Chapter 3
The Social Role of University Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the dimensions and characteristics of social entrepreneurship in universities and its role in developing sustainable communities. It argues that by building on social responsibility practices and creating an identity of a society-oriented university, one which is driven by a social mission and humanistic values and a sense of moral commitment to its communities, higher education institutions are more likely to succeed on the global market characterized by an increasing competition and a high degree of internationalization. Therefore, by understanding the driving forces which determine the social entrepreneurial behavior of the academic community, universities will be more successful in driving social transformation and achieving innovation. While the view of social entrepreneurship in university put forward in this chapter is far from complete, the authors see it as an important first step to enhance theoretical understanding of the phenomenon and facilitate future research.

INTRODUCTION

Social responsibility and the entrepreneurial process have grown in popularity over the last two decades, as many publications illustrate (e.g. Mair and Marti, 2006; Reza et al., 2010; Zomeren and Klandermans, 2011). In the search for social responsibility and entrepreneurship inside the higher education system, researchers and practitioners have to take into consideration the new aspects of concepts such as social entrepreneurship and social change generated by the idiosyncrasies of the academic environment. Most of the educational systems in Europe are public systems, ruled, conducted, and financed according to the laws and regulations of governmental institutions.

These systems have been for the last 100 years the grounds of the education level that the citizens of each country live with and acknowledge. However, the problems of the 21st century show a widening gap of inequality among the social classes which ultimately is given by the difference in access to quality education, no matter if it is public or private. Considering the flourishing of private institutions and the proliferation of alternative forms of education that have created a new and more competitive environment, universities should start to implement structural changes and create new architectures by working on changing the way they operate in order to best serve the interests of their stakeholders.

As such, in order to build an enduring and unique competitive advantage, universities, like any business firm, should dedicate themselves to true end-to-end responsibility and social innovation (Kanter, 2010; Tierney, 2011). These are the universities concerned with creating a healthy educational system and a wealthy research process and incorporating responsibility into all their activities, including their relationships with stakeholders. End-to-end responsibility refers firstly to the university duty towards internal and external customers (academics, staff members, students, employers, Ministry, etc.) and should be reflected in its educational services and its research products. This means that all the processes within the university should be responsible and sustainable and absolutely everything that happens within the university should happen in a responsible manner as well.

Additionally, the university is expected to create innovative ideas which address the local communities' concerns. A university that is not socially innovative is more likely to be less competitive in the new market of higher education and to perish in the newly created environment which is based on extreme competition (Păunescu and Cantaragiu, 2012). Recently, more and more

universities have embraced social goals while building their identity on the market and have acknowledged the need to have an impact on the communities in which they are present.

In this context, does the system of higher education need social entrepreneurship? In the paper we start from the premise that it does and we investigate the dimensions and characteristics of a socially responsible university and its degree of interdependence with the social entrepreneurial university, using an extensive review of the recent literature and university document analysis. Additionally, the factors explaining social entrepreneurial behavior in higher education are researched, and the consequences of social entrepreneurial universities are inquired. The main purpose of this paper is to awaken academic curiosity for social entrepreneurship and to open up new avenues of inquiry for social entrepreneurship theory development and practice.

The literature in this field is very complex, as social entrepreneurship is becoming a term extensively used for all non-profit, for-profit and governmental bodies, and even universities lately. As a result, it has so many ramifications which makes difficult to conceptualize social entrepreneurship in higher education. In accordance, the chapter seeks to bring clarity to the notion of social entrepreneurship and its actual relationships to social responsibility in academia. By extending the areas of research outside the commonly addressed business sector to the higher education sector this paper brings with it challenges to old beliefs and the rewards of new beginnings in both practice and theory.

The reminder of this chapter is structured as follows. The first part introduces various definitions of social entrepreneurship in a business context and with a particular focus on higher education. It explains the characteristics of a socially responsible vs. social entrepreneurial university. In the second part a specific focus is placed on explaining

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