Social sciences, scientific research, higher education and social developments

An Albanian inside of dialectics and structured scientific research, in social sciences

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Abstract

The social sciences have inherited a not so clear relationship with the social politics throughout the history. At the first moment the concept of social sciences came into use in the 19th century the first organizations that were promoting them were not located in the universities. They were located in the Public Sector. They brought into the scenery not only professional of the area, but also politicians, clerics and businessmen. The main objective was the promoting of the reforms that consider the social politics able to improve the so defined social problems.

These associations thought that by collecting different kind of data regarding these problems they would reach a clear insight on the directions the state should follow in the framework of different politics and reforms. As a result, the national research capacity is of the highest importance to the ability of a state to invent and implement successfully its politics based on evidences that concern and come as a reaction to the concerns and issues of the social problems as a whole.

In this article I will be presenting first of all an overview of the scientific research in Albania in the area of the social sciences by pointing out the main areas that deserve to be the prior ones in the contest of developing activities that aim the implementation of the research in Social Sciences. Also, a great number of Institutions has been contacted with the aim of receiving official information and data on the functioning and on the potential problems that can be faced during the research processes. These institutions have been selected based on their involvement at the area of the scientific research of the social sciences[1].

At first this will involve the policy makers at the central level, like the Ministry of Education and Sciences and the main research actors in the public and in the private sector. The criteria of the geographical and the subjects coverage has been also used in order to be able to present a public institutions of the higher education and

[1] The sociological theory of Crozier and Friedberg on organized action seen through a simulation model Camilo Olaya University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

research but even the enterprises that act in the research area are mainly focusing to the integration of these two systems which have been working separately for a long period of time and that must become efficient in order to adapt to the conditions of a country that has limited financial resources.

This article is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the scientific research in Albania, focusing in defining the priority areas for the research in social sciences.

The information about the higher education and the potential problems that it faces, is based on a big number of research institutions, selected based on their involvement in scientific research in social sciences.

This article brings into evidence the fact that in order to establish a stable and effective infrastructure in scientific research in Albania, is important to work in different directions.

A successful way to increase the efficasity through the elements of the "innovative system" is by working with organizations that work in specific sectors of the economy, aiming for a possible cooperation in scientific search, for an important social contribution.

Keywords: Scientific research, Higher education, Institutions, Policy, Law, Statistics

Introduction

The recent years, the actual structure has been visible developed, through the adoption of the High Education Law, dated 2007, and the Law on Science Academy, as amended on 2006. The Law on Science and Techonological Development, dated on 2004, has been amended several times, but it also need to be reviewed, in order to provide compliance with the international standarts and the opening of national programs in the same line with EU priorities, and national financial regulations[2].

Law on High Education dated on 2007, presents flexibility dhe more objectivity in relation with the financing of the universities. In the same way, either the National Strategy for Higher Education presents a number of ambitious scpes in order to improve the operation of university sector. The main focus of the National Strategy for Higher Education is to improve the quality of teaching in universities and in master degrees, but also in the academic research, including PhD.

The Higher Education Strategy presents the inferior number of students in the scientific, maths, engineering programs (19% compared to 25% in other regional contries), or the need to implement the PhD standarts in the same line with the Europian High

[2] http://www.dsdc.gov.al/dsdc/pub/skala_121_07_2008_5_511_1.pdf

Education. These elements are truly essential about the future potential of the Albanian Research System, in order to have high qualified researches compared to the international standards[3].

The Research System in Albania

Basing on the National Strategy of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009-2015, the system of science in Albania includes the high education, scietific research, institutions of development and knowledge, and also technology (innovation). As such a kind, it could not include only public or private institutions of higher education and basic research, but also the private enterprises which acts in this field. The objective is to integrate the both systems, which have been separated for a long time, and that should be efficient in the conditions of a small country with limited financial resources[4].

For the purposes of this report social science research system in Albania can be regarded as the sum of the following components:

- *Human capital:* the numbers of educated, trained and employed social scientists plus the postgraduate and undergraduate social science student population who will provide a sustained national research effort.
- *Infrastructure and research funding:* the buildings, facilities, archives and libraries, support staff and information technology that provide researchers with space and facilities. Here infrastructure includes direct or indirect financial support from governmental or other agencies.
- *Connectivity:* social science research is an important part of enhancing the public good, and research results must be made public through dissemination in publications or by other means. Connectivity also includes direct and unimpeded access to collaboration with government agencies, public institutions, industry, private individuals and organizations, international peers and professional bodies for the purpose of sharing ideas and information.

The albanian policy structure in social sciences

The primary focus of the Higher Education Strategy is on improving the quality of teaching at university and masters levels, but it also formulates a number of orientations concerning academic research, including doctoral and post-university studies. For instance, the HE Strategy highlights the inferior number of students in science programmes, mathematics and engineering (19% compared to approximately 25% in many countries in the region), or the need to bring PhD standards in line with those of the European Higher Education Area. These elements are clearly fundamental

[3] Ministry of Education and Science, Directorate of Higher Education and Research

[4] Ministry of Education and Science

to the future potential of the Albanian research system to carry out high quality research comparable to international standards. Hence, the development of research potential in basic and academic research needs to be led by a phased approach with careful consideration over investments in infrastructure or research programmes[5].

The Council for Higher Education and Science (CHES) was set up as an advisory body to MoES and to the Council of Ministers. Its main role is to provide advice on strategies, policies and priorities. The Higher Education National Strategy envisaged the setting up of a small but high level group for the Research Strategy under CHES. This selected group was entrusted to develop a research strategy and to monitor its implementation[6].

A major change was introduced in the research system, resulting in the integration of former institutes of the Academy of Sciences into the major public universities. Integration of former Academy of Sciences research institutes into the university sector and formulation of a research strategy within each institution will clearly take time.

Actually, 'research policy' is administered through the Directorate of Scientific Research. Financing is provided in the context of bilateral programmes and international cooperation initiatives. This policy has not been generalised yet, despite visible efforts to concentrate resources and introduce competitive criteria. Policy-making capacity in the area of research needs to be improved.

The overall research policy framework

Over the last couple of years, the amendments to the Law No. 9832 on the Higher Education aimed to give special attention to the scientific research as well. The Department of Research and Technology has been identified in the law as a very important unit within the university. Each faculty has the right to coordinate its teaching process and its research. The master degree programmes established in each faculty offer two-level masters: first level master and second level master (according to the Bologna Chart). The second level master is considered a research program, given that one of its key components is research. The PhD programme is fully considered academic research under 3-year supervision. Amendments to the laws on the Academy of Science, Scientific and Technological Research took place over two years and attempted to complete the legal framework and provide a greater impact to both higher education and scientific research. In 2007, the Albanian government implemented a PhD study supporting scheme i.e. The Excellence Fund, which supported the best PhD candidates to complete PhD studies abroad partially or

[5] National Strategy of Higher Education

[6] Ministry of Education and Science

fully. The Excellence Fund does not have any restricting criteria regarding the field of studies for the PhD programme. As a result, MoES has generated no data specifying the field of focus field of the PhD studies supported by this program. A total number of 45 PhD students were supported by this fund during the academic year 2006-2007. The drafting and approving process of the National Strategy of Science, Technology and Innovation assisted by UNESCO, created every opportunity for establishment of mechanisms to design all the necessary instruments that will set up the foundations for the functioning of the scientific research system in Albania[7].

Overview of Research Activities

Research Projects in Social Sciences.

Projects in social sciences cover a three-year period (2007-2010). There are 7 projects in place, with a total cost of 13.315.000 ALL, and over a 3 year period they have accounted for around 2% of the total expenditures for science and technology. The national social sciences' projects cover the following areas:

- Linguistics;
- History;
- Albanian culture and tradition;
- Albanology;
- Social sciences.

History is focusing on the study of monograph and the preparation of historical documents. Researchers are making efforts to shed light on parts of the Albanian history that seems to be still in the dark since the mid- wave until now. In linguistics, projects aim to produce research on the social phenomenon of demographic movement after the 1990s as it relates to the use of the Albanian language in communities of heterogenic population. The Albanian cultural and ethnographic tradition aims at presenting some of the richest traditional Albanian outfits as part of the Albanian identity over time and also to present the art used for producing these outfits/costumes. Social sciences are focused on the research of the specificities of the competitiveness in the different fields, such as social activities, education system and dynamics of divorces. These projects analyse the factors that influence these social phenomena and their consequences on the Albanian society[8].

Our cooperation with the FP7.

[7] Republic of Albania, Council of Ministers

[8] The Agency of Research and the Technology of Information

Number of proposals submitted (including ineligible)	27
Number of applicants submitted (including ineligible)	27
Number of proposals main listed	1
Applicants in main listed proposals	1
Funding obtained (based on main listed applicants)	5.351

Tab.1. Information relating the proposed projects and applicants[9].

Also for the period of time 2007-2009 there are submitted 6 projects in total, from different faculties in our country. These projects have had the manager and their submitted found.

Key competencies in research field.

The 2009 STI Strategy is the first comprehensive policy document that sets the guidelines for future developments in STI. This document provides for a current picture of the STI situation in Albania. It also addresses the issue of lack of financial resources so far, and the need to increase the overall support in the future. According to this document the areas where research will be focused in the period 2010-2015 are:

- Agriculture and Food;
- Information and communication technologies;
- Public Health;
- Albanology and Humanities;
- Natural Resources;
- Biotechnology and Biodiversity;
- Defence and security.

It therefore provides a starting point for examining what other actions need to be undertaken to further develop and complement it. It has a set of strategic goals and corresponding programmes, which are set out below[10].

[9] The Ministry of Education and Science, Directory of Education and Statistics, Policies, Legislation and Scientific Research Section.

[10] The Ministry of Education and Science, Directory of Education and Statistics, Policies, Legislation and Scientific Research Section.

Strategic goal	Programme
Increase public spending on research to 0.6% of GDP by 2015. Increase the share of gross expenditure on R&D from foreign sources to 40% of all research spending in the years 2010-1015.	Research Infrastructure Fund
Create 4-5 Albanian Centres of Excellence in Science (ACES)	Creation and Development of 4-5 Albanian Centres of Excellence in Science (ACES) bringing together a minimum of 20 researchers
Double the number of researchers, through 'brain gain' and training (graduate schools; train 100 PhDs).	Research Eagle Grants Programme to increase Masters & Doctoral graduates Science Promotion and Education Programme towards young people
Increase innovation activity in 100 companies	Programme for Technology Transfer and Innovation to create consortia of academic research institutes with private or other public sector organisations

Tab.2. Main Strategic Goals of selected Programs

There is correspondence between goals and programmes. The decision to focus on a small number of research centres corresponds to the Albanian reality of limited resources and a few sectors, in which there is both research expertise and commercial development. The strategy accepts that the creation of the 4 to 5 centres could take ten years. They will be critical to maximise receipt of EU funding to support R&D.

In what specifically concerns the Programme for Technology Transfer and Innovation, this aims at stimulating commercialisation of Albanian S&T results through fostering collaboration between academic research institutes and firms. It builds therefore on a 'Technology Push' approach and is seen as a transmission mechanism from research to commercial exploitation and not as a mechanism to foster innovation stemming from market needs. Hence, a complementary set of actions is necessary to complete an integrated innovation strategy, which involves enterprises, not simply as recipients of knowledge and technology developed, but as transmitters of needs, in iterations of developments and eventually as joint actors in research. The strategy recognises this need and states, "The Ministry of Economy's proposal to develop a National Centre of Innovation and Technology Transfer"[11].

[11] The Agency of Research and the Technology of Information

Main research trends in Albania

Of concern here are the broader policy framework and socio-political context within which social science research operates. An assessment of capacity development problems and challenges at this level would need to consider four specific elements.

- The first element concerns research policy. Is there a national policy that defines priority areas? Are there any indications of genuine interest in research on the part of the authorities or wider society?
- The second element concerns the working conditions of researchers and their salary levels. The latter are generally linked to the salaries of the overall civil service, and cannot be modified by a single organization or even ministry. Do researchers have sufficient incentives to continue carrying out research rather than joining the private sector, or leaving Albania? These include monetary incentives but not only. Are salaries sufficient for people to work full-time instead of looking for consultancies, moonlighting and working in other institutions, or leaving research to join the private sector or go abroad? Another series of questions relates to the incentives that may exist to encourage researchers to publish.
- The third element concerns the Albania's overall level of stability and security.
- The fourth element concerns the degree of academic freedom: freedom to teach, freedom to publish and freedom of the press. What tradition of academic freedom does Albania have, if any?

Unsatisfactory conditions in any of these areas may reduce the scientific production, and may tempt academics to leave the country. When designing strategies to build capacity, certain negative conditions are easier to overcome than others. It is easier to train individuals than it is to retain them, and easier to create an institution than to create a community of researchers, or to maintain an enabling environment[12].

All those elements reflect current trends and need to be addressed in building an active community of social science research in Albania.

Main socio-economic challenges in Albania[13]

- Poor quality of education, particularly in the social sciences. Priority over the years was given to educational quantity at the expense of quality.
- Limited attention to, and marginalization of, the social science disciplines, while giving priority to professional, and business management studies, which are identified with modernity and development.
- Private higher education institutions barely pay attention to research on social sciences.

[12] The Agency of Research and the Technology of Information

[13] Ministry of Education and Science, Directorate of Higher Education and Research

The current socio-economic challenges are too complex for small and fragmented regional research programmes to redress. They require a concerted and wide mobilization of resources as well as the thoughtful identification of capacity-building modalities to respond to various needs.

Conclusions

Addressing the development of capacity countrywide means taking into account the huge disparities between the size and quality of the social science communities of the regions in Albania. It must also observe disparities in financial resources and allocations to social science education and research.

There are, however, an increasing number of networks that bring researchers together as individuals on a regional level across the Western Balkan Countries to address specific, usually developmental, issues.

Social sciences have a diminishing role in response to societal problems and public interest, and only a modest role in informing policies and effecting social change. There is a need to encourage scholars' sense of themselves as a research community by promoting collaborative research and scholarly exchanges. This community encompasses researchers within the region. Albanian researchers undoubtedly recognize the main challenges facing Albania, but are hampered by serious deficiencies in methodological training and by isolation from international debates and knowledge production.

To redress these problems, it will be necessary to work on several fronts at the same time: training to increase skills, research and publications to produce knowledge, and networking to enhance the visibility and empower the voice of citizens. The challenge is to carry out these tasks while not losing sight of, and promoting, established centres of social science teaching and research. On the institutional level, we should recognize the diversity of institutions engaged in social sciences, including universities, research centres and research-oriented NGOs. These have differing research capacities and access to resources. Furthermore, the obstacles they face may not only be financial, but also infrastructural and related to building a beneficial research environment. NGOs tend to receive much of the international funding for research, but given the pace and burdens of contract research, issues such as research ethics, methodology, critical discussion and publication are neglected. Finally, the research community across Albania suffers from a lack of access to information, including both official information, such as statistical surveys, archival materials and documentation collected by consulting firms and contract research organizations.

One way to increase cooperation between the various elements of "innovative system", will be important to work with organizations representing specific sectors of the economy to enable them to motivate and increase their awareness about innovation. Similarly, training needs to be associated with the Strategy STI, in particular by building basic capability and promotion of these enterprises with technological knowledge or R & D capacity, in order to work with institutions of higher education to determine curriculum university and at a subsequent stage scientific post – university research.

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