

Excellence in Serving Society and Mankind

Thomas Wilhelmsson

1 Introduction

The third mission of universities, serving society, has received much attention in international debate on university policy. It is increasingly presented as one of the key tasks of universities, in addition to their traditional tasks of research and teaching.

Universities can serve society in multifarious ways, while at the same time performing the basic tasks of research and teaching for the benefit of society. It is therefore not surprising that both the definitions of the issue and the terminology vary greatly between individuals and countries. In this chapter, both the terminology including ‘third mission’, plus expressions such as ‘social responsibility’, ‘community engagement’, ‘community services’, ‘outreach’, and ‘societal interaction’, are discussed and analyzed, as are the various means and methods by which society can be served.

The reasons for the increasing importance of the third mission vary. For some it stems from the insight that education and research have a direct role in the globalized knowledge society and profoundly influence its competitive strength. Others stress the indirect function of universities as hubs of creativity, attracting and supporting talent for the benefit of society. The pursuit of the third mission is not, however, purely ‘altruistic’. A well-functioning interaction with society enhances the quality of both university teaching and research.

It is therefore difficult to classify universities that are underperforming in terms of effort and focus in this regard as being world-class universities. This chapter’s discussion focuses on the means of enhancing societal interaction qualitatively and quantitatively. What can and should universities do, in order to achieve excellence in serving society and mankind?

T. Wilhelmsson (✉)
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
e-mail: thomas.wilhelmsson@helsinki.fi

2 The Third Mission

The International Exhibition and Conference on Higher Education (IECHE) in Riyadh in 2013 [1] was devoted to a very topical issue, ‘The Social Responsibility of Universities’. The Riyadh Conference Statement begins by unambiguously declaring:

Universities have three key functions – teaching, research, and service. Often, the service responsibility of universities is undervalued. Yet, service to society and to the academic community is of central importance, and a key element of service is social responsibility.

The traditional and arguably mistaken understanding of universities has pictured them as ivory towers, in which teaching and research take place in a state of splendid isolation from contemporary society. Criticism of this ideal of isolation has become one of the key issues in international debate on the role and development of the university system. In the knowledge society the approach is the opposite. As important players in the knowledge ecosystem, universities can and should, in addition to research and teaching, serve their societies and mankind.

Conceptually the discussion is somewhat confusing. Many concepts have been used to denote issues that involve considerable overlap. In this context, one encounters expressions such as ‘the social responsibility of universities’, ‘community engagement of universities’, ‘community services’, ‘outreach’, and ‘societal interaction’. Some of the expressions clearly have a broader scope than others, and some usages are preferred in some parts of the world while others predominate elsewhere.

There is little need for engaging further in conceptual exegesis. It is of more importance to discuss the issue at hand, the need for interaction between universities and the societies in which they are located. Therefore, I will use the most neutral and frequently used terms, ‘the third task’ or ‘the third mission’. As the two basic tasks of universities are teaching and research, discussion of the third mission highlights the question of whether and in what manner are universities supposed to serve society, in addition to fulfilling the two aforementioned tasks.

Discussion of the third mission does not necessarily imply it being an independent task on the same level as the two basic tasks. Rather, it could and should be viewed more as a different perspective on the basic tasks. Excellent teaching and research as such serve society in a profound manner. Discussion of the third mission emphasizes the fact that teaching and research, and other activities of universities relating to teaching and research, can be more actively and consistently geared toward society’s service. The societal interaction of universities should be based on the basic tasks, but the third mission perspective can provide the means by which they can be developed to better serve society. It has been said, for example, that universities understanding their responsibility for global sustainability should:

- “*transform* education to educate, engage, empower and energize the next generation of problem-solvers”;
- “*drive* a research agenda designed to identify, invent, test and deploy solutions designed to address the formidable challenges of global sustainability”;

- “*insist* on building both disciplinary depth and trans-disciplinary breadth of research and education, connecting science, engineering, technology, mathematics, social sciences, arts and humanities disciplines in service to society”;
- “*assess* the need for societal action, to transmit authoritative information to stakeholders and then *take ownership* of the process of transition of knowledge to application, working in new partnerships” [2].

In different discourses and different locations the emphasis on the various elements of the third mission might vary somewhat. Sometimes ethical elements are strongly stressed. Many of the contributions to the IECHE 2013 Conference adopted this perspective, as can be seen in the Conference Statement:

A university’s social responsibility can be defined as the obligation to represent and practice a set of principles and values ... a commitment to fairness, truth, and excellence; promotion of social equity and sustainable development; recognition of an individual’s dignity and liberty; appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism; and promotion of human rights and civic responsibility.

In other discourses and legal mission statements the focus is rather on regional development. Universities are asked to function as important drivers of social and economic development in their immediate environs. In a still broader perspective the role of universities as drivers of the economy, culture, and social relations of entire societies is emphasized. In some discourses, the emphasis is on the capacity of universities to support the societies in which they operate, while others stress their services for the whole of mankind.

All these perspectives are important, and none of them should be neglected. The third mission of universities is ethical and economic, cultural and social, regional, national, and global. Of course, the relative weight and visibility of the elements are greatly dependent on the nature and situation of each university and of the societies in which they function.

Universities’ contribution to the innovation chain and to the innovation economy in general is an important part of their societal interactions. Many definitions of the third mission include the dissemination of research into economically useful innovations and business opportunities. However, as in this book the innovation economy is dealt with in a separate chapter, I will not examine this issue in more detail in the present context. Other forms of societal interaction will be the focus of this chapter.

3 Why Is the Third Mission Important?

The third task, having an ethical, social, cultural, and economic impact on society, has always been a part of the mission of universities, even though it has not been expressly singled out for recognition and named as a particular task. Medieval European universities were founded to educate good administrators and priests for the benefit of society. Ever since, many universities have played a crucial role in

the development of their societies. The task to raise ethically aware citizens for the benefit of society has been an almost self-evident, taken for granted part of their self-understanding.

However, during recent decades, there has been a clear change in the narrative concerning the third mission. The perspective has shifted from understanding it as a more or less implied by-product of teaching and research to emphasizing it expressly as a task in itself to be promoted and furthered. The shift of emphasis is obviously a consequence of profound changes in society and the wider world.

There is a growing insight into the central role of education and research in the globalized knowledge society. The competitiveness of societies is seen as directly connected with the manner in which they can position themselves within the framework of production and use of knowledge. With the accelerating production of knowledge, the ability to access, create, and use knowledge becomes a key success factor.

The role of universities is crucial in creating such ability. They are key players in the knowledge production and dissemination game, and therefore impact societies and economies in many ways. Besides educating both new leaders and workforce, and creating and supporting innovations, they are often pivotal players in importing new knowledge into societies more generally, in attracting new brains from other countries, and in introducing new patterns of thinking and being into societies.

Globally, universities are also perceived as perhaps the most important producers of knowledge which is urgently needed to cope with the grand challenges that mankind is currently facing. As is clear in the final statement from the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education 2009 [3]:

Higher education has the social responsibility to advance our understanding of multifaceted issues. It should lead society in generating global knowledge to address global challenges, inter alia, food security, climate change, water management, intercultural dialogue, renewable energy and public health.

It is important to stress, however, that universities do not only bring knowledge as such to the disposal of societies. A catchword in the knowledge society debate is creativity. Good universities are hubs of creativity in which new bold critical thinking flourishes. The interactions of such hubs with surrounding societal environments are in many ways energizing for the concerned societies. In his well-known work, 'The Rise of the Creative Class' [4], Richard Florida has shown how members of what he calls the creative class are drawn to settings with a creative ethos. Such flourishing concentrations of creative potential are often centered on universities in close interaction with other creative players in society. As creativity inspirers, universities may have an impact both on societies' global competitiveness and localized regional developments.

Universities also reinforce, create, use, and teach values for societies. In post-modern and globalized societies, traditional value systems are breaking down and the sphere of joint and self-evident values is diminishing. As a result of these tendencies, there is a growing demand for professional discussion and production of values, as well as presentation of those values to society. As previously mentioned, societal interaction is, and has to be, value-laden.

Universities successfully performing the basic tasks of teaching and research will necessarily, to some extent, impact societies in the manner described above. The very existence of (good) universities as such has an impact on societies. The emphasis on the explicit third mission in the debate is founded on the belief that this impact can be increased, perhaps even multiplied, if expressly and strategically promoted. The societal demand for discourse concerning the third mission is obvious.

Demands concerning efficient fulfillment of the third mission are often made to predominantly publicly funded universities. The public sector and politics inevitably have an interest in funding being used as efficiently as possible to societies' advantage. In view of the perceived importance of universities with regard to the well-being of societies, such pressure both from the political sectors, the media and the public at large is understandable. Universities eager to preserve their brand have to be able to engage in such discussions. Engaging in the third mission should not however be solely driven by an eagerness to fulfill demands of politicians or the public, or, as the case may be, of private sponsors. The third mission can be successfully accomplished only if it is also based on the values of the universities themselves, on the genuine belief within universities that they are there to work for the betterment of society and the world. As I will note later, this is an issue that requires strategic leadership within universities.

A firm root in universities' own specific values is also crucial with regard to the excellence vision. In public debate there is often an emphasis on fast and concrete, or at least visibly measurable and demonstrable, results. Short-term societal applicability should not, however, become the driver of universities' development. Without sufficient commitment to long-term basic research and stable education, the quality of universities' performance deteriorates. An excellent university has to be true to its own vision of its social impact.

However, excellent universities fulfill their third mission not only because of engagement in certain 'altruistic' values. Universities need societal interaction also for the sake of their own improvement. Well-functioning interaction is not a one-way process in which universities serve and societies receive the benefit of the service. Real interaction creates benefits for both parties of the interaction. At universities, both research and education are gaining from active and mutual communication with societal players. Some research could not even be undertaken, or at least not so well undertaken, without close cooperation with businesses and other societal actors, and it is obvious that well-organized (and university-controlled) societal input in the educational processes can enhance their quality. The engagement of higher education institutions in the societies in which they operate should be built on "reciprocity and mutuality in learning and education through such engagement" (UNESCO Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. A Framework for Action 2012–2016) [5].

Excellent universities need their third mission. Excellent universities need to understand that their third mission has a global context. What can universities do to promote such a third mission?

4 Various Ways to Serve Society

As discussed in the Introduction, the third mission of universities is not an easily and clearly definable task. Universities can and do serve society in multifarious ways. In the wide definition of the third mission, including all forms of societal interaction, used, for example, in Swedish and Finnish university legislation, the possible interaction measures are innumerable. The discussion concerning indicators for measuring third mission activities of universities in the following section illustrates this very well.

The educational task of universities obviously profoundly affects the well-being of the societies in which they are located. The interaction between universities and the labor market is important with regard to the quality and impact of the educational task. The needs of the labor market are explored in various ways and used in decision-making in the quality frameworks of universities, and often beyond in external accreditation requirements, as is the case in Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. In a well-functioning curriculum, the students are connected to the labor market through internships and by other means. The role of serving the labor market could be, and occasionally is, seen as an element of the third mission, but it should also be understood to be an integral part of a qualitatively well-developed educational task as such. The first mission is education for employment.

More obvious elements of a particular third mission approach in relation to education are reflected in the understanding that universities should serve their surrounding societies by means of activities that are likely to instill in students a sense of responsibility for the impact of their actions on these societies and on mankind in general. An operationally feasible option in this regard might be, for example, to discuss how to involve students of all departments in community activities as part of the curriculum. This kind of educational mission seems to be emphasized in the IECHE 2013 approach. Again, this could be viewed as an integral element of a qualitatively well-developed educational task.

When discussing the educational task, some reflect primarily on education leading to an academic degree. A possible responsibility for organizing life-long learning would then be seen as a part of the third mission. In universities and university systems in which continuing education is to a considerable extent administered in separate institutes, this often seems natural. In many university strategies this issue is dealt with as a part of the social responsibility of universities. Be it as it may, the importance of life-long learning in the knowledge society has been assigned a highly visible profile on the agenda in numerous countries as well as in the EU, and universities cannot ignore this.

The societal impact of the research task is equally obvious. The concept linking research and society is innovation. As previously mentioned, I will not analyze this issue further, as it is dealt with in a separate chapter.

However, as the fostering of student responsibility for contributing to the good of society has been emphasized as an important element of the third mission, I cannot refrain from mentioning the innovative capacity of students in this context. If favorable conditions and useful platforms for student innovation activities are

created, the new ideas of students, not bound by entrenched thinking traditions, might prove very useful for society. Both student start-ups and the broader innovative activities of students are often based on strong value-commitments.

More generally, universities carry a societal responsibility for the socio-economic environment in which they operate, not only via research and education, but also by means of other activities. Also, by playing active roles themselves, universities are capable of promoting sustainable, equal, democratic, culturally and economically advanced societies.

A traditional way of serving society to achieve such ends is by participation in the public discourse. The outreach of universities is performed by universities and their researchers in both traditional media and increasingly via social media. University communication departments and media centers have become increasingly important, as there is a growing insight that universities and researchers are expected to share their knowledge in the public discourse arena.

Direct communication to the public through public lectures and seminars is a part of an active communication strategy. The academic interest of children may be supported and encouraged by informative visits to schools and by the reception of school classes on campus. In order to obtain good results, this can be implemented in an organized fashion. As a pertinent example I can mention the LUMA Centre of the University of Helsinki, which is “an umbrella organization for the collaboration of schools, university and business sector, with the aim to promote and support life-long learning, studying and teaching of STEM¹ subjects on all levels of education” [6].

In addition to their presentation to the general public, knowledge produced at universities and university expertise are, and should be, used in public and private decision-making processes. In fact, in many countries, the most important influence of researchers often occurs through participation in expert committees, public hearings, law drafting processes, and other decision-making procedures. Universities can make strategic decisions to emphasize such tasks as particular contributions to the third mission. For example, the Australian National University has designated supporting and shaping public policy in its country as its means of engagement with the community, and it has established an institute for that purpose [7].

As universities are often important regional players, their social responsibility has a regional aspect, the relative nature of which varies depending on the location and profile of the individual universities. Regional responsibility implies yet another set of stakeholders to interact with. Both local authorities and local businesses may play very important roles and be partners in universities’ societal interactions.

As value-leaders, universities may also, by their own performance and example, support the values they seek to promote in society. A university that preaches, for example, environmental awareness, is not very convincing if such awareness is lacking in its own activities as an organization. Just to mention an example, it was for this reason a natural step for my own university, the University of Helsinki,

¹STEM is an acronym referring to the academic disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

to join the WWF Green Office scheme, and sign on to its responsibilities under this scheme. In the US, the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (2006) has gained considerable visibility in the discussions concerning how to address climate change [8].

Universities fulfill their third mission through a complex set of activities, differing in scope and content. Such activities can be weighted and combined in many beneficial ways. There is no blueprint for the best way to perform the third mission. It all depends on the environment of the concerned universities, on the structure and disciplines of the universities themselves and, of course, on their values.

The needs of the surrounding societies affect the social demand for university interaction. For example, when the University of Nairobi, with the display of huge signs on campus, announces the campus to be a corruption-free zone, it is a powerful political statement intended to affect society. In some other country, perhaps less plagued by corruption, other issues may seem more urgently in need of addressing, perhaps by other means. In some environments, universities are called to fight for democracy and human rights, while in others this need is felt to be less pressing, at least with regard to the home ground.

The disciplines of universities have an impact on how universities interact with society in their daily activities. Professors of, for example, law and medicine are almost routinely involved in tasks falling within the definition of the third mission, be it through consultation, expert opinions, or in other ways. Also the treatment of patients in university hospitals is usually understood as community service. Climate research has a different impact agenda and stakeholders than do some fields of social sciences and humanities. In some areas of basic science, identifying the natural point of contact with society may require more creative thinking and decision-making.

In good universities, one therefore always encounters a great variety of third mission activities, as should certainly be the case. Universities should promote and offer incentives for such activities. The difficult question of how to measure and incentivize third mission activities is discussed in the next section of the chapter.

Universities that seek to appear as excellent in serving society and mankind cannot, however, be content with merely general promotion of the third mission. They have to proceed further toward more strategic enhancement of the area. Designing and constructing strategies in this area requires choice of the most important third mission activities of universities and their place in universities' branding. This of course is closely connected with the definition of universities' values. I will return to the strategic issues in a later section of the chapter.

5 Measuring Societal Interaction

The performance of the two basic tasks of universities is measured and monitored in many ways. University rankings are based on indicators predominantly measuring features of these tasks. What is measured unavoidably, and to some extent

unfortunately, becomes more visible in universities' policy discourses. A university leadership that takes the third task seriously therefore should make an effort to measure and monitor the performance of the task.

It is easy to enumerate indicators measuring some aspects of the third mission. I will provide some examples below. However, one may still claim that measuring societal interaction is a difficult task that can be easily misleading for a variety of reasons.

First, as described above, the range of the manner and means available for achieving worthwhile interaction is so broad as to be virtually limitless. The definition of the third mission does not have any clear boundaries, and a comprehensive measurement therefore is impossible. However, if universities, as indicated above, have attempted to strategically single out certain forms of interaction as their core third mission activities, finding some indicators for these forms of interaction might prove beneficial. For example, if universities emphasize the particular task of fostering the social responsibility of students (as described in contributions to the IECHE Conference 2013), the impact of community services on the attitudes of students can be measured, and has indeed been measured at many universities. It is important to recognize, however, that such indicators only measure a part, and probably only a minor part of all third mission activities universities are engaged in, and want to be engaged in.

Secondly, multidisciplinary universities face an additional challenge because of the fact that different disciplines tend to interact with society in markedly different ways. As mentioned above, faculties of law, medicine, humanities, and science legitimately have different patterns of social interaction. Any indicators chosen almost necessarily are more advantageous for some faculties and departments than for others. It is therefore difficult to use the indicators as such for comparing the third mission performance of different disciplines, or the performance of universities with different ranges of disciplines.

Thirdly, many of the possible indicators are either wanting in terms of reliability or extremely time-consuming to collect. Unlike some research and education indicators, many third mission indicators require particular collection of data from the researchers, or separate studies or questionnaires. Good universities try not to put excessive bureaucratic data-collection obligations on the shoulders of their personnel.

In spite of these considerations, measuring and monitoring of societal interaction take place in numerous universities and many countries. There are many examples of indicators, used as proxies of interaction. For Swedish legislation-drafting purposes I collected the indicators used to measure third mission (as defined by each university) activities by Finnish universities. To illustrate the variations that occur even within one country, I give as an example the indicators chosen by the largest multidisciplinary Finnish universities:

- University of Helsinki: employment ratio of graduates, number of active alumni, and fundraising results.
- Aalto University: stakeholder groups, non-academic funding, employees and turnover of start-ups, and important positions of trust.

- University of Turku: outside participation, open forums, patents, business funding, textbooks, development projects, and important positions of trust.
- University of Oulu: employment of graduates, master theses made for externals, invention notifications, and study credits at the Open University.
- University of Eastern Finland: reputation barometer, external expert assignments, start-ups, strategic partners, visibility levels in science news, and discussion.

The recent societal interaction barometer of the University of Jyväskylä has often been referred to and contains several items: education services to stakeholders, publications to stakeholders, expert services, stakeholder events, applied research and development activity, student theses for stakeholders, industrial property rights, spin-offs, employment ratio, internships, and infrastructure cooperation.

Often such third mission indicators tend to measure the interaction between research or academic expertise and society. Many of them therefore relate to the innovation issue analyzed more closely in Chapter “[Excellence in Innovation and Knowledge Economy](#)”. Indicators on the interaction between education and society are less frequent, but do exist, as the previous examples show. When focusing in particular on the social responsibility of universities to promote certain values and to ensure students internalize such values, a comprehensive measuring of the complete picture is probably impossible, but the development of the attitudes of students can certainly be measured, as is mentioned above.

Even though a large variety of indicators of the above type are used, and have their natural place among the instruments available to university leadership, such measuring and measurements only provide a partial picture. It is basically most useful for monitoring the development over time of particular activities within particular departments. A comprehensive and trustworthy understanding of the role of universities and their components, and a reliable and credible comparison of the performance of these components at a particular point of time, cannot be achieved through the use of indicators alone.

A strategic vision of how universities should fulfill their third mission and efficient measures to support the development toward the vision requires, in addition to the indicator-based purely quantitative assessment of the social interaction of universities, more qualitative means of assessment. Only such qualitative assessment, preferably to be performed at regular intervals, can adequately take into account the varying opportunities, traditions, and applied usefulness of different disciplines. Understanding of the states of affairs under consideration can be reached by means of regular qualitative assessments without overburdening organizations with continuous collection of large amounts of data.

From the point of view of international excellence, such broad assessment is of particular importance. The indicators used to measure third mission activities, as described above, are often not very effective for pinpointing activities reflecting universities’ global responsibilities.

6 Strategy and Incentives for Interaction

The success of universities in the field of the third mission is very much dependent on the active role of university strategies and leadership. As shown above, universities may engage in a large variety of third mission activities, and excellent performance in this area necessitates strategic choices. The third mission is not as self-evident as teaching and research on the academic agenda and because of this, if concerted and directed effort from the leadership is lacking, then it is at risk of being neglected.

In part the third mission is promoted directly by the networking activities of universities' leaders, as often only leaders are in positions such that it enables them to create ties to other large and influential organizations. Still more important though, is the creation of a fertile and productive academic and educational atmosphere throughout universities. Successful partnerships with societies in which universities are located must involve high proportions of university staff and take place in many forms on many levels. This happens only if there are clear and persistent messages from leadership stressing the importance of societal interaction.

As the performance of the third mission is a value-based activity, this only further enhances the role of the leadership. The social responsibility of universities must go hand in hand with the universities' values, and the values of an organization have no worth if the leadership is not expressly and visibly committed to them.

The third task must be appropriately addressed in universities' strategies, as is usually the case. Normally the mission and vision statements already contain references to universities' values in relation to their surrounding societies. For example, in its Strategic Plan 2013-2016 (as in previous plans) the University of Helsinki commits itself as a part of its vision, to promote "the wellbeing of humanity and a just society" [9].

A good strategy should not only set the direction of development. It should also provide tools for making strategic choices and prioritizations. In the complex field of the third mission, such strategic decision-making is important if one aspires to achieve excellence in the service of society and mankind.

Many questions have to be addressed in such a strategy. First and foremost, a good strategy should be able to operationalize the definition of the third mission, in order to provide a basis for discussing, assessing, and promoting the relevant activities. The understanding of the third mission in its relationship to the primary tasks of teaching and research should be defined. Rather than being an independent task, the third mission can be viewed as a perspective on the primary tasks, driven by a commitment by universities to promote important social values.

The strategy should be based on the realization that universities have different roles to play in the interaction ecosystem. Most universities have, and should have, international, national, and regional interaction. However, the proportional balance of these elements varies according to the universities' roles. It is an important question to ask, "To what extent should universities focus on interaction on each

level?” Local universities can have a central role in supporting the well-being of their region, while others more clearly play a national role. In some ways, all universities also work for the benefit of mankind in general. Universities that aspire to be placed within the elite, among the world-class universities, should expressly and actively expand their societal impact beyond the confines of their own society’s borders.

Education is, for example, an important tool for aiding development, and can be offered in cooperation with various organizations and agents in this area. The development of MOOCs was, at least initially, seen as a service to an international society that was eager to learn. Such measures cannot, however, flourish without express strategic choices on the part of universities to serve mankind in this way.

When leading the development of third mission activities at universities, other crucial questions should also be addressed. Which fields of interaction are regarded as the most important for universities and how should activities in these areas be supported? Is it possible and desirable to build strategic partnerships to particular societal actors to promote third mission activities?

Finally, strategic leadership requires decisions about the incentives to promote the fulfillment of the strategic choices. How can departments and individual employees who perform well be recognized and supported? As the indicators reflecting the third mission are not able to provide a comprehensive picture of the complex field that would appear balanced in relation to the opportunities of various disciplines, a purely indicator-based remuneration strategy is not recommendable. As was noted above, in addition to possible incentives based on indicators, universities also need more comprehensive qualitative assessments of their third mission activities, which also can be used for informing decisions concerning remuneration.

In addition to university incentives, the research funding market also increasingly incentivizes societal interaction of university research. Many funding agencies favor projects and themes in which both universities and societal actors participate. In international university discourse, a key concept with regard to the service of mankind is the concept of grand challenges. Much discussion on the role of universities has related their particular importance to their ability to contribute to solving challenges, such as climate change, world peace, and poverty among other things. Many research funders also, notably the EU Horizon 2020 program, have started to focus their activities on such grand challenges and much of international outreach will certainly be organized under this heading in years to come. This is dealt with in more detail in the chapter dealing with innovation and knowledge economy.

7 The Role of the IAB

Excellence in service to society and mankind can be achieved only through strong strategic leadership. University leaders and their strategies have to set the tone for active societal interaction. Leaders have to make strategic choices on what to

achieve based on universities' values. As the task of the International Advisory Board is to support the university leadership on strategic issues, it clearly has a role to play in this context.

The IAB can help in focusing strategies on important issues and in supporting the building of international interaction. As far as decisions concerning activities and partners on the local and national level are concerned, the IAB's contribution naturally has to remain on the level of principles. The society within which the third mission is to be performed is familiar territory for the locals, and it is difficult for outsiders to have well-founded views on issues relating to the realities on the ground at the local level.

As mentioned, it is strategically important to have a clear view on several issues related to the fulfillment of the third mission:

- The strategic position and the values of the third mission within the university.
- The respective weights of regional, national, and international societal interaction.
- The priority of third mission fields and activities of the university.
- Possible partnerships in third mission activities.
- Measurement, assessment, and incentives for the third mission.

Such issues can and should be regularly discussed with the IAB.

In particular, an international board may usefully contribute to the analysis of the role of societal interaction in the process of the university's internationalization. In addition to strategic discussions, the IAB may offer help and support in identifying and locating suitable international partners and networks and worthwhile targets for service to foreign societies and mankind. One fundamental aim of the strategic plan of King Abdulaziz University was "to promote the University's partnerships with distinguished scientific, research and industrial institutions" [10]. The IAB was appointed to support the university in this respect.

An IAB is expected to, and should be expected to, have an impact on the discussions and developments of strategic issues, such as have been discussed in the present chapter. The IAB of King Abdulaziz University hopes that it has, at least to some extent, managed to fulfill the expectations of its host in this respect.

8 Conclusion

For the many reasons analyzed in this chapter, the third mission plays an increasingly important role in contributing to university excellence. It is also a challenging function, as it can be performed in a multitude of ways depending on the values, disciplines, and societal environs of the university.

Striving for excellence in serving society and mankind requires active and strong university leadership, committed to the promotion of its societal interaction. The chosen forms of interaction should have clear and direct connection to university values and strategic planning. The strategy should not only emphasize the

importance of the third mission, but also operationalize its definition and assert the strategic choices made in this area.

The strategic choices are important, as different universities have different roles to play in the interaction ecosystem. Some may focus more on regional forms of interaction, while others also work more conspicuously for the benefit of mankind in general. A world-class university should actively reach beyond the national borders. The International Advisory Board of the university may in particular contribute to the integration of societal interaction in the process of the university's internationalization.

As stated previously, developing the third mission requires leadership. This includes incentivizing activities in this area. However, the creation of proper incentives is difficult, as the measuring of societal interaction is problematic and can be easily misleading. There is an abundance of possible indicators available, but they all measure only limited parts of the activity. Successful leadership in this area therefore must always rely not only on indicators, but also on qualitative assessments of the third mission activities of the university. Active leadership involves strategic qualitative decision-making.

Open Access This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License, which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.

References

1. The International Exhibition and Conference on Higher Education (IECHE). (2013). *The 4th IECH statement*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Retrieved from <http://www.ieche.com.sa/en/exhibition>
2. Weber, L. and Duderstadt, J. (eds). (2012). *Global sustainability and the responsibilities of universities*. London, Paris, and Geneva: Economica.
3. UNESCO. (2009). *Final report on the UNESCO world conference on higher education 2009*. Paris: UNESCO Headquarters.
4. Florida, R. (2002). *the rise of the creative class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.
5. Tandon, R., & Hall, B. (2012). *unesco chair on community based research and social responsibility in higher education: A framework for action 2012–2016*. Victoria, Canada: University of Victoria.
6. <http://www.helsinki.fi/luma/english>
7. Young, I. (2013). Building community engagement in a research intensive university. In *Paper presented at the 4th International Exhibition and Conference on Higher Education—The Social Responsibility of Universities*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, April 16–17, 2013.
8. Alutto, J. (2013). The global commitment. In *Paper presented at the 4th International Exhibition and Conference on Higher Education—The Social Responsibility of Universities*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, April 16–17, 2013.
9. University of Helsinki. Strategic Plan 2013–2016. Retrieved from <http://www.helsinki.fi/strategy>
10. King Abdulaziz University. Second Strategic Plan 2010–2014. Retrieved from <http://css.kau.edu.sa/Pages-Strategic-KAUPlan.aspx>