

Chapter 1

From the Entrepreneurial University to the Civic University: What Are We Talking About?

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ABSTRACT

The chapter aims to investigate the impact of the presence of the university on the perceived quality of life of the host community. To this aim, the authors focused on a specific area, that is the historical town center of Naples (as defined by the UNESCO in the World Heritage List since 1995), where five universities are located. Adopting a qualitative and explorative approach, 25 in-depth interviews have been conducted with local universities' stakeholders and content-analyzed through the software Nvivo 10. Thus, the authors identified precisely the multiplicity of activities through which the presence of the university contributes to the socio-economic and cultural well-being of the community of which it is part, thinking about the dynamics that may occur in the case of an urban-located university. Based on the findings, a conceptual model is proposed that may be further validated with new investigations.

INTRODUCTION

The university has always played a key role in the life of a community, as a privileged place to build the foundations for the progress and development of the community itself. Nowadays, in the knowledge-based society, the pressure on the university to facilitate the direct application of its knowledge in order to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development is even higher (Etzkowitz, 2002, 2004; Feller, 1990; Bercovitz and Feldman, 2006; Riviezzo and Napolitano, 2010; Leih and Teece, 2016; Schmitz et al., 2017; Riviezzo, Liñán and Napolitano, 2017). Thus, a growing academic attention has been devoted towards the “entrepreneurial university” (Etzkowitz, 2004)” as an economic actor able to contribute to local development through its “third mission”. However, the focus has been traditionally posed on the economic and entrepreneurial impacts related to the presence of a university in a community, while the social and cultural impacts have been discussed only to a certain extent. In this regard, the “triple helix model” (Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz, 1996; Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2000), referring to a set of interactions between university, industry and governments to foster economic and social development, has been recently expanded to a “quadruple helix model” (Kim et al., 2011; Carayannis and Campbell, 2012; Leydesdorff, 2012; Plewa et al., 2013; McAdam and Debackere, 2018). In this more recent view, universities, playing a key role as “anchor” institutions, are called to work with and in the wide community they are part of, also creating relationships with media and culture based public and the civil society on the whole, in order to produce economic and social value and enhance the quality of life (Goddard and Kempton, 2016). This vision of the university is strengthened by adopting the concept of “civic engagement”, that «calls for faculty and students to engage with issues and questions that people in communities off campus name as important and to collaborate in true partnership» (Ostrander, 2004; p. 77). The university must therefore recuperate its broader role, that is «a role in fostering democracy and citizen participation and providing social value through both its educative function and its production of knowledge» (Ostrander, 2004; p. 77), and to this aim, it cannot fail to take into consideration the needs of the local community, its characteristics and the relationships that exist with it.

However, what this “civic engagement” really means in the perspective of university’s stakeholders is still an under-researched topic. Even very basic questions still remain without a precise answer: in which way the presence of a university in a place may create value for people living, working or frequenting that place? May the presence of the university in a place affect the perceived quality of life? How? Why? The main aim of this study is to try to address these questions, by identifying the specific university activities that have an impact on the perceived quality of life in the place where university operates.

To this aim, we used a qualitative and explorative approach, based on multiple in-depth interviews with relevant university’s stakeholders in a specific area: the historical town-centre of Naples (Italy). In this area, identified by UNESCO and listed in the World Heritage List since 1995, five universities have been operating for a very long time: University of Naples “Federico II”, University of Campania “Vanvitelli”, University of Naples “L’Orientale”, Suor Orsola Benincasa, Parthenope University of Naples. We firmly believe that this is a privileged place to investigate the links between community and universities, thinking about the dynamics that may occur in the case of an urban-located university.

In the following sections the theoretical background of the study is presented. Thereafter, the methodology and results are discussed. Finally, the implications and limitations are illustrated.

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