



Research Article

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Universities and Entrepreneurship: An Overview of Albanian Public HEI-s on Entrepreneurial University Model Aspects

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Abstract

Albanian higher education sector has undergone various changes in the last years. Such changes have brought different implication and challenges for higher education institutions. HEIs need to find new and innovative ways to be able to respond properly and play their role in the society. This paper aims to provide an evaluation of the status quo of 5 public higher education institutions, that took part in the study, in regard to 6 aspects of the entrepreneurial university model. Interviews were conducted using HEInnovate tool as a theoretical guideline and questions were asked by being grouped in 6 categories: on aspects such as governance and leadership, internationalization, knowledge exchange, human and financial resources, entrepreneurial education and start up support and measures, were conducted in order to have a general overview and identify potential areas of improvement. Entrepreneurship needs to be supported and formalized by the top leadership and effective organizational structure that promotes entrepreneurship at all levels of the institution, financial stream needs to be diversified, blended learning needs to be encouraged and promoted and public HEIs need to increase their international cooperation and presence. The study shows that HEIs need to implement new practices in order to better be prepared to face the current and future challenges. The findings and recommendation can be used to present measures to be undertaken both at institutional level of HEIs and at the level of policy makers in Albania.

Keywords: *entrepreneurial university, entrepreneurial education, knowledge exchange, start up support and measures, financial stream*

1. Introduction

Nowdays, we see clear signs of transformation of higher education institutions models from their traditional missions of teaching and research into more activities and objectives oriented in contributing to social economic development of the countries and regions where these HEIs operate. Such transformation has been forced by various trends and challenges that HEI-s are facing now days in playing their role within the society as knowledge creator and transmitter. The way HEI-s are responding to the needs of the society (both social and economical needs), the way social mobility and access to disadvantaged groups in higher education is facilitated, how universities are stimulating the creating of enterprises both of students and staff through educational entrepreneurship and special support measures, learning and teaching methods are adapted, cooperation at national and international level with various stakeholders is approached are being judged. Since 1980, the concept of entrepreneurial university is presented and studied, which

is considered by many authors as the “ideal state” and best model to be implemented by the universities in responding efficiently and effectively to the challenges and opportunities and being able to be competitive in today’s reality of universities. The literature identifies various attempts to define such concept and present various models of entrepreneurial university.

The main theoretical models are offered by Clark (1998), Sporn (2001), Etzkowitz (2004), Kirby (2005), Rothaermel (2007), O’Shea (2005,2008) and David and Urbano (2012). The literature clearly distinguishes the concept of entrepreneurial university and the entrepreneurial education. The entrepreneurship education concept refers to all levels of education that contribute to the creation and development of entrepreneurial attitudes and having the right skills,(Bygrave,1994) including opportunity recognition (Kirby,2003) to create and run successfully a venture. The entrepreneurial university concept which effect all aspects of higher education is referred to the way HEIs contribute to the regional development that is encouraged and stimulated through leadership that promotes entrepreneurship culture, flexible governance and organizational structure, effective interaction with various stakeholders, providing incentives and support for staff and students to engage in entrepreneurial activities, promoting an entrepreneurial culture and right attitude of staff and students towards entrepreneurship ect. In fact, educational entrepreneurship is a tool and dimension of an entrepreneurial university. In the last years, European Commission has placed an important role to the promotion of entrepreneurship in higher education, not only at the level of educational entrepreneurship, but also at institutional level by creating a guiding framework tool for self-evaluation of HEIs called HEInnovate. In Albania, Higher Education system has changed a lot in the last decades, from the rise of private sector in education to the quality of education that is offered from these institutions. The new Law of Higher Education approved in 2015, has brought some positive changes and challenges to be faced by HEI’s in Albania. If before public HEIs where the ones offering all the services for students and dominating the sector of higher education in the country, the rise of private universities has brought an increased competition, which requires more efforts and different approaches from public universities in order for them to continue and/or survive in this new national/ international competitive environment. A study was conducted focusing in public HEIs in Albania, to evaluate and analyze some aspects of these universities based on the guiding framework of HEInnovate tool including aspects such as: leadership, organizational change, knowledge exchange, internationalization and promotion of entrepreneurship (educational entrepreneurship and special support measures).

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this study is based in interviews conducted with representatives of top management level in 5 higher education institutions in Albania. The interviews were conducted at the level of rector, vice rectors and administrators at public HEIS part of the study.

The universities that participated in the study were: University of Tirana (UT), which is the biggest and oldest Public University in Albania; Polytechnic University of Tirana (UPT) which is the biggest Technical University in Albania, University “Ismail Qemali” in (UVL)Vlora, which is located in the south region of Albania, University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkodër (USH), which is located in the north region of Albania and University “Aleksandër Moisiu” Durrës (UAMD) , which is the newest public university in Albania founded in 2006. Such selection was made in order to have an overview of public universities operating in all parts of the country. Using HEInnovate tool as a theoretical and guideline questions were asked by being grouped in 7 categories:

- HEI’s Leadership and governance- universities strategy, objectives and aims
- HEI’s resources (both human and financial resources)
- HEI’s knowledge exchange
- HEI’s Teaching and Learning methods
- HEI’s Entrepreneurship promotion (including educational entrepreneurship and special support measures for entrepreneurship)
- HEI’s Internationalization

The aim of this study and paper is to provide an assessment of the status quo and of areas to

be improved by public HEIs in Albania in order for them to move toward the model of the “Entrepreneurial University”. The findings and recommendation can be used to present measures to be undertaken both at institutional level of HEIs and at the level of policy makers in Albania.

3. Results and Discussion

This session presents the results and findings of the interviews with representatives of top management level of the universities part of this study.

3.1 Leadership and governance in Albanian public HEIs:

Universities can move faster toward an entrepreneurial approach of the institution only if such approach is supported by a strong leadership and effective governance that seek to promote and support entrepreneurship at all levels of the institution. It is important to have effective structures that are flexible both at organizational and governance level including all stakeholders in order to influence and strengthen cooperation between university and industry by undertaking activities such as: application of science, stimulating ideas and developing new products/services and in the creation of new start ups. Sharing a common vision and strategy is crucial.

All 5 HEIs declared to have a strategy at the institutional level that is generally revised in 5 years that states the vision, mission and values of the institution communicated through various channels (website, official documents) to its staff and students. In the revision process are engaged staff and students of the university and representative of national government but not representatives of alumni, business or international commercial organizations.

In none of the strategy documents at the 5 HEIs entrepreneurship was not clearly stated or emphasized.

Fig.1 presents the 5 HEIs objectives that are related to promotion of entrepreneurship. We can see that the objective of developing entrepreneurship competences and skills were considered as important and very important for all HEIs. Meanwhile support for startups and promotion of entrepreneurship as an important career opportunity were considered as very important only for University of “Aleksander Moisiu” Durrës but not for the other universities. Entrepreneurship promotion through education and supporting start up initiatives are very crucial elements of a HEI’s entrepreneurial and innovative strategy.

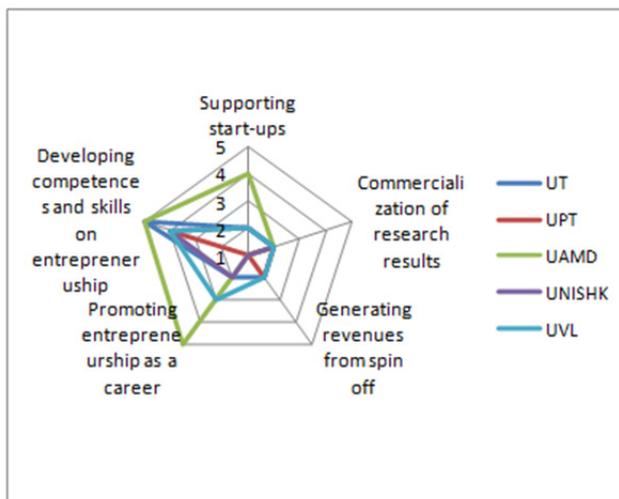


Fig. 1: HEIs objectives related to promotion of entrepreneurship

None of HEIs had adopted or was in the process of adopting procedures and regulation regarding the use of trademarks or commercialization of scientific research or was part as a shareholder in companies established by their students and/ or staff. All universities lacked a system of maintaining regular contacts with their alumni or monitoring their career development even though in some universities such as UT, UPT and UAMD this aspect was in discussion in the universities governing structures. The new law of higher education requires the engagement of external stakeholders in universities governing bodies however such engagement was mostly formal and such representatives were appointed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

The participation of external stakeholders in universities governing bodies is important and collaboration with them is crucial for universities in achieving their “third mission”. All HEIs recognized somehow the contribution of the external stakeholders in universities development mainly through us of facilities or reduced rates, preferential partnerships for student and graduate recruitment or naming of a prestigious university venue. Less used forms of recognition were honorary doctorates or annual reward ceremonies.

3.2 Resources (Human and Financial resources) of Albanian Public HEIs

Human and financial resources are important factors in developing an entrepreneurial institution. In order to build an innovative and entrepreneurial profile of the university proper financial funding, knowledgeable staff, transparent framework and an effective rewarding sytem (both monetary and non-monetary) are needed. Universities should stimulate entrepreneurial behavior and attitude among its staff by providing incentives that are related with entrepreneurial approaches of individuals or teams.

All HEIs have a formal policy for training of their staff and their career development. However training was mainly offered for Academic and researchers and less for administrative staff or part-time staff. Provisions for career enhancement are possible partially for academic staff and researchers (mainly in the form of financial support for participating in conferences or publishing scientific articles). A formal process to identify and reward excellence in teaching, research or entrepreneurial activities engagement is lacking in all HEIs. In all HEIs there was a lack of fundraising activities from the staff of the university and fundraising was seen as responsibility of top level management these also due to the fact that training for staff in this area is not provided and quantifiable objectives in this regard are missing. Potential financial sources are identified informally. Universities financial resources are presented below:

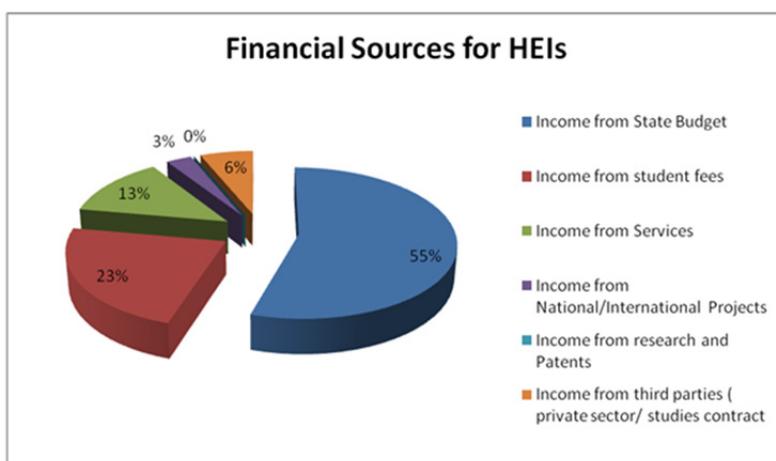


Fig. 2: HEIs Financial streams
Source: HEIs financial departments

All public HEIs are depended by the government in almost more than 50 % of their incomes. Income from research, patents or spin off activities are at 0%. Meanwhile, incomes from donation or participation at National/ International projects are less than 5 % of the total income of the universities. Polytechnic University of Tirana has 6 % of their income based on cooperation with private sector/ studies contract, which is the highest level for this source of income compared to other universities. Public HEIs in Albania do not have a diversified income portfolio that is crucial to develop an entrepreneurial university.

3.3 Teaching and Learning of Albanian Public HEIs

An entrepreneurial pedagogy aims at developing entrepreneurial capacities and capabilities of student and staff by offering more autonomy and responsibility in the learning process. Entrepreneurship development through teaching and learning requires implementation of various forms of methodology in the learning process. In regard to teaching and learning questions were asked to identify the various methods of teaching and to what extent were they used at their institutions and if there was any incentives in using them. Fig.3 presents the results of teaching methods used in each university.

Table 1: Teaching method and extend of use

Teaching methods	UT	UPT	UAMD	USHK	UVL
Moocs	Not used				
Lectures and frontal teaching	Primarily used				
Business Plan writing	Rarely used				
Problem based learning	Regularly used				
Business Idea generation activities	Rarely used				
Entrepreneurs as guest speaker	Rarely used				
Visit to companies	Regularly used				
Business Plan competition	Regularly used	Rarely used	Rarely used	Rarely used	Rarely used
Case studies	Rarely used				
Self-learning exercises using multimedia	Not used	Not used	Rarely used	Not used	Not used
Prototype development	Not used	Rarely used	Rarely used	Not used	Rarely used
Internships	Regularly used				

Frontal teaching and lectures, problem based learning and visit to companies were the most used methods of teaching in all the universities. Internships programs are mandatory for bachelor and master level at all programs and formally procedures and support was provided in each university. Business Plan writing, business idea generation and Business Plan Competition were mainly used in business and economy field but not in other fields of study. Such activities were not formal but more a personal initiative of professors teaching entrepreneurship/ innovation. Beside Polytechnic University of Tirana and UAMD, in all other universities prototype development method was not used. Interdisciplinary study programs were offered at 3 levels of study but usually the interdisciplinary activities offered by the universities were not open to all students from all faculties/ departments. None of the universities had in place incentives for using any specific teaching method.

3.4 Knowledge exchange of Albanian Public HEIs:

Universities are not isolated institutions and their traditional mission as creator and transmitter of knowledge today is seen closely linked with the partnerships that universities create. Knowledge exchange includes both inflow and outflow of knowledge for universities at it can take several forms:

- Involvement of stakeholders in teaching and entrepreneurship activities;
- Cooperation on internships and placements;
- Cooperation on secondments (loaning of academic staff temporarily to a private or public sector partner

- Continues learning and further education programs (LLL courses)
- Joint research initiatives;
- Contract research;
- Industrial Doctorates
- Technology Transfer (licensing, selling of prototypes, spin offs)

Universities can cooperate with various stakeholders in order to exploit their efforts in knowledge exchange and contributing effectively to the economic and social development of the country.

The universities that were part of this study were asked to identify the ways of cooperation with various stakeholders in terms in knowledge exchange.

Mainly the engagements with external stakeholders were in the forms of: Involvement of stakeholders in teaching activities; Cooperation on student internships and joint research initiatives were the most present form of knowledge exchange identified. However practices of technology transfer, contract and/or industrial research and cooperation on staff secondments were not present. None of HEIs had formal infrastructure within the university responsible in technology and knowledge transfer (Office of Technology Transfer). Formal evaluation of knowledge exchange practices, incentives both at individual and faculty/ department level for continues support in commercialization of research is lacking in all 5 universities.

3.5 Internationalization of Albanian Public HEIs:

Today, **Internationalization** is a practice followed by many institutions in the field of higher education as many agree that it offers many benefits both at individual and institutional level. In the era of globalization for a university to choose to stay within the national boundaries is almost as choosing to not survive for a long time. Universities need to attract excellent human capital (staff and student)both from their countries and abroad and today more than ever they are feeling such competitiveness. Internationalization, when part of a broader strategy, can have a great influence in strengthening student and staff cooperation between different international institutions, can stimulate strategic thinking by promoting innovation and modernization of infrastructure and pedagogy and increase the potential cooperation and ways in teaching, research and entrepreneurial activities. During the interviews conducted all HEIs considered internationalization as very important for institutional organizational development and in developing strategic partnerships with universities abroad. In the last years approach to increase their international presence are undertaken. Fig 4 present 5 current practices at public HEIs in Albania in regard to international cooperation.

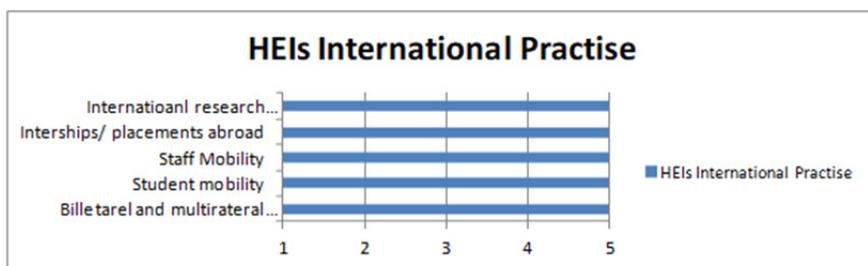


Fig. 4: HEIs current international cooperation practices

Staff and student mobility are practices that HEIs were emphasizing in the last years, mainly through participation of HEIs in Erasmus +, Credit Mobility. However HEIs did not offer any financial support for such mobilities. They are supported by grants given from European Commission. International Joint Education program were present in all HEIs mainly through Double or Joint Diploma at Master level. Such practices were also supported financially by HEIs. The majority

mention internationalization as part of their overall strategy. UAMD had a separate strategy specific for Internationalization. Clear guidance on how to establish international cooperation at all level of the university is missing on most of the strategies. None of the HEIs had formal policy and practices to attract international staff. Recruitment of international staff for entrepreneurship education and start up support weren't either practiced or planned. Most international staffs were visiting staff coming in the frame of international projects funded by EU or bilateral agreement between HEIs. The number of international students is very low at bachelor and master level due to the fact that all study programs are offered in Albanian language. The participation of public HEIs in mobility scheme such as Erasmus +, Credit Mobility has increased the interest of international students wanting to conduct mobility in Albania. In almost all HEIs were discussions in governing bodies of universities to add and increase English offer of study programs in order to attract more international students.

3.6 Promotion of entrepreneurship through educational entrepreneurship and special support measures

Entrepreneurial educations focus mostly on developing the right entrepreneurial skills needed to identify opportunities and to create new ventures. Today universities, especially in knowledge based economies, are making formal efforts to offer support measures and promote start-ups both by their students and staff. Comprehensive integration of entrepreneurship education into all study programs' syllables and the development of the entrepreneurial "soft skills" are important factors in promoting entrepreneurship throughout the institution. All interviewed HEIs representatives declared they are currently offering entrepreneurship education activities. Mainly entrepreneurship courses were offered at bachelor level and at economy and business study programs. Usually staffs engaged in teaching entrepreneurship are young professors that might need training in order to obtain proper teaching experience in entrepreneurship. Start-up competitions or training on entrepreneurship is offered for students but not for staff. Generally such activities are in cooperation with student unions or nonprofit organization and usually are initiative that are based on individual initiatives even though usually have the support of top management leadership of the institution both at faculty and university level. However none of the HEIs offer special support measures for those individuals and/ or teams who want to start a new venture. Start-up incubators are not formally established within the institutions. Formal positions for entrepreneurship education and special support were not identified top-level management, department or faculty level or administration in none of the HEIs part of the study.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Public Higher Education Institutions are facing many challenges due to the trends in higher education and implementation of the new law of higher education in Albania. Even though they are adapting new practices that encourage entrepreneurship still much more needs to be done both at individual and institutional level.

- Entrepreneurship should be part of the institution strategy. HEIs mission and vision should be revised to include entrepreneurship as an important aspect.
- Formal support from the universities leadership is crucial. Therefore a senior management post in charge for the innovative and entrepreneurial agenda of the university may be considered, as currently such position is lacking at all levels of the institution.
- Both Students and Staffs training on entrepreneurship are required. Staff and student attitudes are important informal factors to move toward an entrepreneurial university model faster. Staff training should be offered in many areas that aim to develop the quality of teaching, research, and entrepreneurial activities.
- A formal incentive and rewarding system targeting both individual and teams should be in place in order to reward excellence in teaching, research, engagement in entrepreneurship education and support for business start-ups, internationalization, fundraising practices

and those engaged in knowledge exchange activities and research commercialization.

- Public Universities in Albania have very limited income streams and where more than 50% -60% of their incomes come from the government. A diversified portfolio of income is crucial for HEIs to properly face the challenges and respond effectively to contribution socioeconomic development of the country. Fundraising should be practiced at all levels of the university and staff should be trained and rewarded for their efforts. Research and Industrial Doctorate contract, income from commercialization of research should be taken seriously and increase of grants from national and international projects should be encouraged.
- Formal Infrastructure that support technology and knowledge transfer and start-ups created by student and staff should be established in each institution such as Technology Transfer Offices, Entrepreneurship centers and Business Incubators should be encouraged and invested into.
- A clear strategy on cooperation with external stakeholders is lacking at all HEIs. External stakeholders should be active and contributing to universities organizational change and decisions. Strategic involvement of key partnerships should be rewarded and incentivized by building strategic bonds.
- Entrepreneurial pedagogy should be formally evaluated and encouraged. Blended learning needs to be a regular practice in public HEIs and should be encouraged and stimulated.
- Efforts are being done to make public HEIs more internationalized by being present in various EU funded programs (mainly in Erasmus +, student and staff mobility) but still a clear internationalization strategy is lacking in some universities and mainly international activities and cooperation are funded by EU projects and not from universities budget.

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