Factors in the university - city interaction: The case of Greek Regional Universities

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Abstract
The complex interdependence / interaction relations between the academic and local communities - mainly in terms of their potential contribution to the development of the university and the city - have been the object of intense conflicts. In the current conjuncture, where knowledge has been acknowledged as one of the main means for the development of the cities, regions and countries, this has become a growing consideration. Experience has taught us that, any weakness to define how higher education could act as a principal development factor is largely owed to the failure to take into account a set of factors that seem to be associated with the planning of its expansion and can - directly or indirectly - impact the integration process of the university into the life of the broader area. These are factors that emerge from the broader framework set by the main reference levels of the university - city relationship: i.e. the "state", the "university" and the "city". In this framework, and given the deficient investigation of the subject, this study attempts to identify these interaction factors between the university and the city, and group them on the basis of political, social, economic and spatial criteria. Taking Greece as a point of reference, it is investigated whether these factors have been taken into account in the design of the higher education decentralisation policy, and have affected the relationship between regional universities and the respective cities, and if so how.

Keywords: “regional university”; “university & city”; “academic community & local society”; “regional & local development”; “urban development”; “higher education & regional policy”.

0. INTRODUCTION
The complex relations between universities and cities have been the object of strong disputes. They are seen at times from the viewpoint of potential contributions brought by the university to the city life and at others from the viewpoint of the city itself, which acts on the academic functionality as an “environment”. In the contemporary conjuncture of the recent 20-25 years, mainly, when knowledge has been admitted as one of the key levers for the development of cities, regions and countries, the city-university relations have acquired a new weight - and have been in the process of being re-identified. The causes for this is the major change in the content of “development” and the concept of “university” [mainly in terms of its role in the society and economy], the new policies and socio-economic conditions globally, the contemporary weight attributed to new technologies and knowledge dissemination as a “development factor”, as well as the large number of unsuccessful attempts in developing substantial cooperative relations between universities and cities. Universities have long been faced with new types of challenges, interacting with the changes occurring in the broader society. The vast increase in the number of students coupled with the cutting down on financial subsidies granted to higher education and research, the highly diverse student body in terms of age and origin, and changes in the higher education structure are some of the principal changes that, although globally occurring, affect dissimilarly not only every country or every region, but also areas thereof [Elliott, et.al., 1996: xix].

Experience has taught us that, any weakness to define how higher education could act as a principal development factor is largely owed to the failure to take into account a set of factors that seem to be associated with the planning of its expansion and can - directly or indirectly - impact the integration process of the university into the life of the broader area. Given the deficient investigation of the subject, the objective of research is to study and record the key factors of university - city interaction, and group them on the basis of political, social, economic, cultural and spatial criteria. The sources include the international, primarily American and British, literature and experience of the post-war era [Theodora, 2004: 588-665].

Taking Greece as a point of reference, it is investigated whether these factors have been taken into account in the design of the higher education decentralisation policy, and have affected the relationship between regional universities and the respective cities. The time horizon of reference is the period spanning from the start of higher education decentralisation in Greece [mid 60's] until 1999 [end of 2nd millennium]. It is possible that, in the time that elapsed from the completion of the study [2004] until the presentation of its findings, changes have occurred in the kind and amount of “regional-scale services and infrastructures” in Greek cities [especially “medium-size” ones], as well as in the number and spatial distribution of regional universities. Such changes are not taken into consideration for purely methodological purposes. Besides it is far too early to evaluate the effects of universities that started operating only five years ago, give or take, and have not reached their full growth yet - to the extent it has been planned [a multitude of scientific fields, research orientation, size of academic communities, etc.].

This study is part of a broader research effort on the relationship between Greek regional universities and local societies; the first one ever attempted in Greece [Theodora, 2004]. Thus many of the data, which have emerged from surveys conducted, are the “product of primary research” intended to fill the - anyway established - gap in Greek bibliography and experience. Although there may have been occasional scientific surveys, studies and papers on the development role of regional universities, they have been isolated and case-specific. This research effort - attempted on the basis of an overall and systematic approach of all regional universities [8 Universities] and Greek cities of prefectures [53 cities] - could be the “starting point” for further research at a city level through “case studies”.

The paper is structured in four chapters. The first chapter attempts to outline the principal time “milestones” that have signalled changes in the perception of the relationship between universities and cities in the global arena from the 19th century

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1 “Regional universities”: universities located and operating in cities of the Greek regions. “Central universities”: universities operating in the two Metropolises of the country [Athens and Thessaloniki]. An unofficially established distinction and adopted by the writer.

2 Cf. footnote No 4.
to modern times. In the second chapter, an account is given of the key factors that could, directly or indirectly, affect the university-city relationship on the basis of international literature / experience. The third chapter discusses Greece. The territorial distribution of regional universities at national level is shown, and a series of general conclusions is given regarding the relations between the academic and local communities. It is also investigated, taking a critical view, whether the factors analysed above have influenced the relationship between regional universities and Greek cities.

In the fourth chapter, it is attempted to lay out the new international trends for the improvement of the university-city relationship, taking the case of the Greek experience and guided by international considerations for the issue.

1. CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITY-CITY RELATIONSHIP: THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICE

Historically, the relations between university and local communities have been thorny. The most characteristic periods for the interpretation of mutations in the university-city relationship are thought to be: the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Modern Times - i.e. the time period starting at the end of the Industrial Revolution [Theodora, 1998: 5-9].

However, this paper is mainly interested in the contemporary considerations. Emphasis is placed on the period after the mid-60's, when the intensified massification of university education coupled with the major political, social and economic crises in the international scene laid down the conditions for a change in the perception of the university-city relationship. Such change was, in fact, the outcome of a content transmutation sustained by the concepts involved in this relationship, namely: “development”, “university”, “society”, “space/territory” [Theodora, 2004: 692-697].

The complexity and dynamics characterizing the university-city relationship requires continuous, systematic and interdisciplinary investigation. Such a broad issue may not be fully covered by a single article, and this is not the objective, after all. The interest in this paper is focused on highlighting the particularity of the university-city relationship and the major change undergone by its content over time. Thus a brief account is presented of the key changes that signalled the change in the perception of the university-city relationship, from the 19th century to modern times, on the basis of the international literature/experience. The “milestones” are turning points which, on the occasion of major political, social and economic events and international and national conjunctures, express change in the perception. This does not mean that it would be impossible to have different prevalent perceptions in the same time period or that a change in a perception would necessarily imply the abolition of older views.

During the 19th century the university was still an elite institute with limited involvement in the social and economic problems of the local society, which affects their relationship. The interest of the university in the local society will start being endorsed, mainly on the initiative of progressive teachers and students, after the beginning of the 20th century, with the first timid, yet more methodical, steps taken mainly after World War II.

Yet the real turn in the perception of the relationship between the academic and local communities occurred in the mid-60's - at a time when there was intensified social pressure for increase in the demand for social services that were some how associated with the university’s key role [Dobbins, 1964: 4-5]. It was the time when local society started acquiring consciously importance for the academic community [Clinchy, 1968: 1-18]. The causes were the prevalent political, social and economic conditions, and the change in the notions of “development” and “region”. The turn of the university to the local community will take even an extreme form, mainly through the projection of the university “server” - namely an institute obliged to give solutions to any problem encountered in its broader area.

In the 70’s, on the occasion of major political, social and economic events, part of the academic area started supporting the “opening” of the university to the problems of the local society, and the need for student involvement in the daily problems preoccupying it. The local community started to be projected by the university as a “workshop” on which it could draw a multitude of information that would help it be more efficient in its role and justify its raison d’être. On the occasion of the university’s “opening” to the local society, the first reactions will emerge regarding the limits of its involvement so that its primary role [education, research] may not be threatened [Coleman, Wehr, 1974: 111-113].

From the 80’s the relations between university and local society were in the process of being re-identified. The reason was the broader considerations about its role in the society and contribution to the development [Elliott, et. al., 1996: xii-xiv]. It was the time when, following the successive failures of many universities to handle the problems of their local communities, the question was raised: “what can - and what can’t - the university do for the local community”; a question that would directly or indirectly define the kind of relationship between them. At the same time, in the framework of the broader awareness-raising about the protection of the natural and cultural urban environment, the university-city relationship assumed a new additional dimension: that of the university being actively involved in the protection of natural wealth and cultural regeneration of its area. This trend would acquire much more weight in the following decade [OECD, 1982: 29-31, 157; Morris, 1996: 148-163].

In the 90's - and while there was still the “risk” of giving rise to false hopes and expectations about what the university could achieve with regard to its links with the local community - on the occasion of the developments in the highest education, a re-emergence of the traditional relations between the university and local community was observed [Elliott, et. al., 1996: xx]. Efforts to involve the university in local development issues, that had started quite a few years earlier, were intensified but formed part of a new framework of thought that aimed at not being disoriented from its primary purpose [education, research]. Thus the university “servant” model started being abandoned and gradually replaced by the university “collaborator” model. An institute collaborating with the local community in order to help it learns how to understand, but mainly how to deal with, its problems. It was the time when the efforts for its “opening” to the immediate environment started being supported not only by the members of the university or local communities, or local organizations, but also by the managements of universities as well as central, regional and local governments of the several countries, which started including in their development and educational policies the requirement for enhanced, but mainly more essential, involvement of universities in local development issues.
In the contemporary conjuncture, much as the need to strengthen the collaboration between the university and the city was recognized by the academic and local communities and the governments of several developed countries, the problem still lied in the method of its implementation. The key disagreement pertained to the role of the university in the society. Regardless of how the matter will be resolved, it is certain that universities will have to be transformed from elite institutes into institutes capable to actively cater for the needs of modern society.

### 2. FACTORS IN THE UNIVERSITY - CITY / LOCAL SOCIETY INTERACTION

Investigating the international literature, it was found that - irrespective of various concepts about the university - city relationship - there are certain factors that can have a positive or negative effect on university’s development role in the area, and determine the relations between the university and the local community. Such factors emerge from the greater framework set-up by the basic reference levels of the university-city relationship, namely: the “state” [state policy for education and development and higher education and its and its connection with education planning and regional / local development planning], the university [internal academic organization model; university policy], and the city [city size, history of the area; city significance within the urban network; city infrastructure; urban environment quality; socio-economic structure and culture].

The “time” variable can play a role in addressing and evaluating such factors, since in essence it reflects the importance given through time to the university, the state, the local community, but most importantly the relations between them [Theodora, 2004: 588-664].

In this chapter it is attempted to group the factors on the basis of political, social, economic, cultural, spatial criteria. A detailed account of such factors exceeds the limits of this paper. The aim is to indicate their types and number, but mainly the variety of combinations thereof [different as per case and in time] with multiple influences on the relationship between the university and the city.

Thus it is evidenced - once again - that the university - local society relationship is characterized by complexity & dynamics, which impede research and prevent generic solutions [see Fig 1].

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<th>CRITERIA</th>
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| **Political** | - State policy on education and development, and the role of the university in the broader framework of political actions set thereby  
- State policy on highest education and extent of its inclusion in the education and development policies [Principles of planning (acknowledgement of university diversity as a function and investment, definition of duty), type of academic structure and organization (education, research, social role, management, administration, funding), expansion policy (establishment and location selection policies, extent of inclusion in the existing national university network and regional development policy), programme figures (size of the academic community, number / type of disciplines, comparability of the department with equivalent ones at national level), correlation rate of university establishment / location selection policies with local social-economic components (correlation of scientific disciplines with local productive activity and the needs of the local community, etc.)].  
- University policy and its relation with the broader higher education policy [vision, academic organisation, location selection pattern, regional / local role, etc.]. |
| **Social** | - Main social structure of the city [type / number of organizations, services, agencies]  
- Quality of technical infrastructure [transport, telecom, energy, etc.].  
- Existence of a scientific / educational / research activities network.  
- Type of university action on issues pertaining to the broader local community. |
| **Economic** | - Main productive and research activities in the city.  
- Local building activity.  
- Scientific / technical infrastructure standard of local production sectors.  
- Extent of scientific / research support of local productive and research bodies by the university [relation between the scientific disciplines provided and the local productive activities (city, region) and the country]. |
| **Cultural** | - Local history, cultural level - Cultivation of local population.  
- Main cultural and recreational activities in the city.  
- Existence of mechanisms to develop cooperative relations between the university and the local or international community on cultural issues. |
| **Spatial** | - Size of the city and university - Ensuring a “critical mass”  
- Quality of urban environment.  
- Location of the city in the national, international urban network – Accessibility rate.  
- University territorial distribution pattern at country level.  
- University location in the urban fabric of the city [within, outside, mix].  
- Territorial unity – continuity of university facilities in the urban fabric.  
- Internal city-planning organisation model and architectural structure / form of university facilities, irrespective of the university location in the urban fabric [e.g. “open” or “closed”]. |

**Figure 1**: Key factors in the university - city interaction
Specifically:
Based on political criteria, the most significant factors are:

a) state policy on planning higher education and its connection with education planning, and regional and local development planning;

b) recognition of higher education’s different character as a “function” and an “investment” for regional/local development, and for its use on the greater development process;

c) the universities’ vision regarding their role in greater society and contribution to the area’s development.

However, there are also some other equally important socio-economic, cultural and spatial factors, having to do: on the one hand with the university [internal academic organisation model, spatial development model (location selection as to the entire country, as to the urban tissue, segmentation throughout different cities, or areas within the same city, city planning organisation and architectural structure model)], and on the other hand with the degree of a city’s readiness to accept and put to use the university product to its own benefit and to the benefit of the greater area [history of the area, population (socio-economic structure, culture), city infrastructure (e.g. production, social, technical, education, research, technological, cultural, etc.), city size [“critical mass”], accessibility index, city significance within the urban network, urban environment quality, economic activity] [Theodora, 2004: 588-664]

3. The case of Greek Regional Universities

At a time when world-wide mobility about the “university - city” relationship, and its role in the development of academic and local communities, has been stepping up, the relevant considerations in Greece seem to have started becoming interesting in the past 20-25 years mainly. Thus, as the international experience and practice were constantly enriched [conferences, articles, papers, studies, research, etc.], the Greek remained limited with a small amount of scientific and research studies and papers and restricted to specific cases. Hence numerous aspects of the matter have remained unexplored [Theodora, 2004: 181-304]. So it would be interesting to explore whether, and to what extend, co-estimating interaction factors has played a part in the kind of relationship established between the Greek regional universities and their host cities.

Greece is a country the higher education system operated exclusively by the state. For more than four decades, governmental policies have been bringing out the decentralization of university education as a “means” to improve the quality of education nation-wide and resolve the “regional problem”. At the same time, local societies have requesting, one after the other, the establishment of at least one university department, in the belief that they would thus ensure the upgrading of the quality and economy standards in their respective areas.

Until the mid 60’s the only universities in Greece were located in Athens and Thessaloniki, where Greece’s largest population masses are assembled, and all types of political, social-economic and cultural activities are undertaken. The policy on the expansion of higher education first appeared in the 60’s when the first universities in cities of the “region” were instituted. In phase A [the 60’s] universities are instituted and established in major cities of the country and named after them: University of Patras [Patras] and University of Ioannina [ioannina]. From the 70’s onwards a new decentralization phase was embarked upon; the prevalent concept was the dispersion of the academic function over different cities and towns in the regions. The new universities then were named after the region where they belonged, rather the city where they operated. During that period the following universities were established: University of Thrace [Xanthi, Komotini, Alexandroupoli], University of Crete [Heraklio, Rethymno] and Technical University of Crete [Chania], University of Thessaly [Volos, Larissa, Trikala, Karditsa], Aegean University [Mytilene, Chios, Karlovass i / Vathi, Rhodes] and Ionian University [Corfu]. The decentralization of higher education is still in progress. Many of the existing regional universities obtained new Departments, and the decision had already been made to institute and gradually put in operation three more new regional universities: Peloponnese, Western Macedonia, Sterea Hellas [Theodora, 2008:255-256] [see Fig. 2].

A survey comprising all the regional universities with the objective to record / evaluate the following: scientific fields [Schools/ Departments], size of academic communities, research infrastructure / social activity, spatial

Figure 2: Distribution of Greek regional universities at national level: 1960-1999

Having studied the policies on the establishment and location selection of regional universities and the model of internal university organization and territorial development of their facilities¹ on the one hand, and regional² infrastructure of
cities on the other hand, the general conclusion that may be drawn is that there is limited collaboration between academic communities & local societies [Theodora, 2004: 490-502, 665-692]. This is finding that remains to be assessed at the city planning scale through “case studies”.

Specifically, the picture of the relationship between regional universities and their host cities is as follows:

The crucial and exclusive it seems duty of Greek universities is to offer free education to as large a population part as possible. Consequently, their “research”, “business” and “social” roles [in the sense of university - local community co-operation in order to address their common problems] become a lower priority. Thus, regional universities are treated mostly as “education premises”, without making any particular efforts to be networked with the research and production sectors, and to develop partnerships between the respective academic communities and the local actors, or members of the extra-academic community. Despite the efforts made mainly in the past 15 years:

- university research in most regional universities is limited, and its subject-matter rarely deals with local production / business activities. The Universities of Patras, Crete, Ioannina, the Crete Technical University [Chania] and the University of Thessaly are exceptions to this rule. So it seems that there is a certain degree of correlation between the intensity and kind of research activity, with the city size and university type as regards its scientific disciplines,
- there is still a very limited connection between regional universities and production sectors. Although they encounter problems, the most active regional universities are the ones operating in cities of a certain size, with region-wide infrastructure, and high accessibility index; such cities are usually the ones located on, or near, the major “development axes” [Patras, Volos, Heraklion, Chania],
- the regional universities’ “social role” - in the sense of their participation in dealing with problems of the greater extra-academic community - is rather limited and does not appear connected with the city or university size

Regional universities operate in 17 cities that differ as to their level of development within the national urban network. Most of them operate in cities that had been planning at country and city level [inside or outside the urban fabric], building facilities, residence, research activities [e.g. research programs, bodies, etc.], social action [e.g. events, population reference groups, associations, etc.], problems, etc. The survey was conducted with the aid of a questionnaire and interviews [Theodora, 2004: 439-512].

4 a) Regional-scale services [these are administrative and social services intended for the population of the broader area of the city, as well; possibly in other areas of the country], b) production infrastructure [national- or regional-scale production units (Industrial Areas, Industrial Parks, Scientific or Technological Parks), or major services for the operation of public utilities which need qualified personnel and high standard scientific and technological assistance, and whose products are available beyond their area of operation], c) research / technological infrastructure [research and technological bodies that may cooperate with universities, but are supervised by extra-academic organizations], d) higher education [universities and technological educational institutes], and D transport infrastructure [it is related to accessibility [SK1 (when two transport systems are combined), SK2 (when three or four transport systems are combined)] [Theodora, Loukakis, 2005: 128-157].

5 Patras, Heraliko, Volos, Larissa: interregional importance cities; Ioannina, Komotini, Xanthi, Chania, Mytilini, Rhodos: Regional importance cities; Alexandroupoli, Trakia, Karditsa, Rethymno, Corfu, Agrinio: interprefectural importance cities [based on the results of the typology of Greek cities, proposed by the writer] [Theodora, 2004: 548-561].

The problem, in the relations of Greek regional universities with their host cities, lies mainly in the fact that university education expansion - despite efforts in recent years - is still treated in a unidimensional and fragmentary manner. Unidimensional, because it is not addressed in the framework of multiple roles of the university [i.e. “educator”, “researcher”, “advisor”, “partner”] and different levels of its spatial reference [i.e. neighborhood, city, region, country]. Fragmentary because it is not put into the perspective of broader policies on development and education. It is true though that, following the country’s accession to the European Union, a new context of reflection has been shaped regarding the investigation of the relationship “university - regional / local development”. Based on the survey results, it seems that failure to co-estimate a set of factors in designing / planning the policy on the expansion of higher education in Greece has resulted in inefficient use of the regional universities as a means of regional development on the one hand, and a limited to non-existent relationship of academic communities with the local societies of their host cities on the other. The factors are identified as follows: a) the absence of a long-term consistent policy for education, which resulted in a failure to define the appropriate, each time, development mode, and education style, that would contribute to the implementation of the model’s aims, b) the non-inclusion of the higher education expansion policy in the greater framework set forth by state development and education policies, and by local socio-economic components, as a result of which regional universities are being considered as a means of achieving direct economic results rather than creating the proper conditions for ensuring global, long-term development, c) failure to take into account the university diversity as: “entity”, “function”, “investment”, d) failure to take into account the “city” factor - namely, the “hosting environment” of universities [in terms of: size of the city, social-economic structure of the population, infrastructure, city weight in the national residential system], e) lack of
information among the involved parties with regard to their roles; this leads to confusion about the type and boundaries of mutual relations and partnerships. Local societies thus seem to rather view universities as “premises” bringing mainly direct economic benefits [rents, daily expenses, entertainment, etc]. Universities, on the other hand, seem to fail to understand yet the potential significance of the broader urban environment quality 3 -i.e. the principal “space” to derive resources and distribute of their produced goods [knowledge, research, social role] - for the development of the same and their respective areas.

4. IN CONCLUSION:

TRENDS OF AND PROPOSALS FOR AN ENHANCED UNIVERSITY-CITY RELATIONSHIP

Studying the university - city relations, independently from any perceptions of their kind and limits, it is found that they are neither vague nor abstract. They include fundamental values, and a multitude of contradictions - expressing the kind and quality of relations that are developed between academic and local communities. They are diverse and complex relations. This is due to the disparity of communities involved therein, which is so large that not only impedes their approximation at national or regional/local level - or even university level per se -, but also makes it impossible to draw to generic conclusions that would be simply and internationally applicable [Elliott, 1996: xix:]. However, university - city relations are also interactive, which makes their study even harder. They are based on an two-way process: on the one hand, the impact of the university on the its broader urban environment and, on the other hand, the impact of the city on the development of the university [Schuetze, 1996; 62-77; van der Wusten, 1998]. The mutual dependencies of universities - local communities may give rise to problems, unless they are resolved in differentiated manners that are respectful of place and time [Clark, Neave, 1992: 946-947]. At any rate, the university - city relationship is not a “simple relationship between two clearly defined entities, but a series of relations with the identities of the participants, largely shifting from one relationship to the another and from one moment to another” [Hardy, 1996: 10-24].

The problem in developing substantial cooperative relations between universities and cities seems to originate in the fact that the complexity of the academic and local communities was not addressed in its entirety, thus failing to always co estimate their intense disparity [Clark, Neave, 1992: 841-845]. It is not enough, therefore, to simply set a binding university - city interconnection. Interconnections must be multiple and complex. They should be multiple to influence the largest possible part of both communities. They should complex to respond to a very large number of fields of activity. The cooperation between university communities and local societies is not an easy cause. Yet it is worth pursuing it, since both universities and cities need each other to develop. But to limit the chances of developing friction, and to facilitate the establishment of permanent two-way discussions between university and local societies, the policy on higher education should no longer be one-dimensional, and should be founded on the basis of an equal study of both “university” and “city”. However it is equally important to pay attention to the full integration of the educational activity, academic research and “opening” of the university to the local society on the one hand, and acknowledgement of the diversity of each entity and the way its role is perceived by different people and/or groups at different times on the other.

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