidating current knowledge and acquiring new knowledge, filling skills gaps, solving problems independently, etc. In preparing stakeholders for the problem solving model, the aspects of their cooperation and joint action for their environment (regional and local communities and professional groups) are worth incorporating in the advisory services system.

UNIVERSITY ADVICE ON PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Advising on project development generally does not fall in the scope of university operations. If universities render such services, it is chiefly their additional activity, usually commissioned under an agreement by private actors rather than social and public organisations. Nothing, however, prevents universities from providing a broader range of advice on project development regarding relevant social issues that require assistance and solutions. An example here may be, *inter alia*, the US experience in agricultural advisory services. Under the 1862 Morrill Act, apart from their educational and research function, state universities offer advice on implementation and dissemination of knowledge about agriculture, processing and related sciences, management, environmental protection, a search of alternative income sources in rural areas, creation of rural leaders, etc. (Kania, 2007, pp. 29–30). Provision of advisory services by the US state universities is an example of “triggering economic and social development through supporting science and education, while putting pressure on universities to leave the proverbial ‘ivory tower’ and come into contact with the problems of the local economy” (Matusiak, 2010, p. 168). The US agricultural advice programme stems from the federal policy, yet is adapted to regional and local needs in each state. National-level experience may be transferred to the regional (provincial) level, with its development strategy putting a greater emphasis on selected issues (e.g. water efficiency) that can be supported by the advisory system, including through universities. This is done via the aforementioned university advice on the preparation and implementation of regional development strategies.

“Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” may also be regarded as guidelines for implementing a specific type of socio-economic and environmental projects that are developed in more detail at the regional level and tailored to the region’s policy contained in its development strategy. Consideration should be given to the fact that the Europe 2020 strategy is also supplemented by various actions, frequently sectoral ones, but undertaken in different regions. Such a proposal of the European Union that is addressed to selected areas are the European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs), a new tool to promote development and innovation through cooperation of various actors. “The objective of EIPs is to accelerate innovative solutions to counter the

negative effects of the so-called global social challenges (such as: climate change, demographic change, or scarcity of raw materials) by reducing the fragmentation of activities and mobilising actors throughout the innovation cycle” (*Europejskie...*, 2015). Priority areas for support include important socio-economic issues, in particular (*Europejskie...*, 2015):

- active ageing and independent living,
- availability of raw materials for the future prosperity of Europe,
- productive and sustainable agriculture,
- efficient water management.

In each field, these points are described in detail, with an indication of support instruments and cooperation principles. The European Innovation Partnership “Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability” sets out the following priority areas (*Communication...*, 2012, pp. 8–9):

- increased agricultural productivity, output, and resource efficiency;
- innovation in support of the bio-based economy;
- biodiversity, ecosystem services, and soil functionality;
- innovative products and services for the integrated supply chain;
- food quality, food safety, and healthy lifestyles.

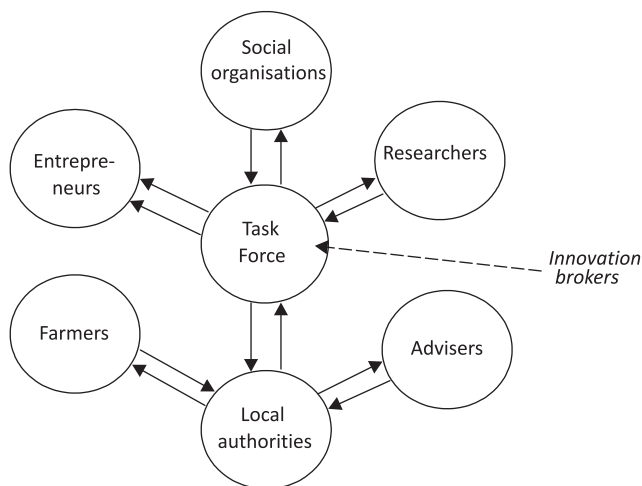


Figure 1. Innovation Task Force Chart

Source: prepared by the author based on: Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi, 2014.

These are priority areas whose development is supported through innovation and advice, hence it is worth considering what role universities

may play in this regard. They are envisaged to potentially be actively involved in these processes by participating in *innovation task forces* which are formed by at least two different actors (beneficiaries) of different categories such as: farmers or groups of farmers, forest owners, researchers, scientific institutes or entities, universities, entrepreneurs in agriculture and food sectors, including catering, and entrepreneurs in sectors delivering for agricultural and food sectors (e.g. producers of fertilisers, feed, plant protection products, machinery and production equipment). A task force may also embrace advisory entities, consumers and their organisations, professional associations working in the field of food chain and local government authorities (Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi, 2014, p. 586 *et seq.*).

Figure 1 presents a chart of the innovation task force composed of various actors, pooling their practical and academic competences, focused on developing innovative solutions for specific projects. An interesting idea is to include an innovation broker, i.e. a liaison ensuring information flow and facilitating the establishment and consolidation of cooperation in the field of innovation between representatives of the agri-food and research sectors and advisers (Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi, 2014, p. 590). It was assumed initially that brokers would be advisers from the Provincial Agricultural Advisory Centres, although it is not definite yet. It seems to me that it would be a good option if broker functions were performed by academics who conduct research into the topics falling within the scope of activities of the task force that has been established. I prefer such choice as researchers are well aware of the issues concerned, can give advice in this regard and may be change initiators.

The innovation task forces presented are designed for agribusiness, yet may form the basis for cooperation in other economic sectors depending on the priorities and objectives defined in development strategies of a given area (country, region, etc.) and the room given therein to university advisory services.

CONCLUSION

The performed analysis indicates that universities can and should be involved in advisory services as part of their activities. The reasons are mainly the following:

- 1) The socio-economic transformation and accompanying restructuring in Poland, the EU policies and programmes implemented by it and regional development strategies generate demand for knowledge and its rapid application in practice, which is possible primarily through a system of advisory services.
- 2) Advisory assistance, with institutional support for structural changes and creating entrepreneurship, may be provided by various institutions. One of them are the universities, which are well positioned to offer a wide range of advice and expertise, given their research potential and knowledge.
- 3) University advisory assistance should be best devised and tailored to recipients, so that they can benefit from it, entering the path of development in line with the implemented socio-economic policy.
- 4) In designing a university advisory services system for regional and local development, what should be defined are its beneficiaries and objectives, including in particular: drawing up regional development strategies, supporting changes, adapting to existing operating conditions, developing and creating entrepreneurship, preparing to use assistance funds, etc., thus influencing the preparation of enterprises, public organisations and social organisations to carry out these tasks.
- 5) A university advisory system should be built on the cooperation with other actors, cooperation under concluded agreements, but also for the preparation and implementation of regional development strategies.

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ZAGADNIENIA SYSTEMU DORADZTWA UCZELNI NA RZECZ ROZWOJU REGIONU

Abstrakt

Tło badań. Podstawową tezę opracowania jest założenie, że doradztwo świadczone przez uczelnie może być podstawą rozwoju regionalnego i lokalnego. Ukazując te zagadnienia, należy zatem określić cele systemu usług doradczych świadczonych przez uczelnie na rzecz rozwoju regionalnego i lokalnego, którymi są: przygotowanie strategii rozwojowych, wspieranie przemian, dostosowanie do istniejących warunków działania, rozwój i kreowanie przedsiębiorczości, przygotowanie do korzystania z funduszy pomocowych itp., a wraz z tym oddziaływanie na przygotowanie przedsiębiorstw, organizacji publicznych i organizacji społecznych do realizacji tych zadań.

Cel badań. Podjęcie próby określenia istoty zakresu i rodzajów doradztwa uczelni oraz działań związanych z jego świadczeniem na rzecz regionów, wraz z wskazaniem uwarunkowań jego świadczenia.

Metodologia. Opracowanie zostało przygotowane na podstawie literatury przedmiotu, wybranych dokumentów programów rozwojowych Unii Europejskiej i Polski oraz własnych przemyśleń autora. Podstawą wykonania były metody przetwarzania danych, tj. analiza i synteza oraz metody wnioskowania logicznego, a zwłaszcza indukcja.

Kluczowe wnioski. Przeprowadzona analiza wskazuje, że uniwersytety w swojej działalności mogą i powinny uczestniczyć w działalności doradczej. Podstawą systemu usług doradczych świadczonych przez uniwersytety powinna być ich współpraca z innymi podmiotami, współpraca wynikająca z zawartych porozumień, ale także dla potrzeb przygotowania i realizacji strategii rozwojowych regionu.

Słowa kluczowe: uniwersytet, region, rozwój, strategia, badania naukowe, rodzaje doradztwa.