



Accepted Special Session

The role of universities in regional innovation, regional development and sustainability transitions

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Over the past four decades, universities have been recognized as significant actors in fostering regional innovation and contributing into local (economic) development in places where they are located. Earlier conceptualizations of the role of universities in innovation and regional development emphasized commercialization activities, technology transfer, investing in start-ups and technological innovation, which usually manifests within entrepreneurial university. More recently, however, they are also expected to play a proactive role in regional sustainability transitions and move beyond an understanding of third mission that is based on only techno-economic rationality. In particular, they are expected to collaborate with broader segments of society (public institutions, NGOs, etc.) and contribute into different types of innovation (e.g., social, green etc.), which has been framed under the “engaged university” model. While new demands have emerged due to several complex societal challenges, the emphasis on older demands has not lost its validity and legitimacy. This raises the question of how higher education institutions are coping with such proliferation of institutional and policy demands, why they prioritize certain demands over others and how they adapt to the newer demands particularly relating to regional sustainability transitions and smart specialisation.

Hence, this session welcomes all presentations that address the role of the universities in regional innovation, regional development and sustainability transitions from different perspectives. We welcome both quantitative and qualitative approaches on this subject, which may address (but not limited to) the following topics:

- Theoretical and conceptual research on the positioning of universities in zero-carbon regional systems of the future.
- Methodological approaches on defining the enhanced role of universities in a sustainable future.
- Empirical research comparing the role of universities in different regions in terms of innovation, regional development and sustainability transitions
- Identifying the roles of higher education institutions in regional and innovation policies
- Transforming from entrepreneurial to engaged university model
- How universities legitimize prioritization of certain demands over others
- How universities drive quadruple helix collaborations
- How universities contribute into green reskilling of various industries