

Interview with prof. Franc Mali (University of Ljubljana)¹ on University-Business Cooperation

The interview with Franc Mali from University of Ljubljana was conducted in October 2013 in the framework of EMCOSU project. Franc Mali is as researcher in STS – field also an expert of university-business cooperation and he has been professionally following this field for over 20 years. He gave us some insights on the university-business cooperation in the end of the last century with a focus on Slovenian case and Eastern Europe.



1. When did you start to work in the field of university-business cooperation?

My professional field are STS (Science and Technology Studies) and deriving from my analytical research work in the middle of 90's I have also started to deal with university-business cooperation and the role of governmental policies in encouraging this cooperation which was at that time very important topic. The reasons for the importance of this topic were manifold. There were many problems how to encourage transitional processes of scientific and university sub-systems in postcommunist countries. Because of the heritage of the past (communist) times, the most evident issues, which arised already in 90s were insufficient research efforts in industry, uncertainties about the quality of the knowledge transfer system, lack of experiences of academic research staff to cooperate with industrial experience, immobility of academic researchers, etc. In the same period, , there was coming in the whole Europe (in S&T progressed countries of Western Europe as well) to increased opinions among various stakeholders (politicians, buisnessmen, scientists etc.) that for Europe would be good to import a lot of R&D policy procedures which have been implimentated in United States already 10-15 years before (for example: transfer of knowledge from academic spheres to buisness-enterprise sector with the help of various intermediary institutions, the new solutions in area of intellectual property rights, etc.). We could say that in the middle of 90s, the new paradigm (the triple helix model) began to put in the force even in the part of the world (Central and East European region) which was before that about 40 years without any

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social experience how to create social and economic model of responsible academic science (not only to subordinate science to the goals of political communist elite).

2. You were interested only in Slovenian or also international scope of university-business cooperation?

That was run in parallel. I wrote several articles on this topic concerning the transition in the fields of sciences in post-socialistic countries. I have published these contribution in Slovenia and in abroad (mostly in STS journals and books: Industry and Higher Education, Science Studies, The academic world was quite closed at that time, so there was a lot of interest in how to connect it with the industry, not only in Central and East European region, but in Slovenia as well. This doesn't mean that there was no cooperation before. Slovenia as the most economic progressed part of the former Yugoslavia has been even some kind of exception before the change in 90s. Slovenia as the part of the former Yugoslavia, didn't strictly follow the former Soviet pattern in the organisation of R&D. In Eastern Europe, where the Soviet model was prevalent, scientists were mainly concentrated in institutions outside industry and university. There was no in-house research and developmental potential in the industry itself, so it was difficult to expect that a lot of stimulation for cooperation would come from one (academic sector) or from another (industrial sector) side. In Slovenia some (public) research institutes were successful in cooperation with industry. For example in the 80's the Slovenian Institute Josef Stefan received its major funding (1/3) from the cooperation with industry. The university system in Slovenia was in the previous system less developed in this respect. The academic staff at the universities was too much (is still too much) oriented only to pedagogical work. In the awareness of academic is even in recent times the lack of awareness that university is the institution which has to combine teaching and research. It was already the ideal of traditional Humboldtian university. In modern times, university system has to perform additional social function, i.e. to take (partially) also for the direct transfer of knowledge to business-enterprise sector. The fulfilment of this social goal is not threat for extreme neoliberal commercialization of university system. Just opposite: the universities can with the proliferation of different social functions reinforce their autonomy.

3. What was happening in the transition countries in the last 20 years in the field of university-business cooperation? Were the Western countries, such as United Kingdom, more developed in this respect?

The model which is also known in the theory and was also articulated in the other theories, such as the theory Triple-Helix and the new mode of knowledge production – came from the United States to Western Europe and coming from scientifically developed countries reached Eastern European countries. After entering the European Union a part of transformations in the academic world also depended on the adaptation to the new EU policies and institutional agendas. Also the emerging strategies of EU, such as Lisbon strategy, were emphasizing the need of more effective academic sphere. This was more emphasized in some Western European countries, such as United Kingdom and Denmark, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries and this also influenced our system, in a form of transfer of good practices etc.

4. What were the key research questions in the 90's in the field of university-business cooperation? What were the main issues in scientific research regarding this topic?

The main issue was how to establish successful models of knowledge transfer. On one side there was an option of strengthening research-developmental potential in industry, on the other side there was an option of inclusion of academic sector into the industry. Regarding to this, there was a question what is the best form of knowledge transfer, how to solve issues in the field of protection of intellectual ownership, how to finance the university-business cooperation. There were also dilemmas whether the universities would thus neglect its primary function which is basic science. These dilemmas are also relevant nowadays as in some views the universities should serve to basic science and research and teaching.